



SLOVAK NATIONAL CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Laurinská 18, 811 01 Bratislava, Slovakia
phone: +421 2 208 501 11, fax: +421 2 208 501 35
e-mail: info@snslp.sk, www.snslp.sk

Best practices, experiences, challenges and ways to overcome the challenges relating to the right to participate in political and public affairs (art.25 ICCPR, art.7 CEDAW, article 29 CRPD).

- a) **Participation in the conduct of public affairs;**
- b) **Right to vote and to be elected and**
- c) **Equal access to public service.**

Slovak National Centre for Human Rights (hereinafter referred to as the “Centre”) as a National Human Rights Institution and a National Equality Body in the Slovak Republic generally expresses its concerns about the participation of vulnerable groups such as women, Roma and disabled persons in political and public life and decision making in Slovakia.

Please find below three brief analyses of challenges and ways to overcome them in relation to the right to participate in political and public affairs for women, Roma people and disabled persons.

1. Participation of women

Participation of women in politics is one of the most critical issues of gender equality in Slovakia. **A low proportion of women in the highest political functions is a long-term trend and does not copy their majority proportion of the Slovak population.** Although Slovak women enjoy equal right to vote and to be elected as men, the actual state of participation of women in the highest political bodies in Slovakia reveals the persistent factual political marginalization of women. Gender aspects in the formation of government are very limitedly taken into account and a question of parity participation of women in the Slovak executive branch has never been opened.

- *Challenges*

Only one of 15 candidates in 2014 presidential election was a woman. Furthermore, **all three of the highest constitutional bodies** (president, speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic and the Prime Minister) **are held exclusively by men. A current composition of the government**

comprises of no women. Only one of the state secretaries is a woman. With regards to proportion of women members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, in 2012 parliamentary election 26.2% of running candidates were women and only 14 women were elected (16% of the total number of MPs). **A representation of women is also low at local levels of government.** None of the 8 mayors of self-governing regions (elected in November 2013) is a woman. A proportion of women members of parliaments of self-governing regions is 15.7 %.

From 8 mayors of capital cities of self-governing regions, only one is a woman (elected in November 2014).

- *Good Practices*

One of the positive examples of women's representation in politics is the **Slovak delegation to the European Parliament, where there are 5 women out of a total of 13 Slovak MEPs**, which makes 38% of the delegation.

Women are most strongly represented in the Slovak **judiciary**. The post of the **President of the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic** is held by a woman. Concerning other highest judicial positions, three women have replaced three men and now **the President and the Vice President of the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic** and **the President of the Judicial Council of the Slovak Republic** are all women. The post of prime minister of the Slovak Republic was occupied by women from 2010-2012.

- *Ways to Overcome the Challenges*

The challenges to be overcome stem mainly from social and cultural climate of the society, practices of political parties and political culture as such. Men traditionally participate in public debates and political activities more significantly at individual bases than women who get involved more in charity. Moreover, women seem to join political parties who do not enjoy wide-spread popularity and are not simply elected to legislative organs. Family and position of the women within family are repeatedly perceived as the most significant challenges for women to enter politics. The lack of consensus concerning the introduction of quota system has continued to be visible among all relevant stakeholders such as political parties, academia and civil society.

The Centre has not carried out activity targeting solely issues of women's political participation or their equal access to public service. However, the Centre always publishes recommendations targeting either State authorities or recommending international bodies regarding women's political participation issues. By the means of those recommendations the Centre recommends ways to

overcome the aforesaid challenges. For instance, the most recently an NHRI Report has been submitted by the Centre to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against women. The Centre believes that in order to eliminate gender imparity in politics it is crucial to increase public awareness on gender equality, tackle gender stereotypes while strengthening human rights and women human rights education. The Centre offers special education activities targeting elementary and high school students on gender equality in general emphasising the role of important women in political leadership. The Centre supports the discussion on women participation in terms of the introduction of informal or formal quotas in candidate list of political parties and further implementation of affirmative actions in this field. Hence, the amendment of electoral laws in order to secure parity representation of women in politics within political parties is needed.

2. Participation of Roma

In Slovakia, the Roma **believe that the most important and also the most trustworthy decision-making level for them is a municipal self-government.** After decentralization reforms municipalities have many competences, which place tools into the hands of self-governments for dealing with many issues in local Roma communities. As the outcomes of the recent municipal elections show, the Roma are increasingly interested in participation in decision-making processes of the self-government.

- *Challenges*

It has been proven difficult to indicate exact data about Roma participation in the elections as **in Slovakia statistics on the basis of ethnicity are not collected.** The estimation of National Democratic Institute stated that in municipal elections which had taken place in November 2014, **33 Roma mayors and more than 390 Roma members of municipal parliaments** had been elected. The numbers have slightly increased comparing to municipal elections in 2010 (29 mayors and 330 municipal parliament members). Unfortunately, 390 Roma members of municipal parliaments is a drop in the ocean taking into consideration that 20 753 members of municipal parliaments were elected. It constitutes only 1.8% out of all elected members of municipal parliaments. On the other hand, Roma voters have been proven as one of the most active voters in municipal elections mostly because they generally believe that at the municipal level they can achieve more impact. They know the candidates personally whereas on national level they feel detached from the running candidates. **As regard to the right to vote a very negative trend of vote-buying needs to be eliminated**

especially in eastern parts of Slovakia. The Slovak Criminal Code defines a crime of election corruption, which can be conducted in a form of vote-buying. As stated in the Strategic Plan of the Slovak Republic for Combating Corruption, this phenomenon shall be eliminated by awareness raising campaigns targeting vulnerable groups, education activities, better cooperation among state authorities and civil society organizations or establishment of effective independent mechanism controlling the financing of political parties and politicians running for elections.

- *Good practices*

The Slovak Republic has addressed the situation and challenges concerning the Roma minority in Slovakia by establishing a post **of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities**. The current Plenipotentiary is preparing a strategy for dealing with Roma issues in Slovakia, the so-called Roma reform. The mandate of the Plenipotentiary reflects its advisory position towards the Slovak Government and it includes implementing system measures for improvement of status and integration of Roma in the society and prevention of their social exclusion as well as contributing to realization and coordination of Government and EU policies targeting Roma communities. The Plenipotentiary consults his activities with the Slovak Prime Minister and the Ministry of Interior and prepares materials for the sessions of the Government. Furthermore, he is responsible for advising the state authorities including self-government institutions on Roma issues.

- *Ways to Overcome the Challenges*

The Roma people need to be empowered because they tend to feel less successful in the conduct of public affairs than other parts of the Slovak population. The awareness raising activities targeting rest of population and dealing with problems of stereotypes and racism need to be conducted. **The Centre would see the role of a successful Roma who will be elected at national level as a role-model for other politicians who pursue their career at municipal level.** The Centre conducts education activities in order to foster respect towards this vulnerable community.

The challenges such as poverty, economic situation, marginalisation and social issues hinder young Roma participation in education activities which ought to be fostered by positive actions. The same recommendation would be given to universities and last but not least the private and public authorities. Generally speaking, the participation of Roma in labour market would ensure their economic stability which would lead to more active participation in public and political affairs.

3. Participation of Persons with Disabilities

It is important to mention, that the right to participate in political and public affairs of disabled people is closely connected with the right to participate in society in accordance with international principles of human rights protection. **In the Slovak context this means to ensure complete ratification of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and of the Optional Protocol thereto, which were ratified by the Slovak Republic in 2010.**

- *Challenges*

General challenges faced by people with disabilities in Slovakia concern mainly the process of de-barrierisation and accessibility of election information and elections as such.

More than 10 % of Slovak citizens are considered to have some kind of disability. This vulnerable group faces several challenges such as difficult access to information or no-barrier-free access to election premises. For instance, blind and partially sighted persons have their ballots in Braille font, and are always being assisted by available election assistance. However, they wish for electronic election in order to ensure the principle of secret ballot. Deaf persons would appreciate having a sign language option available during all TV programmes concerning elections. Furthermore, people with mental disabilities who are authorised to vote (after being declared as legally capable by court) face further complications due to the complexity of the texts of election materials. **Essentially, few election premises offer a barrier-free access, which prevents people in the wheelchair to attend elections.** In order to eliminate this barrier, these persons enjoy the possibility to have the ballot box delivered home. On the other hand, according to the information provided by the National Council of Citizens with Disabilities the majority of disabled people in Slovakia express their wish to vote in election premises. The barriers in access to premises of offices of municipal self-governments and other public offices undoubtedly do not empower the motivation of persons with disabilities to run for such offices.

- *Good Practices*

National Council of Citizens with disabilities offered its web domain to those parties who wanted to outreach disabled citizens.

The further protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities will be ensured by the **Act on Children's Commissioner and Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities**, the proposal of which has now passes the intra-Governmental comment procedure, **establishing the Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities** (Commissioner). The role of the Commissioner as



SLOVAK NATIONAL CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

stipulated in the material Act is, inter alia, to consider from his/her own initiative or after receiving complain the observance of the rights of persons with disabilities in Slovakia, to monitor the observance of the rights of persons with disabilities, and to promote the rights of persons with disabilities. Therefore, any violation of the right to be elected or the right to vote for persons with disabilities could be reviewed also by the Commissioner after the Act comes into effect.

- *Ways to Overcome the Challenges*

The process of de-barrierisation needs to be conducted especially in the election premises, or alternatively the premises shall be carefully selected in order to comply with disabled persons' requirements. The right to vote shall be facilitated through the means of distribution of election materials in Braille font or sign language. The Slovak Republic must, without undue delay, through both legislative and non-legislative measures, develop such an environment for all persons with disabilities, which will allow them enforce, protect and ensure the systematic, effective, long-term, full and equal exercise of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and which will promote respect to their inherent human dignity. The Slovak Republic should consistently consider and follow recommendations and outcomes resulting from the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Contact person: Mgr. Zuzana Pavlíčková, LL.M, pavlickova@snslp.sk