

NGOs information to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

For consideration when compiling the Concluding Observations on the Third Periodic Report of the Slovak Republic under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Submitted by:

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I. OVERVIEW

1. This written submission provides an outline of issues of concern with regard to the Slovak Republic's compliance with the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (*hereinafter* "the CESCR"), with particular focus **on the right to housing**. The purpose of the submission is to assist the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (*hereinafter* the "Committee") with its consideration of Third Periodic Report of the Slovak Republic, and in adopting the Concluding Observation thereto.
2. The submission has been written by the Forum for Human Rights (FORUM)ⁱ, SOCIA – Social Reform Foundationⁱⁱ, and Proti prúduⁱⁱⁱ.

II. THE RIGHT TO HOUSING – ABSENCE OF SOCIAL HOUSING

3. Slovakia has been facing serious housing situation. There are almost no affordable apartments for renting. According to available statistics, there are only 3% apartments in public ownership available for renting. The average in the European Union is 11%. Similarly, there are only around 3% apartments in private ownership available for renting. This situation creates unreasonable pressure on the side of the demand and hence prices. As a consequence, housing is often unavailable and inaccessible to low income families who, as an alternative are forced to choose low quality housing designed primarily for temporary use. Despite this situation, current construction of housing in public ownership is at low levels, approximately only 9% of all newly build apartments (approximately 1500 apartments per year).
4. Moreover, there is an issue with housing benefits. Less than half of low-income families are entitled to receive housing benefits (48,75 %).¹ Further indicator of current situation are data concerning number of young adults living with their parents. In Slovakia, there is a very high percentage of young adults until 35 years of age still living with parents – more than 70%, the European Union average is 49%.² Most of apartments were built before 1989, there is only 360 apartments per 1000 persons, the average in the European Union is however 500 per 1000 persons.
5. Despite acute lack of affordable apartments, especially for low-income families and other vulnerable groups, e.g. persons with disabilities, **there is no housing policy targeting these problems and aiming specially to solve the issue of unavailability and inaccessibility of social housing**. Moreover, existing legal environment does not recognize social housing in its entirety, as **there is no**

¹ 2018 report about social situation in Slovakia, Ministry of Social Affairs. The report is available in Slovak at: <https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/ministerstvo/vyskum-oblasti-prace-socialnych-veci-institut-socialnej-politiky/spravy-socialnej-situacii-obyvatelstva/rok-2018.html>

² Housing Europe Observatory (2018).

complex law on social housing. Further, there is a lack of transparent rules how to obtain housing in public ownership and whole communities are often excluded.

Proposed recommendation:

- Adopt national housing policy with an aim to ensure available and affordable adequate housing especially for vulnerable groups as low-income families, persons with disabilities and persons from marginalized communities.
- Ensure availability of housing in public ownership accessible for low-income families as an alternative to market housing.
- Adopt complex law on social housing, with a definition of social housing, vulnerable groups and supportive measures.

III. THE RIGHT TO HOUSING – HOMELESS PERSONS

6. Another major issue related to the right to housing is the current situation of homeless people. In Slovakia, the problem-solving has been shifted to the sphere of social services, instead of housing. In Slovakia, principles such as “housing first” or “Rapid re-housing” are not recognized and/or widespread. It results in development of crisis intervention social services, which cannot be however considered as proper and efficient measure as it aims on managing homelessness, instead of solving the housing problem.
7. Concerning numbers, there are no exact data on number of homeless people, however different indicators suggest that the number is rising. Neither the law, nor any policies define homelessness and in practice it is understood in a very narrow manner as street homelessness. In Slovakia, affordable housing is unavailable and inaccessible, as we noted above, and it results in serious difficulties with lasting solution the issue of homelessness on individual and society level. As an example, in the capital city of Bratislava, more than 39 % homeless persons lived without a home for more than 10 years.³ As it appears, persons without a home are forced to stay permanently in social service institutions or temporary housing with shared rooms, toilets and showers.

Proposed recommendations

- Adopt national policy on prevention and solving the problem of homelessness aiming to solve the issue of homelessness, defined broadly in accordance with international human rights standards.

³ Another 11% had experience of 6-9 years without a home. Only 7,7% lived without a home for less than a year. The survey is available in Slovak at: https://www.ceit.sk/IVPR/images/IVPR/vyskum/2016/Ondrusova/zaverecna_sprava_scitanie_ondrusova_2016.pdf

- Take immediate measures to solve the problem of street homelessness by ensuring to all accessible affordable housing or, at minimum, 24 hours housing.

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ⁱ **FORUM** is an international human rights organization active in the Central European region. It provides support to domestic and international human rights organizations in advocacy and litigation and also leads domestic and international litigation activities. FORUM has been supporting a number of cases pending before domestic judicial authorities and before the European Court of Human Rights. FORUM has authored and co-authored a number of reports and has provided information to UN and Council of Europe bodies on the situation in the Central European region, especially in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. For more information, please visit www.forumhr.eu.

ⁱⁱ **SOCIA** – Social Reform Foundation wishes to bring about changes in the social system through financial support and its own activities for the benefit of social groups that are most at risk. The vision of SOCIA Foundation is a tolerant civic society with disadvantaged and endangered people as their integral part. The collaboration of “weaker and stronger” should result in building quality and accessible social services - services that meet the individual needs of their beneficiaries in their natural environment. SOCIA provides grants for non-profit organizations and individuals to improve the quality of life of socially, physically and mentally disadvantaged groups. SOCIA has also own projects supporting community-based services. SOCIA collaborates with NGOs and the public administration forming policies and legislative proposals to reform the social system, please visit www.socia.sk.

ⁱⁱⁱ **PROTI PRÚDU** - NGO Proti prúdu/Against the Stream has been established to help homeless people integrate into society, to work on prevention of homelessness and positively impact public attitudes towards homeless people. The main project - street paper Nota bene, gives monthly chance to get decent income, self-esteem and social contacts up to 350 homeless people in 18 towns in Slovakia. Proti prúdu is also active in cross-linking organizations working with homeless people. It advocates the rights of homeless people at the system level, initiates the adoption of the first National Strategy to Prevent and Address Homelessness with goal to end homelessness, prepares analyzes and publications, initiates and advocates legislative changes and participates in expert working groups of various ministries. It regularly organizes a national conferences on homelessness. Proti prúdu involves clients in defending their rights through discussions with the public at a conferences, at schools, in companies or at various events. It helps vendors of Nota bene streetpaper to rent apartments and provide them a support based on the Housing first principles. It advocates the idea of affordable housing, which it considers a real solution to homelessness. Proti prúdu gives the main emphasis on the topic of affordable housing in a wider context and seeking solutions to make housing available in Slovakia. For more information please visit <https://www.notabene.sk/?about-us>.