

JUSTMIG

Sustainable and socially just transnational sectoral labour markets for temporary migrants

Background report

Slovakia

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Recognizing the increasing importance of temporary transnational labour migration, the JUSTMIG project aims to examine trends and patterns of temporary labour mobility and employment of migrant workers on fixed-term or outsourced temporary contracts in selected manufacturing and service sectors in 6 EU countries, as well as the adaptation of industrial relations structures in the same 6 EU Member States and 3 EU Candidate Countries that are source countries for workers. The aim of the background reports of the JUSTMIG project is to provide an assessment of the trends and dynamics of temporary labour migration in Slovakia as well as an up-to-date overview of the presence and importance of migrant workers in temporary employment in Slovakia. The background report will provide both an overview of trends in outward labour migration and an assessment of the impact of outward migration on the labour market and industrial relations.

The background report is based on analysis of statistical data on transnational migration, analysis of relevant policies and regulation, information gathered through desk research on key issues and challenges faced by labour market and industrial relations institutions and two complementary interviews.

A brief summary of relevant policies and regulations regarding migration

The employment landscape for foreigners in Slovakia is governed by Act No. 5/2004 Coll. on Employment Services, subject to amendments. Within this legal framework, citizens of the European Union, European Economic Area, and Switzerland are entitled to work within Slovakia without the necessity of obtaining a work permit. Individuals granted temporary refuge status are permitted to engage in employment within Slovakia without additional bureaucratic requirements, although they are precluded from entrepreneurial ventures or self-employment pursuits. Slovak citizens are afforded a degree of primacy in accessing opportunities within the national labour market. In adjudicating the issuance of work permits, EU Blue Cards, or single permits, the relevant authorities—be it the labour office or the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (COLAF) for EU Blue Card cases—scrutinize the prevailing labour market conditions.

This evaluation encompasses an assessment of whether the pool of registered job seekers encompasses suitable candidates for the vacancies in question. Exceptions to this norm are made in specified circumstances, such as instances of labour scarcity, the renewal of temporary residency for identical positions, or engagements in continuous educational or scientific activity. Any work permit or other form of authorization is intricately linked to a specific employment arrangement with a designated employer and is, therefore, non-transferable. Notwithstanding, certain exemptions, as articulated in Article 23, afford employers the latitude to engage third-country nationals without necessitating a formal work permit. Such exemptions typically pertain to individuals with temporary refuge status or those participating in structured training programs.¹ It is important to highlight the absence of stricter regulations for Slovak work and temporary work agencies, which are needed to prevent the exploitation of migrant workers.

Currently, there are around 800 work agencies in Slovakia and around 450 temporary work agencies are active. For comparison, in Germany or Italy there are around 200 work agencies present. The absence of strict regulations regarding work agencies allows for unfair practices.² Some work agencies in Slovakia operate without valid licences, particularly in manufacturing, logistics, and warehouses. Some of the exploitative and unfair practices that work agencies often use include deducting part of the salary as a commission for job placement or confiscating the passports of foreigners.³ The continuing prevalence of such practices emphasises the need for stricter regulations regarding the functioning of work agencies. Another aspect of having many temporary work agencies is the unavailability of statistics on the employment of migrants. Practically the only evidence comes from individual interviews with stakeholders and migrants. There are systematic efforts to describe the situation of migrants.

¹ Veselková, M. and Hábel, B. (2024). Refugees and labour migrants from Ukraine in Slovakia: One year into the war.

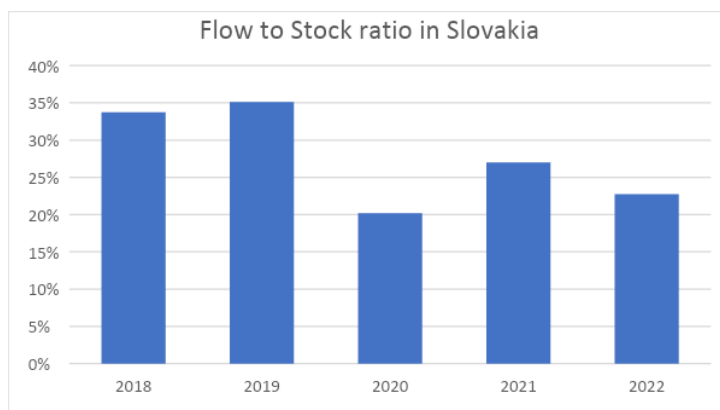
² Based on a semi-structured interview conducted with representatives from a Slovakia-based temporary employment agency.

³ <https://uzitocna.pravda.sk/praca-a-kariera/clanok/489892-ako-venaletiet-nekalym-praktikam-agentur-docasneho-zamestnavania/>

Statistical data on migration

Total immigrant stock. Based on the data from the Eurostat database, in 2022 Slovakia had a total non-EU immigrant stock of 120,625. Within that number, there are 17,297 immigrants from Serbia (14%) and 1,447 from Bosnia and Herzegovina (1%). Since 2018 there has been a sharp increase in the total number of non-EU immigrants in Slovakia. The number of persons with valid permits almost doubled, from 62,365 in 2018 to 120,625 in 2022. At the same time, the stock of citizens of Serbia increased from 13,555 to 17,297, and the stock of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina from 636 to 1,447.

Figure 1 Flow to stock ratio



Source: Own calculations from Eurostat

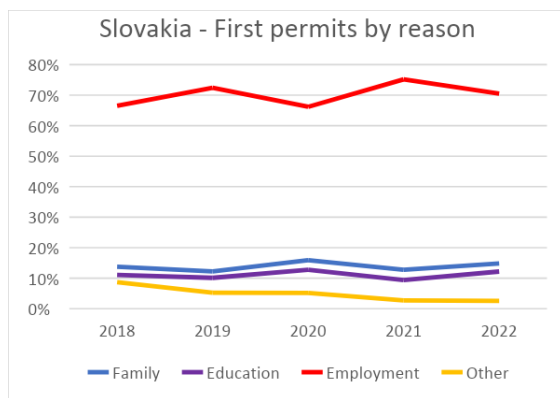
Immigrant inflows. In 2022 Slovakia had about 5.1 first permits issued per thousand persons, which is an increase from 3.9 in 2018, but also the lowest value among six destination countries in our sample. In absolute numbers, there was an increase in the number of first-time permits from 21,040 in 2018 to 27,441 in 2022. Among those numbers in 2022, there were 4,360 and 661 first permits issued to citizens of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, respectively. The level and trend of the annual ratio between first permits issued and all valid permits in a country could indicate the magnitude of temporary labour migration. In relation to immigrant stock numbers, this suggests that the total immigrant inflows in Slovakia have slightly decreased from 34% to 23%, which is still higher than the EU average (14%), but lower than the NMS average (36%). The decrease was even more pronounced in the case of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina (from 73% to 46%), while the drop for the citizens of Serbia was in line with the overall trend (from 36% to 25%).

Experts dealing with migration pointed out significant changes in migration patterns, particularly in sectors such as automotive manufacturing and transportation, where the demand for foreign workers is increasing. Traditionally reliant on labour from Ukraine and Balkan states, Slovakia is now exploring new sources of migrant labour, including Vietnam,

Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, India, Serbia, Georgia, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan.⁴ The emerging trend of hiring workers from these regions reflects evolving labour market needs and the search for alternative sources of skilled and low-skilled workers.⁵

Employment-related inflows. Since 2018, there has been a steady increase in the share of first permits issued for employment reasons. In absolute terms, the number of first permits for employment reasons increased from 13,989 to 19,339. As shown in Figure 3, the share of first permits for employment reasons is about 70%, which is twice as high as the EU average (36%), slightly higher than the NMS average (64%), and higher than the share in any other of 6 observed countries. The share of first-time permits for employment reasons for Serbian citizens significantly increased from 66% to 88%. In the case of citizens from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the share of first-time permits for employment reasons remained unchanged at an extremely high rate of 95%.

Figure 2 First permits by reasons

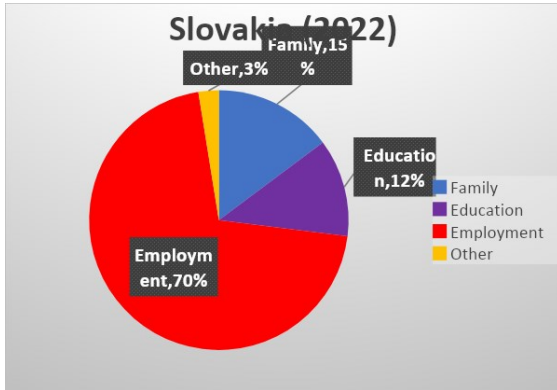


Source: Own calculations from Eurostat

Figure 3 Structure of first permits by reasons in 2022

⁴ <https://rokovania.gov.sk/download.dat?id=06F536FAA885441A9E8D930352EA974D-24B9312FA96529134DB360D283BB3872>

⁵ Based on a semi-structured interview conducted with representatives from a Slovakia-based international organization focusing on migration.



Source: Own calculations from Eurostat

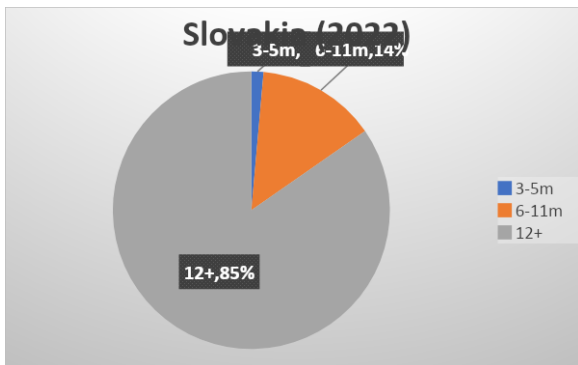
Temporary labour immigration. For this report, we approximated the temporary labour immigrants with those who have first-time residence permits for employment reasons shorter than one year. According to the Eurostat database, there has been a significant decrease in temporary labour immigrants in Slovakia from 23% in 2018 to 15% in 2022. The overall decrease also coincides with the decrease among the citizens from both sending countries. The share of temporary labour immigrants from Bosnia and Herzegovina decreased from 35% to 12% and from 31% to 16% in the case of Serbia.

We have requested official statistics on migrant employment by type of contract from the Slovak Employment Office. Unfortunately, information regarding whether employed migrants have permanent or temporary contracts is unavailable for 99.7% of migrants.

Expert interviewees dealing with migration highlighted automotive as a significant sector for temporary migrant labour in Slovakia, alongside construction, agriculture, food processing and social care. Despite the demand for workers in these sectors, integration support, especially in terms of language education, remains inadequate. Many temporary migrant workers face precarious employment conditions, including temporary and unstable working contracts, non-payment of overtime, and substandard accommodation. Exploitative practices, such as deducting accommodation costs directly from salaries, are prevalent, highlighting the vulnerability of migrant workers in the labour market. The current legislation does not allow to assign temporary agency employees to another employer. As a result, if a foreign worker is no longer needed, the agency quickly gets rid of them. Because changing employers is a complicated and time-consuming legal process, these workers are then forced to either leave the country, which they often cannot afford, or to work illegally. There is a need for stronger labour protections and enforcement measures.⁶

⁶ Based on a semi-structured interview conducted with representatives from a Slovakia-based international organization focusing on migration.

Figure 4 First employment permits by duration



Source: Own calculations from Eurostat

Slovakia as emigration country. Slovakia has historically been a country of emigration, with a significant number of its citizens leaving for work opportunities abroad, particularly after joining the EU in 2004 (Kahanec and Kurekova, 2016). Between 2002 and 2012, approximately 300,000 Slovaks emigrated, with about half not returning until 2015 (Haluš, Hlaváč, Harvan & Hidas, 2017). However, since 2016, the trend has reversed, with more Slovaks returning home than leaving. Return migration is motivated by family reasons, and returning Slovaks tend to settle in central and eastern regions, which were the areas with the highest outflow of Slovaks. In contrast, migrants typically locate in Bratislava and the western regions, which offer better employment opportunities.

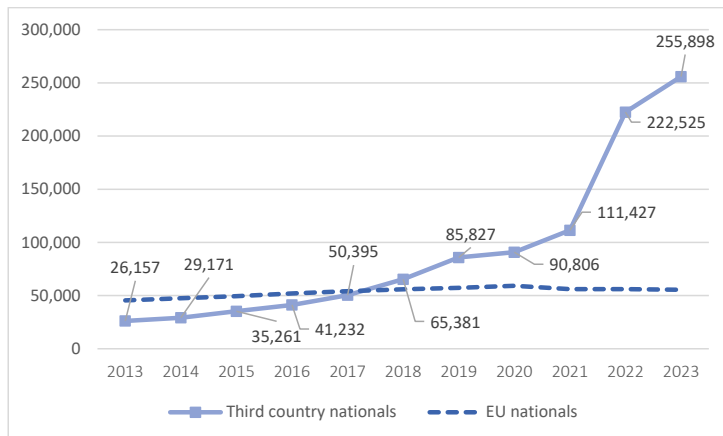
The information about Slovaks living abroad and their employment characteristics could be obtained from national statistics in countries where Slovak citizens reside. The Czech Republic is one of the top destinations for Slovak workers. Most Slovaks in the Czech Republic are employed in the industrial production sector (28% of all employed Slovaks in the Czech Republic in 2022), followed by wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (13%), information and communication (9%), health and social services (9%), construction (8%), administrative and support services (8%), professional, scientific, and technical activities (7%), and transportation and storage (6%). Austria is a major destination for Slovak women who provide 24-hour care to older adults. Wilsch (2023) estimates that a third of care workers (16,000) in Austria are Slovak women.

Slovakia as immigration country. Slovakia is the country with one of the lowest number of migrants in the EU. Slovakia has remained largely unaffected by humanitarian migration flows in 2015 and 2016. The number of asylums granted is not exceeding thirty per year over the last decade.⁷ The inflow of the foreign population has accelerated in economically successful years due to the shortage of low-skilled workers in some sectors. According to statistics collected from the Bureau of Border and Foreign Police, the number of foreign citizens with valid residence permits increased from 71,649 in 2013 to 311,406 in 2023. Currently the majority of migrants in Slovakia are third-country nationals (TCNs), accounting for approximately 80%. At the end of 2023, there were 255,898 TCNs legally

⁷ <https://www.minv.sk/?statistiky-20>

residing in Slovakia, which represents over 4% of the population (Figure 5). The largest groups of TCNs in Slovakia come from Ukraine, Serbia, and Vietnam. Approximately half of these TCNs hold temporary residence permits.

Figure 5 Number of valid residence permits for foreigners



Source: Statistical overview of legal and illegal migration in the Slovak Republic published by the Bureau of Border and Foreigners Police of the Presidium of the Police Corps <https://www.minv.sk/?rocenky>

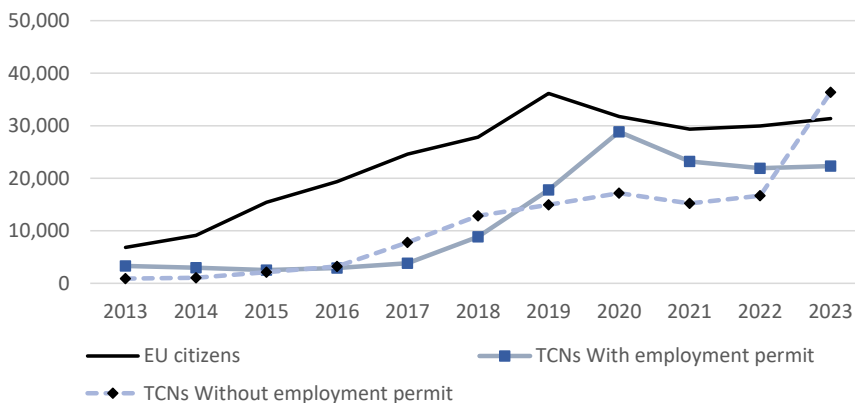
Note: Data as of January 1 of the particular year.

Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia. The unprecedented mass migration of refugees from Ukraine in 2022 presented a unique challenge for Slovak institutions. Within the first month following the onset of the conflict, over 269,111 refugees crossed the Slovak border, and the total number of displaced people passing through Slovakia surpassed one million in 2022. It is noteworthy that 90% of Ukrainian refugees subsequently moved on to other countries. During the 12 months of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, 110,114 refugees from Ukraine registered for temporary protection in Slovakia. Ukrainian refugees do not require work permits; hence, they are reported in the group of TCNs without a work permit (see Figure 6). There is early evidence that around half of Ukrainian refugees accepted jobs below their qualifications, and about a quarter of them were engaged in temporary small contracts (Veselkova and Habel, 2024). These contracts are less secure than regular employment contracts because they provide fewer employee rights (e.g., no holiday or sick pay) but at the same time offer more flexibility, which may be preferred by women with children.

Work permits for migrants. Citizens of the European Union, citizens of the European Economic Area parties and Switzerland have unrestricted access to Slovak labour market. Temporary protection holders can work in Slovakia without any further permits and they are reported in the group of TCNs without a work permit. *Single permit* can be issued for TCNs after labour market test (an employer must report a job vacancy to the labour office

at least 20 working days before applying for temporary residence). The labour market situation is not taken into account in the case of occupations with labour shortages. TCNs can have *employment without work permit* on the basis of an existing residence permit (e.g., permanent residence, temporary residence for the purposes of studies, temporary protection status). Temporary residence is not required for short-term employment of up to 90 days. The number of employed migrants in Slovakia has significantly risen over the years, with a notable increase from 13,400 in 2013 to 95,585 in May 2023. The sharp increase in migrant employment occurred in 2022 due to the inflow of displaced persons from Ukraine. Refugees with temporary protections can work in Slovakia without a permit and they are reported in the category TCNs without a work permit (Figure 6). Despite the continuous growth of migrant workers, businesses are concerned about a shortage of qualified workers, with over 110,000 long-term unfilled job positions in Slovakia.⁸

Figure 6 Foreigners working in Slovakia



Source: Veselkova and Habel (2024) based on records from Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (COLAF)

Note: Data as of January 1 of the particular year. "With employment permit" refers to those employed on the basis of a work permit, single permit or EU Blue Card. "Without employment permit" refers to those employed without a work permit, single permit or EU Blue Card, pursuant to Article 23a of Act No. 5/2004 Coll.

Fast-track immigration policy. International Migration Organization (office Bratislava) helped Slovak government to implemented *National Visa* program to attract qualified and highly educated workers from abroad. A new temporary work permit for highly skilled non-EU nationals was introduced in April 2022. This visa is designed for individuals seeking employment for a period of three months or a job for one year. The National Visa is administratively simpler and allows TCNs to start their employment more quickly. This visa is available to selected groups of third-country nationals and occupations that are

⁸ <https://www.sluzbyzamestnanosti.gov.sk/>

experiencing labour shortages.⁹ Visa is issued for a maximum of one year and cannot be reissued.¹ National visa are less administratively demanding but do not provide a long-term solution to the acute shortage of workers. Temporary migrants with National visa still need to arrange their residence permit and migrants are not allowed to bring their family members to Slovakia.¹⁰

To address shortages in the healthcare sector, changes to the training of third-country healthcare professionals were introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic.. The reform focuses on improving employment opportunities by streamlining the recognition of qualifications and simplifying language requirements. Migrant health workers with recognised qualifications will now be able to undertake temporary work placements to gain experience and improve their chances of future employment.

Temporary work agencies. Many of the migrant workers have never been to Europe, so temporary work agencies post their employees to these countries to thoroughly explain what they need to do and how applicants from third countries should proceed. They often accompany them; for example, to Vienna or elsewhere by plane. Temporary work agencies also organise transportation migrant workers by bus to the user companies, so there is quite a bit of coordination work involved. The interview reflected the view that while temporary work agencies try to explain to migrant workers everything needed within the framework of the job, they cannot replace the institutions responsible for their integration (Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Interior). Furthermore, the creation of integration centres was suggested to help with integration¹¹. Strengthening the protection of migrant workers and their working rights, is vital for their effective integration. However, as competencies linked to integration policies for migrants do not fall within the purview of any ministry, coordinated efforts to promote inclusion and integration of migrants in the labour market are lacking.¹²

An interview with a temporary employment agency expert revealed that the implementation of the new visa program allows them to bring in the workforce more easily and in a shorter time. They attract workforce from Asia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, or the Philippines. Currently, the quota is somewhere around 10,000; previously, the regulation wasn't as efficient and competitive for Slovak employers. With the past regulation, the interviewee reported problems at various embassies; they couldn't process documents for these people on time. Consequently, other countries were much faster in these processes and managed to capture those people who were seeking jobs and wanting to migrate sooner than Slovak employers. As revealed during the interview, employment agencies often outsource the administrative tasks that need to be handled when dealing with migrant workers to companies that provide such services, as they are very time consuming, and embassies are not adequately equipped in terms of staff when it comes to issuing visas.¹³

⁹ <https://www.mic.iom.sk/en/residence/visa/766-national-visa.html>

¹⁰ Based on a semi-structured interview conducted with representatives from a Slovakia-based international organization focusing on migration.

¹¹ Based on a semi-structured interview conducted with representatives from a Slovakia-based temporary employment agency.

¹² Based on a semi-structured interview conducted with representatives from a Slovakia-based international organization focusing on migration.

¹³ Based on a semi-structured interview conducted with representatives from a Slovakia-based temporary employment agency.

Commented [1]: EU Blue Card allows permanent employment contracts if I'm not wrong. If so, I am not sure, why are you mentioning this - its not in our focus...

According to the interviewee, the primary source countries are Ukraine, Serbia, India, the Philippines, Vietnam, former Soviet Union countries, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Moldova. Demand is increasing in manufacturing, electrical engineering, and the automotive sector. The interviewee predicted that the social sector as well as the HORECA sector will become increasingly represented by workers from third countries¹⁴.

Characteristics of employed migrants. Table 1 illustrates the personal characteristics of employed migrants in the Slovak labour market categorized by the type of work permit. EU citizens predominantly consist of men (71%) and are typically considered settled migrants. They often hold long-term employment contracts, with 72% having contracts lasting longer than 24 months, and exhibit a higher likelihood of high-skilled jobs, with approximately one-third employed in occupations classified under ISCO groups 1-3. On the other hand, third-country nationals (TCNs) with work permits represent the least educated migrant group, with only 17% possessing tertiary education. They are primarily employed in low-skilled occupations (ISCO group 8-9) and tend to hold long-term contracts, with 87% having contracts lasting longer than 12 months. However, only half of them remain in Slovakia for more than two years. TCNs without work permits mainly comprise Ukrainian refugees. Although these migrants consist many highly educated women, they often occupy low-skilled positions and work under short-term employment contracts.

Sectoral employment of migrants. According to Table 2, one-third of migrants are employed in the manufacturing and transportation sector. Another fifth are employed by temporary work agencies (Sector N), making it challenging to determine their specific sector of employment. In the total economy, only 6% of employment is organized by work agencies (refer to Table A1 in the Appendix), indicating that migrant workers rely on agency work more than Slovak workers. Third-country nationals (TCNs) without work permits, primarily Ukrainian refugees, are more frequently employed in accommodation and food services and wholesale and retail sectors.

Table 1 Employed migrant workers in the Slovak labour market, 2023

	EU citizens	TCNs With employment permit	TCNs Without employment permit
Total Employed	31,892	26,102	42,589
Women	29%	21%	55%
Education			
lower secondary	48%	24%	31%
upper secondary	26%	38%	35%
tertiary	21%	17%	34%
Occupation			
isco 1-3	31%	11%	17%
isco 4-7	27%	21%	26%
isco 8-9	42%	68%	57%
Employment duration (months)			

¹⁴ ibid.

1-6m	8%	2%	22%
7-12m	8%	11%	18%
13-24m	11%	48%	31%
25+ m	72%	39%	29%

Source: Based on statistics from Slovak employment office

Note: "With employment permit" refers to those employed on the basis of a work permit, single permit or EU Blue Card. "Without employment permit" refers to those employed without a work permit, single permit or EU Blue Card, pursuant to Article 23a of Act No. 5/2004 Coll.

Table 2 Employment of migrants by sector

Sector	EU citizens		TCNs With employment permit		TCNs Without employment permit		Total migrants	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Total economy	32019	100%	26304	100%	43729	100%	102052	100%
C Manufacturing	5973	19%	8289	32%	9703	22%	23965	23%
N Administrative, support service activities	5946	19%	4205	16%	9658	22%	19809	19%
H Transportation, storage	4574	14%	6888	26%	2502	6%	13964	14%
M Professional, scientific, technical activities	3138	10%	1471	6%	3725	9%	8334	8%
G Wholesale and retail trade	2558	8%	952	4%	4019	9%	7529	7%
F Construction	2329	7%	1509	6%	2077	5%	5915	6%
I Accommodation, food service activities	427	1%	754	3%	2992	7%	4173	4%
Q Health, social activities	935	3%	428	2%	1891	4%	3254	3%
J Information and communication	931	3%	646	2%	1246	3%	2823	3%
P Education	864	3%	131	0%	1323	3%	2318	2%
S Other service activities	343	1%	364	1%	1079	2%	1786	2%
A Agriculture, forestry and fishing	531	2%	252	1%	417	1%	1200	1%
L Real estate activities	269	1%	210	1%	510	1%	989	1%
R Arts, entertainment, recreation	358	1%	100	0%	456	1%	914	1%
K Financial and insurance activities	292	1%	18	0%	169	0%	479	0%
O Public admin., defence, compuls. social security	157	0%	11	0%	264	1%	432	0%
E Water supply; sewerage, waste management	122	0%	21	0%	34	0%	177	0%
D Electricity, gas, steam, air conditioning supply	92	0%	6	0%	37	0%	135	0%
B Mining and quarrying	31	0%	10	0%	15	0%	56	0%

Source: Based on statistics from Slovak employment office

Note: "With employment permit" refers to those employed on the basis of a work permit, single permit or EU Blue Card. "Without employment permit" refers to those employed without a work permit, single permit or EU Blue Card, pursuant to Article 23a of Act No. 5/2004 Coll.

Illegal employment. In 2022, labour inspections uncovered a total of 1,410 instances of illegal employment. Of these, 1,023 cases (72%) involved Slovak nationals, 92 cases (6.5%) involved EU citizens, and 295 cases (21%) involved third-country nationals (TCNs) with valid residence permits. Notably, there were no instances of illegal employment involving TCNs without residence permits. Illegal employment was most commonly detected in small companies with fewer than 10 employees, accounting for 75% of all cases. The sectors most affected by illegal employment include construction, accommodation and food services, and real estate activities (see Table 3). Additionally, temporary work agencies (sector N) were identified as particularly prevalent, accounting for 15% of all instances of illegal employment.

Table 3 Number of illegally employed persons per 10,000 workers by sector, 2022

Sector	Illegal employment per 10,000 workers
Total economy	5.9
F Construction	25.3
I Accommodation, food service activities	22.1
L Real estate activities	15.9
N Administrative, support service activities	14.6
S Other service activities	5.4
G Wholesale and retail trade	4.7
M Professional, scientific, technical activities	4.2
C Manufacturing	4.0
E Water supply; sewerage, waste management	3.7
H Transportation, storage	3.7
A Agriculture, forestry and fishing	3.7
J Information and communication	3.6
R Arts, entertainment, recreation	3.5
P Education	0.6
Q Health, social activities	0.3
B Mining and quarrying	0
D Electricity, gas, steam, air conditioning supply	0
K Financial and insurance activities	0
O Public admin., defence, compuls. social security	0

Source: Based on statistics from Slovak Labour Inspection reports

Note: In 2022, labour inspections uncovered a total of 1,410 instances of illegal employment. Of these, 1,023 cases (72%) involved Slovak nationals, 92 cases (6.5%) involved EU citizens, and 295 cases (21%) involved third-country nationals (TCNs) with valid residence permits.

Intra-EU labour mobility of Slovak workers. In 2022, Slovakia issued 122,494 portable documents A1¹⁵ for outgoing workers and received 60,088 incoming postings (De Wispelaere et al., 2023). Typically about a third of A1 postings cover workers in industry and transport sector who are active in two or more EU Member States. Most postings from Slovakia are to Germany (56%), Austria (11%), the Czech Republic (8%), the Netherlands (5%) and Belgium (4%). Slovakia receives most postings from Germany (87%), Poland (3%), Italy (3%). Majority of posting from Slovakia are in industry (82% of which two thirds are in construction) and health care and social work (14%). However the number of A1 documents is not equal to number of persons involved, some workers are sent repeatedly in one year. In 2022, Slovakia posted almost 60,000 workers, that represents 2.3% of all employed workers. Most of posted workers from Slovakia have short-term contracts (average 210 day contracts) and they are posted to Germany (86%) and southern European countries (6% in France, Italy, and Spain).

Public attitudes towards migrants. Public views are important contributors to immigrants' social and economic integration into the host country. About 70% of Slovak citizens opposing immigration and these perceptions have been persistent over time (Kriglerová et al., 2020). The high opposition to migration is also related to the very little interaction of the Slovak population with foreigners. The dominant narrative is that migrants take jobs from Slovaks and push wages down. However, the economic benefits of migration are perceived by one-fifth of respondents. Most respondents would generally support the immigration of highly qualified workers from culturally close countries. Respondents also agree that it is important that foreigners learn the Slovak language and that language courses and integration support should be freely provided to migrants and their children.

Slovakia remained unaffected by the refugee migration between 2015 and 2016; however, the issue of migration resonated in public debates. Migration emerged as a divisive topic during the parliamentary election in 2018 and the presidential election in 2019. Eurobarometer surveys indicate that Slovaks exhibit some of the most negative attitudes towards immigrants and refugees within the European Union. The majority of Slovak respondents view migration as a problem and hold unfavorable opinions towards immigrants. In 2016, Slovakia, along with other Central and Eastern European countries, ranked among the top 10 least accepting nations of migrants out of 138 countries in the Migration Acceptance Index compiled by the Gallup World Poll.¹⁶ Public awareness about migration issues in Slovakia has been below the EU average. Slovaks tend to overestimate the numbers of migrants and refugees in the country (often as much as four times higher than reality), in part because of incomplete or biased information presented in the media. One in five Slovaks (22 %) report that they feel well informed about immigration and integration-related matters compared to the EU average of 37 % (EC, 2020).

At the end of 2022, GLOBSEC, a non-governmental organisation based in Bratislava, conducted a representative survey (including 1,000 respondents in four Visegrad countries) to measure opinions about refugees (Szicherle & Kazaz, 2022). Overall the

¹⁵ Total number of Portable Documents (PDs) A1 issued by EU/EFTA countries referring to Art. 12 and 13 of Regulation 883/2004. PDs A1 are issued for persons insured in a Member State other than the Member State of (temporary) employment.

¹⁶ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/216377/new-index-shows-least-accepting-countries-migrants.aspx>

acceptance of refugees was high, with nearly 90% of citizens holding a favourable view of Ukrainian refugees. However in Slovakia acceptance was lower at 65%. Similarly, the support for the presence of Ukrainian refugees was strong, apart from Slovakia, where the majority had negative feelings about hosting refugees (60%). The level of agreement varies among countries regarding whether displaced people should receive support. While the majority of Poles opposed reducing benefits for Ukrainian refugees, Czechs (46%) and Slovaks (68%) leaned towards decreasing social assistance provided to Ukrainians. Furthermore, the majority of Slovaks expressed the opinion that refugees should not be granted access to free healthcare. Respondents also reported how their lives had been affected by the influx of refugees. Slovaks were most likely to indicate negative impacts on their lives. Conversely, Czechs reported the highest incidence of experiencing inappropriate behaviour from Ukrainian refugees.

Limited government support for integration exacerbates challenges faced by temporary migrant workers is leading to social isolation and dependence on employers. Local governments lack the infrastructure and resources to facilitate migrant integration effectively. Moreover concentrating temporary migrant workers on the cities' outskirts or in small municipalities with insufficient social amenities and infrastructure, in particular to reduce costs, poses a risk due to marginalisation which may lead to social inequalities and tensions, impacting both migrant workers and host communities. Societal perceptions and attitudes towards migrant labour, particularly in smaller communities, can exacerbate integration challenges and lead to friction between migrant workers and local populations.¹⁷

Conclusion and final comments

Before 2022, Slovakia hosted one of the lowest numbers of migrants in the EU. Responding to acute labour shortages in certain sectors, the government introduced a fast-track immigration policy in April 2022, providing temporary work permits for highly skilled non-EU nationals. Following the outbreak of the Russian war against Ukraine, Slovakia became an important transition point for Ukrainian refugees. Consequently, the number of migrant workers significantly increased in 2022. Ukrainian workers are often employed on short-term contracts and frequently accept jobs below their qualifications. One-fifth of migrant workers are employed via temporary work agencies, resulting in unknown employment characteristics such as occupation or true sector of employment. The operations of temporary agencies remain unregulated and largely scattered, with the number of temp work agencies in Slovakia surpassing that in Germany. Obtaining systematic data on the employment of temporary migrants is therefore challenging, and available evidence is primarily based on stakeholder experiences.

The interviews revealed a shift in public discourse on migration, with the government acknowledging the need for foreign workers in certain occupations. However, challenges persist in aligning public rhetoric with policy implementation and addressing negative perceptions of migration. While some municipalities are proactive in attracting foreign workers, others struggle due to limited resources and negative attitudes towards migration.

¹⁷ Based on a semi-structured interview conducted with representatives from a Slovakia-based international organization focusing on migration.

Strengthening the rights of immigrants, including workplace protection, safety regulations, and decent work standards, is crucial for their successful integration. However, integration efforts in Slovakia remain underdeveloped, with limited support for migrant workers upon their arrival and insufficient focus on pre-departure preparation and integration initiatives. Less than 40% of third-country nationals (TCNs) remain in Slovakia for more than two years, indicating that their migration is often temporary in nature. The majority of TCNs holding employment permits are men (80%) and are primarily employed in medium to low-skilled positions. The lack of coordination between sending and receiving countries further complicates integration efforts. Moving forward, addressing these challenges will necessitate a coordinated approach involving governments, employers, civil society, and international organizations to ensure the effective integration and protection of temporary migrant workers in Slovakia.

Given the multifaceted challenges outlined, interviewees emphasized the need for comprehensive policy reforms to protect the labour rights, well-being and inclusion of temporary migrant workers in Slovakia. These reforms should focus on enhancing regulatory oversight, promoting sector-specific integration programs, and combating exploitative employment practices. Collaboration between government agencies, employers, trade unions, civil society and international organizations is deemed essential for achieving meaningful progress in ensuring the integration and welfare of temporary migrant workers. The recent demographic developments in Slovakia show that assuring the inflow of migrant workers is essential for the economic prosperity of the country – integration efforts need to be increased.

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Appendix

Table A1 Sectoral employment, earnings and vacancy, 2022

Sector	Employment		Earnings (EUR)		Number of vacancy
	persons	%	Monthly	Hourly	
Total economy	2394901	100	1304	10.87	20540
C Manufacturing	472027	19.7	1352	11.06	3463
G Wholesale and retail trade	368416	15.4	1233	9.33	2288
P Education	179831	7.5	1213	10.48	308
Q Health, social activities	176631	7.4	1430	11.13	1083
F Construction	163463	6.8	914	8.32	516
H Transportation, storage	159745	6.7	1254	9.52	2239
O Public admin., defence, compuls. social security	152180	6.4	1800	14.2	6272
N Administrative, support service activities	146027	6.1	1052	8.53	403
M Professional, scientific, technical activities	124912	5.2	1484	12.16	657
J Information and communication	86508	3.6	2254	16.13	468
A Agriculture, forestry and fishing	84909	3.5	1009	8.68	174
S Other service activities	64441	2.7	860	7.74	215
I Accommodation, food service activities	60097	2.5	764	6.73	651
R Arts, entertainment, recreation	51781	2.2	1133	9.9	163
K Financial and insurance activities	39807	1.7	2247	17.7	772
L Real estate activities	23927	1	1198	9.38	111
E Water supply; sewerage, waste management	18846	0.8	1225	9.75	189

D Electricity, gas, steam, air conditioning supply	16826	0.7	2106	15.59	538
B Mining and quarrying	4526	0	1319	10.76	30

Source: Slovak Statistical Office Statistical year book 2023