

6. “HORIZONTAL” EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS



Kindergarten commuting flows

Although the most favorable arrangement at the kindergarten level is clearly one in which children do not need to commute, one quarter of children enrolled in Hungarian-medium kindergartens in Slovakia attend an institution outside their place of residence.⁵² Commuting is determined primarily by institutional availability, which is closely linked to settlement structure. In areas characterized by dense small-village settlement network (e.g. the Gemer region), kindergartens are not present in every settlement. The compactness of the ethnic structure is another key factor. In areas

along the language boundary and in increasingly dispersed Hungarian settlement zones, the problem is often not the absence of a kindergarten as such, but rather the absence of a Hungarian-medium kindergarten.

In line with these structural conditions, a clear difference can be observed between southwestern Slovakia, where 77% of children attending Hungarian institutions enroll in a local kindergarten, and central and south-eastern Slovakia, where this proportion is only 69%. Relative to the overall spatial extent of the Hungarian

settlement area, the zone stretching from Lučenec District to Košice-okolie District is particularly underprovided with Hungarian-medium kindergartens, a situation that is clearly rooted in settlement structure. Among these districts, the share of children attending kindergarten locally reaches 70% only in Rožňava District (Table 10). The lowest figure, however, is not recorded here but in Michalovce District (57%). This is partly related to out-migration, more precisely, forms of migration in which the officially registered place of residence does not change, and partly to the fact that,

Table 10: Share of children with a local registered address among those attending Hungarian-medium educational institutions, 2024/25 (%)

District	Kinder- garten children	Pupils in Grades 1–4	Students in Grades 5–9
Bratislava	77.3	73.5	64.2
Dunajská Streda	75.4	63.3	57.7
Galanta	84.3	70.2	61.9
Komárno	79.6	74.5	72.9
Košice	74.4	79.7	77.2
Košice-okolie	69.7	68.8	58.8
Levice	76.5	58.1	56
Lučenec	68.2	67.6	46.1
Michalovce	56.9	56.7	43.5
Nitra	64.0	68.0	29.7
Nové Zámky	77.5	60	58.4
Revúca	65.2	55.6	36.3
Rimavská Sobota	63.7	62.7	36.9
Rožňava	73.8	54.8	38.1
Šaľa	81.2	72.7	75.2
Senec	69.5	31.4	31.1
Trebišov	77.8	66	43.3
Veľký Krtíš	79.5	57.9	57.1
Total	74.8	64.7	54.8

despite a relatively extensive kindergarten network, enrolling children in urban kindergartens (meaning in Veľké Kapušany) is extremely popular. As clearly shown on Map 36, more than half of the town’s kindergarten children commute from other settlements, especially from places where parents work in Veľké Kapušany. Low local-attendance ratios are also observed in districts with low number and concentration of Hungarians. In the Nitra district (64%), for example, the few available Hungarian kindergartens, attributed to the dispersed ethnic structure, explains the low rates.

Map 36 highlights those kindergartens that perform a central (“hub”) function, which explains the low proportion of locally resident children in these institutions. Such cases are most prominent in Rimavská Sobota District (e.g., Bátka, Štrkovec) and, though involving fewer children, in Veľký Krtíš District (Olováry, Vrbovka); among towns, Šaľa also stands out in this respect. At the same time, urban status alone does not automatically generate large-scale commuting everywhere. However, consistent with the growing popularity of urban institutions noted earlier, the share of commuters into towns is above average (28%). From this perspective, it is somewhat surprising that Bratislava, despite extensive daily commuting from its agglomeration, actually “loses” children at the kindergarten level: more children are taken from the city

to Hungarian-medium kindergartens in surrounding Hungarian villages and small towns (50) than those who are brought into Bratislava itself (19).

Map 36 also reveals the routes along which the largest numbers of children commute to Hungarian-medium kindergartens. The busiest routes, those involving at least ten commuting children, are concentrated in Dunajská Streda, Komárno, and Rimavská Sobota Districts.

Primary school (grades 1–4) commuting flows

As one moves up the educational hierarchy, the number of institutions decreases: a pattern already clearly visible at the school level compared to kindergartens. Consequently, while three quarters of Hungarian kindergarten children attended a local institution, fewer than two thirds of Hungarian pupils attended a primary school (grades 1–4) in their settlement of residence. Settlement structure therefore plays a less decisive role in school density than it does for kindergartens, and the difference between western and eastern districts

is correspondingly smaller (62% and 66% attending locally, respectively).

In 2024, the highest shares of locally attending pupils (above 70%) were recorded in the two major cities, indicating that at the primary level their relative geographic distance from the Hungarian settlement area is still sufficient to prevent large-scale commuting toward them, even when parents commute there daily for work. Similarly high values can be observed in Komárno and Šaľa Districts, where compact ethnic structure and relatively large settlement size also play an important role. In Šaľa District, for example, fully organized primary schools operate in the vast majority of Hungarian-inhabited settlements, and commuting only affects settlements adjacent to Šaľa itself. As a result, 80% of pupils attending the Hungarian primary school in Šaľa commute from other settlements.

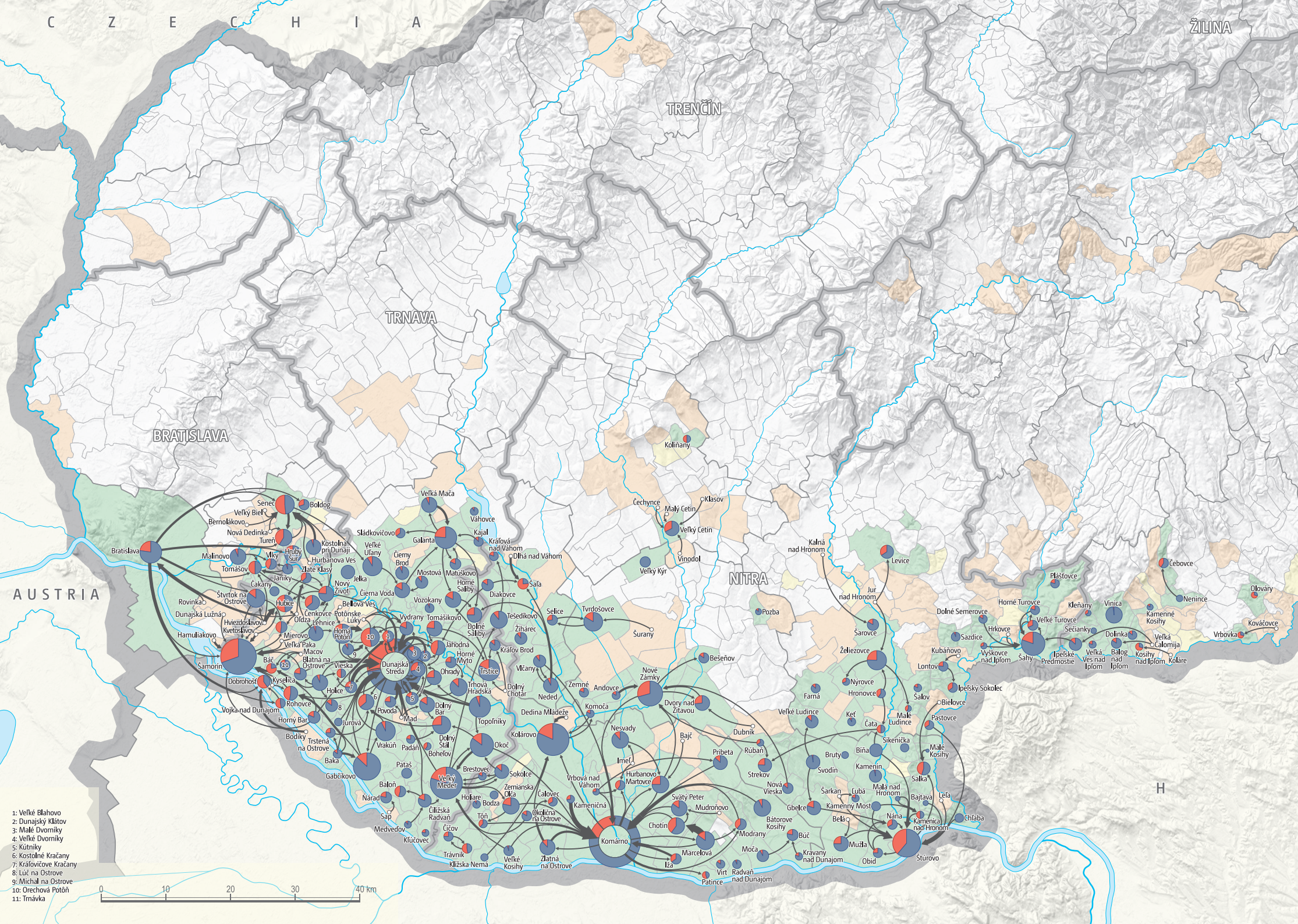
At the opposite end of the spectrum stands Senec District, where an extensive commuting system has developed toward the two larger Hungarian-medium schools in Senec and Tomášov, as well as across district boundaries, primarily toward Šamorín and from

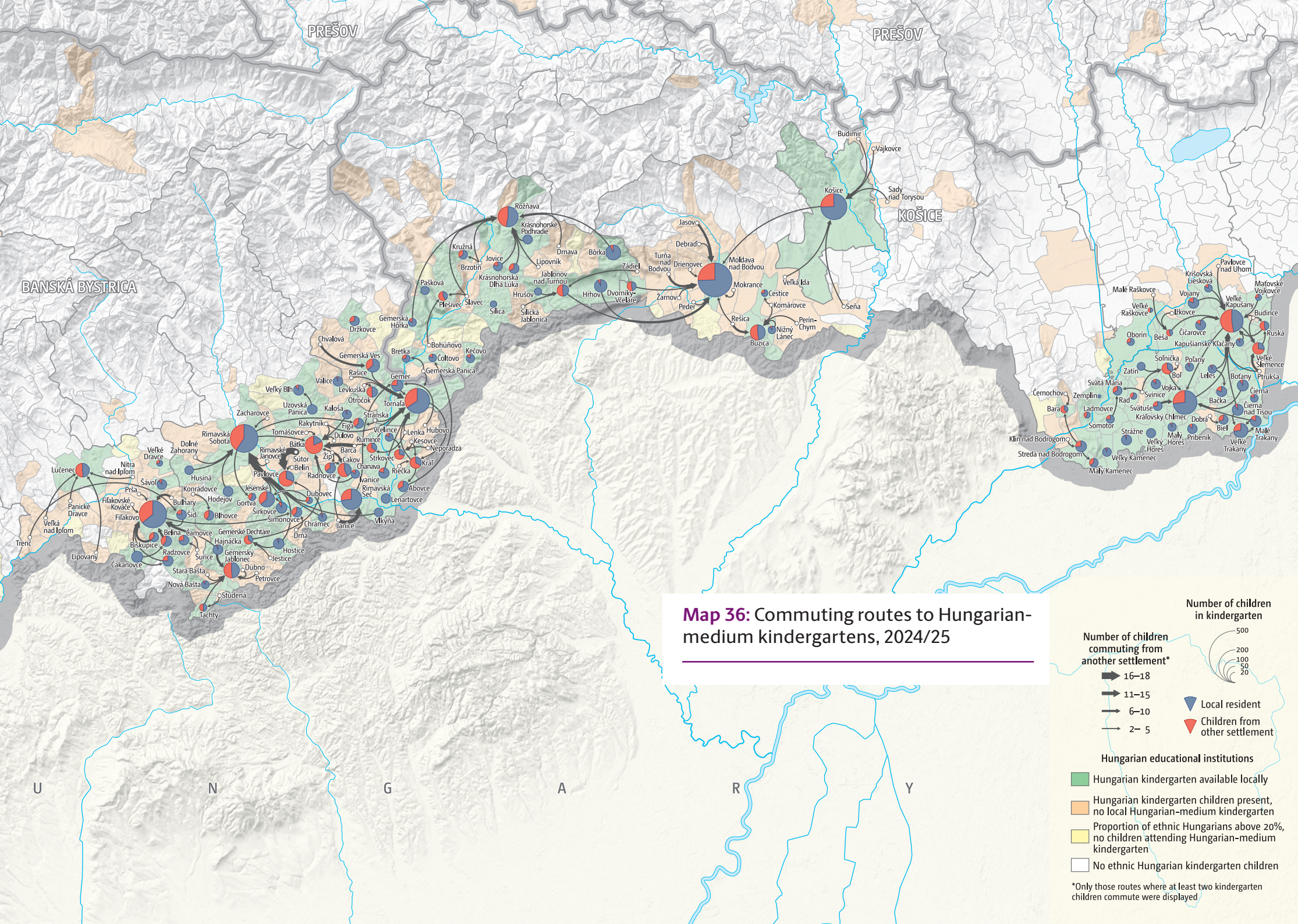
Dunajská Streda District toward Tomášov. The share of locally attending pupils also remains below 60% in Rožňava, Revúca, Michalovce, Veľký Krtíš, and Levice Districts (Table 10). In these districts, two factors underpin the high level of commuting. First is the already mentioned small-village settlement network, which has led (especially in the Gemer region) to the emergence of centrally located large rural schools, functioning as hubs in their micro-region. Second, white-flight may also result in a change in the location of schooling, although here, unlike the cases discussed earlier, this does not necessarily involve language switching. Michalovce and Revúca Districts provide particularly clear examples. When examining Map 37, numerous cases can be identified where thick arrows originate from settlements that do have a school but also have a high local Roma population, pointing toward other settlements, suggesting parental decisions aimed at avoiding schools perceived as Roma-dominated.

The issue of micro-regional center schools also highlights the existence of institutions where commuting rates are already extremely high at the primary level. Particularly notable are the schools in Hucín and

Gemerská Michalovce in the Gemer region, where there are no local pupils in grades 1–4 at all. In Jelenec (Nitra District) a fully organized school exists without pupils in Grades 1–4. High proportions of commuting pupils are most common in the Hungarian majority districts, in Gemer and in Košice-okolie, although isolated cases occur elsewhere as well. It is therefore evident that both the highest and lowest commuting shares occur in villages, which explains why there is no substantial difference between villages and towns in the proportion of commuting pupils, despite the growing popularity of urban schools.

Map 37 also shows the routes with the highest numbers of commuting primary pupils. At this level, flows are considerably larger than those observed for kindergartens. The most significant route is from Bôrka to Drnava (Rožňava District), involving 60 pupils, effectively enough to constitute an independent primary school. Daily travel over a distance of approximately 10 km represents a substantial financial and time burden for pupils, most of whom are of Roma background, as well as their families. Overall, the most heavily used commuting routes are concentrated in the Gemer region and in Dunajská Streda and Komárno districts.





Map 36: Commuting routes to Hungarian-medium kindergartens, 2024/25

Number of children in kindergarten

500
200
100
50
20

Number of children commuting from another settlement*

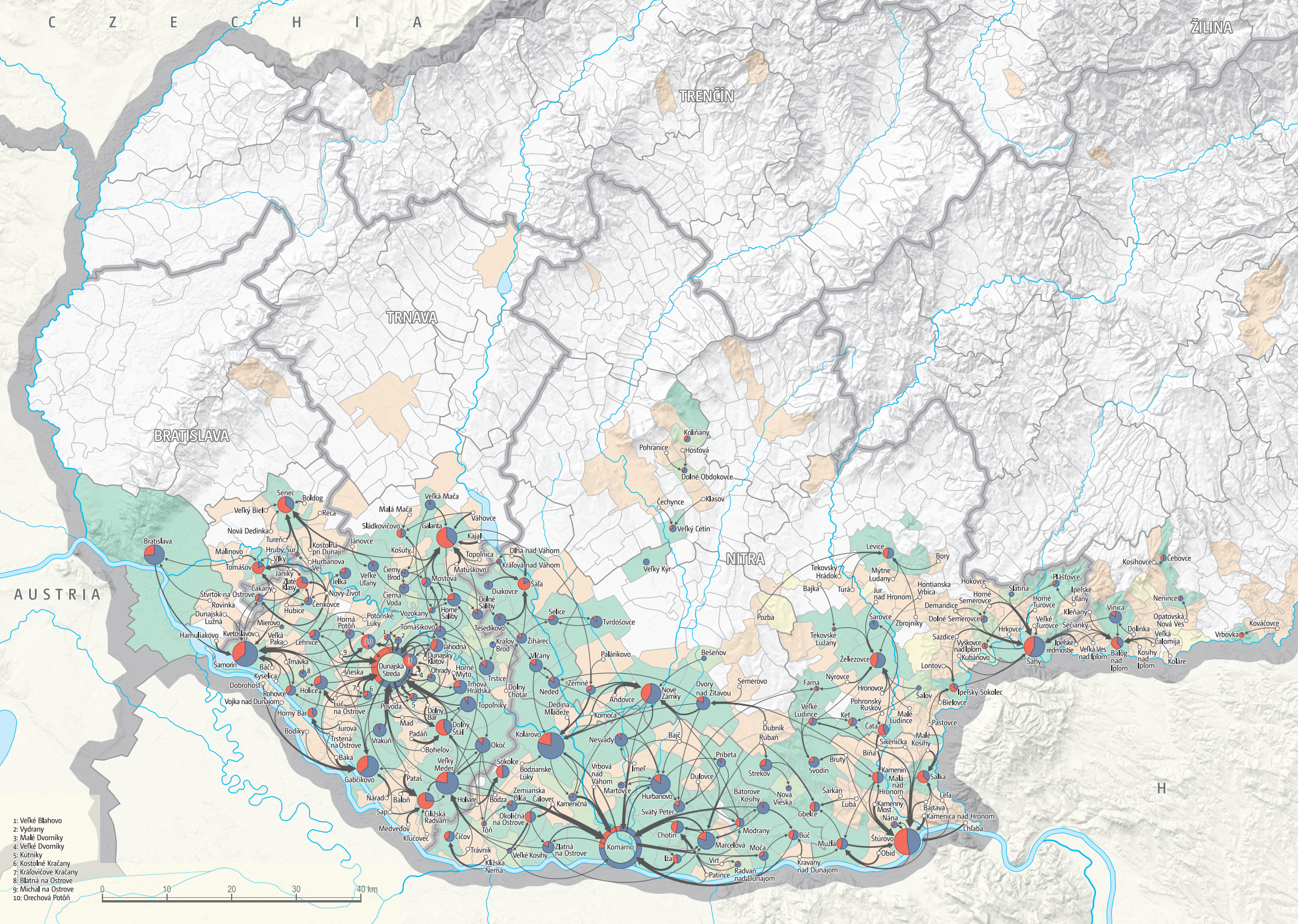
16–18
11–15
6–10
2– 5

Local resident
Children from other settlement

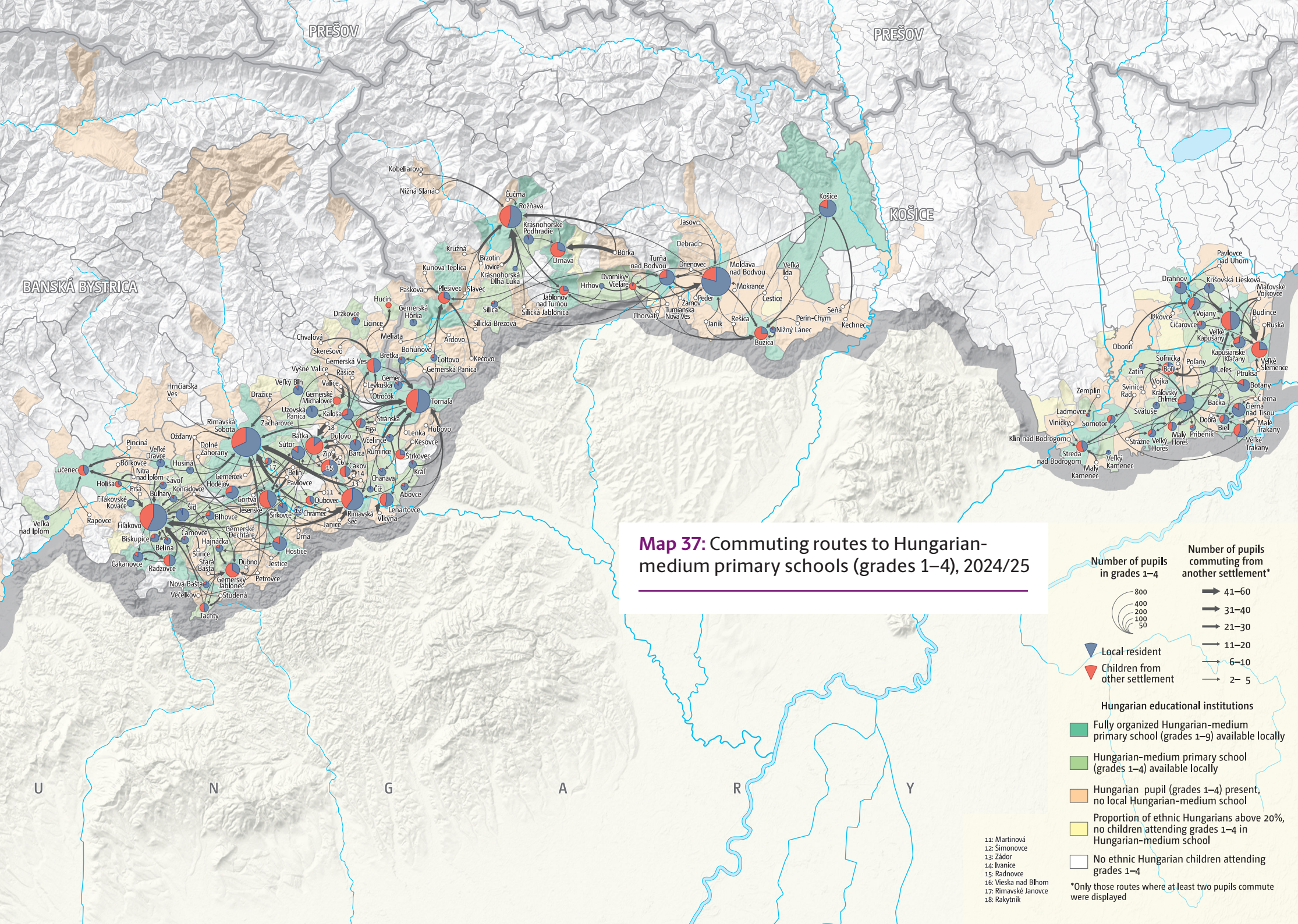
Hungarian educational institutions

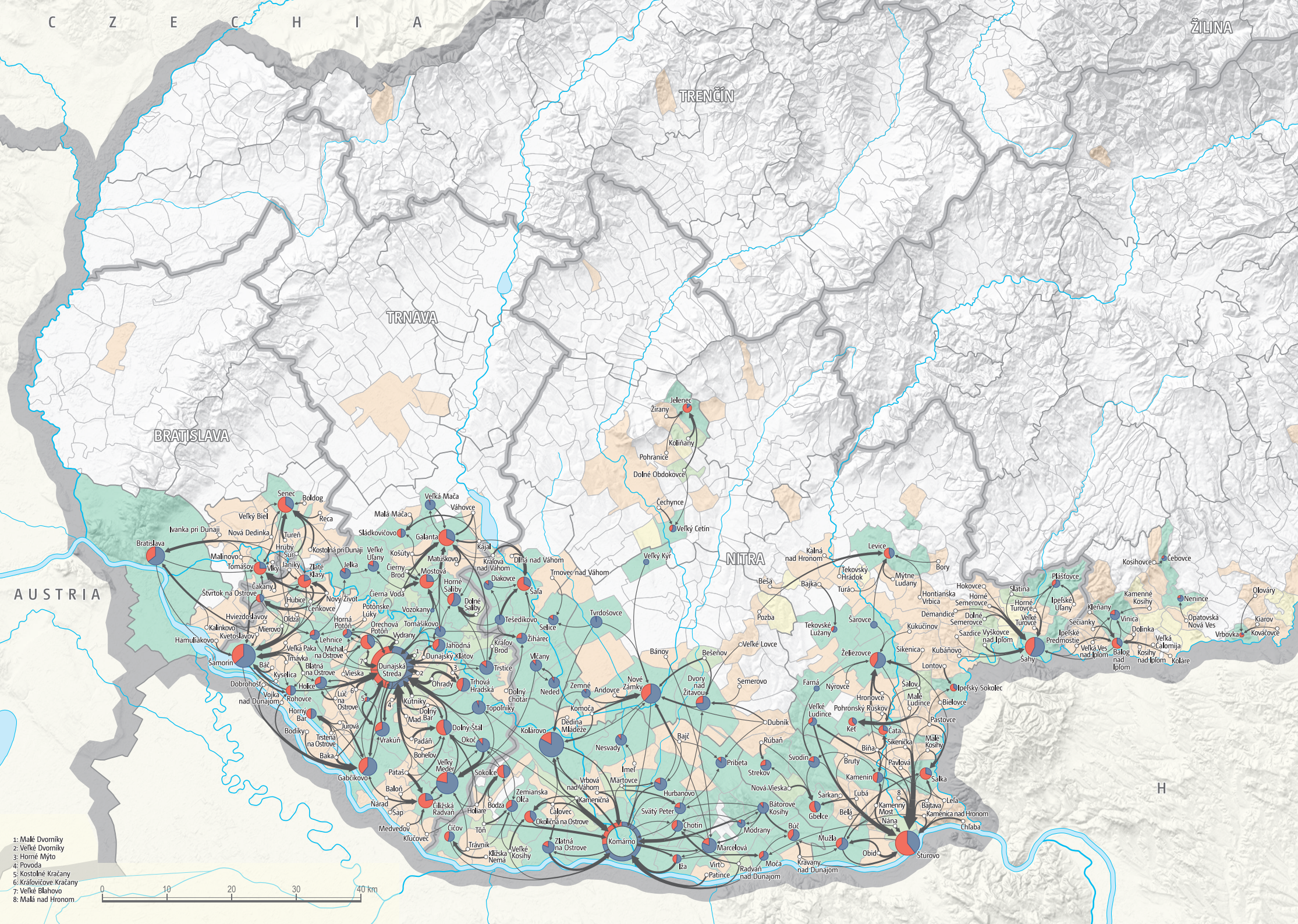
Hungarian kindergarten available locally
Hungarian kindergarten children present, no local Hungarian-medium kindergarten
Proportion of ethnic Hungarians above 20%, no children attending Hungarian-medium kindergarten
No ethnic Hungarian kindergarten children

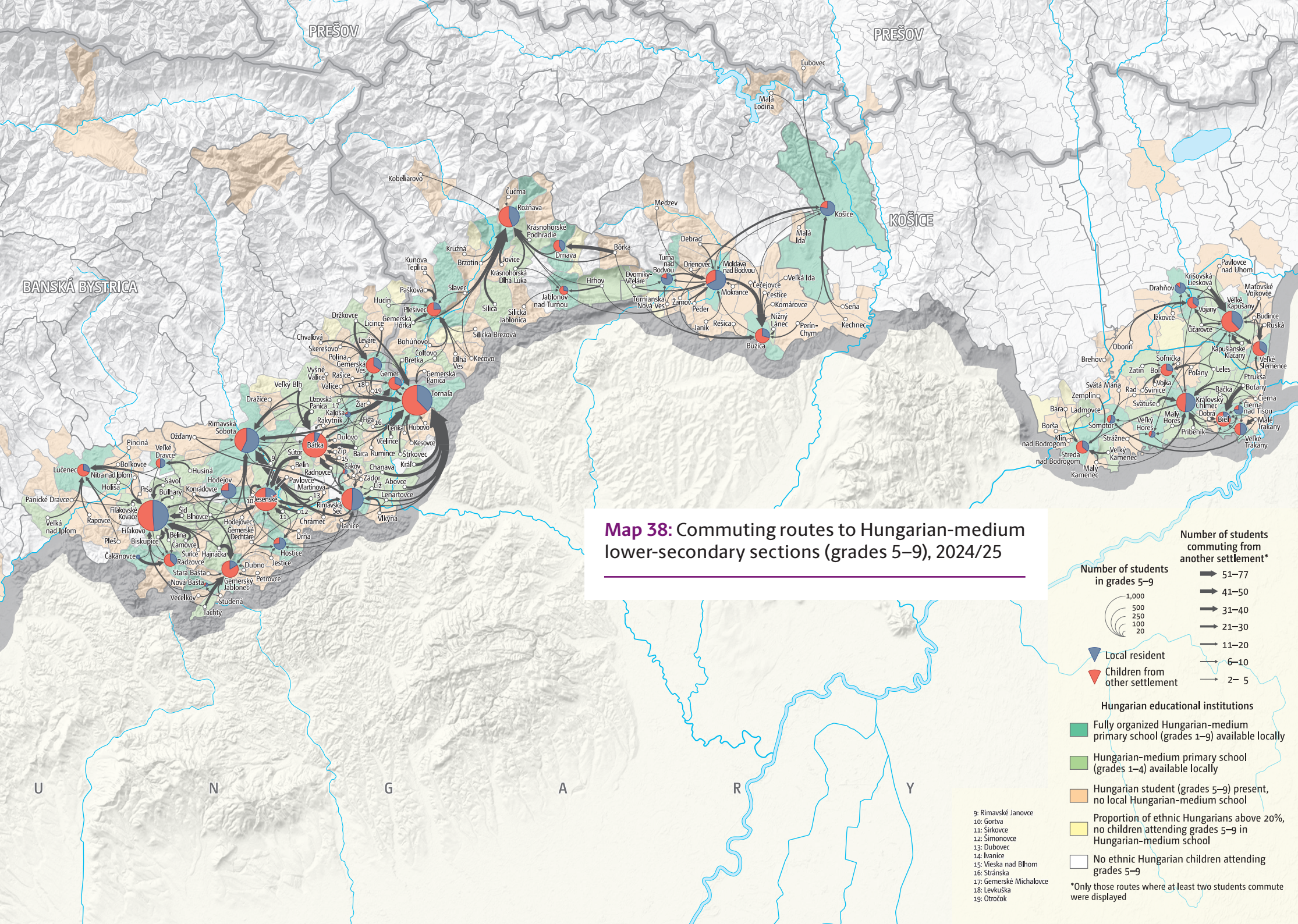
*Only those routes where at least two kindergarten children commute were displayed



- 1: Veľké Blahovo
- 2: Vydrany
- 3: Malé Dvorníky
- 4: Veľké Dvorníky
- 5: Kútники
- 6: Kostolné Kračany
- 7: Kráľovce Kračany
- 8: Blatná na Ostrove
- 9: Michal na Ostrove
- 10: Orechová Potón







Lower-secondary (Grades 5–9) commuting flows

With the further reduction in the number of available institutions, it is hardly surprising that an increasing share of students are required to commute. At the lower-secondary level, only 55% of students attend school in their settlement of residence. Two administrative units stand out with particularly high values (above 75%): Košice and Šaľa District. In the case of Košice, this reflects the absence of sizable Hungarian communities in the surrounding area that would generate commuting toward the city at this level. In Šaľa District, the explanation lies in the fact that (with one exception) all schools are fully organized (Grades 1–9), meaning that relatively few settlements require commuting. It is nonetheless noteworthy that the share of commuters among lower-secondary students is lower than among primary students in this district (Table 10).

At the other extreme, there are districts where the share of locally attending students falls below 40%. Particularly low values (below one third) are recorded

in Nitra and Senec Districts. In both cases, only two fully organized Hungarian-medium primary schools operate (recall that lower-secondary is part of primary schools in Slovakia), and in Nitra District the Hungarian classes in Jelenec do not draw on a substantial local Hungarian community. Similarly low shares characterize the districts in Gemer region (Rimavská Sobota, Revúca, and Rožňava). Here, settlement structure again plays a decisive role: while it still allows for the maintenance of small schools, far fewer fully organized (Grades 1–9) institutions exist. As a result, especially in Rimavská Sobota and Revúca Districts, micro-regional center schools have emerged at the lower-secondary level, where the vast majority of students commute (93% in Bátka and 84% each in Gemerský Jablonec and Jesenské). Incidentally, these village schools operate with larger enrollment numbers than many urban schools. There are also a few settlements that receive no commuting students at all. However, these typically host very small lower-secondary sections, or are surrounded by municipalities without Hungarian schools (Farná, Šarovce, Veľký Kýr) (Map 38).

As commuting increases with each educational level, the number of students traveling along individual routes also rises. At that level, the highest number of

students (77 children) commute from Šid to Filákov (Map 38).

Although at the lower-secondary level catchment areas become increasingly well defined, some atypical routes appear that disregard geographic proximity and settlement hierarchy. These may reflect discrepancies between official and actual places of residence, but there are also cases where the delineation of catchment areas appears to be driven by efforts to balance enrollment numbers between schools, implicitly reinforcing ethnic segregation (e.g., commuting from the Kaloša Valley villages to the village of Gemer).

The maps also show that district boundaries sometimes cut through lived social and educational ties and fail to correspond to actual patterns of movement and interaction. The most striking example is the boundary between Rimavská Sobota and Revúca Districts, which cuts directly through Tornaľa's natural catchment area. All of this underscores the need to look beyond the aggregate data and to examine the educational situation in Revúca District through conducting semi-structured interviews and collecting data in the field.

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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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