

INFORMATION OF NGOs - SLOVAKIA

Addressed to: UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

2021 Day of General Discussion

Children's Rights and Alternative Care

June 14, 2021

1. Lack of support services for children with disabilities

There is alarmingly low availability of complex support, including support early childhood intervention for children with disabilities (aged 0 to 7), parents' training and psycho-social counselling for families (bio-psycho-social support).

- Early childhood intervention as social service has got only 8 % of all children with disabilities (2020)
- Early childhood intervention as special pedagogical counselling only 14 % (2018)¹
- Intensive physiotherapy via health care providers only 17 % (2018)²

Families (8-17%) that receive complex support do not get it as frequently as needed.

Slovakia should ensure availability of a coordinated system of early intervention without financial burden on families. Support should be focused on the family and the child, including complex stimulation of the child's development to maximize the child's potential.

2. Rehabilitation services for children with disabilities are expansive and it is high financial burden for families

The lack of complex support from forces most families of children with disabilities to use a combination of various uncoordinated³ paid outpatient therapies (visits and stays).

¹ Ministry of Finance, Revision of expenses for socially disadvantage groups (2020) <https://www.minedu.sk/data/att/15944.pdf>

² Early childhood intervention: Report on early childhood intervention in Slovakia (2018) https://asociaciavi.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Spr%C3%A1va_o_stave_v%C4%8Dasnej_intervencie_na_Slovensku_2018.pdf

³ Research outcomes, SOCIA Foundation: <https://www.socia.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/DOTAZNIK-vyhodnotenie-final.pdf>

The financial burden is high, it is up to 4 217 Euros per year t. j. EUR 351 per month in families of children up to 7 years⁴. Slovak average salary in 2020 was 1 133 € and 37.6% of Slovak households in 2020 had difficulty to come up with a family budget⁵.

Slovakia plans to reform education system and counselling centres. This reform should ensure availability and accessibility of coordinated system of early intervention and reform of the counselling system for children and young adults without financial burden on parents. The aim of the support should be inclusion of the child into everyday life as well as employment.

3. Low availability of pre-school education for children with disabilities and high proportion of children with disabilities educated in the special education system

In the school year 2018/2019, only 2,221 children with disabilities attended kindergarten³. This represents only 24% of children with disabilities aged 3 to 5 years⁶. The share of children educated separately is highest in Europe - 5.88% of primary school pupils are educated in special classes and special schools⁷. There is still a lack of professional and support staff in the performance of pre-school and primary education of children with disabilities.

Slovakia should ensure the material-technical and personnel capacities of professional and support staff, including their training, so that children with disabilities have access to education in the mainstream. Slovakia should repeal limit of the maximum number of children with disabilities kindergarten class.

4. Low access to leisure activities and school clubs for children with disabilities - reduced opportunity to include children with disabilities into society.

According to the Platform of Families with Disabled Children data collection:

- 50% of children with disabilities do not have the opportunity to attend a sports club
- 48% of children with disabilities do not have the opportunity to attend a school club
- 43% of children with disabilities do not have the opportunity to attend school classes

⁴ Research outcomes, SOCIA Foundation: <https://www.socia.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/DOTAZNIK-vyhodnotenie-final.pdf>

⁵ Research outcomes: http://www.sociologia.sav.sk/cms/uploaded/3169_attach_Hodnoty_spolocnost_2020_pramenna.pdf

⁶ Ministry of Finance, Revision of expenses for socially disadvantage groups (2020) <https://www.minedu.sk/data/att/15944.pdf>

⁷ Hall, R., Dráľ, P., Fridrichová, P., Hapalová, M., Lukáč, S., Miškolci, J., Vančíková, K. Analýza zistení o stave školstva na Slovensku: To dá rozum, Bratislava: MESA10, 2019. Dostupné na <https://analyza.todarozum.sk>

We propose Slovakia should provide training for school clubs, sports clubs, providers of free time and leisure activities how to work with inclusive groups, and provide sufficient support for children with disabilities in leisure activities and school clubs.

5. Limited prevention of placement of children with disabilities in alternative care.

There are several best practices that should be supported or introduced in Slovakia to prevent placement of children with disabilities into institutional care.

- **Communication/announcement of a child's diagnosis** or positive screening should be associated with the provision of crisis intervention, diagnosis information, and subsequent support to parents. According to research of NGOs this often lacks⁸. This creates uncertainty and fear for parents that they cannot take care of a child with disabilities. Sometimes doctors warn parents about demanding care in the future, they use inappropriate words. They recommend early intervention for parents in the social service, only minimally if the doctor / department cooperates with a specific provider.
- **The institute of temporary placement is not used**, during which parents could learn how to take care of a child with disabilities and take him home later. If the parent refuses to take the child into home care immediately - a proposal for a court decision on placement in a specialized group is submitted.
- **Low availability and accessibility of early childhood intervention** – see more in 1
- **Lack of the support and assistance in marginalised Roma community or socially deprived communities** – Sometimes children are placed in institutional care due to repeatedly hospitalisation when the mother does not have support of medical assistants (or other individualised support⁹) to follow correctly medical home care.
- **Low inter-ministerial cooperation** - There are no statistical data on the number of children with disabilities or at risk and the number of families sent for follow-up support. We lack for example the combination of mobile hospice services and early intervention social services after discharge from the hospital can support parents so much that they do not place the child into institution.

⁸ Based on a survey conducted in 2020 by NGO Malíček on a sample of almost 200 respondents from the ranks of parents of premature babies, more than 54% of interviewed parents stated that they were provided with almost no form of support during hospitalization of their child in the neonatology department. social, biological, etc.). Only 11% of respondents received psychological support. As many as 70% of parents said that in a situation after preterm birth, a support group, psychological or parental help from experienced parents with a similar experience would help them a lot.

⁹ the Omama project, aims on early intervention in Roma communities, funded only by grants, included only 300 families out of about 19,600 families from socially disadvantaged backgrounds with children under 7 as of 31 December 2020

6. Continuing systemic discrimination against children with mental disabilities in access to education

Current legislation excludes children with mental disabilities from access to higher levels of education¹⁰. This also applies to children who are educated in special schools and also integrated in mainstream schools. For this reason, they are subsequently excluded from the possibility of studying at a regular secondary school. For this reason, there was submitted an individual communication to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in January 2021¹¹. This submission concerns continuing disability-based discrimination in education against young man M. V. of his exclusion from the standard secondary education, due to his disability. M.V. has been excluded from standard secondary education since he had been, as a child with intellectual disability, educated according to a special programme designed for children with intellectual disabilities. In this programme, the M.V. could never achieve the educational standard that is required, explicitly by Slovak law, to be allowed to access non-segregated secondary education. The barrier to access secondary education thus lies directly in the domestic legislation.

Slovakia should eliminate discrimination against students with mental disabilities. To enable intellectually disabled pupils to obtain lower secondary education (ISCED 2) and to study at mainstream secondary school.

7. Lack of individualised approach and support in transition from school to independent life.

Children with disabilities, even in special secondary schools, lacks an individual approach to each student. Graduates from these schools are unprepared to exist independently in different areas. According to expertize of NGO Alternative they do not have practical knowledge such as: how to open a bank account that is free of charge, how to calculate household finances, what you need to save money, what means gross and net wages and so on. They also often lack information on why it is necessary to register with the Labour Office, what are the benefits of how the system of health and social security contributions works. As a result of this lack of information, young people with disabilities are more likely to run into problems, get into debts relatively soon after leaving school and are unable to start their independent life.

There is also a lack of individual support to find and maintain the employment. Student are not learned how to write CV or present themselves at an interview, to talk about my disadvantage in terms of "what support I need and in what". If they manage to get a job, it turns out that young people with disabilities have difficulty filling in personal documents, prepare for the new eight-hour work schedule, as well as plan their route to work to arrive on time. This often leads employers to consider a young person with a disability to be a

¹⁰ Annual reports of Commissioner for people with disabilities (2020, 2021)

<https://www.komisarprezdravotnepostihnutych.sk/getmedia/a3779384-2843-4455-8332-2117097d07c2/Sprava-o-cinnosti-za-rok-2020.aspx>

¹¹ <https://www.socia.sk/podpora-podania-na-vybor-osn-pre-prava-osob-so-zdravotnym-postihnutim/>

"problem employee" to whom he or she has to devote more time and is not very willing to continue working with him / her after the probationary period.

Another area related to independent living and employability is digital literacy. After school, young people often do not have their own e-mail box, they also have difficulty navigating the amount of information on the Internet and how to find information about job offers. All these problems increase the young person's dependence on his/her parents, for whom this is an additional burden, in the current absence or lack of services aimed at supporting parents of children and young people with disabilities.

There is a lack of a follow-up (transit) service that would provide support to young people with disabilities in the period of transition from school to independent living. Slovakia should introduce and finance services promoting an individual approach to each young person to reduce or eliminate the negative effects of a young person's disadvantage, while increasing their readiness for life after school, in terms of increasing financial and digital literacy, labour market orientation, basic living needs, etc.

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**PLATFORM OF
FAMILIES**
OF CHILDREN WITH
DISABILITIES



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SOCIA – Social Reform Foundation; www.socia.sk

Platform of Families with Disabled Children; <https://www.platformarodin.sk/>

ALTERNATIVE – Centre for Independent Living; <https://alternativacentrum.sk/>