THIRD REPORT 2005
Report on Regional Social Inclusion plans and programs in Slovakia

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Executive Summary

The goal of this report is to study social inclusion policies on regional level, that is, the policies performed by the regional and local self-governments or municipalities. For Slovakia it means to study the topic that is rather unfamiliar in society and far from being the mainstream even at the level of central government. Moreover, regional self-governments that have become the subject of our study were established only in 2001 and they are still partly overwhelmed by the labour pains.

Our report focuses on the recently created agents of regional development: higher territorial units or self-governmental regions (SGRs). They have just completed their first four-year period of functioning and they have not managed to develop separate social inclusion programmes and policies. In order to meet the report requirements, we had to adopt broad understanding of social inclusion policy and to study regional policies that deal with social inclusion often indirectly and not in systemic way. Therefore, our report is imprinted by the regional variety in the policy documents and quality of data it could and had to deal with.

We have selected four higher territorial units of Slovakia and one administrative district. They include Nitra Self-governing Region, Košice SGR, Žilina SGR and Banská Bystrica SGR and the Rimavská Sobota district, that is a part of Banská Bystrica SGR. None of these regions reaches average level of the main economic indicators for the SR (GNP per capita, economic activity, average wage).

The case studies combine the analysis of official sources such as analytical and programming documents of the self-governmental regions, laws, statistical data (Statistical Office of the SR, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, etc.), information from the register of the headquarters of labour offices, standardised interviews with the experts of the SGR offices, local partnerships of social inclusion and the regional offices of Social Development Fund.

Self-governing regions have acquired numerous competencies that could have tremendous impact on social inclusion processes in the region: they have acquired obligations in public transport, health care, education, culture and also in the large domain of social assistance. Theoretically the new competencies of the self-governing regions seem to be an advantage for them: decision-making is closer to a citizen and can be more responsive to local needs. In practice, there have appeared considerable difficulties in implementing the newly acquired competencies. All the studied regions suffer by inadequate financing of their operation; transferred competences are not financially backed; there is lack of skilled human resources. Operation of numerous public and social services is under threat (day care social services), some services are cut down or/ and disappearing (in 2002, several local bus lines and railways were cancelled due lack of resources). Some experts fear that the decentralization to eight higher territorial units could even hamper the development of areas distant from the seat of SGR. Many criticise lack of interest of regional decision makers to establish legal rules for supporting backwoods. However, one can expect some development in this respect as the new criteria for foreign capital financial stimuli have been just prepared by the Ministry of Finance and approved by the government in the end of October 2005.

Preparation of regional and local developmental strategies and programming documents belongs to the crucial activities of the self-government regions. Programming documents are considered to be of eminent importance especially in connection to possibilities drawing financial support from the EU Structural Funds. Many of self-governing regional authorities, however, have commissioned the professional agencies to prepare developmental plan, omitting thus the principle of partnership.
In the 2005, due to the common PHARE project, the self-governing regions concentrated on the preparation of the regional plans of employment (and related documents). Regional action plans of employment have become a mandatory part of the preparation and implementation of the SGR strategic documents. All the SGR plans have been well elaborated and formally almost perfect, in compliance with rules, and each proposed measure was backed by ad hoc partnership and coalition. As a rule, in each SGR plan, strong partners were identified, while vulnerable groups were not included as partners; they are considered as objects/ beneficiaries of proposed measures. In fact, however, the emphasis on educational and research activities (indicators, new conceptions and strategies, lecturing and enlightening fight with xenophobia) seem to be more beneficial for various research and educational agencies than for vulnerable groups themselves.

We can conclude that the regional action plans of employment focus only partly on social inclusion and vulnerable groups. The measures targeted at groups in risk are mentioned in several plans, but they are not specified at all. Therefore, although theoretically perfect, these employment plans could not be considered as an adequate substitution for social inclusion plans.

Work on regional plan of social inclusion has been going on only in Banská Bystrica SGR. The preparation of social inclusion plan is pursued within the wide partnership of NGOs and association of socially excluded people. This development is basically an outcome of coordinated pressure of the NGOs to regional authorities to address social inclusion.

Regional concepts of social services development are important materials to study social inclusion policy in the region. The concepts under study reflect the lack of public financial resources to address the issue. All regional concepts emphasise the necessity to strengthen the capacity of families to provide for their members. “Stronger families” are considered as a proper answer to shrinking capacities of regional institutional social assistance. This has been supported by the conservative ideology that prefers the principle of subsidiarity in social sphere: the intervention should take place only if families are not capable of solving their problems with own sources. However, there are other approaches that have to be taken into account: tripartite (multi-source) system of financing; the equal position of all service providers (public and NGOs) and the usage of the EU funds.

Regional experts state that at the level of SGR, there is limited space to decide on implementation of priorities that are considered crucial by a SGR itself. Criticism of NGOs is often aimed at lack of capacity (human resources) of the regional bodies and municipalities to deal with the new competencies. In addition the threat of underestimation of emerging problems and the lack of ability to cope with their consequences has been pinpointed. For instance, the problem of rent indebtedness can be hardly solved by eviction of debtor family. Quite the contrary, such “solution” can only produce another line of serious problem for a particular family.

Finally, Social Development Fund, a promising tool of social inclusion and mitigating regional differences, turned to be a complicated and tricky system. Many interviewed local experts complain that SDF is dysfunctional and produced more evil than good so far. The local partnership projects that have been already approved are set back for the sake of the machinery in Bratislava. NGOs point out that the important social inclusion projects such as for example EQUAL, suffer by “Bratislava bureaucracy” - time schedules of financial transfers are not respected and payments are belated. In the time of finalizing this report
(November 2005), NGOs involved in social inclusion partnerships, EQUAL and other projects that are dependant on financial reimbursements from the central government (MLSA&F) have been already under existential threat due to delayed financial transfers. Instead of producing social cohesion and inclusion, such approach has produced lack of trust among partners and clients, and erosion of trust in political institutions.

1. Regions as the agents of social and economic development

1.1 Territorial and political division of the territory of Slovakia

The Slovak Republic is divided into the eight higher territorial units. These administrative units were entrusted by new powers in 2002 and became self-govermental bodies. They are called self-governing regions (kraj) and they are named after each region's main city. The regional self-governing assemblies have just finished the first electoral period.

Legal provisions:

✓ the Act No. 302/2001 on self-government of Higher Territorial Units regulates the position of the self-governing region. SGR is ex lege a corporation with the fixed area and the seat of the Region. Authorities of SGR are the Regional representative body – regional assembly and the Chair of the Region. Obligations and limitations of territorial self-government can be imposed only by law or international agreements. The next important Act is the Act No. 416/2001 on transfer of some competences from authorities of the state administration to municipalities and higher territorial units (so called Small Competence Act). This Act regulates the process of transfer of competences originally executed by state authorities, to authorities of self-governing municipalities and regions. Self-governing region (SGR) executes public administration through its original (established by the Act) competences or as a transferred execution of the state administration.

✓ The Act No 446/ 2001 on property of higher territorial units stipulates the parts of the state property that are turned over to higher territorial units, regulates the transfer of the property to regional self-governing authorities and the management with the property held in possession of territorial unit. The objective of the property transfer was the material facilitation of SGRs in the exercise of their competences.

SGRs are given wide-ranging competencies/authorities. Several of them are substantial for social inclusion processes: for instance, the competencies in transport, social assistance, education, culture and sport, health services and last, but not least, regional development planning. Here are more details:

Transport (ground communications, rails and road transport, including granting and taking away road licenses for national regular bus transport, approval of road regulations of national bus transport, striking of contracts of actions of public interest with transport operators, and providing compensation of a loss or parts of it or other accounts for transport operators);

1 Each self-governing region (SGR) is administratively divided into several districts (okres). In total there are 79 districts in the SR. Districts are administrative units of the state administration without self-governing bodies. There are seats of administrative bodies like labour offices. However, the districts are represented by directly elected deputies in the SGR’ self-government (“Region assembly”). There is also space for self-organisation of villages and towns and formation of micro-regional units.
Social assistance (wide-ranging organizational, financial and conception authorities, including providing social care in institutions of social services; creation and publication of the social service conception, conception of social prevention and social consultation in its area, making decisions concerning provision of care services). The Act No. 305/2005 on social-legal protection of children and social custody significantly improves legal foundation for protection of children in Slovakia. It crosses narrow departmentally bound views on care for children and promotes the broader perspective on social legal protection of children. The Act authorizes HTU/SGRs with several obligations in the domain of children protection. The §76 “Jurisdiction of HTU” states that (a) HTU secures creation and implementation of social programmes targeted at the protection of rights and interests of children in order to prevent and to bar the increase of socio-pathological phenomena on its territory and that (c) HTU creates conditions for helping children… and also (f) HTU provides contribution/subsidies to villages and towns, accredited subjects or physical person for performing the measures in compliance with this law. Paragraphs 88 and 89 that specify obligations of HTU and municipality in the financing and have impact on its budget, come into effect in 2006.

Education, culture and sport, health services (including establishment of health centres and hospitals, execution of register of health-care institutions, issuing of allowances for providing health care in non-state health care institutions and making decisions about obligation of health care institutions to provide health care);

Territorial planning and regional development- the activities in this domain are regulated by the Act No. 503/2001 on support of regional development. The Act specifies the force of the bodies of state administration and territorial self-government in the domain of regional development and determines the preconditions of support of regional development.

The position of SGR as the subject and actor of social and territorial planning and development has become a crucial criterion for selecting the SGRs for the case studies of this report.

1. 2. Financing of regional governance
Recent fiscal decentralization gradually impacts on changes in financing of municipal and regional self-governance. Implementation of new fiscal principles has started in 2005. Regional experts suggest that in all higher territorial units, the implementation has had a negative impact especially on provision of social services: the new rules led to substantial decrease of financial resources in the Social Security Chapter of the regional and municipal budgets. For instance, in 2005, the Social and Health Department of the Office of the Banská Bystrica SGR has registered „the swift increase of the solicitations of village and town municipalities and as NGOs for financial contributions for the social assistance, including

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2 We work here with broader understanding of social assistance and protection. Social assistance and protection include, besides social services also social prevention, social counselling, social-legal protection, social assistance benefits and compensation and home-care financial contributions.

3 The Act on social-legal protection of children explicitly treats the duties of a number of subjects to offer the child the immediate help to protect his life, health and warrant his rights and interests. In our opinion this Act articulates and systemises responsibilities and expectations of social prevention and social protection that child and family could be (have to be) offered by various bodies and therefore - as the valuable tool for identifying gaps in social protection and prevention practice - it should be included in any analysis of the state of “social assistance” or “social protection”.

4 clause VI of the 12 Part Transitory and closing provisions of the mentioned Act (p. 3269 Code)
those services, which are original competence of local municipality\(^5\). Lack of resources for social sphere seems to be a general problem:

"...no one of self-government regions is capable to take on obligations of municipalities and to finance all necessary services on its territory. The Act on Social Assistance sets down clearly the competencies of SGR in relation to a citizen dependent on social assistance. However, in the present situation, a considerable part of villages do not provide any social service to their citizens, do not fulfil their legally set obligation, what in practice means that they do not care for their inhabitants, often with pointing at the shortage of financial means."\(^6\)

In spite of substantial changes in public governance, after the first tenure of regional self-government, the general public in Slovakia is largely unaware of tasks and missions of regional authorities. According opinion surveys, SGRs are not considered important and/or useful for citizens. National mass media rarely inform about the representatives, activities and problems of the SGRs. Lot of information about the SGR regions are on their Internet websites, however, access to Internet is still limited in Slovakia – only about one citizen of five used the Internet regularly (Zeman 2005, Velšic 2005\(^7\)).

2. Regional Disparities as the political issue

2.1 Mass media coverage of the topic

The study of media coverage of regional disparities held in 2003\(^8\) examined how media approach the topic of regional differences and countryside. The study reveals that the regional differences were debated in close linkage to the topic of the EU accession; reducing regional differences was presented first of all as the EU request. Issue of regional solidarity was explicating only as a “European principle”, not as an internal principle of interrelations among Slovak regions.

**Legitimacy of re-distribution** (of powers and resources) between the regions has not been debated overtly/openly. Fiscal decentralization has been described as an asset, illustrated by achievements of the blooming regions (articles about Bratislava SGR in SME). No article debated possible impact of fiscal decentralization on backwoods. Overt debates about the redistribution principle were held separately and redistribution was outlined as a feature to be wiped away from economic and public-administration.

Regional self-governments were presented mostly as **struggling with problems of basic operation of regional infrastructure** (public transport, road maintenance, education, healthcare) that have emerged because of the competencies transfer from the central government and missing financial resources. Regions were described as **caring down burdens**, resolving **assigned** tasks and, possibly, **defending** themselves against inappropriate expectations. There were not clear opinion presented of how relations between regional subjects (municipalities,

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5 BBSGR - Conception of social services in BBSGR. 2005
6 Conception of social services in BBSGR. 2005
7 Velšic 13% in 2003 and nearly 20% in June 2005. Zeman 15% in (Slovensko 2004)
8 the study was the part of the state ordered project Regional differentiation, regional development of the Slovak Republic in the context of (EU) integration. Institute for sociology Slovak Academy of Sciences 2003-2005. It focused at the two opinion-making dailies SME and PRAVDA
firms, civic associations and organizations) should develop and how collective and individual actors should take part in preparation of the regional development programme. Mass media also suggested that the preparation of developmental programmes is not sufficiently coordinated and that collaboration between regions and the “centre” is insufficient. Mass media depicted the capability to use (“absorbability”) of the EU Structural Funds as a key precondition of regional development in the Slovak Republic.

2.2. Governmental response to regional disparities

In 2004, the National Council empowered the Government of the Slovak Republic to prepare the analytical report on regional differences. The Slovak government on its session of September 29, 2005 approved the report. The report describes the present socio-economic situation in the Slovak regions and the measures to reduce social and economic disparities in the regions to the end of the current election period (2006). The report articulates the position of the government to the problem of regional disparities. The government position is very close to its position how to address the poverty problems:

“...that the main challenge for Slovakia is to make economic growth and the labour productivity increase. Main contributions to this challenge should be mainly the improvement of the pro-enterprising environment, increase of flexibility of labour market, decrease of tax payments and deliveries, the increased investment in human capital, and not only the public investment.” (The Report p.3)

The report presents current social and economic situation in the regions. In the 1Q of 2005, striking differences in the structure of economically active population have persisted. The difference in employment rate between regions is almost 18 percentage points and the difference in the unemployment rate is more than 20 percentage points. In the 1Q 2005, the number of employed has increased in the six of the eight SGRs (except Košice SGR and Prešov SGR) in comparison with the 1 Q 2004. The number of unemployed decreased in all regions except Prešov SGR. Košice SGR had the highest unemployment rate in the first quarter 2005.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SG Region</th>
<th>1. Q 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bratislava SGR</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trnava SGR</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trenčín SGR</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nitra SGR</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Žilina SGR</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banská Bystrica</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prešov</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Košice</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(c) LFS Statistical Office SR

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9 Kusá, Z., Presentation of regional disparities and problems of countryside in Slovak mass-media. Partial topic of the state ordered project no. č. 2003 SP 51/028 06 00/028 06 02 - 2003 Institute for Sociology 2004 , 60 p. (Slovak)

10 Full title of the Report is „Report on contemporary state of socio-economic level in the regions of Slovakia and on prepared measures for elimination of social and economic disparities in the regions to the end of the current election period.” (SR government session September 29, 2005) I. Radičová, new Minister of LSA&F claimed new version of the report and the second version was presented for public commenting in January 2006. We refer also to the second version of the Report on other place. Here, the reference is to the first version.
In the 1Q of 2005, the lowest registered unemployment rate\footnote{Table 2 Regional differences in the registered unemployment rate in the first quarter 2005 (Data of headquarters of LSAetF SR) in the Attachment of this report} was 3.2% in Bratislava SGR and the highest one – 19.8% was in Banská Bystrica SGR. The regional gap in registered unemployment is 16.6 percentage points. Sharp differences in the registered unemployment rate exist also within the same region. In the given period, the most striking differences were within Banská Bystrica SGR, where the district Banská Bystrica has 8.2% registered unemployment and the district Rimavská Sobota 29.9%. The gap is 21.7 percentage points.

High level of registered unemployment goes hand in hand with high proportion of long-term unemployed. The Nitra SGRs, Prešov SGRs, Banská Bystrica SGRs and Košice SGRs have the most unfavourable structure of jobseekers (long-term unemployed, lower secondary education). Data are in the tables in the attachment.

\subsection*{2.2.1 Central Government’s tools to fight against regional disparities and poverty in the regions defined in the report}
According the Report, the Government recognizes and employs the following measures to eliminate social and economic disparities between the regions: a) development of infrastructure; b) implementation of social and economic programmes, c) support of labour force mobility and 4) fiscal decentralization. We have discussed the ALMP, which is undoubtedly significant measure to fight with unemployment, rather extensively in our previous report\footnote{Kusá Z., Kvapilová E.: Second Report: Assessment of implementation of the Slovakian NAP inclusion (July 2004 - July 2005 period) Group of non-governmental experts in the fight against poverty and social exclusion - Slovakian expert, 2005}. This is why we will deal here briefly only with the SDF and the last two measures: support of labour force mobility and fiscal decentralization.

\textbf{Social development Fund} (SDF) has been represented as the significant national tool of mitigating regional disparities and promoting social inclusion in the NAP/inclusion. The NAP/incl. states that SDF was established in the frame of the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources by the Ministry of LSA&F with the aim

\begin{quote}
"to increase the rate of employment of socially marginalized groups by means of social inclusion partnerships which will be established at various territorial levels (municipality, district, district of the office of labour, social affairs and the family, [self-governing] region) and (...) to identify, prepare and realise labour market training and employment programmes for the most socially disadvantaged population, in particular for members of separated and segregated Roma communities." (NAP/incl. p. 45)
\end{quote}

SDF is defined as an instrument in the fight against poverty and social exclusion by the means of structural funds and state budget programmes realisation. At present\footnote{Here we refer to the revised version of the report of MLSA&F on present state of socio-economic level in the regions of the SR that was submitted at http://www.employment.gov.sk/mpsvrsr/internet/home/pk_docs.php?id=94&sid37d6332ab199cede439939e69445e4 for public commenting between January 23, 2006 and February 3, 2006.}, SDF implements three important programmes, of which only National Project VI “Increase of employability of groups in risk of social exclusion by partnership of social inclusion” is financed by the European Social Fund. The National Project supports following activities: a) foundation of social inclusion partnership and their methodical support in identification needs, goals and micro-projects and b) financial support of micro-projects. According the governmental report\footnote{See footnote 13} “at present there are 97 projects supported in 2004 in the state of implementation. In
2005, the evaluation of the micro-projects submitted in 2005 was cancelled due the delay in paying the pre-payments and complication of the process of certification of the project expenditures. Up till now the social inclusion’ local partnerships are insufficiently financed: the administrative structures are well developed, but the resources for practical activities in regions are lacking, mainly due the cancellation of micro-project evaluation.

Other programmes of SDF are Development of Local Infrastructure (implemented only in the areas with local social partnerships, in 2005 173 projects were supported with 115 million SKK –) and Support of Community Social Work Development in the Municipalities. Both the programmes are financed from the state budget.

The functioning of the SDF is accompanied with many problems, including those connected with the management. There is certain discrepancy between formal “independence” of the SDF and its practical status and relation to the MLSAF. Representatives of the SDF state that “Social Development Fund is an independent organisation established by and directly subordinated to the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of SR” Last change in the leadership of the SDF occurred in August 2005.

Similarly, the financing of the EQUAL projects have suffered in 2005 from great problems, mainly by serious delays in reimbursements and by refusal of the contracted pre-payment. There are many competing explanation for this problem. Some point at the three level of the 100% control executed by the two under-staffed sections of the two ministries. The new ministry and ministerial officials point at complex and bureaucratic Brussels criteria, NGOs suggest that each EU country has its own –better or worse - system and that the problem with payments inheres in Bratislava.

Regional support of strategic investments Up till now the Government itself has been entitled to decree the amount of financial stimuli for a strategic investment. For instance, in 2004, the government decreed the stimuli for 20 investors in total amount of 14 792,848 million SKK (The Report, p.25). Besides the direct stimuli, the government intends to invest considerable amount into the industrial parks that can serve as the developmental hubs for all surrounding. Also in this case, public resources will support primarily industrial parks in backward regions. Currently, there are nine industrial parks of the 1st category that are ready for the investor’s arrival and 75 locations set for industrial parks (so called 2nd category of industrial parks). While finalizing this report, the government has approved the proposal of the Ministry of Finance to give precision to the rules for regional support, to direct public resources mainly to backward regions.

Support of territorial mobility of labour force The government considers the mobility of labour force to play a key role in elimination of regional disparities in the households’ life standards. Apart from imprecise and redundant information, the report informs about the
pilot programme: “Reimbursement of part of travel expenses for job-seekers in the border regions April 2005 – 2006”. The programme supports the commuting of those who work in the three of five neighbour countries: Hungary, Austria, and Czech Republic. Considerations about the necessity to support construction of rental apartment buildings in the regions with high development dynamics are now more frequent also on the governmental level. Fiscal decentralization is defined as a supporting tool in the abovementioned Governmental Report though it does not tell how the changes in the tax system would help to diminish regional disparities. It is probably because their consequences for the operation of Higher Territorial Units and municipalities are almost unclear. The first experiences are rather contradictory. Chair of the Association of the Towns and Villages of Slovakia (ZMOS) Michal Sýkora argues that there is a serious discrepancy between the decentralization of competencies (started in 2002), and the fiscal decentralization (2005). Financial flows have become complicated and not enough transparent. In 2005 over 400 municipalities of the total 2883 (above 14%) operate with fewer sources that had in 2004, though their liabilities have remained the same. The main risks seem to result from shifting the next competencies to municipalities without transferring corresponding financial sources, unfinished “delimitation” of physical and human capital, difficult adaptation of municipalities to the parallel ongoing reforms (health care, education, and social services) and their possible impact on the municipal budget.

Fiscal tool that is to help the municipalities to behave more sensitively to vulnerable groups is, for instance, the Act No. 582/2004 on local taxes, regulating real estate tax and local payment for communal rubbish and minor building waste. The act sets in its § 17 that – by means of its Mandatory Regulation - municipality can free the land from the real estate tax or decrease the rates if they are owned by the citizens who are in material need or are older than 62 years, provided that the land is used exclusively for their personal need. Municipality can also decrease the tax or free citizen from the apartment or construction tax, if apartment or construction is in ownership of the citizen older than 62 years or severely disabled or in material need. The same act permits the municipality to increase the age limit by Mandatory Regulation suitably to local conditions. Majority of municipalities use this provision and increase the age limit for decreasing or freeing from the property tax to 70 years. The same decision, not very considerate to seniors, has been done by the municipality of the Slovakia’s capitol Bratislava and, equally, by the municipality of Zlaté Moravce, the capitol of the poorest district in Nitra SGR.

21 For instance, Action Plan of the Measures for preventing and alleviating poverty and social exclusion in Slovakia for the period of 2005-2006 under the authority of Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family SR, MLSA&F 2005 contains in its part b) Support of social housing the following Activities and timetable: “to elaborate detailed positional document of the Ministry on the housing issue, that would response to the need of unified strategy towards the Ministry of construction and regional development of the SR and would cover topics: for instance, housing as the tool of geographical mobility, renting apartment building accessible for young families and low-income households” : deadline: July 31, 2006, Responsible: Director of Institute of Social Policy MLSA&F”. We suppose in good faith that the task was accomplished.

22 Interview with Michal Sýkora on decentralization Hospodárske noviny NHonline.sk, July 1, 2005,

23 material need is defined as an income less than the set subsistence minimum for given type of household

24 The municipality of Zlaté Moravce has increased the age limit for decreasing the land tax and property and construction tax from 62 years to 70 years by its Regulation No. 8/2005. The regulation also sets that the tax
3. Case studies

The selected subjects of the following case studies are self-governmental bodies of the four higher territorial units (HTU-s) of Slovakia and one administrative district. They are: Nitra SGR, Košice SGR, Žilina SGR and Banská Bystrica SGR and Rimavská Sobota district that is the part of Banská Bystrica SGR. Neither of selected regions reaches the average values of GDP per capita and average wage indicators for the SR\textsuperscript{25}.

Table 2a Average wage in the SGRs under study and in Slovakia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Governing Region</th>
<th>Average nominal wage in 3 Q 2005 in SKK</th>
<th>Average nominal wage in 3 Q 2005: proportion of SR average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nitra</td>
<td>13 609</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Košice</td>
<td>16 049</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Žilina</td>
<td>14 334</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banská Bystrica</td>
<td>13 820</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR total</td>
<td>16 816</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© Statistical Office of the SR, the Governmental Report

The case studies are based on the Statistical Office data, registers of the Headquarters of LSA&F and the analytical and programming documents produced by the regional self-governmental bodies. In addition to the official sources we have done the questionnaire survey among the social inclusion partners/actors in the regions under study\textsuperscript{26}.

The analysed documents are, for instance, regional plans of social and economic development, regional action plans of employment, regional conceptions of social services and, in some regions, also conception of educational system. While drafting this study, neither of the regions has elaborated its social inclusion plan. However, in two regions work on the program of social inclusion of Roma communities has already started.

Table 2b Economic activity of population in the regions under study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Governing Region</th>
<th>January 2003</th>
<th>IV quarter 2004</th>
<th>1 quarter 2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employment rate 15-64 in %</td>
<td>Unemployment rate in %</td>
<td>Employment rate 15-64 in %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nitra</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>56.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Košice</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>50.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Žilina</td>
<td>59.9</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>56.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banská Bystrica</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>52.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rimavská Sobota*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR total</td>
<td>Xx</td>
<td>xx</td>
<td>57.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© Labour Force Survey; * Headquarters of LSA&F SR

\textsuperscript{25} However, of the 8 higher territory units, but one – Bratislava HTU exceeds the national average values.

\textsuperscript{26} We have borrowed the questionnaire form that was applied in the study of the implementation of the Italian NAP inclusion on local level by Fillipo Stratti and Mata Franci (2004)
In all four self-government regions and in Rimavská Sobota district as well, their action plans of employments (APE) have been elaborated with the support of programme PHARE 2002.000.610-15. Their methodology and objectives are identical. The common goal and hope is that the APE is “(a) to extend already existed socio-economic plans and to serve for strengthening the capacities and absorbing capabilities for drawing resources from the European structural funds, especially ESF, and (b) to support the permanent development of structures of partnership to secure favourable environment for realization of the projects.

Each regional APE has the ten specific directives as the action priorities that are in harmony with the latest amendment of the European Employment Strategy, member states employment policies have to consider.

Hence, the main outcomes of the project include: 1) Analysis of (actual and potential) partnerships at a regional, sub-regional and local levels as envisaged in the EU and national employment strategy; 2) Identification of basic conditions for integrated strategies (by 2013) and employment action plans (by 2008) for the region and 3) Principles of coordination of activities aimed at implementation of strategies and action plans among the partners – at regional, sub regional and local levels.

Due to short existence of the regional self-government in the SR, there are not available documents that describe and assess already implemented programmes. Other way around, the majority of the accessible documents are future oriented, presenting the programming frames of development programmes in the regions. Therefore we can rather analyse only general legislation of social inclusion and regional “dreams and imaginations” in social inclusion domain rather than their actual social inclusion policy. Of course, also preparation of plans is of crucial importance, at least as an important precondition and a basis for the next programming period (of the EU structural funds) 27.

3. 1 Nitra Self Governmental Region

Profile of Nitra Region:

Nitra SGR is located in the South-West Slovakia; its south border is the borderline with Hungary. 13.2% inhabitants of the SR live in Nitra SGR. It is ethnically mixed territory: in 2001, there lived here 70.1% Slovaks and 27.6% Hungarians. Roma minority is under declared, probably because of stigmatising associations.

The Nitra region recorded decrease of inhabitants between 1991 and 2001. Districts of Nitra SGR have positive migration balance – except the district Zlaté Moravce -and population decrease mirrors the decrease of birth rate that is observable in all districts of the region except the district of its capitol Nitra, where the population has increased by 1.6%. In comparison with other regions of Slovakia, the Nitra region has the highest rate of inhabitants in post-productive age (19.8% in comparison – for instance of 15.9% in Prešov SGR). In the districts Komárno, Levice, Nové Zámky and Zlaté Moravce, the proportion of seniors more than 20% of total population.

27 Although the project documents available at the websites of the SGRs claim that allocation of ESF has been a part of it, particular figures are still missing. (Žilina SGR)
Population density is uneven in the region, the lowest density (78 inhabitants per 1 km²) is in the Levice district and the highest density (187 inhabitants per 1 km²) is in the district Nitra. A half of Nitra SGR inhabitants live in towns. Majority of settlements are villages with 1000-1999 inhabitants - 102 villages (but only 20.2% inhabitants live there). There are also many small villages – 83 villages with 200 – 499 inhabitants and 97 villages with 500-999 inhabitants.

Economic potential of the region
The Nitra SGR is industrially developed region. There are industrial firms of national importance in chemical industry (Plastika Nitra, Duslo Šaľa); electro-technical industry (Volkswagen Nitra, Osram Slovakia Nové Zámky), engineering industry (SES Tlmače), wood processing and furniture making industry (Mier Topoľčany, Idea Nitra), building industry (PZ Nitra), power stations (nuclear power station Mochovce), paper industry (Štúrovo) and food processing industry (breweries Corgoň, Topvar and Zlatý Bažant, Víno Nitra and many other firms). Alongside, Nitra region has strong agricultural production, mainly of maize, oil plants, pulse, vegetable, fruits, champignons.

Labour market and education in Nitra SGR
For Nitra SGR’ labour market is typical higher demand then supply for jobs. With exception of the district Nitra and Topoľčany, all the districts of Nitra SGR have higher level of unemployment than Slovakia’s average.

The planning documents of Nitra SGR consider the economic growth of Slovakia and of the region the main source of financial independence of citizens and their families. Up till now, the average wage is lower in all districts of Nitra SGR than is the Slovak average, except for the Šaľa district. The highest wage gap (3000 SK that is 22.2% less than national average) was observed in 2005 in the southern district Komárno.

Lack of jobs strikes especially large cohorts born in the 1970s. In 2002, the number of jobs for school leavers was above 9 % of all the vacancies and unemployment of school leavers varied from 23.59 % in January 2002 to 20.32 % in September 2002. The highest unemployment rate was among graduates of the secondary technical (trade) school 56.41 % and the secondary health/medical school 54.55%. The lowest unemployment is among primary school leavers – 8.41% and secondary agricultural schools – 24.38 %.

Nitra SGR action plan sets several priorities to tackle unemployment among school leavers: improvement of the network of school facilities; support to ITC, support to increase quality of school managements as well as variety of education, support to creation of information systems on educational supply and demand, and support to tertiary education. The aims are, for instance, to increase interest of secondary school leavers in university studies, to „reach higher flexibility and locating the secondary school leavers on the labour market“, „to tune

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28 The Nitra Social Services Conception embraces undisguised effort to increase financial participation (responsibility) of inhabitants in covering the operation costs of social services.

29 Komárno district has ethnically mixed inhabitants, of them 69% are Hungarian minority and 27.7% are Slovaks. The registered unemployment was 12.7% in April 2005. Komárno district was agrarian in past and suffers with crisis in Danube shipyard.

30 Regional Action Plan of Employment of Nitra Self-government Region. NSK June 2005
secondary education network without limiting the accessibility of various types of secondary education and “taking into account rightful demands of those concerned” and “to deal with national minority’s schools in frame of all Slovakia” (this, rather unclear objective indicates an interest in “transferring” the responsibility for Hungarian minority schools back to the central government).

Nitra SGR’ APE has proposed measures in the field of education (ITC, modernization of school buildings) that rely on means of the EU structural funds: NGR is aware of crucial importance of submitting the (quality) projects in frame of Operational Programme Basic Infrastructure, Priority 3”. Probably, many projects will be focused on building reconstruction. The analysis states that the organizations that are under the authority of the Nitra SGR (educational facilities, social service facilities, cultural centres and health care centres) are in very bad technical condition.

3.1.1. Nitra’ Regional Action plan of employment
Nitra SGR Regional Action Plan for Employment (further “Nitra APE”) was the subject of regional assembly approval on September 28, 2005 (material No. 1315). The team of authors consisted of academic experts. They admit that the preparation of the plan was marked by the unwillingness of local firms and enterprises to cooperate. Mapping of labour markets dynamics was precluded by total disinterest of economic subjects on the surveys: The questionnaire return rate was extremely low: according to the authors, only 18 questionnaires of more than the one thousand sent. Nitra APE elaborates ten specific directives of the European Employment Strategy as its action priorities. However, the elaboration is done on considerably general level.

3.1.2 The Concept and development of Social Services in the Nitra region
Social services conception represents practicable tool of social inclusion policy in the SGR. This is true also for Nitra SGR. The SGR’ Conception on social services (2004) is the thoroughgoing description of the state of social services in the region.

Among 77 social services facilities in Nitra SGR, majority are oriented to elderly and include old people homes (19) and old-age pensions that together provide social services for seniors. There are also 19 social services homes for adults with various kinds of disabilities, 12 social services homes for children and 2 crisis centres. The next large category comprises children’s homes (11), re-socialisation centres (5) and rehabilitation centres (3). Several social service facilities provide combined forms of social care, the most usual connection is of old people care and care for people with disabilities.

Demand for social services (SS) in the Nitra SGR is high. There is estimated 71 thousands potential clients of SS (senior citizens, citizen with health disability), however, in reality, SS are requested “only by citizens who are in social need, and are in some way dependent on the help of others”.

The capacity of SS facilities is used to 99%. Though in Nitra region the SS network is relatively satisfactory (in 2004, there were 48 SS facilities in public - municipal 31 “tuning up” is illustrated by “more effective use of personnel and material technical equipment of schools” and “create space for the next offer of educational services” (we suppose that of private services) 32 The Conception point out that “the decline of multigenerational family, people’ placing career and personal comfort before caring for parents in older age has the growing influence at increasing demand for social services” (p. 5, foot note 12). Renewal of multigenerational family and strengthening domestic work and care is then seen as the way out of the financial pressures and problems of managing social assistance on regional and municipal level.
and state - administration and 60 non-public facilities), for some social services the real demand is higher than the supply. The result is significant number of “not-placed applicants”. By December 31, 2003, in the SS facilities in Nitra SGR promoter competency, there were 1348 applicants for placement in SSF (213 for placement in old people guest house, 516 for placement in old people home and 619 for placement in social service home).

Supply of various types of services

Some categories of SS are completely missing in the Nitra SGR: there is no protected housing and no specialised facilities for the year-long care for socially disabled seniors; hospices do not exist in the region.

Social services facilities in Nitra SGR are mostly concentrated in towns and villages and surrounded by rather well kept gardens, however, up to 13 buildings (of 48 under evaluation) are in very bad condition and at least one building element is in bad condition in 23 buildings. Only eight buildings are without substantial technical problems.

In September 2005, NSGR deputies (majority is of SMK - Party of Hungarian Coalition) approved that all social services facilities would be transferred under the authority of five non-profit organizations that were formed by the regional deputies themselves. The Head of Nitra SGR refused to sign this resolution of the regional assembly and has declared that Hungarian deputies tried to create chaos in order to prove that the Slovak – Hungarian cooperation is not working and acquire arguments for establishing their own territorial unit, Komárno, where majority of population is of Hungarian ethnicity.

3.1.3 Roma community in the programming documents of Nitra SGR

In the Program of Development of Nitra SGR (79 pp), the word Roma appears but in the two sentences: the Pedagogical Faculty of the UKF in Nitra prepares students for the work with Roma community; there is lack of cultural initiatives of Roma population in the region in spite of their number. In the Concept and Development of Social Services in the Nitra SGR the word Roma does not occur at all. Omission of Roma pupils can be observed also in the document “Conception of the development of primary and secondary schools” of the Nitra SGR.

In Nitra SGR Action Plan of employment (June 2005), the word Roma occurs several times but only briefly: 1) the (Roma culture) curricula at Nitra KF University; 2) in mentioning the opportunity to elaborate special action plan of employment for Roma people; and, in more detail, in Rule 7 “Support of integration and fight against discrimination” and the Regional priority No. 2 “Improve accessibility and attraction of jobs” and its Measure No. 2.3 “To strengthen the power of partnership”. There is nothing about partnership in this Rule, but the measure targets also at the “creation of special language programmes in order to remove the hindrances of the access to labour market, for instance language courses for migrants, refugees and illiterate Roma people.” However, it should be added that Nitra SGR already prepares a special programming document aimed at social inclusion of Roma. The important step in dealing with the “Roma issue” was done on March 29, 2005, when the Assembly of Nitra SGR has approved the proposal to work out the conception „Strategy of social inclusion of marginalized groups with the emphasis on Roma communities on the territory of

33 The initiative of Catholic charity to build the facility for terminal patients in Nitra has collided firstly with inhabitants’ disapproval, now it is hampered by the lack of finances. (STV October 17, 2005)
34 Analysis of the capacity of selected social service facilities in the Nitra SGR’ districts has shown that the services are not accessible evenly. See Table 10 in the Attachment of this Report.
35 The special AP employment for Roma seem to indicate segregationist approach to Roma minority
36 Material No. 1119/2005
Nitra SGR”. The Nitra SGR Assembly has approved financial sources as well as the composition of the selection commission and it has authorised the director of the Office of the SGR to secure the elaboration of the abovementioned Strategy of social inclusion conception “in agreement with the Act on public supply”. The approved material did not include any precondition of Roma community participation in the preparation of the conception.

In sum, Nitra SGR still approaches Roma community as the object of education or protection against discrimination. Roma are not taken as partners to be involved in the preparation of the programming documents in Nitra SGR.

3. 2 Žilina Self Government Region

Profile of Žilina SGR
Self-governing Region Žilina consists of 11 districts and covers almost 14% of the entire surface area of Slovakia. The north-west neighbour of the Žilina SGR is the Czech Republic, the north and north-east neighbour is Poland, on its eastern, southern and south-western borders there are three other Slovak regions. Almost 13% of total population of Slovakia lives in Žilina SGR. There are around 102 individuals per km² (a national average is 109). Over 26% of population in region lives in 247 villages with up to 2000 inhabitants; almost 21% of total population lives in villages and municipalities with between 2000 and 5000 inhabitants; 19% live in dwellings between 5000 to 20 000 inhabitants; in towns between 20 000 to 50 000 there is almost 13% of population of the SRZ and almost 21% of total population in the region lives in towns with over 50 000 inhabitants. Younger population tends to migrate from small villages - it has a negative impact on age structure in small and remote villages.

According to the 2001 census around 20% of the population in the region consists of those bellow 15 years old, over 62% were people between 15 and 64 years old and approximately 17% are people in the retirement age/ post productive. Also in Žilina SGR, the share of pre-productive age population has been significantly decreasing in recent years.

As far as the ethnic structure of the population is concerned, majority, over 85% of total region’s population are Slovaks, Roma minority officially represents less that a half per cent of population, with the highest share 16.6% and 11.0% respectively in Pribilina and Liptovská Porúbka. There are also Polish, Czech and Hungarian minorities represented in the region.

Economic structure of the region is relatively diverse. Employment in industry is higher that a country average and, quite contrary, the employment in agriculture is bellow national average. As a result of foreign investments the most developing sectors of industry include car industry, followed by machinery, building, and tourism. The region is one of the most important centres of the transportation system in Slovakia: two trans-European road routes are crossing the region (E-50, direction west-east and E-75 direction north – south). The region is also connected to the European railway system and Žilina is an important railway and road crossroad in both, north-south and east-west.

3. 2. 1 Žilina’ Regional Action plan of employment

37 According to the 2001 census. Estimations, however, are higher.
Analysis of the regional labour market structure

The project analyses in detail regional labour market structure that includes gender segregated employment (also diversification according to 11 regional districts), and unemployment (according to duration, educational level of registered job seekers and their skills, according to sectors, situation of disadvantaged groups).  

As far as employment according to the classification of occupations is concerned, majority of those employed have been working as technical staff, employees in health and education sectors. In 2001, 2002, 2003 the most significant decrease was in categories “scientific and research worker” as well as in the category “low or no skill worker”. The analysis of the team that have prepared the project for implementation of regional employment action plan concludes, that the former group is shrinking as a result of brain-drain and inadequate/low remuneration of highly qualified workers in the of science and technology sector. Decreasing number of low skilled workers might be a result of their disappearance from the labour market as well as their improved chances to integrate into labour market (training, counselling, etc.).

Apart from reasons connected with restructuring production in the region and poor job creation, other reasons for low employment rates and high unemployment include low labour market mobility: people are not willing to commute for work to other regions (this would, however, deserve more investigation why: insufficient transport structure, travel costs, housing problems, lack of services such as child care…). These characteristics more or less copy the national profile of employment and unemployment. Most jobs have been created for skilled blue-collar workers, second largest group of newly created jobs represent jobs for employees in health, education and administration (skilled, secondary education staff).

Labour force demand and support to human resource development

The authors of the project also evaluated the results of the investigation among 143 enterprises and public institutions in region, realized between December 2004 and February 2005 aimed at identification of the required employee profile (labour force demand) and their support to human resources development (employees’ training, retraining, etc.). Less than 22% of the investigated firms are members of formal or informal regional/local partnerships. This survey has found that firms are mostly interested in school leavers (49%), least interest is in low skilled workers; majority of employers use for hiring procedures direct contact with potential employees via their individual contact with HRD or through advertising the job (without assistance of job offices and/or other private of public employment agencies); majority of employers hire new employees on *ad hoc* basis (lack of long-term employment and HR development plans almost 75% of the sample); almost a half of the investigated entities do not support by any means labour market mobility (meaning measures aimed at supporting commuting to work and alike); some 20% offer partial compensation of travel expenses; some employers reached agreement with bus companies about placing bus stops conveniently for their employees (15%); other employees offer temporary accommodation for their workers (not their families), some offer flexible working time. Firms and public institutions in Žilina SGR indicated the main problems concerning the applicants for jobs: lack of proper skills and/or work experience, low self-confidence and bad presentation during job an interview. However, the main limits for creation of new jobs include financial problems of firms and low commercial demand for their products.

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38 According to the Statistical Bureau of the SR in 2004 economic active population represented 47,7% of total region’s population.
Public and private employment services in the region

Besides public job offices, private employment agents, agencies for temporary job placement and agencies of supported employment, there are 19 active employment agencies in the region. They usually intermediate short-term jobs outside the country, mainly in the Czech Republic, Ireland, France and Belgium (2004 and 2005) for skilled blue-collar workers. There were 65 jobs per agent/agency found this way in 2004. Many job seekers, however, reported problems with social security, wages and other administrative burdens related with employment abroad. Private employment agencies evaluated cooperation with public job agencies very positively (and vice versa).

Regional Action Plan of Employment - content

In the summer 2005 the draft of the Regional Action Plan of employment was released. The plan captures current situation on the labour market and proposes particular actions/ measures in order to meet the following goals: decrease unemployment, especially long-term unemployment, and create measures to support employment of vulnerable groups. The plan is, at the same time, considered as a main tool of social inclusion in the region for those, who are capable of joining the labour market and improving their income and social situation through gainful work. We will point further only at those parts of the document that are closely related to social inclusion processes.

Measures include better information about ALMP via internet (it is not clear if, the places with access to internet will be public, e.g. in job agencies…), support of work incentives to join labour market, especially for those at risk of social exclusion (through creation of so-called transitory jobs, development of services for families with children as child day care, and through public discussion about the risk of social exclusion). Although the issue of family oriented services is of crucial importance, it is not clear who will be responsible for their development. According to the law municipalities can, but are not obliged to offer these services. Taking into account the limited sources of municipalities, there is danger, that especially for smaller and remote localities without potential partners (employers, NGOs, etc.), these kinds of services will not be available.

The plan also includes awareness raising campaigns, organized by various labour market and educational institutions as well as by employers in order to spread the information on various ALMP measures among general public as well as among employers. A part of the plan is to launch a regional bulletin on employment services in the region. Taking into consideration the analysis of the role of agencies of supported employment so far, there is risk, that these might not be an ideal solution for inclusion of disabled and long-term individuals into labour market.

Priority one also addresses the issue of market-market returnees, meaning especially women after maternity and parental leave. Here the goal is to make the information of ALMP measures accessible (via internet) and to offer counselling for job seekers. The first priority in respect to this group does not include, for example, training or re-training that has proved in the past as important and a relatively successful measure.

Priority two - creation of new jobs and support of entrepreneurship focuses basically on two areas: (a) simplification of legislation and administrative procedures for the new starts and SMEs in order to insure job creation; (b) support of education and development of managerial
skills for those who are interested in launching business and/or in self-employment. Main partners are municipalities, educational institutions, regional development agencies and employers.

It is important to stress, that this priority is not explicitly aimed at all vulnerable groups, but rather at school leavers and short-term registered job seekers.

Support to human capital development and life-long learning: main measures listed in the action plan include in-job training and retraining, support of projects aimed at education and training of vulnerable groups and those at risk of social exclusion, creation of “job incubators” for groups at risk, projects aimed at basic education for some specific groups of population. This priority explicitly aims at supporting integration of socially excluded groups of population such as the long-term unemployed, homeless people, migrants, older people, Roma, the disabled -- via education and training, in some cases on job training (transitory/substitute jobs).

The third priority: integration of disadvantaged groups and anti-discrimination is relatively well developed in the Žilina SGR’ action plan. Measures include community action plans for individuals at risk of social exclusion, support of community jobs, counselling and motivation trainings, inclusion of social workers in activation of socially included individuals on the labour market (substitute labour market programs), supporting research on social exclusion in the region, etc. A part of the action plan is also aimed at prevention against social exclusion (work of pupils and students at risk of social exclusion in cooperation with schools, social workers and families).

Conclusions: Žilina SGR’ APE is relatively ambitious, however, very general and does not address sufficiently or at all several priorities (sufficiency of social protection systems, decent minimum income and removal of work disincentives, support of programs aimed at fight against child poverty, housing and problem of homelessness); the action plan at this stage does not offer any budget and it lacks specification of the partners.

3.2.2 Conception of Social services in the Žilina SGR
Conception of Social Services contains detailed description of facilities social care services according the districts in the SGR. In the Conception of social services (elaborated in 2004, more than 250 pages) there is only one page of the text devoted to Roma minority. This information concerns providing special educational care for problematic Roma children in the 5-15 age group in the Liptovský Mikuláš district in so-called Pálkovo centrum.

There are above 300 NGOs are active in social sphere. They are funded mainly by domestic and foreign foundations. The analysis of their situation and work suggests that improvement of their work would require: a) precisely defined developmental priorities of the region, completed transformation, financial resources – mainly from EU, improved collaboration of NGOs, public administration and regional self-governance. The most important NGOs in Žilina SGR are VIPA (Rural Parliament) a KG3S (Regional Panel of the Third Sector). In Žilina SGR there are 21 old people’s homes and social service homes with all-day care for

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39 In 2004 over 10% of total employment in the region took a form of self-employment. As analysed in our previous reports self-employment has not been always an individual choice but rather “must”. There have been cases reported when employers forced their employees to self-employment in order to cut their contributions to social security funds.
200 persons. There is need to increase the number and diversity of the service types. Žilina SGR also plans to increase financial participation of clients’ families.

**Social help and disabled/handicapped:** There are 11 social service homes for children and adults and 8 social services houses for adults, in total they have more than 1100 residents. There is lack of skilled staff, problems with low quality of equipment, with architectonic barriers… Žilina SGR therefore concentrates on education of staff, on building of barrier–free entrances and rooms for disabled people. It aims at improving information on disability and life with handicap, however the proposed integration efforts remain at a very general level, the conception lacks more specific information.

*Work with people in material need* is not mentioned. It is worth drawing attention to the fact that the only social service for groups in risk of poverty – for maltreated and neglected children, prostituted, maltreated women, homeless people - is counselling. Other measures (like shelters, asylums) are not mentioned.

Also Žilina’ Conception of social services emphasises the need to support families as providers of care for their members – stronger families are considered the way out of the problem with lacking resources for social care. )

### 3. 2 KOŠICE Self-Governmental Region

**General profile of Košice SGR**

Self-governing Region Košice covers 13.8% of the entire surface area of Slovakia. The south neighbour is Hungary and eastern border is with Ukraine. As far as the ethic structure of the population is concerned, 81.8% are Slovaks, 11.1% Hungarians and 3.9% claim Roma nationality. Košice SGR has had declining share of seniors: above 10.8% in 2003. More than 14% of total population of Slovakia live in Košice. Nearly one third of its inhabitants live in the regional capital Košice. On the region territory there are 16 towns and 442 villages, 88% of them are villages with less than 2 thousands inhabitants. The regional level of urbanization is 56.5% (EU urbanisation level is 82.7%). Differences in urbanization among the region districts are considerable. The lowest urbanization level is in the district Košice – country (13%) and Gelnica (21%).

**Economic structure** of the region is relatively diverse. Košice SGR has the lowest share of expressways in the SR. It is the transit territory for the transport of oil and natural gas. Capital Košice belongs to the districts with highest unemployment. The strongest branches of the economy of the Košice SGR are industry, services, agriculture and building industry. In the region there are more than 45 thousands economically active units of which almost 75% are small enterprisers. The share of enterprises with foreign ownership is 8%. GDP in Košice SGR increased absolutely between 2001 and 2002 but the share of Košice SGR on the GDP of Slovakia decreased.

**Employment and unemployment in the Košice SGR:** The level of economic activity (population between ages 15-64) is 52% that is less than the Slovakia’ average (60.7%). Unemployment is high (24% in December 2004) but it tends to stagnate. Unemployment is

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40 Data are taken from the Final Report 2005
very high among young people in the age 15 – 24 (43.6%). The employment has mildly increased in the services and industry. Various parts of Košice SGR have their specific problems as lack of any production apart from agricultural, the slump of mining industry (districts of Rožňava and Spišská Nová Ves), decline of building industry and military production (Gelnica). There is underdeveloped infrastructure (In 2003, 79.2% of Košice SGR inhabitants were linked to ducting system and only 57.6% of inhabitants were linked to sewerage), unemployment and concentration of poverty.

Inter-regional differences in unemployment are considerably high as well. In February 2005, the data of LSAF suggested that the lowest registered unemployment was in the city Košice (11–12% in its various parts) and permanently the worst situation was in the district Rožňava (26.27%), Trebišov (26.25%), Sobrance (24.75%). These districts belong among the ten districts with the highest unemployment rate in Slovakia.

Košice SGR has the second lowest employment rate of women in Slovakia. Low female employment rate is seen as the result of the decline of agriculture production and termination of many agricultural cooperatives. The average nominal wage of women (12 817 SKK) is the second highest after the one in the Bratislava SGR (18 596 SKK), however, it does not reach the SR average nominal wage (15 355 SKK).

**Education structure:** Proportion with people with primary education (8 classes = lower secondary) is significantly higher than Slovakia’ average. Some experts ascribe the higher proportion of low education “to the numerous incidence of Roma population and the backwardness of Eastern part of the region” (Final Report, p. 12). The university education is also less frequent than is the SR average. Jobseekers with the lowest level of education (primary education and graduates of industrial schools) represent 65% of registered unemployed in Košice SGR. Unemployed with university education represent 6% of registered unemployed.

**Preparation for labour market:** Many secondary schools in Košice SGR produced unemployed graduates. The survey done by the Educational Department of Košice SGR has found out that unemployment among school graduates varied from 2% to 100%. Highest unemployment rate (100%) was in the case of the secondary vocational school in Nižná Slaná (district Rožňava) and 94% in the agricultural vocational school Košice – Barca. Unemployment rate of the secondary economic and hotel school leavers was around 31%, but relatively favourable situation, however many graduates are employed abroad (Final, p. 22) The survey suggests that many school headmasters believe that employment rate of school graduates will increase after the supposed completion of the technical infrastructure of the region (building of expressway), information services, social and health care…

3. 3. 1 Košice Regional Action plan of employment

**Strategic planning in and creation of partnerships in Košice SGR**

Košice SGR has produced several analytical and programming documents that are strategically important for the next development of the region and for drawing the resources from the EU structural funds. Several documents have been created as a part of the project No. 2002/000.610-15 “Development of strategic action plans and partnership building on

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41 Survey on the data of Regional Labour office for the graduates of 99 observed secondary schools in the school years 2002/2003 and 2003/2004
regional, sub-regional and local level” that was co-financed by the European Union. The main objective of the project was preparation or extension and adaptation of the already existed regional socio-economic plans with strategic action plans of employment on the regional level and harmonization of these with the ESF priorities and policy domains” and the promotion of the process of creating and developing the partnership structures.

It is necessary to acknowledge that the coordinators and authors of the analytical and programming documents of the Košice SGR managed to process large sets of data sources during the identification of the main problems and opportunities in the HDR domain: the accessible statistical data and strategic documents of regional and national level, large questionnaire surveys (high return rate) and in-depth interviews with key actors in regional labour market.

The Final Report comprises the in-depth analysis of the structure of unemployment in the region, analysis of disadvantaged group, offer of the regional labour market as well as the analysis of the demand of the regional labour market. It is supplemented by the list of factors and institutions operating in the Košice SGR. The authors of the Strategy state that during the whole preparation process there was “an intensive communication with the institutions influencing the regional HRD” (Strategy, p. 5).

Strategy of HRD in Košice SGR is based on the National Development Plan and particularly on its attachment- Sectoral Operational Plan of Human Resources. The strategy focuses on the strengthening social capital and institutional cooperation as the main objective, and on the two specific objectives: 1) Social development and support of marginalized groups and 2) Development of educational services.

The first objective Social development and support of marginalized groups has four specific measures relevant for social inclusion. They include: a) support of housing development; b) creation of the set of indicators for permanent monitoring of the marginalized groups of citizens; c) preparation of the strategy for supporting the development of marginalized groups of citizens and d) development of the strategy of social and spatial integration of Roma ethnic” (Final report 2005: 5). It is clear that the measures are of different level of generality, some deal with methodological aspects of public policy, some are very practical like housing development. However, all the measures are still under preparation, therefore it is too early not only for the study of their implementation but also for the analysis of their logical structure. According to the team of authors, the Strategy needs to be treated as an open document that will be regularly evaluated and updated”.

The Strategy is guided by ten principles of the European Employment Strategy?) which are believed to contribute to increase in employment. Each principle will be implemented via specific partnership structures that are designed a bit abstractly. For instance, the rule No. 1b “Active and preventive measures for unemployed and non-active” takes educational institutions and employers as the partners. The Rule No. 2 “Creation of jobs and self-employment” counts on educational institutions, municipalities, regional developmental agencies and micro-regions as the partners of the Košice SGR. It is worth mentioning that employers are not ranked among partners in this rule. The absence of employers as partners in

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43Key authors of the Strategy for KSGR are three economists and 2 geographers.)
the implementation of the Strategy’ Rule No. 2 is explainable by the fact that activities proposed to reach this objective are consciousness rising, building of information network and analyses of various sorts. Rule No. 3 \textit{Improving mobility on the labour market} counts on the measures like support of housing, transport and social services. They are to be implemented by means of creation of model of compensation of the travel costs of daily commuting employees, improving transport conditions, improving condition for temporary housing of employees. In this moment it is not clear what form will these measures obtain during their implementation. Our case study is premature in this regard.

Now let us have a look how Roma people are included in the programming documents in Košice SGR. First of all, their representatives have not been invited to participate in preparation of these documents. Second, the Košice SGR objectives in dealing with Roma issues are considerably abstract and general. Developmental plans promise “the support of activities dealing with Roma problem” (ibid, p.10). Rule No. 4 \textit{Support of Social Capital} includes the aim “to create regional conception of education of the Roma community”. Emphasis on creation of next and new programming documents arouses suspicion about self-serving character of programming documents production.\textsuperscript{44} Similarly general intentions could be found in the Development plans of other regions, for instance the one of the Nitra SGR.

Low educational level and long term unemployment among Roma ethnicity\textsuperscript{45} are also listed among the weak points in the SWOT analysis of the region. The next weak point is the resulting devastation of human capital and loss of working habits that are considered the most important factors of marginalization and exclusion of Roma people from labour market (Strategy of HDR… p. 11). Structural factors of Roma unemployment are less emphasised.

Roma minority situation is also targeted by the Global objective No. 5: Strengthening of social capital and institutional cooperation, and its measure No.1: Support of housing development. The measure is again considerably general and based on the belief in healing effects of supporting the housing market, increased cooperation of public and private sector, increased economic competition among housing services suppliers. In addition, the document declares intention of the Košice SGR to increase social assistance to low-income households and groups with special needs. However, these intentions are formulated vaguely and are not transformed in some practical policy proposals.

\textbf{3. 3. 2 Social Services in Košice SGR}

Košice SGR has also taken over competencies for social services in 2002. In comparison to other SGRs, Košice SGR has not yet elaborated its conception of social services development. The head of Social Service Department of the Košice SGR Office outlines the changes in organization and structure of the social services in the region on the regional web site\textsuperscript{46}. In spite of the lacking financing for social care services\textsuperscript{47}, her official standpoint is optimistic. She points out the continuing responsibility for development and quality of social services that is on municipalities (in frame of their competences) and the SGR and stresses that the

\textsuperscript{44} First of all, their preparation secures solid livelihood to various experts and research agencies

\textsuperscript{45} “….unpleasant social and educational level of inhabitants, high unemployment rate and sizeable concentration and high proportion of unadjusted part of Roma inhabitants” (Strategy… ibid)

\textsuperscript{46} Dr. Eva Dudová. \url{www.kosice.regionet.sk}

\textsuperscript{47} \url{http://www.cassovia.sk/korzar/archiv/clanok.php3?sub=12.3.2005/51606} Opatrovateľské služby a pestúni sa šťaľujú na chýbajúce peniaze (Home care services and foster parents complain about lacking finance)
present changes facilitate responsiveness to the needs in the regions and promote proximity of social assistance due its transfer at municipal level. The obligation of the SGR is first of all, in frame of its founder function, to organize those kinds of social services that surpass the possibilities of municipality and are offered for citizens from a wider region, or the entire Slovakia. At present, Košice SGR is the promoter of the 15 facilities – legal bodies that provide services mainly to seniors and people with sever health disability. Besides the promoter’s function, the competence of SGR is to register the NGOs providing social assistance in compliance with the Act on Social assistance. At present, Košice SGR registers 57 NGO that provide social assistance to all groups of citizens.\textsuperscript{48}

**Good practice in Košice SGR:**

At present, several practical projects are prepared for implementation in the frame of the SDF calls “Increasing employability of the most vulnerable groups and groups in risk of social exclusion by way of social inclusion partnership” and “Development of local infrastructure”. SDF has supported municipalities’ and NGOs’ projects aimed at establishing community centres. Another programme, directly managed by MLSAF and supported via the state budget helped to create Personal Hygiene and Laundry Centres in 2004 and 2005 in 5 municipalities (Drahňov, Bystrany, Slavošovce, Somotor and Trebišov).

The new prospects in Roma minority’ social inclusion process are associated with the project MAXIM that has started in 2005 and will last to June 30, 2007. The project has partly an academic character. The objective of the MAXIM – Marginalization and xenophobia project is “to identify the mechanisms of prevention of exclusion by means of increasing employment and employability of Roma minority in form of partnership of private and public sector”.

The next promising project bears the name Schola Vitae - School of the second chance. Project focuses on the education of the youth from poor settlements and will start in December 2005 at the latest. It will offer individually tailored teaching programmes and help with looking for jobs. School will have also hostel. The project is managed by the NGO Council for counselling in social service in the collaboration with the Headquarters of LSAF, the district labour office and the next institutions, including the Košice SGR. The preparation of the school rooms will costs above 20 millions SKK, the yearly operation will cost 2 million SKK. For the time being, it is not clear where the school will be located and the project suffers by insufficient financing (like majority of the Social Development Fund and EQUAL projects).

### 3. 4 Banská Bystrica Self-government Region

**General description of the region**

According to the Census 2001 data, BBSGR has 661 343 inhabitants and average density 70 inhabitants per 1 km\(^2\). It has the sparsest settlement structure in Slovakia (the country average is 109.7 inh/1 km\(^2\)). BBSGR has 13 administrative districts, of which the most populated is the district of the region capitol Banská Bystrica. BBSGR has 516 settlements, of which 24 are towns. The region has multifarious settlement structure with all types of settlement.
formations, including dispersed mountain settlements. Majority of settlements are villages with 200 – 500 inhabitants.

Overall demographic trend is stagnation of the population growth. In BBSGR, the natural population decrease has started in 1996. In 2001 only 1 of 13 BBSGR districts (Rimavská Sobota district) has a slight population increase. Intra-regional migration balance shows great differences among the districts. In 2001, the biggest migration loss was in the district Rimavská Sobota (-146), Brezno (-100) and the highest migration gain was in the district Zvolen (+213) and district Lučenec (+113).

**Ethnic structure:** According to the Census 2001 data 11.7% of BBSGR inhabitants are Hungarians and 2.3% Roma. However, as it is well known, number of Roma people who do not claim Roma nationality is far higher. The Conception of Social Services in BBSGR suggests that Roma nationality represents 7.96% of BBSGR inhabitants. The highest proportion of Roma minority is in the districts Revúca 23.70%, Rimavská Sobota 18.09% and Lučenec 11.16%. Birth rate of Roma minority is nearly double compare to the birth rate of the majority population and in the age cohort 15 - 19 years, the birth rate is even sevenfold higher. Proportion of children among Roma ethnic group is approximately 37-40%.

**Employment and unemployment:** Unemployment is huge and chronic problem in the BBSGR and its development is rather negative. According the BBSGR programming documents, the lowest unemployment is in Banská Bystrica district - 8,89% and Zvolen 12.55%. In June 2004, the highest level of the registered unemployment in the BB SGR and in Slovakia was in the districts Rimavská Sobota 29,03%, Revúca 28,19% and Veľký Krtiš 27,66%. (Slovakia average registered unemployment rate was 13.91%). The highest number of unemployed are those with lower secondary education (elementary school graduates) – 37% in 2002. The identical proportion of unemployed – 37% are unemployed younger than 25 years (the 2005 data are in the Attachment).

**Social infrastructure:** On the territory of BBSGR there are three universities and several branches of other universities. There are 135 secondary schools with total number 35 625 students (27.8% are students of grammar schools, 36.1% are students of technical colleges and 36.1% are students of vocational schools). In the force of the Regional office Banská Bystrica there are also special schools and special school establishments (54 headquarters administer totally 75 special schools and special school establishments. There are totally 4 222 pupils in these schools. The graduates of special school have considerable lower opportunity to get secondary education and/or professional training. Roma children are placed in special schools much more frequently than other nationalities and often due the language difficulties.

**Civil society:** BBSGR is the only SGR under study that seems to collaborate with civil society not only on ad hoc basis. Already in the Program of social and economic development (2002) there is the information about the state of civil society in the region and about the agreement signed by the chair of BBSGR and the representative of the Regional Panel of the Third Sector signed the agreement on the cooperation of BBSGR and Regional Panel of the Third Sector in April 2002.

**Health care:** Health care in the region is delivered by 1219 non-state ambulatory care centres, 13 hospitals with 3972 beds and other specialised health care establishments, including spas. The Program claims that the aim of BBSGR is “to secure accessibility and proportional spreading out the health care provision, to centralize service provision in bed facilities and to

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49 Panel of the Third Sector has been established in the early 1990s as the association of nongovernmental organization with the aim to protect and promote civil society in Slovakia. Its central body was general assembly so called Stupavská konferencia.. the database of Regional Panel in BBSGR included 726 NGOs in 2002.
secure maximum of possible quality of provided health care on the level of financial possibilities of BBSGR and Slovak Republic”. However, the mass media frequently report of high debts and coming collapse of several BB SGR hospitals.

3. 4. 1 Conception of Social services and social assistance

In BBSGR, social services are provided by more than 56 state facilities. Of them 24 are old people homes, 10 social services homes for disabled adults, 12 orphanages (child homes). Capacity of majority of these facilities is insufficient. Social care is also provided by 35 non-governmental facilities, 5 of them are municipalities and 1 physical person.

From quantitative point of view (number of facilities and number of seating capacity), institutional (year-round) social services dominate over ambulatory and field social work. An average capacity in SSF in the administration of BBSGR is 71 residents. Average seating capacity outside the BBSGR promoter function is 20 residents. Institutional services are prevalent though they are considered more expensive than field social services and are less attractive from the quality of life point of view.

The Conception of social services on the territory of BBSGR (2005) informs about high pressure on increasing the capacities of children’s homes that are established and run by non-governmental organizations and financed via the budget of SGR. The increased need for this kind of services is a consequence of various factors: decreased capacity of the already existing children’s homes (to create family-like environment), increased birth rates among Roma and low living standards of inhabitants of the southern areas of the region, where high and long-term unemployment prevails.

However, the Conception suggests that the BBSGR does not intend to support new and transformed children’s homes financially, because this competence is the original competence of the state and “it is unacceptable … to transfer the duties of the state on SGR without financial resources as it is done nowadays”.

The BBSGR Conception of social services points critically at changes in the financing of social services and problems caused by the fact that assigned institutional care should be financed from distributive taxes (podielová daň) and not from the state budget.

BBSGR plans to support mainly social counselling, fieldwork and prevention that are much cheaper forms of social assistance. This will be done by “rehabilitation of biological families and psychological, social and legal counselling, mainly to maltreated women and children”.

BBSGR does not plan at present to support the already existed homes for elderly and the establishment of new institutional services with yearlong stay because of various reasons, including financial ones. The BBSGR sees the main problem in the fact that the municipalities do not provide (because of the lack of financial resources) field social services and there is scarcity of ambulatory services. However, from the BB SGR perspective, “the absence of field social services is not the reason for placing a citizen in institutional social service facility” (ibid). Taking into account the findings of the analysis of the state of social services facilities in BBSGR, BBSGR has decided to decrease the capacities in old peoples’ homes and increase the capacities in social services homes for seniors. Future development is

For instance: „Due the unemployment families have time for caring for the relative… 40% of applicants listed in the waiting lists are not absolutely reliant on the social service under discussion. Many of them submitted the application because of the fear that in the case of health problem they will remain without health care and many have their application in several facilities” (Conception p. 44)
seen in smaller day-care facilities with common board and distribution of meals – in the localities with higher concentration of old-age pensioners. The Conception proposes tripartite financing (SGR, municipality and citizen), however, the viability of such proposal in the present tensed economic situation in the region is unclear.

**Re-socialisation centres:** national capacity for care for drug-addicted persons is very limited - 216 places in Slovakia. In BBSGR there are registered 245 individuals treated from drug addiction. Capacity of re-socialisation centres in BBSGR is but 28 places. There is urgent need to increase the capacity of re-socialisation centres. BBSGR will try to solve the problem by cooperation with the national Anti-Drug Fund and civil association Návrat in the village Kráľová by the reconstruction of the attic rooms which will widen the capacities by 8 places.

**Shelters:** Good supply of this service is in the district Banská Bystrica that is the centre of work migration from the entire region. Clients in Banská Bystrica shelters come from the BBSGR territory and even from other regions. Some shelters are also in Rimavská Sobota, Žiar nad Hronom (for young people leaving institutional care) and in Zvolen. Other districts have not introduced such service. The BBSGR’ plan is to have one crisis centre in each district of the region, and the number of places in crisis centre should be determined by unemployment rate in the district\(^5\). The idea is that the client’s permanent residence municipalities should contribute financially to running of the district crisis shelter. BBSGR plans to limit duration of staying in a shelter (in the district outside the permanent residence) to two months.

**Facilities for protected housing:** There are four year-round facilities in BBSGR. At present, there is no plan to extend this service, mainly because of limited financial resources.

Experts who analysed social services in BBSGR, suggest that „the changeover of financing communal and regional self-governance has strong impact on social sphere within the entire territory of the SR. The changeover in financing has led to the substantial decrease of financial resources available for covering for social protection in frame of the SGR budget as well as in the budgets of municipalities, certainly in the Banská Bystrica Self-government region:"

> "Lack of sources is signalised by rapid increase of requests by villages and towns as well as NGOs that are addressed to the Office of the BBSGR: requests concern financial contributions to cover social assistance, including those services that belong to original competence of communal self-governance. “ (Conception…, 2005)

The BBSGR experts emphasise that financial difficulties are not a specialty of the BBSGR:

> "...no self-government region is capable of taking on obligations of municipalities and covering costs of all necessary services in the region. The Act on Social Assistance sets clearly what are the competencies of SGR in relation to a citizen who is dependent on the social assistance. However, nowadays, a considerable part of villages do not provide any social services to their citizens and do not fulfil their legal obligation. That means that they do not care for their inhabitants, often making excuses that they lack financial resources.” (ibid)

In this situation, the programming documents of several SGRs and the most explicitly the one of BBSGR, typically emphasise the necessity to base financing of social services on sharing or tripartite principle (citizen, municipality, region). Simultaneously, the emphasis is on the exigency of fundraising: "It is impossible to omit all forms of foreign assistance resulting from the accession of Slovakia to the EU that is irreplaceable source of financial assistance of development of social services and the entire regional development itself” (ibid).

\(^5\) Minimum standard number of sheltered place should be 4 shelter beds per 1000 unemployed citizens (ibid)
3. 4. 2 Regional conception of social and economic integration of Roma people in Banská Bystrica Self-governmental region for the years 2007-2013

Banská Bystrica SGR seems to be the well ahead in preparation of the Regional conception of Roma Integration and in pursuing the principle of partnership. The aim of the Conception is to strengthen coordination of financial resources and activities that are aimed at improving living conditions of Roma people in BBSGR. Its preparation is coordinated by the Office of the Slovak Government’ Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities (regional offices in Banská Bystrica) and facilitated by the NGOs PDCS and Friends of Earth – CEPA. The development of the conception is a participatory process: it has involved representatives of the state administration, municipalities, NGOs and expert institutions in the region. In June 2005, nine thematic working groups were founded to draft strategies by the year 2013 as well as the action plans for the first 12 or 24 months of the 2007-2013 programming period. The working groups have to develop their strategies by the end of October 2005 and the entire regional conception should be finalized in December 2005.

3. 5 Rimavská Sobota District

Rimavská Sobota District is one of the 13 districts of Banská Bystrica self-governmental region (and the one of the 79 administrative districts in which Slovak Republic is divided). Rimavská Sobota district is located on the South of Central Slovakia, on the border with Hungary. The length of its border with Hungary is 74 km. Total territory is 1 471 km² and it represents 3% of Slovakia territory. In the 2001 Census, 51.3% inhabitants claim Slovak nationality, 41.3% Hungarian nationality and 4.6% Roma nationality. According to experts, the number of Roma inhabitants in the RS D is 19-20%.

RS D belongs to the most horizontally segmented areas: there is the tangle of numerous valleys created by river Rimava erosion and above the average number of small villages. There are only three towns of 107 municipalities (Rimavská Sobota 25 070; Hnúšťa 7 146 inhabitants and Tisovec 4 430 inhabitants) and only two villages with more than 2 000 inhabitants. Majority of village municipalities have 430 inhabitants in average.

In the beginning of the 1990s, Rimavská Sobota has had still relatively high proportion of population dependant on agriculture: 33% of economically active inhabitants of the district were employed in agriculture.

Table 3: Employment in Rimavská Sobota District in total and according selected economic branches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1989</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of employees in the RS Zone in total</td>
<td>42 469</td>
<td>13 568</td>
<td>11 931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>13 275</td>
<td>2 475</td>
<td>2 150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

52 The following working groups have been formed: Education of Roma; Support of Roma activities, Housing and infrastructure; Mutual acceptance of Roma people and majority, Roma Health and style of life; Sustainable network of institutional capacities, Prevention of asocial activities and Culture and Roma consciousness rising
53 The information about 10 working groups (the name and contacts of the main coordinators, documentation of individual steps of their work) is accessible via the internet especially due the effort of Priatelia Zeme – CEPA
54 Most information is taken from Brezina D., 2005: Okres Rimavská Sobota. Podkladová štúdia pre projektu ŠO: Regionálna diferenciácia, regionálny rozvoj v SR v kontexte integračných dosahov SÚ SAV 2005 (rukopis)
At present, Rimavská Sobota’ is economically stagnating district. It suffers from high and long-term unemployment for more than a decade. Such development is the result of rapid decrease of employment in agriculture, general lack of job opportunities, lack of financial resources, low qualification of labour force and migration of qualified labour force to other regions (and abroad) as well as absence of a local strategy for economic development.

**Unemployment**: In January 2004, unemployment in the Rimavská Sobota D reached 33.62%. Unemployment rates vary considerably within the RS D. If in the north and central part, unemployment rate is above 22%, in south and eastern parts, unemployment rate is above 45-50%. Unemployment hits mainly those with low qualification. Proportion of comprehensive secondary schools graduates among unemployed is about 25%. Unemployment hits especially the southern part of the RS D: there are villages with more than 70% unemployment rate. In 2004, the highest unemployment was in the village Barca (87.01%) and the lowest in Krokava 15.38%. No village or town in the district had unemployment less than 10% in that year.

**Table 4: Registered unemployment in the subdivisions of LSAF Office Rimavská Sobota D in %**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>year</th>
<th>subdivision</th>
<th>subdivision</th>
<th>subdivision</th>
<th>Subdivision G. Jabloniec</th>
<th>Rimavská Sobota Zone total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Bátka</td>
<td>Hnúšťa</td>
<td>Rimavská Sobota</td>
<td>Jabloniec</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>51.94</td>
<td>22.74</td>
<td>28.02</td>
<td>52.42</td>
<td>33.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>44.73</td>
<td>20.17</td>
<td>24.13</td>
<td>46.79</td>
<td>29.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>43.64</td>
<td>18.62</td>
<td>21.96</td>
<td>46.23</td>
<td>27.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Health care**: RS D suffers from high infant mortality and above average death rate on cardiovascular diseases and cancer. There is high occurrence of transmissible diseases of the group of intestinal infections due poor hygienic conditions. There is also high occurrence of allergies and upper airways diseases, mainly among children. In the RS D, there are 2 hospitals. The number of hospital beds and surgeons per 1 thousand inhabitants is slightly lower than national average. Medical equipment in hospitals does not fulfil the standard criteria. Life expectancy in the RS D is significantly lower than is the average in Slovakia: in 2001 it was for men 64.7 years (SR 67.8) and for women 74.1 years (SR 74.8) and this is the lowest level in Slovakia.

Experts pinpoint that development in the region is also hampered by lack of interest of authorized institutions to establish legal rules to support backward regions. For instance, D. Brezina states that the RS D’ continuing decline could make evident that the constitution of the eight regional self-governments might aggravate the situation in districts that are distant from the seat of the regional capitol. The seats of capitol of artificially created higher territorial units could benefit from new self-government authorities on the detriment of the backward districts (Brezina, 2005).

The enormous segmentation of the settlement and powerlessness of individual municipalities has called for creation of micro-regions. The objective of micro-regionalization is revitalisation of the region - mainly by encouraging and supporting tourism, cross-border cooperation with Hungary and, overall, “better use of intra-regional human resources”. In the
district of Rimavská Sobota, nine micro-regions have been created so far. They declare will to cooperate. The oldest micro-region is the micro-region Muránska Planina that covers selected villages and the towns from the three districts (Rimavská Sobota, Brezno, Revúca)

3. 5. 1. Developmental documents:
Majority of RS D’ municipalities lack up-to-date territorial plans of development, they do not have the projects of economic and social development, not to speak about developmental studies and strategic development plans that are a precondition of submitting the application to the EU structural funds. The three towns of the RS D are in better position. Their municipalities have striven to update older documents and their assemblies have already approved the amended developmental plans. However, village municipalities seem to be unable to elaborate the strategic documents that are the precondition for applying for the EU funds. Moreover, many municipalities do not have clear property relations on their territory and some neglect this issue altogether. On the other hand, Rimavská Sobota district has got the district action plan of employment that was elaborated in frame of the mentioned PHARE project by the local expert from the district Labour office55. The district APE makes impression by its formal precision and hints at implementation of partnership principle in its preparation (two workshops). However, the document is very abstract and resembles more a general exercise in the planning genre, than a practical contribution for the issue under study.

Cooperation and partnerships: The most important agent is Regional Developmental Agency (RDA) that has operated in Rimavská Sobota since 1994. RDA associates entrepreneurs, municipalities, civic organizations and individuals. It has implemented several projects and prepares actively also “larger scale projects”. Another body, the Euro-region Slaná – Rimava, has been established as a result of association of Slovak and Hungarian towns in Slaná and Rimava rivers basin. This subject has not implemented any larger project so far. Members of the Euro-region include municipalities and formally also some entrepreneurs.

Next important agent that has formed the local partnership of social inclusion in the district is SDF. In 2005 there have been supported 10 projects, amounting 5,5 millions of SKK in the RS D. Most of them have focused on improvement of environment and local infrastructure, access to drinking water, access to information for the socially excluded groups. SDF has published on their website the descriptive overview of some projects that have been supported in RS D.

4. Conclusions

This report has focused on recently created agents of regional development: higher territorial units or self-governmental regions. They have just completed their first four-year period of self-government and competences. Our study has combined the analyses of official resources, mainly analytical and programming documents produced by the self-governmental regions themselves, relevant legislature, the laws, as well as official statistics, registers of the headquarters of labour offices, and standardised interviews with the experts from the SGR offices, regional offices of Social Development Funds done in August – September 2006. The interview methodology and form was taken from the study of the implementation of the Italian NAP inclusion on local level by Fillipo Stratti and Mata Franci (2004).

55 Akčný plán zamestnanosti subregiónu Gemer (Ing. O. Kvetko a kol.) Revúca Máj 2005
Majority of the regional experts agree that “new distribution of authorities is an advantage on the theoretical level” but “it faces considerable difficulties in practice”. In all regions, generally experienced problems are related with financing: “Competences were transferred, but they were not financially backed and capacity of staff is also insufficient”. Some experts state that the origin of the eight higher territorial units could even hamper development of districts distant from the seat of SGR. They see the most negative factor in lack of interest of authorized institutions to establish legal rules for supporting backward regions. New criteria for foreign capital financial stimuli have been approved by the Government of the SR in October 2005.

**Preparation of regional and local developmental strategies** and programming documents belong to the crucial activities of the self-government regions. Programming documents are considered to be of critical importance especially in relation to access to the EU funds, as they are the prerequisite for applicability. However, the exigency of having developmental plans often results in the SGR’ (or municipality’) commissioning the document – leaving its preparation to a professional agency. Such procedure seems to be at variance with principle of participation and partnership.

At present, also thanks to the common PHARE project, the regional self-governments have managed to prepare regional action plans of employment and related documents. Banská Bystrica self-government region has also drafted a regional plan of social inclusion. Here the preparation of the social inclusion plan seems to be an outcome of coordinated pressure of NGOs in this region.

SGR action plans of employment have become the mandatory part of preparation and implementation of strategic HRD documents. The regional employment plans include various ad hoc partnerships and coalitions. As a rule, strong partners were identified. Vulnerable groups have not been included into the partnership; if they are mentioned, they appear only as targets of proposed measures. Emphasis on educational and research activities (indicators, new conceptions and strategies, enlightening lectures and fight with xenophobia) instead on jobs creation may be beneficial for various research and educational agencies but not necessarily for groups in risk of exclusion.

Regional action plans of employment focus only partly on social inclusion and vulnerable groups. Measures for marginalized groups are mentioned in several plans but they are not specified at all. Therefore, these formally perfect, but hardly practicable plans cannot be considered the adequate substitution of social inclusion plans.

The self-government regions have been given several competencies that influence substantially social inclusion processes: for instance, the competencies in transport, education, culture and sport, health service and social assistance. Several of them are analysed in the programming documents of the SGRs under study.

The regional conceptions of social services indicate that they have been elaborated in situation, where lack of financial resources was commonplace. This penury has influenced SGRs’ approach to social services provision. All regional conceptions under study emphasise the necessity to strengthen the capacity of families to provide for their members. Stronger families are considered the way out and resolution of the shrinking institutional social assistance.

Regional experts state that on the level of SGR, the normative financing still prevails and that the possibility to decide about implementing priorities that are principal for a SGR itself. On the other hand, NGOs often articulate reservations against regional bodies and municipalities, pointing out that they do not have sufficient capacity to administer and exercise new competences.
The expert interviews suggest that the Social Development Fund, a promising tool of social inclusion for the most backward regions, turned to be complicated and tricky system. Though several results of SDF project are distinctive (8000 participants, 500 created or mediated jobs) and confirm the importance and usefulness of this type of activity, and especially the work of local partnership of social inclusion that can be used as the trans-national example of good practice, it seems that the SDF has not been sufficiently prepared for operation (legislative confusion) and for the utilisation and promotion of the numerous (unexpected?) local initiatives that have emerged due the organisational support of local partnership and were capable to submit micro-projects. It is possible that the unexpected “grass-root” activism and number of the projects threatened the management and financing structures of the SDF and that the excessive activism of NGOs has caused the problems they are now faced with and are reason why experts complain that SDF was dysfunctional in 2005 (evaluation of projects was cancelled, activities hampered) and it has produced more evil than good in the 2005. From the regional perspective, local social inclusion projects that have been already approved were set back for the sake of the machinery in Bratislava. NGO point out that also the EQUAL projects suffer from Bratislava’ bureaucracy: time schedules of financial transfers are not kept, payments are belated.

While finalizing this report in November 2006, many NGOs that were involved in local partnerships of social inclusion, EQUAL\textsuperscript{56} and other projects dependant on financial reimbursements from the central government (MLSA&F) feel existentially threatened due the delayed financial transfers. Instead of strengthening social cohesion and inclusion processes, trust among partners and clients and political institutions, has been eroded.

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