



# SLOVAKIA

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STATEMENT BY

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REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION OF THE  
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Government of the Slovak Republic has reviewed the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and has prepared the **National Report of the Slovak Republic on Population and Development Cairo + 5**, which was adopted in June 1999.

The report says that the second half of 1990s can be described as a period of significant stabilisation of demographic trends (for an illustration: all yearly differences in gross rates range from 0.1 to 0.3). The issue of demographic behaviour discussed most often is fertility. Its largest decline occurred in 1994, since then the decline rate has significantly slowed down. The overall fertility is 1.38. The decline in fertility is linked to the age of a mother at the time of giving birth to her first child. This age is still relatively low, but it has been slowly increasing. Young people postpone the birth of their child under the pressure of economic problems (unemployment, housing problems), because of new opportunities to study or work, and new family values and patterns of behaviour. Average mother's age at the time of giving birth to her first child increased to 23.3 years, 85 per cent of children are born to mothers under 30 years of age.

The most positive demographic trend is the decline of gross abortion rate, which used to be very high in the past. This means a mild decrease in spontaneous abortions and a significant decrease in interruptions. The gross abortion rate is 4.9, which is the lowest figure in the recent years. This decrease is linked to extending the possibilities of contraception, obligatory sex education in schools, and strong anti-interruption climate.

In 1998 the mortality rate reached the value of 9.9. For a long time, infant (8.8) and new-born (5.4) mortality has been showing a favourable trend. The largest problem is a high middle-age male mortality, which exceeds that of females 3 times.

The average life-time at birth (life expectancy) is 68.62 years in men and 76.71 years in women.

The wedding rate has been decreasing mildly, in 1998 the gross wedding rate was 5.1. The wedding age is still low: about 22 years for women and 24 years for men.

The divorce rate is relatively stabilised, in 1998 it was 1.73. The largest group of divorcing persons is formed by marriages with 1 dependent child. The divorce rate is considerably differentiated in individual regions of Slovakia: it is very high in regions with large towns and industrial centres and in the south of Slovakia; it is the lowest in regions with a strong influence of religion and traditional family patterns.

We can sum up that the population structure has characteristics similar to those in the surrounding countries. The population has slowly been ageing, the index of population ageing is about 78. In spite of that we can say that Slovakia is a country with a positive natural increase of population.

The Government of the Slovak Republic **recognises** the population policy as a component part of family policy. As the basic approach to influencing the demographic development it sees the integrated approach to solving the family problems: creating the proper economic and social instruments for supporting the parental functions, providing legal protection and moral support for marriage and family.

Targetted measures in the form of direct financial benefits supporting the reproduction behaviour in the past proved to be of low effectiveness. Those measures worked for a limited time only and were non-systemic, which lead to an oscillation of the population wave with problems in housing, education, training and consequent placing of young people in the **labour** market, etc. On the basis of this experience, a new model of family policy was formed.

The Government of the Slovak Republic adopted the model in 1996 under the title ***The Strategy of State Family Policy***. The Strategy is cross-sectoral, respecting Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The ***Strategy of State Family Policy*** has formulated the following principles for the demographic behaviour of the population and to support a favourable development of this behaviour:

- Deciding on the number of children and on spacing of their births is the right of the parents. This right is linked to the parents' responsibility for the physical and spiritual development of children and their upbringing.
- Monitoring the demographic behaviour of the population of the Slovak Republic and adopting measures are conducted as a component part of the state family policy.
- The objectives of the state family policy in the field of population development are based on a scientific justification: the basic objective is preserving the balance in the age structure of the population and preserving the population growth. For this sake, the State will create enabling environment for starting and conducting long-term research of the reproduction behaviour of the population.

Within the **frame** of the educational process at schools, the State is responsible for the content and implementation of education (according to the WHO definition) as a component part of preparing the children and young people for marriage and parenthood. At basic and secondary schools, the focal point of this preparation is included in Ethical Education and Religious Education, two optional subjects of which one has to be chosen, which enables both parents and children to choose according to their world-outlook and beliefs. The adopted draft of the ***Strategy of Marriage and Parenthood Education*** at basic and secondary schools prepared by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic makes it possible to accept various opinion groups concerning the content and implementation of sex education.

As a component part of prevention, care and health protection of all family members - especially mothers and children - and of interruption prevention, the State ensures dissemination of information on natural methods of birth control and on contraceptive means.

In August 1997, *Analysis of causes of natality decline and a proposal of draft measures for stabilising and promoting the population development in Slovakia* was prepared.

The Government of the Slovak Republic monitors the social situation on a regular basis and carries out analyses of the demographic behaviour of the population. It will continue monitoring the implementation of the state family policy and in case of need propose both direct and indirect measures supporting the family and its right to decide on its reproductive behaviour. In the year 2000 it will evaluate the situation achieved and adopt measures for the following period.

It was the successful implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development in the conditions of the Slovak Republic, and practical experience **from** this implementation which enabled the Slovak Republic, as an associated country of the European Union, to align with and support the position of the European Union Member States.

The Slovak Republic supports the work of the United Nations in the field of population and development. In its further policy in population issues and in measures to be adopted, the Government of the Slovak Republic will aim at comprehensive elaboration and implementation of the conclusions of the Cairo Conference.