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POLICYBRIEF

JUSTMIG

Temporary Migrant Work in the Automotive and Care Sector in Slovakia

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SUMMARY / EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Temporary migrant labour has become a vital component of Slovakia's workforce, filling persistent gaps in key sectors such as automotive manufacturing and social care. Despite acute labour shortages, employment of migrants is typically on a temporary basis, cementing their vulnerability and shallow labour market integration. Existing policies have not been prepared in dialogue with social partners, paving the way to deregulation, sector or company specific solutions. Drawing on evidence from the JUSTMIG project, this brief identifies urgent areas for reform and offers policy recommendations to improve regulation, coordination, and integration. A smarter, fairer approach to labour migration is essential to ensuring the long-term sustainability and resilience of Slovakia's labour market.

INTRODUCTION

Slovakia's economy has been facing acute labor shortages and therefore has become increasingly reliant on migrant workers on temporary or atypical contracts. This is especially the case in automotive manufacturing, logistics, and social care. A range of changes in regulation surrounding labour migration have also been implemented, but labour market institutions have not been sufficiently prepared and developed to cope with new challenges, and they are struggling to keep pace with the new social, and labour market implications of the increased reliance on immigrant workers. According to findings from the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), Slovakia ranks among the least supportive countries when it comes to policies that facilitate the integration of immigrants. In particular, third-country nationals receive minimal, if any, targeted assistance in addressing their employment-related needs. Even in the face of these concerning findings, temporary migrant labour is no longer a marginal phenomenon — it is rapidly becoming a structural feature of the Slovak labour market. The current legal and institutional framework remains fragmented, posing further difficulties for the enforcement of existing regulations and provisions. Migrant workers are exposed and often constrained to accept precarious employment conditions and social protection, which drive weakening of labour standards. Powerful intermediary actors and user companies weaken the role of industrial relations in regulating employment of third country nationals.

CONTEXT AND FINDINGS

This policy brief draws on a Slovak case study from the JUSTMIG project, using desk research, policy analysis, statistical data and qualitative interviews. Interviewed stakeholders included migrant workers, union representatives, care providers, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and an employment agency. The focus was on the automotive and care sectors, where temporary migrant employment is growing rapidly. These interviews provided a nuanced understanding of both institutional responses and the lived realities of migrant workers.

Slovakia has a rather complicated labour market test system in combination with an increasing number of simplified procedures for the employment of third-country nationals on a temporary basis. Stricter regulation is missing when it comes to temporary work agencies operating in Slovakia, paving the way for **regulatory incoherence and problems in labour market administration**. Both employers and employment agencies report frustration with the **lack of capacity at embassies and immigration offices**, where long wait times delay recruitment. In recent years, Slovakia's national visa schemes have been tailored to simplify the hiring of third-country nationals, providing easier access to visas for foreign workers in response to labour shortages in specific sectors. The Slovak government also cancelled the requirement that third-country nationals be employed only in districts with an unemployment rate below 5% and introduced permission for foreigners to continue working while renewal of their permit is considered.

While the national visa schemes have made hiring somewhat easier, the social support infrastructure for labour migrants remains thin. Migrant workers receive **little orientation or legal assistance** and often rely on agencies for housing, translation, and documentation. Meanwhile, trade unions struggle to incorporate migrant workers into collective bargaining due to their vulnerability stemming from **temporary status or precarious contracting, but also language barriers and lack of direct contact**. In automotives, exploitative practices of temporary agencies are persistent, such as non-transparently deducting accommodation costs directly from salaries, or “helping” third-country nationals to register as small entrepreneurs, creating significant numbers of bogus self-employed, higher net income earners but with poor social security. The absence of sufficient regulatory oversight and enforcement mechanisms can lead to situations where migrant workers face unfair treatment, underscoring the need for stronger labour protections and enforcement measures.

There are substantial sector-specific differences. In the automotive sector, the government has responded swiftly to employer needs, framing labour migration as a matter of national economic interest and adjusting regulatory pathways to facilitate recruitment. In contrast, the social care sector suffers from chronic neglect. Funding is insecure, staffing shortages are severe, and institutional support is minimal. The growing demand in this sector is not matched by corresponding attention in migration policy. As a result, social partners in care are calling for greater investment, more stable financing, more accessible care services and structured support for recruiting and integrating both domestic and foreign workers.

Despite these challenges, the research also uncovered **promising opportunities**. In both sectors, some employers are actively experimenting with **integration support, offering permanent contracts after trial periods or investing in language and skills training**. While illegal employment persists, the growing use of **national visa schemes** has also opened new pathways for legal employment. Importantly, stakeholders across the board agree on one thing: the system as it stands is not sustainable, and they recognise the necessity for improvement.

These findings paint a clear picture of a system heavily reliant on migrant labour, but lacking the policy coherence, regulatory capacity, and institutional coordination to manage it effectively. Without targeted reforms, Slovakia risks entrenching a dual labour market where migrant workers remain permanently temporary. An alternative solution is to integrate migrant workers for a fairer and more resilient workforce across the board.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A more coordinated approach to agency work regulation could ensure that temporary migrant employment meets both business needs and fair labour standards. For example, **strengthening oversight of recruitment practices, clarifying the rights of agency workers, and encouraging their access to training and support** would reduce turnover and support productivity in the long term. Additionally, greater transparency about the use of agency labour—especially when it becomes an established practice—would allow social partners to better engage with emerging workforce trends.

Policy initiatives that simplify and streamline labour migration pathways could make a significant difference here. **Faster visa procedures, better guidance for employers, and improved recognition of qualifications** would help employers plan and maintain stable staffing. At the same time, **targeted support for the integration of migrant workers—such as language training, supervision, or orientation**—could improve retention and service quality.

The research also highlighted a need for **stronger data and coordination**. Currently, many institutions lack basic information about the composition, size, and status of the temporary migrant workforce, let alone analyses of the drivers and causes of their social and labour market status and other important outcomes. This makes it difficult to design evidence-based policies or anticipate labour market trends. Investments in data collection and inter-ministerial cooperation—particularly between labour, interior, and foreign affairs—could significantly enhance the ability of public authorities to respond proactively to migration trends while also leveraging its potential, such as in addressing labour shortages.

Current policy responses remain reactive, fragmented, and poorly aligned with labour market realities. If temporary migration is to benefit all parties—migrants, employers, and the broader society—it must be supported by smart, fair, and coordinated policy measures.

A core implication of this research is that temporary migrant labour, if poorly managed, can produce unintended outcomes: labour market segmentation, reduced workplace cohesion, and downward

pressure on working conditions. However, with targeted reforms, Slovakia has the opportunity to shape a labour migration model that meets economic needs while safeguarding rights, promoting inclusion, and building long-term workforce resilience.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The research supports the aim to **regulate the temporary migration system in a just and thorough manner**, bringing clarity, accountability, and support to all actors involved. Based on the evidence gathered, the following recommendations offer a path forward:

- **Ensure the thorough involvement of social partners in the monitoring and regulation of labour standards, alongside strengthened labour market administration and well-resourced labour inspectorates:**
 - This collaboration can enhance compliance, address workplace abuses more efficiently, and build trust between workers, employers, and authorities.
- **Simplify and coordinate employment standards and link them to migration pathways in key sectors:**

Labour migration has the potential to alleviate labour market shortages and improve the efficiency of labour markets. The national visa scheme should be streamlined to enable labour migration based on labour market needs.
- **Regularly update the regulation of temporary employment agencies** to address emerging and evolving issues:
 - Oversight of employment agencies needs to evolve with the labour market and migration trends. This includes minimum standards for employment contracts, adequate reporting, monitoring, prevention, and enforcement capacity of the state to ensure fairness, effectiveness, and mitigation of the risk of misconduct.
- **Promote equal treatment and access to rights for temporary migrant workers:**

Provide a regulatory framework that enables fair wages and working conditions for agency and migrant workers. Employers should be encouraged to offer contracts with progression opportunities, and social partners should work on including migrant voices in workplace dialogue.
- **Invest in support services for migrant worker integration:**

Orientation, Slovak language courses, legal counselling, and mediation services can significantly improve migrant retention, reduce workplace misunderstandings, and foster positive relations with local communities.
- **Improve data collection and inter-institutional cooperation:**

A major limitation identified by stakeholders is the lack of accurate, accessible data on temporary migrant workers: who they are, where they work, and under what conditions. A shared information system between the Ministries of Labour, Interior, and Foreign Affairs, as well as the Labour Inspectorate and the sending countries, operating in compliance with data protection regulations, would support evidence-based policymaking and improve the targeting of services and enforcement.