



Migration Profile

SLOVAKIA

A. Executive Summary

The Republic of Slovakia is in Central Europe and presents a mountainous landscape characterised by the Western Carpathian Mountains and some valleys and lowland areas in the southⁱ. It became independent on January 1, 1993, after its dissolution from Czechoslovakiaⁱⁱ. It has been a member of the European Union since 2004ⁱⁱⁱ.

The most important sectors of its economy in 2020 were industry, wholesale and retail trade, transport, accommodation and food services, public administration, defence, education, human health, and social work activities^{iv}. Intra-EU trade accounts for 79% of Slovakia's exports, mainly to Germany, Czechia, and Poland, while outside the EU the principal export countries are the United States, United Kingdom and China^v. Regarding imports, 80% come from EU countries (Germany 20%, Czechia 18%, and Austria 9%), while 4% come from South Korea and China and 3% from Russia, outside the EU^{vi}.

In 2021, the country experienced a sharp increase in asylum seekers due to the thousands of Ukrainians fleeing war^{vii}. Slovakia activated the status for temporary asylum and has worked actively on their reception^{viii}. Besides Ukrainians, the main nationalities among refugees are Afghans and Iraqis^{ix}.

Regarding immigration, the accession of the Slovak Republic to the European Union and the Schengen Area brought significant changes^x. It increased migration flow from the member states and decreased it from third countries^{xi}. Thus, the primary countries of origin in 2019 were the Czech Republic, Hungary, Ukraine, Romania, and the United Kingdom^{xii}. As for Slovaks emigrating abroad, the main destination countries were the Czech Republic, Germany, the United Kingdom, Austria, and Switzerland^{xiii}.

In 2021, Slovakia's GDP amounted to US\$114,870,706,410^{xiv}, experiencing an annual growth rate of 3% from the previous year due to a decrease of -4.4% in 2020^{xv}. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) net inflows in 2020 represented -0.3% of the country's GDP^{xvi}. Furthermore, the inflation rate in 2021 was 3.1% of its GDP compared to 1.9% the previous year^{xvii}.

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

The Republic of Slovakia is located in Central Europe, bordered by Poland to the north, Ukraine to the east, Hungary to the south, Austria to the southwest, and the Czech Republic to the northwest^{xviii}. It is 49,030 sq. kilometres^{xix} and has 5,447,247 inhabitants^{xx}. The country is subdivided into eight regions^{xxi}.

Its official language is Slovak, although other minority ethnic languages are spoken in the country, such as Hungarian, Rusyn, Czech, Polish, and Ukrainian Roma^{xxii}. Regarding ethnic distribution, most of the residents in the 2011 census were Slovaks (80.7%), with Hungarians representing the second largest group (8.5%), followed by the Roma (2%), Czechs (0.6%), and Rusyns (0.6%)^{xxiii}.

The predominant religion is Christianity (59.8% of the population in 2021 adhered to Catholicism and 9% to Protestantism)^{xxiv}. In this same year, 1.2% were followers of other religions, including Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism. 23.8% were unaffiliated and 6.5% undeclared^{xxv}.

II. International and Internal Migrants

Slovakia registered 167,519 foreigners with a residence permit in 2021 (3.07% of the total population).^{xxvi} The main countries of origin for that year were Austria, Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Ukraine (totaling 52.1% of the immigrant population), followed by Romania, Bulgaria, Russia and Serbia (18.8%).^{xxvii} The immigrants are more concentrated in the 30-34-year age range^{xxviii}. Until the previous year, male immigration (51.07%) was higher than female immigration (48.92%)^{xxix}. The immigrant population is characterised by a higher secondary education level. The number of immigrants with university studies is higher than the native population (26.3% compared to 17.9%)^{xxx}. The main sectors in which they are employed are the manufacturing industry, construction, agriculture and forestry, small business, and retail trade, which are characterised by a high labour demand^{xxxi}.

Slovakia has not always been characterised as a migrant-receiving country^{xxxii}. It is a culturally homogeneous country, which was not affected by increased migration during the 20th century^{xxxiii}. Until recently, Slovakia was almost exclusively a country of emigrants^{xxxiv}. However, the accession of the Slovak Republic to the European Union (EU) and the Schengen Area brought about significant changes. It divided migrants into two categories: EU citizens who have free access to the labour market and a category of migrants who are so-called “third-country nationals” from outside the EU, who need residence and work permits^{xxxv}. Family reunification and marriage are among the main factors leading to immigration to Slovakia^{xxxvi}. Likewise, there are factors related to business, education, and labour opportunities^{xxxvii}.

With regard to immigrants from non-EU third countries, they face more difficulties^{xxxviii}. In this sense, the most vulnerable groups are Ukrainians and people from Asian countries^{xxxix}. In 2021, the Slovak government approved a new migration policy focused on integrating migrants^{xl}. The strategy aimed to ensure coexistence between the Slovak population and

migrants and further strengthen and expand opportunities for funding migrant integration measures. This would include providing the availability of high-quality education for migrant children and the continued provision of Slovak language classes for migrants as well as access to decent housing and social and cultural support^{xli}.

Likewise, since the “refugee crisis”, Slovakia has implemented very restrictive immigration policies, even though the country has not faced the same migratory pressures as its European neighbours^{xlii}. Due to strict eligibility criteria, alternatives to detention are rarely offered^{xliii}. Undocumented migrants are detained in facilities^{xliv}. Moreover, the country's legislation enshrines the presumption of majority age in cases of age disputes, resulting in some unaccompanied children being held with unrelated adults while awaiting the results of bone tests^{xlv}. In 2021, Slovakia recorded 1,559 irregular crossings and 210 irregular residencies^{xlvi}.

Finally, internal migratory flows within Slovakia remain low^{xlvii}. Growing cost-of-living differences and the limited rental market prevent internal immigration of low-skilled persons. In 2019, about 105,000 persons (1.8% of the population) changed residence in the country^{xlviii}.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

According to the Slovak Ministry of the Interior, in the first half of 2022 623,388 people were registered legally crossing its borders outwards, out of which only 37,9% were Slovaks or EU citizens.^{xlix} Female emigration in 2019 (53.55%) was higher than that of males (46.44%),¹ and the main destination countries were the Czech Republic (27.79%), Germany (14.25%), the United Kingdom (13.51%), Austria (9.01%), and Switzerland (5.95%)^{li}. Slovak emigration is characterised by its youth (under 35 years old), the possession of a secondary education diploma, and employment in construction, industry, and health and social services^{lii}.

Currently, Slovakia is among countries with a relatively high rate of labour emigration within the Central European area and an outflow of university students, especially to the Czech Republic (Kureková, 2018)^{liii}. Labour emigration remains a vital phenomenon both from an economic and social point of view^{liv}.

The factors explaining this migration flow are related to the process of economic transition and the degree of mismatches and imbalances in the labour market^{lv}. As a result of the financial restructuring and the disappearance of several industries, Slovakia has faced high long-term unemployment^{lvi}. In addition, regional inequalities deepened as Slovakia failed to revitalise the sector and attract foreign investment more evenly to different parts of the country^{lvii}. Also, social spending declined, leading to a tightening of conditions for unemployment benefits and social welfare^{lviii}. Other factors influencing emigration are the increase in education^{lix} for which the Slovak labour structure was not prepared, as it has neither the capacity to retain talent nor to attract it, as well as unattractive working conditions and wages^{lx}.

Likewise, Slovakia's accession to the European Union and the Schengen Area accelerated migration movements in both directions but especially encouraged further out-migration^{lxi}. As a result, Slovakia faces a weakening of its labour market, educational potential, reproductive- and productive-age population and further ageing, as well as some social

challenges which are increased by the lack of quality reintegration programmes to motivate the return of Slovak citizens^{lxii lxiii lxiv}.

IV. Forced Migrants (Internally Displaced Persons, Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Climate Displaced People)

The United Nations put the estimated number of refugees in 2020 at 1,006^{lxv}. Among them, the main nationalities were Afghan (29.62%) and Iraqi (21.27%), although there were others from Serbia and Kosovo (4.57%), the Russian Federation (3.77%), and Romania (3.67%)^{lxvi}. In 2021, there were 370 asylum seekers registered by Slovakian authorities, of which 29 were granted asylum^{lxvii}. There were 90 adverse decisions, and 212 proceedings were stopped^{lxviii}. Most of them also came from Afghanistan and Iraq^{lxix}.

However, since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, there has been a considerable increase in Ukrainian asylum seekers arriving in the country. Slovakia has worked actively to help Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers: it was the first country in the European Union to activate the status for temporary asylum^{lxx}. From the 24 March to 24 August 2022, there were 729,688 new arrivals to the country^{lxxi}. Of those, 144,706 were men, 388,363 were women, and 196,629 were children^{lxxii}. There is a significant concern with children since more than 35,000 temporary refugees are in the country. Authorities increased the capacity of care facilities for children under three years old in 2021^{lxxiii}.

Asylum seekers from Ukraine arrive at the border exhausted after two or three days of travelling, by car or on foot, carrying bags and dragging suitcases^{lxxiv}. There, they pass through three main border crossings into Slovakia: Ubla, Vyšné Nemecké and Veľké Slemence^{lxxv}. Afterwards, asylum seekers are directed to government-owned shelters in Bratislava, Trnava, Nitra, Zilina, Prešov, and Košice, among others^{lxxvi}. Transport to these centres is provided by the government by way of free suburban transport or taxis^{lxxvii}. Regarding temporary shelters, between 1 March and 23 August, there were 90,911 registered^{lxxviii}.

According to the legal status of temporary asylum, refugees from Ukraine have the same access to the labour market as Slovak citizens (except for public employee positions). Moreover, under the Act on Employment Services, the employer may hire refugees without an employment permit^{lxxix}. More than 10,000 Ukrainians work for the government as assembly workers, auxiliary workers in mining, construction and production, cleaners, and helpers in restaurants, or operators of stationary machines and equipment^{lxxx}. Most of them are employed in Bratislava and Nitra, followed by Galanta and Trenčín, which are the areas with the most significant labour market demand^{lxxxi}.

The UNHCR has identified integration among refugee communities as an issue. An example is the difficulty for those with Russian nationality to apply for Slovak citizenship due to a treaty that prohibits double nationality^{lxxxii}. Although UNHCR aids refugees in the country, there is still no comprehensive education programme in Slovakia, and foreign children are educated according to the standard curriculum for Slovak speakers. Labour market discrimination is ingrained both in administrative procedures and in interpersonal relationships^{lxxxiii}. Furthermore, there is an adverse, somewhat negative attitude toward refugees in Slovak society^{lxxxiv}.

Regarding stateless people, there were 1,532 in 2020^{lxxxv}. Although the country is a party to both UN Stateless Conventions^{lxxxvi lxxxvii}, there are no special procedures for determining statelessness in Slovakia^{lxxxviii}. This matter is usually dealt with throughout the asylum procedure, application for residence, or Slovak citizenship^{lxxxix}. There is no available data at the International Displacement Monitoring Centre regarding Internally Displaced Persons in Slovakia due to climate or violence factors^{xc}.

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

The Slovak Republic is tier 2 in the U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report because although it does not fully meet the minimum standards for eliminating trafficking, it is making significant efforts. Slovak men and women are exploited in labour trafficking in agriculture, manufacturing, and construction in Western Europe. Women are used in sex trafficking in Austria, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, and the UK. Likewise, traffickers exploit victims within Slovakia, where undocumented migrant workers, refugees, migrants from the Balkans and South-East Asia, and Roma communities remain especially vulnerable^{xc}.

In 2021, Slovakia identified 34 victims. The other eight victims were self-identified and recognised by the victim-care service provider. Twenty-three were females (10 girls) and 19 males (two boys). Fifteen were identified as sex trafficking victims, 17 as labour trafficking victims, and two as both. Regarding nationality, 32 were Slovak nationals, and two Vietnamese were transiting from Slovakia to Germany. Likewise, the country initiated 20 new case investigations in 2021. Prosecutors indicted 21 alleged traffickers in 2021, and courts convicted them, all Slovak nationals^{xcii}.

Police and prosecutors cooperated in international investigations with Europol, Eurojust, Frontex, the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands, which resulted in the identification of eight Slovak victims and the conviction of five Slovak traffickers in the UK. It also provided comprehensive anti-trafficking training to civil society stakeholders and government officials. It carried out awareness campaigns and distributed leaflets at its eastern border for refugees fleeing war in Ukraine. In 2021, police reported finding forced labour indicators and conducting inspections of 55 businesses and 340 individuals without identifying any trafficking victims^{xciii}.

In 2021, the government financially backed an NGO that operated a national victim assistance programme, voluntary repatriation, and a national trafficking hotline. It further provided Slovak and foreign victims with shelter, financial support, repatriation to Slovakia, health care, psycho-social support, legal assistance, interpretation, and job training. However, of the 42 victims identified, only 11 joined the government-funded victim care program^{xciv}.

Despite the efforts, Slovakia still confronts serious concerns. Lenient sentencing remains a problem since approximately 69% of the convictions over the past eight years resulted in fully suspended sentences or just a fine. Racial bias, especially in cases of Romani communities, also contributed to more lenient sentences. The trial process remained long and was not adapted to avoid re-traumatization of victims, thus discouraging victims from filing civil suits. Restitution from criminal cases, compensation, and damages from civil suits were available to trafficking victims, but courts rarely awarded them^{xcv}.

There is an essential gap in victim identification, especially for asylum seekers and undocumented migrants. They lack proper access to health, accommodation, and counselling assistance. Most of the victims did not receive pre-trial legal advice and weren't aware of their rights. Furthermore, they were accommodated in situations of domestic violence or homeless shelters due to the country's lack of specialised cover for trafficking victims^{xcvi}.

VI. National Legal Framework

The primary law governing migration in Slovakia is Act No. 404/2011 Coll. on the Residence of Foreigners, which regulates the entry and stay of foreigners, their basic rights and obligations, or expulsion. It grants access to health, food, hygiene, education, accommodation, and the labour market to migrants in Slovakia^{xcvii}. Furthermore, Act No. 5/2004 on Employment Services^{xcviii} dictates the employment of foreigners and Act No. 480/2002 Coll. on Asylum^{xcix} establishes asylum proceedings^c. The latter was reformed on the 1 June 2022, integrating asylum seekers who have been granted supplementary protection and harmonising the Slovak legal order with the EU^{ci}.

In 2021, the country adopted the "Migration Policy of the Slovak Republic: Perspective until the Year 2025"^{cii}. Its main goal is well-managed labour migration to ensure the integration of foreigners, security for nationals and migrants, and good long-term coexistence^{ciii}. Regarding human trafficking, section 179 of the Criminal Code criminalises sex trafficking and labour trafficking, prescribing penalties of four to 10 years imprisonment^{civ}.

On the international scope, Slovakia succeeded in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol in 1993^{cv}. In 1993, it acceded to the 1969 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination^{cvii}. Moreover, in 2000 it acceded to the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons^{cviii} and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness^{cix}. It also ratified the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance in 2014^{cx}.

Moreover, in 2004 Slovakia ratified the Palermo Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially Women and Children^{cx}, and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air^{cxii}.

VII. Main Actors

The State

The Ministry of the Interior (MOI), through the Bureau of Border and Foreign Police of the Police Force Presidium, controls borders, visa practice, the entry, exit, residence and return of foreigners, and counters human trafficking and smuggling. It also analyses travel documents and risks^{cxiii}. Likewise, the Migration Office is responsible for granting asylum and providing supplementary protection to foreigners within the MOI. It ensures primary care for asylum seekers, provides facilities, and coordinates the integration of foreigners in the country^{cxiv cxv}.

The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family provides essential financial assistance to asylum seekers who have been granted temporary asylum^{cxvi}, coordinates labour migration and integration policy, and oversees the care of unaccompanied minors^{cxvii}. Furthermore, the

Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs issues visas and accepts applications for residence and citizenship in Slovakia^{cxviii}.

In the field of human trafficking, the State Secretary of the MOI is the national coordinator^{cxix}. There is an Expert Group composed of government ministries and NGOs that, within the framework of the MOI's Crime Prevention Department, works as the national anti-trafficking coordination committee. It organises policy documents, training and awareness-raising campaigns and implements anti-trafficking programs within civil society^{cx}.

International Organisations

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) provides counselling on migration, implements the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Program, and coordinates the European Migration Network in Slovakia^{cxxi}. It assists irregular migrants and unsuccessful asylum applicants in their countries of origin, provides practical integration assistance, including legal and labour counselling, provides language education, raises awareness about migrants in Slovakia, and promotes intercultural activities between communities and Slovaks^{cxii}.

UNHCR manages asylum procedures in Slovakia^{cxiii}. It conducts border monitoring to ensure asylum seekers access to fair and efficient asylum procedures, trains Slovak border guards, and provides legal advice to asylum seekers^{cxiv}. Since 2009, the Emergency Transit Centre, in eastern Slovakia, has offered temporary shelter for refugees on their way to resettlement countries and provides them with clothes, beds, food, strollers and education programmes^{cxv}. UNICEF offers financial assistance to Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers with disabilities who depend on another person's help^{cxvi}. Moreover, in 2022 UNICEF signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the MOI of the Slovak Republic on the protection and integration of refugee children and families in education, social and health services, human trafficking, exploitation, and sexual abuse^{cxvii}.

The European Union also plays a crucial role in Slovakia's migration and refugee management due to its membership in the Schengen Zone and European policies^{cxviii}. The European Migration Network prepares policy reports on migration and asylum, carries out studies, manages the ad-hoc queries mechanism, and deals with cooperation among principal actors in the field^{cxix}. Furthermore, the Slovak Red Cross provides information, hot drinks, food, clothing, and blankets to Ukrainians arriving at the Slovak border. They also help people carry their belongings to the border crossing or lend wheelchairs to those in need^{cxx}.

NGOs and Other Organisations

People in Need must be highlighted among the leading NGOs working in Slovakia ^{cxxi}. This organisation provides education and job counselling, teaches financial literacy, and helps people build decent housing^{cxii}. Its work is divided into three main areas: Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, Social Inclusion, and Global Education. Currently, its activity is focused on assistance on the border between Ukraine and Slovakia, and they are ready to help Ukrainians who find their temporary home in Slovakia^{cxiii}.

The Slovak Humanitarian Council is a voluntary centre that currently unites 116 humanitarian and charitable organisations, civil associations, and foundations improving care for asylum seekers^{cxxxiv}. They are organisations that offer help, services, maintenance, counselling and several activities for the benefit of socially disadvantaged and disabled people^{cxxxv}. Their activity also focuses on the Ukrainian population arriving in Slovakia seeking asylum, contributing to improving care for asylum seekers through providing essential, complementary, and accompanying services^{cxxxvi}. Likewise, The League of Human Rights is another NGO whose activity focuses on helping foreigners and refugees in Slovakia^{cxxxvii}. This organisation aims to promote transparent, dignified, and responsible immigration, asylum, and integration policy^{cxxxviii}.

The Nitra Community Foundation is a member of the Association of Community Foundations in Slovakia^{cxxxix}. Its activity is focused on supporting public benefit activities in various areas such as education, health, sports, culture, social assistance, and the environment^{cxl}. It also helps people from Ukraine, as they aim to support NGOs and civic associations in Nitra, which work with Ukrainians fleeing the war^{cxli}.

Other NGOs present in Slovakia are Člověk v tísni and the Milan Šimečka Foundation, which is currently working with Ukrainians fleeing the war.

The Catholic Church

The Bishops' Conference of Slovakia has two rites: the Latin rite (Roman Catholic Church) and the Byzantine rite (Greek Catholic Church)^{cxlii}. The Catholic Church has striven for education in the country and charitable assistance to the population: above all, it founded schools, hospitals and educated clergy near monasteries and Episcopal Churches^{cxliii}. The Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia has two provinces: Western and Eastern^{cxliv}. The Western Province includes the archdioceses of Bratislava and Trnava and the dioceses of Nitra, Žilina and Banská Bystrica^{cxlv}. The Eastern Province consists of the Archdiocese of Košice and the Dioceses of Spiš and Rožňava^{cxlvi}.

Caritas assists abandoned children, young people, families in need, and refugees, especially those coming from Ukraine, whom *Caritas* has assisted since the first day of the war. *Caritas* runs reception centres for refugees along the border with Ukraine. With several programmes and projects, it provides shelter for migrants, homeless people, as well as promoting integration for refugees, providing medical and social care for children and single mothers, coordinations hospices for the elderly and humanitarian aid in natural disasters and conflict, and carrying out projects to reduce poverty in developing countries^{cxlvii}.

As for the Salesians, they are also helping Ukrainian people fleeing war^{cxlviii}. They have evacuated orphans from Lviv. In Michalovce, the Salesian parish has set up a 24/7 reception centre^{cxlix}. In Trnava, the Salesian Cooperators have opened their 100-bed reception centre to refugees^{cl}. With the help of other members of the Salesian Family, they offer meals three times a day, specific programmes for children, Slovak language courses, assistance in administrative matters and, if the guests decide to stay in the country, guidance in finding stable housing and work^{cli}.

The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians work at the border, taking in mothers with children.

The Community of Sant'Egidio works in Vyšné Nemecké at the border between Ukraine and Slovakia with refugees fleeing the war^{clii}. They welcome and provide food, clothing and shelter, inform about the right to humanitarian protection in the EU, and guide people who want to continue their journey to other European countries, promoting contact with relatives or acquaintances^{cliii}. Several people continue their journey to the Czech Republic, where they also find support from the community^{cliv}.

October 2022

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