



## **PORADŇA PRE OBČIANSKE A ĽUDSKÉ PRÁVA**

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### **Slovakia must finally come to terms with the practice of illegal sterilization. We owe justice to injured Roma women**

**State authorities in Slovakia are paying increased attention to the need to compensate illegally sterilized women. The Center for Civil and Human Rights (Poradna), together with a group of illegally sterilized Roma women, has been promoting justice for injured women for almost 20 years and calls on state authorities to take systemic action in this area. The Slovak government is also being called upon to take systemic measures by the Ombudswoman and international bodies, and these days the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights.**

Since 2003, the Slovak human rights NGO - Center for Civil and Human Rights (Poradna), together with Roma activists, has been pursuing justice for women who have been illegally sterilized in the past. Poradna has documented many cases of this kind and subsequently represented several injured Roma women in court proceedings. After many years, some of the women sought justice only at the European Court of Human Rights, which confirmed a serious violation of their rights.

In line with the recommendations of many international human rights bodies as well as the report of the Slovak Ombudswoman – Poradna has long advocated for injured women to be compensated systematically on the basis of an adopted law that would allow this.

In November 2020, the Ombudswoman approached Human Rights and Ethnic Minorities Committee of the Slovak Parliament with an initiative to discuss the issue of illegal sterilization of Roma women and the necessary measures in this regard. On 21 July 2021 the issue was supposed to be discussed by the Committee in the presence of two injured Roma women, a representative of the Poradna and the Ombudswoman.

In recent days, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatović has also addressed a [letter to the Slovak government and the Ministry of Justice](#) asking the government to establish mechanism to ensure prompt and effective access to compensation for illegally sterilized women. [In reply to her letter](#), the Minister of Justice stated that she is currently considering possibilities of redress in cooperation with the relevant ministries.

#### **Štefan Ivanco, program coordinator of Poradna, commented on this development:**

*"It is important that the responsible institutions, after many years, pay increased attention to the issue of illegal sterilization of women. The practice of illegal sterilizations, which has been present in our territory for decades, sheds a bad light on Slovakia abroad. Our state must deal with this inhuman practice properly once and for all. Compensation will never remedy the suffering caused by illegal sterilizations. But Slovakia can alleviate this suffering by at least a little compensation and prove that it is a truly democratic and legal state."*

#### **One of the injured Roma women added:**

*„I was sterilized in 1997, after the birth of my second child. I was young - 18 years old. I signed the papers because they told me that I or the baby would die in the next pregnancy. I was scared, so I*

*signed. They ruined my life. Although no compensation will give me back what I have suffered, I believe that we will finally get justice."*

### **Context of this practice in Slovakia**

Cases of illegal sterilizations were documented by the Center for Civil and Human Rights (Poradna) in cooperation with the international NGO Center for Reproductive Rights in 2003 in the published report Body and Soul: Forced sterilization and other assaults on Roma Reproductive Freedom in Slovakia. Its conclusions were based on 230 interviews conducted with Roma women from socially marginalized communities in eastern Slovakia, most of whom suspected that they had been sterilized without prior informed consent. In recent years, the Poradna has provided legal assistance in court proceedings for twelve illegally sterilized Roma women. Many of them sought justice and redress only at the European Court of Human Rights.

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**The Center for Civil and Human Rights (Poradna)** is a non-governmental grassroots organization based in Slovakia focused on the protection of human rights with particular emphasis on the rights of minorities and protection from discrimination. Poradna has for a long time worked on the issue of discrimination against Roma ethnic minority in various areas of public life. It has also been active in the protection of reproductive rights and protection from police brutality. Poradna employs strategic litigation to combat discrimination and human rights abuses against minorities. Poradna offers free legal advice to victims of discrimination and in selected cases free legal representation to victims of discrimination before Slovak courts and the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. It also conducts monitoring in the field, advocacy, and educational activities on the protection from discrimination for lay and expert audiences. Visit us at: [www.poradna-prava.sk](http://www.poradna-prava.sk)

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