

Information on Roma Ethnic Community in the Republic of Slovenia

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1. Origin of Roma and their Settlement in Slovenia

The historical data mention Roma living on the territory of today's Republic of Slovenia already in 15th century, but from 17th century onwards the information about them is more frequent. Today we can firmly talk about specific regions where Roma settled indefinitely: Prekmurje, Dolenjska, Bela krajina and Posavje. In these regions the Roma Ethnic Community lives traditionally, historically, and has preserved its more or less permanent and specific settlement.

2. Statistical Data

In the **2002 census 3,246 inhabitants declared themselves as members of Roma Ethnic Community and 3,834 of them stated Roma language was their mother tongue.** By comparing the data from 1991 census to the 2002 census we see that in the latest census, in **2002, 30.4 per cent more** persons declared themselves as Roma and **28.2 per cent more** stated **Roma language** was their mother tongue.

According to the data from 2003 provided by **social work centres** and to the data from 2004 provided by the **municipalities** where Roma are settled **historically** there are supposedly **6,264 - 6,448 Roma** living in Slovenia. Despite what is contained in the official data of the census, **Office for nationalities estimates** that **between 7,000 and 10,000 Roma** live in the Republic of Slovenia.

3. Constitutional and Legal Status

The special status of Roma living in Slovenia was first recognised in 1989 with a constitutional amendment stipulating the law should regulate the status of Roma. The legal basis for current regulation is provided in **Article 65 of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia**, which stipulates: "*The status and special rights of the Roma Community living in Slovenia shall be regulated by law.*" **In the Republic of Slovenia, the Roma Community does not enjoy the status of a national minority**, but is recognised as a **special community with special ethnic characteristics** (its own language, culture and other ethnic specificities).

Article 65 of the Slovene Constitution is currently being **implemented through sector-specific legislation** and the protection of the rights of the Roma Community has thus far been regulated by **eleven (11) sector-specific acts:**

1. *Local Government Act,*
2. *Local Elections Act,*
3. *Voting Rights Register Act,*
4. *Exercising Public Interest in Culture Act,*
5. *Organisation and Financing of Education and Training Act,*
6. *Kindergarten Act,*
7. *Elementary School Act,*
8. *Public Media Act,*
9. *Librarianship Act,*
10. *Promotion of Balanced Regional Development,*
11. *Radiotelevizija Slovenija Act.*

In the near future also the **Roma Community Act**, which is in the final stage of preparation, will contribute to regulation of Roma issues. It assumes a **special organizational structure** that will enable Roma Community to better and more effectively and efficiently communicate with state authorities. It also sets financial obligations of the Republic of Slovenia and its municipalities in relation to guaranteeing special rights of Roma Community.

Besides above mentioned legal instruments the Government of the Republic of Slovenia adopted several measures and other official documents to overcome and alleviate the difficulties, Roma Community is facing with. **Program of Measures for Assisting the Roma**, adopted in 1995 and still topical and valid, is one of the most important documents with which the Republic of Slovenia showed its awareness of the need to regulate Roma issues consistently.

4. Areas where Roma Face Greatest Problems

Roma Community is a community with poor or without education, mainly without employment, facing grave difficulties in the field of housing conditions.

4.1 Living Standards

The majority of Roma still reside in settlements isolated from other populations or on the borders of settled areas in circumstances that are below the minimum living standards. Only small numbers of Roma families live together with the majority population, who were able to reach **satisfactory level of socialization** and were able to involve themselves in the local environment and the society. To overcome the problem of poor living standards there have recently been many positive developments in this area, mainly through **co-financing of the regulation of Roma settlements by the Republic of Slovenia**.

4.2 Education

In 1996, the **legal basis** for special conditions governing the education of Roma children was incorporated in **new education legislation** and the Organisation and Financing of Education and Training Act, Kindergarten Act and Elementary School Act were additionally amended in 2000 and 2001. The implementation of the "**Strategy for Education of Roma in the Republic of Slovenia**" adopted by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport in May 2004 contributes to an improvement in the educational standards of Roma. It assumes **early inclusion of Roma children**

in pre-school institutions with its main purpose **language-learning** (both Slovene and Roma language), the **appointment of a Roma assistant** to the classes with Roma children, introduction of the **Roma language lessons** in elementary school as an **optional subject**, **permanent in-service training and additional education programs for professionals** etc.

4.3 Employment

Employment is **one of the basic preconditions for improving the social and economic status of Roma**, ensuring their integration into society. **Only 2 per cent of Roma are employed and approximately 98 per cent are unemployed and receiving social assistance from the state.** Many occupy themselves in the so-called grey economy (collecting scrap, gathering wild berries, etc.). However, **great efforts** (on the part of the Slovene government as well as on the local level) **have been made in order to improve the described situation.** Slovene Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs has in cooperation with the Employment Offices created several programs and adopted different measures to encourage and help Roma to find a job. Nevertheless, social assistance also has de-stimulating effects on unemployed Roma. Consequently, in September 2006, stricter conditions for beneficiaries to obtain or retain the social assistance were set (regular visits to the Employment Office, active employment seeking etc.) with its main objective to motivate people on benefit to employ themselves.

5. Organisation of the Roma Ethnic Community

Roma themselves have already realised that the situation of the Roma Community in the Republic of Slovenia cannot be improved without their cooperation and better organisation in their own ranks. **Endeavours of the Office for Nationalities** have focused on organising Roma and establishing Roma associations. To date, **23 Roma associations** have been established.

The **main organisation of the Roma Community is the Roma Union of Slovenia, which also communicates with state authorities.** The Roma Union works more and more actively as a guide and coordinator of the **Roma associations'** (at the moment 23 Roma associations) activities. Working bodies of the Roma Union of Slovenia are **Forum of Roma Councillors**, which represents a link among **Roma councillors** (in municipalities where Roma elect their councillors), and **Forum of Roma women.**

6. Activities in the Field of Culture and Information Services

To be able to realize the actual needs of the Roma people, the **Sector for Cultural Rights of the Minorities and Cultural diversity** (within the Ministry of Culture), includes in its work the Roma Union of Slovenia (in the formation of programs and other measures), and it also cooperates with individual cultural associations as well as some Roma individuals. The Ministry of Culture has so far financed cultural activities provided by different Roma associations, the work of a cultural animator, several performances, several publications, and different lectures on Roma culture, publishing of the newspaper Romano Them – Roma World etc.

An even greater attention is paid to providing **information to the Roma and about the Roma.** **Two radio stations** have been broadcasting regular weekly programs for the Roma for eight consecutive years. Both, the Slovene and Roma languages are used in the program, which

provides information about the work and life of the Roma, reports on their cultural, sports and other events, including Roma music and original contributions by Roma authors. **The Office for Nationalities finances radio programs from the budgetary funds of the Republic of Slovenia and since 2002 it has also been financing two Roma TV broadcasts.** The contents of these TV broadcasts are similar to Roma radio programs. In the future, after the implementation of the Radiotelevizija Slovenija Act, **also the national Radio-television will gradually produce Roma radio and TV programs.**

7. Conclusion

Experience in working with members of the Roma Community has shown that the endeavours of the Republic of Slovenia and its state bodies and municipalities cannot achieve optimum results in resolving Roma issues without including Roma themselves in these activities. For that reason the basic act on Roma Community, that is currently being prepared, focuses on the organizational aspect of Roma Community so as to include Roma in the preparation and implementation of policies, measures and programs intended to improve their situation. Together with already valid sector-specific acts and their implementation the Roma Community Act will in the future certainly bring great progress in the field of regulating Roma issues.