

report

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Equality in accessing justice: Removing barriers for Roma in pursuing their rights in discrimination cases

Štefan Ivanco, Štefan Simončič and Andrea Spítálszky





Cover Image: Jovanka Frangež, a member of Roma community from Maribor, speaks to an RTV Slovenia reporter about the PRESS programme, during an anti-discrimination training as part of the PRESS programme. Credit: Jasmina Vidmar.



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About the authors

Štefan Ivanco is a programme coordinator and researcher at the Center for Civil and Human Rights (Poradňa pre občianske a ľudské práva), Slovakia. He joined Poradňa in 2007, and since then he has been coordinating a range of projects addressing human rights violations against Roma in Slovakia. He holds a Master's degree in political science from the University of Prešov, Slovakia.

Štefan Simončič is a historian and the president of the EPEKA Association since 2014. Since 2010, he has been working at EPEKA in local, national and international projects, mostly funded by the EU. He has also worked as a curator in various projects; he was the Deputy Commissioner in the Slovenian pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2012. Simončič established the first Roma restaurant (Romani Kafenava) in Maribor, that operates as a social entrepreneurship. Currently, he is working to establish the Roma Cultural Route in Slovenia and wishes to establish the title 'European Capital of Roma'.

Andrea Spítálszky is the Legal Programmes Coordinator at Minority Rights Group Europe and joined the organization in 2017. Since then, she has been running various projects related to discrimination and countering cyber hate against Roma in Central and Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. She is a Hungarian lawyer specializing in human rights and international law.

About the organizations

Minority Rights Group Europe (MRGE) is registered as a not-for-profit company under Hungarian law. Based in Budapest since 1996, MRGE is the European regional partner of Minority Rights Group (MRG), with the aim of promoting and protecting the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples across Europe and Central Asia. MRGE does this through capacity building, international advocacy, media outreach and networking.

Center for Civil and Human Rights (Poradňa pre občianske a ľudské práva) is a Slovak non-governmental organization. Since 2002 it has addressed discrimination against Roma in Slovakia in various areas of public life. It has also been active in the protection of reproductive rights of Roma women and protection of Roma from police ill-treatment. Poradňa pursues its mission by human rights monitoring, strategic litigation and advocacy activities. It closely links its work with extensive cooperation with many local Roma activists, community engagement with Roma women and support to Roma communities in pursuing their rights.

EPEKA Slovenia is an association and social enterprise established in 2008 and is part of the wider international EPEKA network. The organization focuses on (non-formal) education, social inclusion, arts, ecology and other social issues. Since its inception the members of EPEKA have worked closely with the Roma community, implementing local, national and international projects aimed at strengthening the competencies of the Roma community and promoting cooperation between the Roma community and the majority population. In 2014, EPEKA opened Romani Kafenava – the first Roma restaurant in the European Union operating on social entrepreneurship principles.

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Other contributors

Roma mediators in Slovakia

Veronika Duždová and **Nasťa Čonková** are both Roma activists. Duždová is from Jarovnice, and Čonková lives in Hermanovce. They have been closely cooperating with Poradňa as members of the informal group of female Roma activists. They both live in marginalized Roma communities and actively resisted discrimination and other human rights violations faced by themselves as well as other Roma in their communities. Over the years, in cooperation with Poradňa, they both conducted many activities on the protection of Roma minority rights, including human rights field monitoring to support strategic litigation and advocacy, public campaigns and advocacy activities on domestic and international levels. They also participated in a range of training events for Roma activists focused on improving the skills of Roma activists to address discrimination or other human rights violations of Roma.

Agáta Duchoňová is a Roma activist. She worked for Poradňa between 2015 and 2018 and gained extensive experience of conducting human rights field monitoring for strategic litigation and advocacy, as well as public campaigns and advocacy activities at domestic and international levels on the protection of human rights of Roma. She has participated in a range of training events for Roma activists on addressing discrimination and other human rights violations against Roma.

Roma mediators in Slovenia

Ulfeta Softić, finished high school and has been actively involved with the Roma community in the Maribor area for several years, mostly through her own initiatives. She has not previously collaborated with other organizations and has been volunteering her time to contribute to improving the situation of the Roma community. She is also actively involved in empowering Roma women and girls.

Matej Tisaj holds a Master's degree in intercultural management and has extensive experience working with the Roma community. He has been involved in various projects and programmes that focus on Roma activism, education and providing additional support to Roma to find employment. Tisaj carried out fieldwork in Ljubljana, Maribor and the Dolenjska region.

Melisa Gutmann holds a Master's degree in social work and has been actively engaged with the Roma community for many years. She is also involved in youth work and in the Roma Academic Association based in the Pomurje region where she conducted regular field visits.

Lawyers in the project

Vanda Durbáková is an attorney working with Poradňa. Since 2004, she has been leading the strategic litigation programme of Poradňa, while representing numerous Roma facing discrimination and other human rights violations before Slovak courts as well as the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

Slavko Vesenjaj is an attorney who supports EPEKA with legal advice in discrimination cases against Roma in the framework of the project. He represents EPEKA and individuals both in Slovenia and at the European Court of Human Rights.

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Executive summary

Roma face discrimination in various areas of life from an early age. This discrimination is underpinned by deep-seated prejudice and negative stereotypes among the majority population. Segregated education and housing, unequal access to health services, discrimination at work and in access to public spaces and police abuse are often part of their daily lives. Despite the widespread nature of this discrimination, only a small number of cases is reported to the equality body or other relevant state authorities. There are different reasons behind this. Roma are often not aware that the negative treatment that they face is defined as discrimination and is prohibited and sanctioned by the law. Many of them do not know about the available legal remedies and protection mechanisms, such as the equality body, and trade or school inspections. Nor is there enough awareness of how these bodies can take legal steps to remedy the situation. Quite often Roma either do not know to whom to turn, or else find legal proceedings too complex. Based on their negative experiences, many Roma do not trust state institutions, with many people arguing that reporting a discrimination case is not worth the trouble as the situation will not change. Finally, the fear of reprisals prevents discriminated Roma from taking legal steps. However, access to justice is crucial to efficiently address discrimination. When state authorities establish that discrimination has taken place and take legal steps to prevent the perpetrator from committing further illegal actions, it might encourage other victims to step forward to claim their rights, and ultimately, to rebuild trust in the authorities, the legal system and the rule of law.

In the framework of the 'Promoting Roma Equality in Slovenia and Slovakia' (PRESS) project, trained Roma mediators carried out regular field visits to Roma communities in both countries to raise awareness of discrimination and available legal remedies. Mediators often provided advice to Roma community members on how to proceed or in more complex discrimination cases, the mediators connected members of the local community with lawyers who provided them with free legal aid and in some cases, reported their claims to the equality body or to other competent authorities, following consent. Mediators had an important role in conducting fact-finding in the context of these discrimination cases. This report outlines the outcomes of the fieldwork and legal aid provided in the framework of this EU funded project. It

serves as a follow-up to our initial baseline report that mapped the different fields where Roma face discrimination and the obstacles in their access to justice. This report presents the mediators' experiences related to their fieldwork and the lessons learned. It also compiles discrimination cases identified in the Roma communities visited. Discrimination cases were documented in various areas of daily life such as education, health care, employment, housing, access to services and public spaces as well as policing. This report also highlights solutions, wherever legal aid was provided by the relevant lawyers, or when cases were reported to the equality body. Lessons learned in the two chosen countries can also serve as best practices and could be applied with the necessary adjustments in other European countries.

As a result of this project, Roma engaged in the fieldwork were better acquainted not only with discrimination, but also with the competencies and functions of the equality body and the other protection mechanisms available to them. Mediators in both countries evaluated the fieldwork positively and were grateful to have been able to visit Roma communities in different parts of Slovakia and Slovenia. As most mediators live or used to live in Roma settlements themselves, they enjoy trust within the communities.

Many community members learned about the concept of discrimination from the mediators and realised that they face similar situations. Lawyers in both countries provided continuous coaching for the mediators by discussing the identified cases, while looking for solutions. Through coaching, the mediators deepened their knowledge of discrimination and improved their skills to provide support for clients. Legal advisers also played a key role in the project. The lawyers provided clients with a range of legal advice on the subject of discrimination and the relevant authorities that Roma can turn to. Some of these cases were reported to the national equality body or other relevant state authorities.

Access to free legal aid and support from legal professionals can be decisive in discrimination cases to encourage clients to step forward and address a discriminatory situation through legal means. The equality body is one of the main pillars of the protection mechanisms available to Roma. Having an expert declare that a case constitutes discrimination, as understood by

law, may be encouraging not only for the subject of the given discrimination case but also for others who are facing similar situations and who may otherwise hesitate to proceed. Therefore, the combination of legal counselling and reporting discrimination cases to the equality body not only strives to (re)build trust in state institutions, but it also increases access to justice for Roma generally. Community members often have no awareness of legal remedies against discrimination and thus obtain no access to qualified legal aid. Providing free legal aid was in this sense especially beneficial. To improve access of marginalized Roma to legal aid, it is important that the equality body explores the possibilities of raising awareness of its services in marginalized communities and that it is able to effectively reach out to these communities, so that its free legal service is indeed accessible for everyone.

Unfortunately, many Roma who face discrimination in Slovakia and Slovenia decide not to take any action as they are afraid of potential negative consequences or else continue to show deep distrust in public institutions and the justice system. The provision of free legal aid and clients' trust in lawyers were crucial to encouraging clients to take legal steps in discrimination cases. Reporting discrimination to the equality body is especially important when it comes to increasing the visibility of discrimination against Roma. From the point of view of those affected, reporting discrimination contributes to building trust in state institutions. Furthermore, it may help to prevent, or deter potential perpetrators of, discrimination.

1 Introduction

This report was produced in the framework of the ‘Promoting Roma Equality in Slovenia and Slovakia’ (PRESS) project.¹ The project has been running since April 2022, managed by Minority Rights Group Europe (MRGE), the Center for Civil and Human Rights (Poradňa pre občianske a ľudské práva, Slovakia) and EPEKA (Slovenia). The project aims to promote and protect the rights of Roma from human rights violations and discrimination by raising awareness across society and among stakeholders, by enhancing implementation of non-discrimination legislation and by empowering Roma to seek legal remedies in Slovakia and Slovenia. In the framework of the project, research was conducted across the different fields where Roma most often face discrimination in the two countries and the obstacles local Roma communities often meet when seeking to access justice. The results were compiled in a comparative report that served as a baseline study for project implementation.² Subsequently, training was organized for lawyers, Roma-led CSOs and activists on anti-discrimination legislation and legal remedies available within the existing state protection mechanisms. Following training, experienced Roma mediators conducted regular field visits to map discrimination and other human rights violations, like police abuse. Mediators either provided Roma with advice themselves, or in more complex cases, they connected the clients with lawyers who provided free legal aid and reported some of the cases to the equality body or other competent state authority, like the trade or education inspection. Throughout the project, legal advisers provided Roma mediators continuous technical support on the relevant legislation.

In Slovakia, Roma constitute the second largest ethnic group in the country after Hungarians. According to the last census in 2021, 67,179 people declared themselves as Roma (1.23 per cent of the population),³ although research shows that their real number is much higher: there are approximately 450,000 (8.25 per cent) people of Roma ethnicity in Slovakia.⁴ In Slovenia, it is difficult to estimate the size of the Roma population. According to the 2002 census, the number of Roma in Slovenia is 3,246 (0.1 per cent of the population). However, since 2002, the ethnicity of the population has not been recorded in the censuses, therefore there is no up-to-date official data on the number of Roma in Slovenia. Research conducted by

the Institute of Social Welfare of the Republic of Slovenia in 2014 indicates that there are 11,700 (0.5 per cent) Roma living in Slovenia, but according to estimates by Roma activists and other stakeholders, this figure is even higher today.⁵

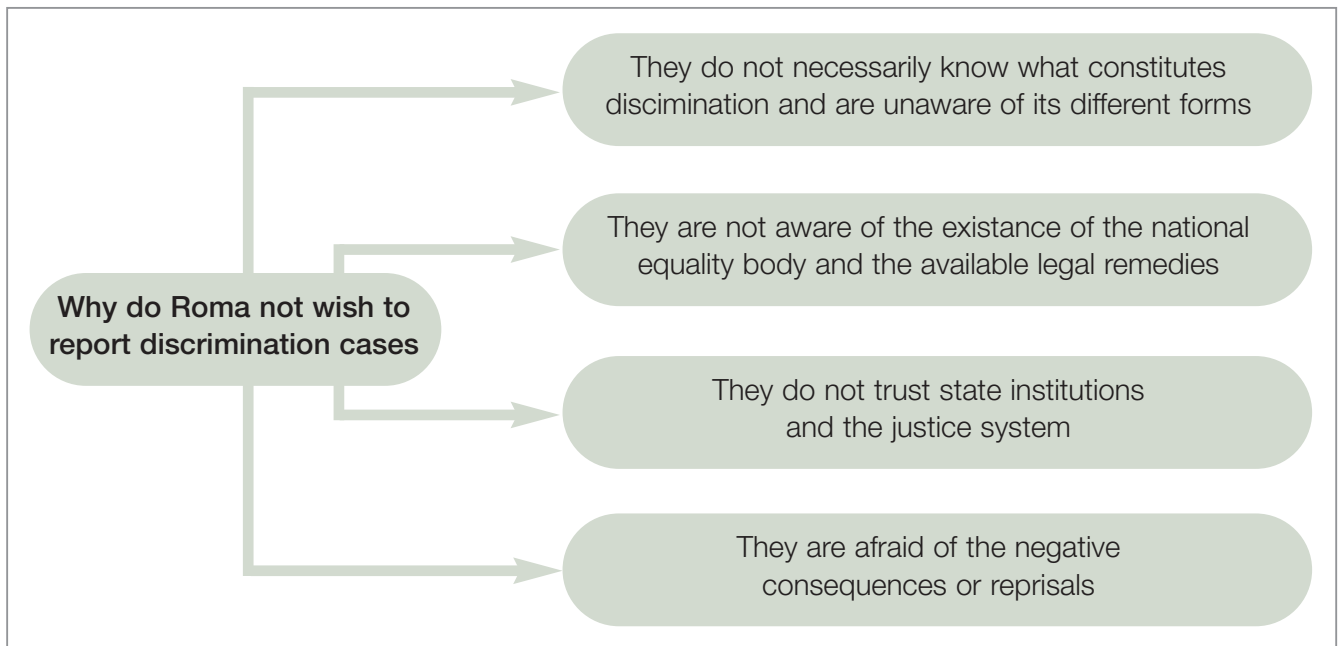
According to our baseline report, Roma often face discrimination from an early age in both countries in various areas of their lives, such as housing, education, employment and health care. Police abuse and ethnic profiling of Roma is also widespread. Roma women often face multiple and intersectional discrimination based on their ethnicity and gender in both countries. Rejection and discrimination against Roma are fuelled by anti-gypsyism, deep-rooted stereotypes and persistent negative attitudes toward the Roma community among the majority population. Although discrimination against Roma is widespread and well documented, many cases go unreported. Roma interviewees who participated in our baseline research in both countries acknowledged the existence of widespread discrimination. Although some of them had taken legal action, most of the discrimination cases are not reported to any relevant authority. There are various reasons behind this phenomenon. Many Roma do not necessarily know what constitutes discrimination and are unaware of its different forms, the existence of the national equality body and the available legal remedies. In addition, due to a general lack of trust in state institutions, many Roma believe that it is not worth reporting discrimination, as despite their efforts, it is thought that nothing will change. Others are afraid that if they challenge discrimination, they might face reprisals. According to our research, those Roma who knew about a non-governmental organization (NGO) or institution that they can turn to were more willing to take legal action. Despite a pessimistic view taken by interviewees in both countries, particularly given the scepticism surrounding the possibility of positive change for Roma people, they all recognized the importance of pursuing Roma rights and reporting more cases of discrimination.⁶

As EU member states, both Slovakia and Slovenia have anti-discrimination legislation in place and an established equality body in compliance with the Racial Equality Directive.⁷ The interviewed legal experts in both countries agreed that the current wording of the anti-discrimination law is adequate in its fundamentals and provides sufficient

legal basis for discriminated persons to pursue justice effectively. Both Slovak and Slovenian legal experts (including a representative of the Slovak equality body) think that the proper implementation of the recommendations of their respective equality body (Advocate of the Principle of Equality, APE, of Slovenia,

and the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights) would prevent further breaches. In Slovakia, the legal experts further highlighted the limited legal engagement of the equality body and suggested that it should give its litigation competence higher priority and have a clear litigation strategy.⁸

Why do Roma not wish to report discrimination cases?



2 Roma mediators' key role: awareness raising, documentation and support

Who are the Roma mediators?

Roma mediators are trained activists who conduct regular field visits in the Roma communities. Usually, they live or used to live in a Roma settlement themselves and are trusted members of the community who are aware of the different difficulties and issues Roma face. Mediators were at the heart of the project and played a crucial role.

Training: passing on knowledge to Roma communities

At the beginning of the project, a training programme was conducted in both countries for Roma activists on anti-discrimination legislation. The aim of the training was to support Roma when challenging discrimination in different legal fora. Roma mediators, who were later engaged in the project in both countries, appreciated that at the training they could meet other Roma activists and lawyers and could share experiences with them. These initial contacts proved to be very useful when establishing connections in other Roma communities and when conducting field visits. The mediators also acknowledged that the training provided them with contacts with Roma community members. According to mediators' feedback, learning about the different forms and manifestations of discrimination was one of the most useful aspects of the training as they could easily use some of the examples to explain what discrimination is during their fieldwork.

I have found the training for mediators useful in my current work, especially because now I can pass on information about what discrimination is in my own words and in the Romani language in the same way. The topics I found most useful were the examples of discrimination presented in a clear and simple way. I explain these examples further to others in the field. Especially cases that happen to women, in kindergarten, school or at the doctor.

Melisa Gutmann, Roma mediator in Pomurje region, Slovenia

Regular field visits: creating a safe space and building trust

After the training, three Roma mediators were engaged in the project in both countries, who visited different Roma communities regularly. Not only did they raise awareness of discrimination and the available legal remedies, but also encouraged and supported those Roma who faced discrimination and wished to turn to some of the relevant state authorities with their case. As most of the mediators lived in the Roma communities themselves and had strong connections and networks, community members trusted them and could share with them their experiences about the different discriminatory situations they faced.

Two mediators started to conduct regular field visits from January in the Košice and Prešov regions in Eastern Slovakia, while a third mediator joined them from March 2023. In Slovenia, three mediators started the field work in May in the Ljubljana, Dolenjska, Maribor, Pomurska and Murska Sobota regions. In the two countries, in total 130 field visits were conducted and mediators reached out to 701 community members (482 women and 219 men).

The role of the Roma mediators was varied throughout the project. During their regular field visits, they provided information to Roma community members about what discrimination is, how it can be identified, what legal remedies are available and where discriminated Roma can turn to with their complaint. In addition, they identified and documented discrimination cases based on what Roma shared with them during field visits and conducted additional fact-finding to collect evidence where necessary. In more simple cases, mediators provided the Roma people engaged in this project with some initial advice.

When Roma community members expressed their interest in addressing the situations they faced and seek legal remedies, the mediators managed the necessary legal paperwork or linked them with the legal staff of Poradňa in Slovakia or an external legal consultant in Slovenia who provided the complainants with free legal aid. Mediators also had a key role in creating a safe space and build trust with the community members and in encouraging them to challenge discrimination. Mediators were also actively involved in advocacy activities and attended some of the meetings with the authorities.

Discrimination cases

Slovakia

The mediators documented incidents of discrimination in various areas of public life. Their findings generally confirmed that many forms of discrimination against Roma remain common and ongoing in Slovakia. Several Roma individuals reported discriminatory practices occurring in local restaurants where food and drinks were sold for Roma only for take-away, with no possibility for them to sit down at the venue. After ordering the food, Roma had to wait outside, and on some occasions, restaurant staff even spat on their pizzas.

Roma living in communities close to a particular railway track reported that the Railway Company of Slovakia (Železničná spoločnosť Slovensko, ZSSK) removed the option of buying tickets on that platform in cash from a ticket machine or from the conductor on the train. Instead, tickets can only be bought online or by SMS. Roma community members wanted to address this situation, because many of them use this train to travel to work.

In another case, several Roma women activists were travelling home by bus from Prešov to Jarovnice/ Hermanovce. When they were getting inside the bus, the bus driver verbally abused them, using vulgar, rude and racist slurs. The clients felt ashamed and humiliated and wanted to complain to the bus company.

Instances of discrimination in access to employment were also reported. For instance, in one of the localities, some factories refuse to employ Roma workers. Roma women from this locality said that they face severe difficulties in finding a job in their region partly because of the ethnic discrimination they face when applying for a job. One Roma woman described how she had been refused employment repeatedly. On one occasion, the state labour office sent her to an employer, but she was told on the spot that there was no vacancy. Other employers expressly told her that they do not hire Roma. The woman

decided not to take any legal steps as she was afraid that she would not be hired anywhere else if she complained.

In some communities, Roma women reported incidents of ill-treatment by medical personnel towards Roma patients. In three communities, the emergency ambulance refused to drive into the Roma settlement. In one case, the ambulance was called to assist an elderly lady, but the medical staff refused to drive into the settlement, as the roads were muddy, and they did not want to get their shoes dirty. Instead, they parked the ambulance some 800 meters away from the community. Finally, the elderly lady was taken to the ambulance by four relatives. The medical staff was extremely rude and hostile to the elderly lady. They shouted at her, while they placed her in the ambulance and even slapped her face. Her family called the police who interrogated both parties, but no further steps were taken. The mediator was informed that the community members, and even women in labour, face similar treatment from medical staff whenever the ambulance is called. Furthermore, Roma women spoke about the ongoing existence of segregated Roma-only rooms in maternity wards in nearby local hospitals. In one locality, Roma clients mentioned to the mediator that the local dentist refuses to provide them with treatment, which is why they have to travel to a distant regional town to be treated.

Segregation of Roma children in mainstream education was reported, particularly in Roma-only schools near marginalized Roma communities. In this context, there is also a growing tendency for municipalities to address the alleged lack of school capacity in segregated schools by building new segregated school facilities instead of making systematic efforts to make use of available capacities to ensure effective access to education for Roma children. The findings of the mediators' field visits suggest that the state authorities are passive and that their efforts are insufficient to effectively respond to these tendencies and to support school diversity and school inclusion. Enrolling Roma children in special education without any substantial reason is also a common practice. In one of the localities, it was reported that the local primary school refused to enrol Roma children living in that locality, arguing that one of the parents did not have permanent residence. As a result, children were forced to commute and attend a school in a village almost 30 kilometres away.

In some Roma communities, mediators documented inadequate living conditions and lack of access to basic infrastructure, including access to drinking water. The Roma clients with whom the mediators spoke considered the lack of adequate housing and infrastructure as the most serious and pressing issue in their lives and as an absolute priority compared to the other forms of discrimination they face. Mediators' findings suggest an

ongoing lack of interest of particular municipalities to utilize available national and EU funds to improve the living conditions of local marginalized Roma communities. At the same time, the findings suggest ongoing failure of state institutions to intervene effectively and ensure that structural discrimination of Roma in the housing sector is addressed. In a few localities, incidents were reported where municipalities kept rejecting permanent residence to Roma who moved to the village, even on account of getting married to someone from a local Roma community.

In addition to incidents of discrimination, there were several cases of alleged police violence committed against Roma, such as the case of some Roma boys ill-treated by the police.

Slovenia

Discrimination in education was mentioned in the different regions where regular field work was conducted, particularly in the Dolenjska region. For example, a Roma man mentioned numerous instances where he faced bullying and hate speech both from his peers and from teachers. This had a deep impact on his self-esteem, and eventually he lost interest in his studies. He mentioned that occasionally he forgot his gym shoes at home, and the Physical Education teacher did not let him participate in the classes so he had to sit on a bench while other non-Roma students who also forgot to bring their gym shoes could participate wearing only their socks. He was troubled that the teacher applied the rules in an inconsistent and discriminatory way, and he felt humiliated as he was treated differently because of his ethnic origin.

In another case, a Roma woman from Maribor explained to the mediator that her son faced some challenges at school. He had to repeat the first grade as he struggled with reading. As the parents cannot read or write, they could not assist him with his studies. The school did provide him some additional assistance, but it was insufficient. In other areas, the child was competent. He was genuinely committed and was diligently completing his homework. Early in his second year, his teacher suggested transferring him to another programme in a different school, assuring the parents that there would be a better environment for him and promising the child equal opportunities upon graduation. The teacher further told them that that institution would provide the child with a more dedicated and personalized approach, ensuring his development. Lacking a broader understanding, the parents agreed, hoping it would make things easier for their son. The parents only later realized that the new school had an adapted curriculum, and the quality of education was

lower. Together with other Roma parents, they realized that their children were steered towards that school as an 'ideal solution', even though, with proper additional support, the children could have thrived in any mainstream school. It turned out that several primary schools had been exploiting the practice of channelling Roma students into adapted programmes for years, possibly to reduce their individual workload. Years later, when the parents' younger son faced a similar situation, the school offered the same option for the child. However, on this occasion, they rejected this opportunity and insisted that their son should stay in the mainstream school.

A Roma woman described the following incident at a shop to one of the mediators. After the shopping, the woman decided to use the self-checkout option to save time. After completing the payment, while she was leaving, the sensors at the exit triggered an alarm indicating that one of the items had not been scanned. Immediately, a salesperson approached her while calling the security guard. They treated her with disrespect, claiming that she had stolen items. She was ordered to unpack all her belongings from her bag, and they compared each item to the receipt. They even looked inside her bag while other people at the checkout watched the scene. Despite finding nothing, the woman was released without any apology, even though it was clear the issue had been a technical one. She was allowed to repack her things without saying a word. While she has seen similar situations before, the staff has always been polite and understanding to others who experienced the same issue, but this is not the case with members of the Roma community.

A Roma man explained another discriminatory situation to the mediator, which ended positively. When he started to work in an automobile factory, he was filled with anticipation and excitement as the job presented an opportunity for him and his family to elevate their living standards. The initial phase was smooth. His colleagues were supportive, and the supervisors genuinely helped him in the process of familiarizing himself with the various procedures, patiently explaining things multiple times if needed. However, the atmosphere began to shift with the appointment of a new foreman who was notably more stringent. The man started to feel as if he constantly had someone behind his back, watching and criticizing every move he made. Whenever he fell short of the set targets, the foreman immediately reprimanded him. This punitive behaviour seemed to be more pronounced towards Roma workers. Roma employees often found themselves working unpaid overtime hours, striving to meet the expected standards. Moreover, the foreman was not only demanding but also verbally abusive, using derogatory remarks. Driven by a sense of injustice and unity, Roma workers collectively decided to voice their concerns to the

management who eventually transferred the foreman to a different department. At that time, the man did not label their experience as ‘discrimination’. He merely understood that the situation was unfair, which propelled the group to stand up, which ushered in a positive change.

Lessons from the mediators work

Mediators in both countries managed to build trust and create a safe space for community members so that they could share their experiences of living with discrimination. In Slovakia, mediators were able to provide information in Romani to those Roma community members who did not have sufficient knowledge in Slovak. Roma often confused discrimination with other human rights violations, and mediators played an important role in clarifying what constitutes discrimination. The Roma community members appreciated mediators’ interest in their experience and felt comfortable to speak openly about their concerns. In Slovakia, all mediators were women, which helped establish contacts with discriminated Roma women. Roma

men were also generally open to share their experiences. In Slovenia, however, Roma women were often reserved when dealing with the male mediator, and only confided in female mediators. It was also observed that visiting Roma women in their homes created a safer space for them to speak.

Most Roma community members were not afraid of speaking about the discrimination they faced, but those who experienced police brutality were afraid of suffering negative consequences, which is why they were more cautious and reserved to speak about their experiences. Others were hesitant to speak about school segregation or discrimination in housing as they feared potential reprisals from the mayor. Although mediators were supportive and tried to encourage Roma community members to take legal steps when facing discrimination, many Roma community members showed no interest in addressing their issues given the general lack of trust in state institutions. Many clients thought that there was no chance deep-rooted discriminatory practices in society could change. In general, mediators were welcome and well-accepted in the different communities. Some of them also faced rejection when the mayors of two municipalities did not want them to liaise with local Roma community members.

I feel that Roma community members in the field appreciated my visits and the overall support we can provide them in Poradňa.

Agáta Duchoňová, Roma mediator in Slovakia

It is important, because a lot of Roma living in marginalized communities indeed have no information about discrimination and how to resist it. Even though they face various forms of discrimination in their lives, they do not know how to defend themselves and do not know anyone who can support them with free legal aid. Through our work I can bring them in touch with my colleague lawyer, who will provide them legal aid.

Nasťa Čonková, Roma mediator in Slovakia

We offer the Roma community a wealth of information and knowledge. Not only do we educate them about discrimination prevention and reporting, but we also connect them with other key stakeholders in the realm of discrimination prevention.

Ulfeta Softić, Roma mediator in Slovenia

3 Building Roma communities' trust in state institutions

Provision of free legal aid: anti-discrimination lawyers' support

Legal aid was provided in different ways in Slovakia and Slovenia. In Slovakia, Poradňa legal staff provided counselling in discrimination cases. Since its establishment in 2002, Poradňa has been providing legal aid to Roma women who were forcibly sterilized in Slovakia, including their representation before domestic courts and the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. After the adoption of the Anti-discrimination Act in Slovakia in 2004, Poradňa also started providing legal aid to Roma facing discrimination in various areas of public life, particularly in accessing public services, employment, education and health care. It brought discrimination cases before Slovak courts and litigated *actio popularis* lawsuits against the state authorities and municipalities addressing structural discrimination of marginalized Roma in the country. From 2009, Vanda Durbáková, an attorney cooperating with Poradňa and leading its strategic litigation program since 2003, has provided legal aid also in cases of police brutality against Roma. Prior to the PRESS project, EPEKA did not work on discrimination, so provision of free legal aid was a new field for them. Therefore, in Slovenia, the consultant lawyer, who delivered the training

for CSOs, Roma activists and lawyers on discrimination, provided legal aid in discrimination cases.

Once mediators identified a discrimination case and the person concerned agreed to proceed with the case, it was picked up by the cooperating lawyers. Based on the information documented by the mediators, the lawyers had an initial conversation with the person concerned and provided them with legal counselling, both on the phone and in person. In Slovakia, the attorney sometimes joined the mediators in the field and visited some of the Roma beneficiaries of the legal aid in person. In the two countries, free legal aid was provided in 80 instances.

The lawyers provided the clients with a range of legal advice explaining to them whether their cases amounted to discrimination according to the domestic Anti-Discrimination Act and what authority/institution they could turn to. Some of these cases were reported to the national equality body or other relevant state authorities. The mediators and the clients conducted thorough fact-finding and gathered the necessary evidence for the cases. In addition, lawyers in both countries provided continuous coaching for the mediators by discussing the identified cases and looking for solutions. Through coaching, the mediators deepened their knowledge of discrimination and improved their skills to provide support for clients.

The national equality bodies: facilitating Roma clients' access

The Advocate of the Principle of Equality of Slovenia	The Slovak National Centre for Human Rights
<p>Monitors discrimination in the country through independent research, studies, surveys, analyses and exchanges of knowledge with national and international bodies; and issues reports and special reports on the situation of specific groups of people</p>	<p>Monitors and evaluates the observance of human rights and the observance of the principle of equal treatment, in accordance with the Anti-Discrimination Act</p>
<p>Provides information, advice and help to people to exercise their rights in practice</p>	<p>Secures legal aid for victims of discrimination and intolerance</p>
<p>Makes declaratory decisions in discrimination cases; anyone who considers that they have suffered discrimination may submit a complaint to the Advocate of the Principle of Equality</p>	<p>Issues, upon request of natural persons or legal entities or through its own initiative, expert opinions in matters of observance of the principle of equal treatment in accordance with the Anti-Discrimination Act</p>
<p>Makes recommendations to state authorities, local communities and other stakeholders to consistently maintain protection against discrimination</p>	<p>Gathers information on racism, xenophobia and antisemitism in Slovakia and provides this information on request</p>

The Advocate of the Principle of Equality of Slovenia	The Slovak National Centre for Human Rights
Issues recommendations to amend disputed legislation and submits a request for reviewing the constitutionality and legality of laws to the Constitutional Court	Carries out independent inquiries concerning discrimination
May conduct strategic litigation in front of Civil Court and perform representation of parties in judicial proceedings	Conducts research and surveys for the purpose of providing data in the field of human rights, gathers and, on request, provides information in this field
Informs, educates and raises general public awareness about discrimination and organizes trainings and capacity-building activities for particular stakeholders on meeting their obligations	Prepares educational activities and takes part in information campaigns with the aim of increasing tolerance in society

Discrimination cases

Slovakia

Clients turned to Poradňa for free legal aid related to discrimination in various areas, ranging from access to public services, employment, education, health care and housing. Discriminatory incidents were identified, documented and brought forward by the mediators from the field or clients to Poradňa for legal aid. Poradňa reported 7 discrimination cases to the equality body requesting either the issuance of an expert opinion or an independent inquiry, to assess whether the incidents amounted to discrimination. In selected cases, they requested the equality body to propose measures for the responsible entity to eliminate discrimination and to monitor the subsequent implementation of these measures. In two of the cases, the equality body had already issued an expert opinion and established that discrimination had taken place, while the rest of them are still pending. Some of the reported incidents were related to broader discriminatory practices, which, as Poradňa argued, potentially victimize an unspecified number of Roma from marginalized communities.

Harrassment on a bus

With regards to the incident involving Roma women travelling home on a bus (see page 8) the lawyer submitted a criminal complaint to the police as well as a complaint to the bus company. The lawyer represented the clients in the ongoing criminal proceedings and in March 2023 was present during the interrogations by the police in Košice. In May 2023, the investigator found the criminal complaint unfounded and discontinued the criminal proceedings. Subsequently, the lawyer filed an appeal to the Office of Special Prosecution arguing the illegality of the investigator's conclusion. The Office of Special

Prosecution rejected the appeal. Simultaneously, the bus company acknowledged the driver's discriminatory act and sanctioned him with a salary deduction. At the same time, in April 2023, Poradňa requested the Slovak equality body to issue an independent opinion on this incident to establish whether the behaviour of the driver amounts to harassment under the Anti-Discrimination Act and whether the employer's actions violated the principle of equal treatment, with an emphasis on the obligations imposed on the employer in the given situation by the anti-discrimination legislation. **The equality body issued its opinion and concluded that the conduct of the driver constituted harassment.** Given that Poradňa's monitoring showed that the racist behavior of bus drivers is widespread and has a broader systemic character, in August 2023 Poradňa turned to the equality body again with a request to conduct an independent inquiry into the bus company and proposed the adoption of effective measures, including training, to prevent discrimination by their drivers in the Košice and Prešov regions.

I didn't feel comfortable. I felt humiliated, because there were gadje there on the bus. I decided to deal with it so that it wouldn't happen again. So that the Roma would not be humiliated anymore.

Affected Roma woman

So many people were on the bus and the bus driver yelled only at us. That's why I decided to deal with it, so it wouldn't happen a second time. We're just as human as everyone else. If I cut myself and him, we have the same blood – red.

Affected Roma woman

Discrimination in access to emergency health care

This case described above concerns three different Roma communities where the ambulance refused to enter a Roma settlement. When called, the ambulance stopped by the main road at the entrance of the community. People who needed healthcare had to be carried to the ambulance by their relatives or other community members. The medical staff refused to come near or inside the dwellings even in obviously acute cases when urgent first aid was needed. In addition, it was also reported that a phone operator of the ambulance service centre in some cases refused to send an ambulance to the community and told affected Roma community members to arrange their own transport to the hospital. The ambulance also commonly refused to come to this community when a woman went into labour, arguing that in these cases they should arrange their own transport to the hospital. It was documented by Poradňa that emergency service in these communities is provided by Rescue Service Košice, which is a state contributory organization. Poradňa reported the case to the equality body **which issued its independent opinion, concluding that the Rescue Service Košice failed to comply with the principle of equal treatment under the Anti-Discrimination Act.** It stated that the given practice fulfills the defining features of direct discrimination in health care based on ethnic origin and other status. In cooperation with the equality body, Roma mediators are planning to participate in a meeting with the management of the emergency ambulance company to urge them to stop this practice.

Discrimination in access to public services

As described in the previous chapter, the railway company adopted a new system for ticket purchases that affected several marginalized communities located close to a particular railway track. People could no longer buy the train ticket at the station at the ticket machine or from the conductor on the train, but they had to purchase it via SMS or online through one of the railway apps. The newly introduced scheme puts passengers who do not have access to the internet, the necessary digital devices (phone, PC) or the necessary technical skills at a disadvantage and thus discriminates against them in their access to goods and services.

The lawyer approached the railway company with a complaint objecting to their discriminatory practice. She argued that this restriction has a discriminatory impact on some disadvantaged social groups including marginalized Roma communities, who do not have smartphones, internet on their cell phones or the necessary digital skills

and equal access to digital technologies to be able to buy tickets on an equal basis. Poradňa reported the case to the equality body and requested an expert opinion to assess whether the described practice introduced by the Railway Company of Slovakia violates the principle of equal treatment. Poradňa further requested that in case it established that discrimination was occurring, the equality body proposes measures to the railway company to eliminate discrimination and to monitor the subsequent implementation of these measures. The case is still pending.

Apart from this submission, Poradňa reported another case related to the discriminatory practice of the railway company which relates to one Roma woman who travelled to work by train on a particular day and claimed that she was the victim of discrimination. Although she owns and uses a mobile phone, before the train journey on that day the battery in her mobile phone was drained, and she wanted to buy a ticket from the locomotive driver. However, he told her that he did not sell tickets. In an attempt to get to work anyway, she subsequently boarded the train without a ticket. During the journey, she was approached by a ticket inspector who told her that she had to get off at the next stop or pay a fine. The inspector issued her a certificate of infringement of the transport regulations with a penalty of EUR 50 for travelling without a valid ticket. The woman has not paid the fine and considered that her inability to purchase her ticket other than electronically via a mobile phone has led to discrimination in access to services. Poradňa requested the equality body to issue an expert opinion on the matter and assess whether this conduct violated the principle of equal treatment. The case is still pending.

When it happened to me, I felt annoyed. And I also felt ashamed, as I am Roma, and there were some friends travelling on the train, who saw how I was treated. Why did I decide to address it? I felt injustice and unfairness and surely it is important to stand up for your truth.

Affected Roma woman

Prohibition from entering a restaurant

In another case described above, when staff in a local restaurant denied serving Roma customers or else only allowed Roma customers to order take-aways, Poradňa conducted an advocacy meeting with representatives of the Slovak Trade Inspection in Košice, having competence to monitor and sanction such examples of discrimination. The Inspection subsequently conducted visits to two problematic restaurants. After the intervention of the Inspectorate, both restaurants put an end to their

discriminatory practices. Later, Poradňa reported further discriminatory cases of this kind to the Slovak Trade Inspection who committed themselves to conducting inspection visits to the restaurants that were identified as being discriminatory.

Discrimination in education

Another case, identified in January 2023, concerned the mother of a child, who lives in a village called Torysa. Although she is married to the father of her children, the local municipality refuses to register her for permanent residence. Instead, her permanent residence is registered in Ostrovany, 25 kms away. The municipality argues that they live in an unregistered house. Consequently, the local school refuses to enrol the child and she has to stay each week with her grandmother in Ostrovany. The mother turned to several institutions, including the child social service, but to no avail. The mother has obtained information that the school has enrolled several non-Roma children in the past who do not have permanent residence in Torysa. After the lawyer provided her with legal aid, the client submitted a formal application to enrol her child in the school and the school sent her a written rejection. Subsequently, the lawyer submitted the appeal against the administrative decision of the school to the municipality. As the municipality rejected the appeal, the lawyer filed an administrative lawsuit before the administrative court in Košice to challenge the decision of the municipality. The court proceeding is still pending.

I believe the legal aid provided by Poradňa is very good. Our family does not have funds to pay a lawyer.

Affected mother of a Roma child

Overall, two cases of discrimination of Roma children in education were submitted to the Slovak equality body. One case of misdiagnoses of Roma children who were placed into a special school for children with mental disabilities was also submitted to Slovak School Inspection for examination.

Legal aid in strategic legal cases

The lawyer also provided follow-up legal aid during several strategic court proceedings concerning discrimination or police violence launched by clients before the PRESS project started. Follow-up legal aid in these cases was particularly important for the legal development of these proceedings. For instance, in May 2023 the lawyer represented a client in a final court hearing, in which

Bratislava I District Court handed down their verdict in a case of racial discrimination. In 2017, in a café in Lučenec, one of our clients was not served because of his ethnic origin. The defendant had to apologize and compensate him financially for the discrimination. The court verdict was widely publicized in the media, which contributed to raising awareness of legal tools against discrimination and encouraged discriminated Roma to defend themselves in such cases.⁹ In addition, follow-up legal aid was provided in the case of three Roma children from Hermanovce who experienced educational discrimination at a local primary school. The Regional Court in Prešov as an appeal court **delivered a decision confirming that the placement of the three children in special classes was illegal** and established the liability of the Ministry of Education for discriminating against the complainants. This is the first ever final decision of the Slovak courts in favour of Romani children who experienced discrimination in the special education system in Slovakia.¹⁰

Slovenia

In Slovenia, legal aid was offered to Roma clients in cases related to housing and employment discrimination as well as online hate speech.

There is a serious shortage of workers in social care institutions for the elderly in Slovenia. A Roma man applied for a job as a carer in a nearby retirement home which is only 750 m away from his home. He successfully completed his interview and started to work at the retirement home. Although he passed the probation period without any problems, the employer did not conclude an employment contract with him, arguing that the clients complained that he was Roma. Despite there being a serious shortage of workforce, the employer decided to dismiss him.

EPEKA was contacted by Roma clients who complained that the cost of social public housing was far too high. Given that the property in question is state-owned and that it is designed for the purpose of social housing, the management costs and all the shared utility bills should not be so high. EPEKA offered to collect information about the costs at other similar social housing estates inhabited by non-Roma people for comparison.

Another case concerns a Roma car mechanic who is well-known in the Pomurje region. Many people come from far away to have their vehicles repaired in Pomurje. The problem arose on the Internet. The mechanic does not have a website and the Google search engine shows his name the way people search for it: 'Gypsy mechanic.' He would like to take steps to change it in the browser. The lawyer took steps to address Google and to resolve the issue.

Lessons learned from the legal work

Lack of trust in state institutions and the justice system is one of the main reasons why Roma prefer not to report discrimination cases. This is mainly because they often face rejection or ill-treatment from authorities. Therefore, many Roma think that it is not worth reporting discrimination cases as they expect that the situation would not change anyway. Access to free legal aid and support from legal professionals might be decisive in these cases to encourage clients to step up and address the situation via legal means. The equality body is one of the main pillars of the protection mechanism which has a key role in providing solutions. Establishing discrimination by expert opinion is encouraging not only for those involved in the given discrimination case, but also for others who face similar situations and might hesitate to proceed. Therefore, the combination of legal counselling and reporting discrimination cases to the equality body not only helps (re)build trust in state institution but also increases the access to justice for Roma community members.

Lawyers had a key role in the legal component of the project. They provided free legal aid in discrimination cases for Roma clients who otherwise could not have always afforded to pay for legal counselling. In addition, they reported some of the cases to the relevant authorities who took the necessary steps to address discrimination. Roma community members were given initial advice through a first contact session facilitated in the field by the mediators. Community members were often not aware of the concept of discrimination and could not distinguish it from other types of human rights violations. In this respect, both mediators and lawyers had a key role in raising awareness in the community of discrimination and its legal aspects.

In Slovakia, where possible, clients were encouraged to act against reported incidents of discrimination, which included taking legal steps, drafting and submitting complaints, and consulting lawyers about how to take further measures. However, when necessary, the lawyer provided clients with more complex legal support. Many clients did not even know that it was possible to approach

the equality body with their cases. The cases reported to the equality body were selected by the lawyer, who determined in which cases the resulting expert opinion and assessment of the equality body could be used to address the given discrimination most effectively, and in which cases the expert opinion could be used to take further legal steps, such as in ongoing criminal proceedings or in anti-discrimination lawsuits, which could potentially be filed in the future.

While some Roma people facing discrimination may be able to take the initial legal steps in their cases, to take full advantage of available anti-discrimination legislation and legal remedies, particularly filing lawsuits and seeking apology and compensation for non-pecuniary damage before the courts, it is necessary that the lawyer assist them throughout the procedure. In Slovakia, the equality body does not conduct field monitoring in Roma communities and Roma facing discrimination rarely turn to it with their cases. Furthermore, as of December 2023, the equality body is not representing discriminated Roma in any pending court proceedings as the lawyer working with Poradňa widely does. In this context, the equality body appreciated that thanks to their monitoring work, Poradňa identified several concrete cases that were submitted for assessment. Cases reported by Poradňa provided the equality body with valuable opportunities to deal with additional relevant incidents of discrimination against Roma. This increased its overall engagement in addressing discrimination of Roma in Slovakia and contributed to developing its legal competence in practice. It should be stressed that the equality body lacks competence to issue legally binding decisions and impose sanctions. It is only eligible to issue non-binding opinions, which discriminatory entities do not have to respect. It is important that the equality body strives to enhance the impact of its opinions as much as possible by proposing effective measures to discriminatory entities to curb and prevent discrimination as well as by follow-up monitoring of their implementation. However, introducing the competence to issue legally binding decisions and impose sanctions is desirable and could significantly contribute to more effective prevention of discrimination in Slovak society.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

During the fieldwork, mediators approached community members and raised awareness of discrimination and the available legal remedies. Mediators were effectively able to give Roma initial guidance as to whether their case falls within racial discrimination or other racially motivated human right violation. Both Poradňa and EPEKA are close to many marginalized communities and mediators were able to conduct field visits in a significant number of communities. Roma mediators in both countries appreciated that at the training, they could meet other Roma activists and could share and exchange experience with them on how to address discrimination. These initial contacts proved to be very useful when establishing contacts in other Roma communities and when conducting field visits. **Thanks to the fieldwork, Roma were better acquainted with discrimination, but also with the competence and functioning of the equality body and the protection available to them, as well as understanding the importance of reporting discrimination.**

Mediators in both countries evaluated the fieldwork positively and appreciated that they could visit Roma communities from different parts of Slovakia and Slovenia. As most of the mediators live or used to live in Roma settlements themselves, they enjoy people's trust. Many of the community members learned about the concept of discrimination from the mediators and realized that they faced similar situations. The lawyers provided continuous mentoring for the mediators throughout the project and advised them whenever it was necessary.

Roma community members often have no awareness of legal remedies against discrimination and no access to qualified legal aid. Therefore, the provided free legal aid was particularly beneficial. To improve access of marginalized Roma to legal aid, it is important that the equality body explores the possibilities to raise awareness of its service in marginalized communities and be able to effectively reach out to these communities. It is also vital that the equality body works much closer to people living in Roma communities so that its free legal service is indeed accessible.

In Slovakia, the equality body should be more active in offering and providing discriminated persons free legal representation in court proceedings. This is particularly instrumental for the gradual removal of complex barriers in access to justice that discriminated Roma continue to

face in Slovakia. Given the existing barriers, the equality body should proactively address discrimination against Roma through available legal remedies, even if there is no individual complainant identified to file a lawsuit on their behalf. In this regard, the equality body should make effective use of *actio popularis* claims that address exposure to systemic discrimination affecting wider groups of persons. The free legal service of the equality body should complement the one provided by the network of the Offices of Free Legal Aid operating in Slovakia, which provides general legal aid to low-income groups of people also in civil law issues.

Unfortunately, many Roma, who faced discrimination in both countries, decided not to take any action as they were afraid of the potential negative consequences or prevailing deep distrust in institutions and justice. The provision of free legal aid and clients' trust in the lawyers were crucial when encouraging clients to take legal steps in discrimination cases.

The cases reported to the Slovak equality body address relevant incidents that may amount to discrimination of Roma. Five of the reported cases are still pending and the overall impact can only be evaluated following an official outcome, once the equality body has assessed them in full. In two cases the equality body issued its independent opinion, confirming that the behaviour of the bus driver amounted to harassment and that the Rescue Service acted in a discriminatory way towards Roma. The conclusions of the equality body in these two cases as well as the legal reasoning backing its conclusions are satisfactory. Poradňa has documented similar incidents of racist verbal misbehaviour of bus drivers against Roma in the Slovak transport system. The issued opinions of the equality body do not have any impact on the prevention of this practice. The equality body did not proactively approach the bus company to address this problem. Therefore, Poradňa approached the equality body with a follow-up request to carry out independent surveys into this widespread discriminatory practice. Furthermore, they proposed relevant measures to remove this practice including organizing sensitization trainings for the drivers and monitoring the implementation of the proposed measures as well as the occurrence of this practice in future.

Reporting discrimination to the equality body is especially important when it comes to increasing the

visibility of discrimination against Roma. From the point of view of those affected, reporting discrimination contributes to building trust in state institutions. Furthermore, it may serve to prevent or deter potential perpetrators of discrimination.

Recommendations for both countries

- Equality bodies should significantly raise awareness of their work on the protection of marginalized Roma against discrimination. Their networks of local offices and available legal staff should be strengthened to ensure that legal aid for Roma facing discrimination is widely accessible. In doing so, governments should allocate sufficient funds that would enable equality bodies to build capacity.
- Equality bodies should acknowledge the existing barriers in access to justice for Roma living in marginalized communities. They should also acknowledge that many Roma facing discrimination do not report incidents and do not take legal action. In response, they should proactively monitor discrimination against marginalized Roma communities and address this gap by available legal remedies, even if there is no individual complainant.
- This report has established that one of the barriers in access to justice for Roma is lack of trust in public institutions. The state authorities should significantly enhance the efficiency of all institutions and professionals engaged in the legal proceedings concerning discrimination and racially motivated crimes including their ability to effectively handle respective complaints and deliver high quality decisions, which expeditiously bring justice for discriminated Roma community members. In Slovakia, the equality body should make effective use of the legal process of *actio popularis* claims.
- The efficiency of institutions and professionals engaged in legal proceedings concerning discrimination and racially motivated crimes is not the only reason for ongoing remote access to justice in this area. The state authorities should also introduce systemic measures to disrupt and eradicate patterns of institutional racism against Roma in the functioning of state institutions, particularly the police forces, law enforcement agencies, hospitals and courts.

- State authorities should effectively address social deprivation and poverty of Roma living in marginalized communities, which seriously weaken their motivation to stand up against discrimination and forces them to deal with basic needs like securing food, drinking water and heat.
- Support capacities of NGOs providing legal aid in Roma communities as well as support development of pro-bono engagement in this area among law firms.

Specific recommendations for Slovakia

- The equality body should make effective use of the legal process of *actio popularis* claims.
- To significantly enhance the impact of the equality body on the elimination and prevention of discrimination, the equality body should be given the power to issue legally binding decisions and impose sanctions. In this regard, good practice from some other European countries, where equivalent institutions possess this competence, should be recognized.
- State authorities and municipalities should fully recognize final decisions of domestic courts and the European Court of Human Rights, holding the state authorities and municipalities accountable for structural discrimination of Roma in Slovakia and failure to effectively remove and prevent discrimination. Ignorance of these decisions seriously undermines the principle of rule of law and has destructive impact on the trust of Roma as well as the whole Slovak society in state institutions, judicial powers and justice.
- State authorities should effectively remove structural forms of discrimination, particularly segregation in housing, education and other areas as well as intersectional discrimination of Roma women, which is particularly widespread in maternity health care.
- State authorities in cooperation with municipalities should increase capacities and abilities of community centres and field workers operating in Roma communities to effectively assist Roma people with accessing all the necessary legal aid from the Center for Legal Aid and the equality body. Community centres and field workers should be able to provide initial guidance and mediate the contact of marginalized Roma with these bodies.

Notes

- 1 Project number: 101049193 — PRESS — CERV-2021-EQUAL, funded by the European Union's Citizenship, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (2021-27).
- 2 Štefan Ivanco, Jerica Lorenci, Andrea Spitálszky, Equality and justice on the sidelines: Comparative report on discrimination against Roma and their access to justice in Slovakia and Slovenia, MRGE, Poradňa pre občianske a ľudské práva, EPEKA Slovenia, 2022, available at <https://minorityrights.org/publications/press-equality/>
- 3 Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 'Number of population by ethnicity in the Slovak Republic at 1. 1. 2021', <https://www.scitanie.sk/en/population/basic-results/structure-of-population-by-ethnicity/SR/SK0/SR>
- 4 The considerable difference in numbers resulted from the different methodology of the research, where data is based on perceived ethnicity attributed to people. The research did not cover all localities where Roma live. Ravazs, A., Kováč, L. And Markovič, F., Atlas of Roma Communities 2019, Bratislava, VEDA, 2021, p. 17. <https://www.institutmateja.bela.sk/atlas> The publication provides the interpretation of the collected data. The core research data is available at <https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/atlas-romskych-komunit/atlas-romskych-komunit-2019/>
- 5 Dolenjska, ['Most Roma live in Maribor and Murska Sobota, followed by Novo mesto, Črnomelj and Kočevje'], 11 October 2017. <https://moja-dolenjska.si/najvec-romov-zivi-v-mariboru-murski-soboti-sledijo-novo-mesto-crnomelj-kocevje/>. The information regarding the estimated numbers of Roma population in Slovenia was obtained through fieldwork and direct communication with members of Roma community and Roma activists.
- 6 Štefan Ivanco, Jerica Lorenci, Andrea Spitálszky, Equality and justice on the sidelines: Comparative report on discrimination against Roma and their access to justice in Slovakia and Slovenia, MRGE, Poradňa pre občianske a ľudské práva, EPEKA Slovenia, 2022, p.3.
- 7 Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin.
- 8 Štefan Ivanco, Jerica Lorenci, Andrea Spitálszky, Equality and justice on the sidelines: Comparative report on discrimination against Roma and their access to justice in Slovakia and Slovenia, MRGE, Poradňa pre občianske a ľudské práva, EPEKA Slovenia, 2022, pp. 12-15.
- 9 See <https://poradna-prava.sk/en/news/court-rules-in-case-of-discrimination-against-a-roma-man-who-was-refused-service-in-a-cafe-in-a-town-lucenec/>
- 10 See <https://poradna-prava.sk/en/news/the-appeal-court-confirmed-the-illegal-education-of-romani-children-in-special-classes-at-a-primary-school-in-hermanovce/>

working to secure the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples

Minority Rights Group

Equality in accessing justice:

Removing barriers for Roma in pursuing their rights in discrimination cases

This report provides an overview and insights into discrimination faced by members of Roma communities in Slovenia and Slovakia, and outlines the strategies to provide legal remedies. In addition to raising public awareness of discrimination against Roma people in these countries, this report provides an outline of the outcomes of fieldwork carried out by trained Roma mediators in 2023 in the framework of the 'Promoting Roma Equality in Slovenia and Slovakia - PRESS' project funded by the European Commission and managed by Minority Rights Group Europe (MRGE), the Center for Civil and Human Rights (Poradňa pre občianske a ľudské práva, Slovakia) and EPEKA (Slovenia). Drawing on first-hand accounts of people within various Roma communities, this report provides detailed analysis of a range of discriminatory practices, which expose systemic forms of anti gypsyism in various aspects of public life including the workplace, public transport, education and health, and resumes the legal work conducted by engaged legal professionals.





The report's insights draw on the practical work conducted through awareness raising and the provision of legal assistance obtained through collaboration with professional lawyers in both countries. These practical lessons could set an important precedent in the process of achieving access to justice for Roma people in Slovenia and Slovakia.

The report also provides invaluable recommendations to authorities and relevant bodies, especially equality bodies in Slovakia and Slovenia. This report will be of interest to legal professionals, advocacy experts, activists, researchers and human rights stakeholders who wish to deepen their understanding of Roma rights in Eastern Europe. The real-life accounts of discrimination vividly described in this report, and the mechanisms outlined here, show that access to justice for Roma communities can be achieved successfully. The proposed recommendations will be of relevance to state authorities seeking to combat discrimination not only in Slovakia and Slovenia, but across Eastern Europe.


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Minority Rights Group Europe San Marco street 56/A, 4th floor, 2, 1034, Budapest
Tel +36 30 209 3152 **Email** minority.rights@minorityrights.org **Website** www.minorityrights.org
 www.twitter.com/minorityrights  www.facebook.com/minorityrights



Center for Civil and Human Rights (Poradňa pre občianske a ľudské práva) Krivá 23, 040 01 Košice
Tel +421 908 695 531 **Email** poradna@poradna-prava.sk **Website** www.poradna-prava.sk
 www.facebook.com/poradna.kosice



EPEKA Slovenia Gorkega ulica 34, 2000 Maribor
Tel +386 30 610 606 **Email** epeka@epeka.si **Website** www.epeka.si
 www.twitter.com/epeka_slovenia  www.facebook.com/epeka.slovenia



Visit the Stories website of the Center for Civil and Human Rights poradna-prava.sk/en/videos/ for multimedia content about the Roma minority in Slovakia.