

# THE ROLE OF NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS IN THE NON-FORMAL EDUCATION OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN FROM MARGINALIZED ROMA COMMUNITIES IN SLOVAKIA\*

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## Introduction

*"All men by nature desire to know."*

Aristotle

Non-profit organizations play an important role in our society in every form of personal and social life. These organizations are given due attention from every field. People don't even realize how important education is for them, how education affects a person's whole life. We learn new information through various mass media and keep it in our memory both intentionally and unintentionally. Education also shapes one's personality and affects their morals. Education has a versatile effect on children. It does not only bring new knowledge but also develops social relations between peers, and builds respect for authority. Through various types of formal, informal, and non-formal education, children receive information that is important for their personal life as well as school life and irreplaceable for their further functioning in society. As Rochovská (2011) claims, a child spontaneously learns about the surrounding world long before they start attending school. Due to various reasons, not every preschool-aged child has the opportunity to attend formal institutions from an early age. Therefore, these children are provided with support and assistance through various non-profit organizations, where they can spend their free time meaningfully with professionals and their parents and receive an initial education on which formal education can build foundations. Non-profit organizations help children overcome social barriers and thus support the devel-



opment of social competencies. Józsa et al. (2023) emphasize the development of social competencies of preschool-aged children, as children with a deficit in social competence often struggle with developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships, which can also affect their academic success Borbélyová – Orsovics (2021) believes that non-profit organizations fulfill an important role in education. At the same time, they emphasize the socializing effect of these organizations on society.

## Theoretical background

The non-governmental non-profit sector is characterized by institutionalized organizations operating on the principles of private law and, from the point of view of the economic principle, operating on the non-profit principle. Non-governmental non-profit organizations, i.e., non-state organizations are founded by citizens as both formal and non-formal organizations and have the character of both legal and natural persons, and their existence very often stems from the principle of self-management of society and the ability to mutually guide the actions of a community of people (Kuvíková et al. 2014). Salamon and Anheier (1998) distinguish five basic characteristics of non-governmental non-profit organizations: organized, private, non-profit, self-governing, and voluntary. The following legal forms of non-governmental non-profit organizations are most known in Slovakia: *civic associations*, *non-profit organizations providing generally beneficial services*, foundations, non-investment funds, interest associations of legal entities, special-purpose facilities of churches and religious societies, and international organizations. Non-profit organizations in Slovakia are governed by Act No. 213/1997 Coll. on Non-profit Organisations Providing Services of General Interest. According to this Act, “a non-profit organization is a legal entity that provides generally beneficial services under predetermined and equal conditions for all users and whose profit may not be used for the benefit of the founders, members of the bodies or its employees, but it must be used in its entirety for the provision of generally beneficial services”, in particular, the provision of health care, social assistance, and humanitarian care; creation, development, protection, restoration and presentation spiritual and cultural values; protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms; *education, upbringing and development of physical culture*; research, development, scientific and technical services, and information services; creation and protection of the environment and protection of the health of the population; services to support regional development and employment; ensuring housing, management, maintenance and renovation of the housing stock. A non-profit organization can do business according to special regulations on the condition that this activity achieves a more efficient use of its assets and that the quality, scope, and availability of the services for which it was founded will not be jeopardized. It cannot participate in the business of other persons and cannot enter into a silent partnership agreement.

Income from the activity of a non-profit organization is subject to tax obligations according to applicable tax laws. The funds of a non-profit organization may not be used to finance the activities of political parties and political movements or to benefit a candidate for an elected position. A non-profit organization may not tie the provision of its generally beneficial services to the provision of donations from natural persons or legal entities. As can be seen from *Table 1*, the number of non-profit organizations is gradually increasing.

*Table 1. Number of non-profit organizations in the Slovak Republic in the period 2016–2020*

Legal form \ Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Associations	40 386	43 544	45 938	48 206	50 575
Foundations	468	469	468	477	471
Non-investment funds	524	518	504	507	501
Non-profit organizations providing generally beneficial services	1 556	1 501	1 602	1 638	1 638
Total	42 934	46 032	48 512	50 828	53 185

Source: author's own processing.

The non-profit sector in Slovakia has a rich history. Its formation and development reflected the significant social, economic, and political changes that society went through, especially during the last century. Volunteerism and the development of civil society in Slovakia have been marked, as one of the few countries, by all the substantial social, political, and economic changes that we are seeing in the countries of Europe. Currently, the non-profit sector is becoming a significant spiritual, political, and economic force. It consists of a wide range of organizations, from small associations, groups, and clubs to strong foundations and funds. They focus on ensuring human rights and basic freedoms, providing humanitarian activities, educating and upbringing the population, supporting the development of employment, and many other areas. The key values that non-profit organizations should respect are integrity, openness, responsibility, service, and charity. Non-profit organizations focused on education are a space for children to support and stimulate personal, social, and communication skills and competencies, which they will need in both formal education and practical life.

Education in Slovakia and everything related to it is subject to Act no. 245/2008 Coll. on Upbringing and Education (the School Act). This Act defines a kindergarten as an institution of formal education ensuring and supporting the personal development of children in individual areas, such as physical, social-emotional, moral, aesthetic, and intellectual. At the same time, it participates in the development of the skills and abilities of a preschool-aged child, and shapes and forms the prerequisites for primary education.



Kindergarten prepares children of preschool age in accordance with their age and individual characteristics for life in society. This institution is intended for children aged three up to entering primary school. It is the first school that a child attends and therefore it covers early education. The enactment of compulsory pre-primary education was proposed already in concepts such as Millennium or Learning Slovakia. To ensure the participation of all children in preschool education, several European countries have made it free and compulsory for at least one year before starting primary education (Austria, Bulgaria, Latvia, and Switzerland) (European Commission/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014: 40). In Hungary, the Act of 2011 on National Public Education introduces free early childhood care and education for all children between the ages of 3 and 6. The Czech Republic introduced compulsory preschool attendance from the age of 5 in September 2017 (European Commission 2016). Belgium, Malta, France, Spain, and Great Britain guarantee children free participation in early childhood education and care programs even from an earlier age (2 or 3 years) (European Commission/Eurydice/Eurostat 2014: 40). The philosophy of preschool education in the European Union countries also emphasizes the right of every child to a place in kindergarten. To fulfill this right, the tendency of EU states is to establish by law the obligation for the founders of schools to create enough places for all children. Until 2021, there was no legal obligation for founders to create enough places for all children in Slovakia. By changing the legislation, from the 2024/2025 school year, all four-year-old children will be entitled to kindergarten, and from the 2025/2026 school year, all three-year-old children will be entitled to kindergarten. A very important change occurred in 2021. According to the current legislation, pre-primary education is compulsory for children who turn 5 by August 31. According to Borbélyová (2023: 17), the current legislation also offers the possibility of educating 5–6-year-old children in a non-institutional form, in the so-called home education (the possibility of individual education). For illustration, we present a short overview of the number of children enrolled in kindergartens, and we separately indicate how many children are in compulsory pre-primary education according to different types of founders.

*Table 2. The number of enrolled children according to the school founders*

School year	Public kindergartens		Private kindergartens		Church-owned kindergartens		Total of enrolled children
	Children enrolled	Number of children in compulsory education	Children enrolled	Number of children in compulsory education	Children enrolled	Number of children in compulsory education	
2020/2021	153 086	-----	7 868	-----	5 607	-----	166 581
2021/2022	157 862	57 894	9 156	2 919	6 152	2 203	173 170
2022/2023	162 254	60 630	10 169	2 956	6 407	2 248	178 830
2023/2024	161 421	59 218	10 664	3 031	6 609	2 304	178 694

Source: Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information, 2024 (<http://statdat.statistics.sk>).

It is assumed that the number of children will increase from the 2024/2025 school year, but everything depends on the available capacities in kindergartens.

Despite the compulsory pre-primary education in Slovakia, some children do not attend kindergarten. This mainly concerns children from socially disadvantaged/disadvantaging environments or from marginalized Roma communities.

In the Slovak context, two terms are currently used, namely socially disadvantaged environment and socially disadvantaging environment. From the child's viewpoint, it is an environment that disadvantages them regarding their optimal development and is therefore *disadvantaging* for the child/pupil. On the other hand, the term *socially disadvantaged environment* refers to a disadvantaged environment, not to the child or pupil who grows up in it (Klein et al. (2012: 100). explain the *difference* between a *socially disadvantaged environment* and a *socially disadvantaging environment* very simply: "A socially *disadvantaging* environment expresses the characteristics of the environment in dynamics, that is, in the intentions of the possibility of its change. A socially disadvantaged environment expresses the characteristics of the environment in statics, in a certain fatality, as if such an environment could not be changed." According to Act no. 245/2008 Coll. on Upbringing and Education (the School Act) a child from a socially disadvantaged environment is understood as a child living in an environment which, due to social, family, economic, and cultural conditions, does not sufficiently stimulate the development of the child's mental, volitional, emotional qualities, does not support their socialization and does not provide them with enough adequate stimuli for the development of their personality. Marginalized Roma communities, Lipnická (2014) understands that "*socially excluded communities of people who are disadvantaged compared to other people due to poverty or cultural factors and live in settlements, areas of villages or towns, which hinders their personal development and quality living conditions.*" According to Klein–Sobinkovičová (2013), marginalization represents the creation of unequal social relations, which result in limiting life opportunities and reducing the chances of participating in decision-making and influencing these decisions. It is more than just economic poverty and deprivation, as it involves a general limitation of opportunities to participate in normal social life, including education. There are two basic types of marginalization:

1. Economic marginalization is linked to poverty and affects different groups such as the Roma community, citizens with disabilities, refugees, the unemployed, and the homeless. This form of marginalization is often accompanied by the threat of social and cultural isolation.
2. Symbolic marginalization is related to prejudices and stereotypes that are present in society and affect groups based on ethnic, religious, or sexual orientation. Some groups may fall into both categories of marginalization, and there is often overlap between the two types.

These forms of marginalization lead mainly to the exclusion of children from active participation in social life and limited access to opportunities, which is most evident in the field of education.



As we mentioned above, it is precisely these children from marginalized Roma communities who, to a large extent, have the opportunity to participate in non-formal education, which is usually implemented in connection with the goals, content, and means of a certain degree of formal education in the school system, but under specific conditions, i. e., in non-profit organizations. Non-formal education *does not replace formal education*, including pre-primary education in kindergartens for children of preschool age. Among other things, educational activities developing the child's personality are carried out in cooperation with experts, legal representatives, and representatives from the community. It can take place within project, community, civic, and other activities with an educational focus. Non-formal education is aimed at acquiring knowledge, skills, and competencies that can improve the participant's social and work performance. It is provided in employers' facilities, private educational institutions, non-governmental non-profit organizations, educational facilities, and other organizations. Non-formal education includes, for example, organized leisure activities for children, youth, and adults, foreign language courses, computer technology courses, retraining courses, but also short-term training and lectures. A necessary condition for the implementation of this type of education is the participation of a professional lecturer or teacher. It does not lead to obtaining a degree. Miňová–Novotná (2012: 58) states: *"Professional non-governmental organizations responded flexibly to the educational needs of children and young people. In the field of non-formal education, they began to use methods that allow direct experience, and experiential and social learning. Non-governmental organizations are involved in educational activities not only through leisure activities of interest. With their experience in introducing new procedures and methods, they can also contribute to formal education and thus enrich the already existing new approaches introduced by schools and school facilities."*

Non-formal education does not replace institutional pre-primary education but responds to insufficient or absent readiness of children outside the educational stream for the school environment through carrying out activities that develop children's personalities, providing a suitable educational approach for parents, and motivating the community to adequate education and training from an early age. As we have already mentioned, only non-profit organizations have dealt with the non-formal education of children from marginalized groups. Through community work, their own centers, and clubs, they represent the role of the state, which has not yet created the conditions for institutional preschool training for all children. Therefore, non-profit organizations providing generally beneficial services play a key role in society in the implementation of public goals.

## Survey findings

The *aim* of the conducted survey was to map and summarize the current non-profit organizations providing non-formal education for children of preschool age from marginalized Roma communities, and to analyze the embedment of the formal form of non-formal education for children from marginalized Roma communities via non-profit organizations.

To achieve the aim of the survey, two methods were used, i.e., the content analysis of documents and interviews. Gavora (2015) states that content analysis has long been a standard method of pedagogical research aimed at evaluating and interpreting the content of texts. Průcha–Walterová–Mareš (2013) describes the interview as a research tool used in direct oral communication between the researcher and the respondent. Gavora (2010) adds that it is also possible to apply it indirectly, by telephone or as an online interview. The survey was conducted between March–May 2024 on two purposefully selected samples. We used a content analysis of documents consisting of focus and profiling on a publicly available sample of 10 non-profit organizations and 1 project. A non-standard telephone interview, which consisted of 11 open-ended questions, was conducted with 7 non-profit organizations mainly from eastern Slovakia.

*Brief content analysis and description of 10 non-profit organizations and 1 project providing non-formal education*

### 1. National project

The School Open to All project follows the results of three previous national projects under the guidance of the Methodological and Pedagogical Center (MRC, MRC2, PRINED). Its uniqueness lies in the creation of an effective model of cooperation between several components of the education system, i.e., support and mutual cooperation of teachers and professional staff in kindergartens and primary schools, including pedagogical assistants, professional staff from CPAP (the Center for Educational and Psychological Counselling and Prevention), as well as teachers providing the non-formal education of preschool children outside the educational system together with their tutors (parents of these children).

Non-formal education is aimed at the upbringing and education of children from MRC who cannot or do not attend kindergarten for various reasons (e.g., limited capacities of kindergartens, persistent distrust of parents towards the school institution, parents' lack of interest in pre-primary education, financial reasons and others). It is attended by children from MRC with the aim of acquiring the competencies necessary for successful entry into primary or pre-primary education (hygienic habits, communication skills, social behavior, development of fine motor skills and graphomotor skills, etc.).

Within the national project, 119 children aged 5–7 were involved in non-formal education. In the overall assessment, most of the teaching staff (44) agreed with the opinion that non-formal education:



- improves school readiness of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds,
- comprehensively develops the personality of a child from a socially disadvantaged environment, and
- balances the shortcomings of lacking encouragement of the child by the family.

## *2. Wide Open School organization*

**Characteristics:** The non-profit organization Wide Open School builds on the successful activity and tradition of the Open School Foundation, which has been operating since 1994, and continues to develop its mission. Non-profit organization Wide Open School is an open non-profit organization focused on community development and lifelong learning in socially disadvantaged groups with an emphasis on families, especially those with children at an early age, actively operating at the local, national, and international levels.

**Vision:** All families in mixed communities, especially those with very young children, live in a fulfilling and tolerant environment, have access to quality education and social services, and can rely on an open and competent public administration to meet their needs.

**Mission:** The organization is interested in the needs of families from mixed communities, especially those with very young children; contributes to the development of a stimulating environment with an emphasis on education, employment, housing, and health; minimizes intolerance and facilitates dialogue between interested groups.

After 1989, as a result of the cancellation of many kindergartens, many non-governmental organizations started to engage in non-formal education. One of the most significant, which influenced both non-formal and institutional education at the pre-primary and primary levels, was the Wide Open School Foundation (1994) with the Step by Step methodology. At its philosophical level, the organization created the concept of lifelong learning in the dimension of an open society that does not make final judgments and recognizes the continuous development and inner potential of everyone. In the upbringing and education of children, it counts on the participation of the family and the community. The methodology includes 4 principles based on: care, relationships, communication, and community.

## *3. Foundation for a Roma Child*

**History:** Another important non-governmental organization was the Foundation for a Roma Child (1991) and its preschool program for children and parents under the name – Education Centers (1993), operating in eastern Slovakia. They primarily dealt with 5–6-year-old children from a socially disadvantaged environment, their parents, and the wider community. The Education Centers worked also with children at the primary level through clubs, tutoring, and educational work. The foundation later changed its name to INFOROMA, and in 2004 it was renamed to Balancing the Chances, CA.



*Characteristics:* Civic association Balancing the Chances has long been dedicated to the early education of children from socially disadvantaged environments and marginalized Roma communities.

*Vision:* The Hand in Hand project began to be implemented in November 2023 in the Old Brickyard quarter in Prešov. From January 2024, it was expanded to 2 new locations – Veľký Šariš and Kendice. The project is focused on the non-formal education of children aged 0–6 years in the family environment of MRC. It is implemented with the support of the Ministry of Education, Research, Development, and Youth of the Slovak Republic. The Hand in Hand project is funded by the Recovery and Resilience Plan.

*Mission:* In cooperation with the family, the organization contributes to the personal development of children from MRC aged 0–6, and prepares them for pre-primary education and subsequent entry into school. Its activities, improve the quality of family education and enhance the competencies not only of children but also of their parents.

#### 4. Multifunctional center for children and youth – Moldava nad Bodvou

*Characteristics:* The Space Connects Us, a multifunctional center in Moldava nad Bodvou, connects minority children and youth with the majority. Learning not only at school includes the following three types of programs: 1. School in a different way: tutoring of children from socially disadvantaged environments, summer schools, and integrated educational programs. 2. Learning through play: various types of knowledge quizzes and competitions, organized on various holidays and memorial days. 3. Non-formal education: the activity includes various types of training and courses for children as well as adults.

*Vision:* Establishing a multifunctional center for children and youth, which is a coordination center for other centers that work with youth and children in Moldava nad Bodvou, and improving the level of communication and cooperation of existing centers working with children and youth.

*Mission:* The goal of the Multifunctional Center in Moldava nad Bodvou is to support the social integration of Roma and disadvantaged youth. The center aims to ensure that children and youth from marginalized groups receive quality services in various areas such as health care, education, and employment. They have created a comprehensive concept for the development of work with youth and are expanding the social infrastructure and services for such groups.

#### 5. Baff Sa, CA

*Characteristics:* They run the BAFFkáčik club, where they provide children with a safe space for tutoring, workshops, etc. They are preparing activities such as Oral hygiene, and Get to Know Your Profession, March is the month of books. For 5 years, they have been implementing thematic summer camps, such as Me and My Profession, Craftsman, Animal World, and Protect Me!



*Vision:* They have been working for a long time with children and youth from socially weaker families affected by high marginalization – social, economic, and geographical.

*Mission:* The civic association Baff Sa is a partner of the Multifunctional Center for Children and Youth of the "Space Connects Us" project. The civic association cooperates and participates with several existing civic associations and kindergartens as well as primary schools.

## 6. ETP Slovakia

*Characteristics:* The Center for Sustainable Development is a recognized organization that has brought to our professional field several innovative approaches and topics beneficial for working with excluded communities. Work in community centers is complemented and expanded by non-formal education and work with youth. They provide tutoring and interesting activities such as music and drama clubs, sports, and creative art workshops. They also do shorter trips all year round and summer camps. Many of these activities are implemented or organized by young people for their younger peers.

*Vision:* Since 2008, they have been implementing the Bridges from Poverty training, a concept from the United States introduced by Ruby Payne. As part of the training sessions, which are interactive, our lecturers also share their many years of field experience. With a similar goal, to strengthen understanding and help break down prejudices, we also hold peer workshops at schools, where young people from the Luník quarter of Košice act as workshop lecturers and talk about life in the Roma settlement. Sometimes these workshops also take place in the form of "wanderings" right in the Roma settlement.

*Mission:* Preschool clubs are also run in community centers; since the introduction of compulsory preschool attendance, they focus on younger children aged 3–5 years. In the field of education, they focus on the interesting FIE (Feuerstein's Instrumental Enrichment) method, which is based on the belief that a child's intellectual abilities can be modified by changing the environment and the activities he or she performs. This method is based on cognitive stimulation and includes the identification of the child's needs while using prepared sets of tasks, the so-called instruments. The results of this world-recognized method are manifested by the improvement of specific cognitive abilities, increased motivation to learn, and the acquisition of important learning strategies.

## 7. Community center Veľká Ida (ETP Slovakia)

The community center in Veľká Ida operates under ETP Slovakia. Community centers play a key role in promoting social inclusion and education among residents. They offer comprehensive social services and education to community members, especially from marginalized Roma communities. Without community centers, the integration of socially disadvantaged residents is extremely difficult. They are therefore an essential part of any social integration and inclusion program.

Throughout the week, trained professionals provide social services and organize educational and recreational activities for children and youth.

#### *8. Community center Stará Ľubovňa–Podsadek (ETP Slovakia)*

The Stará Ľubovňa–Podsadek community center also operates under ETP Slovakia. Their mission is to support regional development, protect the environment, and help in the development of the social, economic, educational, and cultural potential of individuals, organizations, and communities with an emphasis on disadvantaged regions, socially disadvantaged groups, and ethnic minorities.

#### *9. Community center Moldava nad Bodvou*

The community center is open to all. Through its activities, it tries to involve individual members of the community in active participation aimed at improving their living conditions, but also the conditions of the entire community.

The community center provides:

- Mandatory services, e.g., social counseling, field social work, low-threshold programs for children and youth, field medical assistance, community work, and community rehabilitation...
- Optional services, e.g., preschool clubs, getting ready for school, development of computer literacy, professional counseling...

The aim of the community center is to activate and support formal and informal social networks within the community in order to solve negative social phenomena.

#### *10. Man in Danger*

*Characteristics:* Man in Danger is a non-governmental, non-profit organization providing humanitarian aid and development activities in the world and in Slovakia. The organization was founded in 1999 with the aim of effectively helping people who suffer from the consequences of conflicts, natural disasters, and non-democratic regimes. They gradually added educational activities and helped excluded communities in Slovakia to their mission.

*Vision:* They work directly and closely with the local Roma community, try to connect it with Slovak society, and provide it with help. They prepare children for school, tutor them, organize various preventive and recreational activities, and try to take children out of their homes so that they have the opportunity to see the world and learn what possibilities "out there" exist.

*Mission:* In the created clubhouses, they primarily try to support children and youth, provide them with space to spend their free time, develop their social skills, and support them in difficult periods of life. Here, children can engage in activities according to their interests.

## 11. The Way Out

*Characteristics:* The work of the organization includes tutoring, educational, social, and publishing activities, international cooperation, and the organization of activities that contribute to the achievement of set goals. The Way Out civic association was established in 2008, with the first Omama training taking place in July 2008.

*Vision:* The Omama program focuses on the key phase of a person's life, in which the foundations for later success are built. Omamas advises already pregnant mothers and later shows parents how to best develop their children's potential, even if they live in poor conditions. Through games and activities, they help develop children's brains and skills from an early age. This program therefore focuses on the education and development of the child at an early age in socially disadvantaged groups such as excluded Roma locations.

*Mission:* The aim of these activities is, among other things, to improve all aspects of the child's development at an early age: fine and gross motor skills, cognitive abilities, socio-emotional area, language skills and communication, creativity, resilience, healthier lifestyle. The program is intended to strengthen the self-confidence of the child and parents, their mutual relationship, and the child's respect for themselves and others (Melikantová–Miňová–Mušinka 2020: 52).

## Summary

The aim of the content analysis of 10 non-profit organizations and 1 project was to find out the focus of these available organizations regarding the non-formal education of children from marginalized Roma communities. We can say that the selected non-profit organizations in their profiling and focus on non-formal education are also oriented toward children of preschool age. As for content and time focus, it is different in every non-profit organization. These parameters depend on several components, especially the location, spatial conditions, and society in the given region. Based on the content analysis of the available non-profit organizations that function as civic associations, it can be concluded that adequate attention is paid to children in preschool age at the non-formal level of education. At the same time, non-profit organizations play an important role in developing communication, personal, and social competencies and skills in preschool-aged children.

## The results of the survey using the interview method

After evaluating the available information from 7 non-profit organizations and based on the respondents' statements, we can conclude that each non-profit organization aims at the non-formal education of preschool children who cannot attend kindergarten for various reasons.

The reasons given were the limited capacity of kindergartens, parents' lack of trust in school institutions, parents' lack of interest in pre-primary education, and financial constraints. In their statements, the respondents also asserted that this way they can provide children with a better atmosphere or an interesting program and prepare children for entering primary school. Programs are created according to the needs of children and participants and not according to specific school curricula. They try to make the children progress and achieve better academic results and thus have a better chance for them to apply in the labor market so that they can be a benefit to society.

*Table 3. Involvement of non-profit organizations in projects*

Projects	Multi-functional center	Baff Sa, CA	CC Veľká Ida (ETP Slovakia)	CC Stará Ľubovňa (ETP Slovakia)	CC Moldava nad Bodvou	Man in Danger	The Way Out
SPP Foundation		X					
Multifunctional center for youth		X					
Pontis		X					
Eset		X					
Omama							X
Gender equality for Roma communities						X	
NP Community services in towns and villages with MRC			X				
Phase 2 Step by Step			X				
A second chance for education			X				
RCPU KE a KS	X						
Comenius Institute	X						
None				X	X		

Source: author's own processing.

Non-profit organizations operate thanks to their involvement in various projects. We purposefully investigated whether they have developed a project focusing on non-formal education. As can be seen from *Table 3*, almost every organization participates in some projects, although they differ.



They are mostly projects aimed at the marginalized Roma community, but we also find other projects that help non-profit organizations in providing or implementing non-formal education. Organization Baff Sa, CA participates in several projects, which allows them to provide interesting content for a wider range of interested parties and to gain experience, skills, and a network of contacts.

*Table 4. Age categories of children in non-formal education via non-profit organizations*

Age category	Multi-functional center	Baff Sa, CA	CC Veľká Ida (ETP Slovakia)	CC Stará Ľubovňa (ETP Slovakia)	CC Moldava nad Bodvou	Man in Danger	The Way Out
5–40 years		X					
0–6 years							X
Minor parents							X
No age limits	X					X	
3–18+ years		X	X	X	X		
Adults				X			

Source: author's own processing.

The non-profit organizations provide non-formal education for different age categories, i.e., from early age to adulthood. The group of children from the age of 3 predominates, but there are non-profit organizations that also work with minor parents and adults. Different age groups of children have different needs, interests, and ways of learning, so it is important to take these factors into account in non-formal education. Age categories in non-formal education can also serve as a basis for various forms of assessment and monitoring of children's progress within a given educational program. Every non-profit organization works with pre-school children from MRC, as there is space and need to educate these children. This way, the non-profit organizations contribute to reducing inequality in access to education, which is often significantly lower in these communities. In addition, non-formal education provides children with the opportunity to develop their skills and abilities outside of the formal school environment and within a community where they can feel more comfortable and safer. This can have a positive effect on children's self-esteem and motivate them to further education and development. In addition, non-formal education can help overcome the language barrier, which is problematic when children start formal education.



Table 5. Providers of non-formal education in non-profit organizations

Professionals in non-formal education	Multi-functional center	Baff Sa, CA	CC Veľká Ida (ETP Slovakia)	CC Stará Ľubovňa (ETP Slovakia)	CC Moldava nad Bodvou	Man in Danger	The Way Out
Teachers	X						
Field workers	X						
Lecturers	X	X					
Animators		X					
Professional workers			X				
Teaching assistants			X				
Community center workers				X	X	X	
Omamas							X

Source: author's own processing.

During non-formal education, primarily community center workers or lecturers and professional workers are present for the children. In *Table 5* we can see that in some non-profit organizations mamas, teachers, animators, teaching assistants, or field workers work with the children. We find it positive that children are cared for by trained experts during non-formal education because, with their professional approach, they help children develop comprehensively in all aspects. They also try to help these children cope with a socially and economically disadvantaged environment and improve their chances for the future.

Table 6. A space where non-formal education takes place in non-profit organizations

Space	Multi-functional center	Baff Sa, CA	CC Veľká Ida (ETP Slovakia)	CC Stará Ľubovňa (ETP Slovakia)	CC Moldava nad Bodvou	Man in Danger	The Way Out
Community center	X	X	X	X	X		X
Kindergarten		X					
Outdoor		X				X	
Caravans							X
Households							X

Source: author's own processing.



A community center is a place where almost every non-profit organization provides non-formal education. If they do not have much space, they carry out activities and non-formal education outdoors. A suitable space for non-formal education is important because it allows children to feel comfortable and safe, which improves their willingness and motivation to participate in activities. Spaces should be large enough and well-equipped for different types of activities to offer diverse experiences for skill acquisition. A suitable space provides an opportunity for creative and interactive learning where children can experiment and discover new things. Finally, it supports social interactions and teamwork, which is important for the development of social and communication skills in children.

When asked how often they provide non-formal education during the work week, 4 non-profit organizations answered that they implement it every day (CC Veľká Ida (ETP Slovakia), CC Stará Ľubovňa (ETP Slovakia), CC Moldava nad Bodvou and Man in Danger). Other non-profit organizations try to provide non-formal education to children from the marginalized Roma community at least once a week. It would be ideal if these non-profit organizations worked with children every day so that the children could acquire the habit and confidence in regular attendance in education. Regular attendance during the week provides enough time for children to engage in activities and acquire new skills and knowledge.

*Table 7. Duration of the meeting in non-profit organizations*

Duration	Multi-functional center	Baff Sa, CA	CC Veľká Ida (ETP Slovakia)	CC Stará Ľubovňa (ETP Slovakia)	CC Moldava nad Bodvou	Man in Danger	The Way Out
45 minutes	X						X
1 hour	X				X		X
30 minutes		X					
4 hours			X	X			
Varied						X	

Source: author's own processing.

Generally, the duration of one meeting of non-formal education in non-profit organizations does not exceed one hour. The four-hour sessions are divided into blocks and each block deals with different content. Multifunctional center Moldava nad Bodvou, CC Moldava nad Bodvou, and organization The Way Out prefer meetings of up to an hour. Baff Sa, CA prefers only shorter 30-minute meetings. CC Veľká Ida and CC Stará Ľubovňa hold 4-hour meetings from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The non-profit organization Man in Danger stated that the duration of individual meetings depends on the given topic and the scope of activities.



Table 8. Number of children participating in meetings in non-profit organizations

Number of children	Multi-functional center	Baff Sa, CA	CC Veľká Ida (ETP Slovakia)	CC Stará Ľubovňa (ETP Slovakia)	CC Moldava nad Bodvou	Man in Danger	The Way Out
15	X	X	X				
Group work			X	X	X		X
50				X			
30					X		
Varied						X	

Source: author's own processing.

The number of children participating in the meetings is different. It depends on the content of the program and activities, but also the interest of the children. A total of 4 non-profit organizations mention group work. Working with children in groups has many advantages. One of the main advantages is that children learn from each other in a group and can exchange opinions, experiences, and knowledge. In addition, it helps them develop social skills such as communication, cooperation, and respect for others. In the group, children also have more motivation to learn, and their interest in the given topic increases.

Table 9. Focus of non-formal education activities in non-profit organizations

Focus of activities	Multi-functional center	Baff Sa, CA	CC Stará Ľubovňa (ETP Slovakia)	CC Stará Ľubovňa (ETP Slovakia)	CC Moldava nad Bodvou	Man in Danger	The Way Out
Reading literacy development	X	X	X	X	X		X
Vocabulary development	X	X	X	X	X		X
Mathematical concepts	X	X	X	X	X		X
Fine motor skills development	X	X	X	X	X		X
Creativity	X	X	X	X	X		X
Hygiene		X			X		X
Community rehabilitation			X		X		
Team cooperation			X		X		X
Tutoring			X	X	X		
Parental competencies							X

Source: author's own processing.



The total of 5 non-profit organizations unanimously stated that their activities and programs are aimed at developing reading literacy, fine motor skills, vocabulary, mathematical ideas, and creativity. The interviewed non-profit organizations focus on educating about and acquiring hygienic habits in children, which are very necessary for life, especially when starting formal education. As stated by Miňová (2016), up to 100% of kindergarten teachers interviewed confirmed that 2–3-year-old children from marginalized Roma communities cannot wash their hands with soap without assistance. Activities are also planned to support social interactions and cooperation, but also practical skills such as basic computer skills, crafts, gardening, and the like. Tutoring is carried out with older children who need help in learning. Activities are organized outside of traditional classroom time and place to accommodate personal preferences. Various forms of communication are also often used, including discussions, group work, exercises, experimentation, and practical tasks. This way, children can acquire new skills, become aware of connections, and apply theoretical knowledge in practice. The motivational element is the creation and achievement of a specific result. Thanks to non-profit organizations, participants in programs and activities have a clearly defined purpose, which allows them to focus on specific areas and have an idea of what they want to achieve.

## Summary

Non-profit organizations in Slovakia have an irreplaceable place in society. With their goals, mission, and vision, in some parts of Slovakia, they represent and complement the absence of governmental organizations, e.g., also on the education of children from marginalized Roma communities. Non-profit organizations operate directly in the field and are close to the residents of the given community.

Non-formal education is especially important for children from marginalized Roma communities, who often face obstacles in the traditional formal school system. Children from the marginalized Roma community are often exposed to discrimination and excessive poverty. They have limited access to basic and higher education, which can negatively affect their future and opportunities in the labor market.

The conclusions of the survey indicate that several non-profit organizations described above focus on the non-formal education of preschool children. The non-profit organizations evaluated the whole non-formal education very positively. They pointed out that it is very important, beneficial, meaningful, and especially necessary to educate children even before starting formal education and differently than in a school environment. Children are sensitive, curious, and interested in new information, and when it is conveyed to them in the form of a game, they quickly become familiar with new information. Non-profit organizations also often try to adapt non-formal education to the needs and interests of children to make it as effective as possible.



They try to create programs that are interesting and interactive, so that it is pleasant for children to participate in them, and thus they receive a positive basis for formal education. They further agreed that non-formal education is an important tool for preventing social exclusion and improving equal opportunities for marginalized communities, including Roma communities. For this reason, it is important to support and invest in non-formal education and ensure that it is accessible to all, regardless of their origin, social status, or age. The advantage of non-formal education is that it allows children to learn in a natural environment that is close to them, where despite the limited capacity of kindergartens, lack of interest of parents, or financial restrictions, they have the opportunity to gain new experiences and develop their talents.

We recommend that even more attention be paid to the non-formal education of children from marginalized Roma communities in non-profit organizations. It is important that through non-profit organizations these programs and activities are offered in cooperation with local communities and institutions, that they are adapted to local needs and conditions, and that they are guided by the cultural, linguistic, and social specificities of these communities. Such an approach can lead to an improvement in the educational and social status of children from marginalized Roma communities and to greater inclusion in society.

Non-profit organizations in Slovakia are expanding their scope to remote locations that are most affected by poverty and therefore play a key role in society.

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