

1. INTRODUCTION

Hungarian communities living as minorities in Hungary's neighborhood are supported by a wide range of institutions, including educational, cultural, ecclesiastical and civil organizations and associations. The most extensive network among these is undoubtedly that of schools with Hungarian as the language of instruction (hereinafter: Hungarian-medium schools or simply Hungarian schools), which operate as part of the public education systems of Hungary's neighbor states and provide instruction in Hungarian or, in some cases, bilingually. Hungarian kindergartens and schools constitute the primary institutional arenas of

formal socialization;¹ therefore, complementing language use within the family, they play a particularly important role in the acquisition and maintenance of the native language, the formation of peer networks and consequently in the processes of ethnic transmission and socialization, as well as in the reinforcement of ethnic identity. At the same time, this process also provides a "feedback" into itself: in many cases, attendance at a Hungarian-medium school becomes an integral component of Hungarian identity itself;² thereby establishing a reciprocal correlation between ethnic identity and mother-tongue education.

For these reasons, changes in the number of Hungarian kindergarten children and school students represent a key indicator of the future prospects of minority Hungarian communities – including Hungarians in Slovakia. Accordingly, the primary aim of the present volume is to depict the educational situation of Hungarians in Slovakia through the enrollment figures of students participating in Hungarian-medium public education and the changes observed between 2010 and 2024. However, trends in student numbers reveal more than the situation of students or education alone. Drawing on the detailed official figures it becomes

possible, on the one hand, to identify the main trends and regional disparities of Hungarian public education in Slovakia; and on the other hand, to pinpoint educational levels and areas facing particular difficulties; and also to draw broader conclusions regarding social and demographic processes among Hungarians in Slovakia, and even regarding ethnic inequalities within Slovak society.

On this basis, it is evident that changes in the number of Hungarian kindergarten and school children accurately reflect ongoing social processes among Hungarians in Slovakia. Examining these numerical trends provides an insight into their demographic situation, patterns of migration and assimilation, while data analyses also offer important support for decision-making related to educational organization and institutional maintenance.

It is important to note that this endeavor is not without precedent, although previous works have been published exclusively in Hungarian or Slovak. The *Public Education Map* published in 2022 examined this issue in four countries with sizeable Hungarian minority communities (Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania and Serbia) within a similar conceptual framework.³ More than a decade ago, the Association of Hungarian Teachers in Slovakia prepared an exceptionally detailed analysis of

the state of the Hungarian school network in Slovakia, however this work remained unpublished as a manuscript.⁴ A thorough overview of Hungarian education in Slovakia was compiled by Ildikó Vančo in 2020; this is one of the few publications available in English.⁵ More recently, interested readers can primarily find analyses of challenges and phenomena affecting Hungarian public education in the articles written by Emese Ibos and her collaborators, as well as in materials produced by the Department of Minority and Inclusive Education and the Institute of Educational Policy of the Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic. The relevance of the topic has further increased given that, at the time of writing, the outcome of the Slovak government's so-called rationalization measures affecting the entire school network (in particular Hungarian schools) remains uncertain, as does their impact on the long-term viability of the Hungarian institutional network.⁶

The present publication can be classified as an atlas, as its most prominent elements are the color maps depicting the number of Hungarian kindergarten children and school students and their enrollment rates both at municipal and regional levels. Using maps and tables, the relevant information becomes accessible even to non-specialist readers; however, the maps are, of course, complemented and interpreted by textual

sections that explain the observed processes. It must therefore be emphasized that this work is primarily based on the analysis of available statistical data and does not aim to examine issues of educational organization or pedagogy, areas in which the authors do not claim expertise. Instead, we seek to provide a comprehensive analysis of one of the most important segments of Hungarian-medium public education: trends in the number of kindergarten children and students, their current trajectories, as well as the demographic and broader social context underlying these developments.

In structuring the volume, we sought to trace a trajectory from input to output within the public education system. Accordingly, following the methodological chapter, we present the structural conditions within which the situation of Hungarian public education must be interpreted (the characteristics of the institutional system under study and the general demographic processes affecting Hungarians). We then offer a detailed analysis of the demographic foundations of Hungarian public education, student numbers, as well as their changes over time from kindergartens through secondary schools. Finally, as a form of output, we examine the academic performance of Hungarian students and the ultimate outcome: the highest level of educational attainment within the Hungarian population.

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THE CHANGING FACE OF HUNGARIAN MINORITY EDUCATION IN SLOVAKIA



an Atlas of Student Enrollment, Demography and Social Trends

Horizontum Civil Association; Geographical Institute HUN-REN CSFK; VEKTOR Social Research Association

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