

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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## Slovenia : Roma and the right to education Factsheet

### The Roma in Slovenia

Out of two million citizens, in the 2002 Slovenian census, approximately 3,000 people declared themselves as Roma. However, their real number is estimated at between 7,000 and 12,000. 3,834 people have declared Romani language as their first language.

Most of the Roma are concentrated in the Dolenjska and Bela Krajina regions in the south-east of the country, and in the Prekmurje region in northeastern Slovenia near the border with Hungary. Roma also live in urban centres, including in the capital, Ljubljana. Many of their settlements, especially in the Dolenjska region, are not formally legalized; they lack sanitation, running water, sewerage or waste removal services.

Unemployment among Roma is above 90 per cent in some areas. Most of the working Roma collect scrap iron and, occasionally, work at local farms.

Many Roma were “erased”, that is, unlawfully removed from the registry of permanent residents in 1992, after Slovenia became independent. As a consequence, they lost their jobs or could no longer be legally employed.

### Legal framework and the Roma education strategy

The 1991 Constitution provides for equality in the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms, irrespective of national origin, race, sex, language, religion, political or other conviction, material standing, birth, education, social status, disability or any other personal circumstance (Article 14).

The Constitution contains detailed provisions on the special rights of the Italian and Hungarian communities in Slovenia (Article 64), including on the right to education and schooling in their own languages. No such provisions are included on the rights of Romani communities.

Slovenian law and practice differentiate between “autochthonous” (indigenous) Italian and Hungarian minorities, who enjoy the highest degree of minority rights protection, “autochthonous” Romani communities, who receive lower protection, and “non-autochthonous” Roma, whom Slovenia excludes from the scope of the implementation of the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

The Constitution enshrines the principle of compulsory and publicly financed primary education (Article 57).

In 2004, the government adopted a Strategy for the Education of Roma. The Strategy is a significant step in identifying the main obstacles to the integration of Romani children and a number of important measures aimed at improving access to education for Roma. However, it has not been followed by a

detailed action plan translating it into policy.

### **Exclusion from primary and pre-school education**

Romani children are reported to be enrolled in 40 nursery schools throughout Slovenia. However, the majority of Romani children do not have access to pre-school education.

Approximately 30 per cent of Romani children who reach school age are estimated as having a very limited command of Slovene.

The rate of school attendance differs, while in Prekmurje 70 per cent of Romani pupils are reported to attend school regularly, in Dolenjska region the corresponding figure is 39 per cent.

Romani children attending school frequently do not complete all nine years of compulsory elementary education.

### **Main barriers in access to education**

Racism and discrimination Romani children are over-represented in schools for children with special needs or segregated in "Roma only" classes and groups. Negative stereotyping by teachers results in low expectations of Romani children and other discriminatory attitudes.

Long distances between settlements and schools, overcrowded and cold houses, poor sanitary conditions in the settlements, lack of adequate clothing and insufficient financial resources to meet costs associated with education continue to deny children the full advantages of education.

Linguistic barriers and lack of multicultural curricula. Failure to include Romani language, culture and traditions in school curricula.

Insufficient access to pre-school education and lack of Romani teaching assistants;

Lack of training for teachers and Romani assistants.

### **The "Bršljin model"**

In March 2005, after protests by parents of non-Romani children at the numbers of Romani pupils attending the Bršljin elementary school in Novo Mesto, the Slovenian Ministry of Education and Sport decided to create special separated classes at the school in certain subjects for Romani children only. Following appeals by parents of Romani pupils and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including Amnesty International, the Minister of Education retracted his initial proposal and reportedly suggested that different classes could be created on the basis of the pupils' knowledge and performance in school. Separate groups in three subjects – Slovene, foreign languages and mathematics – are formed for pupils who do not perform sufficiently well. These special groups are intended to provide further help to pupils who experience difficulties in the three subjects and, at least in theory, would allow pupils to return to the mainstream groups after a "catching-up" period. Teachers in Bršljin admit that such groups are composed mostly, and in some cases only, of Romani pupils. Such a model has been criticized in Slovenia for being in effect a continuation of the old segregation approach. In a report published in 2006, the Council of Europe expressed concern that the Bršljin model was a step back from the already achieved levels of integration and recommended that its implementation should be revised, in consultation with experts on education and Romani representatives. The Bršljin model is currently being evaluated by the Slovenian education authorities and a decision on its further implementation, including in other Slovenian schools, will be made when such evaluation is completed. This is expected to happen in January 2007.

### **Recommendations to the Slovenian authorities include to:**

Ensure that the implementation of the so-called "Bršljin model" does not result in the effective segregation of Romani pupils in special "Roma only" primary school groups or classes..

Ensure that, in those cases where this is not happening, children from low-income Romani families are provided with assistance in order to overcome barriers in access to education originating from their poor socio-economic status.

Take steps to ensure that Romani culture, history and traditions are included in school curricula in all areas or schools with a significant Romani population.

Take steps to ensure that Romani children have access to pre-school programmes of a sufficient duration, which should incorporate Romani culture, history, traditions and language, as well as Slovene language.

Take steps to ensure that Romani assistants and mediators are employed in a systematic and comprehensive way in all schools and pre-schools with a significant Romani population.  
Take steps to ensure that teachers and other staff working in schools, especially where they work with significant numbers of Romani pupils, receive training on Romani culture, history, traditions and language, with the involvement and cooperation of Romani organizations.  
Provide pedagogical and other relevant training to Romani assistants and mediators, with a view to ensuring their full and meaningful participation in the teaching process.

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