**Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/32/33 Human Rights and Climate Change – Response of Slovakia**

*Introduction*

Following text aims to cover most of the items raised by the questionnaire provided by Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, although it does not it always strictly as answers to the questions. From this reason after general description of the crucial relations between children´s rights and climate change the remaining text is focused especially to the context of the European Union or Council of Europe frameworks and in more details on the Slovak Republic. As far as UN Convention of the Right of Child is concern we would also like to make reference to the Concluding observations on the combined third to fifth periodic reports of Slovakia (United Nations document CRC/C/SVKCO/3-5). The information provided for this purpose on behalf of Slovakia we see as relevant also for the purpose of the questionnaire and that for is not repeated again unless appropriate.

*Relationships between climate change and children´s rights in general*

The description of the relationships between climate change and the employment of the children rights should primarily stay on covering both civil and political rights, as well as socio-economic and cultural rights in the light of climate change effects.

Thus children’s rights affected by climate change should be investigated following standard categorization of these rights[[1]](#footnote-1) : rights which satisfy basic needs (right to life, right to health, right to water, right to food and right to housing); specific children’s rights (right to be cared for by parents, right to education, right to play, and right to leisure and access to culture); participation rights (right to active participation, right to freedom of expression, association and assembly, accountability and right to an effective remedy); civil and political rights (right to a nationality, right to birth registration and right to preservation of identity, right to equal protection against discrimination, right to privacy and family life and right to property).

From this perspective in general and global terms some of the important relations between children rights and climate change are described as follows.

Immediate climate change detrimental consequences (e.g. in the case of unanticipated negative calamities) and gradual climate change detrimental consequences (e.g. the rising temperatures, epidemics, sun exposure, or insufficient safe drinking water) might deteriorate children’s health, to the end they might bring additional risks to the survival and development of the child, (including risk of increased infant mortality). Factors that play a relevant role in global warming also harm children’s health. This also is the case with emissions from factories and vehicles with their adverse effect on air quality.

Sudden climate change events and the gradual consequences of climate change often produce environmental anxiety, a type of post-traumatic stress. Global warming is also having the effect of making healthcare infrastructures unavailable or scarce.

Threats of children´s rights provoked by climate change could be in the lack of access to available food, when the price of food rises in the aftermath of catastrophes and ordinary people cannot afford to buy it. In some world regions climate change is leading to the decline in food production. Chronic droughts, floods, diversion of grains for bio-fuel production etc. are diminishing food production. Increased temperatures and changes in rainfall patterns produce desertification and land erosion. As a result, land becomes infertile and livestock die.

The right to water is seen a through the access to enough fresh drinking water for human survival and through the use of water for personal hygiene and for drainage networks.

The increasing contamination of water sources, over-pumping of water reserves, inadequate sewer networks and degradation of freshwater threatens the right to access to water. As the earth gets warmer, heat waves and limited water supplies would make access to drinking water and sanitation more difficult.

Education is for climate change as important as health. Well-educated children are better prepared to recognize threats. Education must be provided in a way that reinforces specific values, such as respect for the children’s cultural identity and respect for the natural environment. As far as the cultural identity is concerned, climate change may have the effect of eroding lands, lifestyles and cultures. Respect for the natural environment should be learned by children in a way that encompasses both national and international problems such as global warming and in a way that actively involves children in local, regional and global environmental projects.

Access to information is a critical component of the fight against climate change, especially for children. The flow of information should be promoted, because well-informed citizens and well informed children can cope better with the harmful consequences of climate change and can better address their risks. Children have the right to be informed accurately about the origins of climate change and its symptoms, risks and consequences.

Children are right-holders and not only parents but also governments have obligations on their behalf. One of them is to make channels available for children to be informed and to participate in climate change mitigation, adaptation and relocation policies, children should if possible to give their views during actions planning, including views on legislative decisions, which directly or indirectly affect children. Children also have the right to participate, according to their maturity, in climate change talks, programs and decisions. In the course of climate change talks, children’s opinion should obviously be taken into account according to their age. Thus children should be a part of the process of identifying risks and resilience-building options when planning and implementing mitigation and adaptation programs, children’s specific needs and capacities should be included in the vulnerability assessments and planning processes of the climate-smart development programs, and children should be included in the processes of monitoring and evaluation of programs and initiatives that affect them.

Children are entitled to equal protection under the law without discrimination. Climate change might exacerbate existing inequalities and vulnerabilities, which are consequences of factors such as discrimination regarding health status, access to knowledge and access to information. There is a real need to advance adaptation and mitigation measures in an effort to enable everyone to live in dignity. Children affected by global warming and natural disasters may encounter problems like unequal access to assistance, gender-based discrimination and violence or discrimination in the supply of aid.

The right to property is one of the rights affected as a consequence of climate change. Climate change may also result in the loss of property. Although land property is not normally a child’s business, the deprivation of property will affect the child’s right to inherit his or her parents’ possessions. These risks should be taken in consideration while combating climate change.

*National Action Plan for Children of the Slovak Republic (2013 – 2017)*

Below are described the status and the objectives of the National Action Plan for Children (2013 – 2017) in the context of the National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in the Slovak Republic.

In Slovak Republic The National Action Plan for Children is the fundamental instrument for a targeted and coordinated approach to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols on the national level. It has been designed to complement the measures that are already being carried out under other national action plans, programs, conceptions and strategies.

The National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights in the Slovak Republic manages relationships and dependencies between individual programming documents to ensure that individual actions do not overlap but instead complement each other and add value to the fulfilment of the objectives of sub-programs. The structure and methodology of the National Action Plan for Children are consistent with this plan to unify the system for protecting and promoting human rights in Slovakia and to define a long-term strategy in this area.

The National Action Plan for Children provides the core framework for the protection of children's rights, which must be extended in response to current needs in practice and the interests of children as a target group – it is therefore conceived as an open document setting out the fundamental tasks for the period 2013 to 2017 with a first evaluation and updating of tasks in 2014 and with annual evaluation and updating thereafter. The five-year term of the National Action Plan for Children reflects the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and also coincides with the five-year cycle for periodic evaluation of the implementation of Slovakia's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The strategic aim of the action plan is that through the actions and measures that it set out it contributes to building and developing an integrated and effective system for protecting the rights and interests of children and ensuring progress in the exercise and protection of children's rights and interests. Subordinate strategic aims for the promotion and protection of children's rights in accordance with the above overall aim are defined as follows:

1. Strengthening and reinforcement of the status of children as rights-holders and human beings with their own dignity and developing abilities and opinions;

2. Support and development of family competences as a natural environment for the growth and well-being of the child and the promotion of positive parenting;

3. Adoption and implementation of legislative and non-legislative measures reflecting up-to-date knowledge and the latest requirements of international documents and practice;

4. Coordination of policies affecting children on all levels – on horizontal and vertical axes;

5. Institutional provision for the implementation of the Convention and its optional protocols, including adequate staffing and financing;

6. Monitoring and continuous evaluation of effectiveness in all areas of interest under the Convention;

7. Ambitious development of practice supporting the reinforcement of positive factors promoting the non-discriminatory treatment of children including special measures for particularly vulnerable groups of children;

8. Ensuring that children have access to effective remedies for violations of their rights and that such remedies have regard for children's need for sensitive treatment;

9. Promoting interdisciplinary cooperation and improving the vocational training and expertise of professionals working with children;

10. Increasing the awareness of children and the general public concerning all aspects of the convention and greater dissemination of information relating to the Convention.

The structure of the Slovak state administration and the procedures implemented for the legislation and regulatory framework elaboration, adoption and enforcement ensure taking in account also to the National Action Plan for Children while dealing with the climate change polices.

*Adressing climate chnage in the Slovak Republic*

Overall policy framework to tackle climate change in the Slovak Republic consists of European strategies and climate related policies complemented with specific national policies and measures focused on the most critical areas. In Adaptation Strategy of the Slovak Republic on Adverse Impacts of Climate Change (1914) are addressed more frequent physical impacts of climate change in Slovakia such as floods, landslides, long-term droughts and others, which have effects on health, ecosystems, economies, societies, services and infrastructure.

The strategy describes the impacts on natural system (geological environment, water, soil, biosphere and biodiversity) and the following sectors: health, urban environment, agriculture, forestry, transportation, energy, industry and tourism. There is a set of adaptation measures proposed for each of these sectors and impacts in the strategy. The aim of the strategy is to draw attention to the fact that climate change is an urgent issue that requires an integrated and comprehensive approach. The strategy was approved by the government and through defined objectives, principles and criteria which prioritize proposed measures creates the framework for adaptation processes in Slovakia. Tasks for ministries and municipalities are imposed by governmental approval of the document to contribute to the objectives of the strategy. The adaptation strategies and decision-making process have to take into account potential positive or negative impacts of adaptation measures on different sectors but no methodologies for assessment of potential adaptation benefits and costs are available and therefore it is dependent only on expert judgment and qualitative assessment, which is useful tool for the evaluation and selection of priority measures. Adaptation measures with positive impacts on public health are considered to be the top priority.

Determining criteria for selection of priority measures are the urgency of the problem, the complexity of the solution (positive contributions to the widest range of areas), feasibility measures, identified additional opportunities.

Coordination of activities (information transfer, adaptation measures monitoring etc.) should be organized as follows: the National Contact Point (the Ministry of Environment) provides communication with international organizations and coordinates national activities in cooperation with the Working Group for adaptation, the Working Group for Adaptation provides the adaptation activities in the area of its competence, cooperates with professional institutions and other relevant organizations, is responsible for preparation of the documents for the Coordination Committee for Climate Change Policy and for decision-making, the High Level Committee for the Coordination of Climate Change Policy (HLC) defines the main tasks and gives overall lines for further policy-making processes on adaptation. Currently, there is no available methodology for monitoring and evaluation of the effect of adaptation measures and it is hard to choose indicators for monitoring the progress and effects of adaptation measures, but the preparation of a specific set of such indicators and methodology is planned for the near future. The Adaptation Strategy of the Slovak Republic on Adverse Impacts of Climate Change is a framework document for adaptation processes in Slovakia, which will need to be updated based on experience and new scientific knowledge every 5-10 years – also regarding to the conclusions of the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

*Education, training and public awareness on the subject of climate change in the Slovak Republic*

Below is provided an overview of the key activities of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (MESRS), Ministry of Environment (MoE) as well as other institutions of the Slovak Republic in the field of education, training and public awareness on the subject of climate change and related policies since 2009. Education is generally a responsibility of the MESRS, for this issue, but also in training and in raising public awareness the MoE also contributes significantly directly or through its branches as the Slovak Environmental Agency (SEA) and the Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute (SHMI). Education and information on this subject are also provided by the selected university and scientific institutions, interest groups, as well as professional and non-governmental organizations (NGO).

Climate change is expertly challenging and cross-cutting theme that goes beyond the content of educational programs for elementary and secondary schools. The issue of climate change and its adverse consequences is a component of a wide spectrum of topics within the environmental education in primary and secondary schools. On the level of colleges and universities, its importance has increased recent years. The topic of climate is possible to study in Comenius University in Bratislava and partially in University of Economics in Bratislava - with regard to its economic and political consequences.

Primary and Secondary Schools National Institute for Education as a budgetary organization directly managed by MESRS introduced a national training program “Environmental education” for level 1 and 2 of primary schools, secondary schools and grammar schools. Environmental education covers following climate change areas: renewable sources (RES) and non-renewable natural resources, rational use of natural resources in relation to sustainable development, the use of alternative energy sources, energy transport resources and their impact on the environment, industry and sustainable development of society, recycling, energy consumption, quality of life, diversity of environmental influences on health, ways and means to protect the health or life of the unevenness on the Earth (different environmental conditions and different social development of the Earth, causes and consequences of global environmental problems (and principles of sustainable development). In secondary schools and high schools, the topic is a part of environmental education in a more comprehensive educational fields such as “Human and society” and “Human and values” that focus on the connection between environmental, technical and economic and social approaches to solving problems and point to further principles of sustainable development related to climate policy (cooperation in diversity, poverty eradication, disease, disparities between people, ensuring a life of dignity for people)

Global Education National Strategy for Global Education for the period 2012-2016 was approved by the Government on January 8, 2012. The strategy defines the main issues of education focusing on global issues, including climate change. Action Plan for Global Education is submitted annually to the Government in order to fulfil the National Strategy for Global Education and the framework of the National Programme of Official Development Assistance of the Slovak Republic.

There are several innovatiove educational programs suc as Ecological Footprint currently conducted via web portal www.ekostopa.sk. Its main objective is for students to correctly identify an impact of our daily activities on the environment. Enersol is a project was launched in 2000 and is a joint program of six European countries (Germany, Netherlands, Great Britain, Italy, Czech Republic and Slovakia) important also because of the international exchange of experience of teaching the RES and approximation of technical texts in secondary schools. To Live Energy in Schools is an educational material, interactive games and recommendations how to conserve energy at school: www.siea.sk/zit-energiou-kamaratka-energia. Forest education (National Forest Centre) is an environmental education for learning about nature and life in the woods through games and experiences.

1. Children’s rights in a changing climate: a perspective from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Susana Sanz-Caballero, Department of Public Law, University CEU Cardenal Herrera, Luis Vives 1, 46115 Alfara, Spain, in ETHICS IN SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS, Vol. 13: 1–14, 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)