



Industrial relations and social dialogue
**Slovakia: Developments in
working life 2022**

Authors: Rastislav Bednárík, Ľudovít Czírja, Miroslava Kordošová, Daniela Kešelová and Zuzana Turkovič (Institute for Labour and Family Research, Bratislava)

Research manager: Christine Aumayr-Pintar

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European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Telephone: (+353 1) 204 31 00

Email: information@eurofound.europa.eu

Web: www.eurofound.europa.eu

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Introduction

The year 2022 was marked by the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's war in Ukraine and a sharp increase of inflation. The growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) slowed down. According to the prediction of the National Bank of Slovakia (Economic and Monetary Development Autumn 2022), the annual change for the third quarter of 2022 shows an increase in GDP by 1.8%, an increase in inflation (HICP) by 11.7%, a decrease in the average real wage by 3.8%, an increase in employment by 1.8% and a slight decrease of the unemployment rate to the level of 6.2%.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine became an important economic factor. In Slovakia, it caused a sharp increase in energy prices and an increase of inflation. The situation in Slovakia is all the more difficult because the country is heavily dependent on gas and oil from Russia.

In connection with the growth of energy prices, the threat of an increase in energy poverty is increasing. About 5.2% of the population have arrears on their energy bills, which stands for more than 283,000 inhabitants. This problem is most pronounced in the case of multi-member households. It affects up to 10.7% of the population living in households with two adult members and at least three children. The inability to provide adequate heat in a flat or in a house affects mostly lonely seniors (up to 11.6% of them), but also younger lonely people or households of two adults with at least one senior.

The number of refugees from Ukraine registered for temporary protection or similar national protection systems in Slovakia is 102,675 persons (as of 13 December 2022), according to UNHCR. The government, the parliament and the population got involved to help the refugees. The results of a UNHCR survey (July and August 2022) among 724 Ukrainian refugees showed that they valued access to healthcare, provision of shelter, food, access to employment and education in Slovakia.

In 2022, the government's communication with social partners improved. Most of the proposed government measures passed through the Economic and Social Council (a tripartite body) or through the system of interdepartmental comment proceedings, where the social partners are represented. It was also a success that, after a long time, employers and trade unions reached an agreement on the increase of the minimum wage for 2023 without intervention of the government. However, employers' organisations and trade unions noted the absence of dialogue, especially during the preparation of large European projects to support the recovery of Slovakia economy after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Political context

The government led by Eduard Heger has been marked by internal coalition conflicts since the beginning (from April 2021). In 2022, a new crisis was started by disagreements about so-called pro-family package of the Minister of Finance, Igor Matovič, which the Freedom and Solidarity party (SaS) disagreed with. The crisis was subsequently aggravated by the dispute over the amendment of the state budget, the crisis in the health sector and other disputes. In September, SaS withdrew from the coalition, and in December the parliament expressed distrust of the government. Subsequently, on 16 December 2022 the President dismissed the government. The government thus ended 2022 in resignation.

On 29 October 2022, local and regional self-government elections were held in Slovakia. Participation of citizens in municipal elections (elections of mayors, and deputies of local and city councils) reached 46.2%, and participation in elections to regional self-governments (elections of chairmen and deputies to eight Higher territorial units) reached 43.7%. According to political scientist Juraj Marušiak, from the Institute of Political Sciences of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, "There were no big surprises in the combined municipal elections and elections to self-governing regions. The relatively weak position of OĽANO or the success of the non-parliamentary Hlas-SD was shown."

The government's measures to help businesses and households with rising inflation, rising energy prices and war in Ukraine were taken late and at a lower level than was expected by the population. The delays were mainly caused by disputes in the government between the coalition partners about the way how to solve the crisis.

Actors, institutions and processes

Social partners

Social partners are organised at the national/peak, sectoral and company levels. There were no relevant changes in organisations of social partners and rules regulating their operation. No information is available about establishment of relevant new employer or trade union organisations or mergers. Sectoral organisations of social partners are affiliated to peak organisations of employers and trade unions. Peak employer organisations are: the Federation of Employer Organisations (AZZZ SR), the National Union of Employers (RUZ), the Association of Industry Unions and Transport (APZD) and the Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia (ZMOS). Trade unions are represented by the Confederation of Trade Unions of Slovakia (KOZ SR), Joint Trade Unions of Slovakia (SOS) and Independent Christian Trade Unions of Slovakia (NKOS). With the exception of NKOS, all organisations are member of the tripartite Economic and Social Council (HSR).

Minor changes took place in the number of employees covered by member organisations in comparison with 2019. For instance, the AZZZ SR associated organisations employing about 15% more employees, organisations affiliated to the APZD employ about 10% fewer employees, the Confederation of Trade Unions of Slovakia represents about 14% fewer employees.

Social dialogue bodies or frameworks

There were no changes in frameworks and bodies participating in social dialogue. Social dialogue took place at three levels. At the national level in tripartite Economic and Social Council (HSR), which had 13 meetings (11 meetings in 2021). However, social partners criticised the quality of consultations because the government did not consult with them all measures. The government submitted bids on some of its measures without consultation with social partners to the Parliament. It used a short-track legislation procedure. For instance, the proposal to implement additional taxes to some large companies. Employers criticised this, and the National Union of Employers (RUZ) prepared a proposal to prevent such a policy of the government and submitted it to the meeting of the tripartite HSR on 12 October 2022. The other employer organisations the AZZZ SR and the APZD joined the proposal. These peak employer organisations together with the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) asked the MPs not to discuss the bid on this additional taxation.

An important outcome of social dialogue was that peak representative organisations of employers and trade unions reached the Agreement on the level of minimum wage for 2023 (agreed first time after more than ten years).

Despite of the worsening situation in the economy in 2022, 28 multi-employer collective agreements (KZVS) were registered at the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (MPSVR SR) (25 in 2019). However, none of the valid multi-employer collective agreements was extended in 2022. There were no relevant changes in labour disputes in comparison with 2021 and there was not any genuine strike.

Other working life related institutions

Among other institutions that influenced working life were mainly Labour inspectorates from the system of Labour Inspection of the Slovak Republic. Parliament approved the amendment to Act No.

125/2006 Coll. on Labour inspection. It should make the work of Labour inspectorates more efficient. The amendment emphasizes improving the business environment and streamlining the organization and management of the labour inspection system. It has a cross-sectional nature and is mainly focused on the activities of Labour inspectorates.

Furthermore, the content of the protocol on the results of the labour inspection was supplemented with instructions on the possibility of filing a legal claim against the protocol. At the same time, some provisions of the law are specified and the moment of detection of the violation of the prohibition of illegal employment is established. The amendment to the law enters into force on 1 January 2023. The amendment to the law affects the subjects of employers in all sectors of the production and non-production spheres (Bulletin, 2022).

In connection with the amendment to Act no. 5/2004 Coll. on employment services, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family established the Alliance of Sector Councils. Its main task will be monitoring employers' demands for qualified labour and transferring these demands of the labour market to the lifelong learning system. The new legislation establishes supra-departmental cooperation between the alliance and sector councils based on the tripartite principle. The Alliance will monitor development trends and subsequently formulate what education and skills are required by the current and future labour market. The amendment to the law enters into force on January 1, 2023 (MPSVR, 2023).

In the amendment to Act no. 5/2004 Coll. the conditions of employment of citizens with disabilities, who have difficult access to the labour market, have also been adjusted. The amendment to the law regulates the definition of a protected workshop and a protected workplace. Sheltered workshops are primarily intended to employ the most dependent citizens who cannot find employment on the open labour market. National projects are currently being prepared for citizens with health disabilities with the aim of integrating them into the open labour market (MPSVR, 2022a).

The amendment also simplifies the access, but especially the stay, of nationals of third countries on the labour market in Slovak Republic. It cancels the condition of their employment only in jobs in the districts with a registered unemployment rate lower than 5%. At the same time, the foreigner will be able to perform their work even during the period of decision on his application. Such an adjustment will make it possible to maintain the qualified workforce in the same job, which is especially desirable in professions that are in short supply, for example in the health sector.

Governmental responses to inflation

To mitigate the negative consequences of inflation on certain population groups the government introduced two inflation subsidy packages containing an ad hoc additional support of €100. The first inflation package (€105 million) was approved in May 2022 (MPSVR, 2022b). The second package was approved in October 2022 (UPSVaR, 2022a). Besides, the government response to inflation contains an increase of certain permanent allowances, for instance child allowance or caregiving cash allowance. The measures from these packages included, for instance increase in the material need benefit, income support for informal caregivers, inflation subsidy and increased support for the family during rising inflation. They are described in more details in following text.

There was a one-off €100 **increase in the Material need benefit**ⁱ in May 2022. It was introduced by the amendment No. 159/2022 of the Government Regulation No. 102/2020 on some measures in social affairs, family and employment services in the state of emergency announced in connection with COVID-19. A total of 58,000 households were estimated to receive this €100 benefit.

The same amendment also introduced a one-off €100 rise of caregiving financial allowance in May 2022 as an **income support for informal caregivers**ⁱⁱ to cover their increased living expenses. It was paid to total of 63,600 informal carers with total expenditures of €6.4 million. Moreover, as of 1 July 2022 the Government Regulation 213/2022 Coll. increased the regular monthly caregiving cash allowance by about 3.4%. The cost of increased care allowance is estimated to be €4.6 million in 2022.

The need to help various population groups was discussed in the media. The social partners were not involved in implementation of the measure to provide a one-off benefit of €100 for informal caregivers. On the other hand, in the form of negotiations at the tripartite body (the Economic and Social Council) they were involved in the designing and implementing that part of the measure which increases continuously the caregiving cash allowance. Besides, the Joint Trade Unions of Slovakia (SOS) proposed to open a discussion on the cumulative receipt of the pension benefit and caregiving cash allowance without mutual accounting of the contributions.

The **inflation subsidy**ⁱⁱⁱ provided a one-off subsidy of €100 to vulnerable population groups and was introduced by Government Regulation No. 160/2022 and No. 228/2022 amending the Government Regulation No. 103/2020 on some measures in labour, social affairs and family subsidies during the state of emergency announced in connection with COVID-19. The measure aims to cover increased living costs for:

- informal caregivers not receiving the caregiving cash allowance
- people providing personal assistance to a person with disabilities
- persons aged 62 and older by May 2022 receiving pensions, for instance retirement, early retirement, widow/widower and disability pensions
- persons with state social insurance in May 2022 due to their care of a child with long-term adverse health condition aged from six years to 18 years

Several measures provided an **increased support for the family during rising inflation**^{iv} to cover their increased living costs, these measures included an increase to the child allowance and the tax bonus. The measures were introduced by the Act No. 232/2022 amending the Act No. 535/2003 Coll. on Income tax and the Act No. 600/2003 Coll. on Child allowance.

Financial support for substitute childcare providers contained an ad-hoc special allowance of €100 paid to each substitute parent in June 2022. Moreover, the benefits for substitute childcare providers have increased since 1 July 2022 and new contributions were introduced, particularly:

- monthly repetitive allowance for substitute parents and
- monthly repetitive special allowance for substitute parents taking care of a child with disabilities.

New contributions were introduced for instance child allowance to cover increased expenses up to a maximum of €500 per calendar year and education allowance to a maximum of €100 per calendar year.^v

The second inflation subsidy package was introduced in October 2022 based on the Government Regulation No. 349/2022 Coll. amending the Government Regulation No. 102/2020 Coll. It extends the groups of population eligible for the subsidy. The measures include one-off subsidies of €100 paid to persons from following groups:

- children born from 1 June 2022 to 31 October 2022 (children born by 1 June 2022 received this subsidy within the first package) in a form of additional ad-hoc child allowance.
- Orphan children not receiving the orphan pension (in a form of substitute alimony).
- households in material need who were not eligible for material need assistance in May 2022 (in a form of additional ad-hoc material need allowance).
- persons with severe disability if his/her income is not higher than the sum of subsistence minimum of €234.42 (in a form of cash allowance for compensation of increased costs or cash allowance for transportation).
- a dependent child for whom the maintenance obligation is determined by a court decision up to €150.
- young persons whose substitute family care provided by surrogate parents, or an institutional care has ceased due to reaching adulthood (UPSVaR, 2022a).

ⁱ Eurofound (2022), [Material need benefit increase](#), case SK--2022-19/2790 (measures in Slovakia), EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

ⁱⁱ Eurofound (2022), [Income support for informal caregivers](#), SK-2022-23/2812, (measures in Slovakia), EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

ⁱⁱⁱ Eurofound (2022), [Subsidy to support humanitarian aid \(inflation subsidy\)](#), case SK-2022-23/2791 (measures in Slovakia), EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

^{iv} Eurofound (2022), [Increased support for the family during rising inflation](#), case SK-2022-27/2808 (measures in Slovakia), EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

^v Eurofound (2022), [Financial support for substitute child care providers](#), SK-2022-21/2810 (measures in Slovakia), EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

Collective bargaining and inflation

How inflation features in wage negotiations

In 2022, inflation in Slovakia has increased significantly. According to the Slovak Statistical Office, in 2021 it was 3.2% but in March 2022, it was already 10.4% and further increased to 15.4% in November. The yearly average was 12.8%. Peak organisations of employers and trade unions negotiated in such circumstances on the level of minimum wage for 2023. They agreed to increase the statutory minimum wage for 2023 by 8.4% (in 2021, the government increased the minimum wage for 2022 by 3.7%). The increased level of the statutory minimum wage was included in multi-employer collective agreements, usually in their supplements for 2023.

Higher wage levels can be negotiated and agreed in single-employer collective agreements in companies. The problem is that company collective agreements for 2022, particularly wage agreements, were usually negotiated/concluded in 2021 or even earlier when the inflation was much lower. Significantly increasing inflation over 2022 mobilised trade unions, which required to open collective bargaining to negotiate wage increase.

Examples of recent responses

In the US Steel Kosice, negotiations started (under the threat of genuine strike) in September. On 20 October 2022 social partners agreed on Supplement No. 5 to the valid company collective agreement. Since 1 November, the monthly wage tariffs of employees were increased by €80. In railway company ZSSK Cargo, the collective agreement for 2023-2024 was concluded on 23 November 2022. Employees will receive €150 single payment on payday for January 2023 and since 1 July 2023, basic monthly wages of employees will increase by €150. In F.D. Roosevelt hospital in Banská Bystrica, Supplement No. 2 to the collective agreement for 2021-2022 was concluded on 25 October 2022. Since 1 November 2022, the basic wage of physicians increases by 5% and the basic wage of other health care workers increases by 10%. Basic wage of the other workers increases by 10% since 1 December 2022. These examples indicate that trade unions and management in companies responded to increased inflation by wage bargaining and concluded supplements to valid collective agreements or new agreements. But implementation of higher wages significantly delayed and mainly concerned 2023. The most of them was effective in November 2022, when inflation was more than 15%.

In a multi-employer collective agreement for workers performing work in public services for 2022 and in a multi-employer collective agreement for civil servants for 2022 (concluded in 2021), a 3% increase of salary tariffs was agreed. Increases were effective since 1 July 2022. On 13 July, the government and social partners concluded Supplement No. 1 to each of these collective agreements and extra payment of €500 was paid to employees together with their salary for August 2022. On 13 July 2022, new multi-employer collective agreements were concluded for civil servants and public servants. Both are effective from 1 January 2023 to 31 August 2024. In Multi-employer collective agreement for civil servants, 7% increase of salary tariffs is agreed from 1 January 2023 and a next 10% increase from 1 September 2023. In a multi-employer collective agreement for workers performing work in public interest, a 7% increase of salary tariffs is agreed from 1 January 2023 and a 10% increase since 1 September 2023. For university teachers and research workers 10% and 12% increases of salary tariffs are agreed.

At the end of September 2022, more than 2,100 doctors from hospitals submitted collective resignations due to dissatisfaction with the situation in the healthcare sector. The medical trade unionists insisted on fulfilling eight requirements. The problem in reaching an agreement was mainly in salaries. The government and the trade unions finally agreed and concluded a memorandum on 30 November 2022, just before the expiry of the notice periods. Subsequently, doctors in hospitals withdrew their resignations en masse.

Developments in working time

Changes to legislation

There were no fundamental changes in the legislation regarding working hours in 2022. The maximum weekly working time of an employee was: 40 hours in one-shift operation, 38 and 3/4 hours in two-shift operation, 37 and 1/2 hours in three-shift operation or continuous operation. (Zákonník práce, 2022). The First Aid measure for companies (during the corona crisis) was replaced by a permanent system of job protection from March 2022 - short-time work (kurzarbeit). Short-time work as a tool of passive labour market policy helps the employer to keep jobs so that he does not have to dismiss his employees. During this time, the employee is entitled to a salary compensation of at least 80%, while 60% is provided to the employer by the state. The state support applies to an emergency situation declared by the government (e.g., a pandemic), a state of emergency/emergency declared by the president (e.g., in time of war), an extraordinary circumstance declared by the government (i.e., a year-on-year decrease in annual GDP of at least 3%) or force majeure circumstances (e.g., flood, fire, missing supplies of materials due to an accident, etc.). The new system applies to companies with employees, self-employed and one-man sole proprietorships are excluded. Act No. 215/2021 Coll. on support during short-time work came into force on March 1, 2022 (Act 215/2021, 2021). In 2022, the maximum amount of the state subsidy for one hour of obstacles at work was €7.8138. The state subsidy is provided for a maximum of 6 months in 24 consecutive months.

There was also an amendment to the Labour Code in relation to surcharges for work on holidays, weekends and at night. The legal norm is to enter into force on 1 June 2023. Thus, wage surcharges will be in effect again and will be linked to the minimum wage. The suspension occurred in 2020 in connection with the corona crisis and the state of emergency in the economy and society. This suspension is valid until 31 May 2023.

Bargaining outcomes

In 2022, there were no fundamental legislative changes in the area of working hours, so collective bargaining mainly concerned wage adjustments, salary scales and other benefits. Some companies were forced to shorten working hours, based on the lack of materials, raw materials and rising energy prices. An example is collective bargaining at US Steel Kosice, where they agreed to reduce working hours for all employees from 15 November to 31 December 2022 (SITA, 2022).

Debates on duration and organisation

In connection with the unfreezing surcharges (i.e., re-entering into force) as part of the amendment to the Labour Code, in the second half of 2022 there was an intensive media, political and professional discussion about surcharges for work at night, overtime, on weekends, etc.

TU SR (KOZ SR) expressed satisfaction with the amendment to the Labour Code. Therefore, TU SR perceives the return to the legislation that was in effect until 2020, especially in the current situation, due to the extreme price growth, as a way to increase the income and thus also the standard of living of employees and their families.

In a joint statement, the representatives of the employers expressed deep disappointment with the approach of the members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. They consider approved wage surcharge and increases in company costs without any reasonable justification and discussion to be an irresponsible gamble with the entire economy and the future of Slovakia. According to them, the amendment was approved despite the fundamental disagreement of all employer's tripartite organizations without a relevant assessment of the effects and impacts on the business environment. The surcharges will translate into higher prices for goods and services, which all residents of Slovakia will have to pay. According to them, the adopted amendment may be responsible for the elimination of jobs and a sharp increase in unemployment. The further increase in costs at the time of the energy and inflationary crisis will cause companies to be unable to keep their employees. Mass layoffs could affect thousands of people in all regions, including the most vulnerable low-wage workers (TASR, 2022). Dissatisfaction was also expressed by professional associations, the Food Chamber of Slovakia, the Slovak Chamber of Agriculture and Food, the Slovak Alliance of Modern Trade and the Association of Trade of the Slovak Republic, according to which the cost of additional payments for employees will significantly increase and thus the price of goods. A negative consequence of the proposed amendment to the Labour Code will be further decreasing competitiveness of Slovak agricultural and food producers.

Labour market shortages and social partners

In 2022, the health situation improved and more vacancies appeared on the labour market: 10,000 more than in 2021. According to the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, there were 81,909 vacancies in November (in November 2021 there were 73,224 places). At the end of 2022, the occupations with the highest number of job vacancies (ISCO) were similar to the previous year:

- Plant and machine operators and assemblers (8): 39,841 job vacancies.
- Craft and related trades workers (7): 16,373 job vacancies.
- Elementary occupations (9): 8,909 job vacancies.
- Professionals (2): 4,065 job vacancies.
- Service and sales workers (5): 5,832 job vacancies.

In regional terms, a higher number of job vacancies is reported by companies in the economically more powerful western part of the country - in the Bratislava Region (26,883), in the Trnava Region (15,120) and in the Nitra Region (12,573). On the other hand, the least vacancies were registered by the labour offices in the eastern part of the country - in the Košice Region (3,334) and in the Prešov Region (3,652). According to the Statistical Office there were 21,295 vacancies in the third quarter of 2022 (3,259 more than a year before) and close to the pre-pandemic situation (21,920 vacancies in 2019). In the third quarter of 2022, most vacancies (NACE) were in:

- Industry (B-E): 4,324 vacancies.
- Transport and storage (H): 2,318 vacancies.
- Retail and wholesale (G): 2,388 vacancies.
- Public administration and social security (O): 6,635 vacancies.
- Health and social work (Q): 1,112 vacancies.

Recently, several measures have been taken to expand the possibilities for employers to hire foreign workers. Most often, workers from Ukraine, Serbia and Romania. Currently, the government has prepared a legislative measure and the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family quarterly publishes a list of shortage professions. These lists are mainly used when employing foreigners - when permits are issued for the employment of third-country nationals.

Another option for increasing the supply of labour is involvement of Roma in the labour market. A large part of the Roma adult population has a low level of education, and therefore the employment of Roma is connected with measures to obtain work qualifications for this group of the population (which is, however, a more complex problem - it is also necessary to assist Roma families to obtain housing, ensure children's school attendance, provide specialized courses for young Roma workers to obtain qualifications, etc.).

According to a survey by ČSOB bank from the end of 2021, large and medium-sized companies solve labour shortages more often by increasing wages (42%), while the smallest ones by retraining employees. On average, 8% of respondents decided to solve labour shortage with foreign labour.

However, employers have for a long-time emphasized the need for reforms in education and training for occupations. Andrej Hutta, member of the Presidium of the Federation of Employers' Associations of the Slovak Republic (AZZZ) and Chairman of the Employers' Council for the Dual Education System, warns that in 10 years Slovakia will lack 250,000 workers. Others may have

insufficient qualifications for jobs that will be needed in Slovakia. He emphasizes that if we want to have jobs with higher added value in 10 years, we need to adapt the school system. He thinks that Slovakia should look for inspiration in the Austrian and German system of vocational education - to create larger educational centres that will prepare more expensive professions that are technologically demanding and require investments in the order of millions. After that, the network of schools and school facilities that will manage the other less economically demanding branches should be adjusted. According to him, employers should be more involved in the vocational training system, because they know best the requirements for employees and developments in the market. Five functioning business schools in Slovakia are – according Mr. Hutta - a positive example of the involvement of employers in dual education.

Several projects were developed to improve the quality of education - also on the side of employers. In 2021, employers launched the pilot year of the project called "Prepared for practice". Its goal in Slovak education is to produce graduates who are prepared for the real needs of the labour market and individual companies. Some 36 secondary vocational schools from all over Slovakia participated in the pilot year. They had to ensure that the content of the students' final, matriculation or graduation exams was in accordance with the needs of practice. According to Mário Lelovský, the vice president of National Union of Employers (RUZ), certificates of RUZ are a guarantee for the employers that the job applicant has met the specified criteria and comes from the school system to work with the necessary skills. The added value for graduates is that with the Certificate they will significantly increase their chances of quick employment and a higher starting salary", stated

At the end of 2022, the situation in the healthcare sector became particularly acute. Trade unionists have urged systemic changes to slow down the exodus of doctors and nurses abroad for higher wages. In the end, the government agreed not only to increase salaries in the sector (for example, for doctors by an average of 35%), but also with other proposals to increase the number of students at the secondary schools and higher education institutions in the health sector.

Other important policy developments

Employment status and contracts

By amending the Labour Code by Act No. 350/2022 Coll. with effect from 1 November 2022, (Zákonník práce, 2022) some rules that responded to European directives on transparent and predictable working conditions, were changed.

They adjusted for instance the possibility of switching to another form of employment: the employee has the right to ask his employer for a form of employment with more predictable and certain working conditions (e.g., the right of the employee to ask the employer to change the fixed period to an indefinite period). However, the employer is not obliged to comply with the employee's request, he is only obliged to respond to the employee in writing and to justify the response accordingly.

Furthermore, the employer can provide the employee with employment contract information and other details not only in paper form, but also in electronic form, as long as the employee agrees and has access to the electronic form of the information.

The trial period in the case of fixed-term labour relations has also been amended, the agreed trial period may not be longer than half of the agreed duration of the employment relationship. In practice, this means that if the employment relationship is agreed, for example for a period of four months, a trial period can be agreed for a maximum of two months.

The employer may not prohibit the employee from taking up employment with another employer outside of the working time schedule, determined by said employer, nor may the employee be disadvantaged in any way for this.

A new information obligation of the employer was also introduced, to inform the employee about the deadline for filing a lawsuit to determine the invalidity of the termination of the employment relationship and to inform the employee about the right to professional training provided by the employer. The deadline for providing information is four weeks from the date of employment. In order to eliminate the bureaucratic complexity, the employer fulfils this obligation already by stating the information in question in the employment contract itself.

Some rules regarding employment for agreements on work performed outside the employment relationship have also been changed. In the new section of § 223a, employers are required to provide employees-contractors with written information on the scope and time periods of the work when concluding the agreement.

The employer must notify the change of these data no later than on the day it becomes effective. It follows from the above that an employee working on the basis of an agreement does not have to perform the work outside the time specified in the written information, or unless the minimum deadline for informing about the performance of the work has not been observed.

In addition, according to the new regulation, contractors have the right to compensation in the amount of at least 30% of the remuneration in the event that the employer cancels the employee's performance of work within a period shorter than the period determined by him for informing the employee about the performance of the work. In addition to the listed general mandatory requirements, the employer is also obliged to agree on special mandatory requirements of a specific

form of work in the employment contract, which are stipulated by the Labour Code or a special regulation (e.g., agreement on employment for a certain period of time, agreement on shorter working hours).

Wage setting

In the period from the third quarter of 2021 to the third quarter of 2022, according to the data of the Statistical Office, the average salary increased by 9.37% from €1,185 to €1,296. The increase in wages in the public sector also contributed to this growth. Regulation no. 220/2022 Coll., 221/2022 Coll. (from 15 June 2022) and 229/2022 Coll. (from 22 June 2022) the Slovak government increased the salary rates for employees performing work in the public interest, as well as state employees and members of the Fire and Rescue Service and members of the Mountain Rescue Service, with effect from 1 July 2022 by 3%. Subsequently, on 24 August 2022 the government increased these salary tariffs for the year 2023 by 7% from 1 January 2023 and by another 10% from 1 September 2023 (Government Decree No. 295/2020 Coll. and 296/2022 Coll.). In particular, as of 1 September 2023 the wages of teaching staff and researchers will increase by 12%. At the end of the year, the parliament agreed to higher salaries for 25 medical professions working in institutional facilities on a differentiated basis, ranging from 6.9 to 45.8%.

As for the minimum wage for 2022, it was at the level of €646 per month, which was an increase of €23 compared to 2021. For the year 2023, the social partners agreed on an amount of €700 per month, while the increase of €54 also took into account the increase in the cost of living and to inflation.

Gender pay gap

According to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, the gender pay gap remains significant in Slovakia at approximately 18%. The difference in the average gross monthly wages between men and women in 2021 was the same as the year before, 17.9%. The pay gap is decreasing in the long term, but only at a slow pace (for example, the difference between men's and women's average monthly wages reached to 25.3% in 2008). Among other reasons, one of the key reasons is the high representation of women in areas for which low pay is typical. Such sectors include, for example, education, healthcare and social services. The average nominal monthly salary of an employee in the Slovak economy during the third quarter of 2022 increased by 9.4% year-on-year to €1,296. This relatively fast growth was however not enough to overcome the inflation rate, and the average wage fell by 4% year-on-year in real terms. Information on men's and women's wages for 2022 is yet to be published by the Statistical Office of the Slovak republic.

Health and safety

In March 2022, the National Council of the Slovak Republic approved the amendment to Act No. 124/2006 Coll. on safety and health protection at work. The amendment brought several novelties and modifications, but they only entered into force on 1 January 2023 (Act No. 114/2022).

In 2022, the trend of protecting the health of employees in connection with the coronavirus pandemic continued, but strict measures were eased. The wearing of an FFP2 respirator remained mandatory for staff and visitors to healthcare facilities and social services facilities, patients in doctor's waiting rooms and customers of pharmacies but was eliminated for other places of work.

On 28 April 2022, as part of the World OSH Day, Open Days were held at all regional Labour inspectorates. In addition, the Labour inspectors prepared several seminars and webinars for the professional public on the topics of safety and health protection at work, which resulted from their initiatives (NIP, 2022a).

In connection with the energy crisis, the Government of the Slovak Republic adopted a proposal for measures to reduce energy consumption in public buildings. Based on this, the amendment to the Decree of the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic No. 99/2016 Coll. on details on health protection against heat and cold stress at work, which established that from 1 December 2022 to 31 May 2023 the minimum permissible operating temperature for the cold season of the year in work class 1a will be 19 °C (Decree No. 381/2022), which aims to save energy on heating. Class 1a corresponds to work with low body energy expenditure, it only applies to administrative work such (as typing, computer work, drawing, accounting, office work) and office space. Nothing has changed in other work categories (1b to 4). Should it happen that the employer does not comply with the set temperatures at the workplace, employees have the right to contact the relevant regional public health office with a complaint.

Work–life balance

In 2022, Slovak Republic implemented the national project Gender Equality in the Workplace through the Department of Equality of Women and Men and Equal Opportunities in the representation of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. The main goal of the project financed by the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund was to establish systemic measures for the implementation of the policy of reconciling work and family life. The measures are aimed at supporting women's participation in the labour market through a more equal distribution of care responsibilities between women and men, through supporting and facilitating the return of women from maternity leave, or through the overall improvement of the conditions for the employment of women with care responsibilities. The key output of the project is a strategic document entitled Concept of reconciling private, family and work life.

As of 1 October 2022, the amendment to the Labour Code allows men in Slovakia to take 14 days of paid paternity leave in the first 6 weeks after the birth of a child, even if the mother receives maternity or parental benefits at the same time. This is the transposition of the European Union directive on the balance between the work and private life of parents and carers of 20 June 2019 (Directive 2019/1158). Paternity leave is paid for by the Social Insurance Agency. This two-week period is included in the total of 28 weeks during which the father when caring for a child under 3 years of age is entitled to maternity leave. The amendment aims to contribute to a more equal distribution of caregiving duties between women and men and to enable men to spend time with a new-born.

Lifelong learning and skills development

The most recent national statistical data on life-long learning are provided from Labour Force Survey (LFS) published by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (SU SR). They refer to the number of participants in non-formal education in the first and in the second quarter of 2022. Another source of data is the Adult Education Survey (AES) and Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS). However, these surveys provide older data, particularly the most recent are from the year 2016

(AES) and 2020 (CVTS). Due to the different methodology (sample and reference period), all three surveys provide different outcomes on adult learning.

According to LFS about 9% of population aged 15 years and older participated in non-formal education (NFE) in the second quarter of 2022. Disaggregated by the labour status, the highest rate of participation was among working population. About 14.7% of working persons participated in NFE. Less than two percent participants were among unemployed and persons outside the labour force (Zacková, J., Smoligová, D., 2022).

According to the CVTS for the year 2020, about 48.7% persons employed in enterprises with 10 or more employees participated in CVT courses in Slovakia. Compared to 2015 the share of participants declined by about 8.1 percentage points (p.p.). The highest share of participants was in large enterprises with 250 and more employees (65.5%). Compared to 2015 it is only a slight decline by 1.3 p.p., a steeper decline is seen among medium enterprises. Compared to 2015, the share of participants from enterprises with 10 to 49 employees declined by 15.4 p.p. and by 14.5 p.p. from enterprises with 50 to 249 employees in 2020 (Eurostat, 2022).

Other sources of national data on education, particularly on non-formal education of unemployed within active labour market measures, are provided in annual reports based on administrative data of Centre of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (UPSVR). As these annual reports are published usually in May for the previous year, the most recent data are available for the year 2021 (UPSVR, 2007-2021).

According to the employers' association affiliated to tripartite the Republic Union of Employers (RUZ), employers have increased the quality of professional education in last 10 years. It is considered as a significant reform of education system. The vision is to link all schools with the labour market. Employers want to focus on tertiary education, lifelong learning and renewal of labour market prognosis (RUZ, 2022).

Working life of Ukrainian refugees

Employment and working conditions

Between 24 February 2022 and 2 January 2023 total of 1,094,380 Ukrainian citizens entered Slovakia. Total of 104,959 temporary refugee statuses were granted between 1 March 2022 and 2 January 2023. Temporary refuge is the easiest way of protection for war refugees. It does not require long administrative procedures. To war refugees (mostly Ukrainian citizens) it allows a fast and unlimited access to the labour market, health care and education (MV SR, 2023).

Ukrainian citizens are the biggest group of third country citizens working in Slovakia. There were more than 30,000 citizens from Ukraine working in Slovakia by 31 December 2022 (Trend, 2022). The Act No. 92/2022 was adopted on 22 March 2022 to amend the wider legal framework to enable support (social support, employment, education, health care for the war refugees from Ukraine in Slovakia).

The National Labour Inspectorate (NIP), in cooperation with the European Labour Authority (ELA), prepared a translation of manual “Legal work, legal employment” into Ukrainian Language. The publication contains, in a simplified and clear form, basic information which can help employees and employers to orient themselves correctly in the given issue. It is available in Slovak and Ukrainian language (Mochňacká, J., Timková, K., Birošová, M., Gubala, P. et al., 2022).

NIP on its website has published basic information about working time, leave, minimum wage and professional competence in the field of OSH and technical equipment in the Ukrainian language. It enabled the employees from Ukraine to become more familiar with the labour law regulations in Slovakia (NIP, 2022b).

Administrative data on employment were provided on a special request by the Centre of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the SR (UPSVaR). Total of 11,977 persons from Ukraine with temporary refuge status were employed with the support of UPSVaR between 1 March 2022 and 24 September 2022. About 26% found employment in industry and about 24% in administrative services. Less than 10% were employed especially in accommodation and food service activities (8%), wholesale and retail (7.4%), professional, scientific and technical activities (6.5%) and healthcare and social work activities (5.8%) (UPSVR, 2022b).

The job portal ISTP.sk and Trexima conducted an online and telephone survey in April and May 2022 on job quality. The sample size contained 750 respondents, particularly 450 Ukrainian job applicants and 300 employers. According to the survey, the biggest barrier in access to labour market in Slovakia is language barriers. Other barriers included lack of suitable job offers on job portals, lack of information about the job search possibilities, not meeting the requirements of employers, problems with accommodation and lack of school capacities.

Every fifth respondents was already contacted by an employer in Slovakia. On the other hand, the survey shows that about 36% job applicants from Ukraine have had a rather negative experience job searching.

Furthermore, the respondents appreciated adequate job offers on job portals (33%), support of family and friends (23%), help of volunteers and other Slovak citizens (20%) and the services of labour offices (5%).

Any job would be accepted by 43% of citizens from Ukraine. About 4% are interested in self-employment. From the perspective of the job positions, the applicants were mostly interested in the positions, for instance administrative worker, social worker, teacher or auxiliary jobs in the catering services. In Ukraine they used to work as teachers, accountants, managers, administrative workers, shop assistants or medical doctors.

According to the survey results about employers, about 30% have already employed citizens from Ukraine on some vacant job positions. Jobs offered to Ukrainian citizens include operators in industry, auxiliary employee in catering services, cleaner and waiter/waitress. Employers find language, administrative procedures and acquiring necessary documents to be the biggest problems to employ citizens from Ukraine.

The survey was also focused on the future plans of Ukrainian citizens. More than 94% of survey participants from Ukraine gained temporary refugee status or applied for it. About 56% of respondents from Ukraine plan to stay in Slovakia after the war. About 41% plan to return to Ukraine. About 3% decided to stay in Slovakia temporarily and plan to move to another country.

By 10 May 2022 there were total of 3,100 job applicants from Ukraine registered on job portal ISTP.sk and 8,300 job offers marked as suitable for citizens from Ukraine. The portal offered about 330 student jobs for students from Ukraine studying at Slovak universities (Hudec, P. 2022). By 29 June 2022 there were more than 10,000 job offers for Ukrainian citizens. The most offered jobs for Ukrainian citizens were in Bratislava, Trnava and Nitra regions (Trexima, ISTP.sk, 2022a). The job portal ISTP.sk published the job offers for citizens from Ukraine. It provides the registration form in Ukrainian language (ISTP.sk, 2022b).

The Act No. 92/2022 allows healthcare workers to work in their specialisation in hospitals and in outpatient healthcare facilities at internship positions under the supervision of another healthcare employee with a particular specialisation. The applicants are required to speak either Slovak or English and submit a copy of the documents proving their qualification. About 100 healthcare professionals from Ukraine were interested in such positions by 25 March 2022 (RTVS, 2022a).

In 2022 Ukrainian medical doctors in Slovakia, especially paediatricians, faced obstacles in recognition of their education gained in Ukraine. The difference is in the length of study. While in Slovakia it is necessary to study for 10 years to become a paediatrician, in Ukraine the same title can be acquired in six years. The Ministries of Education and Healthcare are searching for a solution (RTVS, 2022b).

Social partner initiatives to support Ukrainian refugees

Trade unions and employers' organisations in their statements and practical activities expressed their support for Ukraine.

Particularly, the KOZ SR coordinated the supplies of food, essential supplies and medicines for its colleagues from the trade union in Ukraine. KOZ SR cooperated closely with the European trade union confederation (EOK) and with the International trade union confederation (MOK) regarding further assistance at Slovak - Ukrainian border. Many members of KOZ SR joined this assistance individually, too. They provided help directly at the border with Ukraine.

For instance, the trade union KOVO (OZ KOVO) provided for refugees the free of charge transportation from the border in Ubl'a either to refugee camp in Humenné or to the railway station

in Košice. Many other trade unions, not only from Slovakia, have already helped with the transportation of hundreds of persons escaping from the war to safety.

From the perspective of the employment, the KOZ SR expected that the number of employees from Ukraine increased in following weeks.

It was expected that this could help the labour market as Ukrainian citizens could fill jobs in sectors suffering from labour shortages. For KOZ SR, it was important that these employees were fully integrated into the working process and did not become an instrument of wage and social dumping or a targeted slowdown in wage growth.

KOZ SR prepared employment legal advice on their website to help Ukrainian citizens to be aware of their employment rights and obligations in Slovakia. (KOZ SR, 2022a) They could find the necessary information in the Ukrainian language in the Trade Union Client Centre. KOZ SR also published a brochure on employment conditions called “Conditions of employment in Slovakia for refugees, emigrants or asylum seekers (IOM, 2022).

Information on organisation of Ukrainian citizens in the trade unions in Slovakia is not available.

Commentary and outlook

The year 2022 was marked by the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine became an important economic factor. In Slovakia, it caused a sharp increase in energy prices and an increase of inflation.

The governmental responses to inflation in 2022 were applied as legislative measures. There were two main types of measures provided: additional one-time allowances and increased permanent allowances.

The measures were focused on certain groups of population rather than companies. The aim was to mitigate a negative impact of inflation on households, particularly pensioners or persons in material need, young adults from substitute care and caregivers of dependent persons. Another big target group of the measures was the group of families with children, including surrogate families.

There were no fundamental changes in the area of working hours. In corporate practice, Law no. 215/2021 Coll. on support during short-time work entered with effect from 1 March 2022. Furthermore, the working conditions of disabled employees at sheltered workplaces and sheltered workshops were modified. The strict health measures were eased in 2022.

In the labour market, despite the arrival of citizens from third countries (for instance, refugees from Ukraine), the labour shortage persisted - the number of vacancies increased. The government and social partners have long-term efforts to reduce the labour shortage, both by increasing the employment of citizens from third countries, but also by providing educational activities for the unemployed, for the Roma population, and by reforming the education system. Employers' organisations and associations considered the trend in skills development to be positive, especially in the connection to dual education within the formal education system.

In 2022, steps were taken to improve the work-life balance, mainly through creating the Concept of reconciling private, family and work life as the main output of the national project Gender equality in the workplace, and an amendment to the Labour Code, which allows men to take 14 days of paid paternity leave in the first 6 weeks after the birth of a child.

There was no significant improvement in the gender pay gap - the difference between average wages of men and women remains at approximately 18% in Slovakia.

After the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, social partners, NGOs and public organisations provided support to citizens from Ukraine fleeing from the war. Besides the supplies to meet the elementary needs of Ukrainian citizens and the provision of free of charge transportation from the Slovak-Ukrainian border, the activities included online awareness raising on job searching, employment possibilities and labour law in both Slovak and Ukrainian.

There were no relevant changes in organisations of social partners and rules regulating their operation. Minor changes took place in the number of employees covered by member organisations in comparison with 2019. There were no changes in frameworks and bodies participating in social dialogue. Social dialogue took place, as usually at three levels - national, sectoral and company levels. An important outcome of the bipartite social dialogue at the national level was agreement of the representative organisations of employers and trade unions on the level of minimum wage for 2023.

Considering the economic situation, particularly the high inflation, the social partners in the public sector concluded company-level as well as multi-employer collective agreements in which higher wages were agreed. Nevertheless, agreed wage increases did not respond timely to the high inflation in 2022. They are mostly effective in 2023.

In 2022, the government's communication with social partners improved. However, employers' organisations and trade unions noted the absence of dialogue, especially during the preparation of large European projects to support the recovery of the Slovak economy.

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