

# 4. ETHNIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROCESSES AMONG HUNGARIANS IN SLOVAKIA



## Population size and settlement structure

When we seek to answer the question of how many Hungarians live in Slovakia, the response is more complex than it may initially appear. Estimates of the Hungarian population are most commonly based on census data, yet even the census cannot provide an unequivocal figure. In the most recent census (2021), respondents were asked about their nationality (Slov. *národnosť*, Hung. *nemzetiség*, literally translated as nationality, but is better reflected by the term “ethnicity” or “ethnic affiliation”), their mother tongue, and their second nationality/ethnicity (hereafter referred to as ethnicity or ethnic affiliation). These three response options produce not a single number but rather an interval,

highlighting that ethnic categories do not necessarily have sharp boundaries and that a portion of those with Hungarian ties maintain multiple ethnic affiliations.<sup>14</sup>

According to the 2021 census, the number of persons declaring Hungarian ethnicity was 422,065. In addition, 34,089 indicated Hungarian as a second ethnicity. A total of 462,175 identified Hungarian as their mother tongue. Overall, the number of individuals who declared themselves Hungarian in at least one category approaches half a million; this can be regarded as the broadest census-based circle – yet it still does not encompass everyone with Hungarian

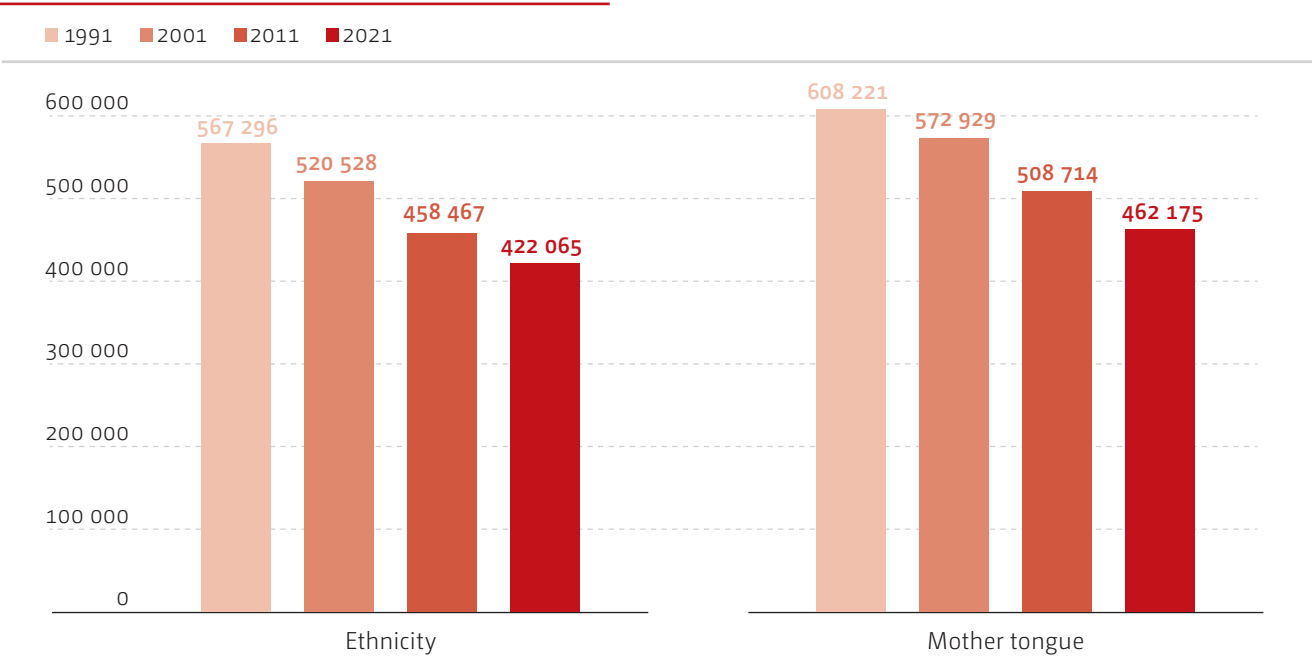
background, such as those from mixed families who speak Hungarian but declare themselves Slovak in every category. In 2021, 128,000 persons who also identified as Hungarian (i.e. roughly one in four individuals with Hungarian ties) indicated affiliation with another ethnic group. Among those with multiple affiliations, three quarters also identify as Slovak, and 16% also report a Roma linguistic-ethnic identity. It is also clearly visible that the number of respondents claiming Hungarian as their mother tongue exceeds that of those declaring Hungarian ethnicity (Figure 1). Two main factors underlie this difference (and its magnitude): first, the large number of Roma of Hungarian

mother tongue; and second, the fact that in Slovakia the category of “nationality” (ethnicity) carries strong political connotations.<sup>15</sup>

Accordingly, the expression of minority attachments often occurs within the framework of the “mother tongue” category – pointing to the privileged position of Slovaks and to the ethnic hierarchy operating in Slovakia. This also implies that, when examining the demographic foundation of Hungarian public education, it is more appropriate to start from the category of Hungarian native speakers (where available data allow).

Ninety-nine percent of Hungarians in Slovakia live in sixteen districts of southern Slovakia and in the two major cities, Bratislava and Košice.<sup>16</sup> The concentrated territorial distribution is well illustrated by the fact that 75% of Hungarian native speakers reside in towns and villages where Hungarians constitute the largest ethnic group (Map 3). This picture is nonetheless nuanced by the morphology of the Hungarian settlement area, which stretches longitudinally along the Hungarian–Slovak state border from west to east, narrowing at certain points and in some places becoming discontinuous.<sup>17</sup> This spatial pattern also translates into differences in the socio-demographic character of Hungarian-inhabited regions. Perhaps the sharpest contrast emerges between the Veľký

**Figure 1:** Changes in the number of persons of Hungarian ethnicity and Hungarian mother tongue, 1991–2021

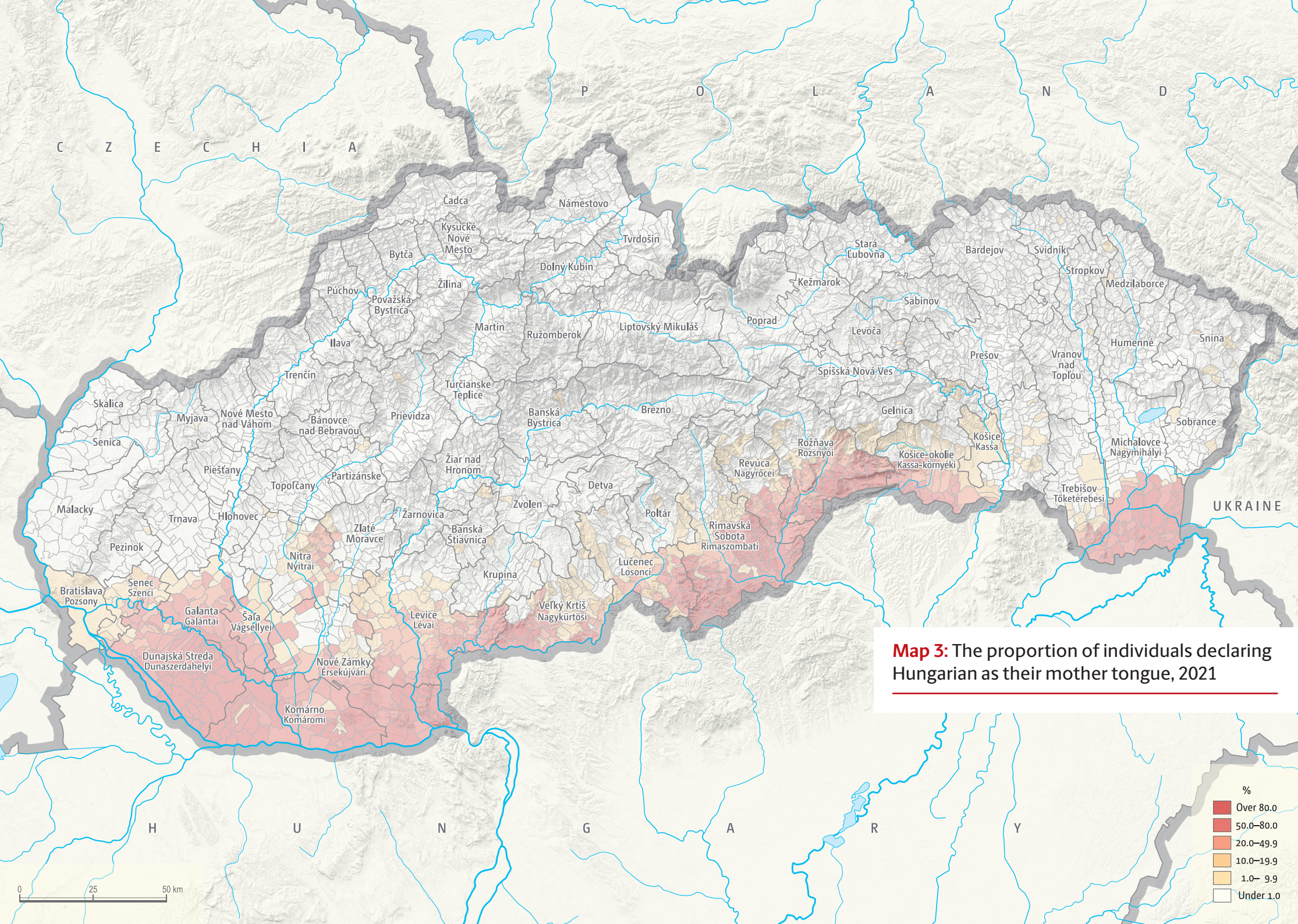


Krtíš and Lučenec districts, where the Hungarian settlement area narrows substantially. In the present analysis, we typically (but not exclusively) treat the boundary between these two districts as the dividing line between the western and eastern segments of the Hungarian-language area. More than two thirds of Hungarians live west of this boundary.

The elongated shape of the Hungarian settlement area is also disadvantageous in terms of administrative

territorial division: while the Hungarian ethnic area is relatively compact at the settlement (municipal) level, Hungarians constitute a majority at the district level, which is arguably the most important territorial frame of our analysis, in only two units: the Dunajská Streda and Komárno districts (these Hungarian ethnic majority areas are called ethnic block or ethnic majority area in the followings). The significance of these two districts is further increased by the fact that one third of Hungarians in







Slovakia live there. Although the census indicates that Hungarians represent roughly 40% of the population in the Rimavská Sobota district, more than half of births there are to mothers of Hungarian ethnicity; for many analytical purposes, this district can therefore also be interpreted as a Hungarian majority area. It is important to note that in certain parts of South Slovakia Hungarians form the local majority in contiguous areas (e.g., around Štúrovo or Kráľovský Chlmec) (Map 3). However, administrative delineations merge these areas with Slovak-majority territories, so that the Hungarian proportion at the district level typically remains below one third.<sup>18</sup> The discrepancies between ethnic settlement structure and administrative territorial division point to the fact that the processes under study are sometimes more meaningfully interpreted at the micro-regional level (i.e. the level of a town and its surroundings) than at the district level.<sup>19</sup> Micro-regions, however, while often indicating substantive needs and forms of territorial cooperation, are far less tractable statistically.

Beyond the aforementioned districts, where the concentration of Hungarians is high, the Hungarian share in most districts of southern Slovakia is around 20–30%. Districts where the Hungarian share falls below 10% should be interpreted as dispersed (diasporic). These are typically areas outside compact ethnic blocs

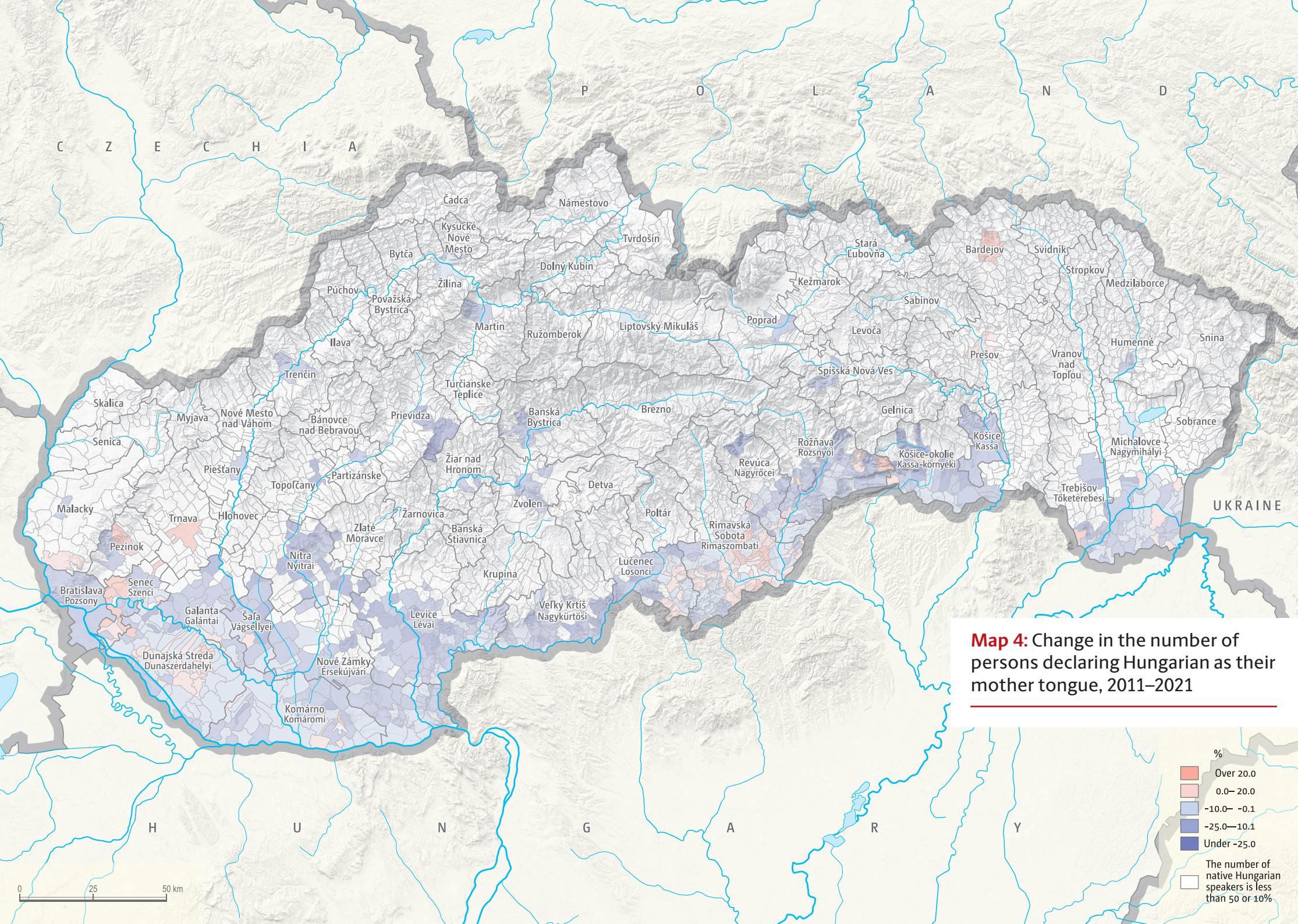
or at the edge of the Hungarian settlement area, where the concentration of Hungarians is low, thus they form a demographic minority locally. (In the following, we refer to these as “dispersed areas” – as opposed to areas with a Hungarian majority.) This applies primarily to the two major cities and the Nitra district (below 5% Hungarian share), but increasingly also to the Senec district and the Košice-okolie district. In addition, the compactness of the ethnic Hungarian settlement has decreased remarkably in the Levice and Veľký Krtíš districts; therefore, despite relatively high Hungarian shares (between 20% and 25%), these districts can in many respects also be regarded as parts of the dispersed minority area.

The compactness of the Hungarian settlement area is, however, declining not only in these districts but more generally. As noted above, the 2021 census indicates that 75% of Hungarians (73% by ethnicity) live in settlements where Hungarians form a local majority; relative to earlier periods, this proportion has nevertheless declined slightly (2001: 77% and 76%, respectively). In total, Hungarians constitute the local majority in 346 settlements by ethnicity and in 377 settlements by mother tongue. At the same time, 20% of Hungarians now live in settlements where their share does not reach the 15% threshold stipulated in the minority language use legislation.

An important indicator of the settlement structure of Hungarians is the level of urbanization, which lags substantially behind both that of Slovaks and the national average: today, only 38% of Hungarians in Slovakia live in towns and cities. Relative to the Slovak population, Hungarians are overrepresented in settlements with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants; slightly underrepresented in the 10,000–50,000 category corresponding to small and medium-sized towns; and severely underrepresented in cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants. This implies that Hungarians mostly live as a majority in rural and largely peripheral areas, while their representation declines steadily higher up the settlement hierarchy, constituting a clear socio-economic disadvantage.<sup>20</sup>

Settlement size is also of critical importance for public education, since it fundamentally shapes both the fiscal capacity of municipalities maintaining schools and the magnitude of budgetary support tied to student numbers. In 2021, 23% of Hungarian native speakers lived in settlements with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants, while 34% of Hungarian-medium primary schools are located in such settlements – yet only 13% of Hungarian students attended them. This clearly illustrates the challenges posed by a fragmented settlement structure in certain regions. However, only 13% of fully organized schools are located in







villages below 1,000 inhabitants, highlighting the significance of commuting and the role of school transport networks.

To interpret changes in Hungarian student numbers, it is useful to review demographic processes within the Hungarian population, i.e., changes between 2011 and 2021. In general, the decline was somewhat smaller in the eastern half of the Hungarian settlement area (east of the Veľký Krtíš district); indeed, in the Rimavská Sobota district the number of Hungarians increased (Table 1).<sup>21</sup> This is particularly striking in the context of an overall trend, partly driven by internal migration<sup>22</sup>, whereby an increasing share of Slovakia's total population concentrates in the more developed western areas, and especially around Bratislava.

Beyond these regions in central Slovakia, where the Hungarian population increased and/or its share grew, the smallest declines characterize the Hungarian ethnic majority areas (Dunajská Streda and Komárno; in the former, the number of Hungarians increased in several settlements) and the Senec district, where internal migration processes, namely Bratislava's suburbanization and metropolitan expansion, contributed to a relatively favorable demographic situation for Hungarians (Map 4). However, these processes were amplified within

**Table 1:** Change in the number and share of persons declaring Hungarian as their mother tongue in southern Slovakia, 2011–2021

| District              | 2011           |                | 2021           |                | 2011–2021                              |                                                                      |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                       | Number         | Proportion (%) | Number         | Proportion (%) | Change in the number of Hungarians (%) | Change in the proportion of Hungarians (as % of the 2011 proportion) |
| Bratislava            | 15 307         | 3.8            | 11 958         | 2.8            | -21.9                                  | -27.7                                                                |
| Dunajská Streda       | 91 412         | 81.1           | 88 795         | 75             | -2.9                                   | -7.4                                                                 |
| Galanta               | 33 799         | 37.7           | 30 324         | 33.5           | -10.3                                  | -11.1                                                                |
| Komárno               | 71 425         | 73.3           | 66 339         | 71.3           | -7.1                                   | -2.7                                                                 |
| Košice                | 8 584          | 4.5            | 7 633          | 3.7            | -11.1                                  | -17.2                                                                |
| Košice-okolie         | 17 348         | 16             | 14 839         | 12.2           | -14.5                                  | -23.9                                                                |
| Levice                | 30 661         | 28.1           | 25 134         | 24.3           | -18                                    | -13.6                                                                |
| Lučenec               | 19 845         | 30.7           | 18 866         | 28.7           | -4.9                                   | -6.6                                                                 |
| Michalovce            | 14 325         | 14.3           | 13 376         | 13.1           | -6.6                                   | -8.2                                                                 |
| Nitra                 | 10 447         | 6.9            | 7 513          | 4.8            | -28.1                                  | -30.2                                                                |
| Nové Zámky            | 52 704         | 39.4           | 47 011         | 36.3           | -10.8                                  | -7.8                                                                 |
| Revúca                | 9 298          | 25             | 8 425          | 23.4           | -9.4                                   | -6.3                                                                 |
| Rimavská Sobota       | 36 310         | 47.5           | 36 643         | 47.7           | 0.9                                    | 0.3                                                                  |
| Rožňava               | 18 057         | 31.7           | 15 442         | 27.7           | -14.5                                  | -12.5                                                                |
| Šaľa                  | 17 455         | 35.1           | 14 886         | 31.2           | -14.7                                  | -11.1                                                                |
| Senec                 | 9 538          | 15.5           | 8 678          | 9.6            | -9                                     | -38.4                                                                |
| Trebišov              | 32 473         | 32.8           | 29 415         | 30.3           | -9.4                                   | -7.8                                                                 |
| Veľký Krtíš           | 12 731         | 30.7           | 10 579         | 26.6           | -16.9                                  | -13.6                                                                |
| <i>Slovakia total</i> | <i>508 714</i> | <i>10.2</i>    | <i>462 175</i> | <i>9</i>       | <i>-9.1</i>                            | <i>-11.7</i>                                                         |

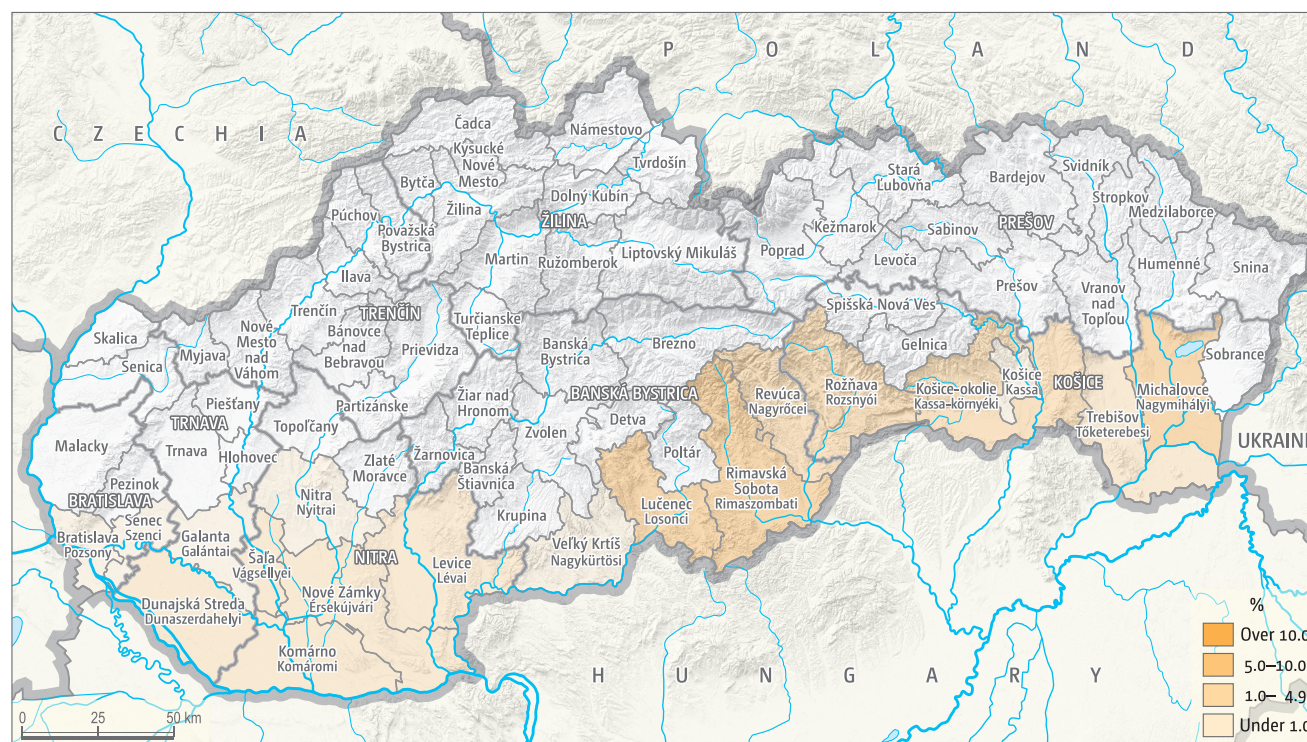


the Slovak population; therefore, the Hungarian share declined remarkably on the western edge of the Hungarian ethnic block area. This has already generated substantial debate regarding school and cultural demands among Slovaks relocating from the capital and among those moving in from other Slovak-majority districts.<sup>23</sup>

As a counterpoint to the above areas, districts can also be identified where the decline in the number of Hungarians was particularly pronounced. These are primarily regions, where Hungarians live in a dispersed settlement pattern and the decrease of the Hungarian population was already conspicuous earlier. This includes the entire Nitra district, the major

cities, the Veľký Krtíš district (where the Hungarian language area is increasingly narrowing) the central part of the Levice district, which has become highly mixed since the post–World War II population transfers, and the Rožňava district. These are also the areas (most notably the two major cities, Košice-okolie, and Nitra) where the number of persons indicating Hungarian as a second ethnicity is the highest relative to those indicating Hungarian as a first ethnicity, illustrating the relative frequency of dual affiliations and intermediate positions in these settings. Overall, territorial analyses suggest that changes in the number of Hungarians are primarily structured by their concentration (i.e. the compact block vs. dispersed minority dichotomy, hereafter referred to as the block–dispersed dichotomy) and settlement structure (urban–rural dichotomy).

**Map 5:** The proportion of persons identifying as Roma in at least one category within the population with Hungarian ties in southern Slovak districts, 2021



In addition to these factors, one further element of outstanding importance must be highlighted: the role of Hungarian(-speaking) Roma, who contribute substantially both to Hungarian demographic reproduction and to the maintenance of the Hungarian education system. Statistical tracking of this group is, however, extremely difficult in Slovakia as well, since (similarly to other countries in the region) only about one quarter of persons of Roma origin identify themselves as Roma by ethnicity or mother tongue, reflecting stigmatization, marginalization and the prevailing







socio-political climate. The census data are revealing in this regard: between 2011 and 2021, the recorded Roma population in Slovakia decreased by one third. According to the 2021 census, the number of persons with Hungarian–Roma dual affiliation is 20,000, yet many persons of Roma origin do not identify as Roma in any category. Hungarian Roma people live primarily in southeastern Slovakia, and in certain regions their share among Hungarians exceeds 10% even in census data (Map 5).

Register data reveal similarly little about their number. Both in vital statistics and in school registration, substantially fewer Roma by ethnicity are recorded than would be suggested by estimates. Particularly striking is that, according to school statistics, among the 50,000 children enrolled in Hungarian-medium public education in the 2024/2025 school year (from kindergarten to secondary school), only 450 were registered as Roma; while some views hold that nearly half of Hungarian schools would not be viable without children of Roma origin.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast to census-based figures, estimates suggest that the number of persons considered or classified as Roma is substantially higher. According to the Atlas of Roma Communities in Slovakia (based on external classification) the number of persons living in Roma communities whose primary language is Hungarian

was around 58,000 in 2019.<sup>25</sup> Their spatial distribution, however, follows a pattern similar to that emerging from census data, underscoring differences between southeastern and southwestern Slovakia (Map 6). This territorial pattern is also relevant when interpreting the picture emerging from educational data.

## The demographic basis of the Hungarian-medium public education system in Slovakia

Demographic data provide a stable framework for describing a conventional education system organized on a territorial basis. In such cases, the “target group” of the education system is the number of children living in a given territory; the analytical question is simply at what ages and in what proportions children enter schooling at different educational levels and institutional types; i.e. what share of a given age cohort participates in public education.<sup>26</sup>

In the case of a minority community’s education system, the situation is more complex, because

the demographic limits of education system are not clear. Although the main demographic processes affecting the Hungarian community in Slovakia are well known and documented,<sup>27</sup> the boundaries of the community cannot be considered fixed, which complicates the analysis of coverage and enrollment rates in Hungarian-medium education. The question is therefore how precisely the student target group of Hungarian-medium education in Slovakia can be delineated, and how reliable the available data are regarding that target group.

The Hungarian-medium education system simultaneously offers learning opportunities for several categories of children. These include Hungarian native speakers, those who speak Hungarian well, those with a Hungarian identity, children of one or two Hungarian parents. Information about the child is often information about the parent: a newborn or very young child has no ethnic identity; rather, parents have (or might have) an intention regarding the ethnicity in which they would like to raise the child. A newborn likewise has no mother tongue in a strict sense, since they do not yet speak. Instead, the child’s mother tongue is emerging from the language that the parents use within the family. A timing issue also arises regarding data collection. A child’s linguistic and ethnic environment may change over time. For example, following parental



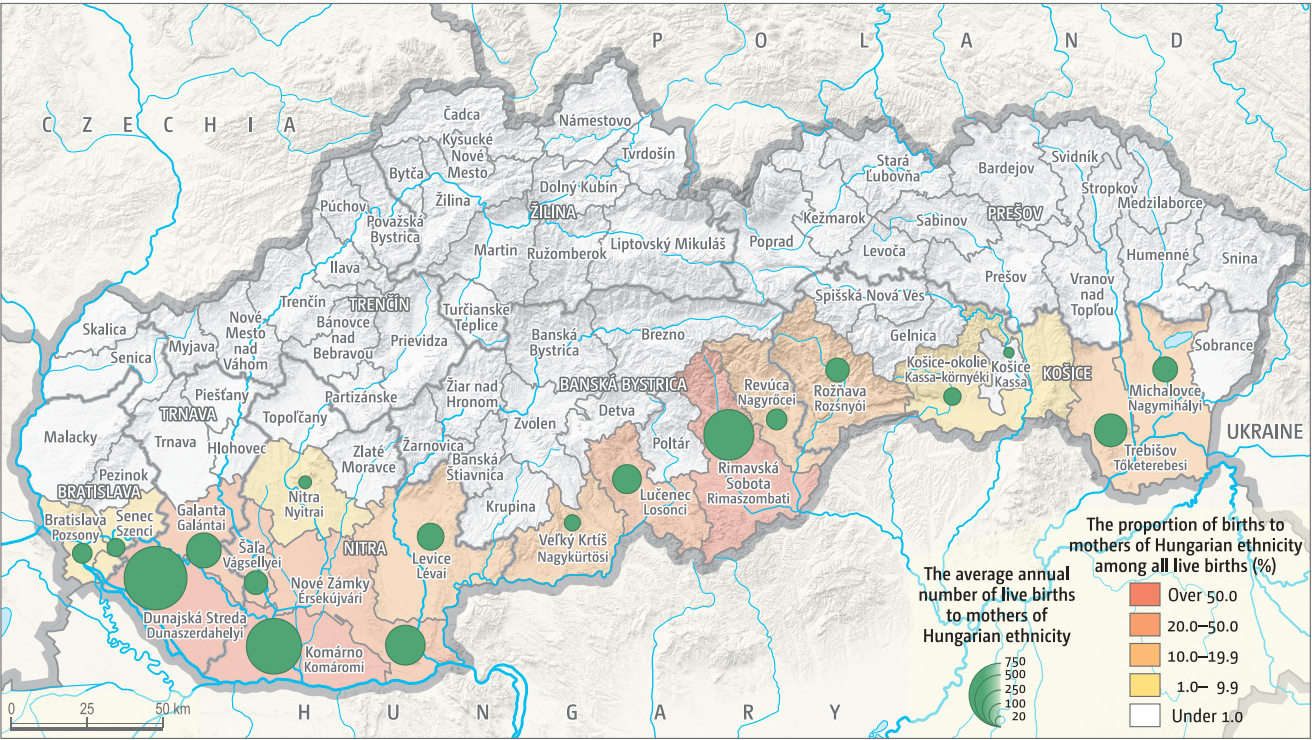
separation, a child from a mixed marriage may experience a shift toward either a more Slovak- or more Hungarian-oriented family environment.

In our assessment, the most appropriate proxy for the future primary “core” target group of Hungarian-medium education in Slovakia is the number of

children born to mothers of Hungarian mother tongue, as this is the group whose linguistic competencies are most likely to align with a Hungarian-medium education system. If the mother is not of Hungarian mother tongue but the family has other ties to the Hungarian community (e.g., the father is Hungarian native speaker; the mother is of Hungarian ethnicity but not of

Hungarian mother tongue), the child may of course still enter Hungarian-medium education. However, these latter groups no longer belong to the narrowly defined primary target group, but rather to a secondary group whose size and motivations are far harder to determine.

**Map 7:** The proportion and average annual number of births to mothers of Hungarian ethnicity among live births in 2016–2020, by district



Despite abundant data sources on minority communities in Slovakia, a critical data source is missing. No information is collected on maternal mother tongue at the time of birth. This is because Slovakia’s vital statistics system records the mother’s ethnicity upon giving birth, not her mother tongue.<sup>28</sup> For this reason, Map 7 displays by district the share and annual average number of births to mothers of Hungarian ethnicity. The map presents averages for 2016–2020, both to smooth out random year-to-year fluctuations and to focus on cohorts that already appear in the education system (kindergarten and early primary years), enabling comparison with actual student numbers. By definition, the data refer not to the actual place of birth (hospital) but to the mother’s place of residence (where the child is taken home after giving birth). According to this database, an average of 3,511 “births to Hungarian mothers” occurred annually in Slovakia in the examined period. This corresponds to around 6.1% of all births in Slovakia, which is substantially lower than the 8.2% (primary, adjusted) ethnicity



share in the 2021 census. The difference is largely demographic (the Hungarian community is older and includes fewer women of childbearing age), although inaccuracies in vital statistic registration likely also play a role.

In broad outlines, the territorial distribution of births to Hungarian mothers resembles the (primary) ethnic distribution of the total population recorded in the 2021 census, but the differences are not negligible. For example, both for the total population and for births, the two districts with the highest share of Hungarians are Dunajská Streda and Komárno. In the birth data, however, the ranking is reversed: 71% of children in the Komárno district and 64% in Dunajská Streda were born to mothers declaring Hungarian ethnicity. By contrast, census data indicate that 72% and 67% of those whose ethnic affiliation is known declared Hungarian ethnicity in the Dunajská Streda and the Komárno District, respectively; suggesting an inversion of proportions.

In third place stands the Rimavská Sobota District, which can be regarded as the third Hungarian-majority district when maternal ethnicity at birth is considered: 51.5% of mothers is registered as ethnic Hungarians, corresponding to an annual average of 472 children. This above-50% share is substantially higher

**Table 2:** The number and share of Hungarian children born in 2016–2020 by district, according to birth statistics (mother's ethnicity) and the 2021 census (child's mother tongue)

|                       | A. Live births        |                                     | B. Mother tongue      |                                     |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                       | Proportion (adjusted) | Average number of children per year | Proportion (adjusted) | Average number of children per year |
| Bratislava            | 1.3%                  | 72                                  | 0.9%                  | 45                                  |
| Senec                 | 5.0%                  | 60                                  | 3.4%                  | 46                                  |
| Dunajská Streda       | 64.3%                 | 746                                 | 62.9%                 | 711                                 |
| Galanta               | 25.6%                 | 226                                 | 25.5%                 | 215                                 |
| Komárni               | 70.6%                 | 575                                 | 67.2%                 | 482                                 |
| Nitra                 | 1.8%                  | 30                                  | 1.5%                  | 23                                  |
| Nové Zámky            | 25.8%                 | 294                                 | 28.2%                 | 286                                 |
| Šaľa                  | 22.1%                 | 103                                 | 21.9%                 | 89                                  |
| -----                 | -----                 | -----                               | -----                 | -----                               |
| Levice                | 13.6%                 | 133                                 | 15.6%                 | 134                                 |
| Lučenec               | 23.0%                 | 155                                 | 27.5%                 | 172                                 |
| Revúca                | 18.9%                 | 79                                  | 21.4%                 | 79                                  |
| Rimavská Sobota       | 51.5%                 | 472                                 | 55.9%                 | 500                                 |
| Veľký Krtíš           | 13.0%                 | 48                                  | 20.3%                 | 69                                  |
| Košice                | 0.9%                  | 20                                  | 1.5%                  | 29                                  |
| Košice-okolie         | 3.3%                  | 56                                  | 7.9%                  | 128                                 |
| Michalovce            | 10.5%                 | 115                                 | 14.7%                 | 154                                 |
| Rožňava               | 15.1%                 | 103                                 | 18.3%                 | 112                                 |
| Trebišov              | 17.0%                 | 198                                 | 22.2%                 | 241                                 |
| other districts       | 0.0%                  | 25                                  | 0.0%                  | 18                                  |
| <i>Slovakia total</i> | 6.1%                  | 3511                                | 6.6%                  | 3533                                |

*A: live births to mothers of Hungarian ethnicity; B: children of Hungarian mother tongue in the corresponding cohorts.*



than the 41.3% ethnicity share in the census for the total population. The primary driver of this difference is the high proportion of Roma mothers of Hungarian mother tongue. This Hungarian-speaking, typically monolingual and demographically younger group contributes substantially to the number of births in the Rimavská Sobota District. Hungarian Roma, not only here, but also in other southeastern districts (see Map 5), identified themselves as Hungarian mother tongue at the census, but not necessarily, or only partially, as of Hungarian ethnicity. By contrast, in birth statistics (and even more so in the school enrollment statistics) they were more likely to be recorded as Hungarian by ethnicity than in the census.

More than half (51.1%) of Hungarian births in Slovakia occur in these three districts that are Hungarian-majority; at least in birth statistics. Beyond them, there are no districts where the share of Hungarian births approaches 50%, or even one third (Table 2). In the Levice and Michalovce Districts, the share of Hungarian births is low (13.6% and 10.5%, respectively), yet given the size of the population this still implies more than one hundred children per cohort. Beyond the above districts, a Hungarian-medium education system is realistically conceivable in areas where at least one secondary-school class worth of Hungarian children are born per cohort (17–20

children). Alongside Bratislava and Košice, this includes the Senec, Košice-okolie, Nitra, and Veľký Krtíš Districts. In these two cities and four districts, however, the total number of Hungarian births does not reach 300 children per cohort, amounting to less than one tenth of all Hungarian births.

A key methodological question is the reliability of data derived from forms completed upon giving birth in hospitals.<sup>29</sup> Mothers right after giving birth understandably do not focus on such administrative matters; data is often collected in a superficial manner. Moreover, the recorded variable concerns ethnicity rather than mother tongue. For this reason, it is worth to compare birth statistics with census figures (Table 2).

The table compares maternal ethnicity at birth (average for 2016–2020) with the mother-tongue data recorded for children born in the same years in the 2021 census database. In calculating proportions, we always use the share within the population that declared ethnicity/mother tongue. At the national level, the average number of Hungarian births is essentially identical in the two sources (3,511 children versus 3,533 “Hungarian” births). In the census population, this corresponds to a slightly higher proportion (6.6%), since the share of non-respondents or persons with unknown ethnicity is higher in that database.

Differences between the two sources show a striking territorial pattern. In southwestern Slovakia (including the Levice but excluding the Veľký Krtíš District), a consistent pattern emerges. Across every district in this region, more children are born to mothers of Hungarian ethnicity than are later recorded in the census as having Hungarian as their mother tongue. The discrepancy is most pronounced in the Hungarian population of Bratislava (72 vs. 45 children per cohort), but it is not negligible elsewhere either. Nearly one quarter of children born to ethnic Hungarian mothers do not appear as Hungarian mother tongue in the Nitra and Senec Districts, and a deficit is also present even in the two districts typically treated as ethnic block areas. In the west, therefore, a characteristic phenomenon is that women of Hungarian ethnicity give birth to children who appear as non-Hungarian mother tongue in census statistics. The effects of Hungarian–Slovak mixed partnerships are a plausible explanation, as in such families the intergenerational transmission of the mother tongue is more likely to be disrupted. The boundary of this phenomenon lies roughly around the Levice District, where the two values approximately converge. The majority of Hungarian children in Slovakia are born in these southwestern districts: depending on the source, 58–64% (birth-time ethnicity vs. census figures on mother-tongue).



East of the Levice District, the proportions reverse: the number of children of Hungarian mother tongue exceeds the number of births to mothers recorded as Hungarian by ethnicity. This is not an exotic statistical curiosity, since 36–42% of Hungarian children in Slovakia are born in these areas. In some cases, the discrepancy is substantial. Treating Košice and Košice-okolie as a single area, vital statistics record only an annual average of 75 births to mothers of Hungarian ethnicity. In contrast, the census data on mother-tongue yields an average Hungarian cohort size of 157 for the same birth years in the same area. There are also striking differences in proportions: for example, in the Veľký Krtíš District, 13% of births are to mothers of Hungarian ethnicity, but 20.3% of children are of Hungarian mother tongue; in the Trebišov District, the respective figures are 17% and 22.2%. The causes are partly linked to the Hungarian

Roma discussed above. Roma mothers of Hungarian mother-tongue are in many cases recorded upon giving birth in hospitals as of Roma (or even more often Slovak) ethnicity; in the census, by contrast, the child's Hungarian mother tongue is recorded. However, as the Veľký Krtíš District illustrates, this phenomenon is clearly not limited to Roma populations: it can also be observed in areas where the proportion of (Hungarian) Roma is very low, but where the number of individuals declaring Hungarian mother tongue differs substantially from the number declaring Hungarian ethnicity.

Southeastern Slovakia likely experiences losses due to Hungarian–Slovak mixed partnerships, similar to southwestern patterns. However, a crucial compensating factor exists: Hungarian-speaking families that are not classified as Hungarian by ethnicity contribute

substantially to the linguistic landscape. These families contribute enough Hungarian-language speakers to mask and exceed assimilation losses. This territorial division and the contradictions between data sources highlight why it is difficult to quantify the demographic background and base of the Hungarian education network in Slovakia. Overall, the demographic data suggest a clear mission for a well-functioning Hungarian-medium education system in Slovakia. In southwestern Slovakia, such a system should be capable of attracting children born to women of Hungarian ethnicity, including those born in mixed marriages. In southeastern Slovakia, by contrast, the system should be designed to integrate all Hungarian mother-tongue children, regardless of their registered ethnicity. If one defines the demographic target group of Hungarian education in such a geographically divided yet inclusive



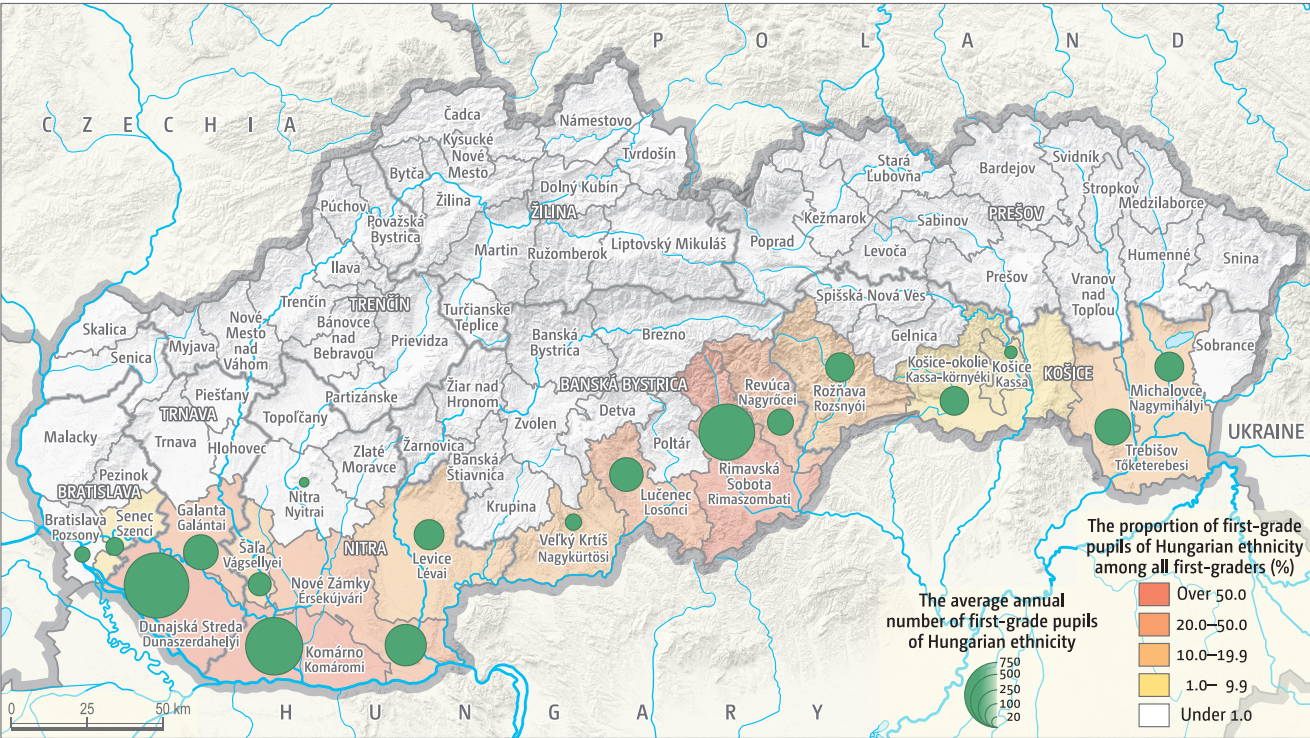


manner, it amounts to approximately 3,750 children annually for whom Hungarian-medium education would be the appropriate place in Slovakia. In the cohorts examined, this represents around 6.6% of children born in Slovakia; still substantially lower than the current share of the Hungarian mother-tongue population in the country.

The picture is further refined by the fact that in Slovakia data are also collected at school entry on the ethnicity of the enrolled child. This information is recorded for every child, regardless of the language of instruction. In some schools it is copied from other documents; elsewhere it is based on parental declaration. According to this database, over the past three school years an annual

average of 3,845 first-grade pupils of Hungarian ethnicity were enrolled in Slovakia, whether in Hungarian- or Slovak-medium educational institutions (due to grade repetition, the number of genuinely new entrants in the system is somewhat lower). These values are similar (in magnitude and territorial distribution) to the “combined,” geographically divided demographic baseline calculated above (Map 8).

**Map 8:** The proportion of first-grade pupils of Hungarian ethnicity (among all first-graders) and their average annual number in the 2022/23–2025/26 school years





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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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