



Report on the results achieved in the national priorities for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

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Abbreviations

| | |
|-------------|---|
| Agenda 2030 | The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development |
| AWG | Ageing Working Group |
| CCPCJ | The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice |
| CIZS | Centres of Integrated Healthcare |
| CNG | Compressed Natural Gas |
| CVTI SR | The Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information (SCSTI) |
| CUE | Sustainable Energy Centres (SEC) |
| DPH | Value-added tax (VAT) |
| EIA | Environmental Impact Assessment |
| EK | European Commission (EC) |
| EŠIF | European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) |
| EU SILC | European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions |
| EÚ | The European Union (EU) |
| GCF | Green Climate Fund |
| GHG | Greenhouse Gas |
| GPP | Green Public Procurement |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization |
| HDP | Gross domestic product (GDP) |
| HTA | Health Technology Assessment |
| HND | Gross national income (GNI) |
| ICC | International Criminal Court |
| IKT | Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) |
| KURS | Concept of the Territorial Development of Slovakia |
| LNG | Liquefied Natural Gas |
| MF SR | Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic |
| MH SR | Ministry of the Economy of the Slovak Republic |
| MIRRI SR | Ministry of Investments, Regional Development, and Informatization of the Slovak Republic |
| MPRV SR | Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic |
| MPSVR SR | Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and the Family of the Slovak Republic |
| MRK | Marginalised Roma communities |
| MDV SR | Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic |
| MŠVVŠ SR | Ministry of Education, Science, Research, and Sport of the Slovak Republic |
| MZ SR | Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic |
| MŽP SR | Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic |
| MZVEZ SR | Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NECP | National Energy and Climate Plan |
| NEET | Not in Education, Employment or Training |
| NKÚ | Supreme Audit Office |
| NLP | The National Forest Programme |
| NOP | The National Oncology Programme |
| NR SR | The National Council of the Slovak Republic |
| NPRVaV | National Programme for the Development of Education and Training |
| OBSE | Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) |
| ODA | Official Development Assistance |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| OSN | United Nations Organization (UNO) |
| OZE | Renewable energy sources |
| PISA | Programme for International Student Assessment |
| PHSR | Economic and Social Development Programme |
| SAMRS | Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation (SAIDC) |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |

| | |
|--------|--|
| SEA | Strategic Environmental Assessment |
| SM SR | Permanent Mission of the Slovak Republic |
| SR | Slovak Republic |
| SSR | Security Sector Reform |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNCTA | United Nations Conference on Trade and Development |
| UNECE | United Nations Economic Commission for Europe |
| UNEF | United Nations Emergency Force |
| UNEP | United Nations Environment Programme |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| VOD | Public passenger transport |
| VÚC | Self-governing Region |
| VZ OSN | United Nations General Assembly |
| WHO | World Health Organization |

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INTRODUCTION

The Report on the results achieved in the national priorities of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (hereinafter referred to as “the 2030 Agenda”) is submitted by the **Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic** (hereinafter referred to as the “MIRRI SR”), in cooperation with the **Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic** (hereinafter referred to as the “MZVEZ SR”), following the task laid down by the resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic No 350, of 24 July 2017, on the Proposal for the National Implementation Process of the 2030 Agenda.

The aim of the report is to provide information on the results achieved in the national priorities for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda from the date of their adoption in July 2018 to April 2020. The report also includes information on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by the Slovak Republic in the international context.

The report is intended for all those who have an impact on the decisions covering sustainable development in Slovakia, whether it be experts from public administration, academia, civic and private sectors, as well as the broader professional community. The presented report is the first report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Slovak Republic.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN 2015) is a key agenda ensuring global sustainable development. Its transformative nature is laid down in 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2018, Slovakia opted for an approach to the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which translated 17 sustainable development goals into national actions through six National Priorities for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, approved by the government in 2018.¹ The priorities are as follows:

- Education for a life in dignity
- Transformation towards a knowledge-based and environmentally sustainable economy in the face of changing demography and global context
- Poverty reduction and social inclusion
- Sustainable settlements, regions and landscape in the face of climate change
- Rule of law, democracy and security
- Good health.

Slovakia’s progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda may be summarised as follows:

The Slovak Republic has created an institutional framework for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The MIRRI SR² is responsible for the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda (internal dimension). MZVEZ SR is responsible for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the international context (external dimension). The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic provides its capacities for setting a set of evaluation indicators and linking them to the UN Statistical Commission and the EU Statistical Office (Eurostat). The umbrella coordinating body integrating all dimensions of sustainable development is the Government Council for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, through which individual ministries, the National Council of the Slovak Republic, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, representatives of the judiciary, representatives of academia, non-governmental, private sectors, and regional self-government associations and trade union representatives participate in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (the Government Council for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has 35 members).³

¹ The National Priorities for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda were adopted by the Resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic No 273, of 13 June 2018. National priorities are laid down by the participatory process implemented in early 2018.

² Prior to 1 July 2020, The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Investments and Informatization (ÚPVII SR).

³<https://www.mirri.gov.sk/sekcie/cko/horizontalny-princip-udrzatelny-rozvoj-2014-2020/aktuality/rada-vlady-pre-agendu-2030-pre-udrzatelny-rozvoj/index.html>

The Government of the Slovak Republic has adopted conceptual documents for the 2030 Agenda implementation, such as The Baselines for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda (2016), Proposal for the National Implementation Process of the 2030 Agenda (2017), Proposal for the Concept of the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the International Context (2017), Proposal for the National Priorities for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda (2018). It has also adopted monitoring, evaluation, and revision frameworks for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as a component part of the document Proposal for the National Implementation Process of the 2030 Agenda.⁴

The Slovak Republic presented the progress made in implementing the 2030 Agenda before the UN in July 2018, in the format of its first Voluntary National Review for Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.⁵

An independent audit of the Supreme Audit Office (hereinafter referred to as the “NKÚ”) performed in late 2018 assessed the country’s preparedness to meet the UN 2030 Agenda sustainable development goals⁶ and identified three key tasks for a successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda, namely: adoption of the national goals for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in connection with the adopted priorities and laying down national indicators to measure progress in the national goals, to provide national personnel capacities and technical equipment for the coordination of the 2030 Agenda after 2020,⁷ and to launch a general awareness-raising campaign to enhance the knowledge of the 2030 Agenda.

Currently, MIRRI SR is in the process of updating Agenda SK30 strategic document which represents the national sustainable development strategy of the SR by 2030. Updating the Vision and the Strategy complies with the Manifesto of the Government of the Slovak Republic,⁸ with the accession to the European Green Deal, it reflects on the COVID-19 pandemic and with the latest sustainable development initiatives.

The part entitled Monitoring and Indicators provides information on the indicators taken into account in assessing the results achieved across individual national priorities. Global comparison shows that Slovakia is in the “club” with those countries that occupy higher notches on the global ladder of sustainable development. When it comes to the 2020 SDG Index, Slovakia has been placed twenty-seventh out of 166 countries,⁹ thus retaining its position from 2019.¹⁰ Of the first thirty countries in the global 2020 SDG Index, twenty-one countries are EU member states. When compared to V4 countries, Slovakia with its SDG Index ranks below the Czech Republic (8th position) and Poland (23rd position) and is higher than Hungary (29th position). For our geopolitical space as an EU member state, however, the informative value is largely to be seen in the comparisons within the EU 27 and in general in the evaluation indicators relevant to the EU 27 (100 Eurostat indicators).¹¹

The part entitled **Results achieved in the national priorities of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** the report provides information on the positive and negative trends across individual National Priorities for the 2030 Agenda in the monitored period.

Slovakia achieves good results in the national priority Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion. The percentage of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion is the third lowest in the EU, the Slovak Republic has exceeded the national goal of Europe 2020 strategy to lift at least 170,000 people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion by 2020. However, children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, people from marginalised Roma communities, single parents and people with disabilities, homeless people, as well as the elderly and women still face a higher risk of social exclusion.

⁴ Government Resolution No 350, of 24 July 2017.

⁵ VNR Slovakia 2018

⁶ Reviewing the country’s preparedness for meeting the SDGs of the UN 2030 Agenda (November 2018)

⁷ National project Building intervention logic of the strategic planning in central government authorities under the OP Effective Public Administration. The project is funded by the ESF (project duration: February 2017 – January 2021)

⁸ <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/24756/1>

⁹ Sustainable Development Report 2020

¹⁰ In 2019, placed 27 out of 162 countries, in 2020, placed 27 out of 166 countries

¹¹ Eurostat 2020 edition of the digital publication SDGs and Me, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/sdgs/>

Challenges remain in the national priorities Education for a life in dignity and Transformation towards a knowledge-based and environmentally sustainable economy in the face of changing demography and global context. Despite positive trends in some indicators, these are topics where problems persist: although the rate of early school leaving in Slovakia is lower compared to the EU average, the targets of the Slovak Republic set under Europe 2020 strategy have not yet been met. Slovakia continues to lag significantly behind the EU average in terms of the participation in lifelong learning, and the Covid-19 pandemic has brought the opportunity to reconsider the content and form of education. In the transformation towards a knowledge-based and environmentally sustainable economy, Slovakia still lags behind the EU average in the share of the renewable energy in total gross consumption, in expenditures and human resources for research and development, and in the recycling rate.

The country **faces significant challenges** in national priorities Sustainable settlements, Regions and Landscape in the face of climate change, Rule of law, democracy and security, and Good health. Environmental problems impact the economy, employment and the comfort of life of Slovak citizens - Slovakia has problems with air quality, which is worse in Slovakia than the EU average, with low waste recycling rates, with the protection of ecosystems, and negative trends persist in sustainable mobility, energy availability, as well as in the availability of drinking water and sanitation. Agricultural pollution and environmental liability remain a problem with respect to water and soil pollution. As regards rule of law, democracy and security, major problems persist having serious implications for the public confidence in the independence of the judiciary - public and business perceptions of judicial independence remain at the tail of EU countries, public confidence in police is declining, the Corruption Perception Index is stagnating, only a small percentage of citizens reports violence, crime or vandalism in their neighbourhoods. There is still an urgent need for systemic reforms of several internal mechanisms of the country's democratic system.

In the part covering **the external dimension of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda**, the report provides an overview of Slovakia's participation in meeting the 2030 Agenda goals in the monitored period in the form of cooperation with the international community. The Slovak Republic has taken an active part in high-level events accepting political commitments in the field of sustainable development goals, it negotiated and adopted resolutions toward the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and supported international organisations through voluntary contributions, and within the framework of Slovakia's development cooperation programmes, it worked in partnership with partner countries in accordance with the Medium-term Strategy for International Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic for 2019-2023, specifically with three programme countries - Kenya, Moldova, Georgia, with partner regions and selected countries of the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership, Eastern Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and Afghanistan. Slovakia has reflected the knowledge and experience (best practices) gained in the context of the UN system agencies and other international organisations in meeting sustainable development goals in Slovakia. The Slovak Republic has subscribed to an international commitment to achieve a 0.33% share of ODA in GNI by 2030, however, the country is lagging behind (0.11% of GNI in 2019). The main reason for the lag is the long-term absence of a systemic increase in the resources for ODA SR. In order to meet the goal, it is imperative to accelerate financial and HR resources, especially those allocated for the bilateral activities of the ODA SR.

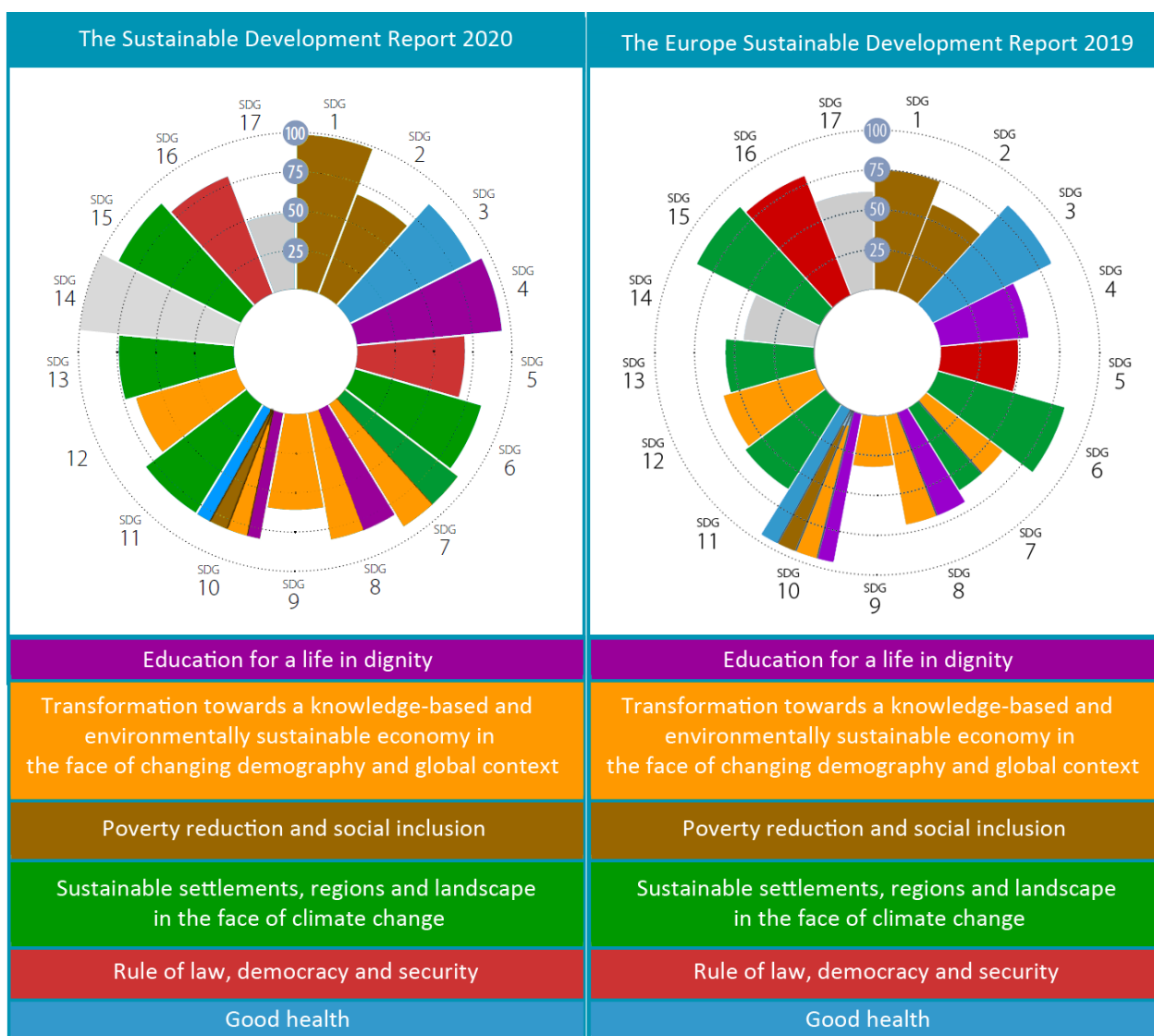
In conclusion, the report states **compliance with the findings of the Country Report for 2020 - Slovakia (European Semester 2020) in the progress achieved in the SDGs in the Slovak Republic. It makes a recommendation to observe the findings of the audit of the National Audit Office, from late 2018**, which assessed the country's readiness to meet the sustainable development goals of the UN 2030 Agenda. Finally, the report emphasises that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development should be crucial in developing recovery plans at national, European, and global levels, in order to increase resilience to future challenges.

MONITORING AND INDICATORS

SDGs monitoring in the global context

A list of global indicators has been approved at UN level to measure and evaluate progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals. Following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals at the UN General Assembly in September 2015, the UN Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators proposed a list of global indicators to measure progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The global indicators proposal was adopted at the 48th session of the UN Statistical Commission in March 2017, and on 6 July 2017, by the UN General Assembly.¹² In accordance with the adopted UN resolution, the global framework of indicators will be refined yearly and comprehensively reviewed in 2020 and 2025. At its 51st session on 6 March 2020, the UN Statistical Commission approved the first comprehensive revision of global indicators. The current list of indicators contains 231 unique indicators, while the total number of indicators assigned to 169 targets of the 2030 Agenda is 247 (12 indicators are repetitive).¹³

Graph 1 SDGs by national priorities for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development



The Sustainable Development Report 2020
Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Bertelsmann Stiftung

The Europe Sustainable Development Report 2019
Sustainable Development Solutions Network and Institute for European Environmental Policy

¹²(UN Resolution A/RES/71/313) <https://undocs.org/A/RES/71/313>

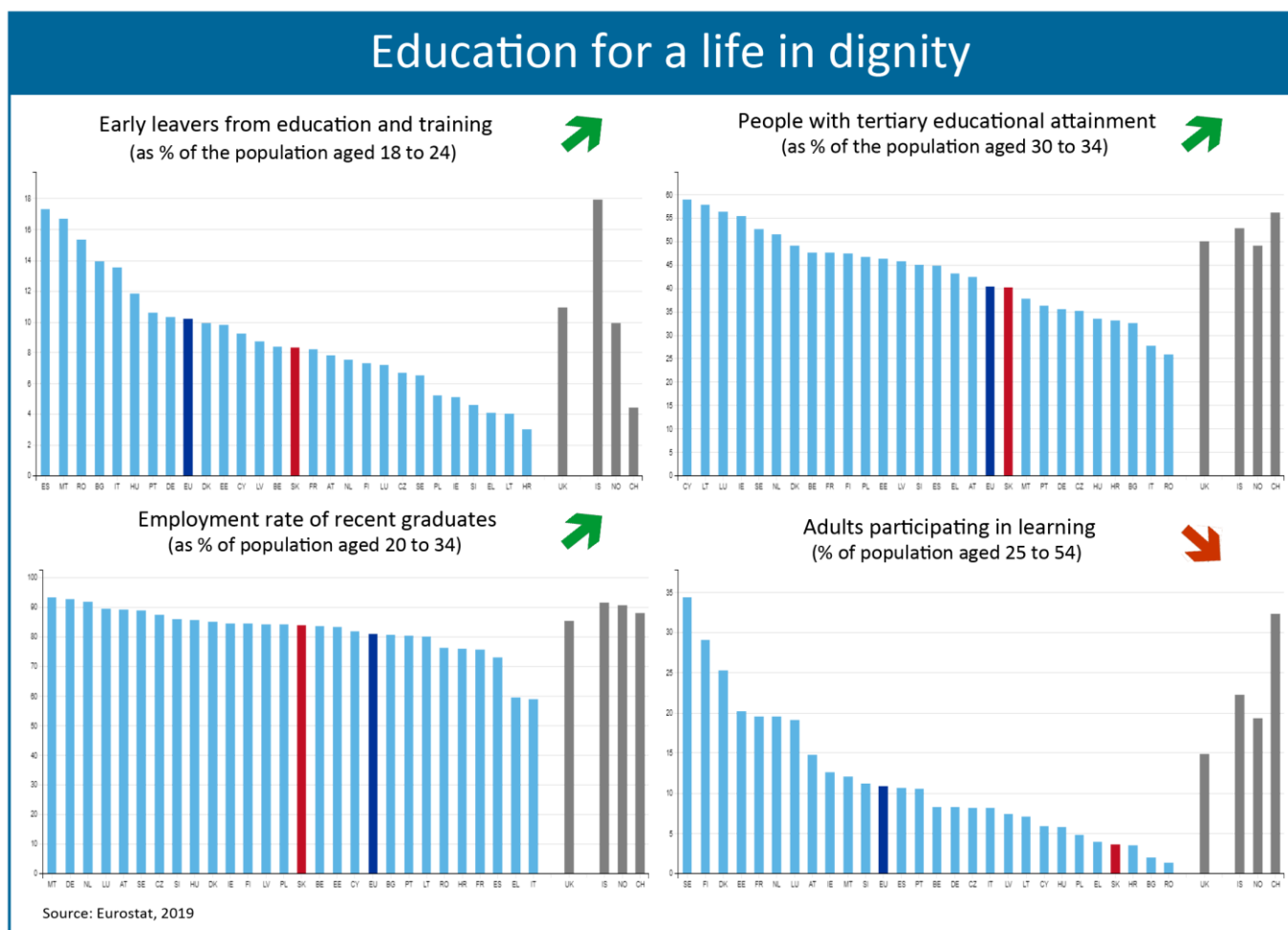
¹³ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/indicators-list/>

SDGs monitoring in the EU context

In 2017, the European Commission also presented a reference framework of indicators for monitoring the 2030 Agenda sustainable development goals in an EU context, which is the basis for Eurostat's annual progress reports on the EU's sustainable development goals. This reference framework of Eurostat indicators is updated annually (inclusion of new data sources, new EU policy priorities). The EU SDG Indicator Set 2020 contains 100 indicators relevant to the EU context (approved on 16 January 2020).¹⁴ On 22 June 2020, the latest report Sustainable development in the EU - Overview of progress towards the SDGs in the EU Context, 2020 edition, was published.¹⁵

Below are shown development trends and comparison between the Slovak Republic and other EU-28 countries covering the areas of national priorities for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda based on selected Eurostat indicators - SDGs and Me, 2020 Edition.¹⁶

Graph 2 Selected Eurostat indicators for priority Education for a life in dignity



¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/276524/10369740/SDG_indicator_2020.pdf


¹⁵ According to Eurostat data (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20190517-1>), in the SR, the participation rate of adults aged 25-64 in learning was 4% in 2018, whereas the average participation rate in the EU-28 stood at 11.1% in 2018.

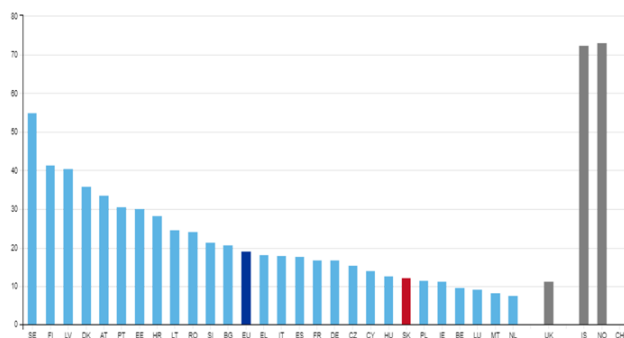
¹⁶ SDGs and Me is an innovative digital publication of Eurostat providing simple and clear visualisation tools for selected indicators out of 100 EU SDGs indicators


<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/sdgs/index.html?country=SK&goal=SDG1&ind=1&chart=bar>

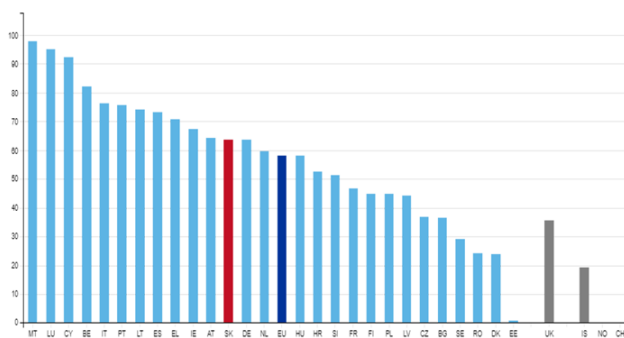
Graph 3 Selected Eurostat indicators for priority Transformation towards a knowledge-based and environmentally sustainable economy in the face of changing demography and global context

Transformation towards a knowledge-based and environmentally sustainable economy in the face of changing demography and global context

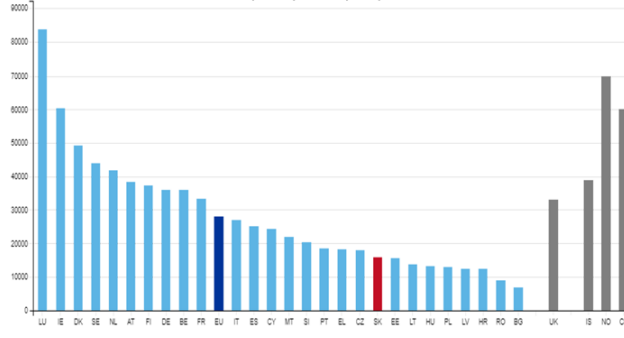
Share of renewable energy
(as % of gross final energy consumption) 




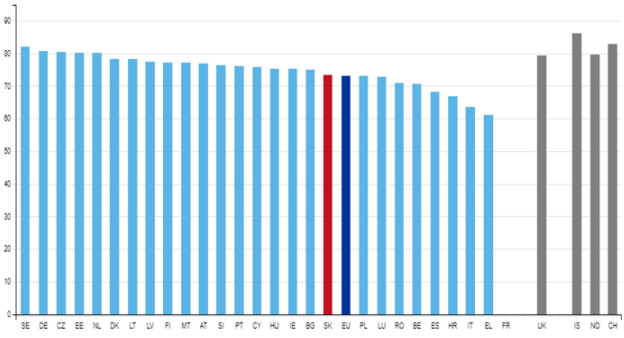
Energy dependency
(as % of imports in total energy consumption) 




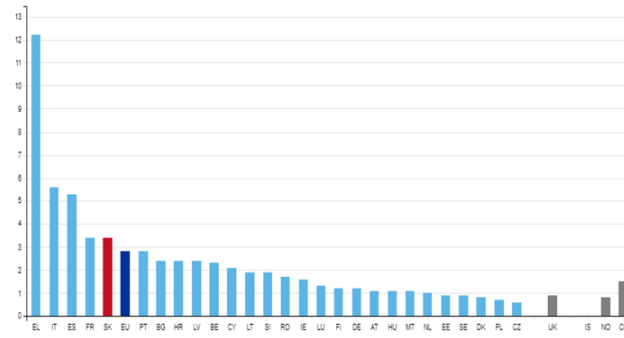
Real GDP
(in € per capita) 




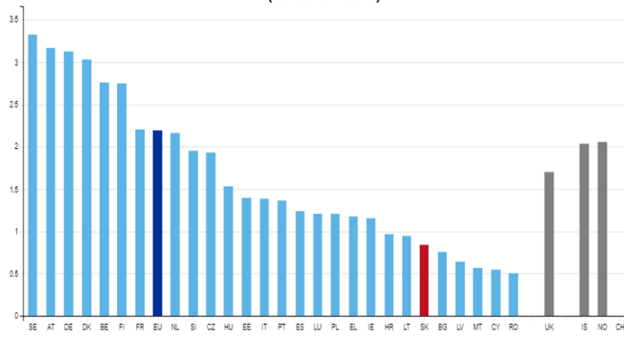
Employment
(as % of the population aged 20 to 64) 




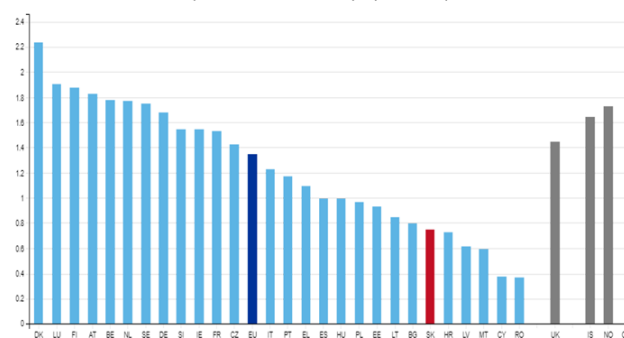
People unemployed for 12+ months
(as % of the active population) 




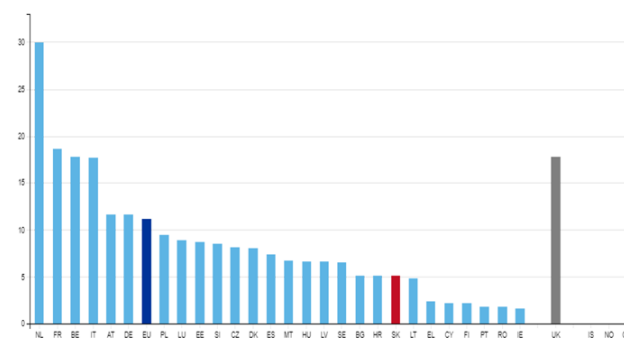
Research and Development expenditure
(as % of GDP) 



Research and Development personnel
(as % of the active population) 



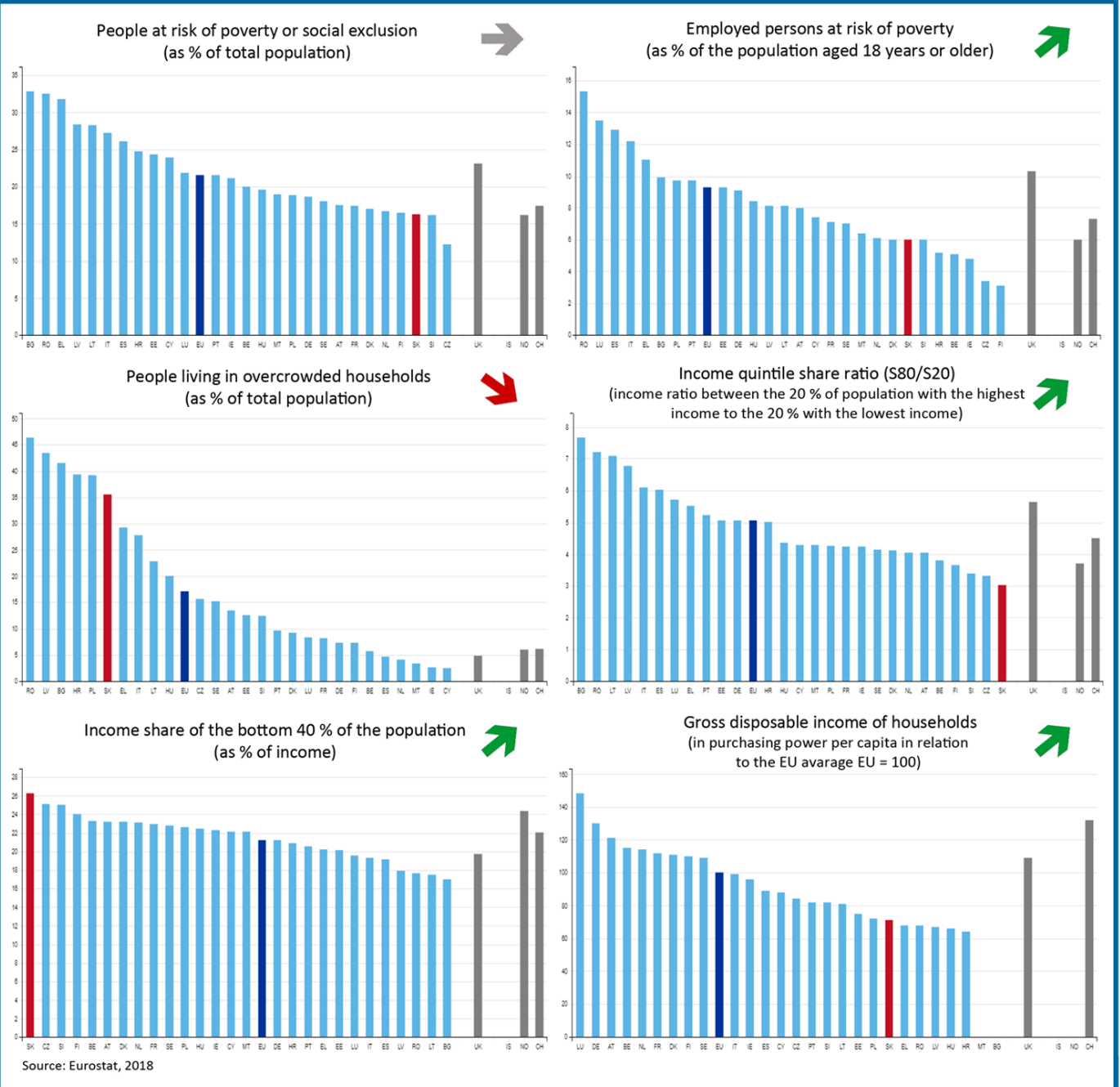
Circularity rate / Circular material use rate
(% of material input) 



Source: Eurostat, 2018/19

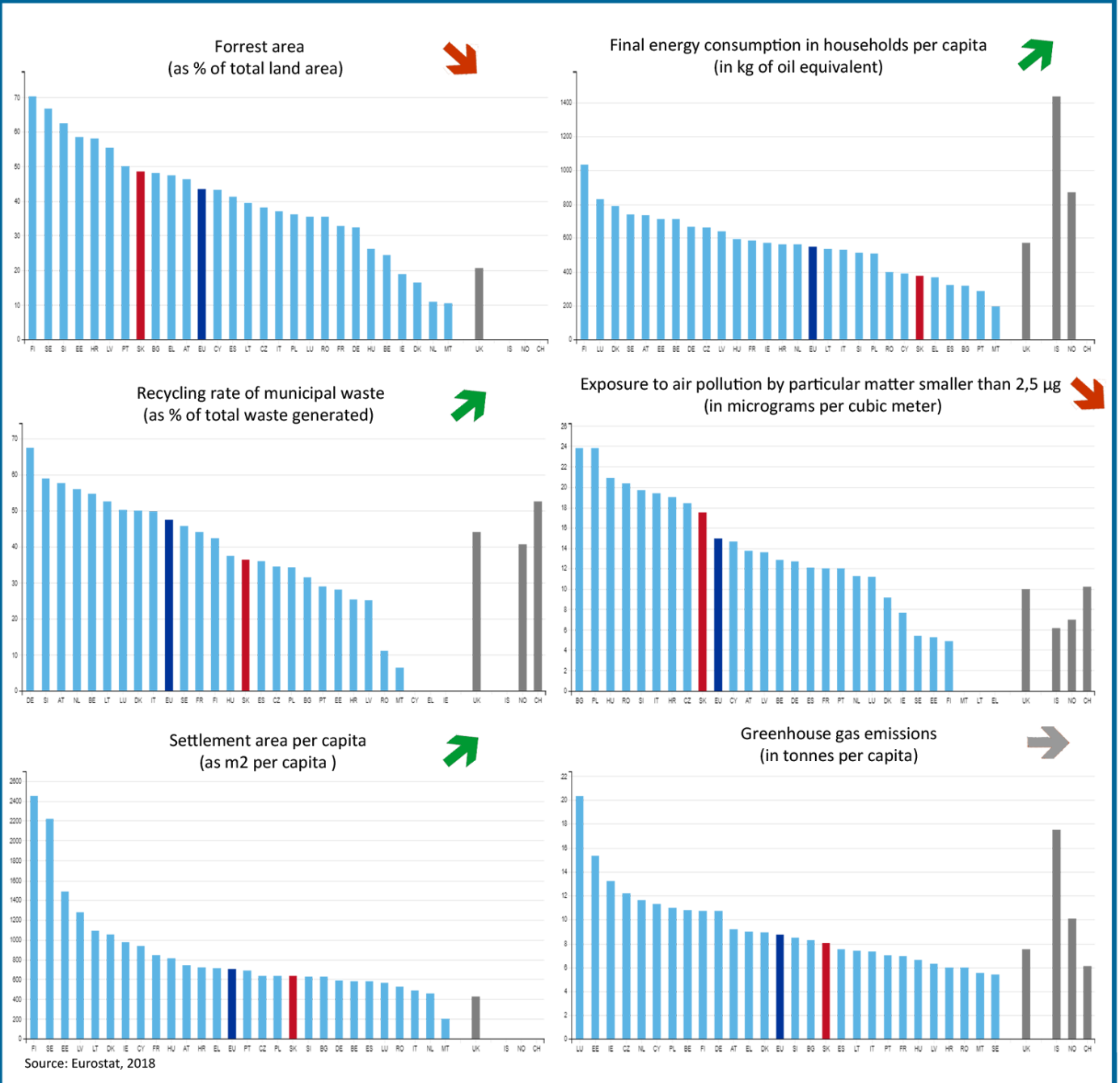
Graph 4 Selected Eurostat indicators for priority Poverty reduction and social inclusion

Poverty reduction and social inclusion




Graph 5 Selected Eurostat indicators for the priority Sustainable settlements, regions and landscape in the face of climate change

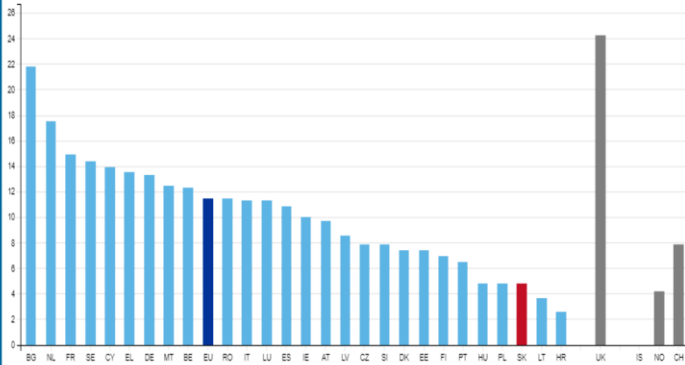
Sustainable settlements, regions and landscape in the face of climate change




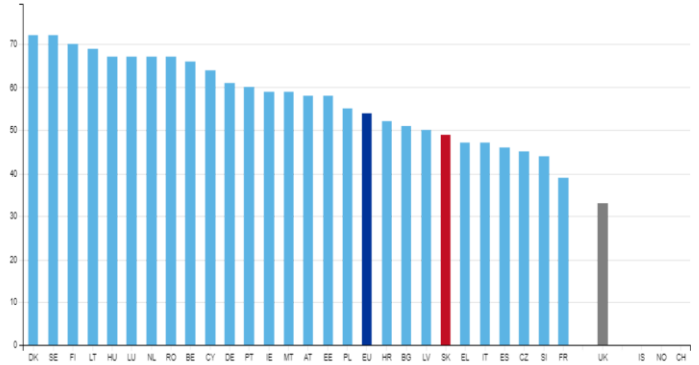
Graph 6 Selected Eurostat indicators for the priority Rule of law, democracy and security


Rule of law, democracy and security

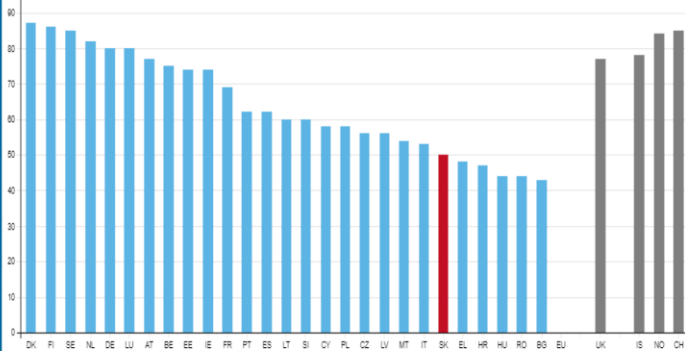
People reporting crime, violence or vandalism in their area
(as % of total population) 




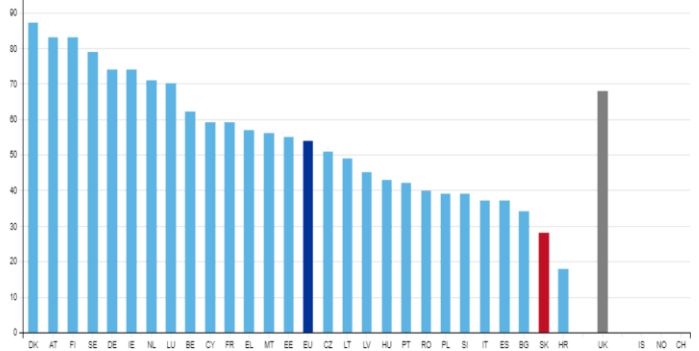
People with confidence in the EU Parliament
(as % of the total population) 



Corruption Perceptions Index
(Scale of 0 highly corrupt to 100 very clean) 



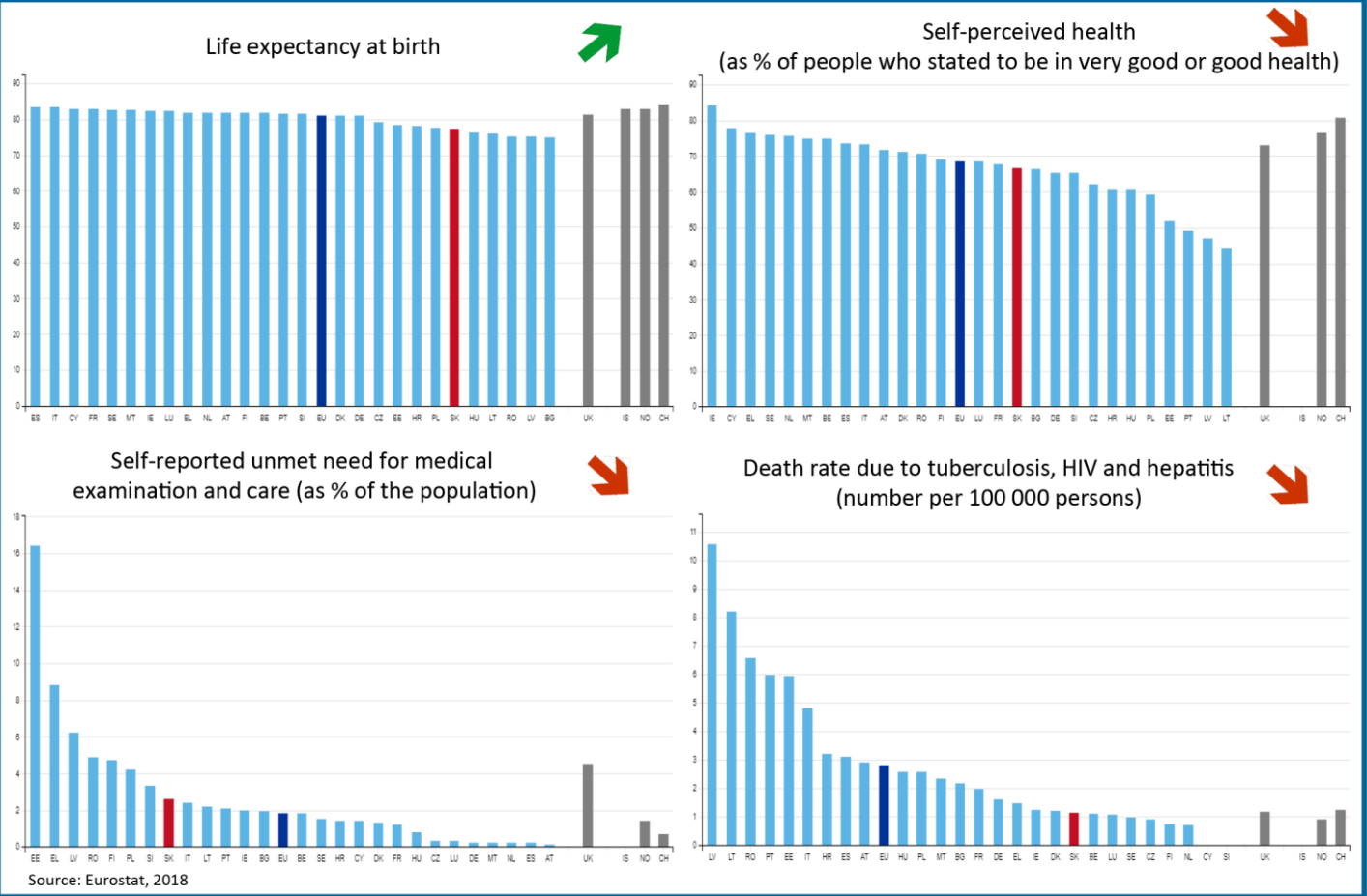
People perceive their justice system as very or fairly independent
(as % of the population) 



Source: Eurostat, 2018/19

Graph 7 Selected Eurostat indicators Good health

Good health



RESULTS ACHIEVED IN THE NATIONAL PRIORITIES FOR THE 2030 AGENDA IMPLEMENTATION

Education for a life in dignity

The COVID-19 virus pandemic has provided an unprecedented opportunity for a comprehensive rethinking of the content and form of education. Historically, the first ever experience clearly pointed to the state's unpreparedness for providing other than full-time education, and pedagogical and professional staff had to show great creativity and flexibility in providing the learning process in online education. The pandemic crisis has also shown that the state is not prepared to provide education for all children online, as children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, due to their lack of access to ICT, were left out of educational activities. The negative trend can also be observed in connection with early school leaving. While in 2013, the rate of early school leaving was at 6.4%, in 2019, it was 8.3%. The above figure has markedly exceeded the Europe 2020 Strategy goals, within which Slovakia set the goal for reducing the rate of early school leaving to 6% by 2020. Slovakia continues to lag significantly behind the EU average in terms of the participation in lifelong learning, which is crucial with respect to the transition to production automation and retraining and reskilling the existing labour force.

| <i>Source: Eurostat</i> | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Early school leaving rates of the 18 – 24 years old | 6.9 % | 7.4 % | 9.3 % | 8.6 % | 8.3 % |
| Employment rate of graduates 20 – 34 years old | 75.2 % | 79.6 % | 81.5 % | 83.4 % | 83.9 % |
| The share of population aged 30-34 with tertiary educational attainment | 28.4 % | 31.5 % | 34.3 % | 37.7 % | 40.1 % |
| Participation in lifelong learning (percentage of population aged 25 – 64) | 3.1 % | 2.9 % | 3.4 % | 4 % | 3.6 % |

MAJOR CHALLENGES

1. Improving the quality of education and training and enhancing the social status of the teaching profession

Goal: Improving the quality of education and training and enhancing the social status of the teaching profession in the context of international comparison, global megatrends, and implementing the principles of knowledge society.

At the legislative level, several strategies and regulations have been adopted. Among the most relevant is the National Programme for the Development of Education and Training for 2018-2027, which was adopted by the Government of the Slovak Republic in June 2018. The National Programme for the Development of Education and Training (hereinafter referred to as the “NPRVaV”) pays special attention to three cross-cutting issues which are:

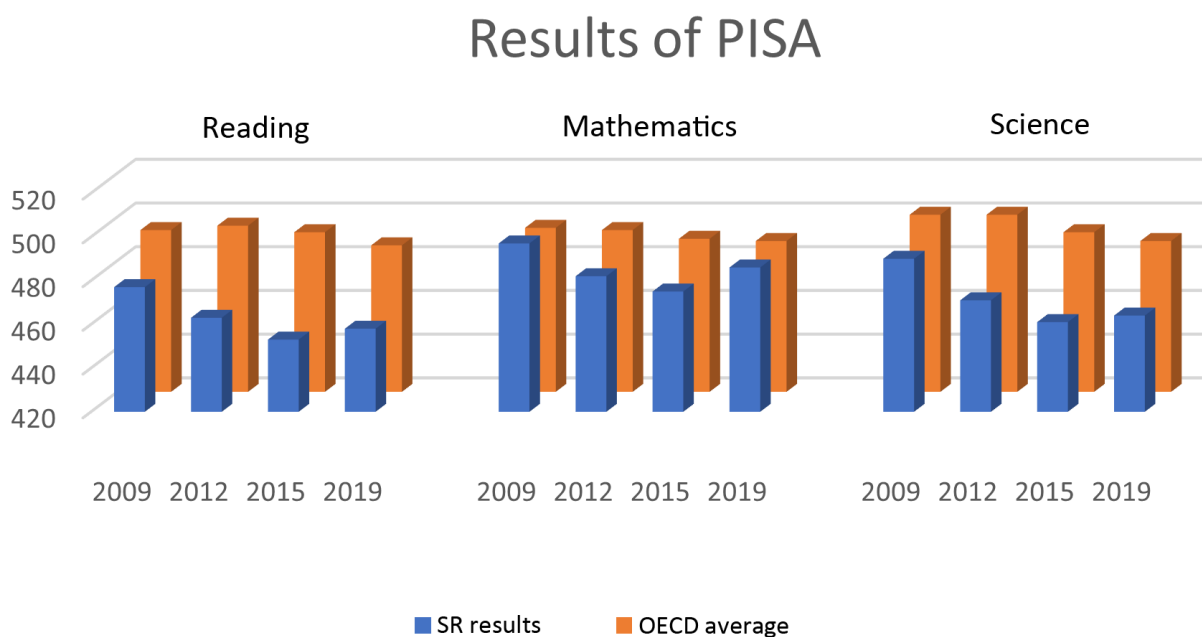
- 1) Developing the continuing education system within lifelong learning;
- 2) Integration and inclusion of marginalised Roma communities and pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds;
- 3) Linking education and training systems to the labour market and the economy's needs.¹⁷

¹⁷See: <https://www.minedu.sk/17786-sk/narodny-program-rozvoja-vychovy-a-vzdelavania/> (seen on 30 March 2020)

An amendment to Act No 245/2008 Coll. on Upbringing and Education (the School Act), as amended in July 2019, introducing compulsory pre-school education for children aged 5 and over is an important step forward. In the monitored period, also Act No 112/2018 Coll. on the Social Economy and Social Enterprises (hereinafter referred to as the “Social Economy Act”), which entered into force in May 2018, began to be implemented. It introduces new tools facilitating better labour integration of the most disadvantaged people in the labour market.

The results of the sixth cycle of OECD PISA international testing published in December 2019¹⁸ compared to the previous cycle, indicate a slight improvement. The statistically most significant boost was reported in mathematical literacy in which students in Slovakia lag behind the OECD average by three points. In reading and scientific literacy, the results were slightly better compared to the previous cycle, however, they did not reach the level of results published in 2012 and the results of Slovak pupils still lag significantly behind the OECD average.

Graph 8 Results of International Student Assessment (PISA)



Source: OECD

In connection with improving the social status of teachers, during the monitored period, the salary scale of pedagogical and professional staff increased along with teachers’ remuneration at the beginning of their career. The increase was implemented on the basis of commitments under the Collective Agreement of a higher degree for the years 2019 and 2020 for employees remunerated according to Act No 553/2003 Coll., entering into effect as of 1 January 2019, by 10% for all employees, and as of 1 January 2020, by 10% for all employees. The basic monthly salary of the employees starting work was increased by 9.5% by a specific provision effective as of 1 September 2019.

¹⁸ (OECD) OECD (2019) PISA 2018 Results: Combined Executive Summary, Paris, OECD

2. Strengthening the principles of inclusive education

Goal: Strengthening the principle of inclusive education, ensuring equal opportunities for all pupils/students regardless of their social background, health condition or nationality/ethnicity, with emphasis on improving the opportunities for a positive social mobility.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Research, and Sport of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter referred to as the “MŠVVŠ SR”) as an Intermediate Body for OP Human Resources, PA Education, promotes inclusive education and training via the implementation of several national projects. Since 2016, the national project School Open to All has been implemented, and in the monitored period between July 2018 and April 2020, other national projects were launched: Towards inclusion and success on the labour market through the standardisation of the counselling system and prevention and Helping professions in the education of children and pupils.

The objective of the national project Towards inclusion and success on the labour market through the standardisation of the counselling system and prevention is developing and setting the standards of the counselling system and prevention and the implementation of a multidisciplinary approach to the child favouring its successful completion of compulsory schooling and finding a job on the labour market. The project will be running until May 2023.

The objective of the national project Helping professions in the education of children and pupils is increasing the inclusiveness of education by financing the positions of teaching assistants including teaching assistants for pupils with disabilities (special educator, social educator, and a school psychologist) in 311 schools (of which 75 are kindergartens, 175 elementary schools, 61 secondary vocational schools and grammar schools). The project will be running until November 2022.

There are also demand-driven projects under implementation within the calls promoting inclusion in schools More successful at an elementary school (472 projects) and More successful at an elementary school II (113 projects). Within the projects, teaching assistant jobs including teaching assistants of pupils with disabilities and the jobs of the inclusion team members are financed (special educator, social educator, and a school psychologist).

A significant measure having the capacity to strengthen the principle of inclusion is the amended Act No 245/2008 Coll. on Upbringing and Education (the School Act), as amended, of July 2019, laying down compulsory pre-school education of children aged five and over. The amended act takes account of the current situation when only every third child from marginalised Roma communities (MRC) attends a kindergarten for at least a year. The amended act also promotes education in the home environment and as of 2022, the so-called zero grades in elementary schools will be abolished.

The integration of children and students with disabilities still remains a challenge. The revision of expenditures on groups at risk of poverty or social exclusion offers a comprehensive analysis. and a proposal for specific measures in the education of children with disabilities.¹⁹

The interested public has accepted with great enthusiasm the founding of the so-called Inkluentrum (Inclusive Education Centre) which announced its activities in early 2020. It is the first pro-inclusive counselling centre in Slovakia providing professional support to teachers, teaching assistants, and also to the parents of children with disabilities. The organisation is accredited by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of the Slovak Republic and is mandated to provide innovative education.

3. Creating conditions facilitating the availability of quality job opportunities

Goal: Creating conditions facilitating the availability of quality employment opportunities in an open labour market for all population groups.

In the monitored period, the registered unemployment rate continued to reach historic lows and the labour market experienced a significant skilled labour shortage. The employment rate of the persons from the

¹⁹ <https://www.minedu.sk/revizia-vydavkov-na-skupiny-ohrozene-chudobou-alebo-socialnym-vylucenim-2020/>

MRC environment was estimated at 21% in 2018. Despite the figure being significantly higher compared to the previous period, the employment rate of the Roma (21%) still lags significantly behind the employment rate of the majority population living in the same areas which is 51%.²⁰

With regard to young people in the NEET category, a positive trend was reported in the monitored period which is an outcome of a massive support for youth employment through active labour market policies,²¹ of the economic growth, the economic cycle phase, and demographic trends when the number of persons leaving the job market outnumbers the persons entering the job market.

The situation regarding the availability of quality job opportunities continues to be complicated due to a high level of indebtedness and the number of enforcement proceedings in the Slovak Republic.²² Therefore, individuals under enforcement proceedings continue to prefer alternative ways of dealing with labour relations and the activities in the shadow economy, due to which the level of their vulnerability in the labour market is extremely high.

A tool which can have a positive impact on the availability of quality job opportunities for all population groups, regardless of their health condition, ethnicity, social situation or level of education and basic skills is the act on the social economy. Out of the total number of 94 registered social enterprises in Slovakia (as at 31 March 2020), 93 are of the integration type, which means that they fulfill their positive social impact by employing people disadvantaged in the labour market.

4. Increasing the readiness of the labour force to respond to the labour market needs and promoting lifelong learning

Goal: Overcoming structural imbalances between labour supply and labour market demand, increasing the preparedness of the labour force for the current as well as future labour market needs, and ensuring sufficient opportunities for individual lifelong learning.

Despite a significant decline in registered unemployment, the long-term unemployment rate in Slovakia still remains well above the EU 28 average. The presence of significant regional disparities also remains a problem, which are reflected in the long-term unemployment rate. It holds that the regions most hit by long-term unemployment are the regions of Banská Bystrica, Prešov, and Košice.²³

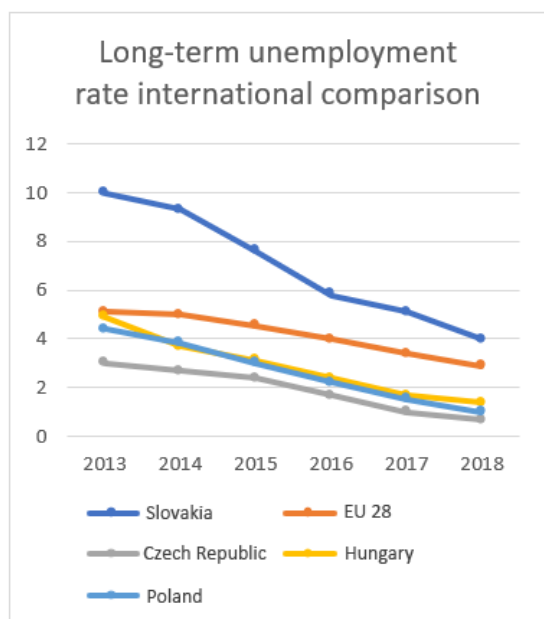
²⁰ (IFP) Inštitút finančnej politiky (2018): Komentár 18: Inklúzia Rómov je celospoločenskou témou, Bratislava, MF SR - The Institute for Financial Policy (2018): Comment 18: Roma inclusion is a nationwide topic. Bratislava, MF SR

²¹ In the monitored period (July 2018 – April 2020,) several national projects promoting employability and employment of young people under 29 were implemented by the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family.

²² Partial solution alleviating debt burden was introduced by amended Act No 7/2005 Coll. on Bankruptcy and Restructuring, and on amending certain acts, of March 2017, leading to a significant simplification of the so-called personal bankruptcy. In 2019, some 16,000 individuals were granted personal bankruptcy. However, given 137,883 enforcement proceedings initiated in 2018 alone (of which 27,954 were concluded in 2018), the number of personal bankruptcies is still low and the debt burden of individuals can still be seen as a barrier to their entry into the labour market (source: Správa o činnosti Slovenskej komory exekútorov a o činnosti súdnych exekútorov za rok 2018 – Report on the activity of the Chamber of Judicial Officers of the Slovak Republic and on the activity of judicial officers for 2018).

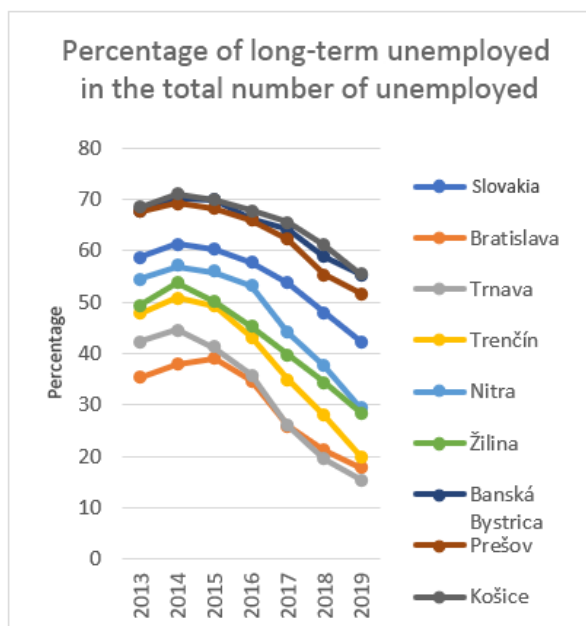
²³ Monthly statistics published by the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family of the SR.

Graph 9 Long-term unemployment rate



Source: Eurostat

Graph 10 Long-term unemployment rate by regions



Source: ÚPSVaR SR

In the international context, one of the solutions to long-term unemployment is a well-functioning system of lifelong learning accessible and attractive to all citizens, as well as the orientation of active labour market policies towards measures promoting the skills and competences of jobseekers. From a statistical point of view, the level of participation of adults in education did not change significantly in the monitored period and Slovakia still lags significantly behind the EU 28 average.²⁴ As part of the active labour market measures, more attention has been paid to education programmes, which is reflected in the increased share of expenditures on education measures in the total budget allocated for active labour market policies.²⁵

The development and assessment of basic skills in low-skilled persons is also the subject matter of the BLUESS project, with the research team, since 2019, being the State Institute of Vocational Education. The project activities focus on a more thorough examination of the group in need of support to increase reading, mathematical, and basic computer literacy and on the preparation of tools for the development and assessment of basic skills. Among the main objectives of the BLUESS project is triggering a debate on the need to address basic skills and literacy at the national level, mapping out the situation in connection with the basic skills in the Slovak Republic (with emphasis on low-skilled persons), identifying major issues and drafting recommendations for policy makers including tools and methodologies to identify the literacy needs of low-skilled people and manner of their assessment.

5. Promoting such social conditions that would make young people connect their future with Slovakia

Goal: Promoting such social conditions under which the phenomenon of “brain drain” is not an issue.

The Statistical Office data suggest a more significant change in the behaviour of people working abroad for a short time. Compared to 2018 and 2019, their number decreased by 12,100 persons, which is 8.7%.²⁶ The argument for their return is mainly improving job opportunities in Slovakia.

²⁴ According to Eurostat data (trng_lfse_01), in 2018, the rate of adults aged 25 – 64 reached 4 % in the SR, while the EU-28 average is 11.1 %.

²⁵ According to the annual assessments of ALMPs (active labour market policies) published by the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family of the SR (hereinafter referred to as the “ÚPSVaR SR”), in 2018, the spending on active labour market policies linked to the training of job-seekers was 10.6 % of the total spending, in contrast to 5.8 % in 2017. In parallel, the number of participants in training programmes as a share of the total number of participants in individual ALMPs measures increased from 10.5 % in 2017 to 13.4 % in 2018. The 2019 data have not yet been published, however, a positive trend is envisaged (source: author’s projections).

²⁶ See labour force sample survey

In order to create favourable conditions for the return of the experts from abroad to Slovakia and their further work, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of the Slovak Republic, in cooperation with the administrator of the CVTI SR scheme, has developed Support scheme for the return of experts from abroad between 2015 and 2018,²⁷ which winds up in 2020. The scheme objective was to create a sufficiently attractive incentive for the return of the experts to Slovakia by reducing or partly offsetting the existing barriers and transaction costs.

By contrast, in the monitored period, the number of employees from abroad working in Slovakia increased significantly, from 3,685 people registered in late 2016 to 28,578 people registered in late 2019. The largest group are the citizens of Ukraine and Serbia.²⁸ The importance of these people for the economy is confirmed by fact that in 2018, one in three newly created jobs was populated by a foreign worker.²⁹ Due to the lack of domestic labour and the inability to engage untapped labour force, in recent years, Slovakia has become an attractive destination for third-country workers.

In connection with the ability to attract and retain highly qualified and talented individuals, the situation in Slovakia has not changed. According to the Global Competitiveness Index,³⁰ the country's competitiveness dropped by one notch compared to 2018 and 2019, and in international comparison, the results of Slovak universities did not improve either.³¹

²⁷ <https://www.vedatechnika.sk/SK/o-scheme-navraty/Documents/Navraty/Podporna-schema-na-navrat-odbornikov-zo-zahranicia.pdf>

²⁸ See: Mesačná štatistika: Zamestnávania cudzincov na území SR, ktorú pravidelne zverejňuje UPSVaR (Monthly statistics: Employment of foreigners in the territory of the SR regularly published by the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family)

²⁹ MF SR: Národný program reforiem 2019 (National Reform Programme for 2019)

³⁰ World Economic Forum: The Global Competitiveness Report 2019, Insight Report, WEF, Geneva, 2019.

³¹ According to QS World University Ranking, Comenius University in Bratislava and Slovak University of Technology ranked the highest of all Slovak universities in 2020 and 2019, both the universities ranked 751-800. However, in 2018, Comenius University ranked 701-750.

Transformation towards a knowledge-based and environmentally sustainable economy in the face of changing demography and global context

In 2012, the growth level of the Slovak economy reached 70% of the EU-15 level and has remained at that level ever since. The economies of the Slovak Republic and of the EU-15 are growing at a similar pace. In 2018, the wage quota increased to 0.41 (EU-15 = 0.48), which contributes to the growth of added value. The growth of labour costs leads to the streamlining of labour and to productivity growth. Wage growth promotes restructuring, automation, and digitalisation. The Slovak economy is among the economies with a higher weight of industry (SR = 26.2%, EU-28 average = 19.5% in 2018) and a lower weight of services in comparison with the economically most advanced EU-28 countries. The three strongest export industries, i.e. car production, electrical engineering, and machinery, are limited to assembly operations rather than to manufacturing. Gross value added increased by 6.2% (2018/2017). In 2016 and 2017, the manufacturing industry generated almost a half of the total growth in value-added. In 2018, its share decreased to 26.4%.³²

| <i>Source: Eurostat</i> | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption | 12.9 % | 12 % | 11.5 % | 11.9 % | x |
| GDP per capita in € | 14,270 | 14,550 | 14,970 | 15,540 | 15,890 |
| Total employment rate | 67.7 % | 69.8 % | 71.1 % | 72.4 % | 73.4 % |
| Long-term unemployment rate | 7.6 % | 5.8 % | 5.1 % | 4 % | 3.4 % |
| Employment in science and research | 0.7 % | 0.7 % | 0.70 % | 0.8 % | x |
| R&D expenditure as a percentage of GDP | 1.2 % | 0.8 % | 0.9 % | 0.8% | x |
| Use of recycled materials | 5 % | 4.9 % | 5.1 % | | x |
| Share of energy imports in total energy consumption | 60.1 % | 60.6 % | 63.9 % | 63.7 % | x |

MAIN CHALLENGES

1. Creating a higher value-added economy by promoting national research, development, and innovations and a sustainable use of national resources

Goal: Ensuring transition to the intensive sources of economic growth - domestic research, development and innovation, restructuring the economy towards a higher added value and a sustainable use of national resources, strengthening the economic self-sufficiency of the regions, and the development of the regions with a view to address the needs of their inhabitants.

R&D funding is based on public finances (state budget and EU resources), which raises the issue of the sustainability of this method of financing.³³ The share of the companies' expenditure on research and development in the GDP of the Slovak Republic is among the lowest in the EU. Companies prefer the import of technology and innovations over domestic solutions. As part of the support for business research and development, the share of deductible research and development expenses has increased. In 2018, the share of deducted expenditures (costs) for research and development increased from 25% to 100%, in 2019, to 150%, and in 2020, to 200%. In addition, if the taxpayer reported a tax loss or if the tax base after the reduction of the tax loss was reported to be lower than deducted R&D expenses (costs), since 2020, the period for claiming the deduction has been extended from 4 to 5 next tax periods following its occurrence.

³² High value added is not only determined by a company belonging to a particular economic sector. In case of the subsidiaries of multinational companies, their position in the manufacturing (assembly) value chain is crucial, and the share of pre-manufacturing and post-manufacturing activities (associated with a high value added) is low compared to the companies in economically developed countries.

³³ Country Report Slovakia 2020. Brussels, 26 February 2020, SWD(2020) 524 final.

https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2020-european_semester_country-report-slovakia_en.pdf

In 2018, in total, 250 entrepreneurs claimed a deduction of expenses (costs) for research and development resulting in a reduction in income tax by EUR 25 mil. Thus, one third of the company's R&D expenditure was supported through the deduction. By increasing the deduction of R&D expenditure (costs) to 150%, a decrease in 2019 income tax is provisionally estimated in all taxpayers claiming the deduction in an amount of EUR 45 mil. Most of the estimated increase is due to a change in the percentage of the deduction of R&D expenditure (costs). The process transparency is a prerequisite for minimising the misuse of this form of support for domestic innovations.

Among the domestic growth sources are domestic investments, human capital, innovations, soil, raw materials, and the landscape. The share of the Slovak food in stores is low, it is at a level of 40%.³⁴ The bottlenecks are to be seen on both the supply (quantity, quality, added services) and demand sides (store supplies, customers). The share of domestic-brand goods of trading companies can also be increased by targeted trade policies of these companies.³⁵ The untapped potential is in improving cooperation between manufacturers, processors, and traders of local produce. Public financial support in the food sector is targeted at and limited to wholesome foods.

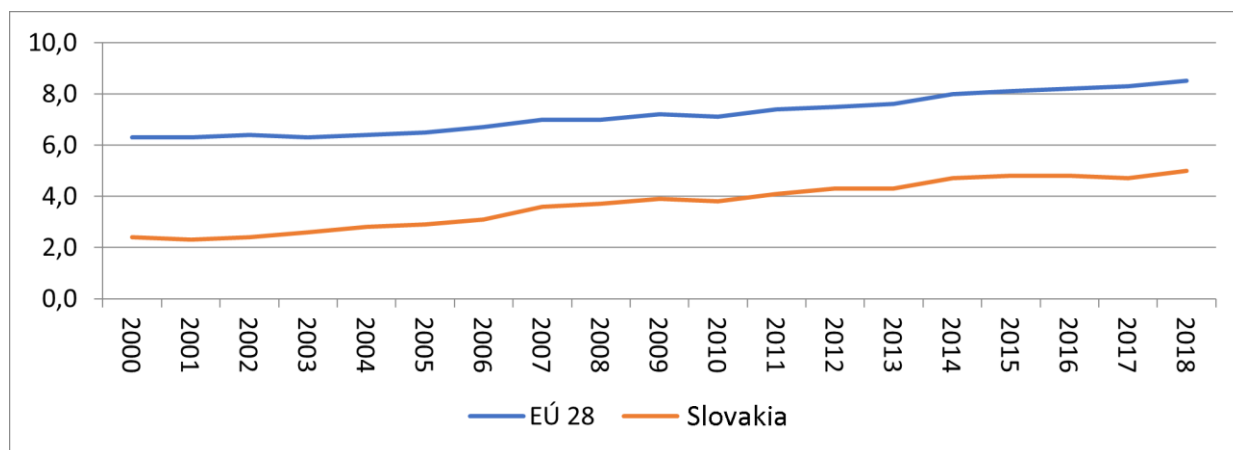
2. Reaching environmentally and socially sustainable production and consumption, heading for a circular economy

Goal: Heading for an environmentally and socially sustainable production and consumption, a circular economy while reducing subsidies in the problem sectors and internalising social externalities and environmental protection expenditure.

Competitiveness is impacted by efficiency, reduction of input consumption, and by minimising waste. Economic sectors have a negative impact on the individual elements of the environment, especially when it comes to air, water, soil, and rock mass pollution, waste generation, land cover and land use, the fragmentation of the landscape ecosystems, health, noise, etc.³⁶ Environmental quality degradation is reported in 11% of the country's territory.³⁷

The fact that the Slovak economy is among the most energy-intensive economies in the EU is attributable to the industry's mix rather than to its low energy efficiency. Energy productivity is gradually growing, however, it is still 1.7-times lower than in the EU-28 (Graph 11).

Graph 11 Energy productivity of the SR and the EU-28 between 2000 and 2018 (in EUR per KGOE)



Zdroj: Eurostat. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_07_30/default/line?lang=en

³⁴ Monitoring MPRV SR and SPPK.

³⁵ Decisive weight is given to retail chains, as they generate 86 % of food sales.

³⁶ Enviroportal: Vplyvy na ŽP. <https://www.enviroportal.sk/environmentalne-temy/vplyvy-na-zp> (Environmental impacts)

³⁷ Lieskovská, Z., Lényiová, P. a kol. (2019): Správa o stave životného prostredia Slovenskej republiky v roku 2018 (Rozšírené hodnotenie kvality a starostlivosti). Ministry of the Environment of the SR and Slovak Environmental Agency. (MŽP SR a SAŽP). (State of the Environment Report of the Slovak Republic 2018 – extended assessment of quality and care).

The SR is below the EU average when it comes to the amount of generated waste per capita, however, waste management remains a concern, as there is a high rate of waste dumping and a low rate of recycling.³⁸ In 2016, the recyclable materials recovery rate was 4.9 % (which was below the EU-28 average of 11.7%). As regards companies, investment and employment indicators only cover the recycling sectors, i.e. not all sectors, in which companies apply circular economy principles, are covered. In 2018, the recycling rate of municipal waste was 36.3 % (as opposed to 47.0% in the EU-28). In 2017, the recycling rate of plastic packaging waste was 65.7 % (67.5 % in the EU-28). In 2016, the recovery rate of construction and demolition waste was 54.0 % (89 % in the EU-28). The fact that Slovakia generates less municipal waste may be viewed in positive light – in 2018, the amount of generated municipal waste per capita was 414 kg (492 kg in the EU-28).

Green innovations will be incentivised by increasing the share of green public procurement. In the document Greener Slovakia, the Strategy for the Environmental Policy of the Slovak Republic by 2030 (hereinafter referred to as the Envirostrategy 2030),³⁹ a commitment is made that green public procurement will cover at least 70 % of the total value of public procurement by 2030. The Waste Prevention Programme of the Slovak Republic for 2019 – 2025 lays down Measure O.5 according to which the ministries and their subordinate organisations and other central government authorities will be consistently enforcing the green procurement principles, in accordance with the current National Action Plan for Green Public Procurement. In a stepwise fashion, mandatory green public procurement will be implemented by self-governing regions and cities and also green e-procurement.⁴⁰

The evaluation of the level of the GPP implementation is provided in the Information on the Implementation of the GPP National Action Plan.⁴¹ In 2018, the GPP share in the total public procurement as regards the number of contracts, concluded agreements, orders, and purchases, accounted for 7.6 % (in case of local governments as low as 3 %). The GPP share in the total public procurement as regards financial value was only 3.8 % (however, in case of local governments as much as 21.7 %). The supply of goods predominates, whereby the share of services and construction work is insignificant. Based on the previous experience, it is assumed that the strategic goal laid down in the GPP National Action Plan in the SR for 2016 – 2020, a 50% share of green public procurement in the total public procurement will not be met.

With respect to the modifications of the industry structure in the SR, The Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan for 2021 – 2030 and the Economic Policy Strategy of the SR will especially focus on energy efficiency and on the ecological production of Slovak industry compared to the rest of the world. Between 2019 and 2020, several documents were adopted at national and European levels, with an ambition to move towards environmentally sustainable production and consumption.

EU strategies are:

- Measures following from the European Green Deal,⁴² such as the implementation of the prepared European Climate Law committing to the climate-neutrality objective and the Circular Economy Action Plan. The communication was published on 11 March 2020
- Farm to Fork Strategy
- The EU's New Industrial Strategy
- EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030
- EU Strategy for a Sustainable and Smart Mobility.

³⁸State of the Environment Report of the Slovak Republic 2019 (2019)

³⁹ Ministry of the Environment of the SR (2019): Green Slovakia – Environmental Policy Strategy of the Slovak Republic by 2030 (Envirostrategy 2030). Government Resolution No 87/2019 adopted on 27 February 2019.

⁴⁰ Information on the implementation of the GPP National Action Plan in the Slovak Republic for 2016 – 2020, for the year 2018. UV-16935/2019. <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/23996/1>

⁴¹ In 2018, based on a questionnaire survey, 1,529 organisations of self-governments and central government bodies were addressed. The survey response rate was 30 %. <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/23996/1>

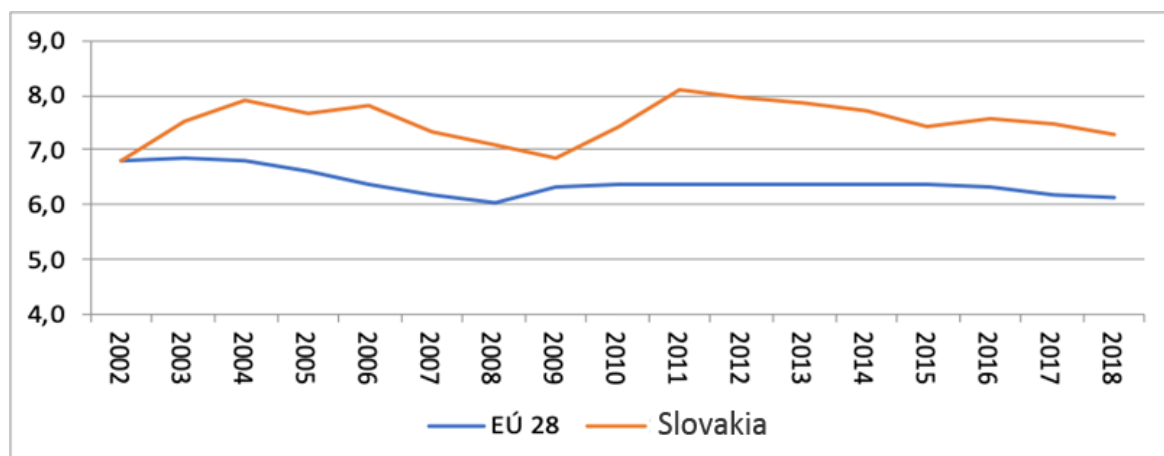
⁴²Measures/strategies based on the EDC (electronic data collection) will be developed at the national level by the relevant ministries..

National strategies:

- Low-carbon development strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2030 with a view to 2050 adopted by the Resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic No 104, of 5 March 2020
- The GPP National Action Plan, the expected date of submission to the government is late 2020
- Increasing the energy efficiency of buildings
- Forest strategy
- Zero Pollution Action Plan
- An update of the raw materials policy.

The environmental sustainability of economic activities is affected by the tax system. Since 2002, the share of environmentally related tax revenues in total taxes in the Slovak Republic has been between 7 and 8%. Compared to the EU-28, Slovakia's share is higher (Chart 12). In 2018, the share of environmentally related taxes in the GDP reached 2.5%, ranking Slovakia among the EU countries with an average share of environmental taxes in the GDP (Eurostat, 2019). Therefore, the question is what kind of incentives and regulation will be needed to influence the trend towards environmentally sustainable production and consumption, given the unfavourable situation affected by the current setting of taxes and fees.

Graph 12 Share of environmental taxes in total tax revenues in the SR and the EU-28 between 2002 and 2018 (in %)



Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/t2020_rt320/default/line?lang=en

The Envirostrategy 2030 and the newly adopted legislative and strategic documents respond to the environmental challenges facing Slovakia. The basic vision is to achieve a better quality of the environment and a sustainable circular economy, based on the rigorous protection of the environment and using as few non-renewable natural resources and hazardous substances as possible, which will lead to an improvement in the population's health. By prevention and adapting to climate change, its consequences in Slovakia will be moderate. Air protection aims at a dramatic emissions reduction of SO₂ by 82% compared to 2005, NO_x by 50%, NMVOC by 32%, NH₃ by 30%, and PM_{2.5} by 49%, to achieve a significant reduction of the negative effects of air pollution on human health and the stability of ecosystems. Green fiscal reform will shift the burden of taxation towards environmental taxes in line with the polluter pays principle. Municipal waste recycling rate, including its preparation for reuse, should increase to 60% by 2030, and its landfill rate should be reduced to at least 10% by 2035.⁴³ The projected energy intensity of the industrial sector should come closer to the EU average.

⁴³ After the transposition of the EU Waste Framework Directive, the current wording of Act No 79/2015 Coll. on waste and on amending certain acts in Annex 3 (objectives and binding ceilings in waste management), Item V (the waste management objective in municipal waste) reads as follows: „The waste management objective with respect to municipal waste is to increase the preparation for reuse and recycling of household waste to at least 55 % by 2025, to at least 60 % by 2030, and to at least 65 % by 2035, of the volume of the waste generated in the preceding calendar year.“ „The waste management objective with respect to municipal waste is to reduce the volume of municipal waste disposed in landfills to at least 10 % of the total volume of generated municipal waste.“

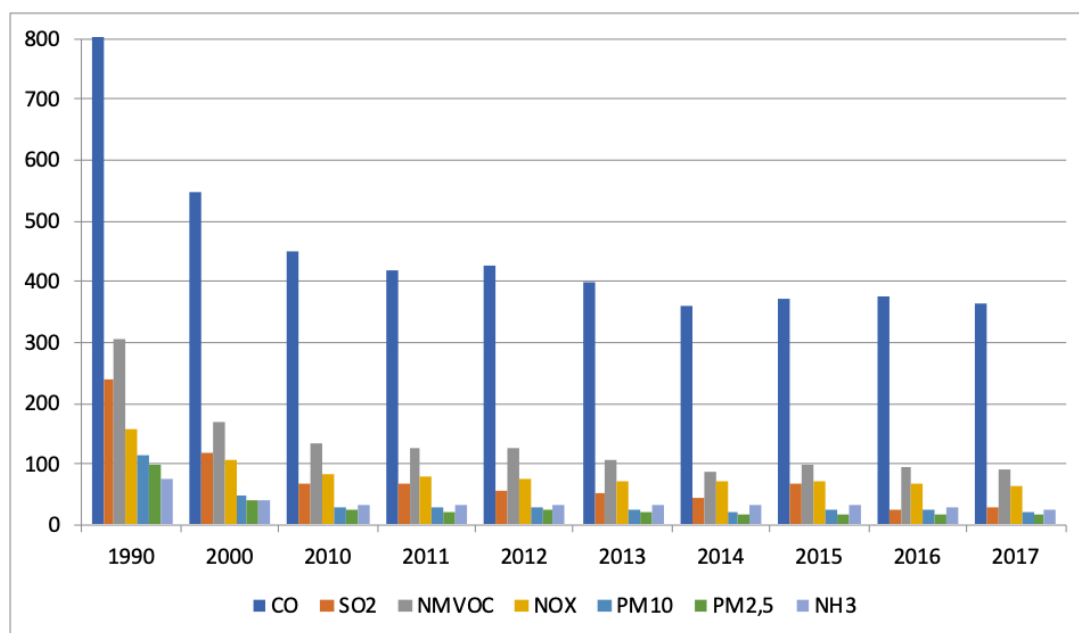
The environmentally sustainable behaviour of companies is determined by their culture and cost criteria. From the point of view of regulation and incentivisation, there are legal regulations such as Act No 24/2006 Coll. on Environmental Impact Assessment and on amending certain acts, as Amended (EIA and SEA), Act No 302/2019 Coll. on the deposit return scheme for disposable beverage containers and on amending certain acts in the wording of Act No 74/2020 Coll., and Act No 469/2002 Coll. on the eco-labelling of products, as amended, requiring environmentally sustainable behaviour of companies today.

3. Building sustainable energy and transportation

Goal: Building sustainable energy and transport infrastructure, developing low-carbon economy based on the principles of sustainable energy and the development of a low-emission transport and logistics system, strengthening the economic self-sufficiency of the regions.

The energy intensity of the economy remains to be high. The share of energy from renewable energy sources is low. The share of road transport in the performance of passenger and freight transport is high. The share of individual passenger transport is high and it creates pressure on the construction of roads and parking spaces. The share of emissions from transport is increasing, with NO_x pollutants having the highest share (approximately 46%).⁴⁴ The energy sector is the largest producer of greenhouse gas emissions. Its share in total emissions produced in the Slovak Republic is 50.3%. The economy's high energy intensity creates a high demand for energy. Production restrictions, the winding up of several companies with a significant impact on the environment and investing in technologies with a reduced environmental impact have contributed to a significant environmental liability reduction between 1990 and 2000. Since 2014, the situation has remained unchanged (Graph 13).

Graph 13 Development of air pollutant emissions



Source: *enviroportal.sk*. <https://www.enviroportal.sk/indicator/detail?id=141>. Note: In 1990, CO emissions reached 1,133.7 kt. Explanations: NMVOC - non-methane volatile organic compounds, NO_x – nitrogen oxides, PM₁₀ – solid particles less than 10 micrometres in diameter, PM_{2.5} – solid particles less than 2.5 micrometres in diameter, NH – ammonium.

The share of carbon-free electricity generation is 80%. The share of energy from renewable sources in gross final energy consumption has long been around 12%.⁴⁵ Hydropower has the highest share in the electricity generation sector, and in the heat production sector, it is biomass.

⁴⁴ Report on the State of the Environment in the Slovak Republic in 2018 (2019).

⁴⁵ The share of energy from renewable energy sources in gross final energy consumption <https://www.enviroportal.sk/indicator/detail?id=1763>

In order to reduce energy intensity and increase energy efficiency, the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan for 2021-2030 will be implemented. In 2018, amendments to two important pieces of legislation in the energy sector were approved - the Energy Act and the Act on Renewable Energy Sources and Highly-effective Combined Generation.

The electromobility development strategy triggers a systematic support for and development of electromobility. The Action Plan for the Development of Electromobility (February 2019) focuses on the support and solution of related problems. The topic of electromobility is included in all of the state's relevant strategies and policies. To support the use of alternative fuels in transport, the subsidy is geared towards the purchase of electric cars or plug-ins (call in December 2019 - total volume EUR 5 million).

To boost the development of electromobility, a network of charging stations must be set up. The Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic announced a call for a subsidy for the construction of charging stations addressing municipalities, local governments, and organisations founded by them (from 1 July to 1 October 2019). Investments in the battery industry were announced. The Ministry of the Economy of the Slovak Republic encouraged an investment in the production of batteries. Biofuels have the largest share in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in transport. Biofuels will continue to remain major contributors to achieving the 2030 environmental goals (share of RES and the reduction of GHG), also CNG, LNG and their alternatives produced from renewable sources, and electromobility.

Amendment to Act No 595/2003 Coll. on income tax introduced a new depreciation group for electric cars and plug-in hybrids with a depreciation period of 2 years. The envisaged amendment of Act No 50/1976 Coll. on Spatial Planning and the Building Code (the Building Act) aims to simplify the administrative process in the construction of the charging infrastructure and to introduce the obligation to build the charging infrastructure along with the construction of new parking spaces.

Restrictions on individual transport have not yet been adopted⁴⁶ but sustainable transport is promoted (Act No 151/2019 Coll. on the provision of subsidies to support the development of bicycle transport and cycling tourism). A call for a subsidy for the development of bicycle transport and cycling tourism was launched (September 2019 – EUR 13 million). The promotion of the sharing economy concept is laid down by the legal regulation on the provision of passenger transport services via digital platforms - Act No 9/2019 Coll., amending Act No 56/2012 Coll. on road transport.

4. Adapting agriculture and forestry to climate change

Goal: Adapting competitive agriculture and forestry to climate change, while minimising the negative effects on health, the environment, and on biodiversity.

The aim is to achieve environmentally sustainable primary production and processing. Soil contamination is linked to the areas of industrial activity and to the areas of influence of the so-called geochemical anomalies - mountain and foothill areas. In 2017, 38.5% of the total area of agricultural land was endangered by potential water erosion, while taking into account the protective impact of the current vegetation cover and the method of land management which covers 751,333 hectares of predominantly arable land. There is a need to implement anti-erosion measures in these areas. The elimination of agricultural practices resulting in habitat fragmentation and the loss of biodiversity is a priority for sound agricultural ecosystems and the ecological stability of the landscape. Agriculture accounts for 6% of all greenhouse gas emissions and is the largest producer of ammonia emissions.⁴⁷

The intensification of agriculture and the use of fertilisers have a major impact on the environment. The substances in fertilisers, which enter the soil, escape from it and have a negative impact on water and air quality. In the long-term, amounts exceeding the recommended rate of nitrogen have been escaping from agricultural land. An improper fertiliser application, i.e. their incorporation into the soil, has an impact on the environment. If fertilisers, once applied, fail to be immediately tilled below the soil surface, there is a

⁴⁶ Restrictions are determined by the condition of transport infrastructure.

⁴⁷ Report on the State of the Environment in the Slovak Republic in 2018 (2019).

probability of leakage into the environment. The soil can absorb approximately 55 - 60% of nitrogen. Compared to 1990, in Slovakia, the value of nitrogen escaping into the air (in the form of nitrous oxide) has dropped by more than a half.⁴⁸

By its forest area, Slovakia is among the countries with the highest forest cover in the EU. In 2018, the reported forest cover was 41.2%. The majority of forests are commercial forests (72.1%). The forest age structure varies significantly when compared to the normal (optimal) age structure, with forests over 70 years old predominating, of which most have reached an age, at which their recovery is required. Conversely, the share of young forest stands aged between 20 and 70 is below what is considered normal representation. Of the total timber reserves, 51.4% are located in forests managed by state organisations. Protected areas, including the areas of European importance and protected bird areas, are located on 60% of forest land, commercial forests included.

Intensive felling is performed on the so-called white areas, whereby the records on the total volume of timber felled in these areas are non-existent. This makes the total wood flows non-transparent, especially when it comes to the volume of logging and wood supply, including its export and energy use. The felling of woody plants growing outside the forest land is laid down by the legal regulation on nature and landscape protection. In 2018, the Wood Act No 113/2018 Coll. facilitating the implementation of EU regulations on the legality of timber was adopted. The purpose of this law is to prevent illegally harvested timber from entering the market.

In 2018, 2.1 mil. square metres of raw wood were exported; it is the second lowest volume in the past 10 years. There is a lack of processing capacity for the highest quality assortments of coniferous and deciduous roundwood.⁴⁹ Pursuant to the Decree on the provision of subsidies in forestry for the performance of non-production functions of forests (2017), subsidies were granted to forest managers as a remuneration for the performance of non-production functions of forests and for a nature-friendly forest management (in 2018, EUR 2.3 million were granted to 127 beneficiaries, and in 2019, EUR 2.5 million to 111 beneficiaries).

5. Ensuring fiscal sustainability of demographic changes

Goal: Ensuring fiscal sustainability of demographic changes, generating public revenues to maintain the state's social services associated with population ageing, and stimulating the direction of the economy.

In order to increase the efficiency of tax collection, prevention of abuse of the tax system and combating the grey and the black economies, the Government of the Slovak Republic adopted the Concept of the Slovak Republic in the fight against tax fraud on value added tax (2011) and subsequently action plans.⁵⁰ Tax gaps represent an estimate of the amount of tax revenues, which the public administration loses due to legal and illegal activities. In case of unpaid VAT of the potential VAT collected in the SR, the estimate of the gap for value added tax (VAT) reached 28.3% (2016), i.e. in nominal terms EUR 2.2 billion, which accounts for 2.7% of the GDP. The estimate for 2017 is 26.3%.⁵¹ Compared to 2012, when the VAT gap hit its peak, it was possible to reduce it by more than a quarter.

Measures to combat tax evasion have a significant impact on improving tax collection. In 2012, a three-phase action plan was adopted to prevent fraudulent conduct of entities and to improve VAT collection. Among other legislative measures are control reports and self-taxation in building and construction

⁴⁸ Haluš, M., Dráb, J. (2017): Tri výzvy životného prostredia na Slovensku. Inštitút environmentálnej politiky MŽP SR (Three Environmental Challenges in Slovakia). Institute for Environmental Policy at the (MoE SR).

⁴⁹ Správa o lesnom hospodárstve v Slovenskej republike za rok 2018 – Zelená správa. Ministerstvo pôdohospodárstva a rozvoja vidieka SR a Národné lesnícke centrum. Bratislava 2019. Report on the Forest Sector of the Slovak Republic 2018, the Green Report. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the SR and National Forest Centre, Bratislava 2019.

⁵⁰ During an audit, the SAO (Supreme Audit Office) found that the Financial Directorate of the Slovak Republic did not submit a report for 2014 and it did not develop reports on the implementation of the measures for 2015 and 2016. (NKÚ SR (2017): Záverečná správa. Účinnosť opatrení politiky boja s podvodmi na DPH. december 2017) (SAO 2017: Final Report. Effectiveness of the measures on combating VAT fraud. December 2017).

⁵¹ The estimate of the gap on excise duty on mineral oils is between 13.7% and 16.8% of the potential revenue collected from this tax (2017). This corresponds to the lost tax revenue between 194 and 246 mil. eur. The highest-risk group are trucks with diesel engines.

services. The corporate tax gap⁵² has narrowed significantly since 2014, however, estimates are less reliable due to data constraints. Legislative measures included the introduction of the tax license and the register of financial statements.⁵³ Media-covered tax fraud cases highlight failures in the public financial management system and in the judiciary.⁵⁴

Expenditures resulting from the population's ageing are forecast by the Working Group on Ageing (AWG).⁵⁵ These projections address three areas: pensions, healthcare, and long-term care. Demographic projections show a rapid population ageing but the estimate of the rate of ageing has decreased compared to previous estimates. In 2016, public expenditure sensitive to the age structure accounted for 18.9% of the GDP and was the eighth lowest in the EU. The model estimate assumed that pension expenditure might fall from 8.6% of the GDP in 2016 to 7.6% of the GDP in 2034, mainly due to the 2012 pension reform.⁵⁶ According to the Country fiche on 2018 pension projections of the Slovak Republic 2020 Update (MF SR, January 2020), pension expenditures are projected at a level of 9.9% of the GDP in 2040 and should hit climax at a level of 13.9% in 2060.⁵⁷ The projected pensions increase and the economic downturn in 2020 due to the global pandemic will lead to a reassessment of the assumptions and results of these estimates. The forthcoming National Programme for Active Ageing for the years 2021 - 2030 aims to create a programme framework for the implementation of the measures promoting the active ageing policies in public interest in the forthcoming 2021 – 2030 decade.

The implementation of the measures from Expenditure reviews improves the efficiency of the public health insurance expenditure. The biggest savings reported are an outcome of reducing the overuse of medicines,⁵⁸ of reference pricing of the medical supplies and devices (Table 1). The review activities of the General Health Insurance Company have improved. The set funding system continues to generate hospital indebtedness.⁵⁹ Savings are achieved through the central procurement of medical equipment. The prevention of tumour diseases is improved by launching screening programmes aimed at their early detection, which in turn reduces healthcare costs.

⁵² The corporate income tax gap represents the difference between the potential tax on corporate sector activities subject to this tax and the tax actually paid under current legislation. It is estimated for the non-financial corporations sector.

⁵³ Výškrabka, M., Antalicová, J. (2018): Daňový report Slovenskej republiky 2018. Ekonomická analýza 50, október 2018, Inštitút finančnej politiky MF SR. CITÁCIE. (2018): Tax Report of the Slovak Republic. Economic Analysis 50, October 2018, Institute for Financial Policy MF SR, CITATIONS)

⁵⁴ Given the crisis in the judiciary and the will to resolve it after the 2020 parliamentary elections, it is assumed that the scope for the undeclared economy will be significantly reduced.

⁵⁵ The AWG publishes population ageing reports, modelling the spending on pensions, healthcare, education, long-term care, and unemployment benefits by 2070.

⁵⁶ Fodor, J., Rizman, T., Šrámková, L. (2018): Šedivíme pomalšie. Správa Európskej komisie o starnutí populácie. Komentár 2018/11, 30. 5. 2018, MF SR. CITÁCIE (Growing Grey Slower: The European Commission 2018 Ageing Report. Commentary 2018/11, 30 May 2018, MF SR, CITATIONS).

⁵⁷ Country Fiche on 2018 pension projections of the Slovak Republic 2020 Update (MF SR, január 2020), https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/economy-finance/update_of_the_country_fiche_on_public_pensions_for_the_ageing_report_2018_-_slovakia.pdf

⁵⁸ The amendment of the Medicinal Products Act from late 2018 facilitated savings in expenditures. New expensive medicinal products are no longer entered in the classification system in an uncontrolled manner. However, the rules on the reimbursement of exempt medicinal products have not been introduced and expenditure on these medicines is rising. No limits have been introduced by health insurance companies on the providers of outpatient laboratory testing. Expensive medicinal products that were classified in the past and continue to be covered by general health insurance, regardless of their cost-effectiveness, remain a concern.

⁵⁹ The negative balance in financing the healthcare sector is affected by an increase in the expenditures of university and teaching hospitals. In 2018, a five-year process of bringing together the individual rates of individual hospitals was launched. In 2019, the government approved a proposal to reform institutional healthcare (the hospital network stratification), but it did not pass Parliament.

Table 1 Austerity measures of the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic and their implementation (in millions of euros). Source: IU (Implementation Unit) MZ SR, health insurance funds data

| Source: IU Ministry of Health SR | Plan 2017 | Implementation 2017 | Plan 2018 | Implementation 2018 | Plan 2019 | Implementation 2019 | Potential savings |
|--|------------|---------------------|------------|---------------------|------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Austerity measures TOTAL | 174 | 98.7 | 190 | 40.4 | 196 | -119 | 363 |
| Measures decreasing the expenditures of VZP | 143 | 102.8 | 159 | 121.5 | 165 | 106 | 268 |
| Overuse of medicinal products – introducing limits on providers dispensing outpatient prescriptions | 20 | 22.2 | 20 | 29.7 | 20 | 20.2 | 59 |
| Exempt medicinal products – introducing rules on the reimbursement of exemptions | 10 | 1.8 | 10 | -0.2 | 10 | -0.6 | 10 |
| Potentially cost-ineffective medicines - centrally purchased medicines by health insurance companies | 25 | -4.7 | 25 | 4.5 | 25 | 4.5 | 42 |
| Special medical material – price cuts (price referencing) | 35 | 33 | 45 | 33 | 45 | 33 | 55 |
| Medical devices – reference pricing and review activity | 15 | 10.4 | 15 | 22.4 | 15 | 15.4 | 15 |
| Diagnostic examinations – reduction of CT and MR examinations | 10 | 10.9 | 16 | 5.9 | 22 | 6.1 | 25 |
| Diagnostic examinations – introducing limits on outpatient providers | 3 | 2 | 3 | -6.5 | 3 | -15 | 37 |
| Improving assessor activity of the General Health Insurance Company | 25 | 27.2 | 25 | 32.5 | 15 | 42.1 | 25 |
| Measures to reduce expenditure of hospital operators (subordinate organisations of the Ministry of Health SR) | 31 | -4.1 | 31 | -81.1 | 31 | -225 | 95 |
| Optimising operating costs | 5 | -3.1 | 5 | -20.9 | 5 | -54.4 | 10 |
| Optimising medical processes | 15 | -23.4 | 15 | -59.4 | 15 | -134.8 | 74 |
| Optimising medicine and special medical material purchasing | 8 | 6.8 | 8 | -17.3 | 8 | -51.8 | 8 |
| Efficiency of procurement for medical equipment | 3 | 15.6 | 3 | 16.4 | 3 | 16.4 | 3 |
| One-time cost transactions | - | - | - | -100.3 | - | - | - |

Reducing poverty and social inclusion

Slovakia has long been among the countries with the lowest poverty rates: the percentage of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion is the third lowest in the EU-27 and is at 16.3% (2018) compared to the EU average of 21.6% (2018).⁶⁰ Since 2008, 239,000 people have been lifted out of the risk of poverty or social exclusion, by which Slovakia met the goal of the Europe 2020 strategy to reduce the number of people at risk by at least 170,000 by 2020⁶¹. Some groups of the population face a significantly higher rate of social exclusion: children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, people from marginalised Roma communities (MRCs), single parents, large families, and people with disabilities, homeless people. In these groups, significantly worse results in the indicators of social exclusion are reported, in contrast to the total population of Slovakia. Due to inequalities, women have also been at risk of poverty for a long time. In 2018, public spending on the social inclusion of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion were estimated at € 2,611 million, which represents approximately 2.9% of the GDP and 7.1% of the total public expenditure. EU funding and co-financing accounted for roughly 10 %.

| <i>Source: Eurostat</i> | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion | 18.4 % | 18.1 % | 16.3 % | 16.3 % |
| Employed persons at risk of poverty | 6 % | 5.8 % | 5.1 % | 6 % |
| Persons living in overcrowded households | 37.8 % | 37.9 % | 36.4 % | 35.5 % |
| S80/S20 income share ratio | 3.6 % | 3.6 % | 3.5 % | 3 % |
| Income share of the bottom 40 % of the population | 24.8 % | 24.5 % | 25 % | 26.2 % |
| Total gross income of households compared to EU average | 74 % | 68 % | 69 % | 71 % |

MAIN CHALLENGES

1. Reducing social and economic inequalities

Goal: Reducing social and economic inequalities between different population groups.

Slovakia has made progress in preventing the deepening of income inequality, progress is also reported in reducing the inequalities between different population groups. In 2018, for the first time ever, Slovakia topped the ranking among all EU countries in the S80/S20 income quintile share ratio (3.03% compared to the EU average of 5.17% in 2018).⁶² In Slovakia, the Gini coefficient, which takes into account the total income in a society, reported the lowest level in the whole EU in 2018 (20.9% compared to the EU average of 30.9).⁶³ The reason behind positive trends is the increasing minimum wage, which reduces the gap between the least earning employees and the people with an average wage, declining unemployment⁶⁴ and increasing old-age pensions, thanks to which the at-risk-of-poverty rate for older people is nearly half of the whole population and the lowest in the EU.⁶⁵

The stagnation in adjusting the amounts for assistance in material need has long been negatively contributing to the widening of the income gap between different population groups. Between 2009 and 2019, the amount of the material need assistance for a household without its own income remained unchanged, which resulted in a decrease compared to the at-risk-of-poverty line for individuals by 22%, and in the case of a couple with two children, by 23%.⁶⁶

Until 2019, the indexation of material need assistance had not been regulated by law and it depended on the government's decision. The amendment to the Act on Assistance in Material Need effective from April

⁶⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/sdgs/index.html?country=SK&goal=SDG1&ind=1&chart=line>

⁶¹ National employment strategy by 2020

⁶² Source: Eurostat.

⁶³ Source: EU SILC 2018 – Poverty and social exclusion indicators

⁶⁴ In 2019, total unemployment rate was at 6.11 %, source: Centre of Labour, Social Affairs, and the Family of the SR

⁶⁵ Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and the Family of the SR

⁶⁶ The poverty line is calculated on the basis of a total income, that is, also including income from work. The relative limit is compared with the absolute limit of the minimum income at the level of assistance in material need.

2019 increased the amounts of assistance in material need, with the exception of the housing allowance, by about 5% and introduced automatic indexation following an increase in the minimum subsistence level. From 1 January 2020, the amounts of material need assistance have been increased on the basis of an index adjusting the minimum subsistence amounts as at 1 July 2019, by 2.5%. Among other instruments contributing to an income increase are: state social support with the amounts regularly adjusted, e.g. child allowance, parental allowance, etc., and other benefits and allowances under other schemes, or tax relief. Last but not least, it is a matter of introducing activation and motivation measures in the system of assistance in material need, the aim being better employability in the labour market and an increase in the income of households in material need.⁶⁷

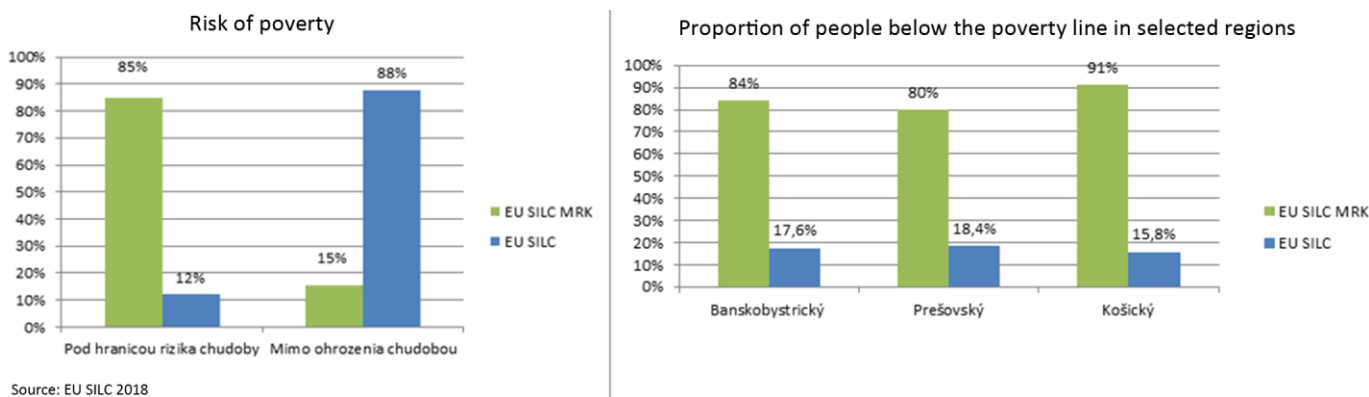
A more comprehensive approach to tackling inequality in society is presented in the annual World Report on Happiness which combines broader criteria: GDP per capita, level of social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom to make life choices, generosity, corruption perception. According to the latest 2020 report, Slovakia placed 37 in the ranking of 153 countries (in 2018, it was placed 39th, in 2019, it was placed 38th).⁶⁸ The authors of this report point out that there is a strong link between the country's position at the top of this ranking and its ability to combat inequalities in society. Despite the progress made, Slovakia has room for improvement in reducing social and economic inequalities between different population groups.

2. Integrating marginalised Roma population

Goal: Increasing integration rate of marginalised Roma population

Inequalities between the marginalised Roma population and other groups of the population persist. This has been confirmed by the results of the special EU SILC MRC 2018 survey, which provides the first ever data on MRC income and living conditions comparable to the results of the current EU SILC survey in Slovakia and in EU countries⁶⁹. Up to 85% of MRC households are at risk of poverty, compared to 12% of the current survey. The median disposable income of these households is three times lower than in the general population. Up to 56% of the population in Roma communities face severe material deprivation (compared to 7% of the current survey). Thus, there is still a gap between the living conditions of marginalised Roma communities and other groups of the population.⁷⁰

Graph 14 Risk of poverty - comparison between EU SILC MRC and EU SILC 2018



A positive signal is that in 2018 we recorded the lowest unemployment rate and the highest employment rate in the marginalised Roma communities (this information can be found, for example, in the recently published collection *Good Practice of Activation Work*). This is a result of several measures implemented in recent years, e.g. the adoption of the law on the social economy, the scheme for the least developed

⁶⁷ Revision of expenditure for groups at risk of poverty or social exclusion, MR SR 03/2020

⁶⁸ World Happiness Report 2020

⁶⁹ EU SILC MRC was prepared in cooperation with the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. The survey focused on the level of income, poverty and social inclusion of MRC in Slovakia, with the emphasis on comparability of the data with the levels in majority population.

⁷⁰ source: The Office of Plenipotentiary of the Government of the SR for Roma communities.

districts, which brings new jobs to the regions, or the employment for thousands of Roma in auxiliary professions as field social workers or health education assistants. Pastoral work with the Roma also plays an important role. More and more companies have been launching specific programmes to reach out and employ people from marginalised communities.⁷¹ The newly published *Atlas of Roma Communities* (2019) will contribute to a better assessment of the impacts of integration policies targeted at marginalised Roma communities. It covers a total of 810 municipalities, and researchers estimated that the Roma population in Slovakia today represents approximately 440,000 people. According to a qualified estimate, 331,000 Roma live in a total of 1,030 communities, and approximately 18 per cent of the Roma population captured in *Atlas* live in an integrated way.⁷² It is important to maintain the positive trend in the integration of the MRC; in the new strategy for the integration of the MRC, it will be appropriate to monitor the reported unemployment rate as well as the employment rate. It will be necessary to place more emphasis on local economic models as a basis for specific measures for the inclusion of the MRC and to significantly support activities in the field of social economy⁷³.

Adoption of an amendment to the Education Act, which introduced compulsory pre-school preparation for every five-year-old child from September 2021,⁷⁴ is probably the most significant measure in the area of public policies aimed at the integration of marginalised communities in the recent period. So far, only one in three children from marginalised Roma communities has completed at least 1 year in kindergarten before entering primary school. The amendment also introduces the possibility of education in the home environment. At the same time, it abolishes the zero years of primary schools with effect from 2022.

Field social work is the longest functioning and probably the most developed public service in relation to excluded Roma communities. At the beginning of 2020, the last phase of the National Project Support and Improvement of Quality of Social Work started, funded by the European Social Fund. This will ensure the operation of the service until March 2023 and allow continuation of the work of 250 field social workers and 200 field workers, as well as 50 other professionals. New positions of professionals will also be supported focusing more on new activities in municipalities, such as active search for affordable rental flats, contacting potential landlords, encouraging legalisation of buildings and building lot settlement, or initiating the programs “housing first“, financial advice, prevention and assistance in debt relief programmes, enforcement proceedings or personal bankruptcies. In the field of employment, professionals will actively search and contact potential employers, sensitize and motivate them to employ people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.⁷⁵

Despite the positive impact of the measures on MRC integration, we must state that inequalities persist. Availability of funds post 2020 will have a direct affect on the sustainability of implemented measures. Adoption of the new Strategy for Roma Integration by 2030 is the main condition for financing measures from the new EC programming period for the years 2021 – 2027.

3. Better public services for people at risk of poverty and social exclusion

Goal: Ensuring equal opportunities for people at risk of poverty and social exclusion, including by improving the quality and accessibility of public services, and by combating discrimination, including institutional

Slovakia made progress in the monitored period in the area of increasing the quality and availability of public services. The adoption of the law on the social economy can be described as the most fundamental measure in the recent period in the area of the availability of public services. Its aim is to increase employment and support social cohesion and the development of public services.

⁷¹ http://www.minv.sk/swift_data/source/romovia/publikacie/Zbornik%20Dobra%20prax%20aktivacnej%20prace.pdf

⁷² The Office of Plenipotentiary of the Government of the SR for Roma communities in cooperation with the Institute for Labour and Family Research as part of the National project of Monitoring and Evaluation of inclusive policies and their impacts on MRC/ESF.

⁷³ External evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy for Roma integration of the SR to 2020, December 2019, p. 130.

⁷⁴ Act No 209/2019 Coll. amending Act no. 245/2008 Coll. on Upbringing and Education (School Act) and on Amendments to Certain Acts, as amended, and Amending Certain Acts

⁷⁵ source: Implementation Agency of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family, SR

Progress has been made in the area of deinstitutionalisation of social services, in particular through the National Project of Deinstitutionalisation of Social Services Facilities - Support for Transformation Teams⁷⁶, and an amendment to the Social Services Act effective from 1 January 2018⁷⁷, which significantly contributed to improving social services. The current update of the Strategy for the Deinstitutionalisation of Social Services and Substitute Care in the Slovak Republic takes into account the need for more active implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.⁷⁸

An important indicator in assessing the availability of social services is also the level of their co-financing from public funds. In 2019, the volume of funds from the state budget allocated for the financial contribution pursuant legislation on social services through the chapter of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family of the SR reached EUR 156 million. At the same time, higher territorial units, too, declared a year-on-year increase in their budgets for this area.⁷⁹

In the period under review, home care services have extended significantly for citizens with severe health disabilities, persons with adverse medical condition and for seniors. Home care service is an effective support tool to keep citizens in their natural home environment at community level in line with deinstitutionalisation of the social services system. Since 2014, the European Social Fund and the state budget contributed more than EUR 140 million for the home care for people in need through the implementation of four projects.

4. Solidarity in redistribution of available resources

Goal: Strengthening the principle of solidarity in redistribution of available resources

Although the level of income inequality in Slovakia is the lowest from among all EU member states, in the area of solidarity with the poorest groups of population, we are at the other end of the scale.

Assistance in material need in Slovakia is significantly lower in relation to the average income in the economy than similar aid in most EU countries and well below the at-risk-of-poverty line. Poor children in Slovakia live in deeper poverty than the EU-15 average or neighbouring countries. Expenditure on assistance in material need in 2018 accounted for about a third of one per cent (0.34%) of public expenditure, with a sharp decline over the last five years together with the numbers of beneficiaries. The decline in the number of beneficiaries partly reflects growing demand on the labour market due to the improving macroeconomic situation. Any chance to really improve their social situation through activation work is limited by a low level of activation contribution. It was valorised only in 2019, for the first time since 2009, and only by 5 %.⁸⁰

In order to correct the devaluation of assistance in material deprivation against the at-risk-of-poverty line over the last 10 years and to partially alleviate the lag behind the European standard as well as the standards of neighbouring countries, the Revision proposes an upward adjustment of the assistance so that it is able – with no housing allowance, yet with a child allowance – to provide each household with children with an equivalent disposable income at the subsistence level of an individual without children.

The Operational Program Food and Basic Material Assistance, which has been implemented since 2014 and includes the provision of food and hygiene packages or the provision of hot meals, is an important expression of solidarity and a tool to help the most deprived groups of population. In 2018, a total of 364,181 food packages and 47,100 hygiene packages were distributed. At the same time, a total of 41,997

⁷⁶ the implementation started in August 2018 under OP Human Resources. Estimated date of completion: 12/2023. So far, 48 out of 96 large-scale facilities joined the programme, being systematically prepared for the process of transformation and deinstitutionalisation. The National Project coordinated by the Ministry of Labour, social affairs and the family is followed by both implemented and prepared calls under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, focused on the so-called hard activities, ie the real purchase/construction/rental of properties in order to deinstitutionalise social services and provide them at the community level.

⁷⁷ Act No 331/2017 Coll. – definition of legislative amendments aimed at supporting deinstitutionalisation of the whole system of social services.

⁷⁸ source: Implementation agency of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family, SR

⁷⁹ For instance in case of a client with grade VI of dependency in a social services facility under the condition of dependency, cofinancing in the grade VI of dependency (from chapter of the MPSVR SR) increased year on year from EUR 504 to EUR 546/month/bed in 2020. Source: MPSVR SR

⁸⁰ Revision of expenditure for the groups at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2020

hot meals were provided to homeless people. Since March 2017, the period for providing hot meals has been expanded from the winter months only, to the entire calendar year.

5. Adequate housing for people at risk of poverty and social exclusion

Goal: Ensuring access to adequate housing for people at risk of poverty and social exclusion

Slovakia faces significant challenges in ensuring access to adequate housing for people at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The rate of severe housing deprivation in the at-risk-of-poverty population is higher than the EU-15 average and, in addition, it worsens over time. The physical availability of housing in Slovakia, measured by the number of flats per 1,000 inhabitants, is one of the lowest in the EU. The offer of rental housing with regulated rental fees belongs among the lowest in the EU. Yet, the construction of new flats has been slowing down. The housing allowance is part of the overall system of assistance in material need and is not provided as a separate benefit. At present, about 50% of recipients of material need are entitled to a housing allowance. In addition, the allowance is not sufficiently sensitive to the overall living situation of its recipients, for instance size of the family or housing costs. Such setting can be described as non-standard when compared with other developed countries. Public support for social services in crisis intervention, providing accommodation for people in housing need, has been declining over time. Linking crisis intervention social services into a comprehensive system is not enshrined in legislation, although it could reduce public spending on homelessness and make a significant contribution to the quality of life of homeless people. The review of spending on groups at risk of poverty or social exclusion, conducted in March 2020, proposes measures to increase financial assistance related to housing costs by adjusting the housing allowance, more effective assistance to homeless people and people at risk of homelessness, based on more comprehensive data and testing the “housing first” strategy in conditions of Slovakia. Housing social enterprises, which can be set up under the Social Economy Act⁸¹, could soon become one of the tools to improve access to adequate housing.

National programme Project Support for the Settlement of Legal Relations to Land in Municipalities with the MRCs, coordinated and implemented by the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities, is a key initiative in the area of improving housing conditions for the MRC. The Project shall help target groups or municipalities to acquire entitlements to the land under their dwellings. Subsequently, it will be possible to implement measures aimed at improving the standards of housing hygiene of local residents.⁸²

The MPSVR of the SR responded to the social need for broader support of social services in crisis intervention and assistance to homeless people. The Ministry prepared an amendment to the Act on Social Services implemented by Act No 331/2017 Coll. with effect from 1 January 2018. Within the definition of “unfavourable social situation”, the Act newly defines also the risk of social exclusion of a natural person or a limited ability to socially integrate and independently solve one’s problems due to the loss of housing or the threat of loss of housing. This is a new specific reason for intervention by providing social services in relation to this target group, which is broader and specific than natural persons who are in an unfavourable social situation due to the fact that they do not have the necessary conditions to meet basic living needs.

Sustainable and affordable housing is a basic pre-requisite for human dignity, as it is one of the fundamental necessities of life. The amount of the financial contribution from the budget chapter of the MPSVR of the Slovak Republic allocated for the social services provided in shelters established or founded by municipalities increased from EUR 120/month/place to EUR 150/month/place. The role to provide or ensure field social services of crisis intervention was newly given into the competence of municipalities. At the same time, the inclusion of field social service of crisis intervention among types of social services where the municipality is obliged to provide financial contribution for the operation of social services to non-public providers who do not provide social services for profit. The reason for this regulation was to create legal framework for financial support of non-public social service providers, which in terms of its purpose and target groups for which it is intended, is one of the primary forms of assistance and support to

⁸¹ Review of expenditures on groups at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2020

⁸² source: The Office of the Plenipotentiary for Roma communities of the Government of the SR

individuals and communities in disadvantaged social situations. It includes activities aimed at identifying natural persons of various target groups (who do not have the necessary conditions to meet basic living needs, individuals dependent on addictive substances or activities, individuals endangered by the behaviour of other persons or victims of such violence, remaining in a spatially segregated locality with presence of concentrated and generationally reproduced poverty, but also natural persons with severe disabilities). The field social service of crisis intervention also includes the provision of professional activities, service activities and other activities focused primarily on the implementation of preventive activities, social counselling, social rehabilitation, assistance in exercising rights and legally protected interests and creating conditions for the provision of meals or food, to the extent necessary according to the specifics of individual target groups.

Higher territorial units have a newly established obligation to co-finance the operation of the provision of social service – support to independent housing in the framework of financial support to non-public providers of this social service.

This newly established obligation to provide financial support from public funds is based on the fact that this type of support service aimed at promoting the autonomy, independence and self-sufficiency of a natural person, including through assistance in household budget management, is also one of the new instruments to assist and support the target group of people in an unfavourable social situation due to the threat of loss of housing. The MPSVR of the Slovak Republic within its remit as a Managing authority for the OP Human Resources, financed from ESIF, continues to co-finance social services of crisis intervention in the framework of project financing.

Sustainable settlements, regions and the landscape in the context of climate change

Slovakia currently faces many environmental challenges, having problems with the air quality, low level of waste recycling, as well as with ecosystems protection. Environmental problems affect the economy, employment and living comfort of its citizens. Slovakia has been already affected by climate change with visible environmental, economic and health consequences. In the period under review, the Government of the Slovak Republic approved major strategies for the country's adaptability to the consequences of climate change - the Strategy for Adaptation of the Slovak Republic to Climate Change (2018), the Environmental Strategy 2030 (2019) and the Low Carbon Development Strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2030 with an outlook to 2050 (2020). The National Forestry Program of the Slovak Republic 2021-2030 and the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for the Adaptation of the Slovak Republic to Climate Change are being prepared. There is a visible shift to strategic planning in the field of adaptation same as a shift in adaptation policy towards a comprehensive water management in the country. Plans of sustainable mobility are being prepared at the levels of self-governments, HTUs and regional capitals. Negative trends exist in the area of sustainable mobility (high investment debt in public passenger transport infrastructure, missing or unconnected cycle paths in most cities), in the area of access to affordable energy (high energy poverty rate in the Slovak Republic, low protection of customers at risk of energy poverty) in the area of access to drinking water and sanitation (insufficient use of decentralized solutions and nature-friendly technologies). Air pollution is another persistent challenge in Slovakia, with higher levels than the EU average. Pollution caused by agriculture and environmental burdens remain a major problem for water and soil contamination. Municipal waste recycling rate is also under the EU average. Slovakia has major reserves in the circular economy.

| <i>Source: Eurostat</i> | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Land area covered by forests | 48,7 % | 48,7 % | 48,6 % | 48,6 % |
| Household energy consumption per capita (in tonnes of oil) | 366 t | 374 t | 388 t | 378 t |
| Municipal waste recycling rate | 14,9 % | 23 % | 29,8 % | 36,3 % |
| Water area suitable for bathing | 48,5 % | 63,6 % | 59,4 % | 56,3 % |
| Greenhouse gas emissions per capita | 7,7 t | 7,8 t | 8 t | 8 t |

MAIN CHALLENGES

1. Supporting strategic planning at the level of regions

Goal: Inclusive and sustainable development of settlements and regions and integrated, participative spatial and strategic planning

It is necessary to update the approach to territorial development in Slovakia. Despite the fact that changes in urbanisation and settlement structure in Slovakia are visible only in the long term, in the period under review, the approach to planning at the regional and subregional level has developed. Alongside this change comes a discussion about the change in the competence of public administration bodies, their powers and competencies.

The adoption of two key methodological documents, which represent a contribution to integrated, participatory spatial and strategic planning, was a positive step in this context. "Methodology and institutional framework for the creation of public strategies⁸³," brings new elements to strategic planning: a comprehensive and supra-ministerial approach and flexibility in planning and intervention in public administration. The second document is "Methodology of creation and implementation of programmes of economic and social development of regions, development programmes of municipalities and clusters of

⁸³ Adopted by the Resolution of the Government of the SR No 197 of 26.04.2017

municipalities with the application of the principles of sustainable smart development" (January 2020). This methodology is developed in accordance with the comprehensive approach that is necessary for the harmonisation of spatial and strategic planning. The quality of the methodology will be tested in the processes of preparation of new plans of economic and social development at the level of HTUs in 2020 and 2021.

In addition to the two documents on methodology, the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic (MDV SR) tabled to the Government of the SR in January 2020 a draft law on territorial planning and a draft building law proposing their effectiveness from 1 January 2022. Negotiations on the two proposals were suspended. The MDV SR is currently working on new proposals. The change in building law is fundamental in several aspects. Its benefit rests in the very consideration of the needs of spatial planning and construction, including adaptation measures or accessible (barrier-free) design for people with disabilities. The change is also important from the perspective of separation of the processes and rules of spatial planning and construction. MDV SR is working on a second edition of amendments to KURS 2001 (the Concept of the territorial development in Slovakia) as amended in KURS 2011 by the first set of amendments.

Building capacities at the relevant levels of public administration is also important. In the energy sector, the process of building local capacities for energy planning has already started. The process was initially linked to less developed districts. In three Slovak districts (Kežmarok, Rimavská Sobota and Rožňava), pilot structures were created after 2016. These districts have chosen building the Centres of sustainable energy as an important regional priority. These centres gradually develop their activities. It will be interesting to evaluate their activities after a certain period of their proper functioning.

The identical process may be also replicated in strategic planning and regional development planning, in data processing and project preparation. Since 2019, the HTUs have been implementing projects on capacity building in the area of analytical and strategic planning activities, funded from OP Effective Public Administration. This leads to creation of analytical and strategic units at the HTUs which start working on regional development strategy documents. In a similar way, capacity building in expert advice services has been supported in the creation of strategic documents and project intentions in Horná Nitra, a region undergoing a comprehensive socio-economic transformation caused by gradual withdrawal from the lignite mining.

2. Ensuring access to affordable mobility, energy, drinking water and sanitation

Goal: Ensuring access to basic services and resources, including affordable mobility, energy, drinking water and sanitation for all, while respecting environmental sustainability and the polluter pays principle

In the area of mobility, we may observe a stable development in distribution of passengers and goods between various modes of transport. In passenger transport, the share of individual transport has been mildly growing over a longer period of time. Labour distribution in public and non-public transport in 2018 was standardly and significantly in favour of non-public transport (73,6 %).⁸⁴ Thanks to investments from ESIF, it has been possible in recent years to renew part of the rolling fleet in passenger rail transport and in public transport in regional capitals. There is an ongoing lack of transfer terminals and parking spaces, alongside with poor condition of the stops. There is a persistent lack of investment into the public passenger transport infrastructure, mainly tram transport, and integrated railway transport system in the vicinity of the largest cities (for instance railway connection Košice – Prešov, or railway corridors interconnection in Bratislava)⁸⁵. Missing cycling paths or missing interconnections between existing paths and routes in most towns and regions are another problem as this makes it impossible to use bicycle as a proper transport means. In 2020, the new strategy for the development of bicycle transport and cycling tourism in the SR is envisaged. It will be important for the strategy to be part of a comprehensive set of measures in the development of sustainable mobility. Despite gradual elimination of obstacles in the public passenger

⁸⁴ https://www.mindop.sk/files/statistika_vud/preprava_osob.htm

⁸⁵ <https://www.mindop.sk/ministerstvo-1/doprava-3/strategia/strategicky-plan-rozvoja-dopravy-sr-do-roku-2030/strategicky-plan-rozvoja-dopravy-sr-do-roku-2030>

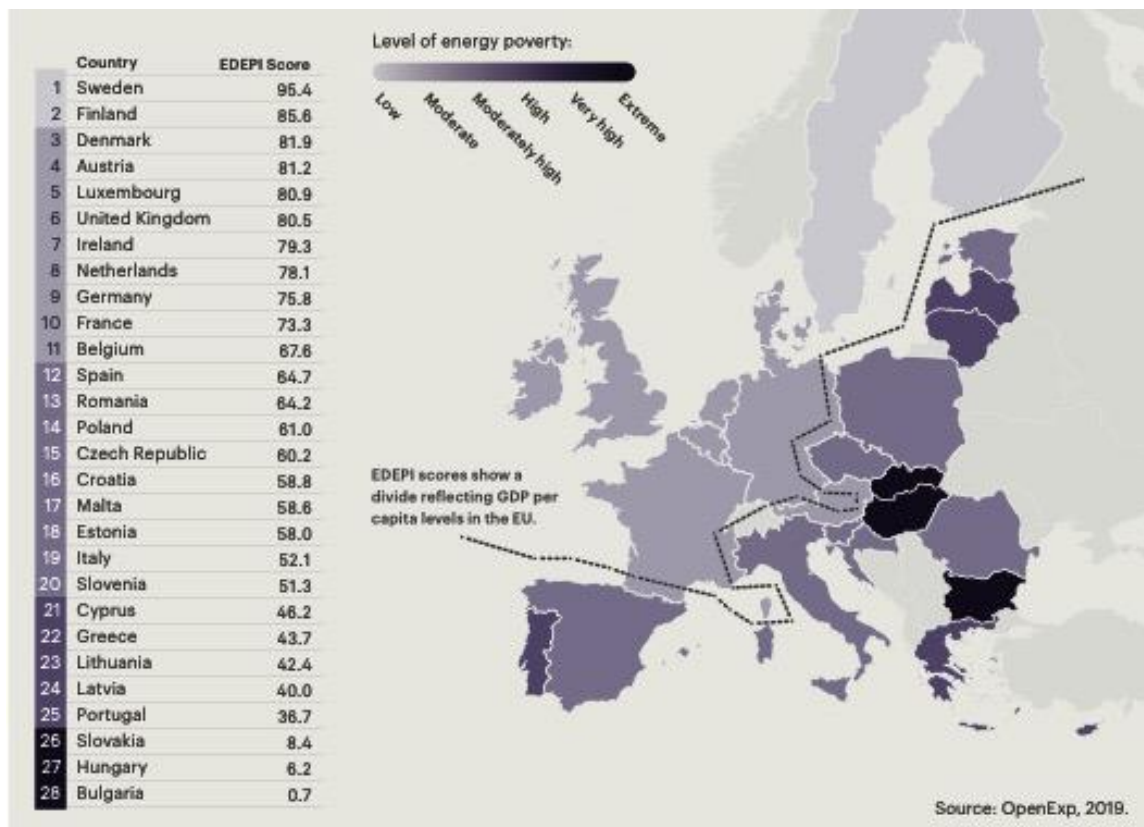
transport, there still remain many problematic locations in relation to accessible transport for people with disabilities.⁸⁶ Prepared amendment to the building law will be critical. Regional plans of sustainable mobility, which are being prepared at the level of HTUs and regions, are another step to sustainable and affordable mobility. These plans are a precondition for financing from ESIF in the new programming period; their development is supported from the IROP

The new decree of the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic No 5/2020 Coll. plays an important role in the area of transport services. It aims to "ensure a uniform concept of ordering services in the public interest in road transport, railway transport and public passenger shipping."⁸⁷

In terms of access to drinking water and sanitation, in 2020, it is important to prepare a Plan for the development of public water supply and public sewerage for the territory of the Slovak Republic for the years 2021 - 2027⁸⁸. The Development Plan will propose objectives for the development of public water supply and public sewerage as well as priorities for the construction of this infrastructure, including the use of decentralized solutions or technologies close to nature. However, current practice largely ignores such measures and technologies.

Ensuring affordable energy for citizens is in the remit of the Ministry of the Economy SR. According to the composite indicator (EDEPI) of the OpenExp international think-tank, in 2019 Slovakia showed a high level of energy poverty and scored 26th from EU-28.⁸⁹

Figure 1 Level of energy poverty in the EU member states according to EDEPI, OpenExp, 2019



The Office for the Regulation of Network Industries of the SR prepared a Concept for the protection of consumers meeting the conditions of energy poverty⁹⁰. Inclusion of social aspect and protection mechanisms for households at risk of energy poverty is an important step, and by its nature it is comparable

⁸⁶https://spv.sk/library/files/Stav_barier_2019_OZ_Narodna_platforma_proti_barieram_01042020_1.pdf

⁸⁷ <https://www.mindop.sk/ministerstvo-1/doprava-3/institut-dopravnej-politiky/analyticky-utvar/harmonizacia-verejnej-osobnej-dopravy/vyhlaska-c-5-2020-z-z-ktorou-sa-vykonavaju-niektore-ustanovenia-tykajuce-sa-objednavania-verejnej-osobnej-dopravy>

⁸⁸ <https://www.enviroportal.sk/sk/eia/detail/plan-rozvoja-verejnych-vodovodov-verejnych-kanalizacii-pre-uzemie-sr-n>

⁸⁹ http://foeeurope.org/sites/default/files/climate_justice/2019/media_briefing_-_power_to_the_people_-_right_to_energy_coalition.pdf

⁹⁰ On 11 June 2020, the concept has not yet been adopted by the government. Problematic topics were: ban on suspension of energy supply to debtors during heating season, definition of public supplier, and social tariff.

with other subsidy and support tools implemented by the state in the area of energy policy. The problem in this concept is that it does not include any binding tasks, only recommendations.

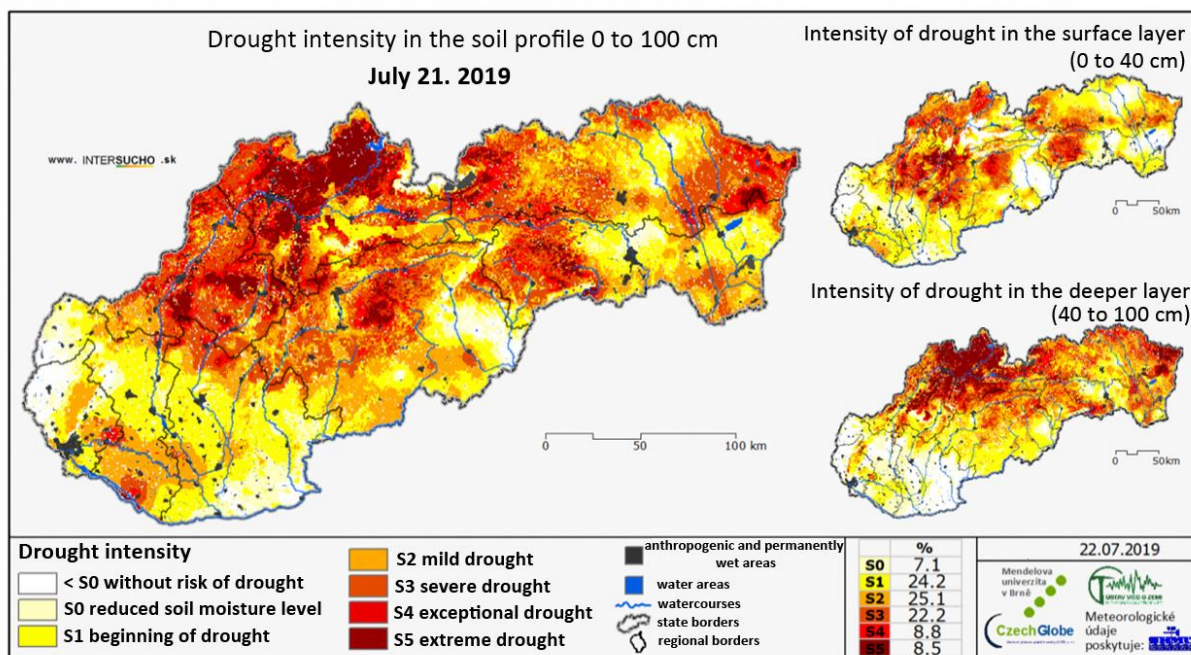
3. Adapting the landscape for adverse effects of climate change

Goal: Adapting human settlements and the landscape to the adverse effects of climate change, and thus improve the quality of life of its people and maintain stable and healthy ecosystems.

The impact of climate change is significantly affecting availability of water resources in Slovakia. Drought has become a critical meteorological phenomenon in the country and therefore presents a priority topic in adaptation strategies, same as in strategic and conceptual materials of water management. In 2018, strategy of adaptation of the SR to climate change.⁹¹ Compared with the Adaptation strategy 2014, in which the problem of drought appears only in a general description of trends and to a limited extent in selected measures, in its update of 2018, entire comprehensive measures focus on the problem of drought, including revitalisation of habitats vital for retaining water in the country, and agri-envi-climate schemes.

In 2018, the Government of the SR in its decree No 110/2018 adopted the document “The Value of Water – Action plan for the solution of drought effects and water scarcity” (H2ODNOTA je voda), a horizontal document focusing on the issue of drought in Slovakia.⁹² The document sends a signal that the adaptation policy moves away from a narrow focus on anti-flood measures towards a comprehensive water management at national level. The measures focus both on technical areas, such as the system of irrigation canals and land improvement (amelioration), as well as on the reform of approaches to land and forest management and, last but not least, on the country's ability to retain water through nature-friendly measures.

Figure 2 Drought intensity in Slovakia in July 2019



Source: SHMÚ, 2019. Online: <http://www.shmu.sk/sk/?page=2049&id=1007>

The implementation of water retention measures on the urbanised territory (both in the urban and extra-urban areas) brings benefits for adaptation to climate change. It was supported within the 40th call⁹³, as

⁹¹ <https://www.minzp.sk/files/odbor-politiky-zmeny-klimy/strategia-adaptacie-sr-zmenu-klimy-aktualizacia.pdf>

⁹² <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/22714/1>

⁹³ announced on 20/04/2018, <https://www.op-kzp.sk/obsah-vyzvy/40-vyzva-na-predkladanie-ziadosti-o-poskytnutie-nfp-zamerana-na-vodozadrzne-opatrenia-v-urbanizovanej-krajine-v-intravilane-obci/>

well as within the 62nd call⁹⁴ under the OP Quality of the Environment. The demand for measures is high, which means that municipalities start to systematically contemplate the solutions of climate change effects, mainly warming-up of atmosphere, water scarcity or increased energy consumption. There is a persistent shortage of qualified designers of comprehensive adaptation solutions. In 2019, an expert group was established to draft and design measures for regeneration of creeks and rivers aimed at increasing water retention capacity in the country.

In the context of water retention and adaptation measures, the revised building act in relation to spatial planning is also important. It is necessary to integrate the adaptation measures into the processes of spatial planning at a comprehensive level to prefer systemic solutions to isolated measures. Equally important is to use references to technical standards in the field of precipitation water management within public procurement.

At the level of self-governments, there is a clear shift towards strategic planning in the area of adaptation. Several self-governments are working on their adaptation strategies. As one of the forerunners, Bratislava self-governing region embraced the adaptation already in 2016 and published the Catalogue of adaptation measures. In 2018, Košice self-governing region prepared and adopted its Programme of landscape renewal.⁹⁵ Several other self-governments already have or are currently preparing their adaptation strategies (for instance Capital city of the SR Bratislava prepared an Atlas of climate change effects in the urban environment, monitoring the occurrence and distribution of heat islands and locations endangered by intensive precipitations). In 2018, the Slovak Environment Agency (SAŽP) published online the Catalogue of selected adaptation measures. It brings a set of adaptation measures and is intended for representatives of local governments. The Catalogue is being regularly updated.⁹⁶

The National Forestry Programme of the SR for 2021 – 2030 (NFP) will be a principal document in respect to adaptability of the Slovak landscape to the effects of climate change. The Programme will introduce or strengthen adaptation measures in forests, measures to strengthen water retention function of forests, and measures related to water accumulation in the forest landscape. Despite being in the early stages of its preparation, the introductory report to the Programme shows a strong support for sustainable forest management and enhanced adaptation of forests through environmentally friendly forest management. The introductory report to the NFP 2021 – 2030 describes postponing of adaptation measures as a problem hindering the mitigation of climate change impact on forests. It puts climate change and its impact on forests at first place among problems.

Land management and consolidation is an important tool to support the adaptation of agricultural land to the adverse effects of climate change. In 2019, the Ministry of Regional Development of the Slovak Republic prepared the document "Proposal of measures for accelerated implementation of land consolidation in the Slovak Republic", which was approved by the Slovak Government by its Resolution No 358 of 21 August 2019. The unique nature of land consolidation rests in the fact that in addition to water retention and other adaptation measures to combat climate change adverse effects, it includes measures for consolidation of land entitlements, which are needed for their implementation. Land consolidation thus creates solutions, which are key to implementation of other measures, but are often absent in other measures and policies.

4. Reducing pollution and contamination of the environment

Goal: Significantly reducing pollution and contamination of all parts of the environment while maintaining the “polluter pays” principle

Although total air emissions decreased significantly over the last 30 years, the Slovak Republic is currently one of the EU member states that have been criticized by the EC for the past decade due to insufficient solutions to air quality and its negative effect on public health. In this context, the Slovak Republic is currently facing infringement procedure for a long-term non-compliance with the limit value for PM10 particles expressed as a daily average. In some areas, the levels of benzo(a)pyrene are also high.

⁹⁴ announced on 27/04/2020, <https://www.op-kzp.sk/obsah-vyzvy/62-vyzva-na-predkladanie-ziadosti-o-poskytnutie-nenavratneho-financneho-prispevku-zamerana-na-vodozadrzne-opatrenia-v-urbanizovanej-krajine/>

⁹⁵ https://web.vucke.sk/files/sk/kompetencie/regionalny-rozvoj/koncepcne-materialy/pok_schvaleny.pdf

⁹⁶ <https://www.sazp.sk/novinky/sazp-vydala-katalog-vybranych-adaptacnych-opatreni-na-nepriaznive-dosledky-zmeny-klimy-vo-vztahu-k-vyuzitiu-krajiny.html>

Table 2: Reduction of emissions of selected pollutants in 2017 in percentage

| Reduction of emissions of selected substances 2017 compared to 2005 | SO ₂ | NO _x | NM VOC | NH ₃ | PM _{2,5} |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|--------|-----------------|-------------------|
| | 69% | 40% | 40% | 14% | 30% |

Source: National Programme for Emissions Reduction⁹⁷

The Economic Policy Strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2030⁹⁸ shall contribute to improving the situation. The Strategy declares the need for further regulation of air pollution, sets more ambitious goals in the field of air quality, requires more rigorous monitoring and effective financing of measures to improve air quality. A strategy to improve air quality is also being prepared, with the aim to design a comprehensive air quality management concept. To enforce the measures resulting from the new strategy, it is important to develop a more efficient mechanism for air quality management, primarily in those locations where the quality of air has been deteriorating. The inclusion of local authorities may become a decisive factor in the effort to improve the air quality, as these authorities are closer to the people affected by air pollution. Hence the measures they enforce can be targeted and more efficient. Although the revised law on air quality introduced in 2017 an opportunity for the local governments to create low-emission zones, no such zone has been created as yet. The measures to promote clean transport shall be part of plans for sustainable mobility.

The government's decision of 2018 to terminate subsidies into energy generated from coal by 2023⁹⁹ is important. This will bring a significant reduction of air pollution caused by SO_x and NO_x, as well as a reduction in CO₂ emissions. The planned transformation of carbon-intensive energy and industrial regions such as Horná Nitra¹⁰⁰ and Košice region¹⁰¹ may have a significant impact on air quality.¹⁰² It is important that MIRRI SR continues in consultations, involves stakeholders from relevant regions into the development of action plans, and that it absorbs and efficiently uses as many funds as possible from the new financial tool of the EC – Just Transition Fund, for the transformation of these regions.

The topic of local heating, its regulation and standards is also problematic. In Slovakia, there has been a visible return to local heating recently, including an increased use of biomass, despite stringent rules on disconnection from the central heating network. This results in deterioration of air quality in municipalities and more complex enforcement of compliance with the standards, quality of fuel and its appropriate use.¹⁰³

This problem requires a multidimensional approach, including a subsidy scheme to encourage the boiler replacement, raising awareness and checks of such installations. In 2019, Slovakia received a grant for LIFE, an integrated project aimed at air quality improvement in Slovakia (LIFE-IP SK – Air Quality Improvement). Its objective is to streamline plans for air quality improvement in Slovakia through capacity and competence enhancement at the local and regional levels, and to promote measures for air quality improvement. The sum of EUR 15 million will be spent on the project, of which EUR 9 million will come from the Commission. Under the project, a network of managers for air quality management is created, who will assist regional and local authorities (HTUs, towns and municipalities) at development and implementation of measure to improve air quality. It is obvious that the air quality protection alone is not able to eliminate all the negative consequences of policies and decisions of other economic policies, which have been contributing to air pollution. Addressing such a complex and horizontal problem as air pollution undoubtedly requires horizontal, inter-ministerial cooperation and adoption of measures across all different

⁹⁷ National programme for emissions reduction; https://www.minzp.sk/files/oblasti/ovzdušie/ochrana-ovzdušia/dokumenty/strategia-ochrany-ovzdušia/vlastny-material-narodny-program-znizovania-emisii-sr_final.pdf

⁹⁸ <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/23019/1>

⁹⁹ Resolution of the Government of the SR No 580/2018

¹⁰⁰ <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/24029/1>

¹⁰¹ Plan for the Just Transition Fund

¹⁰² Just Transition Fund introduces the opportunity to finance such measures. ÚPVII prepared Action plan for the transformation of Horná Nitra and currently prepares an Action plan for the Košice region. FST: COM/2020/22 final, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020PC0022>

¹⁰³ <https://www.economy.gov.sk/uploads/files/IjkPMQAc.pdf>

sectors. If we want to go further in air protection, we need to combine and harmonize the existing policies of other ministries to create synergies and achieve higher environmental performance.

Water and soil pollution remains a challenge. Here, the crucial cause is agricultural activity. In December 2018, the process of the third cycle of water planning started, under which significant water management problems¹⁰⁴ are being addressed. It has been stated that in terms of “achieving good chemical status in groundwater subsurface, there has been a problem with groundwater pollution caused by nitrates and pesticides, which originate from their flat and diffusive use on the surface during agricultural activities.” A fundamental update of the Action plan for sustainable use of pesticides is therefore essential. Environmental burdens are another significant source of pollution. Violation of the law and weak enforcement of the law are the main problems in pollution. Environmental inspection capacities also need to be reinforced. Open questions also persist in the process of elaboration of the new water plan for Slovakia in terms of the scope and format of the water quality data that should be available to the public.

Progress in reducing pollution has also been achieved thanks to the significant support from the OP Quality of the Environment funded from the EU. In recent years, projects in the field of wastewater drainage and treatment have been supported, mainly in agglomerations covered by the obligations of the SR under the EU Accession Treaty, as well as projects for the exploration, monitoring and redevelopment of environmental burdens. Between the years 2018 to 2020, further calls were announced under the OP Quality of the Environment, which shall contribute to the protection of groundwater through the construction of sewerage systems in the municipalities located on Žitný ostrov, the uptake and update of IT tools in the field of water management, as well as through an improved air monitoring.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.vodnyplan.online/problemy-dunaj.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ Currently announced calls – OP Quality of the Environment: <https://www.op-kzp.sk/vyzvy/aktualne-vyzvy/> and closed calls – OP QE: <https://www.op-kzp.sk/vyzvy/archiv-vyziev/>.

5. Protecting nature, ensuring the stability of ecosystems and halting the loss of biodiversity

Goal: Nature protection and landscaping aimed at ensuring the health and stability of ecosystems, the ability of the landscape to provide the necessary ecosystem services and halting the loss of biodiversity

In the field of water management, there has been a visible shift, mainly at the level of projects in water management policy. Between 2018 - 2019, under the OP Quality of the Environment for the years 2014 - 2020, thirteen projects have been implemented to ensure the continuity of rivers alongside their entire riverbeds, and to protect habitats alongside the rivers Myjava, Rudava, Turiec, Hron, Štiavnica, Rimava, Osrblianka a Slaná. Slovak water management enterprise, state enterprise, carried out the preparatory work for thirty projects to ensure the continual flow of streams and rivers and habitats of Malý Dunaj, Brezovský potok, Hornád, Cirocha, Poprad, Torysa, Revúca, Nitra, Žitava, Hron, Prochotský potok, Ipeľ a Slaná.¹⁰⁶

Biodiversity and soil biodiversity belong among essential preconditions for the existence of life on Earth. It is a very sensitive system and highly dependent on individual components. A disruption of one of them may lead to extinction and total loss of a whole series of other components. In Europe, including Slovakia, the number of animal species and diversity of fauna on agricultural land, and hence agricultural soil biodiversity, have been significantly decreasing. It is a result of a whole array of causes. The intensification of agricultural production, use of pesticides, elimination of natural or man-made windbreaks around fields, and growing monocultures on large areas are among the most prominent causes. The EU has adopted a commitment to ensure by 2030 that 75 % of the total agriland are healthy and able to supply healthy food, contribute to healthy nutrition and mitigate climate change. It is therefore essential to increase the share of organic land management. These efforts have a promising trend in Slovakia: in 1991, only 14 773 ha of land was ecologically managed, while in 2018, it was already 192 143.05 ha.

There have been significant shifts and legislative changes in the sector of forest management in recent years (2017 – 2020). The National Forestry Programme SR 2021 – 2030 (NFP) will be a new strategic document, currently in the stage of preparation. The new forestry vision is linked to sustainable development and quality of life of people. The NFP initial report recalls that forest ecosystems are to offer economic, ecological and social services in a balanced manner. Furthermore, the NFP is based on the concept of sustainable biomass production and brings a concept of bioeconomy linked to the forest ecosystem services. In its focus, the NFP represents a shift in the philosophy and values with the aim to create conditions for the provision of ecosystem services in the changed climate context. A surprisingly high interest and public support for the issues of forests were seen in Slovakia, which has not been observed in the area of environmental protection for quite some time now. This is one of the reasons why the NFP seeks to address problems, which arise from incorrectly conducted dialogue on the role and tasks of forestry for society, through application of the model for conflict mitigation, dialogues, transfer of knowledge from science and research, searching compromise, and in deepening inter-ministerial cooperation. Act on forests No 326/2005 Coll. was amended in 2019. Its second amendment in Act No 355/2019 is substantial, as it introduces a definition and legal limits for the application of nature-friendly forest management, redefines the declaration of primeval forests in Slovakia as forests in significant forest areas, in which the principle of non-intervention approach is applied for the first time in the Slovak legislation. A new definition of forest emergencies threatening ecological stability or biological diversity has been added, together with the possibility to issue specific forest protection measures. Amendments to the forest law also concern changes to the approval proceedings for forest management programmes in the protected areas of Natura 2000, and introduce more stringent conditions for forest plots exchange. Another amendment concerns the enforcement of protection measures for the prevention of multiplication and spread of harmful agents in forests, including the scope of nature protection organisation and competence of nature protection bodies in order to respect the requirements of nature protection in a protected area or its protected zone.

The objectives in sustainable management of renewable energy sources are introduced in the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP).¹⁰⁷ In 2018, Act on support renewable energy sources and high efficiency heat and power was amended.¹⁰⁸ Its main objective was to phase out subsidies on wood combustion in biomass installations, with the exception of wood originating from energy crops and waste

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.svp.sk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/v%C3%BDro%C4%8Dn%C3%A1-spr%C3%A1va-2019-web.pdf>

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.economy.gov.sk/energetika/navrh-integrovaného-narodného-energetickeho-a-klimatickeho-planu>

¹⁰⁸ Act No 377/2018 Coll. amended the Act No 309/2009 Coll. on Support for Renewable Energy Sources and Efficient Heat and Power.

from wood processing industries. Only application practice alone will show a real impact on the biomass for energy market.

In the field of habitats and species and measures to halt decline in biodiversity, it is vital to close the cases lead against Slovakia in relation to the Natura 2000 system of protected areas and to have a modern, well prepared and implemented strategy and action plan to protect biodiversity in the years 2011 – 2030. New goals in nature, biodiversity and landscape protection were set in the Envirostrategy 2030.¹⁰⁹ Amendment to the Act No 543/2002 Coll. on nature and land protection as amended, which came into force in 2020, brought substantial changes. It introduced new regulation on provisions related to deficiencies which were criticised by the European Commission, including the need for more efficient procedures for declaration of the areas of European significance, better and evidence-based nature protection, as well as streamlining processes for approval of forest management activities in the protected areas. In 2018 – 2020 progress was achieved in approval procedures for nature protection documents – the government approved protection programmes for 18 out of the total number of 41 protected bird habitats.

Support for the protection of habitats and species and nature-friendly forest management was also funded from ESIF within the OP Quality of the Environment. In December 2018, the 49th call¹¹⁰ was announced - the owners/users of land in protected areas were given another opportunity to implement measures aimed at nature and landscape protection.

The proposals for new regulations in the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU (CAP EU) for the period 2021 – 2027¹¹¹ put emphasis on adaptation to climate change and mitigation of its effects, biodiversity protection, conservation and protection of habitats, as well as on the promotion of sustainable development and efficient management of natural resources such as water and land. This setting together with the commitment of 30 % of the rural development funding for the areas linked to the environment and climate create a favourable framework for funding measures in this area. It would be preferable to coordinate the preparation of the new programming period in CAP EU with the preparation of the new Cohesion Policy, mainly in priorities aimed at measures in the landscape and rural development.

¹⁰⁹ Decree of the Government of the SR No 87/2019 from 27 February 2019.

¹¹⁰ Announced at 31.12.2018; <https://www.op-kzp.sk/obsah-vyzvy/49-vyzva-na-predkladanie-ziadosti-o-poskytnutie-nenavratneho-financneho-prispevku-zamerana-na-dobudovanie-sustavy-natura-2000-realizacia-schvalenych-dokumentov-starostlivosti/>

¹¹¹ <https://www.mpsr.sk/navrh-nariadenia-epar-o-financovani-riadeni-a-monitorovani-spolocnej-polnohospodarskej-politiky/1328-43-1328-13616/>

Rule of law, democracy and security

The murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová in February 2018 was a turning point which influenced and has been influencing the development in the rule of law, democracy and security in the Slovak Republic ever since. The act itself, its investigation, main findings published by the media, and the following nation-wide public pressure is the beginning of the political as well as a societal change in a broader framework. The pandemic of coronavirus causing COVID-19¹¹² has become a global challenge for all areas of social life. Its short- and long-term effects on the balance between the area of freedom and democracy on the one hand and the need to protect public health and security on the other, are fundamental both in the global and the Slovak context.

| <i>Source: Eurostat, Eurobarometer</i> | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|---|------|-------|-------|------|------|
| Citizens' trust in the independence of the judicial system | x | 21 % | 23 % | 29 % | 28 % |
| Citizens' trust in the police | 43 % | 47 % | 43 % | 38 % | 41 % |
| Proportion of population which has ever reported a crime, violence or vandalism in their neighbourhood | 6 % | 5,8 % | 5,1 % | 6 % | x |
| Corruption perception index (100 – best, 0 – worst) | 51 | 51 | 50 | 50 | 50 |
| Citizens' trust in the EU Parliament | 41 % | 46 % | 46 % | 46 % | 49 % |

MAIN CHALLENGES

1. Improving law enforcement, access to justice and protection of human rights

Goal: Improving law enforcement, access to justice and protection and promotion of human rights

The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development is a set of global commitments as a response of the global community to the most serious challenges of our days. Isolated interventions and measures loose efficiency. Not only states, also individuals need to act. First and foremost, we must start from ourselves as the global commitments of the 2030 Agenda apply to each of us. Responsible entities must provide truthful information from monitoring progress in national priorities in the 2030 Agenda implementation. Only truthful monitoring will enable states (and subsequently individuals) to co-create a true picture of the 2030 Agenda implementation, and also help each other in recovery processes. The serious crime, the murder of Ján Kuciak affected the whole Slovak society and triggered a reaction from the state, including a massive deployment of law enforcement forces. This reaction confirmed that the Slovak Republic is able to fulfil its commitments arising from international documents.

The subsequent investigation of the murder revealed and has been still revealing major corruption cases and links of the crime to politicians, the police, prosecutor's office and judiciary. These revelations also led to personnel changes in these areas. Deficiencies in many processes, e.g. in the appointment of heads of the police or prosecutor's office, in disciplinary proceedings against prosecutors or judges, the inefficiency of self-regulatory processes in the judicial system, pointed to the urgent need for systemic reforms in several internal mechanisms of the democratic system in the country.

All recent revelations, including proven interference in the independence and impartiality of judges, have had a significant impact on the perception of the independence of the judiciary by the public and business sectors. In citizens' trust in the independent judiciary system, Slovakia ranks among the worst in the EU.¹¹³ This is mainly due to the attempts of politicians and financial groups to influence court decisions and

¹¹² The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared on 30 January 2020 the state of global pandemic of coronavirus causing the COVID-19 disease.

¹¹³ The 2019 EU Justice Scoreboard, European Commission, COM(2019)198/2, graphs 47 and 49. At the time of writing this document, the EU Justice Scoreboard 2020 is not available.

judges. The intensity of perception of these reasons ranks the Slovak Republic in the penultimate place from EU countries.¹¹⁴

In the area of justice, the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic initiated a structured internal discussion with judges in several working groups with CEPEJ experts on the current state of justice on the basis of the CEPEJ Report (Commission for Effective Justice at the Council of Europe). The discussion is a prerequisite for a comprehensive judicial reform. Based on these discussions and in compliance with the Programme Declaration of the Government of the SR for 2020 -- 2024, the Ministry of Justice prepares a new judiciary reform, including a new judicial map for the general judiciary, a reform of administrative and constitutional judiciary, and a reform of Judicial Council of the SR.

In the monitored period, the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic implemented a partial reform in the area of enforcement proceedings (concentration of enforcement proceedings in the competence of one court, namely the District Court of Banská Bystrica) and a partial reform in the area of the fight against corruption (Act No 315/2016 Coll. on the Register of public sector partners, and on the amendment of certain acts as amended by Act No 241/2019 Coll., the so-called anti-letterbox act, the establishment of a court for the register of public sector partners, namely the District Court of Žilina). The launch of several projects with the aim to improve efficiency of the judiciary is a positive step. However, it is necessary to continue in the thorough preparation and implementation of measures recommended to the SR, e.g. the European Commission for Effective Justice (CEPEJ).

In the recent period, ambiguous political attitudes and populism popped up in the public discourse in the adoption of international human rights instruments. For instance in December 2018, the Slovak Republic did not vote on the UN Global Framework on Safe, Managed and Legal Migration (the so-called Marrakesh Convention). The national parliament decided three times in the course of 12 months on disapproval with the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (better known as Istanbul Convention). Some other treaties, which did not provoke radical cultural and ethical attitudes¹¹⁵, also failed to be ratified. Slovakia still lacks a law regulating the conditions of national minorities.

International bodies and organisations¹¹⁶ recommend to Slovakia to reassess its positions in the area of combating violence against women, inequalities between men and women, and racial segregation in access to education.

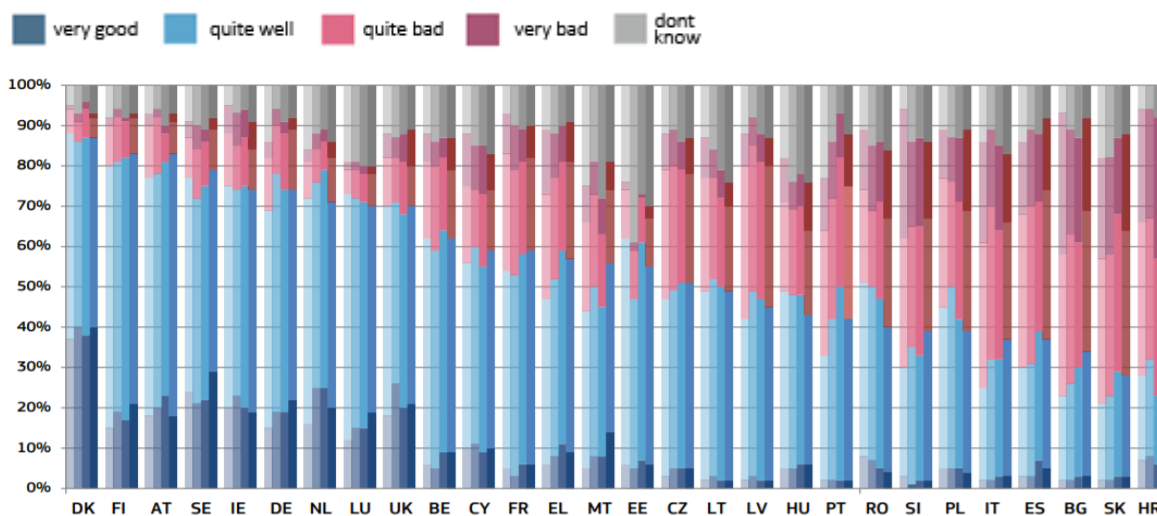
¹¹⁴ The 2019 EU Justice Scoreboard, European Commission, COM(2019)198/2, graphs 48 and 50.

¹¹⁵ E.g. Option Protocol on the Convention against Torture (signed in 2018), Protocol No 12 (signed in 2000) to European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms Protection. However, the National Council of the SR approved Protocol No 16 (signed in 2013) to the European Convention.

¹¹⁶ Within the 3rd round of the so-called Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the UN Human Rights Council in May 2019, the Government of the Slovak Republic defined the responsibility and position of the Slovak Republic on individual UPR recommendations; the recommendation to ratify the Istanbul Convention was rejected by the Slovak government. Draft Recommendation addressed to the Slovak Republic during the 3rd round of the UPR of the UN Human Rights Council, on 27 May 2019 (available at <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/23865/1>). On 26 November 2019, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe sent a letter to the representatives of the National Council of the Slovak Republic calling on the members of the parliament to refuse further restrictions on access to safe abortions and restrictions on women's reproductive rights. (available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/country-monitoring/slovak-republic>).

Graph 15 Public perception of independence of courts and judges

(light colours: years 2016 and 2017; dark colours: years 2018 and 2019)



Source: 2019 EU Justice Scoreboard

The institutional system for the protection of human rights proved its fragility again in 2019, when the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic was not fully functional, exclusively due to political obstructions. For a certain period of time, the court was unable to adopt decisions on the compliance of legal regulations with the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, and there was a significant delay in deciding on individual complaints about violations of fundamental rights and freedoms.

Partial fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goal 16.2 – End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against children – is ensured by fulfilling the strategic goals of the Slovak National Strategy on the Protection of Children against Violence, which is based on active inter-ministerial cooperation, implementation of the National Project Supporting Protection of Children against Violence, as well as the implementation of the new National Concept for the Protection of Children in the Digital Space.

Rejection of legislative proposals for changes in the management system of the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights and resignation to increase its independence in line with the recommendations of international organisations in 2019, did not contribute to strengthening the mechanisms for defending the rights of discriminated groups, either. On the other hand, increasing the capacity of the Centre for Legal Aid will help improve access to justice for disadvantaged groups (additional counselling offices were set up during the implementation of the national project, and the number of legal consultations provided by the offices increased significantly).¹¹⁷

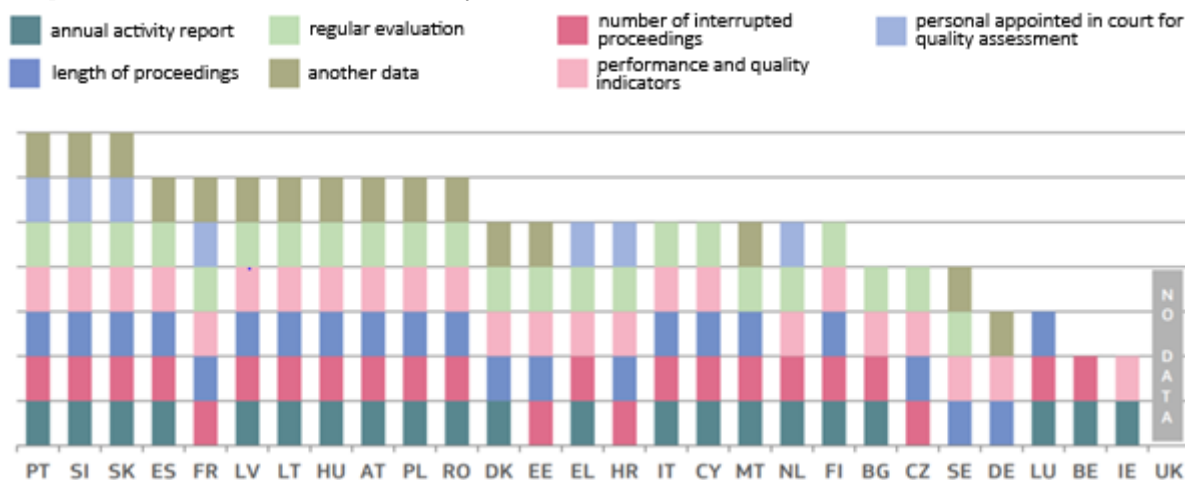
The implementation of a number of projects financed from EU funds in the field of enhancing the quality of the judicial system, through streamlining internal management and administration processes in the courts, increasing professional and analytical capacities, using automated processes assisting judges in their decision-making, implementation of innovative solutions, is an opportunity for a real transformation. However, it will be possible to evaluate the real sustainability of the results of this change only after its completion. However, a real strengthening of law enforcement will require a more fundamental reform, e.g. reorganisation of the court map, specialisation of courts and judges, consistent and thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of work of individual judges, setting up a special administrative court, which can relieve the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic in certain matters, and it will also require some reforms of the prosecution system and police reforms.

In this context, it is important to appreciate capacity building in the Analytical Centre of the Ministry of Justice of the SR, which regularly collects relevant data, conducts monitoring and evaluates the work of

¹¹⁷ Continuous evaluation of key indicators is available at: <http://www.reformuj.sk/projekt/posilnenie-a-dobudovanie-kapacit-v-oblasti-poskytovania-pravnej-pomoci-a-prevencia-eskalacie-pravnych-problemov/>.

courts and judges. Analytical data collection is necessary for the right political decision-making and set-up of the system. Our analytical work in the field of justice is one of the most comprehensive in the EU.

Graph 16 Available data on the work of courts



Source: 2019 EU Justice Scoreboard

2. Enhancing public administration performance: creating result-oriented data-driven public policies in compliance with the value for money principle

Goal: Ensuring transparent, professional and effective performance of public administration at all levels, aimed at achieving results from decisions, creating policies based on relevant and reliable data available to the professional and general public, and implementing the value for money principle

Public administration reform has focused in recent years primarily on the e-services and digitalisation of its processes. Partial positive changes have been delivered by several projects introducing e-services, improving the use of data in public administration, quality management in public administration, human resources training and the implementation of anti-bureaucracy measures. These latter measures oblige public authorities in their official activities to obtain and use certain data, which have been already registered, in the IT systems of the public administration.¹¹⁸

Newly established client centres, improving the quality of their work, creating single points of contact (handling several official matters at one place) with minimised waiting time, are evaluated as a showcase of an efficient public administration in its practical performance towards citizen.¹¹⁹ The preparedness of local governments for e-communication has also increased significantly.¹²⁰ However, several towns and municipalities, especially smaller ones, still do not have sufficient professional, technical and financial capacities to provide high-quality services they are expected to provide to their citizens. Insufficient capacity to effectively manage the territory and provide services to citizens, as well as extreme fragmentation into a large number of municipalities, are weaknesses in the current model of decentralization and deconcentration. Implementation of structural changes in the functioning of towns and cities, strengthening the role of urban development in the context of regional development, partnerships and cooperation are therefore essential.¹²¹

At the level of the central government bodies, it is still possible to identify shortcomings in policy planning and coordination, as well as in making key decisions in some areas, based on consultations and evidence.¹²² Recently, analytical capacities have been newly created or completed at almost all bodies of the central

¹¹⁸ For instance: National Reform Programme of the SR 2019, Ministry of Finance SR, April 2019

¹¹⁹ Efficient Public Administration: Continuous evaluation of the performance, effectiveness and efficiency of the OP, Final report, Ministry of the Interior SR, June 2019, p. 39.

¹²⁰ Final Report: Plnenie opatrení prijatých na odstránenie zistených nedostatkov z kontrol vykonaných NKÚ SR, Najvyšší kontrolný úrad SR, August 2019 (Supreme Audit Authority SR)

¹²¹ Concept of urban development of the SR until 2030), Ministry of Transport and regional Development of the SR, Decree of the Government No 5/2018.

¹²² Country Report Slovakia 2020. 2020 European Semester: Assessment of progress on structural reforms, prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances, and results of in-depth reviews under Regulation (EU) No 1176/2011, European Commission, February 2020, p. 48.

government. Since January 2020, the legislative position of the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic has been strengthened within the revision of expenditures of the budget cycle and upon the cost efficiency evaluation of large investment projects. However, a comprehensive assessment of individual ministries and their analytical units confirms that the implementation of their analyses in the adoption of public policies has not yet been systematic and, due to the current institutional setting, it has not yet been immune to some political interference.

3. Ensuring an effective control system of public power and strengthening of mechanisms for detection and combating the most serious forms of corruption

Goal: Ensuring an effective control system of public power, including transparent and independent institutions and bodies for the protection of rights and freedoms. Strengthening mechanisms and methods for detection and combating the most serious forms of corruption behaviour

Year 2020 is about the need to evaluate and revise certain institutional and functional settings in the relationship between the state and the citizen. This need has a broad support of the general public. The society-wide protests of the last year and a half proved that a critical part of Slovak society calls for access to real justice for all, and for more effective and efficient power control mechanisms. For the further development of the country, the magnitude of public pressure to adopt professional solutions and carry out controls of the measures taken will be decisive.

Failure to launch the activities of the Office for the protection of whistle-blowers is a wasted opportunity in detecting and combating the most serious forms of corrupt behaviour. It was expected, that as of 2019, it would be able, as an independent body, to provide legal and other support to whistle-blowers, whose determination and personal courage to expose corrupt behaviour in the public authorities are irreplaceable. In the fight against corruption, Slovakia also lacks a law on lobbying, has not yet adopted stricter code of conduct for police officers¹²³, neither more specific rules for proving the origin of the property of public officials.

The National Criminal Agency of the Presidium of the Police Force (NAKA) was established as a special unit of the Police Force to detect and investigate the most serious crimes, including crimes of corruption, which fall within the jurisdiction of the Specialised criminal court. The substantive jurisdiction of NAKA primarily determines its focus on the suppression and repression of corruption offenses. NAKA cooperates closely with the Special Prosecutor's Office of the General Prosecutor's Office of the Slovak Republic. Preventive actions in the form of raising public awareness about the harmful consequences of corruption for society, the possibilities of reporting corruption cases and the legal protection provided to whistle-blowers also contribute to the effective fight against corruption. We cannot forget NAKA activities in media coverage of the cases and mainly the cases in which citizens reported corruption and subsequently in cooperation with the police, they helped convict the criminals. The elimination of corruption crimes is also determined by subjective factors, namely the legal awareness of individuals, their moral integrity and interest in public affairs, and their willingness to participate in the reporting of corruption. To eliminate any potential for corruption, it is in the interest of NAKA to promote a culture of moral integrity and prevention of corruption in order to create a social atmosphere with zero tolerance to corruption and any illegal activities in relation to corruption. In this connection, NAKA participates in the creation of national anti-corruption policy, develops anti-corruption programmes in the sector, action plans for the fight against corruption, and prepares preventive anti-corruption measures to increase legal awareness and involve the public in preventing and combating corruption. In order to eliminate corruption and promote anti-corruption policy, as well as to introduce moral integrity tools in the work of public administration, NAKA, in cooperation with the OECD, developed the Anti-corruption e-learning programme entitled Integrity against Corruption. The programme is available on the website of the Ministry of the Interior of the SR also in the English version: <http://www.minv.sk/?survey>

As in the case of the Office of the Public Defender of Rights, so in the case of the Supreme Audit Office of the Slovak Republic (NKU) it can be stated that the executive power in Slovakia is not interested in the consistent remedy of identified deficiencies. After identification of inefficient use of funds, or low success

¹²³ Country Report Slovakia 2020. 2020 European Semester: Assessment of progress on structural reforms, prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances, and results of in-depth reviews under Regulation (EU) No 1176/2011, European Commission, February 2020, p. 51.

in the performance of public policies, the Office faced political attacks. It is necessary to work on the recent findings of the Office, which confirm that the internal control mechanisms of the central government and its bodies, as well as in the state-owned enterprises are often ineffective. They focus rather on formal aspects, not on real assessment of the performance and cost-efficiency of spending public funds.¹²⁴ In the field of protection of all aspects of the environment and nature, the Department for detection of hazardous materials and environmental crime of the Criminal Police Office plays an important role. The establishment of the Slovak Forest and Timber Inspectorate also plays an important role in the society. As a governmental body in the field of placing on the internal market timber and timber products, the department has been inspecting since 2018 domestic operators in the field of timber logging and its first placing on the market, timber traders as well as timber importers.

4. Strengthening the principles of open government through the participation of civil society

Goal: Supporting civil society, education towards democratic citizenship and mechanisms of participation in the creation, implementation and control of public policies

The principles of open government and their elements are already applied in practice; the measures under development will be implemented in the next decade.¹²⁵ Elaboration and subsequent application of the so-called publication minimum for the state administration in practice, support for open educational modules and resources, elaboration of national strategy of open science, public access to internal organisational and management acts of central administration bodies, as well as generally binding regulations of municipalities and self-governing regions on legal portal, introduction of new standards for publication of data on end-beneficiaries, and other planned measures can significantly enhance transparency in the areas concerned.

The economic consequences of the spread of COVID-19 will affect all sectors of the economy. Relevant losses of income from private sources, public fund-raising and partially from self-government funds can be expected. Some non-governmental and non-profit sectors will face existential risks, while the support from the national budget is uncertain. There is a high probability that some activities will be put on hold. For the sector, to be able to continue in its functions and bring socio-economic and other benefits to society, it is necessary to set appropriate rules and conditions for obtaining subsidies or other financial support, but also to devise a system for measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of public resources intended for NGOs. It is also appropriate to implement elements of the partnership principle and multilevel governance within the European Structural and Investment Funds. The current, mostly formal system of uncoordinated participation in monitoring committees and working groups should be streamlined in the next programming period 2021 – 2027.

It remains vital to support existing mechanisms and create other mechanisms for public participation in the preparation and control of public policies at the national, as well as at the regional and local level. Recent examples demonstrate the need to procedurally restrict the possibility of using the accelerated legislative procedure and, in the case of constitutional norms, to exclude it completely. It will also be necessary to adjust some conditions for political participation that are not conducive to the entry of new actors into political competition.

5. Ensuring objective and multiple sources of information

Goal: Ensuring public access to objective and multiple independent sources of information, strengthening independence of the public media, critical thinking and media literacy

During the period under review, no measures were taken to protect journalists and promote investigative journalism. On the contrary, this area has recently been faced with proposals, which interfere with the freedom of the media to comment on the work of public officials. In 2019, the National Council of the

¹²⁴ For instance: Report on the results of control activities of the Supreme Audit Office of the SR in 2018 (NKU), March 2019; Final Report: Plnenie koncepcií rozvoja vybraných štátnych podnikov v zakladateľskej pôsobnosti Ministerstva pôdohospodárstva a rozvoja vidieka Slovenskej republiky, NKU, October 2019; Final report Implementation of ESO Programme, NKU, December 2017.

¹²⁵ For instance: Action Plan – Akčný plán iniciatívy pre otvorené vládnutie v Slovenskej republike na roky 2020 -2021, November 2019, Decree of the Government of the SR No 553/2019; Action Plan: Koncepcie rozvoja občianskej spoločnosti na Slovensku na roky 2019 – 2020, June 2019.

Slovak Republic also approved a bill extending a ban on opinion polls to 50 days before any type of elections, a move that significantly restricts citizens' access to information.

The problem of insufficient plurality of local media, which are covertly or openly funded by municipalities or cities, has not been addressed even before the recent parliamentary elections. Mechanisms to prevent concentration of media ownership with a potential negative effect on the plurality and impartiality of the information have not been specified. Some cases of the conflict of interest of entities benefiting to a large extent from public resources remain unregulated.

6. Strengthening resilience of the society

Goal: Effective identification and systematic strengthening of the society's resilience against threats to the rule of law, democracy, internal and external security

In September 2019, the National Centre for Cyber Security (SK-CERT) was established within the National Security Authority. SK-CERT expanded the Slovakia's competence in addressing cyber security incidents at the national level. The new Act on Cyber Security also created a framework for strengthening military intelligence with a newly established Centre for Cyber Defence Centrum¹²⁶ of the Slovak Republic. Institutional security in this area and the cyber security incident management system in the public administration were also supported by massive investments.

A clear strategy and conceptual approach to tasks are a means that may support the strengthening of the state's resilience to other security threats in the coming period, such as prevention and reduction of extremism and radicalization¹²⁷ to the minimum, combating hate speech on the Internet, mitigating natural and technological disasters, new diseases and other threats posed by climate change, including new (hybrid) threats. There have been several initiatives identified in these areas.

In December 2019, the National Council of the Slovak Republic adopted the Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime to allow criminal prosecution of acts of the racial and xenophobic nature committed through computer systems. It lifted its reservation and amended its Declaration on the Convention on Cybercrime. The Government of the SR also approved in December 2019 Slovakia's participation in the European Centre of Excellence for combating hybrid threats in Helsinki. In its programme declaration, the new government approved a whole package of tasks to strengthen the fight against hybrid threats, including an Action Plan to coordinate the fight against hybrid threats and dissemination of disinformation.

The Concept of the fight against hybrid threats, approved by the Government of the Slovak Republic in 2018, identifies the tasks of the institutional framework of the National Contact Point and the Cooperation Centre for Hybrid Threats. However, the document served only as a background material. To prepare a clear future-oriented strategy and measures to increase resilience to hybrid threats, it is vital to take a political decision and determine responsibilities and the division of competences between stakeholders.¹²⁸ The non-approval of the Security Strategy of the Slovak Republic in 2017, as well as the non-approval of the related Defence Strategy and the Military Strategy by the National Council of the SR hinder swift response of the security sector to new security threats. It is necessary to strengthen international cooperation at all levels and safeguard the place of the Slovak Republic in the EU and in the collective defence system within NATO, including enhanced crisis management capabilities both at the international and national level, interoperability of armed forces, and Slovakia's ability to transform and adapt to new types of threats and challenges.

International cooperation will also be essential in the protection of public health against the spread of the new coronavirus. Once states have dealt with the infection within their own borders, cooperation will be particularly crucial in order to minimise the risk of retransmission of the disease from other countries.

¹²⁶ Act No 69/2018 Coll. on Cyber Security; Concept of Cyber Security of the SR for 2015-2020; Decree of the Government of the SR No 328/2015; Action Plan for the implementation of the Concept of Cyber Security of the SR for 2015-2020, Decree of the Government of the SR No 93/2016.

¹²⁷ For instance: Final report on achieving tasks of the Concept of the fight against extremism for the period of 2015 – 2019 was submitted to the Government of the SR for the years of 2015 and 2016. A proposal for the new concept has not yet been submitted.

¹²⁸ Concept of the SR for the fight against hybrid threats. Declaration of the Government of the SR No 345/2018.

Good health

Slovakia has half as many deaths that could have been prevented by various interventions (whether lifestyle changes, prevention, environmental measures, etc.). The quality, efficiency and availability of healthcare are the goals of health policy. However, it is impossible to reach them at this stage without striking a compromise. This is also the reason why some of the proposed strategic measures have not yet been adopted. The absence of the concepts of aftercare and long-term care poses a significant problem that will only aggravate over time due to a demographic development in the country. The government's programme for the period of 2020 - 2024 includes a commitment to create a new statutory system of long-term healthcare and social care, including its financing and a smooth transition from acute healthcare to long-term care.

| <i>Source: Eurostat</i> | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|--|-----------|---------|-----------|-----------|
| Estimated life expectancy at birth in years | 76,7 | 77,3 | 77,3 | 77,4 |
| Healthy life years (men/women) | 54,8/55,1 | 56,4/57 | 55,6/55,6 | 55,5/56,6 |
| Percentage of population perceiving their health as good or very good | 66 % | 66,5 % | 67,1 % | 66,7 % |
| Percentage of population with perceived unmet needs for medical examination | 2,1 % | 2,3 % | 2,4 % | 2,6 % |

MAIN CHALLENGES

1. Promoting responsibility for own health

Goal: Promoting healthy lifestyle, prevention and responsibility for own health

The preventable mortality rate, which can be influenced by better healthcare but also by other health determinants, in Slovakia is at the level of the V4 average¹²⁹: 244, respectively 246 per 100 000 inhabitants.¹³⁰ Compared with the EU average 161 per 100 000 inhabitants, Slovakia reports half as many deaths, which could have been prevented by the change in the lifestyle, prevention, environmental measures or other interventions. It is a run on a very long track. Any results of such interventions will be reflected in the data only after several years.

The area of health promotion is underfinanced and strategies to increase citizens' responsibility for their own health have not been proposed as yet. Over the last two years, however, a shift needs to be highlighted in promoting disease prevention.¹³¹ In August 2018, the government adopted the long-awaited National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) - a strategic plan for 2018 – 2020 to improve cancer control. As part of the programme, the National Cancer Institute was set up with the task to implement the NCCP in five areas: epidemiology, science and research, prevention and screening, diagnosis and treatment, supportive care. The highest expectations are associated with the National Cancer Register and its improved functioning, as its out-dated data make it difficult for the regulator to adopt right decisions.

NCCP defined several objectives to support prevention in its action plans: from reducing tobacco consumption and environmental exposure to screening, early detection, and early start of optimal treatment. Screening ensures timely and correct diagnosis of asymptomatic disease. Its role is to identify and start early treatment with the assumption of a better prognosis. It is in the area of screening promotion, where the main progress was achieved. The current system of preventive screening has not yielded satisfactory results: less than a third of 50 to 69-year old women had any examination for breast cancer in two last years, which is only half the EU average; less than half in the age group 20 to 69 had any examination for cervical cancer, compared to two thirds in the EU.¹³² For both diagnoses, as for the colon cancer, the organised screening across the relevant population is the appropriate preventive tool. In 2019, the Ministry of Health presented pilot screening programmes for all three diagnoses. The continuation of screening

¹²⁹ V4 average is significantly worse because of the bad results in Hungary: 325 deaths per 100 000 inhabitants.

¹³⁰ V4 average is significantly worse because of the bad results in Hungary: 325 deaths per 100 000 inhabitants.

¹³¹ Health promotion means the process of increasing citizens' ability to influence and improve their health. The strategic framework for health promotion rests on 5 main pillars: support for public health policy, creation of a supportive environment, strengthening public participation, improving personal skills (e.g. healthy lifestyle), and refocusing healthcare services.

¹³² State of Health in the EU: Slovakia; Health profile of the country 2019. Data from the year 2017.

programmes and their flat financing also depends on the financing of the Programme. This shall be provided by the state budget. Further financing in the near future may come from the EU funds.

2. Ensuring high-quality healthcare

Goal: Ensuring high-quality, affordable and early healthcare for entire population across all geographical areas

The quality, efficiency and availability of healthcare are three intermediary goals of health policy that cannot be met all at the same time without compromise. This makes it difficult to implement the related changes and is also the reason why some of the proposed strategic measures have not yet been adopted.

The efficiency of the Slovak healthcare system has its measurable reserves. Although Slovakia spends comparable or even higher resources on healthcare than other V4 countries, it does not achieve adequate results in quality indicators. Slovakia is one of the countries with the highest number of preventable deaths: 168 per 100 000 inhabitants, compared to the EU average of 91 per 100 000. Standardisation is one of the prerequisites for the comprehensive provision of quality healthcare. The aim of the national project Creation of new and revised clinical procedure standards and their introduction into medical practice, which was launched at the Ministry of Health in 2017, is to gradually create clinical procedure standards in medical practice. The first standard clinical procedures were approved by the Minister of Health in 2018 and published subsequently.

The most significant reform proposal in healthcare in the last two years is the project of stratification of hospitals, which has been gradually supplemented and extended to a comprehensive proposal to redesign the network of healthcare facilities, to increase their availability and enhance the entitlements of insured persons. The proposal addressed several structural problems of the sector: too many acute beds, lack of the subsequent healthcare beds, absence of hierarchy of competences, regional disparities in the institutional and outpatient healthcare, available staff capacities or demographic challenges.

One of the main tools of the project is the concentration of certain types of medical procedures, namely invasive and surgical, in hospitals with necessary skills and experience for their performance, thus ensuring a better quality of healthcare. The proposal brings a new hierarchical organisation of the hospital network and guarantees access to acute institutional care within 30 minutes for 90 % of the population of the Slovak Republic. It foresees a gradual increase in the number of long-term care beds. The design of the hospital network is interconnected with the design of the outpatient care network, as well as with the definition of availability. Its implementation is phased until 2030 so that individual participants in the system can prepare for the change. The proposal has strong support from the professional community but it was not supported by the parliament and therefore it did not go through the legislative process.

The project of central integrated healthcare (CIHC) funded from the EU has also supported the idea of better local availability of healthcare, namely general and also selected specialised outpatient care.

An extensive official analysis entitled Review of healthcare expenditures was published in October 2019. The analysis was prepared by the Value for money¹³³ department of the Ministry of Finance of the SR in cooperation with the Institute of Healthcare Policy of the Ministry of Health of the SR. It proposes measures, which if implemented, have a potential to deliver a long-term improvement of the Slovak healthcare system and its results. At the same time, quantified measures are linked to the public health insurance budget assessment. According to the analysis, Slovak expenditures on healthcare are adequate to the wealth of the country; nonetheless the problem is in their inefficient use and redistribution. In some areas, resources are wasted, in others they are lacking; hence they cannot be used for the improvement of healthcare. When compared with other countries, Slovakia spends more on medicines, diagnostics and consultations with specialist, owing to an excessive number of visits and consultations. They are the main categories with room for improvement. On the contrary, primary care, long-term care, prevention and mental-health support are underfinanced. It is necessary to invest into staffing, mainly to increase the numbers of nurses and general practitioners. Clear definition of basic entitlements of patients and direct payments rules will enhance system transparency. In the field of medicines policy, expensive medicinal products pose a threat to long-term sustainability, when they do not prove their efficacy, and they are

¹³³ <https://www.mfsr.sk/sk/financie/hodnota-za-peniaze/revizia-vydavkov/revizia-vydavkov.html>

reimbursed from public funds regardless. Fair prioritisation of resources in healthcare must be ensured by means of creating an HTA agency. Releasing resources for other areas is to be achieved through higher volumes of centralised purchase of medicines and e-prescriptions. The effectiveness of medicines policy is jeopardized by the current failure to carry out regular and proven medication processes, such as revision of reimbursement and external referencing. Specialized outpatient care is used excessively in Slovakia, also for the procedures performed by general practitioners in Western countries. This is due to the highest number of consultations per patient in the EU and the high rate of treatments prescribed by general practitioners and performed by specialists. In order to achieve change, it is necessary to expand the numbers of general practitioners and their competencies. The resources saved can be more efficiently distributed among existing providers. The proposed sharing of test results between doctors via eHealth will help eliminate duplicated examinations. The cooperation between the Ministries of Health and Finance has brought about a change in the way healthcare is financed, which is intended to ensure resilience to cyclical changes in the economy. Since 2020, government payments into the system are no longer defined as a percentage of the average wage, but reflect real needs in the healthcare. In practice, this means that the total package of necessary expenditures is determined, and the amount of the state payment is then determined as the difference between receipts from contributions paid by economically active persons, and expected health expenditures. The total package is defined by the growth of expenditures related to wages, inflation, aging and value for money measures in the revision of expenditures.

3. Addressing inequalities in the health of population

Goal: Identification of inequalities in the health of population, their causes and ways of addressing them

A substantial gap persists in life expectancy between men and women in Slovakia, with the gender gap of 6.9 years. It is higher than the EU average of 5.2 years, although it has been gradually decreasing. At the age of 30, Slovak men with the highest level of education are expected to live on average 14 years longer than men with the lowest education. This is one of the largest gaps in the EU.¹³⁴ Nad'alej It is still true that infant mortality varies up to tenfold between the regions of Slovakia and that, for example, the incidence of oncological diseases in the Nitra region is significantly higher than, for example in the Prešov region. A gap in life expectancy between majority population and Roma communities is 6 years. Infant mortality is almost three times higher in MRC than in the rest of the population (the number of deaths under one year per 1000 live births is 12.3 compared to 4.2 in the rest of the population). Differences in life expectancy at birth and infant mortality also exist between districts; the worst situation in Roma population is in the district of Trebišov. Between 2006 and 2015, Roma life expectancy was less than 68 years in this district. Infant mortality reached almost 30 deaths per 1000 live births, a level comparable with the levels in the developing countries.¹³⁵

Healthy Communities is a title of a valuable project addressing inequalities in the healthcare. Through health promotion assistants, the project operates directly in those localities where approximately 250 thousand Roma live, with infant mortality in MRCs being 13.9 infant deaths, compared to 4.3 deaths in the rest of the population (2016). Health promotion assistants help improve health conditions in the localities, raise awareness on hygiene and health routine, they cooperate with local healthcare providers, and intervene in the field of preventive checks and compulsory vaccination. Within the project, health promotion assistants also assist in hospitals in the districts with high proportions of Roma population. They also help ensure spread of information and data collection in the communities.

Improving the redistribution of health insurance premiums is one of the subtle, technical but useful measures to reduce inequalities. Since 2019, the redistribution mechanism has also included the parameter of multi-annual cost indices, which reflect patient costs in three previous years. The predictive power of the redistribution mechanism has increased to almost 25% (one of the highest in the world). Health insurance funds are thus allocated in a more justly manner, and possible inequalities have been reduced in financing of health care for long-term costly patients (policyholders). Another improvement may be the additional compensation for patients, who remain significantly costly even after applying the redistribution model. Many of these patients fall through the current models and parameters, simply because they suffer from a very rare disease and receive a very expensive treatment. Additional compensation (so called ex-

¹³⁴ State of Health in the EU: Slovakia; Health profile of the country 2019. Data collected in 2016.

¹³⁵ IFP Report of December 2018: „Inklúzia Rómov je potrebná aj v zdravotníctve“ (Roma inclusion is also needed in the healthcare.)

post redistribution) is currently not being used because of the risk that if insurance companies were fully compensated for these costly patients, they would not be motivated to manage them efficiently. One option would be to set up an independent review committee for all insurance companies to decide on the justification of treatment costs for a small number of expensive patients not covered by the model.

The absence of the concepts of aftercare and long-term care is a significant problem that will increase over time due to a demographic development. Unclear competences and financial delineations between local governments, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Health lead to inequalities in access to the necessary care and nursing services. Proposed stratification touches on only part of this problem - it proposes the necessary increase in the availability of chronic beds in institutional care.

The proposal of the concept of aftercare created at the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic in 2019 was developed in the form of Act No 467/2019 Coll. It approved the amendment to Act No 461/2003 Coll. on social insurance as amended, as well as the amendment to Act No 576/2004 Coll. on healthcare, services related to the provision of healthcare and amending certain laws. The new Act strengthens the position of nursing and palliative care providers, defines home care as well as personal care for a sick family member in their natural social environment, financed by the "long-term" care allowance during the period of up to three months.

The government's programme for the period 2020-2024 contains a commitment to create a new statutory system of long-term health and social care, including its financing, as a joint project of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family and the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic, and a smooth transition from acute health care to a long-term care.

EXTERNAL DIMENSION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA

In accordance with the Concept of the 2030 Agenda Implementation in the International Context, approved by the Government of the Slovak Republic in its Resolution No 5 of 11 January 2017, in the period from 2018 to 2020, Slovakia actively participated in the fulfilment of the objectives of Agenda 2030 in the form of international cooperation in three main areas:

- Initiating and engaging in activities aimed at achieving the 2030 Agenda goals at **the global level**;
- Cooperation with **partner/developing countries** in achieving their goals resulting from Agenda 2030;
- Implementation of international experience in achieving sustainable development goals **in Slovakia**.

The activities of the Slovak Republic in the external dimension of the 2030 Agenda were intensive in the framework of the UN and its specialized agencies, as well as in other international organisations and groupings. The Slovak Republic **actively participated in high-level events** adopting political commitments in the field of sustainable development goals. Slovakia **organised discussions** aimed at promoting and sharing best practices and experience, **negotiated and approved resolutions** aimed at implementing the 2030 Agenda. The Slovak Republic **provided voluntary financial contributions** to international organisations.

In the partner countries, the Slovak Republic implemented dozens of bilateral projects within the framework of **official development assistance** (ODA). The new Medium-term Development Cooperation Strategy of the Slovak Republic for the years 2019-2023 is also based on Agenda 2030. **The Strategy's six sectoral priorities are in line with the six national priorities for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Slovak Republic**. The total amount of ODA SR provided in 2019 reached the level of **EUR 115.02 mil**, and **EUR 116.74 mil**, in 2018. The Slovak Republic this contributed – through multilateral and bilateral ODA – to the implementation of the objectives of Agenda 2030 in partner countries; through bilateral ODA mainly in the programme countries (Kenya, Georgia, Moldova) and in the priority regions and countries (Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership countries, Eastern Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East, and Afghanistan). For the period of 2018-2019, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the SR/the Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation (SAIDC) published 28 calls for interest in grants, under which **132 projects** were supported in the total amount of **EUR 8.5 million**. In the same period, the SR also financed posting of 52 volunteers in developing countries, provided financial contributions through its representative bodies (so called microgrants) in the total amount of approximately EUR 1 million and organised 34 activities under CETIR/Sharing Slovak Expertise programme.

Development cooperation also includes activities to increase the awareness of children and teachers about Agenda 2030. The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MZVEZ SR) regularly supports such activities in the framework of global development education.

The Slovak Republic has been continuously dedicated to an international **commitment to achieve a target of spending 0.33% of GNI on ODA by 2030**. So far however, we have been lagging behind this target (**0.12% of GNI in 2019**). To fulfil the commitment of the Slovak Republic, it is necessary to intensify the pace of increasing financial and human resources, especially for bilateral activities within the ODA SR.

Fulfilling the external dimension broken down by individual objectives of Agenda 2030

In order to fulfil **Goal 2** (*End hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture*), the Slovak Republic actively participates in the work of the Committee on World Food Security in Rome and its high-level expert panel. The SR has also been sending statistical inputs to indicators under the auspices of the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), which are a basic prerequisite for policy-making to achieve the 2030 Agenda goals. As part of Official Development Assistance (ODA), the Slovak Republic joined the AgriFi development programme in Kenya in the amount of EUR 2.5 mil. The programme is designed to support farmers, reduce food deficit and strengthen the competitiveness of the agricultural sector.

In order to achieve **Goal 3** (*Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*), the SR cooperates intensively with the WHO (World Health Organisation). An example is the WHO Collaborative Centre at the Institute of Vyšné Hágy, which focuses on TB and marginalised communities. In 2020, the centre was transformed to provide care for COVID-19 patients. In January 2020, the SR supported the work of the WHO with a voluntary financial contribution for the fight against COVID-19. The Slovak Republic shared positive results achieved in the fight against TB at a UN high-level event in New York in September 2018. In the years 2018-2019, the SR contributed almost EUR 4.5 million to the healthcare systems in the developing countries. The SR also provided healthcare and nutrition to internally displaced persons and local population in Iraq, Kenya, Syria and South Sudan. In its prompt reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, the SR adjusted its development and humanitarian activities with the objective to help partner countries, mainly in the field of prevention of the spread of the new coronavirus and to strengthen their health systems. For this purpose, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic uses several development cooperation instruments, e.g. financial contributions provided through representation offices of the Slovak Republic abroad, financial contributions to local partners (e.g. hospitals), as well as grant calls focused specifically on the fight against COVID-19. In cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior of the SR, the Slovak Republic also provides material humanitarian aid to partner countries.

In fulfilling **Goal 4** (*Ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all*), the cooperation with UNESCO is key. Slovakia's membership in the Education 2030 Steering Committee is one such activity in this field. Representatives of the Slovak Republic also participated in the preparation of the Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Diplomas, and the expert of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the SR was elected chairwoman of the regional group focusing on the area of inclusion. To support the education of children, the Permanent Delegation of the Slovak Republic to the UNO in Geneva organised an event on assisting technologies for disabled children, where the SR shared its experience in this area.

In 2019, the Slovak Republic signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) with the aim of moving existing cooperation to a higher, systematic level, building capacity and expertise, and engaging Slovak NGOs in UNICEF projects. The Slovak Republic also provided UNICEF with voluntary financial contributions. The Permanent Mission of the SR to the UN in New York cooperates (within the support group) on the implementation of the Youth 2030 Strategy. In 2018, it co-organised the Youth Assembly on Innovation and Cooperation for a Sustainable World, and in February 2020 it cooperated at the Model UN Youth Summit in New York.

In the years 2018-2019, within the framework of ODA, the Slovak Republic contributed to the fulfilment of Objective 4 in developing countries with the amount of more than EUR 9.2 million, e.g. through the establishment of a modern training centre in Kabul aimed at providing practical training in the field of solar systems, or educational projects for children, young people, women and educators from Syrian and Palestinian refugees and the host community in Lebanon.

To achieve **Goal 5** (*Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*), the cooperation between the SR and UN Women (UN organisation for gender equality and women's empowerment) is pivotal. In 2020, MZVEZ SR prepared the Memorandum of Understanding to be signed with UN Women, and signed an Agreement on funding and posting a Slovak expert to UN Women in Georgia. In 2018 and 2019, the Slovak Republic provided voluntary financial contributions to the budget of this UN organisation. The Slovak Republic is also finalising its first National Action Plan for the implementation of UN SC Resolution 1325, Women, Peace and Security. In cooperation with UNESCO and the private sector, the MZVEZ SR organises an annual competition for women in science, which supports young female scientists.

In 2019 and 2020, the Permanent Mission of the Slovak Republic to the UN in New York co-organised a forum dedicated to the involvement of women and girls in science. During Slovakia's two-year membership in the UNHRC (UN Human Rights Council) in 2019-2020, the Slovak Republic actively engaged in the fight against discrimination against women and girls, and co-sponsored Council resolutions on gender equality. Equal opportunities is a cross-cutting theme in all activities in the development cooperation of the Slovak Republic.

In fulfilling **Goal 6** (*Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all*), the Slovak Presidency at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly played an important role. Based on the initiative of Mr Miroslav Lajčák, the President of the UN General Assembly, the International Decade of Action: Water for Sustainable Development 2018 -2028 was announced in 2018.

The Slovak Republic has strengthened the participation of Slovak scientists and academics in UNESCO hydrological programmes. In 2019, this effort also led to the successful election of the Slovak Republic to the UNESCO Intergovernmental Hydrological Council for the period of 4 years. In cooperation with UNESCO, in 2019, a water security project in Turkana, Kenya, was prepared for implementation.

The Slovak Republic is active party to the UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes.

In the years 2018-2019, the Slovak Republic also contributed to the fulfilment of this goal in the volume of more than EUR 2.6 million in the framework of projects aimed at the water and sanitation systems projects in partner countries. The SR helped build the infrastructure of drinking water wells in Bozan, Iraq, or provided technical assistance for water and wastewater management in Moldova and Ukraine.

In fulfilling **Goal 8** (*Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all*), the active participation of the Slovak Republic in the events targeted on development financing played an important role. At the initiative of the President of the 72nd UN General Assembly, Mr Lajčák, a high-level event was held in 2018 aimed at the role of the private sector in Agenda 2030 and sustainable development goals financing. A concrete output from the event was a compendium of best practices, which serve as an inspiration for member countries and potential investors within UNCTAD. The Slovak Republic has also participated in UNESCO projects to support new jobs (e.g. World Heritage Journey Europe, which was joined by the city of Banská Štiavnica). The Slovak Republic also contributed to this goal by implementing a joint V4 project focused on the development of coastal provinces in Kenya by creating jobs through organic and fair-trade production of cashew nuts and sesame seeds.

In achieving **Goal 10** (*Reduce inequality within and among countries*), the cooperation of Slovakia within UNESCO offers another good example. In 2019, the Slovak Republic was re-elected to the Intergovernmental Committee for the MOST Programme, which focuses on research and normative activities. The chairwoman of the Slovak MOST Committee became a member of the intergovernmental Bureau of this programme. The Slovak Republic has been using development cooperation since 2016 also as a tool to address root causes of migration in countries of origin (target 10.7). The medium-term development cooperation strategy for 2019-2023 underlines the need to address the causes of migration in countries of origin and transit by eradicating poverty, creating jobs and promoting food security.

In response to the development of migration flows in the region and the pressure that Morocco has been facing in connection with migration, the V4 countries and Germany have agreed to provide a joint financial contribution of EUR 30 million to help manage illegal migration. The contribution was announced as one of the outputs of the summit of V4 prime ministers in Bratislava on February 7, 2019. For the integrated border management project in Libya, two amounts were allocated by the EU: the amount of EUR 46.6 million for the phase I, and EUR 45 million for the phase II. With their financial contribution, V4 countries supported to the second phase of the project. Since the outbreak of the migration crisis in 2015, the Slovak Republic has been advocating the need to primarily address the root causes of migration flows countries of origin and transit, and has been an active contributor to the EU trust funds created for this purpose, including FRIT instrument (Turkey). Within the first tranche of FRIT in 2016-2019, the Slovak Republic paid the amount of more than EUR 10.5 million. In the 2nd tranche, based on a GNI key, the Slovak Republic is expected to contribute an amount of almost EUR 5.5 million. In connection with the prevention of the spread of Covid-19 disease caused by the new coronavirus in refugee communities and their host countries, Slovakia financially supported the UN activities, including the UHNCR and the International Red Cross.

In fulfilling **Goal 11** (*Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*) the cooperation of the Slovak Republic with UN-Habitat is key (UN Programme for human settlements). The Permanent Mission of the SR to the UN in New York regularly organises informal meetings and briefings for member states with UN-Habitat representatives with the aim to strengthen coherence and networking

within the UN system. The Slovak Republic has been cooperating with the UNESCO World Heritage Centre for a long time now, and regularly provides voluntary financial contributions to specialised funds for the preservation of heritage, and also shares its own expertise, for example through the Slovak University of Technology. The Slovak Republic also joined the UNESCO Network of Creative Cities, when the city of Košice became a member of the network in 2018.

In achieving **Goal 13** (*Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*), the first financial contribution of the Slovak Republic to the GCF (Green Climate Fund) in the amount of USD 2 million was announced during the UN Climate Summit in New York in 2019. The President of the Slovak Republic Z. Čaputová also took an active part in the summit. In the years 2018 - 2019, the Slovak Republic also actively participated in UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) events in Nairobi. Environmental protection and climate change are also long-term crosscutting themes in all development cooperation activities of the Slovak Republic.

In fulfilling **Goal 14** (*Conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*), the most visible contribution of the Slovak Republic lies in its active participation in the negotiations on the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, aimed at the protection and sustainable use of biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction.

In fulfilling **Goal 15** (*Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems...*), the Slovak Republic is involved in the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF). The importance of this commitment is underlined by the fact that in 2018, the Slovak representative was elected chairman of the UNFF Bureau for a two-year term. He also actively participates in the UNESCO Man and Biosphere programme, where the Slovak Republic acted as a member of the International Coordination Committee of the program as well as the International Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves. The Slovak Republic has been contributing to the fulfilment of the UNESCO International Geoscience Programme focused mainly on the ecological use of natural resources. The Slovak Republic is significantly involved in the pan-European political process aimed at supporting sustainable forest management - FOREST EUROPE, where our country has held the position of political leader since 2016.

In achieving **Goal 16** (*Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*), the SR is mainly active in the field of security sector reform (SSR). In its function of co-chair of the Group of Friends of the SSR in New York, the Permanent Mission of the SR to the UN, New York, organised several events, meetings and briefings with the aim to share experience in this area.

While holding Presidency in OSCE in 2019, Slovakia focused on strengthening a coherent and coordinated approach to security sector reform. The Slovak Republic has initiated and organised several important events, including a high-level conference and regional expert seminars. The Slovak Republic also initiated the very first report on the OSCE's approach to the SSR. Through the implementation of the SSR in relation to the 2030 Agenda, Slovakia also contributes to a systemic approach to conflict prevention, and elimination of injustice and instability. In 2019, the Slovak Republic was elected a member of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) for a two-year period (2020 - 2021). The commission aims to mobilise resources and make recommendations in the areas of post-conflict reconstruction and peace building.

As an active supporter of the International Criminal Court (ICC), the SR is a member of the Bureau of the Assembly of Parties to the Rome Statute (2017 - 2020). Slovakia also made a voluntary financial contribution to the ICC Trust Fund for Victims, as well as a voluntary financial contribution to the Programme of Assistance in the Teaching of International Law.

In the years 2016 -2019, the Slovak Republic was a member of the Commission for Narcotic Substances (CND) in Vienna, and actively participated, among other things, in the creation of a declaration on the fight against drugs. The Slovak Republic is actively involved in the work of the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and the Criminal Justice (CCPCJ), where it also held the position of vice-president (2015-2017).

The SR contributes to achieving SDG 16 also as a vice-president of the Human Rights Council (2019-2020), and through active promotion of a Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Within the framework of development cooperation, the Slovak Republic has continued to share the experience from its transformation and integration processes, and to support the democratisation and reform process in partner countries. This part of ODA SR reached the amount of almost EUR 16 mil between 2018 and 2019. Examples include strengthening Northern Macedonia's capacity for the European integration process by creating a National Convent on the EU platform, strengthening governmental and non-governmental cooperation at the level of local government in Albania, and supporting the civil society participation in Moldova's public affairs.

CONCLUSION

The report brings overview of the results achieved in the National Priorities of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - Education for a Dignified Life, Towards a Knowledge and Environmentally Sustainable Economy in the Time of Demographic Change and a Changing Global Environment, Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion, Sustainable Settlements, Regions and Countries in the Context of Climate Change, Rule of Law, Democracy and Security, and Good Health - in the Slovak Republic in the time horizon from July 2018 to April 2020.

Slovakia has been achieving good results in the national priority Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion, although several groups of the population still face the risk of social exclusion. Challenges persist in the national priorities Towards a Knowledge and Environmentally Sustainable Economy in the Time of Demographic Change and a Changing Global Environment, and Education for a Dignified Life. We face significant challenges in national priorities of Sustainable Cities, Regions and Countries in the Context of Climate Change, Rule of Law, Democracy and Security, and Good Health.

Similar conclusions were drawn in the Country Report for 2020 - Slovakia (European Semester 2020), which in 2020 for the first time also includes an assessment of the country in terms of its progress towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The report stated: “although Slovakia has made progress towards meeting the SDGs, some challenges persist. Compared to the EU average, the Slovak Republic achieves better results in several social SDGs, including poverty reduction (SDG 1) and inequality (SDG 10). Some progress has also been made in the areas of good health and wellbeing of people (SDG 3) and quality education (SDG 4), although in these indicators, the Slovak Republic lags behind the EU average. However, environmental pressures and the changing climate have negative effects on the sustainable development of the Slovak Republic. There has also been a less favourable development in the area of low-emission energy consumption and resource productivity. Slovakia still faces problems in strengthening climate action (SDG 13), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7) and more responsible consumption and production (SDG 12).”¹³⁶

In the area of the Agenda 2030 implementation in the international environment, the report emphasises Slovakia's active participation in adopting global political commitments in the field of sustainable development goals, Slovakia's support in the form of development cooperation and assistance in accordance with Slovakia's Mid-term Development Cooperation Strategy for 2019-2023 and its commitment to achieve the volume of ODA at the level of 0.33% GNI by 2030.

An independent audit carried out by the National Audit Office at the end of 2018 assessed the country's readiness to meet the UN Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.¹³⁷ Based on its findings, the report recommends to approve national implementation targets and agreed priorities, define national indicators to measure progress, provide staff capacity and technical equipment to coordinate the 2030 Agenda beyond 2020, and implement a general information campaign to raise awareness of the 2030 Agenda.

The recovery of economic growth after the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is currently a major focus. There are real concerns about a significant slowdown in achieving the 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals as a consequence of the current crisis caused by the global pandemic. However, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development should be key in developing recovery plans at national, European and global levels.

¹³⁶ Within the scope of its legal basis, the European Semester can help stimulate national economic and employment policies towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by monitoring progress and ensuring closer coordination of national efforts. This report contains a deeper analysis and monitoring of the SDGs. The new Annex E presents a statistical assessment of trends in relation to the SDGs in Slovakia over the last five years, based on a set of EU indicators related to the SDGs developed by Eurostat:
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1584543810241&uri=CELEX%3A52020SC0524>

¹³⁷ „Checking the country's preparedness to meet the UN Agenda 2030“ (November 2018)