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## The Impact of Government Social Policy on the Roma Community in Czecho-Slovakia from 1948 to the Present with Comparison of Contemporary Research about Social Pathology

### ABSTRACT

The authors aim to draw attention to underestimating and disinterest in conducting a social study on the Roma population in socialism, which was carried out only in the early 1970s. The study on social and pathological phenomena focused on the impacts on the overall societal scale. The researchers did not perform studies in Roma communities and families. The state-controlled blanket assimilation was expected to automatically arouse positive changes in Roma families. Research into social pathology in Roma communities and families was launched only in the second half of the 1990s, mainly after the millennium. The study points to the authors' archival qualitative research at the turn of 2020 and 2021 in the Slovak National Archives in Bratislava. The second part of the article presents qualitative research on violence against Romani women in connection with the presented effects of not addressing this negative phenomenon. The main goal of the research is to show the extent of interest in the social situation of the Roma during the communist regime and to point out the main problems in the present day.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

A solution of the so-called Gypsy issue in socialism needs to be critically analysed. The totalitarian state's assimilation process (1948–1969) and the so-called integration process (1970–1989) did not achieve the planned positive results. The political representation after 1989 refused the approach and methods of the totalitarian state, but neither the post-communist, democratic governments avoided the tradition of the ongoing political continuity of the undervaluation of the problem in its intensity and complexity. The authors aim to draw attention to underestimating and disinterest in conducting a social study on the Roma population in socialism, which was carried out only in the early 1970s. The study on social and pathological phenomena focused on the impacts on the overall societal scale. The researchers did not perform studies in Roma communities and families. The state-controlled blanket assimilation was expected to automatically arouse positive changes in Roma families. Knowing and solving the internal problems of Roma families did not become a political and social order. Research into social pathology in Roma communities and families was launched only in the second half of the 1990s, mainly after the millennium. In general, the development of the issue from 1948 to the present retains the state of mutual distrust; neither of the parties creates conditions to improve the social situation of Roma families. The study points to the authors' archival qualitative research at the turn of 2020 and 2021 in the Slovak National Archives in Bratislava. The second part of the article presents qualitative research on violence against Romani women in connection with the presented effects of not addressing this negative phenomenon. The main goal of the research is to show the extent of interest in the social situation of the Roma during the communist regime and to point out the main problems in the present day.

The expressions Gypsy/Gypsies are used according to the archival sources. The expression "Roma" has been used in professional literature, legislation and public life since 1989 (not in an ethnic but a political sense). Despite certain negative language connotations that the term Gypsies carry, it is still used for the reasons of historical or merit-related correctness. Bearing in mind the group diversity of the described community, the authors use Roma in its political sense embracing all Roma groups (some part of it does not use this ethnonym).

Research on the impact of government policies on the Roma population is insufficient in the Czechoslovak and Slovak conditions. During socialism – social research was not conducted until 1970. Based on the observations, the conducted surveys described the real situation in the so-called Roma settlements without proposing solutions on how to solve the so-called Gypsy issue. Crucial agents of the solutions were the Central Committees of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and Slovakia (Ústredný výbor Komunistickej strany Československa, Ústredný výbor Komunistickej strany Slovenska; hereafter ÚV KSČ, ÚV KSS), which stayed on the sideline and publicly never addressed the so-called Gypsy population issue. The ÚV KSČ and ÚV KSS commented on government resolutions by internal instructions and commands. The instructions were classified and provided for “internal use” only. They were not professional guidelines but political directives – without any use in practice. It caused confusion and chaos in the work of the institutions and organisations of the “first contact”, which expected precisely formulated guidelines. From an ideological point of view, it was the fastest social and economic settlement and gradual assimilation “fusion” of the underdeveloped Gypsy population with the majority population. In the early 1980s, the ÚV KSS initiated the need for social research according to the model in the Czech part of the federation, where social research has been implemented since 1970. Eva Davidova has systematised the policies of the Czechoslovak government and pointed out important moments in an attempt to distinguish periods and important actions (Kwadrans 2019, pp. 118–139). The findings were to prevent the stagnation of the “hidden assimilation” – integration – a strategy that respects some cultural elements of the Roma culture. The social scientists ideologically directed by the Marxist-Lenin philosophy only confirmed the party’s guidelines and government resolutions, without a practical result, on implementing a social experiment of integration and outlining its societal implications. The apparent lag of the Slovak Republic in social research on the Roma population also after 1989 is a result of the negative societal atmosphere and the historical experience of the majority’s coexistence with the minority, which penetrates the academic and professional spheres as well. The main goal of the research is to show the extent of interest in the social situation of the Roma during the communist regime and to point out the main problems in the present day. Social pathology and related domestic violence are still understood as a private issue which no one has the right to intervene in – unless a tragic event occurs. The specific status of Roma women is examined marginally and is not included in the government resolutions. The destruction of the Roma national minority got to the stage that most Roma families occurred in a social and cultural vacuum that even the current ideologically free social scientists cannot solve.

## **THE GYPSY ISSUE – A SAD HERITAGE OF CAPITALISM**

After the Communist Party seized power in 1948, the authorities of the “government of the people” – the national committees started to fulfil the key role in fulfilling the organisational and educational tasks focused on the so-called Gypsy population to address the so-called Gypsy issue. From the beginning, the process of “uplifting”, “alignment”, “culturisation”, “re-education” of the underdeveloped social group of Gypsies was influenced by non-professionalism, lack of relevant knowledge and experience, and the adoption of insufficiently thoughtful “revolutionary” solutions in the practice of trial and error. Many functionaries of the national committees were burdened with prejudice and negated the process of uplifting – equalling the underdeveloped social group with the majority population. The travelling groups were included among the asocial, traitorous persons threatening the country’s development. They did not intend to equal the travelling groups with society but to prescriptively include them in the work process.

The first interdepartmental commission held a meeting on 11 November 1949 at Prague’s Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. The meeting resulted in a division of the so-called Gypsy population into three primary groups: settled, who had work habits; partially settled, who worked seasonally; and travelling (“wandering”). The report of the interdepartmental commission confirmed a repressive action mainly against the travellers but did not leave out other non-travelling, so-called settled, non-working Gypsy citizens. Those who avoided work were to be isolated in the work centres, and children were to be concentrated in special education and work centres. The resolution of the interdepartmental commission “Gypsies and Persons Living by their Way of Life” (Cigáni a osoby po ich spôsobe žijúce; own translation) obliged the regional national committees (krajský národný výbor, hereinafter KNV) and the district national committees (okresný národný výbor, hereinafter ONV) to organise the centres for the travelling groups. Suitable accommodation, meals, work placements of all the abled, healthcare and police surveillance, the most necessary hygienic service and the observance of the internal rules were to be provided in the centres. The centres were to be gradually rebuilt to the model hostels, where re-educated travelling families were to live and work (SNA, f. PV, 1949, kart. č. 126, invent. č. 104).

The legal historian Petráš states that the Constitution of 1948 proclaimed freedom of movement and residence. Travelling was included in the system of interventions against criminal, asocial persons and dissidents (Petráš, 2007, p. 233). The Central Committee of the Communist Party (ÚV KSČ) and the Ministry of Interior enforced the repressive assimilation solutions impacting all the non-work-

ing Roma. Field surveys identified the reality of life in the Roma settlements and indicated how to continue solving the problem. In Slovakia in the early 1950s, on the initiative by Povereníctvo vnútra, the first survey in the so-called Gypsy settlements in the Poprad district was conducted. The survey identified the lack of attention by the ONV to address the so-called Gypsy issue. People lived in the “holes”, underground shelters in unhygienic conditions. The local national committees (miestny národný výbor, MnNV), on their own initiative and under pressure by the majority population, refused to give the employed Roma building permits in the town residential areas and allow them to buy older abandoned houses. According to the survey results, the internal social relationships in Roma families and kinship were not sufficiently explored. The cultural and moral level of the settlement residents was evaluated on the lowest level. The study report informed tendentially that the settlers avoided work, neglected care for their children and hygiene. Theft often occurred (SNA, f. PV, prieskum, 1953, pp. 2–3). The survey stated that the characteristics of the settlement residents were burdened by gender traditions which were evaluated negatively. Their accompaniments were frequent conflicts in families, physical attacks, disorder, theft, and lack of interest in work; they had been identified with the traditional Roma culture, which was evaluated as underdeveloped (“primitive”) and unpromising. The researchers also revealed racial discrimination, contempt, and rejection of the rest of the population, which developed mistrust and hostility towards the majority of neighbours in Roma people. The researchers agreed that poor hygiene, eating habits, loose education, and morality did not have a cultural context, resulting from permanent long-term poverty (*ibid.*, 1953, p. 4).

The survey of the way of life was also conducted by Povereníctvo kultúry in the most problematic districts in the east of Slovakia. The number of negatives was much higher than positives. Roma girls became mothers already at the age of 14 and 15 years. Many large young families had from 5 to 12 children, exceptionally even more. Some men had children with several women. Care for the family provided by men was minimal. Neonatal mortality remained high. Eating was irregular, unilateral; they often consumed potatoes, cabbage, and flour dishes; the meat was consumed only exceptionally. The travelling groups and settlers often stole field crops and poultry. Men forced women and children to steal. The health condition was alarming. Tuberculosis, trachoma, jaundice, whooping cough, asthma, typhoid, and skin and venereal diseases occurred often. In the settlements, elemental hygiene could not be maintained; there was a lack of wells with potable water and built toilets. According to the estimates by Povereníctvo kultúry, only fewer than 30% of working-age men in eastern Slovakia were employed. Most

of them (68%) worked in construction, waste management, agricultural cooperatives (jednotné roľnícke družstvo, JRD) and state agricultural properties (štátny majetok, ŠM). Other (32%) went for short-term, part-time jobs to the Czech and Moravian districts. Most of the year, they were also unemployed. The educational level was at the lowest level. In the Eastern Slovak Region, three full-time soldiers and two teachers completed university education, and several men completed secondary education. Women remained illiterate or semiliterate. Up to 70% of pupils completed primary education in the lower grades of primary schools. When finishing primary school, they were semiliterate. In the Eastern Slovak Region, 79% of Roma were illiterate (SNA, f PK, 1956, kartón. č.5, invent. č. 53, p. 6).

Roma from the settlements enjoyed watching the projections of adventure movies in “mobile cinemas”. Edification lectures were held in intervals in the film screening; otherwise, the audience would have left. The inhabitants of the settlements liked dance parties without the participation of non-Roma neighbours; men went to pubs; physical conflicts in families and between the enemy families occurred frequently. The traditional, underdeveloped way of life in the Roma settlements remained an anachronism not compatible with the life of the citizens building a socialist society. The state’s political leadership was convinced that only socialism could solve the so-called Gypsy issue. The permanent settlement of the travelling groups and providing jobs for the unemployed men in the settlements were the conditions for the task to be met. Up to 25 thousand men earned a living by a “wandering way of life”, trafficking, deception and theft. The state authorities realised that Roma was a reservoir of the cheap labour force for the unpopulated Czech border areas, industrial agglomerations and the industrialisation of Slovakia. The main objective was to involve in the constructive efforts of as many Roma as possible (ibid., 1956, p. 8).

The resolution of the political bureau of the ÚV KSČ *On Work among the Gypsy Population in Czechoslovakia (O práci medzi cigánskym obyvateľstvom v ČSR*; own translation) (1959) strictly rejected the emancipation requirements for the recognition of the Gypsy nationality, the codification of the language, the formation of the so-called Gypsy schools and classes, and the formation of the departments of Gypsology in Prague and Bratislava. The recognition of the requirements initiated mainly by the Prague academic environment would have strengthened social marginalisation and stagnation of re-education and assimilation. On 17 October 1958, the National Assembly of Czechoslovakia passed Act No. 74/1958 Coll. on Permanent Settlement of Travelling Persons. The Act contained five sections. It did not mention Gypsies but travelling persons. One of the five sections punished persons who kept travelling by imprisonment between six

months and three years. Travelling included the cases of the acquisition of means of living by committing crimes and offences such as pimping, palm reading, begging, and conducting trade without official authorisation, for example, grinding knives, repairing umbrellas, tinker's trade, boiler smith's trade, trough making, waste materials collection, and pedlary (Práca, 1959, p. 32). After settling, the travellers and illegal entrepreneurs were to work in construction, agriculture and forestry. Petráš cites the rationale behind the regulation: "It is necessary to use some violence; however, the violence is not race-related, but it is full of a spirit of socialist humanism, and it does not intend to isolate Gypsies but to include them in the society" (Petráš, 2007, p. 238; own translation).

Roma men were exclusively assigned to unqualified and physically demanding work. The factory management let them work in groups. Only exceptionally, they were assigned to work among other workers. They called them pejoratively "black mouths" or "black groups". The factory clubs organised training courses only exceptionally for them; the professional qualification was increased only individually – in Roma, who joined the Communist Party. The problem was their work's low quality and productivity and lack of long-term work experience. In most of them, there were tendencies towards absenteeism, fluctuation, moving illegally from place to place and searching for occasional work. In Slovakia, according to the historian Jurová, the results in 1959–1965 reached the number of 16,600 men involved in the work process. The employment rate in the male population was 57%. Up to 2,500 shacks in 45 settlements were pulled down. Children's literacy and school attendance increased slightly (Jurová, 1993, p. 75). In Slovakia, after 1965, 1,027 settlements with 12,500 shacks and more than 60,000 people were registered. Overall, 8,500 men did not work, 7,500 people were handicapped, and more than 20 thousand people were illiterate (*ibid.*, 1993, p. 79).

On 13 October 1965, the Government of the ČSSR approved the establishment of the Government Committee on the Issues of the Gypsy Population. The main task of the Committee was to enforce the principles of the organised relocation and scattering of Gypsy families, mainly from the Eastern Slovak Region to the Czech and Moravian regions. The relocation of selected families was meant to be based on voluntarism, persuading about the benefit of moving for work in the Czech and Moravian industrial agglomerations. However, the selection of the relocated persons did not respect the requirement of families capable of fast adaptation. All the KNVs in Slovakia tried to eliminate problematic families, which caused resentment in the Czech regions. According to the archival documents, the plan was to relocate 1,100 families in 1966–1968. Officially, 494 families were placed; 110 problematic families gradually returned. The government relocation schedule

was met at 37%. In that time, 2,254 families migrated unorganised and illegally to the Czech and Moravian regions, where they did not have accommodation, work, or school ensured (SNA, f. Úrad vlády SSR, 1972, kartón č.79).

The concept of state-controlled relocation and scattering was not met. The scattering in the Czech and Moravian municipalities did not happen; there were only some exceptions. In the municipalities, socially excluded “gypsy immigration cores” gradually emerged. Roma families from Slovakia exchanged village settlements for urban ghettos. A demographer Srb characterised the scattering and settlement in the industrial municipalities as a failed government action. The deconcentration of Roma from settlements broke the generational and family relationships, which led to the disintegration of a traditional Roma family. According to the author, Roma contributed to the population in the Czech border area, but the basis for the process that developed into the so-called Gypsy issue was laid. Srb stated that 9,900 families, including approximately 63 thousand persons, scattered in the Czech and Moravian regions (Srb, 1969, p. 195).

#### **THE END OF THE SOCIALIST SOCIAL EXPERIMENT**

In Czechoslovakia, the National Government adopted resolution No. 279/1970, in which it formulated the concept of social work, which perceived the so-called Gypsy issue as a problem of the “socio-pathological group of people” who, due to the negative habits in the past, live in non-cultural conditions (Gjuričová, 1999, pp. 19–20). In Czechoslovakia, the first 80 social workers specialising in Roma were trained in the early 1970s. In Slovakia, the Slovak Red Cross (Slovenský červený kríž, hereinafter SČK) organised a course for 60 Roma cultural-socio-medical activists unable to be employed by the national committees. Despite the unclear situation on who would employ them, the SČK trained 110 Roma women. The course admission requirement was the completion of basic education. In 1970–1973, 350 women were trained; only some of them worked on external contracts on extra-work activities. Their work was to explain the importance of vaccinations, contraception, neonatal care, personal and household hygiene, addressing social, economic and family problems, and care for neglected retirees (súkromný archív Emílie Horváthovej, 1970).

The resolution of the SSR Government No. 234/1977 addressed the development of crime among Roma people. In the previous years, the criminal activity of mainly the young Roma generation born in socialism increased. Roma accounted for 3.85% of the population and committed 11.2% of crimes and 15.5% of offences. Of the 185,387 inhabitants, 5,814 were sentenced, of which 27.8% were juvenile offenders. The Ministry of Interior, Justice, the Prosecution and national com-



mittees argued that it was not related only to negative habits from the past. They argued by a “biological fact” resulting from early adolescence, social isolation, an underdeveloped (“primitive”) way of life, and a low educational level. Due to the characteristics, Roma adapted to the working process with difficulties. In general, they avoided working in factory halls in working teams that did not correspond with their traditional individual crafts carried out in the open space and did not respect unwritten habits and social values. Another result of the assimilation process was the gradual disappearance of traditional Roma jobs and crafts, traditional values and morality, and the permanent crisis of a Roma family. In 1975, there were 1,168 children placed in residential education facilities. Up to 534 of them were Roma. The Slovak Government responded to the situation by proposing the further increase of the capacities of the educational facilities and diagnostic institutions. The Government released 54 million crowns for the construction and reconstruction of the facilities (SNA, f. Úrad vlády SSR, 1977, uznesenia, kartón č. 409).

The SSR Government’s resolution No. 141/1980 expressed the praise for health education in planned parenthood. In 1981, 1,791 women underwent a voluntary abortion, and 2,271 women used the contraception DANA (SNA, f. Úrad vlády, 1983, kartón č. 595, Správa, p. 8). A more critical opinion was expressed by the Economic Department of the SSR Government. On 31 December 1984, there were 224,694 “Gypsy inhabitants” in Slovakia, which accounted for 4.3% of the population. There were 27,080 unemployed persons, and 5,152 persons received a disability and partial disability pension. 3,200 families were living in 2,575 shacks in 339 settlements. Poverty in the settlements and towns was manifested by a high infant mortality rate, breakdowns of families living in overcrowded shacks and low-category flats, and the constantly increasing number of children with a combination of social and health handicaps. In the future, most of them will fail to complete basic education; many of them will end up in institutional care, will not join the work process, and will not be able to take care of their family; they will experience increased morbidity, early invalidity, a criminal future and relapse (SNA, f. Úrad vlády SSR, 1985, kartón č.666, Národohospodársky odbor, pp. 1–3).

There was a similar situation in the Czech part of the federal state. There were 2,382 Roma families in permanent social care, but up to 18,800 families needed permanent social care, i.e., 72% of families who failed to provide child maintenance. Only 15% of families did not need any form of assistance. In 1983, there were up to 150 families per one social worker; for social therapy to be successful, it was ideal to set the number of 30 families. Social workers preferred individual social work through which Roma were educated about the lifestyle of the citizens

of the socialist society. Group and community (so-called “regional”) social works were performed only exceptionally (Pavlok, 1983, pp. 140–141, 149).

The Eighth Five-Year Plan (1986–1990) objectives defined unrealistic criteria. In planned parenthood, a reduction in high birth rates and the infant mortality rate was to be achieved. The most appropriate method to prevent high birth rates was to take care of girls leaving primary schools, getting them into jobs or vocational schools outside their families’ places of residence. The girls were to stay single and childless as long as possible. They were to get married only after saving the funds and ideally with a non-Roma. They were expected to have a maximum of three children. The Roma youth older than 18 were to be included in one of the social organisations to spend their leisure time meaningfully. There were 1,450 clients per one social worker. For this reason, the number of field social workers were intended to be increased by 221 persons. A hundred and sixty-eight of them were to work in the Eastern Slovak Region (SNA, f. Úrad vlády SSR, 1985, kartón č. 666, Národohospodársky odbor, pp. 4–6, 8–11). The Ministry of Finance did not release funds for any planned government activities in the comment procedure. The SSR Government accepted the disapproval of the Ministry of Finance. Only the Prime Minister of the SSR Peter Colotka succeeded in increasing the number of members of the National Security Corps (Zbor národnej bezpečnosti, hereinafter ZNB) by 180 men who strengthened the district administrations of the ZNB in the localities with a high concentration of the Roma population (SNA, f. Úrad vlády SSR, 1987, kartón č. 727, p. 3).

A general stagnation of the integration of the Roma population was manifested by, for example, performing the basic task – the liquidation of the so-called settlements. In 1980, the state bought and disposed of 426 shacks; in 1988, the number decreased to 160. There were 2,133 shacks left to be liquidated. In 1987, 921 families moved to municipal flats, but the plan was 1,500–1,800 families. Only “partial positive results” were achieved; the “pace” was to be increased. Otherwise, a “substantial change” will not be achieved. In 1986, to reduce the high “unhealthy population”, the Ministry of Health adopted the measures to enable the national committees to substantially increase the cash benefit in justified cases of undesirable parenthood. In 1987, 1,823 Roma women were sterilised for 425,500 crowns. The national committees stated that “payment of benefits” helped stabilise the number of children in Roma households (SNA, f. Úrad vlády SSR, 1988. Uznesenia vlády SSR, kartón č. 773, pp. 2–4, 9). The negative consequences of sterilisation, when women ceased to fulfil their basic function, deepened the crisis of Roma families and were not studied by anyone. The fact that the disintegration of Roma families means the increased number of dependent children whom the

abandoned women could not take care of was tackled by the public institutions by increasing the capacities of children's institutes.

The Government Resolution No. 250/1988 of 2 November 1988 addressed the strategic focus of the Government Commission that was "to use the ethnic element, to develop the self-awareness of Roma in shaping the ethnicity as a motivation factor for the social and cultural progress of both an individual and the entire ethnic group" (SNA, f. Úrad vlády SSR, 1989, uznesenia vlády SSR, kartón č. 801, p. 1; own translation). In the preparation of the new Constitution, the SSR Government Commission on the Gypsy Population Issues began to address the constitutional legal status of the "ethnic group of Roma" with the attribution of the right of association and the versatile cultural development. To face the manifestations of racial hatred and prejudice, to issue an educational journal with the partial use of the Romani language. In education, the Romani language was to be used as a support in Slovak and Czech language teaching; the Ministry of Education was to provide specialised courses for graduates of pedagogical faculties focusing on the specificities of education of Roma children (*ibid.*, 1989, p. 2).

Despite the signalised positive changes and the involvement of the greatest possible number of educated Roma to address their own and societal problems, the SSR Government in its opinion states: "In the economic sense, this population increasingly takes advantage of the highly humane approach of our society to address its issue, does not engage actively in this process, is not properly motivated; on the contrary, it uses democratisation in its own way, and thus begins to enforce its national interests" (*ibid.*, 1989, stanovisko ku Kontrolnej správe, p. 4; own translation). According to the communist ideologists, granting national rights would not lead to a progressive solution; on the contrary, it would preserve the "primitive way of life". The final objective – the settlement, the "merge" of the minority with the majority would never happen. In the late 1980s, the government's ideology and political order were supported by interdisciplinary research to accelerate the process of socialist integration and acculturation. The research was to describe the process of "erosion", "breaking down" the traditional large family into individual families of a "contemporary type". The scientists' groping is documented by the statement: "Many contradictions between this ethnic group and the rest of the society are a practical reason for exploring the Gypsy family – its way of life – without emotion and romanticism, but with the effort of unbiased, factual, true knowledge of reality" (Dubayová, 1988, p. 213; own translation). The researchers planned to quantitatively broaden the knowledge on the Roma family. They could not define the manuals on how to achieve a qualitative change – integrating the "Gypsy family" (Bačová, 1988). The science bound by Marxist-Lenin-

ist ideology could not introduce more objective, alternative solution models. The cultural and social disintegration of the Roma population was intensified when building the socialist society. The accompanying signs of a crash of the social experiment to resolve the so-called Gypsy issue – problem – included the increasing manifestations of pathological behaviour, the disappearance of value criteria, the destabilisation and disintegration of Roma culture norms, and the permanent intergenerational and gender crisis of the Roma family.

## **THE PRESENT**

In socialism, the more closely specified manifestations of pathological behaviour in Roma families were not a topic. The study points to the authors' archival qualitative research at the turn of 2020 and 2021 in the Slovak National Archives in Bratislava. The second part of the article presents qualitative research on violence against Romani women in connection with the presented effects of not addressing this negative phenomenon. If we talk, for example, about violence committed by Roma men in relation to their partners and wives, it was the same taboo, or a “normal thing”, as in the then majority population. Domestic violence “did not exist”; therefore, it was not necessary to specifically pay attention to its elimination through effective prevention and targeted government programmes, which would have created a prerequisite for the emergence of services that would have allowed women experiencing violence to seek assistance.

## **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ROMA FAMILIES**

The research history on violence against women in the Slovak Republic is much shorter than in western democracies, where similar research has been carried out from the late 1960s. In Slovakia, after “unspelling” the problem, only partial surveys, which only marginally related to the issue, were initially carried out. The reason why the Slovak Republic, in comparison with other countries, such as the USA, has a significant time-lapse in relation to the examination of violence against women is, in particular, that, before 1989, strong traditionalism prevailed and included domestic violence in the intimacy of the family environment. In the socialist regime, there was also an embargo on the disclosure of negative societal phenomena and, therefore, official data on violence against women were published for the first time only in 1997. In the same year, one of the few statistical surveys

in Slovakia was carried out about women abused by the husband (or ex-husband). The research data show that 46.5% of women were attacked by their husbands already in the first year of marriage. In up to 70% of the post-divorce cohabitations of couples, violence against the woman persists. The incidence of physical violence more often than once a month is in 57.1% of the women; and 80% of the women from the sample are “beaten” by the husband at least once a year. The presence of children in attacks is in 69% of the cases. Medical assistance was sought by 22.3% of the “beaten” women, and only 19.8% of them contacted the police. The sample of women was not representative; it consisted of the women who had sought psychological assistance. *The Report on the Security Situation in the Slovak Republic in 2003* (*Správa o bezpečnostnej situácii v Slovenskej republike v roku 2003*; own translation) states the information about domestic violence cases, but it does not state their overview and classification, only the percentage of women as victims of the crimes (Bútorová et al., 2005, p. 13). Later, in the broader public opinion polls, there were isolated questions about the attitudes of the population towards “domestic violence” and the experience with it. An example is regular empirical sociological studies of the Institute for Public Affairs from 1995, 2000 and 2002, and the survey by non-governmental organisations in 2001 in the campaign “The Fifth Woman”. The first representative study on women and citizens of the Slovak Republic’s attitudes towards violence and their experience with it was conducted at the end of 2002. Slovakia was one of the last countries where such research was carried out, and even not funded by the state budget (Bodnárová & Filadelfiová, 2003). Therefore, it would also be necessary for national institutions to initiate and fund activities in this field because the Slovak Republic should fulfil the commitments made by the signature of the international and European documents. However, the reason is that an increase in the level of knowledge about “domestic violence” or violence against women in Slovakia can significantly change the public’s attitudes towards this type of violence and ultimately reduce its spread in society. The data can contribute to increasing the general society’s awareness of violence against women and to a better understanding of the need to intervene if they are witnesses of violence. The empirical data may help to persuade the hesitating part of public administration and regional and local self-governing structures of the necessity to address the issues of violence against women (Bútorová et al., 2005, p. 17).

We argue that the status of a Roma woman within society and the elimination of violence against Roma women are not addressed specifically in government materials. An exception is a medium-term concept for developing the Roma national minority in Slovakia (2008), entitled *Solidarity – Integrity – Inclusion 2008–2013*. The document is the only one that addresses gender equality in rela-

tion to Roma women in a separate part in which it proposes specific recommendations also on the elimination of violence against Roma women. In addition to the government material, the instruments for the elimination of violence against women have been set up in a general and full-area mode without the specific and substantive needs of Roma women (regardless of their status), requiring a special approach based on multiple deprivations determined and anchored by the ethnic gender stereotypes. A failure to respect these specificities may continue to result in the deepening of the unequal status of Roma women within the family, community and society, and in the acceptance of violence against Roma women, which may lead to unforeseeable consequences in the whole society (Rác et al., 2015, p. 7).

Research on violence mapping the situation of Roma women in families is, as in the majority population, reliant on the activities of non-governmental and non-state organisations, and civic associations. In a minimalist but valuable way, they assist women experiencing violence, create a space for specialised, safe services and thus substitute in this area for the state. In 2009, the Cultural Association of Roma in Slovakia conducted a study whose main objective was to identify a part of the situation in applying and acknowledging women's human rights in the segregated and separated Roma communities. The areas of education and the labour market were studied; the focus was on the availability of various goods and services, the obstacles that Roma women face on the way towards their ideas about life, as well as a gender system in the home sphere (Dáta o ľudských právach žien, 2009). The study attempted to identify the similarities and differences in the real experience of Roma women and men and the attitudes to and opinions on the fundamental roles of women and men in society. Roma men and women from segregated and separated settlements or parts of villages and towns of three regions of Slovakia – Košice, Prešov and Banská Bystrica – were included in the study. One of the study's aims was to find out how people in non-integrated communities imagine their future lives before becoming adults, to what extent they can fulfil their ideas, and what barriers to their dream life path they perceive. The results show that they dream of common things – a happy family and work life, having a job, own accommodation, education, and financial and material security. In general, the women's dreams were more specific, more related to family and more often focused on breaking down the traditional models – women's education and work, and family cycles and models. Most often they perceived the barriers to fulfilment in the lack of their education and difficulties in finding a job with the financial reward, but also in the family – original, parental, or own. They were followed by the conviction about the barriers resulting from the ethnicity; the barriers caused by parents and health problems were stated too (ibid., 2009).

The results of a qualitative study by the civic association Quo Vadis (2012) appear as very valuable findings which enhanced the knowledge on the situation in the application and acknowledgement of the human rights of Roma women. The qualitative study confirmed that Roma women in Slovakia belong to highly differentiated environments, many of which are characterised by strong patriarchal structures even in the present. Many of the women assessed their surroundings as communities based on principles supporting the authority of men in relation to women, with the model of the family of a man as the only breadwinner and with a limited division of household work and duties. In the broad groups of Roma women, the patriarchal structures enter intensively into their lives at different stages of their life cycle – from childhood to adult life, to old age. Furthermore, Roma women attempt to distort such a gender system and succeed – sometimes with economic or social integration support. The findings also show a very diverse situation of Roma women; their situation and status in terms of the relationship between two primary living spheres, domestic and public, and the quality of integration into individual areas of the public sphere is very heterogeneous and different. A relatively widespread problem among many Roma women, coming mainly from marginalised communities, and segregated and separated settlements, is the accessibility of health care (Obraz rómskej ženy, 2012).

A national project focused on violence against women was conducted in Slovakia for the first time in 2014 and 2015. Its investigator was the Institute for Labour and Family Research with the objective to directly support specialised social services for women experiencing violence. A nonstop free telephone line for women experiencing violence was set up, and research studies on specific groups of women at risk of violence were conducted. One of them is a group of Roma women living in marginalised communities. The study aimed to map the progress and impact of violence against Roma women and analyse the views of experts on this phenomenon. There were 35 participants in the study, including 14 experts working with women experiencing violence and 21 Roma women experiencing violence. The study's authors, Rác et al. (2015, p. 147; own translation) state “that violence against Roma women within the family is not based solely on ethnic specificities. The factors of violence in intimate relationships in the Roma family are rather identical with the factors of violence committed in the families of the majority population. In terms of the forms of committed violence, we found out that there was a much higher frequency of controlling and economic manifestations of violence which, with significant material and financial deprivation, very effectively exacerbated their dependence on their partners, and is one of the main reasons to stay in an abusive relationship. Those women are often worried about

their own lives, but they are scared to leave their partner because of children or fear the future without family support and money. Often they are in a difficult financial situation when they do not have funds even for the phone or a means of transport that they and their children would use for transport to a safe place”.

### **EXAMPLES OF INSTITUTIONALISED VIOLENCE AGAINST ROMA WOMEN**

In 2003, the Centre for Reproductive Rights, in cooperation with the Counselling Centre for Civil and Human Rights, a Slovak organisation for the protection of human rights, and Ina Zoon, an expert consultant on the rights of minorities, carried out the study to gather facts on human rights, which included deep private interviews with over 230 women in almost 40 Roma settlements throughout eastern Slovakia – in the area with the highest concentration of Roma (*Násilné sterilizácie a ďalšie útoky na reprodukčnú slobodu Rómov na Slovensku*, 2003). The topics of the interviews included: the circumstances in which sterilisation is carried out; the treatment by healthcare professionals in the maternity wards and other facilities for mothers and pregnant women; and access to reproductive health information. The study revealed widespread human rights violations, namely the reproductive rights of Roma women in eastern Slovakia, such as forced and violent sterilisations, misinformation on reproductive health matters, racial-discriminatory access to health care services and treatment, physical and verbal attacks by health care providers, and denying access to medical documentation. The study revealed clear and consistent examples of health care providers’ behaviour who do not take due note of the need for informed consent for sterilisation, and who do not provide Roma patients with accurate and comprehensive information on reproductive health, which resulted in human rights violations in Roma women. Many other women were never even informed about their sterilisation. “The study and data collection simply show that Slovak physicians have consistently neglected their duty to provide Roma women with information on their reproductive health, health status, possibilities and alternatives to contraception” (*ibid.*, 2003; own translation). Very similar results were stated by the authors of the publication *We Speak Aloud (Vakeras zorales)* 14 years later. The Counselling Centre for Civil and Human Rights (2017) conducted a study with a smaller sample. It captures the personal stories of 38 Roma women from marginalised communities; it describes the discrimination against Roma women and violence in gynaecological and obstetric care in eastern Slovakia. Although the Slovak Government has adopted certain measures in recent years to improve the access of marginalised Roma communities to healthcare, including health services in the field of sexual and reproductive health (*Stratégia Slovenskej republiky pre integráciu Rómov do*



roku 2020), it is evident that much more needs to be done to effectively address and eliminate systemic discrimination as well as poor treatment. In the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Roma integration by 2020 (“Strategy”), adopted in 2012, the Government made the first step and acknowledged that Roma men and women might experience discrimination in access to health care due to segregation of Roma and non-Roma patients. The Strategy defines broad health-related objectives focused on women and men from marginalised Roma communities and also aims to increase their awareness of reproductive health and ensure that they have “non-discriminatory, free and quality access to sexual and reproductive health care services, based on volunteering and the principles of informed decision-making and consent” (Stratégia Slovenskej republiky pre integráciu Rómov do roku 2020, D.2.3, čiastkový cieľ 5; own translation).

We argue that a significant imperfection of action towards eliminating violence in Roma families and assistance for victims is weak to almost no support provided by the state – one national project in 30 years since the fall of communism, non-representative studies mapping violence in Roma communities, lacking awareness or inefficient primary prevention of violence against women in the MRK, the unavailability of specialised services for Roma women. As in socialism, the topic of violence in Roma families is again becoming taboo and non-existent.

## CONCLUSION

On the nature of the relationship of the Slovak society to Roma, we can borrow the opinion of Miroslav Kusý: “When a person does not perceive a problem intensively as his own vital problem, he cannot be blamed that he does not particularly deal with it, and it also applies to the whole nation” (Kusý, 1997, p. 477; own translation). The highest state authorities, before and after 1989, more platonically than prescriptively, have asked the majority population for tolerance, empathy. Ultimately, the problem of the coexistence and integration of Roma into society is marginal for most Slovaks. The social assimilation promoted in socialism and the integration of Roma families promoted after 1989 to the present have not become a reality. Roma have found themselves trapped in the social disintegration, in the process of the breakdown of social relationships, norms, patterns of behaviour on which previous Roma identity, affinity, and solidarity were based. Most Roma have adopted a subordinate role that they are not welcomed and respected. They have accepted the majority prejudices and sanctions and acquired a self-destructive

tive feeling in their own inferiority, resulting in a spread of social and pathological phenomena occurring in Roma families.

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