

Slovakia Report

Sustainable Governance Indicators 2024

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Executive Summary

The period under review (January 15, 2022 – January 15, 2024) was marked by significant turbulence in the Slovak Republic. The performance of the OĽaNO government began to deteriorate in the summer of 2022 due to internal conflicts within the ruling coalition, particularly between Igor Matovič, leader of OĽaNO, and Richard Sulík of the Freedom and Solidarity party (SaS). This tension led to the SaS leaving the coalition on August 31, 2022, with all its ministers resigning in early September. Consequently, the government lost its majority in parliament, holding only 68 of 150 seats. Although Sulík initially promised his party's support for reforms, the SaS and Pellegrini's Hlas (Voice) party initiated a successful no-confidence vote on December 15, 2022, which passed with 78 votes. Sulík justified this action by accusing Finance Minister Igor Matovič of reneging on his offer to resign, which had been intended to prevent the no-confidence vote and enable the government to continue functioning.

The Heger government did not stay in office until the early elections; it was replaced on May 15, 2023, by a caretaker government led by Prime Minister Ľudovít Ódor. This government did not receive a vote of confidence from parliament and was therefore commissioned to rule with limited powers. In the national elections held on September 30, 2023, Robert Fico's political party, Smer, won with 23% of the vote and formed a government with Pellegrini's Hlas and the Slovak National Party (SNS). Analysts widely agree that the primary cause for the fall of the OĽaNO government was Igor Matovič's extremely low capacity for strategic and collaborative leadership.

During this period of political instability, Slovakia also faced significant external challenges. The "third" phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in the winter of 2021-2022 left the country among the most affected. Additionally, the Ukraine war resulted in a massive inflow of Ukrainian refugees, and the concurrent energy crisis contributed to severe inflation.

These turbulent times severely impacted the quality of governance, particularly in terms of foresight and sustainable policymaking. Political conflicts within the ruling coalition and the urgent need to address the poly-crisis further diminished the already limited capacity of Heger's government for strategic and evidence-based policymaking. Despite preparing the National

Recovery and Resilience Plan, approved by the European Union in spring 2022, the government's measures, particularly in healthcare and judicial reforms, faced significant delays. Ódor's government made efforts to improve governance by preparing white papers, but its proposals were rejected by both former coalition members and the opposition.

The new Fico government has taken steps to stabilize the critically unstable national public finances. However, its initial actions have shown signs of revanchism and a limited commitment to fighting corruption. The first months of this government have been characterized by strong polarization between the new coalition and the opposition.

Slovakia exemplifies a typical post-transition country. While it has largely constructed new structures and aligned its legal and institutional systems with international best practices, implementation remains limited or absent. The most critical barriers to progress are the prioritization of politics over evidence-based policy, non-collaborative governance, and systemic corruption.

Key Challenges

Although several efforts have been undertaken in Slovakia to promote a liberal democracy, the country's democratic structures and institutional frameworks remain fragile, and the current Fico government will test their resilience.

Enhancing governance quality in Slovakia requires a shift toward evidence-based strategic policymaking. This approach should prioritize high-quality legislative processes, including thorough ex ante and ex post regulatory impact assessments. It should also uphold the rule of law, safeguard individual dignity, combat corruption, foster collaborative governance, and promote accountability and responsibility.

However, significant short-term changes are constrained by the unique national context. This limitation is explained by the theory of public economics and public choice, as articulated by scholars like Stiglitz (2000). According to this theory, political parties and leaders, driven by the imperative of reelection, tend to align with the preferences of the "median voter."

In Slovakia, the median voter's inclination, influenced by path-dependent factors and potentially limited educational quality, tends to advocate for

extensive state interventions and a robust welfare state. This voter base tolerates corruption and harbors aversions toward immigrants, particularly those from non-European backgrounds, and LGBTQ minorities. These preferences shape the behavior of political actors, who often favor populist measures over evidence-based but potentially challenging policies.

Numerous critical institutional factors further impede progress in Slovakia. Among these, a notable challenge lies in the gap between the formal existence of accountability mechanisms and their actual efficacy (cf. Veselý 2013). Politico-administrative dynamics exacerbate this challenge, with the professional, apolitical civil service envisioned as a check on political excesses proving to be illusory. A change of government often leads to the appointment of loyal civil servants at all levels, resulting in a highly politicized and inexperienced civil service that undermines the capacity to implement effective policies (Staroňová and Rybář 2021; Gajduschek and Staroňová 2021).

Addressing systemic corruption requires a grassroots approach. Although governmental financial operations may be transparent, “transparent corruption” persists due to the populace’s high tolerance for such practices. Changing attitudes toward corruption necessitates a broader societal shift, which may be hindered by declining education quality and persistent fiscal illiteracy. (Orviská, 2003).

Democratic Government

I. Vertical Accountability

Elections

Free and Fair
Political
Competition
Score: 9

Slovak legislation enshrines all standard elements of free and fair elections. Legal provisions regarding the registration of parties and candidates are liberal and ensure a fair process. Registered political parties, movements, and coalitions can nominate candidate lists for parliamentary elections. These nominating organizations must obtain 10,000 signatures and deposit €17,000, which is returned only if they receive at least 2% of the vote. Eligible parties and candidates are not disqualified from registration without adhering to objectively verifiable legal criteria. Those denied the right to be elected or registered can appeal to the Supreme Administrative Court.

The State Commission for Elections and Control of Financing of Political Parties (Štátna komisia pre voľby a kontrolu financovania politických strán) supervises national elections. This commission has 14 members: ten nominated by political parties in parliament, and one member each delegated by the president of the Constitutional Court, the president of the Supreme Administrative Court, the prosecutor general, and the president of the Supreme Audit Office. Parties must maintain accurate financial records, disclose donations, and regularly publish accounts. The State Commission monitors party funding, and each party must submit an annual report to parliament. Although the law on political parties stipulates various fines for noncompliance, these are infrequently enforced, as not all political parties use transparent accounts during elections.

Candidates and parties have fair opportunities to access public media. The public broadcaster, Radio and Television of Slovakia (RTVS), is legally required to introduce candidates and present their campaigns. Political broadcasting on private media outlets is free. No official bodies overseeing election campaign fairness reported media manipulation. However, a few days

before the elections, a deepfake audio was posted on social media to discredit the leader of Progressive Slovakia (Kóváry, 2023).

Transparency International Slovakia evaluated the transparency and accuracy of financial records of political parties during the 2023 elections. The SaS party performed best in terms of transparency, while the Hlas party performed the worst. The National Criminal Agency (NAKA) is investigating possible manipulation of the 2023 parliamentary elections, particularly concerning the unrealistically high percentage of votes given to OĽANO and its allies in some Roma settlements.

Free and Fair
Elections
Score: 10

All citizens, both de jure and de facto, can exercise their right to vote without restrictions. Voting rights are granted to all citizens, including those without permanent residence or with felony convictions. There is no disenfranchisement due to a flawed voter registry since registration is passive. In rare cases of registry errors, citizens can request corrections through municipal administration and appeal decisions to the administrative court.

Elections are organized by three levels of election commissions, headed by the State Commission for Elections and Control of Financing of Political Parties (SEC). These levels include 50 District Election Commissions (DECs) and around 6,000 Local Election Commissions (PECs) serving a country with 5.5 million inhabitants. Voters who are unable to visit polling stations on election day, usually for health reasons, can request to vote via a portable ballot box.

The Ministry of Interior (MoI) and the Statistical Office support election commissions at all levels. The MoI handles technical preparations and methodological support. DECs and PECs, which are formed before each election, manage voting, counting, and results tabulation. Each DEC and PEC has at least five members nominated by election contestants. The Statistical Office administers results tabulation, sets up units in all DECs and the SEC, and installs a system for electronically processing election results.

The early 2023 parliamentary elections proceeded as scheduled, with minor delays in two PECs due to extended voting times for health reasons. Disabled citizens had the option to vote at home, highlighting issues with access. There were few incidents of harassment, violence, or intimidation against voters and voting commissions during the elections. Six thousand five hundred police officers maintained public order, and out of 123 reported violations before or during the elections, only five were classified as penal code violations. The results from one PEC were annulled due to the manipulation of envelopes by a commission member; this did not affect the overall election outcome.

Quality of Parties and Candidates

Socially Rooted
Party System
Score: 4

Some legal aspects of Slovakia’s political system hinder the representation of important societal interests. The proportional representation system, which operates with a single electoral district and a 5% threshold, leads to the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities and underdeveloped regions. This setup undermines fair representation and governance. For instance, most major foreign investments are located in western Slovakia, and since the 2020 elections, none of the Hungarian minority parties have been represented in parliament.

These legal provisions have influenced the organization of political parties. Many parties in Slovakia are highly centralized and effectively owned by their political leaders and founders, lacking local and regional structures. An extreme example is OĽaNO (recently renamed “Slovensko”), which Igor Matovič fully controls. Since its foundation in 2011, this party has had no registered members or regional and local structures. The absence of party structure led SNS leader Andrej Danko to change the law on political parties after the 2016 elections, increasing regulation on party organization and membership transparency. Due to these requirements, political entities elected to parliament in 2023 have some membership and minimal regional and local structures. However, Slovensko remains a “non-standard” entity in terms of party organization (see Malý and Nemeč, 2023).

All major political entities running for national elections publish their party manifestos. However, these texts do not comprehensively represent significant societal interests programmatically and do not rely much on clientelism. Instead, they are predominantly populist, aimed at attracting voters with often unrealistic promises (see Rossi, 2020).

Effective Cross-
Party
Cooperation
Score: 4

The majority of political parties in Slovakia support democratic values. However, during the 2023 election campaign, several mainstream political parties, such as Smer-SSD, distanced themselves from liberal values. Alongside “systemic” parties that support liberal democratic values (like SaS), there are several “anti-system” parties (for more, see Gyarfášová, 2018; Rybář and Spáč, 2020; Rossi, 2020; Malý and Nemeč, 2023).

Slovakia has several far-right movements that support the country’s fascist past, such as Slovenská pospolitost’ (Slovak Togetherness, SP). Since the mid-1990s, SP has advocated for the abolition of democracy in favor of a corporatist regime. The Supreme Court dissolved the party in 2006. Leaders, including Marián Kotleba, formed a new party, Kotlebovci – Ľudová strana

Naše Slovensko, recognized as ultra-right and neofascist (Gyarfášová, 2018). This party was elected to parliament in 2016 and 2020. In 2021, some members of parliament left to form Republika, which also used moderate rhetoric. In the 2023 elections, both parties failed to pass the 5% threshold, although Republika reached 4.75%. The Slovak National Party (SNS) gained 5.62% and 10 MPs, mainly due to popular figures from conspiracy circles with radical conservative and pro-Russian attitudes. Paradoxically, due to preferential votes, only SNS chair Andrej Danko was elected as a party member, with the rest being radical independents, several of whom became ministers or state secretaries.

The political spectrum in the Slovak parliament after the 2023 elections includes:

Smer: A formerly social-democratic party led by Robert Fico that is criticized for weak anti-corruption efforts and its shift toward nationalism and extremist rhetoric.

Progresívne Slovensko: A left-wing liberal, pro-European movement, elected to parliament for the first time.

Hlas: A social-democratic party formed after splitting from Smer in 2020, formally pro-European.

SaS: Freedom and Solidarity, a liberal, mostly pro-European party.

SNS: Slovak National Party, nationalist with limited acceptance of liberal democratic values and a reserved stance on EU membership.

KDH: Christian Democratic Movement, center-right, conservative on gender and family issues, pro-European.

OLaNO: Now rebranded as “Slovakia,” a center-right movement supporting traditional Christian and family values.

The ruling coalition consists of Smer, Hlas, and SNS. There is ongoing debate about whether this coalition structure poses risks to EU and NATO memberships, though analysts note Fico’s experience and pragmatism (see Karnitschnig, 2023). However, his election rhetoric regarding the war in Ukraine and amendments to the Criminal Code have raised concerns domestically and internationally.

Ruling coalitions prepare and sign agreements to manage different ideological positions, though adherence can vary. The 2020–2022 coalition led by OLaNO often ignored its agreement, leading to Prime Minister Matovič’s resignation in 2021 and the coalition’s collapse in 2022 (see Malý and Nemeč, 2023).

Officially, all liberal democratic parties reject cooperation with anti-democratic entities. However, there were instances in 2022–23 where the

ruling coalition relied on support from Republika to pass legal proposals (see Jabůrková, 2022). Matovič's chaotic pandemic governance and past collaboration with the radical right are key reasons why the three 2023 post-election opposition parties (PS, SaS, and KDH) do not cooperate with his "Slovensko" movement.

Overall, the post-2023 election developments have blurred the boundaries between parties' normative attitudes. The current Smer-SD-led coalition operates pragmatically, focusing on office-seeking and power interests.

Access to Official Information

Transparent
Government
Score: 9

The three critical Slovak pillars of transparency – the law on free access to information, the existence of the registry of public contracts which stipulates that a contract can only be executed after being published in this registry, and the registry of public sector partners (only private bodies from this registry are eligible to receive grants from any level of the government over a certain value or sign a contract with any public body) – remained untouched and functional during the evaluated period (Nemec, 2022).

Access to government information remains "free." The questioned body can only charge direct costs associated with providing the requested information. The court decides in cases of potential noncompliance (for detailed information about all aspects of the free access to information legislation, see Wilfling, 2012).

The earlier report by Transparency International Slovakia (TIS) indicates that Slovak public institutions generally respond adequately to citizens' requests for information. The standard response time is a maximum of eight days. The report also suggests that state enterprises and, to some extent, self-government may try to conceal some eligible information, though not on a mass scale (Riapošová and Dančíková, 2015).

II. Diagonal Accountability

Media Freedom and Pluralism

Free Media
Score: 8

Media freedom in Slovakia is guaranteed by the constitution and upheld by a set of laws, including media law and election legislation. Censorship is prohibited, the judicial oversight system is functional, and the jurisdiction of

the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) serves as the final authority for free speech cases. While the press does not require a license to publish, radio and TV broadcasting operate under a state-regulated license regime (cf. Hanák, 2022).

Slovakia ranks highly in the World Index of Media Freedom, placing 17th in 2022 (RSF 2022). According to Urbániková (2022), while the legal regulation of media freedom is sophisticated, its implementation faces challenges. Public radio and TV broadcasting (RTVS) exemplifies media capture, partly because politicians in parliament elect the director. This issue is highlighted in the 2021 Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom report (2022).

Oligarchs influence some media outlets. For instance, Boris Kollár, leader of the Sme Rodina party and Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic from 2020 to 2023, owns two of the four most popular radio stations in Slovakia.

In the Media Pluralism Monitor 2022, Slovakia was rated as a low-risk country for the “Journalistic profession, standards and protection” indicator (Urbániková, 2022). However, the 2018 murder of journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée remains partially unresolved. Two perpetrators and an intermediary were convicted, but the trial of the alleged instigator, Marian Kočner, and his accomplice continues. While direct physical attacks against journalists are rare, politicians frequently intimidate them (Urbániková, 2022).

Pluralism of
Opinions
Score: 7

According to the Center for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom’s 2022 report (Urbániková 2022), Slovak anti-monopoly policies ensure the transparency of ownership structures and maintain a plurality of opinions in digital, print, and broadcast media outlets at low-risk levels. Regulations overseeing publicly owned media formally ensure an adequate plurality of views. However, the plurality of opinions in private media presents a risk. For the “Market Plurality” indicator, Slovakia is among the countries with the highest risk. The concentration of media ownership in the hands of Slovak, Czech, and other regional entrepreneurs has been increasing. The most profitable media outlets are currently divided among Czech-Slovak entrepreneurs whose core business lies outside the media (Godársky & Mračka 2023).

The 2022 Law on Media introduced the obligation to register all media outlets in the registry of public sector partners, increasing the transparency of the media market.

Many major digital, print, and broadcast outlets consistently critique government policies and report on abuses of power, which applies to both the 2020 – 2023 OĽANO and 2023 – SMER governments. The legislation forces the broadcasting media to encompass a diverse range of political perspectives – paragraph 16, article 3a of Law 308/2000 directly requests the versatility of information and plurality of opinions.

Commercial and owner influence over editorial content is at a medium risk level in Slovakia. However, for the public broadcaster RTVS and most private media, the political independence of the media and the level of conflict of interest are at high risk. The political independence of local and regional media is also endangered due to their funding and ownership by local and regional authorities, resulting in content often blatantly skewed in favor of the current local and regional political representation (Urbániková, 2022).

Civil Society

Free Civil
Society
Score: 9

Slovakia's constitution and other legal institutions fully safeguard political rights, including freedom of association and assembly. Political and civic groups can operate freely without unwarranted state intrusion or interference, provided they respect the law. These freedoms can only be restricted under the law and to the extent necessary in a democratic society for a legitimate aim. The right to associate is executed through registration, which can only be rejected for specific reasons, such as incomplete documentation or if the public space is already booked for another event.

The government does not use intimidation, harassment, or threats of retaliation to prevent citizens from exercising their rights to assemble and associate legally (see Centre for Human Rights of the University of Pretoria 2021).

An example of civic groups operating freely is the Platform of Volunteer Centers and Organizations. In 2023, they organized a series of roundtables with representatives from public administration, local government, and organizations promoting volunteerism. They drafted the National Plan for the Development of Volunteerism for 2024–2030, which is now open for public comment.

The situation may, however, change. The new government, led by Prime Minister Robert Fico, has expressed intentions to adopt new legislation related to NGOs and cancel the existing tax assignment system. Currently, all taxpayers can assign 2 or 3% of their income tax to civil society organizations (CSOs), including associations, foundations, nonprofit funds, and nonprofit

organizations delivering public services. Eligible CSOs must be registered annually with a notary, and their activities must be connected with health, sports, social care, culture, education, protection of human rights, environmental protection, research and development, or voluntary work (paragraph 50, the law on income taxation 595/2003). The legislation also permits direct allocations of public funds to CSOs, commonly at the self-government level (laws on budgetary rules 523/2004 and 583/2004).

Robert Fico has referred to some NGOs as foreign agents (see Správy RTVS, 4 November 2023, or Robert Fico’s post on social media). He explicitly called Transparency International Slovakia a foreign agent because it is financed from abroad. Fico announced plans to “copy and paste” the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), a U.S. law requiring political and lobbying groups or individuals linked to foreign entities to register.

The Law on Obligatory Registration of NGOs, which came into effect in 2019 during a Smer-led government, created a register of NGOs launched in 2021. There are more than 82,000 registered NGOs in Slovakia. Concerns over the new government’s actions and rhetoric have increased (ECNL 2023).

Effective Civil
Society
Organizations
(Capital and
Labor)
Score: 8

The existing legislation in Slovakia provides numerous opportunities to cultivate civil society organizations (CSOs). The primary public funding source for CSOs is tax assignation, which amounts to approximately €80 million annually, supplemented by state budget allocations through competitive schemes and programs.

Major CSOs can cooperate and form alliances, although there are limitations due to their policy fields and normative orientations (Konceptia rozvoja občianskej spoločnosti na Slovensku na roky 2021–2030, 2021). The rules for membership in the Government Council for CSOs encourage organizations to unite with similar entities to gain membership.

Public involvement in major CSOs’ activities is generally limited, with more significant support typically arising during specific crises (Analýza socioekonomického prínosu neziskového sektora a stavu a trendov rozvoja občianskej spoločnosti, 2020).

Each government in Slovakia formally supports the development of civil society organizations (CSOs) and is legally required to consult major CSOs on draft legislation. The Plenipotentiary for the Development of Civil Society, an advisory body within the Ministry of Interior, regularly prepares development concepts. Since March 10, 2022, this position has been held by Filip Vagač, a well-known CSO expert and activist. The Government Council for CSOs,

established in 2012, includes state secretaries (junior ministers) from various ministries, giving the government more influence. CSOs are represented according to the Chamber of CSOs' representative rules, but only the chair (Minister of Interior) can propose new members.

The main CSOs representing labor and capital primarily access policymaking through the tripartite mechanism – the Economic and Social Council – as well as social dialogue platforms and various advisory bodies at government and ministerial levels. This dialogue includes trade unions, business and professional organizations, CSOs, territorial and professional self-government bodies, trade and professional chambers, consumer groups, NGOs, and churches.

Trade unions and employer associations are the main non-state actors in capital and labor. The Confederation of Trade Unions (KOZ) represents 25 sectoral unions and an umbrella organization, collectively representing up to 25% of employees. The main employer association, AZZZ, represents 35 employers' unions and associations, covering about 50% of employer organizations. Two umbrella associations represent almost all self-governments. These negotiations focus on various economic and social policy issues, primarily minimum wage rules and other labor-related matters. Many business representatives not in the Economic and Social Council are united in umbrella and coordination associations, positioning them well to provide policy proposals. Many cooperate with different think tanks. Due to leadership changes, trade unions have suffered from fragmentation but have recently improved their negotiation capacity.

Several CSOs in Slovakia possess sufficient organizational strength to formulate policies independently or engage in integrated policy formulation processes with the government. Notable players include INEKO, IVO, INESS, and Aliancia Fair Play (Analýza socioekonomického prínosu neziskového sektora a stavu a trendov rozvoja občianskej spoločnosti, 2020; Vladovič, 2008).

The practices of the Slovak governments from 2020 to 2023 (except for the short-lived Ódor government) have been problematic. Igor Matovič's capacity to cooperate with other actors was limited (Malý and Nemeč, 2023). The new government under Prime Minister Robert Fico holds a negative view of politically oriented CSOs, sometimes referring to them as foreign agents. The system of tax assignment is currently under discussion. (Správy RTVS, 4 November 2023).

Effective Civil
Society
Organizations
(Social Welfare)
Score: 8

The state of social welfare in Slovakia mirrors the conditions observed in the capital and labor sectors. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Slovakia possess sufficient organizational strength to independently formulate policies or engage in a collaborative policymaking process with the government. Additionally, several CSOs provide social welfare services and are part of the Association of Social Services Providers, participating in the SR's Council of Non-Governmental and Nonprofit Organizations.

The most influential welfare policy contributors include INEKO, INESS, Socioforum, and others. These organizations share their expertise with CSO representatives who have access to decision-making processes. Among CSOs delivering welfare services, Liga proti rakovine is the most prominent, with the Red Cross ranking second in visibility (for more, see *Analýza socioekonomického prínosu neziskového sektora a stavu a trendov rozvoja občianskej spoločnosti, 2020*).

Effective Civil
Society
Organizations
(Environment)
Score: 6

The situation for environmental CSOs in Slovakia parallels that in the economy, labor, and social welfare sectors. The most prominent environmental CSO is Slovak Greenpeace, followed by Sloboda Zvierat and LO Vlk (*Analýza socioekonomického prínosu neziskového sektora a stavu a trendov rozvoja občianskej spoločnosti, 2020*). Environmental CSOs, such as Ekofórum, which comprises 22 member organizations, collaborate to represent the sector in the Government Council for CSOs.

Environmental CSOs face challenges in influencing government policies and securing widespread public support due to differing opinions and the limited willingness of citizens to support environmental protection (*Analýza socioekonomického prínosu neziskového sektora a stavu a trendov rozvoja občianskej spoločnosti, 2020*). While they have significantly improved environmental protection and awareness, their activities sometimes encounter public opposition, particularly when they affect daily life.

A prominent issue is the debate over brown bear management. Some experts, primarily from environmental CSOs, argue that the bear population is low and that the problem lies with human behavior. In contrast, farmers and hunters advocate for regulating bear numbers due to increasing encounters in villages and cities. This debate was a significant topic in the 2023 election campaign, with the current Fico government promising regulation (Plávalová, 2023).

III. Horizontal Accountability

Independent Supervisory Bodies

Effective Public
Auditing
Score: 8

The Supreme Audit Office of the Slovak Republic (NKÚ) is an independent body established by law. It has nearly 300 employees and a budget of €13.9 million in 2022, determined annually by the State Budget Law. NKÚ conducts financial, compliance, and performance audits with full discretion over the scope of its audits. It is authorized to obtain necessary information and question officials and witnesses. The president and two vice presidents of NKÚ are elected by the National Council of the Slovak Republic via secret ballot (Law 39/1993).

Since its inception in 1993, NKÚ's ability to perform high-quality audits has improved, and its reports have received significant media coverage. However, a key limitation is the follow-up on its recommendations, with implementation details often only available in control protocols (Nemec, 2022). The Open Budget Survey (OBS 2021) rates NKÚ as competent and efficient but suggests improvements in auditing a larger percentage of budgeted and extra-budgetary funds. The OBS also recommends that NKÚ report on executive actions taken in response to its findings and that the executive publicly disclose the steps taken to address these recommendations.

Effective Data
Protection
Score: 6

Law 18/2018 governs the protection of personal data in Slovakia, establishing rights and responsibilities for data processing and defining the role and organization of the Office for Personal Data Protection of the Slovak Republic.

The Office for Personal Data Protection is an independent body with a budget set annually by the State Budget Law. In 2021, it had 45 employees and a budget of €1,738,043.75. The office monitors compliance with data protection laws and has the authority to obtain information and question officials. Its president is elected by the National Council of the Slovak Republic via secret ballot, while the government nominates the vice-president based on the president's proposal (Law 18/2018).

The Office's direct control activities are limited; its 2023 control plan covers only three central ministries and one central state administration body. It maintains a relatively low profile, attracting media attention primarily when publishing annual reports on fines. Information on follow-up actions is not publicly available.

Effective Judicial
Oversight
Score: 5

Rule of Law

The Slovak Republic has a low score on the World Bank Rule of Law indicator, with 0.6 in 2022, down from 0.7 in 2021 (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi, 2010). This decline reflects various challenges within the national judiciary.

The Slovak judiciary, including specialized courts, is formally autonomous and responsible for interpreting and reviewing laws. However, recent rulings, such as those by the Bratislava IV court regarding suspensions by Interior Minister Šutaj Eštok, show inconsistent decision-making, suggesting a selective commitment to independent judicial review (Drozdíková, 2023).

Corruption within the judiciary undermines its effectiveness. High-profile arrests, such as those of the former vice-president of the Supreme Court and ex-special chief prosecutor Dušan Kovačik, highlight ongoing corruption and clientelism. Public trust is low, with 88% of citizens perceiving corruption in the courts and less than 30% believing in their independence. The judicial selection process also appears to be influenced by social connections rather than merit (Spáč, 2022).

Appointment processes for the Supreme Court and Constitutional Court aim to ensure independence. For the Constitutional Court, 13 judges serve 12-year terms, selected by the president from a list approved by the National Council. However, media reports suggest that political parties may influence these appointments, especially if the president lacks independence (Remišová, 2018; Orosz, 2016). Similarly, the Supreme Court's Chief Justices often face political interference despite the judicial council model (Kosář and Spáč, 2021).

The Judicial Council oversees the judiciary's administration and has 18 members, half elected by judges and the rest appointed by the president, parliament, and government. Concerns about the independence of the council's members persist, as their status can be precarious.

Challenging government actions in court is possible, with the Constitutional and Supreme Administrative Court handling such cases. The Public Procurement Office can also challenge decisions made by public bodies. However, case lengths are often excessive (Kullová 2023).

Rare but notable instances of noncompliance with court decisions include the Interior Minister's refusal to revoke controversial orders.

Universal Civil
Rights
Score: 4

The Slovak constitution and national legal system formally guarantee the protection of civil rights. Section 2 of the constitution states that every person is entitled to their human rights and freedoms, including safeguarding personal liberty against both state and non-state actors, the right to life and security, the prohibition of torture and inhumane treatment or punishment, and the protection of privacy. Section 4 stipulates that membership in any national minority or ethnic group must not be used to the detriment of any individual. Section 7 ensures equality before the law, equal access to justice, and due process under the rule of law, including protection against arbitrary imprisonment without due process. However, the constitution and legal system inadequately address the prevention of discrimination based on factors such as sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation (for further details, see the constitution).

Despite these formal guarantees, practical realization issues are significant. Amnesty International's 2022/23 report, *The State of the World's Human Rights*, is highly critical of Slovakia. The report highlights ongoing discrimination against Roma individuals and human rights violations against Ukrainians arriving in the country due to the war. It also notes the vacancy in the Public Defender of Rights office following the expiry of Mária Patakyová's term in March. The appointment of Róbert Dobrovodský on 1 December 2022 left the office nonfunctional for several months, leading to increased complaints about human rights violations.

The situation for the Roma minority is particularly problematic. The Roma are the most vulnerable segment of society, frequently subjected to mistreatment by state authorities, including the police, and racial discrimination, especially in the labor market and access to education, where segregation is prevalent. According to an Amnesty International report, there has been no significant effort to improve the living conditions of the Roma community.

In 2022 and 2023, members of parliament from the leading coalition party OĽANO proposed several amendments to restrict abortion, but none of these proposals passed. Slovakia has also made no progress toward ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

LGBTQ+ individuals remain stigmatized, and their rights are insufficiently protected. Same-sex marriage is not possible due to a 2014 constitutional amendment defining marriage as "a unique union of a man and a woman"

(Guasti & Bustikova, 2020). Registered civil partnerships are not legally recognized. In October 2022, negative attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community culminated in a terrorist attack in Bratislava, where two gay individuals were shot. The police identified the assailant as a young man with anti-LGBTQ+ and antisemitic views.

Effective
Corruption
Prevention
Score: 4

The Registry of Public Contracts and Public Sector Partners significantly facilitates corruption detection. These tools ensure that public procurement processes are more transparent, with all details of tenders publicly accessible. Anti-corruption legislation also includes rules on conflicts of interest and asset declarations for high public officials. However, enforcement and investigation based on these regulations are reportedly inadequate.

For instance, in late 2023, Prime Minister Robert Fico purchased a luxury flat in a prestigious area of Bratislava but did not disclose the price or details of the transaction despite media pressure (Hajčáková 2024). Many other public officials face similar unresolved questions regarding their assets. While major anti-corruption stakeholders emphasize transparency, it alone is insufficient. There is a lack of coordination, enforcement, and accountability within the anti-corruption framework. Thus, while transparency raises public awareness, it does not guarantee effective investigation, prosecution, and justice. Slovakia experiences a mismatch between high perceived corruption and a low rate of investigated high-level corruption cases.

Rules governing the financing of political parties are established under Law 85/2005 on Political Parties and Political Movements. This law outlines regulations on private income, direct public funding, spending limits, reporting, oversight, and sanctions (see Law 85/2005). The Ethical Codex of the Civil Servant, effective from Jan. 1, 2020, under government regulation 400/2019, governs civil service ethics.

Despite these anti-corruption safeguards, their impact on the scope and scale of corruption in Slovakia is limited, with some describing the situation as “transparent corruption.” Like other countries in the region (see Langr, 2018), systemic corruption persists in Slovakia. The Group of States Against Corruption reports that Slovakia has made minimal progress in preventing corruption and promoting integrity within the central government (based on data from previous administrations).

During the 2020 – 2023 term under the OĽANO-led governments, combating corruption was a primary focus. Notable results include establishing the Office for the Protection of Whistleblowers and significantly increasing the number of investigated cases. High-ranking civil servants and judges were among

those under criminal investigation, with some already sentenced. Nonetheless, there is ongoing debate about the legality of certain investigations. The Prosecutor General's Office invoked Article 363 of the Penal Code to halt investigations in nearly 30 cases, including some where higher-level courts had upheld the legality of the charges. Notably, high-level politicians from the anti-corruption governments have been included in investigations. For example, in August 2023, the National Criminal Investigation Agency began investigating the director of the Slovak Secret Service, the previous director (appointed in 2020), and the director of the National Security Office (based on research for the EUPACK project).

Additionally, the caretaker government led by Eduard Heger was dismissed in May 2023 amid a corruption scandal involving Agriculture Minister Vlčan. Vlčan's firm received a €1.4 million subsidy from the Environment Ministry's competitive call. Despite other applications, the company won, and Vlčan refused to return the subsidy, opting to step down instead (see Benediktovičová, 2023).

Legislature

Sufficient
Legislative
Resources
Score: 7

The Slovak parliament (NR SR) and its members of parliament fully control their resources. NR SR has a separate chapter in the state budget, and the amount of allocated resources is annually determined by the Law on the State Budget. Members of parliament have access to a parliamentary library, and the office of the parliament provides an information service to all members of parliament. They also have a budget for assistants, who are expected to perform research and analysis.

The Parliamentary Institute is a specialized research and information center that, upon official request, delivers analyses related to laws negotiated in parliament, responds to members' of parliament information requests, drafts comparative analytical papers, and provides training for MPs. The parliament may commission expertise, such as from think tanks, to enhance evidence-based decision-making. Political parties also provide additional research and analytical support to their members of parliament (see Mackie, 2022). However, the evidence available through these channels and from other sources, like universities, is not systematically prepared and used for political decision-making in Slovakia (see, for example, Nemeč, 2022).

Effective
Legislative
Oversight
Score: 5

The National Assembly and parliamentary committees have the full ability to acquire documents from the government; they also have the exclusive right to summon ministers to committee meetings and hold them accountable. However, the ruling majority also holds the majority in these committees,

which weakens accountability. Generally, documents are provided in their entirety and delivered within a reasonable timeframe. Ministers and other officials invited to parliamentary committee meetings normally comply with invitations and provide answers to the questions posed.

There are a few instances where ministers did not appear, or members of parliament from the ruling coalition parties did not participate, rendering the committees unable to even open the meeting. Opposition members of parliament are often not satisfied with the responses (see for example Jabůrková, 2023). The competition between the government and the opposition hinders effective oversight.

Effective
Legislative
Investigations
Score: 2

The main right of opposition parties is to call meetings of parliamentary committees to control the executive, including individual ministers, but not to initiate proper “investigations.” Even if such a control procedure did take place, the likelihood of an unfavorable decision or report is minimal, as coalition members of parliament usually boycott such meetings. This has been the common practice of all recent Slovak governments – for example, Jabůrková (2023). Slovakia’s parliamentary committees are the weakest among EU countries (Zubek 2021).

Legislative
Capacity for
Guiding Policy
Score: 5

During the period under review, the National Council of the Slovak Republic has more parliamentary committees than ministries. This includes Mandate and Immunity Committees and at least three specialized committees overseeing intelligence services and the National Security Authority (NBÚ). Since the 1998 elections, the law has required proportional representation in these committees, with an informal practice that members of the opposition chair them. This practice has been respected since the 2023 elections.

The European Affairs Committee and the Committee for Human Rights and National Minorities have several ministerial counterparts, and the committees cover all ministerial task areas. Thus, allocating subject regions among committees does not hinder parliamentary oversight of ministries. The size of committees and the frequency with which they meet enable effective monitoring and discussion of ministerial activities.

Since the 2023 elections, the coalition has chaired 12 committees, and the opposition has chaired seven. The opposition currently chairs the following legislative committees:

Mandate and Immunity Committee

Committee public administration and regional development

Committee for human rights and national minorities

Special control committee to control the activities of the NBU

Special control committee to control SIS activities

The Special Control Committee oversees the activities of the Military Intelligence Service.

Committee to review the decisions of the NBU

This composition de facto means that only one “substantive” committee is chaired by an opposition member of parliament.

The likelihood that draft legislation will change due to committee deliberations is high, especially for “less politically sensitive” laws; however, exact data are unavailable.

Governing with Foresight

I. Coordination

Quality of Horizontal Coordination

Effective
Coordination
Mechanisms of
the GO/PMO
Score: 3

The European Semester 2022 country report on Slovakia is critical of horizontal coordination (European Commission, 2022: 9): “The low capacity of the public administration is a serious bottleneck for investments and reforms. The lack of human resource management, effective governance, and coordination across areas such as administration, justice, services to people and businesses, and research and innovation often results in delayed or only partial implementation of reforms. The limited capacity of the Government Office to evaluate policy proposals from line ministries and to ensure they are aligned with the government’s overall priorities is one of the reasons for such evaluation.”

The specialized body within the Government Office regularly involved in assessing government-sponsored draft bills is the Legislative Council of the Government of the Slovak Republic. The statute of this council defines its main responsibilities as follows:

- Coordinating and directing the activities of ministries and other central state bodies; reporting on the preparation of draft laws and government regulations.
- Discussing and assessing drafts of constitutional laws, laws, government regulations, proposals, legislative intentions, and parliamentary bills when the chairman of the Slovak National Council requests the government’s opinion on these proposals and international treaties, which take precedence over laws;
- Preparing opinions for government deliberations on draft constitutional laws, laws, and regulations of the government, as well as on legislative proposals and parliamentary bills if the chairman of the National Council of the Slovak Republic requests the government’s opinion on these

proposals, and by drafting international agreements that take precedence over law. However, since assessing draft laws and regulations is the main function of this body, its opportunity to coordinate government policies and influence policy proposal preparations is minimal.

Effective
Coordination
Mechanisms
within the
Ministerial
Bureaucracy
Score: 3

The only formal bodies visible through the online search responsible for interministerial coordination are the Councils of the Government. These councils (23 in total) have an advisory role, with most having sectoral responsibilities. A few exhibit cross-sectoral characteristics, such as the Council of Government of the Recovery and Resilience Plan. No specific digital technologies facilitate interministerial coordination. Work-related incentives are formally available but rarely used. RIA and other formal pre-consultation procedures do not provide sufficient incentives for identifying synergies and opportunities. The Government Office focuses on draft bills' legal and technical coherence but lacks the capacity and sectoral expertise to evaluate their policy content. The legislative process encourages negative coordination by providing comments on draft laws. The current situation is not evaluated by any academic or other official online text, but the relatively old evaluation by Staroňová (2007) remains valid. Staroňová (2007, 120) states, "Coordination takes place only after the legislation is developed during the formal review process in the adoption phase of legislation (the so-called 'commenting period') and follows a very formal sequencing as stipulated in the Legislative Rules.... In general, there is a strong sense that ministries are autonomous organizations."

Complementary
Informal
Coordination
Score: 2

There is no publicly available information about the organization or contents of any informal meetings among high-ranking government officials or party groups in Slovakia. There are informal Coalition Council meetings, but only leaders of coalition parties can participate. For example, the OLaNO-led government experienced several coordination crises – due to personal animosities between OLaNO and SaS leaders – that undermined official efforts to enhance formal interministerial coordination mechanisms through regular meetings of coalition party leaders.

Quality of Vertical Coordination

Effectively
Setting and
Monitoring
National
(Minimum)
Standards
Score: 3

Clearly defined nationwide minimum standards to guide the decentralized provision of public services in critical areas such as environmental services, social assistance, land use, waste management, public transport, and housing are poorly defined, especially concerning the independent functions of subnational governments. Moreover, compliance monitoring with these standards is often fragmented. If the service is the original responsibility of a

self-government, like waste management, the state does not set any standards related to its delivery (however, requirements defined by the EU directives automatically apply).

In healthcare, the Healthcare Surveillance Authority supervises the delivery of health services; however, standard diagnostic and treatment procedures are still not codified. Regional self-governments are responsible for the minimum network of primary care facilities, and central authorities monitor the achievement of the centrally defined minimum standard (Government decree from 12 January 2022).

The Ministry of Education approves applications from primary and secondary schools to join the “school network” (law 245/2008 Z. z. on education). However, the minimum network is not defined. The Ministry also issues the national curricula for primary and secondary education. Compliance with the national curricula is monitored by the State School Inspection.

Effective
Multilevel
Cooperation
Score: 5

Overall, Slovakia’s legislative framework requires subnational self-governments (regional and local) to actively discuss central government policy initiatives that directly affect them. Many formal and informal forums operate mostly on a hierarchical basis; however, it is difficult to establish any regular pattern regarding binding decisions or informal recommendations. Typically, the central government cooperates with self-governments and their organizations.

Previous Fico-led governments organized meetings in various locations across Slovakia to consult with respective self-governing bodies. However, the quality of these discussions and the relationship between the central state and self-governments significantly depend on the different administrations. During the 2022 Matovič and Heger governments, relations between the central state and representative organizations of self-governments (ZMOS – Association of all municipalities; SK8 – Association of Regional Self-Governments; and Únia miest Slovenska – Union of Cities) were visibly antagonistic.

For example, in September 2022, ZMOS organized protests in front of the Government Office, criticizing the government for its lack of action in dealing with inflation and the energy crisis (increasing costs). The self-government associations frequently criticized draft laws, but their comments were often ignored (see Správy RTVS, 30 June 2022). In 2023, under the caretaker government, the situation improved. With the start of the new Fico government, future relations remain uncertain.

II. Consensus-Building

Recourse to Scientific Knowledge

Harnessing
Scientific
Knowledge
Effectively
Score: 3

The institutional mechanisms in place are designed to ensure that the government can access the best available scientific expertise from the outset and on short notice for all key projects. However, the advisory system is unstable and operates on an ad hoc basis (Krajňák et al., 2020). Since the pandemic, there has been an increasing tendency to bypass formal institutions (Buštíková and Baboš 2020), except under the Ódor caretaker government. The Matovič and, to a large extent, the Heger governments did not fully utilize the formal institutional potential (see Malý and Nemeč, 2023).

The Heger government prepared the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, which was approved by the EU in the spring of 2022, partly using external expert capacities. The Ódor government established several expert commissions to produce its “White Papers.” For example, the “White Paper” titled “Bližšie k občanom” (Closer to Citizens), focusing on self-government reforms, was prepared in consultation with numerous experts and representative associations.

Former Prime Minister and later Minister of Finance Igor Matovič’s approach to experts can be characterized as antagonistic. For instance, he set up a temporary advisory body, the Economic Crisis Council; however, he demonstrated a near-zero capacity to regularly and systematically consult and collaborate with critical stakeholders during the COVID-19 crisis. Despite lacking expertise and executive experience, Matovič tried to behave dominantly, rejecting or publicly mocking many proposals from these advisory bodies. When most medical experts protested against blanket testing in October 2020, Matovič retaliated by publicly calling them “mazes” (Grędzińska et al., 2022: 37).

There is no established indicator measuring the frequency of criticism for disregarding scientific advice, but the media cover such cases on an ad hoc basis. Criticism usually results in the resignation of experts.

Involvement of Civil Society in Policy Development

Effective
Involvement of
Civil Society
Organizations
(Capital and
Labor)
Score: 6

The existing institutional mechanisms facilitate the active involvement of non-state actors in capital and labor policymaking and implementation. Legislation clearly defines the roles of key actors, including trade unions and employers' associations.

The Economic and Social Council (ESC) serves as a consultative and coordinating body for the government and social partners at the national level. Meetings are held regularly according to a government plan, and all information from these meetings is published on the government's website. The ESC and other institutional mechanisms, such as legislative rules, ensure a formal, inclusive process that allows participation from both private sector and labor representatives.

Non-state members of the ESC and other civil society organizations in this sector have a highly visible presence. Media coverage frequently highlights their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their involvement in the policymaking process and its outcomes, as required by media law.

As a consultative body, the ESC's recommendations are not mandatory for the government. For example, most comments from non-state members regarding the state budgets for 2022 and 2023 were not incorporated by the OĽANO-led governments. A notable aspect of the ESC's activities is its role in negotiating between employers' and employees' representatives over the minimum wage (as per Law 663/2007 on the minimum wage). While negotiations for the 2022 minimum wage were unsuccessful and the state set the rate, agreements were reached for the 2023 and 2024 minimum wage levels.

Effective
Involvement of
Civil Society
Organizations
(Social Welfare)
Score: 6

In addition to labor issues, the Economic and Social Council of the Slovak Republic addresses welfare matters. The Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family of the SR (Ministry of Labor) has several other councils that handle different welfare areas, such as senior citizens, families and differently abled individuals. Each council includes several members representing prominent CSOs in their respective regions. According to council statutes, CSOs should normally be consulted during the ex ante assessment of all draft laws in the area (legislative rules). Mechanisms allow social welfare CSOs to engage in expert commissions, public hearings, and performance monitoring. All official documents, including meeting minutes, voting records, and resolutions, are available on the Ministry of Labor's website. However, not all aspects of the consultation process are fully transparent.

The quality of consultations and the results depend on the specific conditions and actors involved. The OĽANO governments from 2020 to 2023 often made decisions independently of other stakeholders' positions due to their limited capacity for participative decision-making (see Malý and Nemeč, 2023). Trade unions and other primary CSOs in the welfare area are publicly visible, and the media report criticism regarding the quality of their participation in policymaking and policy implementation processes. Besides government councils, there are no visible formal mechanisms to organize disputes within and between major social welfare CSOs or to balance potentially diverse opinions in practice.

Effective
Involvement of
Civil Society
Organizations
(Environment)
Score: 4

Institutional mechanisms exist to ensure the active involvement of environmental CSOs from the initial stages of policymaking on issues central to this sector. Legislative rules and other regulations mandate the engagement of environmental CSOs in expert commissions, public hearings, and performance monitoring. In 2019, the Council for the Green Agreement was established to further this involvement. However, compared to the mechanisms in labor, capital, and welfare, the consultation process in the environmental sector has been more irregular, selective, and lacking in transparency during the period under review.

During this period, some environmental CSOs and their representatives received significant government support. For instance, Michal Šipoš, the chair of the parliamentary club of OĽANO (2020–2023), repeatedly declared that environmental protection was a major priority for the government. The OĽANO-nominated minister, Ján Budaj, was active and frequently consulted with major environmental CSOs. Many of these organizations, such as Clima Coalition, Via Iuris, and Friends of the Earth Slovakia, were involved in consultations on the Clima Law prepared by the Ministry in February 2023. However, the law was not approved by the government due to politicization before the early elections in September 2023.

The new Fico government, in power from autumn 2023, indicates at least partly antagonistic relations with environmental CSOs. These CSOs played a critical role in the massive and successful protests against the nomination of Rudolf Huliak to the position of minister of the environment (see, for example, Mäkká and Grečko, 2023).

A notable example of the politicized situation in environmental protection is the issue of the brown bear. Some relevant CSOs state that the number of brown bears in Slovakia is at the optimal level, between 1,000 and 1,500 bears. Other CSOs claim there are 3,000 to 4,000 brown bears in Slovakia,

exceeding the country's real territorial capacity. The State Environmental Protection body of the Ministry of Environment ordered a study to estimate the real number of brown bears. Two Czech universities conducted the study to ensure its accuracy, determining the number to be between 1,012 and 1,275. However, some environmental experts claim that the study was manipulated because only 2,200 biological samples were collected and analyzed, suggesting that with 4,000 samples, the results would be different (see Správy RTVS, 27 July 2023). This case study highlights the variability of opinions and the frequent manipulation of facts in the sector. Reflecting its positions, the OĽANO government did not issue any regular permits to shoot brown bears (only a few were shot based on specific licenses), while the Fico government plans to significantly reduce the number of brown bears.

Openness of Government

Open
Government
Score: 4

The Slovak government is an EU outlier in developing comprehensive data governance frameworks, building data management capacities across the public sector, and enabling its open government data portals to function as interactive feedback and communication tools rather than mere data repositories. According to the European Data Portal, Slovakia ranked as one of the least-performing EU countries for the indicator "Maturity of open data" (59.37% of the maximum score in 2022). The Government at a Glance 2019 report (OECD, 2019) ranked Slovakia as one of the worst-performing EU countries regarding the openness, usefulness, and reusability of government data. In some critical areas, like the size and scope of public service employment, publicly available data do not exist (Nemec, 2022).

The government does not proactively provide information and data that adequately meet the increasing demands of citizens in terms of information diversity and level of detail. It does not ensure the availability of comparable data across different regions and administrative levels. Some databases, such as the public procurement registry, can be considered user-friendly for humans and machines, including data formats, ease of access, and the provision of documentation or user guides.

III. Sensemaking

Preparedness

Capacity for
Strategic
Foresight and
Anticipatory
Innovation
Score: 6

Since 2016, Slovakia's central government units, known as analytical units, have been established within ministries to focus on strategic foresight and anticipatory innovation. These units independently explore ideas and scenarios, provide tools and guidance, coordinate and monitor activities, offer training and coaching, and organize events. The primary funding source for these policy units has been the EU-financed Efficient Public Administration operational program. The national Building and Development of Analytical Units at Selected Central State Administration Bodies project supported the creation of analytical units at 14 central administration bodies.

Before this project, the Institute of Financial Policy at the Ministry of Finance and the Institute of Health Policy at the Ministry of Health were established and widely recognized as effective public policy units. However, the Institute of Health Policy was transformed into the less effective Institute for Health Analyses in 2021 (see Čunderlíková, 2021).

The Institute of Financial Policy (IFP) has maintained its important cross-sectoral position during the 2022–2024 period. The IFP's mission is to provide reliable macroeconomic and fiscal analyses and forecasts to the Slovak government and the public. It also functions as the policy unit of the Finance Ministry. The IFP comprises several core departments:

The Macroeconomic Department: Analyzes and forecasts developments within the Slovak economy, such as GDP growth, inflation, and unemployment.

The Tax and Fiscal Department: Analyzes and forecasts public budget revenues (taxes and social insurance), fiscal policy, and public finance sustainability.

The Structural and Expenditure Policies Department: Evaluates government spending and structural policies, such as education, health, and the environment, from the Finance Ministry's perspective.

The Value for Money Department (UHP): Aims to enhance the value received by the public for their money. Its primary objectives are to increase the effectiveness of general government expenditures, improve public services, and consolidate public finance. This department reviews public spending and assesses planned public investment projects, particularly those costing above €40 million or €10 million in the IT sector.

Beyond the IFP, the Office of Government and other ministries generally do not promote policy experimentation through innovation labs, behavioral insights, or delivery teams using techniques such as prototyping, human-centered design, randomized controlled trials, project-based employment, or data analysis.

The government occasionally allocates financial and human resources to external bodies for establishing test beds for new ideas, but it often expects predetermined results (see Sedlačko and Staroňová, 2022).

Analytical Competence

Effective
Regulatory
Impact
Assessment
Score: 5

The standard formal mechanisms for evidence-informed policymaking are almost fully implemented in Slovakia. The Government at a Glance report (OECD, 2021) ranks Slovakia above the OECD average for the indicator “Regulatory Impact Assessment, Primary laws” and exactly at the OECD average level for the indicator “Systematic Adoption of Regulatory Impact Assessment.” The same is true for the set of indicators that evaluate the level of stakeholder engagement. However, the report does not show visible progress for 2017–2021.

Since the RIA approach was de facto introduced in Slovakia in 2001, no central unit has been established at the government’s core office. This situation did not change during the period under review. Gradually, consecutive governments have improved the methodology; however, its implementation has been rather erratic.

One key issue is that impact assessments apply only to measures initiated by the government on a regular basis (three rounds of reading in the parliamentary legislative procedure). Ministries, when drafting legislation, still often struggle with quantifying wider impacts and focus mainly on budgetary impacts and, to a lesser extent, impacts on the business environment. Since the COVID pandemic, the RIA process has been further limited by the increase in the fast-track legislative process.

The quality of the implementation of RIA and the transparency and openness of the legislative process significantly decreased during the COVID-19 crisis, and the situation did not return to “normal” even after the crisis (Staroňová, Lacková, and Sloboda, 2023). The quality of the legislative process is also confirmed by the Value for Money Unit report, published in October 2023 (Ministry of Finance, 2023). The report stresses that the system of ex ante evaluation is too formal and complex, without specific criteria depending on

the level and content of the submitted proposal. It particularly highlights that ex ante assessment is often omitted. According to this report, in 2021 and 2022, more than 35% of the laws adopted by the parliament were parliament-sponsored legislation, or had more than 50 amendments longer than six standard pages submitted during the legislative process in 2022. According to research conducted in 2019, only seven out of 165 laws were adopted by the non-standard procedure. In 2021, this proportion changed to 60 out of 123, and in 2022, although it slightly dropped, it remained insufficient at 21 out of 175.

Effective
Sustainability
Checks
Score: 5

Slovakia's national sustainability strategy, which sets national SDG priorities, was adopted in 2016. The government regularly evaluates progress. For example, the "Second Report on Results in Achieving National Priorities of the Agenda 2030" was approved by the government on June 22, 2022, and the "Second Voluntary National Review of the Slovak Republic – VNR" was published in 2021. The main coordinating body for implementing the 2030 Agenda in Slovakia is the Government Council of the Slovak Republic for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, founded in 2017. In addition to these official materials, the Slovak Statistical Office published a comprehensive report in March 2023 about the achievement of selected SDG targets (Fričová, 2023).

The VNR report states (141): "...when it comes to means of implementation, the strategy falls short of aligning the national budget with SDGs, and it also does not address some of the systemic transformations in governance structure which are necessary for more effective implementation of policies." The report notes, "in several cases, indicators are reminding us of considerable gaps and the need to speed up implementation." These gaps have been exacerbated by multiple crises, including climate change, COVID-19, and the war in Ukraine. "Uneven progress in the past eight years has demonstrated that, in addition to setting ambitious global goals and establishing worldwide monitoring mechanisms, a more intensive international coordination of implementation is also inevitable."

Systemic sustainability checks are not legally required as part of RIAs. However, the current scope of RIAs encompasses many sustainability elements. In practice, though, sustainability checks are neither prominent nor conducted systematically. The country's monitoring capacity – the availability of data, information, and statistical abilities – is only partly sufficient to measure progress. The VNR report states: "data continue to be a serious challenge" (140). Čepelová and Douša (2020) also emphasize the lack of a sound system of indicators and deficiencies in systematic monitoring for guiding public policies.

Effective Ex Post
Evaluation
Score: 3

Regularly analyzing the effectiveness and efficiency of existing policies through ex post evaluations is not required by law. The Government at a Glance 2019 data ranks Slovakia as one of the least-performing countries in terms of ex post evaluations (OECD, 2019). A specific positive aspect is the work of the Value for Money Unit at the Ministry of Finance. This unit regularly delivers and publishes public spending reviews. Additionally, according to the OECD evaluation (2021), Slovakia has the lowest score in ex post evaluation among EU countries that are also OECD members, ranking second to last behind Turkey.

In practice, ex post evaluations in Slovakia have primarily aimed at reducing the administrative and bureaucratic burden for companies, driven by some measures proposed by the Economy Ministry. Čaplanová (2022) argues that Slovakia has developed a methodology for evaluating the implementation of ex post evaluations, enabling it to move toward making ex post evaluation a regular part of creating the regulatory framework of public policies.

Sustainable Policymaking

I. Economic Sustainability

Circular Economy

Circular
Economy Policy
Efforts and
Commitment
Score: 5

The Slovak Republic lags behind both EU and global averages in circular economy (CE) practices, with only 5% of secondary materials reintroduced into the economy. Key weaknesses include low public and private research support and an inconsistent institutional framework for eco-innovations (FinReport, 2023).

The Ministry of Environment has identified CE as a priority in its Envirostrategy 2030, dedicating a chapter titled “A Greener Slovakia.” Initially, key stakeholders began responding to global developments and assessing progress toward CE.

The government follows indicators set by the European Commission, but the most recent evaluation report (2021) still relied on OECD indicators. According to the OECD (2022), current CE policies in Slovakia are relatively advanced in waste management. However, there remains a significant implementation gap.

The Circular Slovakia Initiative, which emphasizes the need for environmental action and a climate crisis response, has become an association of legal entities. One of its founding partners is the Ministry of the Environment, and it brings together private, public, and nonprofit sectors. The Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of the Environment are responsible for CE, with the main unit being the CE Section at the Ministry of Economy. However, a determined and well-coordinated approach to CE development is lacking, as governance and implementation of CE initiatives are relatively weak in Slovakia (Beckmann et al., 2021: 23).

A framework for transitioning to a CE exists within Envirostrategy 2030, outlining clear goals that include cooperation among ministries, the private sector, and municipalities. Key challenges for Slovakia include reusing, recycling, waste reduction, and fostering eco-innovations (Liebscherová & Tóthová, 2019). A national strategic document is under preparation. According to the OECD (2022), a national CE roadmap is essential to guide the direction of change and identify key areas for focus. Despite positive trends, future materials consumption in Slovakia will increase by more than 50% by 2050 compared to 2017 if no additional policy measures are introduced. The Slovak CE roadmap should emphasize using economic instruments to promote sustainable consumption and production, focusing on the construction sector and food and bio-waste value chains as areas with substantial potential for resource efficiency and circularity (OECD, 2022).

The Third National Action Plan, adopted in 2016, focuses on green public procurement. However, its effectiveness remains influenced by the “price” criterion. By 2030, green public procurement should constitute at least 70% of the total value of public procurement in Slovakia. Additionally, supermarkets will be prohibited from disposing of food waste (European Court of Auditors, 2023).

Viable Critical Infrastructure

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to a Resilient
Critical
Infrastructure
Score: 5

Law No. 45/2011 Coll. on Critical Infrastructure was enacted on February 8, 2011, to enhance the protection of vital infrastructure, particularly against the escalating threat of terrorist attacks. This legislation aligns with EU Council Directive 2008/114/EC, which pertains to identifying and marking European critical infrastructures and evaluating their protection needs. The new Minister of the Interior plans to draft a new law in this field and establish a new unit dedicated to managing critical infrastructure (Ministry of Interior 2023b).

Critical infrastructure protection encompasses a broad range of issues. Over several years, Slovakia has identified the necessary infrastructure and associated protective tasks. It is essential to understand that safeguarding critical infrastructure is not a one-time effort but a continuous process requiring sustained attention. Departments responsible for individual sectors or operators of critical infrastructure elements must focus continuously on protection, incorporating the latest methods, trends, and knowledge to enhance their practices. Slovakia is a member of the Critical Infrastructure Web Information Network (Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, 2023a).

The National Program for the Protection and Defense of Critical Infrastructure in the Slovak Republic has been established. According to the current law on critical infrastructure and its Annex No. 3, the main sectors and their subsectors under the jurisdiction of central authorities are:

Transport: Managed by the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic, including subsectors such as road, air, water, and rail transport.

Electronic Communications: Overseen by the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic, encompassing subsectors such as satellite communications, networks and services of fixed electronic communications, and mobile electronic communications.

Energy: Under the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, including subsectors like mining, electric power, gas, oil, and oil products.

Post: Managed by the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic, overseeing postal services, postal payments, and procurement activities.

Industry: Overseen by the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, including subsectors such as the pharmaceutical, metallurgical, and chemical industries.

Information and Communication Technologies: Under the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic for Investments and Informatization, focusing on information systems and networks.

Water and Atmosphere: Managed by the Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic, including subsectors such as meteorological services, water structures, and the provision of drinking water.

Healthcare: Under the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic.

Finance: Managed by the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic, including subsectors such as banking, financial markets, and public finance management systems (Santusová & Jakubík, 2020).

Infrastructure in the Slovak Republic is highly vulnerable and interconnected. The wide range of issues related to its protection reflects the critical importance of infrastructure for society in Slovakia (Santusová & Jakubík, 2020).

Decarbonized Energy System

To decarbonize the Slovak economy according to the WAM scenario (“with additional measures”), it will be necessary to reinvest €8 billion over the next decade, in addition to the WEM reference scenario (“with existing measures”). From 2031 to 2050, this amount will increase to €196 billion. By 2040, the average additional annual expenses will represent 1.8% of GDP; in the years

2020–2050, it will represent up to 4.2% per year. These costs include investments borne by households, the business sector, and the state. However, the Slovak Republic has adopted a higher decarbonization target than modeled in the WAM scenario (climate neutrality until 2050), which implies higher costs for decarbonization than stated in the Low-Carbon Development Strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2030 with a View to 2050. The strategy does not have exact data on costs and is broken down into sector-specific action plans: energy, industrial processes, transport, agriculture, land-use change and forestry, and waste sectors. Slovakia is lagging in its framework to support energy communities and enable consumers to actively participate in the energy transition (Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic, 2023).

The role and nature of bioenergy in heating and transport for achieving renewable energy sources and greenhouse gas reduction targets need to be clearly defined in relation to a realistic assessment of natural gas and electrification. Slovakia must provide long-term certainty with measurable commitments for businesses to make investments. Meeting the EU-level target of a 55% reduction, translating to approximately 52.5% for Slovakia, will require enabling legislation for renewables and energy efficiency, as well as stricter regulations for persistently problematic sectors like transport and agriculture (GLOBSEC, 2020).

Slovakia has high ambitions to transform its energy system. Further policy support is needed to help decarbonize the economy. The recovery and resilience plan envisions direct investments to increase installed renewables capacity by 120 MW, representing approximately 20% of its current wind and solar capacity. The plan includes key market design reforms and support for renewables to accelerate the uptake of clean energy. Specifically, the updated legal framework will facilitate new activities and access to the electricity market – energy communities, aggregators, self-consumers, and electricity storage – and increase the possibilities of connecting new renewable sources to the grid (European Commission, 2023).

Adaptive Labor Markets

Policies
Targeting an
Adaptive Labor
Market
Score: 5

Several reports have investigated the effectiveness of labor market policies and regulations in Slovakia. The most recent is the Value for Money Unit report, approved by the government in 2020 (Ministry of Finance, 2020: 30-32). The report states: “Slovakia’s spending on active labor market policies (ALMP) is relatively lower than in most EU countries, and the effectiveness and efficiency of certain tools are lower compared to experience from other EU

countries. Slovakia spends considerably less on demand-side (education and training) programs than the EU average of over 40%. Better targeting of ALMPs could increase the number of unemployed candidates successfully placed in the labor market by nearly one-half.”

A recent academic study (Pisár and Mertinková, 2022: 96) offers a similar perspective: “Slovakia is the country with the 6th lowest funding of policy instruments (0.22% of GDP for active instruments; 0.55% of GDP in total). The funding structure of the instruments is 40.14% for active instruments and 59.86% for passive instruments, which does not meet European guidelines. Slovakia should direct its public spending from employment incentives to education support, as the effectiveness of employment support tools is highly debatable.”

Policies and regulations do not sufficiently incentivize employers to anticipate sustainability challenges in the labor market and invest in upskilling or reskilling their workforce. This was especially true during the pre-pandemic period when the labor market was not stressed by a lack of vacancies, and many companies had problems finding the needed workforce. Worker mobility across firms, industries, regions, and countries is supported by government schemes and employers, with the mobility benefit provided under the employment services law 5/2004 being the most visible tool.

The period following the publication of this report coincided with the COVID-19 crisis. During this time, the government focused on short-term measures to mitigate the economic shocks caused by the pandemic. Direct state instruments to support employment, particularly the compensation for part of employees’ salaries and short-time work schemes, increased the probability of employment retention.

Policies
Targeting an
Inclusive Labor
Market
Score: 6

There is an ongoing discussion in Slovakia about how effectively policies and regulations combine accessible out-of-work benefits with active labor market programs to safeguard workers and improve job prospects. No final consensus has been reached. Few policies and regulations exist to incentivize people to enter employment or increase working hours; most target women with children (the National Action Plan for Employment of Women for the Years 2022–2030 was recently adopted). The proportion of young people not employed, educated, or trained is marginal and is addressed especially by the ongoing educational reform.

The legal system provides sufficient space for employers to help workers achieve a work-life balance. The main instrument is collective contracts signed between the employer and the representatives of employees. These contracts

define a concrete set of benefits, including the rules for remote work arrangements. The scope and scale of such benefits differ case by case.

A specific problem in Slovakia is the long-term unemployment of marginalized groups, which governmental policies insufficiently address. According to Kahanec et al. (2020), almost half of the Roma households in Slovakia declare themselves unemployed (the highest number in the region). Kahanec et al. (2020) state: “The most important ALMP program in relation to Roma integration appears to be public works schemes (Activation Work Programs), since almost half of the unemployed Roma participate in these programs. They focus on jobs in the public sector to help the unemployed maintain basic work-related skills and last between 6 to 18 months, during which a lump-sum benefit is received. Benefits from public works schemes are often the only available income of Roma. However, studies show that these programs do not provide relevant skills for the participants who are unable to escape the unemployment trap and find a job on the open labor market.”

Policies
Targeting Labor
Market Risks
Score: 8

Existing policies and regulations provide universal social protection for all workers. Health, social, and unemployment insurance are compulsory for all employed or self-employed individuals.

Labor Law 76/2021 Z. z. stipulates that the employer shall negotiate all relevant aspects of working conditions and sign the collective agreement with trade unions present in the firm or with the council of employers in firms where trade unions do not function. Only in firms where no representative body represents employees can the employer act autonomously.

Sustainable Taxation

Policies
Targeting
Adequate Tax
Revenue
Score: 5

The tax quota II (taxes and social contribution to GDP) continuously increases in Slovakia, reaching 42.4% by 2023. Due to fiscal challenges generated by the “poly-crisis,” the government seeks ways to increase public revenues, independent of potential disincentives of the tax system that may discourage individuals from seeking employment and companies from making investments. Many experts criticize the especially high levels of social contributions. According to the OECD (2023), the level of social security contributions is significantly higher than the EU average and is expected to grow as the new Fico government increases health insurance contributions by 1%.

The body responsible for tax collection is “Finančná správa” SR. This agency has sufficient administrative capacity to collect taxes, although the efficiency

of tax collection remains problematic. According to the Tax Justice Network's Corporate Tax Haven Index, Slovakia ranks 51, better than most other new EU members.

Thanks to several improvements within the tax collection system, the tax gap in Slovakia has gradually decreased but remains higher than the EU average (European Union, 2023). Administrative costs of taxation in Slovakia are higher than in most other developed countries (for older data, see Nemeč, Pompura, and Šagát, 2015). This point is emphasized by the European Semester Report 2022 (European Union, 2022: 8): "Further efforts simplifying taxes and improving compliance can increase public revenues and ensure fairness."

Policies
Targeting Tax
Equity
Score: 6

There are no recent academic studies on the horizontal and vertical equity of taxation in Slovakia. Experts opine that horizontal equity should not be a concern; however, the issue of vertical equity deserves attention. According to the European Semester Report 2022 (European Union, 2022: 8): "The tax burden on workers is high, particularly for low-income earners. This can discourage people from taking up work." Several experts have proposed a return to a progressive personal income tax rate to help revitalize Slovak public finance and increase the level of vertical tax equity. However, the Fico government did not include this change in its recent tax reform package (Bakoš, 2023).

Policies Aimed at
Minimizing
Compliance
Costs
Score: 4

The most recent academic study analyzing the compliance costs of Slovak taxation is the article by Nemeč, Čižmárik, and Šagát (2017). According to this study, the compliance costs of income taxation for the self-employed in 2011 were between 156.37% and 839.02%, and for firms, between 12.76% and 47.13%. The tax administration system has improved since this research, particularly through electronization. However, additional steps are necessary, as stressed by the European Semester Report 2022 (European Union, 2022). The tax rules remain complicated and insufficiently stable.

Babčák (2023) provides compelling data. According to his paper, during 2023, the income tax law was amended 25 times, with 15 of these changes not taking effect on January 1. The VAT tax law was amended eight times, and the tax code ten times. The author also emphasizes (Babčák, 2023: 16) that the tax legislation is "characterized by the extraordinary complexity of individual tax institutes, generating the associated excessive administration with which neither the tax subjects nor the financial administration have sufficient experience."

Policies Aimed at
Internalizing
Negative and
Positive
Externalities
Score: 3

The fact that the Slovak tax system is not an effective tool to internalize negative externalities is stressed by the 2022 European Semester Report (European Union, 2022: 8-9): “Fiscal policy and taxation are not yet sufficiently supporting the green transition. Addressing the pricing of CO2 emissions is essential, as they are generally too low given their environmental costs. Despite the economy’s energy intensity, environmental taxes were only 2.4% of GDP in 2020. Road taxes and vehicle registration fees could better reflect emission intensity by increasing them for polluting vehicles. Additionally, environmental charges related to waste management and air pollution could be adjusted accordingly to better promote resource efficiency.”

Taxes are not used to internalize positive externalities; this government role is realized through subsidies. Various subsidies exist for this purpose. However, the European Semester 2022 (European Union, 2022: 8) report states, “The use of economic incentives and disincentives lacks coherence and is not always in line with the polluter pays and the user pays principles.”

Sustainable Budgeting

Sustainable
Budgeting
Policies
Score: 4

Formally, both international and domestic fiscal frameworks and rules require policymakers to prevent a continuous increase in government debt, particularly under the Constitutional Law on Fiscal Responsibility 493/2011, given Slovakia’s membership in the Eurozone. Despite these fiscal responsibility mechanisms, the deterioration of Slovak public finances persisted during the 2020–2023 period. While objective factors such as the COVID-19 crisis, high inflation, and the war in Ukraine contributed to this decline, the lack of political responsibility also played a significant role (Ministry of Finance, 2023).

Following the problematic period of 2020–2021, the public deficit decreased to 2% of GDP in 2022, reducing the government debt level from 61% to 57.8% in the same year. However, the situation deteriorated again in 2023, as parliament approved populist policies following the collapse of the Heger government and the September 2023 elections. According to the EU, Slovak public finances in 2023 are considered the least sustainable within the EU. The caretaker Odor government, which had limited powers, prepared measures to revitalize Slovak public finances (Ministry of Finance, 2023). Some of these proposals were adopted by the new Fico government, which approved a list of consolidation measures and managed to pass the related Law 530/2023 in parliament. However, the EU Commission’s assessment indicates that the draft budgetary plans for 2024 are not fully in line with the Fiscal Council’s recommendations (European Commission, 2023).

Overall, the Commission views the draft budgetary plans of Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Spain, Ireland, Slovenia, and Lithuania as consistent with the Council's recommendations. Conversely, the plans from Austria, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Slovakia are considered less aligned.

The Constitutional Law on Fiscal Responsibility 493/2011 does not mandate accumulating financial reserves during economic expansions to enhance financial capacity during crises. The budgetary rules do not prioritize public investment or safeguard future investment opportunities. The governments of 2020–2023 did not engage in long-term planning or conduct systematic, forward-looking assessments of the budget's impact. However, such activities are systematically undertaken by the Council for Budgetary Responsibility, established based on the Constitutional Law on Fiscal Responsibility 493/2011.

The budgetary process in Slovakia is transparent. According to the IMF (2023: 1), "There are relatively strong institutions in place to support fiscal transparency in Slovakia. The evaluation in this report shows that most aspects of Slovakia's fiscal reporting, budgeting, and risk management are in line with the good or advanced practices of the IMF's Fiscal Transparency Code."

The national budget does not explicitly address the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and lacks target values for economic and social development expenditures. For instance, the Heger and Fico governments have overlooked long-term risks to public finances, such as population aging, a shortage of skilled labor, and the need for reforms in the pension, education, and healthcare systems.

Sustainability-oriented Research and Innovation

Research and
Innovation Policy
Score: 5

The Slovak government rhetorically commits to leveraging research and innovation as key drivers for transitioning to a sustainable economy and society. The Council of the Government for Science, Technology, and Innovations has been established. The most recent national research and innovation strategy (Výskumná a inovačná autorita, 2023) was prepared by the Slovak Research and Innovation Authority, an entity within the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic responsible for coordinating research and innovation. The preparation of this strategy involved over 200 experts from both the public and private sectors.

A roadmap for executing this strategy is in place, detailing clearly defined goals, time frames, and, in most cases, resources and performance indicators outlined in the annex to this strategy. However, the strategy and its annexes are not legally binding. The first part of the annex specifies sector-specific goals, which align well with the overall targets. The second part of the annex lists cross-sectoral goals (activities) designed to support research and innovation in Slovakia. For example, Activity 1.1.1.2 aims to develop a plan for consolidating the responsibilities of individual ministries, agencies, and institutions involved in research and innovation policy and support. The expected outcome of this activity is improved research and innovation development management, with participation anticipated from 11 ministries.

The government promotes an innovation-friendly environment through various measures. According to Pisár, Ďurčeková, and Křápek (2021), EU funding has been the primary source of public support for business innovation in Slovakia since 2006. National public investment in research and innovation remains among the lowest in the EU.

Specific measures are in place to enable startups to effectively translate scientific advancements into more resource-efficient products. The Conception for the Support of Startups exists but has not been updated for nearly a decade. Startups receive both financial and in-kind benefits.

Specialized bodies supporting startups include the Slovenská záručná a rozvojová banka and the Slovak Business Agency. There are no significant bureaucratic obstacles hindering the application process for support.

While raising venture capital for startups may pose challenges, private banks also offer specific programs providing loans to startups. For example, Slovenská sporiteľňa runs a special program, “Program pre začínajúcich podnikateľov a podnikateľky,” designed to support startups.

Stable Global Financial System

Global Financial
Policies
Score: 7

The most recent Mutual Evaluation Report (MER, Council of Europe, 2022) states that Slovakia has been working hard to combat money laundering. According to this report, Slovakia was found to be “Compliant” with five and “Nearly Compliant” with 22 of the FATF’s 40 recommendations. Slovakia received a “Substantially Effective” rating for one of the Effectiveness and Technical Compliance evaluations. The report also states that Slovakia has progressed in addressing the defined deficiencies. However, the fifth round MER identified several shortcomings, such as no timelines for the National

Risk Assessment (NRA) updates and no legal obligation to provide information about the results of the NRA.

Slovakia has intelligence and regulatory institutions dedicated to the prevention of money laundering. The Financial Intelligence Unit of the police forces (<https://www.minv.sk/?financna-policia>), established under Law 297/2008 on the protection against the legalization of illicit incomes, is responsible for overseeing compliance with the law. Other authorities, such as the National Bank of Slovakia and the Financial Directorate of the Slovak Republic, have specific functions within the scope of special regulations.

Law 297/2008 lists institutions that must comply with money laundering regulations and are obliged to report any suspicious transactions to the required authority. Examples of these obliged institutions include banks, stock exchanges, securities warehouses, management companies, tax and economic consultants, selected insurance companies, accountants, post offices, auditors, lawyers, and notaries. This system is relatively effective in preventing money laundering nationally, as the Council of Europe report confirms.

In spring 2023, disinformation circulated in Slovakia stating that the EU wanted to ban cash. As a result, the Sme Rodina party pushed for a constitutional amendment granting people the right to pay for goods and services in cash. The amendment was criticized by the European Central Bank (ECB) because it was not consulted, and the Court of Justice of the European Union has already ruled that cash payments cannot be refused.

II. Social Sustainability

Sustainable Education System

Policies
Targeting Quality
Education
Score: 4

The question of the extent to which policies and regulations in the education system hinder or facilitate high-quality education and training does not have any definite answer; however, important progress in some aspects can be reported for the 2022–2024 period.

Financial and human resources remain critical problems, independent of the circumstances of the poly-crisis period. Slovakia's educational expenditures are very low – only Romania and Bulgaria spend less among EU countries. Despite a significant increase over the last few years, teachers' salaries are still low, making the profession unattractive for graduates, particularly in the

capital, Bratislava, where the salary is insufficient to cover standard living costs. According to RTVS (2023), the average gross salary of a teacher in March 2023 was €1,206, while the average salary of a master's degree graduate was €1,782. Due to these factors – and the low social status of teachers – the recruitment of highly skilled educators is rather problematic. Many schools repeatedly announce vacancies and, in the interim, are forced to use non-qualified teachers to fill empty positions.

The results of Slovak pupils in PISA are systematically declining. According to 2022 results (OECD, 2023), performance in all three skills – reading, mathematics, and science – is below the OECD average. The state responded to the decreasing quality of primary education by implementing a large-scale educational reform, and in 2023, new national curricula were approved (Fico's government promised to continue with this reform).

According to most evaluations, existing policies and regulations ensure continuous monitoring of labor market demands. However, this is not followed by the adaptation of education and training programs to provide relevant skills. Consequently, there is a disparity between the supply of graduates and the actual demand in practice, both at the secondary and tertiary education levels. Reforming the university system is a specific goal of the Slovak Recovery and Resilience Plan. One of its objectives is to align proposed study programs more closely with the needs of the national economy.

Individuals have good access to lifelong learning opportunities. The system of post-education training is coordinated by the Ministry of Education, which accredits training programs. However, the efficiency of these programs is not systematically evaluated.

Education for sustainable development is insufficiently integrated into the curricula at all school levels.

Policies
Targeting
Equitable Access
to Education
Score: 4

Existing policies and regulations ensure equal access to pre-primary education. According to Law 209/2019, which amended the general schooling law (245/2008), all children under five – the last year before entering primary school – must attend kindergarten. Additionally, access to kindergarten from age three is guaranteed based on the amendment of the general schooling law from May 9, 2023 (this right will be implemented step-by-step until 2025). Access to early childhood development facilities (nurseries), however, is not guaranteed.

The education system ensures equitable access to all levels of education, regardless of socioeconomic background. According to the PISA 2022 report

(OECD, 2023), Slovakia is significantly below the OECD average for the indicator “socioeconomic fairness.” Students with low social status also have poor results. In April 2023, the European Union initiated investigations at the European Court of Justice into Slovakia for continuing discrimination against Roma children in primary education. According to the EU, Slovakia is the EU member state with the highest rate of segregation of Roma in education, and the existing plans to address this problem are insufficient.

The education system does not provide regular second-chance education opportunities for individuals with very low skill levels upon leaving education, except for retraining. There is also a lack of education programs “preparing teachers for a non-mainstream educational process with non-mainstream pupils” (Lukáč and Lukáčová 2024: 34).

Sustainable Institutions Supporting Basic Human Needs

Policies
Targeting Equal
Access to
Essential Services
and Basic Income
Support
Score: 4

The social welfare system in the Slovak Republic is comprised of four main components: healthcare, social insurance, state social support, and social assistance (Bendárik, 2021).

Healthcare benefits are provided under the supervision of the Ministry of Health. The mandatory health insurance system covers treatment costs in healthcare facilities and part of the cost of medicines. However, some citizens are uninsured for various reasons and receive only emergency care.

The social insurance system, which is overseen by the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family, is a public institution that provides cash benefits financed by contributions. This system operates on a pay-as-you-go basis and includes insurance for old age, disability, survivors, illness, maternity, unemployment, accidents at work, and occupational diseases.

State social support consists of cash benefits primarily for families and is managed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Payments are processed through the Office of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family. The Ministry of Finance handles the tax bonus, which is distributed via tax authorities and businesses.

Social assistance includes monetary and in-kind benefits provided by the state administration (mainly the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Health) and local government. These benefits target individuals in material need, those with reduced work capacity, and severely disabled persons. Social

assistance is organized through regional state administration offices, local self-government, and non-governmental organizations.

The basic social network includes healthcare, sickness benefits, maternity benefits, disability care, old age care, survivor benefits, occupational accident and disease insurance, family benefits, unemployment support, minimum income guarantees, long-term care, and social protection for self-employed persons. Relevant institutions offer comprehensive information about rights and access to essential services and basic income support on their websites. However, targeted and individual support is less developed. Slovak social policy is often reactive and bureaucratic, with nonprofit organizations filling existing gaps (Plaček et al., 2023).

Regarding access to cash transfers and benefits, Slovakia's social rental housing system is underdeveloped. Following privatization after 1989, only 2–3% of the housing stock consists of social rental houses (Zajacová, Zúbková, and Stehlíková, 2023). Although Law 222/2022 was introduced to support rental housing, the results are still awaited.

The housing situation of the Roma population is particularly concerning. According to the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, 58% of households in marginalized Roma communities live in inadequate housing, and 88% experience overcrowding. State efforts to improve the situation are limited, and successful nonprofit projects have yet to be incorporated into mainstream public initiatives (Murray Svidroňová et al., 2017).

Under Law 442/2002, those with housing typically have effective access to water and sanitation services. These services were originally the responsibility of municipalities, with cash or in-kind benefits available for households needing to connect to the network. The Regulatory Office for Network Industries (URSO) regulates water and sanitation fees. Roma in marginalized settlements often have limited access to these services, with varying levels of provision depending on municipal capacities and priorities.

Energy supply operates on a de-bundling principle, allowing consumers to choose from various suppliers. URSO regulated prices and was heavily subsidized by the state during the 2023–2024 period of energy price inflation.

Municipalities and self-governing regions provide public bus transport. Public rail transport operates on a de-bundling principle, though private carriers play a minimal role. Prices are regulated and subsidized in both cases.

Access to digital infrastructure and financial services depends on affordability and capacity. Although Slovakia is close to the EU average for internet access, it lags among socially vulnerable groups (European Commission, 2023). More than 90% of individuals aged 15 and above hold a bank account. However, there are no systematic alternative solutions for Roma citizens living in marginalized settlements without electricity.

Policies
Targeting Quality
of Essential
Services and
Basic Income
Support
Score: 4

The primary social cash benefits in Slovakia (Law 417/2013 on emergency support) as of January 1, 2023, were as follows:

A general emergency benefit (with a minimum level of €84.90 monthly for a single person and a maximum level of €97.50 for a family with more than four children).

Protective allowance (€86.80 monthly).

Activation allowance (€86.80 monthly).

Child allowance (€3.70 monthly).

Housing allowance (with a minimum level of €95.20 monthly for a single person and a maximum level of €91.90 for a family with more than four children).

At the same time, the “subsistence minimum” was defined as €68.88 monthly for the first adult in the family, €87.57 monthly for the second adult in the family, and €22.77 monthly for each child.

The level of these benefits is flexible and is adjusted to reflect the “subsistence minimum” and other factors. However, it is not possible to state that the basic income benefits in Slovakia enable the fulfillment of basic human needs, especially for families in Roma communities with both parents unemployed and many children in one family (Kahanec et al., 2020). Despite some existing subsidies, the policies and services do not ensure that the level of cash transfers, subsidies, earmarked financial support, or benefits in-kind meet basic human needs in housing, water and sanitation, energy, and public transport. Digital infrastructure and financial services are not subsidized, which means there is no free internet access.

Sustainable Health System

Policies
Targeting Health
System
Resilience
Score: 5

Slovakia’s health-related digital infrastructure is still under development. The existing system, E-zdravie, supports “transactions” and helps collect data. Several specialized bodies are responsible for gathering data to monitor emerging threats and accurately assess public health matters, such as the Institute for Health Analyses and the Institute for Research and Development at the Ministry of Health, the National Health Information Centre, and the

Public Health Authority of the Slovak Republic. These institutions collect significant amounts of data. However, the extent to which these data are utilized to prevent emerging threats and accurately assess public health matters remains problematic.

The primary limiting factors are the very limited resources of the Slovak health system (OECD, 2021) and the country's limited capacity for evidence-based policymaking, which became particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic (Grendzinska et al., 2022).

The limited resources prevent ensuring the availability of health products and services when and where they are needed, a situation exacerbated during the COVID-19 crisis. The OECD/European Observatory report (2021: 22) states: "The COVID-19 crisis and related containment measures limited access to services in 2020 and 2021. In early 2021, 23% of people reported forgoing care during the first 12 months of the pandemic, slightly more than the EU average of 21%." The situation slightly improved in 2022–2023, but waiting lists are still too long. The intention to set the maximum waiting time for treatment at one year was postponed to 2025.

The government is failing to implement effective measures to offset healthcare risks. The OECD/European Observatory report (2021: 22) states: "Slovakia has one of the highest mortality rates from preventable and treatable causes, yet spends the least on prevention in the EU. Substantial scope remains for improvement in effective public health policies to reduce avoidable hospitalizations and premature deaths."

Moreover, the reforms are not properly presented to stakeholders; therefore, reform attempts are hindered by regional and professional priorities, such as plans to reduce the number of hospitals or to push for specialization within hospitals. There are also problems with basic services and personnel. Hospitals struggle with a constant lack of medical doctors and nurses. In 2022, the trade union representative said that Slovak hospitals need 5,000 doctors but have only 3,700 (Folentová, 2022). The country also lacks 2,200 nurses, roughly one-fifth of the required number. In the summer of 2022, three thousand medical doctors – almost all of the current hospital staff – threatened to resign in protest of the poor state of health service. They demanded reforms and higher salaries.

Slovakia invests very few resources and little effort in preventive healthcare. It does not encourage changes toward a healthier lifestyle (OECD, 2021: 22): "Nearly half of all deaths in Slovakia are attributable to potentially preventable behavioral and environmental causes."

Waiting lists are not transparently published, but for some treatments, patients must wait more than a year. The level of unmet demand is above the OECD average (OECD, 2021a).

Fico's government postponed the health network reform prepared by the 2020 OLaNO-led government, which was part of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. This reform aimed to ensure that individuals receive appropriate care at the right place and time, particularly on the tertiary level. The strategy for implementing integrated care was already passed in 2014, but Robert Fico blocked its revised version prepared in 2019.

Limited resources restrict access to high-cost technologies and medications (OECD, 2021)).

Policies
Targeting
Equitable Access
To Healthcare
Score: 6

Policies and regulations largely ensure equitable access to healthcare in terms of timeliness, quality, and scope, regardless of socioeconomic status, age, gender, ethnicity, etc., as guaranteed by the constitution. However, fully equitable access to healthcare is not always possible. For example, people in rural communities do not have the same access time to emergency services as those close to main hospitals. Although there is a regulation stipulating a 15-minute response time for emergencies, in practice, this depends on the availability of emergency services.

Another practical limitation is the situation of the LGBTQ+ community. The 2023 government, at the request of the SNS party, abolished changes that simplified the process of changing gender (HNOnline, 21 November 2023).

Access to essential healthcare is relatively equally guaranteed across all regions of the country by the minimum network of healthcare facilities, as mandated by government decree 640/2008. Access to basic, non-urgent services does not significantly differ between the center and the periphery, thanks to this minimum network. However, the situation is slightly worsening in peripheral areas today due to a shortage of general practitioners. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find new GPs and nurses to replace those who have retired.

As in most countries, people living in the capital, Bratislava, with its seven academic hospitals and one new, well-equipped private hospital, and to a large extent those living in cities (such as Banská Bystrica and Košice, each with two academic hospitals, as well as Martin, Nitra, Trenčín, Prešov, Trnava, and Žilina), have better access to more specialized treatments.

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to Achieving
Gender Equality
Score: 3

Gender Equality

Formally, Slovakia has established institutions and strategies related to gender equality. The constitution guarantees equality among all individuals regarding dignity and rights and prohibits discrimination on various grounds, including sex (Article 12). Law 365/2004 on anti-discrimination further prohibits discrimination based on sex, religion or belief, race, nationality or ethnic group, disability, age, sexual orientation, marital or family status, color, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, lineage or other status, or for reporting a crime or other anti-social activity. The Department for Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities at the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and the Family is responsible for coordinating Slovakia's gender equality policy.

The National Strategy for Equality between Women and Men and Equal Opportunities in the Slovak Republic for 2021–2027 was developed by the Ministry of Labor and focuses on eight strategic areas. While the strategy outlines several concrete goals, it does not define progress indicators.

Despite these formal measures, the reality remains challenging due to the dominance of parties with very traditional understandings of gender values. Under pressure from the Slovak National Party (SNS), Slovakia withdrew its signature from the Istanbul Convention (IC) in 2019. In the same year, the SNS pushed for a parliamentary resolution that rejected any EU decisions and measures based on the IC after the European Union joined the convention. Consequently, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) stated that there is insufficient comparable data to assess violence against women in Slovakia.

According to the EIGE (2022), Slovakia underperforms in all evaluated indicators, including commitment to promoting gender equality, personnel resources of the national gender equality bodies, gender mainstreaming, and the production and dissemination of sex-disaggregated statistics. Slovakia's latest Gender Equality Index (2023) confirmed that the country particularly struggles with equality in the domain of power, where it has the lowest score, 31.1 points out of 100, ranking 22nd in the EU. In the 2023 elections, Progressive Slovakia was the first party to apply a voluntary quota for women (a zip system)

Strong Families

Family Policies
Score: 6

Maternity leave in Slovakia lasts for a maximum of 34 weeks, with six to eight weeks taken before birth and 26 to 28 weeks after (Dančíková, 2023). Following childbirth, it is mandatory to take at least 14 weeks of maternity leave, extending at least six weeks beyond the birth. Employment is guaranteed upon return, as stipulated by the labor code. The maternity benefit is 75% of average earnings from the previous calendar year, with a minimum of €413 and a maximum of €1,851 as of 2023. Paternity leave is also available.

Parental leave extends until the child reaches three years of age, with a parental leave benefit of €413 (as of 2023). Employment is guaranteed upon return from leave. With employer agreement, parental leave can be extended until the child turns five. Both parents may take parental leave simultaneously. Employees also have the right to take leave to care for a sick relative at home and to look after a child under 11 years (or 18 years if the child has long-term health problems), with insured parents receiving 55% of their previous daily earnings for 14 calendar days.

The system of nurseries for children below the age of three has insufficient capacity. According to Mikulíková (2023), there are 208 nurseries in Slovakia with the capacity to accommodate 3,800 children. This issue also affects kindergartens, leading many women to stay home with their small children if they can afford it.

Starting in 2025, parents will have the right to a kindergarten place for their child, with the last year of kindergarten becoming compulsory. Municipalities will be responsible for managing this demand and will receive subsidies from the state to build new capacities. However, many representatives complain that financial support is slow.

There are various forms of financial support, such as child benefits, supplements to child benefits, and tax base deductions, aimed at aiding families but not ensuring economic stability or basic financial security. These measures are insufficient to encourage individuals to have children, given their low levels (the standard child benefit is €60 per month). Additionally, the measures taken by the previous OĽaNO-led coalition (2020–2023) to support families, particularly through tax base deductions, did not offer specific support for Roma families. Roma children are at long-term risk of poverty and social exclusion, as Roma citizens face discrimination in the workplace.

In the EU SILC MRK survey (Markovič and Plachá, 2021), 87% of households in marginalized Roma communities (MRK) are at risk of poverty,

and 52% face serious material deprivation. These figures are alarming when compared to data on the overall population of Slovakia, where 11% are at risk of poverty and 6% face serious material deprivation (Kadlečíková, 2022).

Sustainable Pension System

Policies Aimed at
Old-Age Poverty
Prevention
Score: 5

The pension system partly ensures an old-age income for individuals in non-standard employment or with interrupted employment histories. Persons with less than 15 years of social pension insurance are not eligible for a pension, although insurance from other EU countries counts. Self-employed persons contribute to pension insurance, with a minimum level defined independently from the tax base. Disabled persons have a specific disability pension scheme. The state does not pay pension insurance for the unemployed, meaning that periods of unemployment do not count toward pension entitlement.

Women’s old-age poverty is a significant issue, driven by two core factors: a relatively low level of pension benefits in Slovakia and income gender inequality. Wage differences between men and women in Slovakia are higher than the European Union average, currently at 16.6%. This inequality in pay affects the entire society’s standard of living. Salary differences, despite women’s higher educational attainment, make women more at risk of poverty, especially seniors and widows. Gender inequality also extends to pension amounts, with Slovak women receiving, on average, 18% lower pensions than men.

The state pension benefit must provide an old-age income that enables citizens to meet their basic needs. The minimum pension of €376.50 in 2023 is guaranteed only to people with 30 or more years of pension insurance. The average pension was approximately €650 in 2023. Single persons with pensions below €500 may have significant problems covering their basic needs independently, even if they live in their own housing. Persons who have to pay for rental housing may need €700–€800 monthly to cover their basic needs (National Bank, 2023).

Policies
Targeting
Intergenerational
Equity
Score: 4

The pension system encourages individuals to work longer because the level of the individual pension increases with each additional year of employment. Receiving both wages and pensions simultaneously is allowed without restriction.

The state pension system (first pillar) is funded on the pay-as-you-go principle, with current workers funding pensioners. It does not guarantee an adequate old-age income for lower-income groups and some other social groups, like

the long-term unemployed. According to the European Semester (European Union, 2023: 4): “The aging population poses challenges to the long-term sustainability of public finances. Pension expenses are estimated to increase from 8.3% of GDP in 2019 to 13.4% in 2050, one of the largest increases in the EU.”

The minimum pension, available only for those with 30 years of pension insurance, was set at 145% of the subsistence minimum. Since October 2023, it has increased from €65.70 to €89.90 per month. Pensioners unable to secure basic living conditions can also apply for the “Assistance in Material Need” benefit.

Sustainable Inclusion of Migrants

Integration Policy
Score: 4

According to the Migrant Integration Policy Index (2020), migrants in Slovakia face numerous obstacles to integration. While they enjoy basic rights and security, they do not have equal opportunities. Slovakia scores significantly low in labor market mobility, political participation, and education. Family reunification is rated as “halfway favorable.” The process for immigrants to obtain citizenship is lengthy and complicated, requiring a minimum of eight years of continuous stay.

The Ministry of Interior is the main body responsible for migration. On September 8, 2021, the Slovak government approved the Migration Policy of the Slovak Republic Perspective 2025, which prioritizes “managed economic migration” and a strict fight against illegal migration. The policy includes general goals but lacks concrete targets and indicators. Slovakia has faced a lack of service infrastructure, negatively impacting the long-term integration of migrants. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, several new local and regional offices (e.g., Košice, Nitra, Trnava) were established through the initiative of regional self-governments and NGOs. The Migration Policy document suggests the need for a specialized nationwide coordination office, but no significant policy steps were taken until January 2024.

Anti-migrant attitudes are prevalent in Slovakia. According to a Eurobarometer survey, 83% of Slovak respondents have negative feelings toward people from outside the EU (EC 2018). These negative attitudes are reflected in the positions of political parties. A report by the Slovak Ombudsman on December 12, 2023, criticized the living conditions of immigrants in the refugee camp Sečovce (Kancelária VOP 2023).

Attitudes towards immigration from Ukraine have been more open and friendly due to cultural proximity. The government adopted several measures to support their stay and possible integration. However, Amnesty International criticized the insufficient protection of the rights of immigrants from Ukraine, especially women with children and the LGBTQ community (Amnesty International, 2023).

Effective Capacity-Building for Global Poverty Reduction

Management of
Development
Cooperation by
Partner Country
Score: 4

The coordinators of Slovak development aid are the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, the Directorate-General for Economic and Development Cooperation, and the Department for Development Assistance and Humanitarian Aid. The Coordinating Committee for Development Cooperation serves as the interministerial body for development cooperation. The Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation (SAIDC) implements Slovak development cooperation. The legal basis is Law 392/2015 on development cooperation. The “Medium-Term Strategy for Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic for 2019–2023” provides the main framework, aligning with the SDG goals but not clearly defining capacity-building targets for recipient countries or binding budget allocations.

Slovak development aid has a regional focus. During 2019–2023, it targeted three program countries – Kenya, Moldova, and Georgia – as well as four partner regions and one partner country. These include the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia); EU Eastern Partnership countries (Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine); Eastern Sub-Saharan Africa (Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea, South Sudan, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, Tanzania, Uganda); and the Middle East (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Afghanistan).

Official documents define poverty reduction measures in a very general way, perhaps due to the common view that domestic poverty should be addressed first using EU funds, undermining public support for development cooperation (Jankowski, 2018; Gažovic and Profant, 2015).

Slovak development aid is delivered in six sectors: education, healthcare, good governance and civil society building, food security and agriculture, infrastructure and sustainable use of natural resources, and support for creating a market environment.

Slovakia's official development aid for 2022 was as follows:

Bilateral ODA: €38,906,106.80

Multilateral ODA: €123,843,244.32

Total ODA: €162,755,840.89

ODA to GDP: 0.153%

The state budget situation is the primary determinant of the total amount of Slovak development aid. The financial plan outlined by the Medium-Term Strategy for Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic for 2019-2023 is only tentative.

The extent to which the Slovak government improves access to technology, scientific knowledge, essential medicines, vaccines, and healthcare services depends on the specific content of the calls for projects and the proposals submitted by the winners.

III. Environmental Sustainability

Effective Climate Action

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to Achieving
Climate
Neutrality by
2050
Score: 5

The Ministry of Environment of Slovakia, in close cooperation with other departments, will be responsible for managing, coordinating, and updating the Low-Carbon Development Strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2030 with a Low-Carbon Development Strategy of the Slovak Republic by 2030, with a view to 2050 iew to 2050 (referred to as NuS, 2020) every five years.

The Strategy (NuS, 2020) is broken down into sector-specific action plans, including energy, industrial processes, transport, agriculture, land use and land-use change, forestry, and waste management. For example, in 2016, the energy sector was the main contributor to total greenhouse gas emissions, accounting for 67.04% and 27,543.77 Gg CO₂ equivalent. Total fossil fuel consumption is decreasing due to higher energy efficiency, with biomass consumption in 2015 being 3.6 times higher than in 1990.

The primary sources of greenhouse gas emissions are metal production (52%), the mineral industry (23%), the chemical industry (16%), and substitutes for ozone-depleting substances (7%). Nitric acid production is the most significant source of N₂O emissions.

The level of transit traffic has increased. Total aggregate GHG emissions in the transport sector increased by 12% in 2017 compared to the 1990 base year, while road transport emissions increased by 58% compared to the base year. The long-term trend in this sector is rising emissions, representing a substantial risk to achieving climate neutrality.

In agriculture, the primary source of N₂O emissions is agricultural soil, accounting for 90%, followed by manure processing, which contributes 10% of total N₂O emissions. Enhancements in agricultural practices, crop production regeneration, and the use of mineral fertilizers have led to a slight increase in emissions in recent years.

Overall CO₂ removals in the land-use sector are expected to range from –6,642.32 (2017) to –4,206.56 (2035) Gg CO₂. Projections for 2017–2035 show a decreasing trend in CO₂ removals, mainly due to reductions in forest land, cropland, and grassland removals, and increased emissions from settlements and other land categories (NuS, 2020).

The Waste Management Program of the Slovak Republic for 2016–2020 revealed that most original targets were not achieved. Emission projections in the waste sector, according to WEM and WAM scenarios until 2040, are decreasing and depend on meeting practical targets (NuS, 2020).

Internal estimates by the Ministry of Finance, in cooperation with the Permanent Representation of the Slovak Republic to the EU, suggest that between 2027 and 2050, Slovakia will have €42 billion to €45 billion available for climate change measures from the EU budget alone (excluding other national and European funds). It remains questionable whether the government and public authorities are prepared to utilize such significant financial resources intended for decarbonization projects aligned with achieving climate neutrality by 2050 (NuS, 2020: 93).

The Strategy (NuS, 2020) proposes additional measures, titled NEUTRAL, aimed at moving closer to achieving climate neutrality. The impact of these NEUTRAL measures has not yet been modeled in the strategy. Addressing this modeling will be necessary for future updates, with an updated version set to be adopted no later than 2025, including an assessment of socioeconomic impacts, such as decreases in real income.

Energy efficiency action plans served as the primary tools for implementing energy efficiency measures until 2020. These plans evaluated existing measures and established new ones to achieve energy savings goals. After 2020, responsibility shifted to the integrated National Energy and Climate Plan

(NECP) and biennial progress reports in the energy sector (Dokupilová et al., 2022: 47).

Slovakia has a structured mechanism for managing, planning, monitoring, and evaluating energy efficiency, based on European and national strategic documents and legislative requirements. However, the independent Climate Council was not established because the Climate Law was not passed in 2023. The Ministry of Economy serves as the general coordinator of the energy efficiency agenda, focusing primarily on energy savings across all sectors of the national economy. An interdepartmental working group, including all relevant central state administration bodies, was formed for this purpose.

The Ministry of Economy evaluates applications for issuing certificates for constructing energy facilities to ensure compliance with the NECP. This assessment can only be conducted based on applications that meet all prescribed requirements according to the Act on Energy. The Ministry of the Interior determines whether the request aligns with the priorities of the energy policy and NECP (INEKP, 2019).

Effective Environmental Health Protection

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to Minimizing
Environmental
Health Risks
Score: 5

The Greener Slovakia – Strategy of the Environmental Policy of the Slovak Republic until 2030 paper (Envirostrategy 2019: 60) emphasizes that environmental problems increasingly impact the economy, employment, health, and population comfort. The document outlines general goals and specific ambitions, serving as a strategic guide with defined indicators. However, implementation and monitoring have been slow. For example, it does not consider international statistics on unsafe drinking water, instead comparing Slovakia to V4 countries and the EU average.

By 2030, the municipal waste recycling rate, including preparation for re-use, is targeted to increase to 60%, with the landfill rate reduced to less than 25% by 2035.

In climate change mitigation, Slovakia aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the emissions trading sectors by 43% and outside these sectors by at least 20%, compared to 2005. The country focuses on clean air, water, and soil, as air pollution causes more than 5,000 premature deaths annually in Slovakia.

Municipalities can introduce measures such as low-emission zones and transport restrictions (§ 2, § 9 of the Air Act), and a smog warning system (§

13 of the Air Act) to warn the population when PM10 particle thresholds are exceeded (NPZE, 2020: 120).

The Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency (SIEA) coordinates efforts aimed at green housing infrastructure, including heating systems (Green Households, 2023). This initiative lacks financial support without time and funding limits, with financial support often reserved within minutes.

Less than two-thirds of the Slovak population is connected to public sewers, despite the public sewer system being in place. Voluntary disconnections and a long-term decline in total water consumption, which may indicate positive environmental trends, could also negatively impact public health and hygiene. Household water consumption has fallen below the World Health Organization's recommended sanitary minimum in recent years. This decline could be due to increased water prices, improved water-use technologies, or higher use of individual wells not recorded in official statistics. All public water supply networks comply with hygienic limits and currently supply 88% of the population (ASA QM, 2019).

Effective Ecosystem and Biodiversity Preservation

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to Preserving
Ecosystems and
Protecting
Biodiversity
Score: 6

Within the Slovak Envirostrategy 2030, biodiversity protection will be enhanced, and measures will be implemented to prevent the degradation of species and habitats (Envirostrategy, 2019: 60). Protected areas and degrees of protection will be reviewed and simplified by 2024 (Greener Slovakia, 2020: 46).

The Slovak government has prepared the Concept of Nature Protection until 2030, which includes measurable indicators. The main goals of this concept are:

- Improving efficiency in the protection and management of protected areas,
- Preventing the deterioration of species and habitats, and restoring at least 15% of degraded ecosystems by 2030,
- Creating legal, institutional, and management conditions for landscape protection, ensuring stability and connectivity in the landscape, resilience of the natural environment to climate change, and the sustainable use of natural resources,
- Enhancing the effectiveness of nature and landscape protection by supporting research, education, communication, and data systems in the fields of nature protection, biodiversity, and landscape. This includes ensuring support for the active involvement of relevant groups in the protection and management of

protected areas. The financial aspect of this plan involves a mix of EU funds, the Slovak budget, and stakeholder participation. Partial goals are planned for fulfillment by 2025 or 2030 (CNP, 2019). However, following the change of government, the concept (CNP, 2019) has been politicized, particularly the national park reform prepared by the previous OĽaNO-led coalition aimed at sustainable tourism development.

Zoning plans for national parks are particularly contentious. For example, Environment Minister Tomáš Taraba (SNS) criticized the zoning plans, stating that they deprived national parks of income, leading to an annual loss of €24 million (Pravda, 2023). He also rejected the plan to create Podunajsko National Park in southwest Slovakia near Bratislava and along the Danube River, arguing that it took over the most fertile agricultural land.

Effective Contributions to Global Environmental Protection

Policy Efforts
and Commitment
to a Global
Environmental
Policy
Score: 6

Slovakia generally joins the majority of multilateral international agreements. In 2018, Slovakia voluntarily participated in the UN's High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, resulting in a new strategy for environmental policy (Greener Slovakia, 2019). This document sets measurable goals to be met by 2030.

The Low-Carbon Development Strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2030 with a View to 2050 (NUS), was approved by the government on March 5, 2020. The NUS represents Slovakia's response to its obligations in the fight against climate change due to its membership in the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN). This strategy aims to identify existing measures and propose new ones within Slovakia to achieve climate neutrality by 2050.

The plan also includes national reduction targets until 2030 based on European targets, although some of these are set at lower levels. These goals are detailed in Slovakia's Integrated National Energy Plan until 2030 (NECP). For Slovakia, it is clear that unless additional measures are taken beyond those used in the WEM and WAM models and scenarios, the country will have to address an emissions gap projected to be 7–14 Mt CO₂eq. The monitoring period for this plan is every five years (NUS, 2020: 93).

Slovakia participates in various regional international initiatives, such as the Danube Strategy and the Carpathian Convention, and collaborates with Danube River countries to develop flood management plans.

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