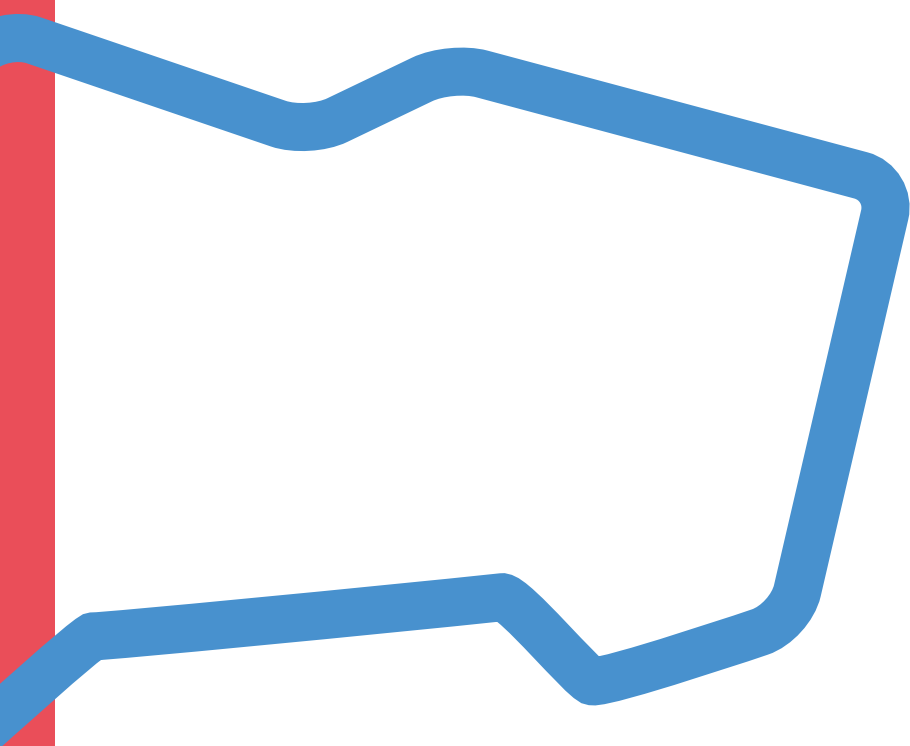


Slovakia in 2040 is a country
where people thrive.



Vision Slovakia 2040:

Towards
a Better Quality
of Life

DOCUMENT INFORMATION

Vision Slovakia 2040: Towards a Better Quality of Life

Prepared by: The Slovak Academy of Sciences in cooperation with the Slovak Rectors' Conference

Lead representative of the Slovak Academy of Sciences:

Ing. Marek Radvanský, PhD.

Pillar coordinators of Vision Slovakia 2040

A Dignified Life - Martin Smatana, MSc.

Successful Slovakia - Mgr. Miroslav Štefánik, PhD.

Sustainable Country - Mgr. Richard Filčák, PhD.

Modern State - doc. Mgr. Ing. Tomáš Černěňko, PhD.

Authors:

Marek Radvanský, Tomáš Černěňko, Richard Filčák, Martin Smatana, Miroslav Štefánik, Petra Dzurovčinová, Iva Kleinová, Barbora Belovická, Emília Sičáková Beblavá, Dušana Dokupilová, Karol Frank, Michal Garaj, Daniel Gerbery, Tomáš Goga, Patrik Haburaj, Ľuboš Halada, Marcel Horňák, Martin Hudcovský, Zita Izakovičová, Tomáš Jeck, Adriana Kolesárová, Marek Kordík, Ivana Maleš, Tomáš Miklošovič, Matúš Mišík, Karol Morvay, Marianna Mrva, Maroš Paulini, Ján Pokrivčák, Radoslav Považan, Martina Repíková, Miloš Rusnák, Pavol Siman, Mária Širaňová, Daniel Škobla, Jozef Škultéty, Branislav Šprocha, Jana Špulerová, Martin Šveda, Martin Venhart, Jana Venhartová, Jozef Vozár, Ján Výboštok, Domicián Zahorjan

Expert reviewers

Julian Blum, Marjana Dermelj, Karel Havlíček, Mikuláš Luptáčík, Martin Schulz, Juraj Sipko

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Mandate

This document, Vision Slovakia 2040, forms the first, conceptual part of the strategic framework for Slovakia's development up to the year 2040. Its purpose is to define the country's long-term development trajectory, the desired state of Slovakia in 2040, the main development objectives and the principles of public policy. This will be followed by the second part, Strategy Slovakia 2040, which will build on these. The Strategy will provide the implementation framework, including the definition of reforms and measures required to achieve the objectives of the Vision.

The document's starting point is the ambition to improve the quality of life of the people of Slovakia, to support sustainable economic development, to strengthen the country's competitiveness and resilience to external and internal risks, and to enhance its ability to seize opportunities while preserving social cohesion, balanced regional development and environmental sustainability.

On 19 November 2025, the Government of the Slovak Republic, by Resolution No. 561 on the Starting Points and Procedure for Preparing the Vision and Strategy for the Development of Slovakia to 2040 – Slovakia 2040, tasked the Slovak Academy of Sciences, as the scientific authority of the Slovak Republic, with preparing this document in cooperation with the Slovak Rectors' Conference. The Vision for the Development of Slovakia to 2040 – Slovakia 2040 is to be completed by the end of August 2026, and the Strategy for the Development of Slovakia to 2040 – Slovakia 2040 by the end of March 2027.

The common objective of these documents is to strengthen the strategic governance of the state and thereby increase its resilience to unexpected threats, disruptive challenges and change. Slovakia needs the capacity to respond rapidly and strategically to evolving conditions in both its internal and external environments and to make use of opportunities and comparative advantages for its sustainable development. The fundamental framework is to preserve the character of the Slovak Republic as a democratic, sovereign and social state governed by the rule of law, with balanced and sustainable economic, social, environmental and regional development.

The quality, legitimacy and transparency of the preparation process are based on a broad participatory approach involving line ministries, local and regional self-government, associations and professional organisations, academia, the business sector, social partners and the public. The aim has been to gather relevant knowledge, reconcile priorities and identify solutions that command the broadest possible consensus.

Vision Slovakia 2040 is overseen by a coordination group comprising the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic; the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economy; the Deputy Prime Minister for the Recovery Plan and Knowledge-Based Economy; the Minister of Education, Research, Development and Youth; the Minister of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization; the Government Plenipotentiary for Social Dialogue; the President of the Slovak Academy of Sciences; and the President of the Slovak Rectors' Conference, and it draws on cooperation with the Standing Conference on All-Society Dialogue in the Slovak Republic. The drafting process is organised through a system of working groups.

The Vision has been developed under the professional auspices of the Slovak Academy of Sciences as an independent, non-partisan and cross-ministerial document intended for practical application in society, in particular in the strategic governance of the state, the design of public policies, reform and investment decisions, and the coordination of the long-term priorities of the Slovak Republic.

It has been prepared in a transparent manner and is open to systemic updates and necessary revisions. Compared with similar strategic documents abroad, it places greater emphasis on systematic analysis and applies an evidence-based approach.

Forewords

Distinguished representatives of public life,
Distinguished members of the expert community,
Dear readers,

Every country needs a clearly defined direction and a set of goals it seeks to achieve over the long term. It needs the ability to look beyond the horizon of the next few years. It needs to identify where it is strong, where it lags behind, what it must adapt to and, above all, what kind of life it wishes to offer its citizens. Vision Slovakia 2040 has been created precisely so that we do not respond only passively to external developments and crises, but are able to take proactive steps towards a better society and a better life for our citizens.

Slovakia faces a number of challenges that will shape the country in the coming decades. Demographic change, technological transformation, public finances, climate adaptation, the quality of public services and trust in public institutions together constitute a complex strategic challenge that requires the state to focus its resources consistently and effectively.

The Slovak Academy of Sciences has accepted the task of professionally guiding the preparation of the Vision and Strategy Slovakia 2040 as part of its mission and service to the public. The document has not been developed as the project of a single institution or a single political grouping, but as a joint project of experts from various domains of public, academic, civic and private life. The Slovak Academy of Sciences has contributed independence, scientific integrity and the ability to connect knowledge from all relevant fields.

Vision Slovakia 2040 is not intended to be a wish list or a collection of simple answers. Different perspectives meet in the process of developing a vision. At the same time, the Vision is meant to serve as a common framework that helps to determine what really matters for the country's future. It should articulate the direction, principles and priorities on which the more detailed Strategy Slovakia 2040 will build.

The Vision of Slovakia presented here rests on four fundamental pillars. We need a good quality of life for people in all regions, a successful and competitive economy, a sustainable country, and a modern and predictable state capable of delivering this Vision. Achieving it will require social cohesion and the full use of our citizens' talents.

Vision Slovakia 2040 embodies the ambition to build a country in which it is worth living, working, doing business, creating, raising children – and one to which it is worth returning. The document is not a final answer to all questions. It is the beginning of a necessary agreement on what kind of Slovakia we wish to leave to the next generation. If it is to succeed, it must remain open to new knowledge, public debate, monitoring of results and regular reassessment.

My wish is that this document will become a framework for further debate on development in state institutions, local and regional self-governments, schools, businesses, research institutions and across society at large. And that, together with the Strategy that will follow, it will chart a clear and consistent path towards fulfilling this positive vision of Slovakia.

In closing, I would like to thank all those who have contributed to its preparation. In this endeavour, the Slovak Academy of Sciences will remain on the side of knowledge, constructive dialogue and responsibility towards the future of Slovakia.

Martin Venhart
President of the Slovak Academy of Sciences

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

The development of the Vision for Slovakia 2040 took place within an organizational framework approved by the Government of the Slovak Republic. At the government's request, the Slovak Academy of Sciences served as the expert guarantor and author of the document. The entire process was coordinated by a steering group headed by the Prime Minister, of which I was a member in my capacity as the Slovak Government's Plenipotentiary for Social Dialogue.

The government tasked me with participating in the coordination of the preparation of the Vision and Strategy Slovakia 2040 and with actively utilizing the opportunities for social dialogue during its development and public review. The Permanent Conference on Society-Wide Dialogue in the Slovak Republic played an important role in this process. My role was to serve as a liaison between the authors, the political leadership, and representatives from the economic, social, local government, academic, and civic sectors. Through the Permanent Conference on Society-Wide Dialogue and Cooperation, we worked with other partners to create a space for presenting expert opinions, aligning priorities, and seeking social consensus. Our ambition was not to replace the expert contribution of the Slovak Academy of Sciences or to unilaterally determine the content of the Vision. We strove to promote openness throughout the process, to bridge the gap between academic research and practical application, and to ensure a transparent evaluation of the proposals submitted.

A working group of expert consultants played a significant role in this process. I would like to thank them for their professional work, expertise, and the time they devoted to preparing the Vision. The team served as an advisory, analytical, and critical body in the creation of an independent, cross-ministerial, and non-partisan strategic document for the Slovak Republic. Its interdisciplinary composition made it possible to assess Slovakia's future development within the broader context of the economy, law, public administration, local government, social relations, education, energy, and other areas. The consultants continuously reviewed draft versions of the document to ensure their alignment with the assignment from the Government and with the principles of strategic planning. They focused in particular on whether the Vision presents a clear picture of Slovakia in 2040, whether the proposed direction is supported by data and development trends, and whether its pillars and cross-cutting themes form a coherent whole.

An important part of their work was also maintaining a clear distinction between the Vision and the follow-up Strategy Slovakia 2040. The Vision is intended to set the country's long-term direction and establish a basic framework. Specific measures, reforms, investments, budgets, responsible institutions, timelines, and target values will be the subject of subsequent strategic work. In the final phase of the document's development, the consultants participated in the expert evaluation of comments on the latest working draft. At the same time, the team of consultants served as an internal expert review panel. They pointed out inaccuracies in content and terminology, inconsistencies between different sections of the document, unsubstantiated claims, missing connections, and phrasing that went beyond the scope of the long-term vision. Throughout the entire process, the consultants took care to maintain an independent, non-partisan, and cross-ministerial approach.

I am convinced that the work of the Government Plenipotentiary for Social Dialogue, the Permanent Conference on Society-Wide Dialogue, and the expert consultants contributed to ensuring that the development of the Vision proceeded as an open, professionally grounded, and participatory process. We succeeded in combining expert analysis with practical insights, transparently evaluating comments, and creating a socially acceptable framework for the subsequent "Slovakia 2040" Strategy.

Executive summary

Slovakia in 2040 is a country where people thrive. It is a place where it is worth living, building a home, working, creating and doing business. People feel that the country is advancing and offering opportunities. Their everyday lives are improving. Slovakia is developing its economy, natural wealth and human talent so that both present and future generations can benefit from them.

Values we protect.

We protect democracy, security, resilience, responsibility, justice, cohesion and a commitment to progress in both good times and bad. We ally ourselves with those who share these values.

The reality that we must acknowledge.

Slovakia has solid foundations, but if it is to be successful in the long term, it must make full use of its potential. Despite progress in many areas, it lags behind in health outcomes, housing affordability and social trust. Investment in talent, research, innovation and productivity is stagnating. For some residents, social background continues to determine life chances. Slovakia is not reacting quickly enough to climate change and the ongoing digital and green transitions. Its potential for long-term prosperity is being held back by a polarised society and a weakening capacity to prepare, coordinate and implement change.

The future we must prepare for.

The world is in a period of growing uncertainty and unpredictability, and Slovakia is affected by global megatrends. Four scenarios outline possible futures: from gradual decline to a transformation that leads towards greater prosperity, resilience and quality of life. They are not forecasts; they help to identify risks, opportunities and the key decisions that must be taken. At the same time, they point to the need for an active approach and the systematic strengthening of the country's capacities.

Steps that need to be taken.

Fulfilling the Vision will require several important changes. These concern reform of the state, transformation of the economy, necessary investment in people, improvements in health and strengthening of cohesion and security.

Slovakia in 2040:

Ensures a dignified life for every resident.

Poverty and social exclusion are not systemic problems. People have access to stable and affordable housing and live healthy, active lives in a more cohesive society.

Is one of Europe's competitive and innovative economies.

It is building an economy based on higher added value, is part of the digital transformation and supports entrepreneurship. It is underpinned by high-quality education, excellent research and talent.

Is developing as a sustainable country.

It actively adapts to climate change. It rests on the strong foundations of a low-carbon and circular economy based on low-emission, affordable and secure energy sources. It protects biodiversity, water and the resilience of the landscape, and supports sustainable mobility, quality food and responsible resource management.

Is a modern, trustworthy and efficient state.

It can plan strategically and implement public policies effectively. It provides high-quality services, ensures comprehensive security, uses data and innovation, strengthens the professionalism of institutions and builds trust between the state and society.

All residents, without distinction, should be able to see themselves in the Vision, regardless of age, region, social background, origin, disability or life situation.

For example, *a child* whose mother tongue is not Slovak, yet still successfully integrates into school. *A secondary-school student* who, following in Milan Rastislav Štefánik's footsteps, goes to study abroad and, upon returning to Slovakia, finds both opportunities for interesting work and a home for their international family.¹ *A recent graduate* who can become independent in affordable housing. *A single mother* who, thanks to quality infrastructure, finds a well-paid job even in a small municipality close to her family, local community and kindergarten. *An entrepreneur* who has the confidence to invest and create jobs because they can rely on a predictable and fair environment. *Parents* who, in the digital world, protect their teenage children from harmful content and the pressures of social media. *A person in their fifties* who can find work without age discrimination. And *a pensioner* who can get a prompt appointment with a doctor without having to pay a fee.



Introduction: Slovakia on the threshold of a new era

Within a relatively short period of time, Slovakia has established itself as a stable, safe and comparatively prosperous democratic state. After the collapse of the centrally planned economy, it seized new opportunities. The economic transformation of the 1990s and reforms at the beginning of the century created the conditions for catching up with more advanced parts of Europe, attracting investment and integrating into key political, economic and security structures. Slovakia became a member of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures, together with the adoption of the euro in 2009, accelerated economic growth, stabilised the country, anchored it more firmly within Europe and significantly improved the quality of life of people in Slovakia.

The Slovak economic model formed part of the typical Central European model of post-transition economies, based on inexpensive but skilled labour, foreign investment and integration into European production chains. This approach delivered substantial progress, but is gradually reaching its limits. The pace and structure of investment are insufficient to sustain long-term growth in productivity, innovation and economic resilience. The critical state of public finances increasingly limits the scope for further development. The transition to an economy based on research, data, innovation and higher value-added technologies, however, is still very slow, fragmented and insufficiently aligned with the needs of firms and regions. These structural problems are compounded by adverse demographic trends and population ageing. While quality of life in Slovakia is improving, its relative lag persists, as many other countries are improving just as fast or faster.

Slovakia needs a fresh impetus for the next stage of its development. A new economic model requires a shift in the structure of public expenditure towards increased investment, including the creation of conditions for effective investment in the business sector, especially in small and medium-sized enterprises and start-ups. In doing so, it must build on Slovakia's existing comparative advantages, particularly its strong industrial base and position in the energy sector, which need to be further developed and transformed by harnessing technological progress. People remain Slovakia's key resource; however, as the number of people of working age falls, the return on investment in the more efficient use of the workforce, as well as in high-quality education and talent management, rises.

The main objective of the Vision is to improve the quality of life of people in Slovakia, as illustrated in Figure 1. Surrounding this objective are four broad themes, which we call the pillars of the Vision: a dignified life, a successful Slovakia, a sustainable country and a modern state, further broken down into specific areas that give these pillars concrete form. These pillars are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. A dignified life is only possible where the economy generates sufficient resources, the state functions properly and the country remains healthy for future generations. At the same time, these pillars cannot be assessed in isolation. The international environment is changing and Slovakia must adapt to these changes. Clearly defined values and a cohesive society will help the country respond successfully.

The chapter *Values and principles: what we protect* sets out five principles to which Slovakia is committed and from which it should not depart as it moves forward: from democracy and the rule of law, through security, responsibility towards future generations and justice, to a commitment to progress.

The chapter *Present: what we build on* briefly assesses where Slovakia stands today. It is based on the premise that only by consistently identifying the areas in which we are not achieving the desired results can we begin to find solutions.

The chapter *Future: what may be ahead of us* presents megatrends, that is, systemic changes that will shape Slovakia's development in the coming decades. It describes four possible development scenarios. These scenarios set out the alternatives within which Slovakia's future is highly likely to unfold: from a scenario of gradual decline to a scenario of successful transition towards

greater prosperity, resilience and quality of life. Their purpose is to deepen understanding of the risks, opportunities and decisions that can influence the country's direction. Slovakia will face a fundamental choice as to whether its institutions, economy and society adapt to a changing world and whether it can use these changes as an impetus for further development.

The chapter *Path to the Vision: Key areas of focus* measures today's challenges against the risks and opportunities of the future. It identifies a set of key changes that need to be made on the way to achieving the ambitions of each pillar in an age of uncertainty. These are essential preconditions for the successful transformation of the country: turning the state into an effective and trustworthy steward of the public interest, establishing a new economic model, investing in people, preventing disease, uniting and cultivating society, and protecting Slovakia from threats.

The chapter *Vision: what we want to achieve* describes the desired state of the country across four key pillars. It shows how Slovakia's long-term development should be reflected in people's everyday lives, in the quality of public services, in the strength of the economy, in environmental protection and in the trustworthiness of the state. The Vision is based on the premise that only a future we can clearly articulate can be successfully achieved.

The document is the result of several months of cooperation among more than 350 experts and stakeholders from various fields who, in working meetings, discussed each part of the Vision, including values and future scenarios. Expert workshops, a series of roundtables and a large number of individual consultations were devoted to the document. We considered more than 2,300 comments. We discussed the content of the Vision with local governments and representatives of civil society across Slovakia's regions. The Vision seeks common ground, not division. This is also why it uses language that is understandable not only for civil servants and experts, but for every resident of Slovakia.

How the Vision translates into practice will not depend solely on the content of this document. Fulfilling the Vision will require social legitimacy, an ability to respond to change, and consistent governance and delivery of results, which are discussed in more detail in the concluding chapter. The specific priorities and direction will be set out in the forthcoming *Strategy Slovakia 2040*.

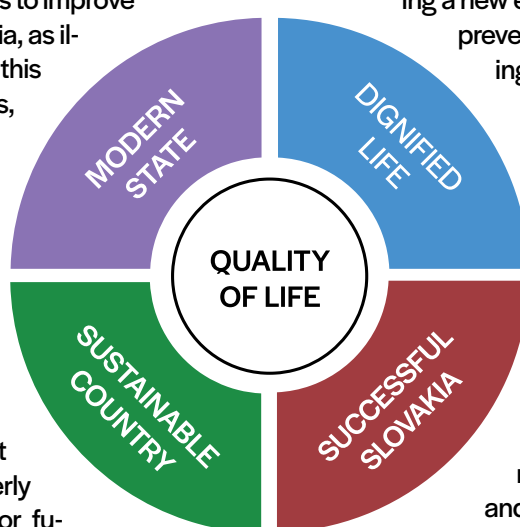


Figure 1: Organisation of the Vision pillars

Values and principles: what we protect

Democratic

Slovakia is a democracy and a state governed by the rule of law, founded on the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. It supports democratic processes through which the will of the citizens is translated into state decisions. It protects free elections, fundamental rights and freedoms, mutual checks and balances between constitutional bodies, judicial independence, an active civil society, independent media, institutional stability and a culture of respect, open debate and the rejection of all forms of violence and discrimination. Slovakia protects and nurtures diversity, which is an integral part of the state's democratic pluralism and stems from the coexistence of Slovaks, Hungarians, Roma, Ruthenians and other ethnic groups, as well as from respect for the dignity and identity of every person.

Safe and resilient

Slovakia's security rests on its strong alliances with other countries that share its robust democratic values: economically and strategically, above all with the member states of the European Union, and in defence with its NATO allies. The state and its citizens continuously strengthen their ability to respond to uncertainty, recognise disinformation and manage crises, especially when they threaten the democratic order. Slovakia's resilience also rests on patriotism based on pride and a willingness to enhance and protect the country.

Responsible

Slovakia understands risks and opportunities that extend beyond electoral cycles. It uses limited public, natural and human resources in a way that creates better living conditions for future generations in terms of demography, education, the structure of the economy, public finances and the management of the impact of climate change.

Just and cohesive

The residents of Slovakia have the right to fair access to opportunities and services regardless of their origin, nationality, age, gender, sexual orientation, health status or disability, religious or political beliefs, socio-economic status or place of residence. The state supports social mobility and inclusion, recognises diversity as a value and creates conditions for strengthening solidarity and good relations between people. A society built on trust is more resilient, more productive and better able to cope with the rapid transformation of which we are a part.

Forward-looking

Slovakia systematically strives for a tangible improvement in quality of life by tirelessly learning from mistakes, proactively using new technologies, supporting innovation and introducing new approaches. Its ambition is to become, in certain areas, a country other states can learn from. It creates conditions for the development of entrepreneurship, industry, investment, culture and value creation as the foundations of a prosperous society. A forward-looking mindset is a precondition for raising quality of life.

Present: what we build on

The aim of the Vision is to continuously improve quality of life in Slovakia by increasing competitiveness and innovation performance, in line with social and environmental sustainability. Quality of life encompasses how people in Slovakia live: what income and material conditions they have; whether they live in good health and have access to quality healthcare, decent housing, and a healthy and safe environment; whether they can find meaningful and well-paid work while maintaining a balance between work and private life; and whether they feel part of a community and have equal opportunities to participate in public, cultural or community life.²

This chapter therefore analyses where Slovakia stands in 2026 from the perspective of four main pillars: the dignity of people's lives, an economically successful Slovakia, the sustainability of the country and the governance of public affairs. In some areas, such as the share of low-carbon electricity, Slovakia ranks among Europe's leaders. In others, however, despite efforts and tangible improvements, it still lags behind the EU average or is repeatedly listed among the less successful countries of the Union. If we as a society are to move forward, we must openly acknowledge these challenges and seek potential for change.

Dignified life

Quality of life cannot be measured solely by the growth of gross domestic product. It is determined by people's ability to live stable, healthy and dignified lives regardless of their place of residence or social background. In shaping its Vision for 2040, Slovakia has solid foundations to build on: employment is growing; the system of social transfers and strong family ties mitigate the impacts of social risks; the high share of owner-occupied housing protects a large proportion of households from market shocks; and life expectancy is increasing.

However, these foundations are not sufficient. Disposable incomes lag behind the average of the European Union, and some population groups face a high risk of poverty and social exclusion. Affordable housing is also in short supply. Slovakia falls behind in terms of years lived in good health without limitations in performing everyday activities. Despite the gradual increase in average life expectancy, it still trails the EU average; fertility has been persistently low; and demographic ageing is accelerating. Interpersonal trust is among the lowest in Europe. These factors reinforce one another and may become more pronounced.

The pillar Dignified Life consists of four interconnected objectives: a decent standard of living and resilience to social risks, stable and affordable housing, a healthy and active life, and a cohesive society.

The average wage in Slovakia is roughly half the European Union average.³ The proportion of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion reached 16.7% in 2025, or almost 890,000 people. This risk is concentrated in single-parent and large families, single-person senior households, in eastern Slovakia and in marginalised Roma communities.⁴ The financial resilience of households is low; almost half of adults live from pay-day to payday or draw on their savings.⁵

Slovakia is characterised by a high proportion of owner-occupied housing (approximately 93%), with a minimal private rental sector and a low proportion of social housing.⁶ Between 2015 and 2025, property prices doubled and grew faster than incomes.⁷ In 2024, seven out of ten young people aged 18 to 34 lived with their parents, the second-highest proportion in the European Union.⁸ Young households, households living in rented accommodation and households at risk of poverty are more likely to bear an excessive housing cost burden, and almost one-third of the population lives in overcrowded dwellings.⁹ The available data suggests an increase in the number of homeless people and households at risk of losing their homes.¹⁰ Residential construction has long been unable to meet housing demand, and the effects of the reform of construction law have not yet had time to materialise.¹¹ Unaffordable

housing drives suburbanisation, which increases costs for both households and municipalities.¹²

Despite gradual improvements, Slovakia still falls behind in health and active living. In 2024, average life expectancy was more than three years lower than the EU average.¹³ In terms of years lived in good health after age 65, the gap compared with the EU exceeds four years.¹⁴ In 2023, the standardised mortality rate from avoidable causes of death was 53% higher than the EU average.¹⁵ In addition, large regional differences in health status and mortality persist in Slovakia; for example, in marginalised communities, infant mortality is more than three times the national average.¹⁶

The health system, despite a significant increase in resources since 2020, remains underfunded and lags behind in staffing capacity and infrastructure.^{17,18} The system of social services and long-term social and health care is facing similar pressures, with a particular lack of outreach and community-based services. This situation will coincide with rapid population ageing: by 2055, the share of people aged 65 and over will reach 33%.¹⁹ The system will face growing demand, most strongly in regions that have been experiencing population decline since the beginning of the 21st century and have a sparse network of facilities.

The final objective within this pillar is a cohesive society. Strong communities and trustworthy institutions are a precondition for the effectiveness of all other policies. Slovakia has strong family ties, but what is known as generalised trust – trust in other people in general – has long stood at around 21%, one of the lowest levels in Europe.^{20, 21} Trust in key public and political institutions such as the government, parliament, courts and the legal system, and public administration, ranged between 30% and 40% in 2023.²² In 2025, a quarter of adults reported feeling severe loneliness.²³ Social isolation is increasing; civic participation and engagement in cultural life are weaker and highly stratified by education and income.^{24, 25, 26} Without stronger institutions, community bonds and broader social trust, it will not be possible to manage the demographic and societal changes of the coming decades.

All four areas are linked by efforts to reduce income, social, gender, health, territorial and intergenerational inequalities and to strengthen the resilience of households, communities and regions. There is potential in making social policy more targeted and better connected to the labour market, and in developing pre-school education and family services. Underused and neglected areas and sites can be used to expand rental housing. Slovakia can achieve improvements by strengthening prevention, social and health care and long-term care, creating a stable environment for family life, managing labour migration and supporting civil society and solidarity between groups. If these opportunities are not taken,

there is a risk of deepening inequalities, a weakening of the protective function of work, further deterioration in housing affordability, postponement of family formation, faster ageing and a growing economic burden on the working-age population.

Successful economy

Slovakia is built on a robust and technologically relatively advanced industrial base, which enables a strong export orientation and, together with membership of the euro area, integration into production chains within the EU. Even with unfavourable demographic trends, a skilled workforce remains our most attractive domestic resource. Slovakia is striving to reform education at all levels; for example, thanks to the Recovery and Resilience Plan, a fundamental curriculum reform has been launched in primary schools. Business-sector investment in research and development is on an upward trajectory.²⁷ Slovakia remains competitive in selected fields of research such as nuclear energy, cyber security, and materials and biomedical technologies.

At the same time, however, the Slovak economy has reached a turning point: after years of rapid growth, the so-called demographic dividend – the period of economic growth driven by an increasing working-age population – has been exhausted.²⁸ By 2060, Slovakia will be one of the fastest-ageing countries in the EU.²⁹ Demographic trends are already constraining the labour market, investment activity, public revenues and the resilience of democracy and security.³⁰ The situation is worsened by the outflow of highly qualified people, particularly to the Czech Republic, and the only partial use of the potential to attract international talent. One specific aspect of the talent shortage is the gap in technical and scientific skills, which poses a direct threat to the economy's industrial base.³¹ Without reforms that improve the quality of human capital, keep older people in the labour market and increase the economy's ability to use inputs more efficiently, Slovakia risks stagnation and a slowdown in its economic convergence with EU countries.³² The current specialisation of the economy, together with a less favourable position in international supply chains, poses economic risks that will need to be gradually reduced in the longer term.

A weakening of competitiveness is already partly reflected in the slowing of Slovakia's economic convergence towards the EU average. In 2026, labour productivity stands at roughly two-thirds of the EU average, which constrains sustainable wage growth and slows the closing of the gap in living standards.³³ A key obstacle is the dual structure of the corporate sector: a smaller group of large firms (often foreign-owned) achieve high unit productivity, while a large number of small (predominantly domestic) firms lag behind, among other reasons due to relatively poorer access to investment capital.³⁴

The productivity of foreign-owned firms is approximately twice as high.³⁵

There are also shortcomings in the structure of capital endowment. While the stock of machinery and equipment is close to the EU average, intellectual property assets (software, databases, research and scientific outputs) are significantly underdeveloped. The industrial model of work persists. Slovakia has the third-lowest savings rate in the EU, at 17% of gross national income in 2024 compared with the EU average of 24%. Net national savings are negative and households' ability to save is weakening. Corporate disposable income is growing more slowly than in the EU: between 2014 and 2024 it increased by 32% in Slovakia compared with the EU average of 58%, which is why firms rely more heavily on debt financing and public funds. Small firms in particular face difficulties in accessing capital.³⁶

The state of public finances, despite consolidation efforts, remains in a high-risk zone from the perspective of both medium- and long-term sustainability.³⁷ This situation stems from a combination of rising future costs linked to population ageing (the pension system, health-care and long-term care) and the current unfavourable state of the general government budget (deficit and public debt).³⁸ Public finances are burdened by poorly targeted social transfers and high operating expenditures of the state, which limits the scope for pro-growth investment.³⁹ Shortcomings of the business environment include frequent legislative changes, high tax and social contribution burdens on labour, and uncertainty that discourages investment.^{40, 41, 42} The state should shift its priorities from redistribution towards investment in education, science and research, energy and material efficiency, and diversification of energy sources.

Research and innovation are underfunded and poorly connected to the international environment and to economic activities in the regions. In 2024, Slovakia invested 0.98% of gross domestic product (GDP) in research and development, compared with the EU average of 2.24%. Around 40% of this spending (0.39% of GDP) came from public sources.⁴³ The funding of academic institutions is poorly diversified: third-party contributions to university budgets stood at 5%, compared with 22% in Germany.⁴⁴ At the same time, the share of the population with higher education is rising (39%), as is the share of foreign students at Slovak universities (20.3% in 2025).^{45, 46}

Technological change is increasing the need to acquire new skills and adapt or gain new qualifications.⁴⁷ Slovakia has low participation in pre-primary education and worsening results in the OECD's PISA tests of basic skills among 15-year-olds.^{48, 49} Slovak teachers are among the worst paid in OECD countries.⁵⁰ Compared with other EU member states, spending on active labour-market policies is low and training programmes

play only a limited role.⁵¹ Making better use of domestic talent, including long-term unemployed people, marginalised Roma communities, people of pre-retirement and retirement age, people with disabilities, and parents and carers outside the labour market, is becoming crucial.⁵² Competently managed labour migration is also gaining specific importance. The outflow of secondary-school graduates, of whom roughly one-fifth study abroad and only about 40% return, needs to be offset by higher-quality study opportunities at home, the integration of foreign students, and support for return migration through active engagement with the Slovak diaspora.^{53, 54}

Sustainable country

Slovakia currently has real potential to become a country that can reconcile economic development with nature conservation and climate responsibility. It is among Europe's leaders in protecting natural heritage. Over three decades, Slovakia has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by half. In electricity generation, Slovakia's carbon footprint is one of the lowest of any EU member state.⁵⁵ Rising resource productivity, the reform of national park management and the expansion of water infrastructure all indicate measurable progress. This progress is the result of long-term policies, public investments and commitments, as well as strong support from the population.⁵⁶

The national network of protected areas includes 14 protected landscape areas and 9 national parks with their buffer zones. In 2025, these territories together accounted for 22% of Slovakia's total area.⁵⁷ In the extent of its protected land, Slovakia is among the leading EU states. However, it is necessary to ensure adequate conditions for protecting biodiversity and restoring nature. Protection of species and habitats is gradually improving, but as many as 78% of species and over 56% of habitats of European importance remain in an unfavourable state.^{58, 59} Biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation threaten health, the economy, food security, clean water, carbon sequestration and adaptation.

Climate change is already adversely affecting the situation. Climate models predict that by 2030 the average annual air temperature in southern Slovakia will increase by 0.7 to 0.9 °C compared with the 1991–2020 average. Longer-term projections indicate significant risks: by 2050, average temperatures are expected to rise by approximately 2.0 to 3.0 °C and by 2100 by 3.5 to 6.0 °C.⁶⁰ Higher temperatures are leading to declines in soil moisture and water availability and significantly threaten the stability of the landscape, forests and agriculture. Climate change will have severe negative impacts across the entire economy and society, from tourism, food security and electricity generation to the financial sector and the state budget.

A key challenge is integrated water management in the landscape. Investment has so far focused on water retention, the revitalisation of rivers and wetlands, and climate-adapted agriculture. Systemic, more comprehensive approaches to supporting infrastructure and adaptation measures in the landscape and settlements are lacking. These investments require new financing models and joint participation by the state, local and regional self-government and private capital, which are not yet in place.⁶¹

Early warning systems, crisis management and civil protection are gradually being developed, but their capacities remain uneven across the country.⁶² Protecting biodiversity, restoring ecosystems and integrated management of natural resources are considered key prerequisites for climate resilience, yet the implementation of systemic and coordinated approaches in the Slovak context continues to lag behind.⁶³

Greenhouse gas emissions fell by 54% between 1990 and 2024, and Slovakia has adopted binding targets for further reductions.^{64, 65} Thanks to the high share of low-carbon electricity, the phase-out of coal-fired power generation and the potential for carbon sequestration in the landscape, Slovakia is well placed to pursue ambitious targets to be met by 2040. Achieving these will depend primarily on industrial transformation and sustainable forest management, support for adaptation measures in forests, and sustainable management of the agricultural landscape. The rate of circular use of materials has increased and resource productivity has risen by 111% since 2005, although it still remains relatively low compared with the EU average.⁶⁶ Slovakia is among the countries that in recent years have achieved so-called absolute decoupling of gross domestic product growth from greenhouse gas emissions, while increasing resource productivity.⁶⁷

Although new rules and systems have increased the rate of separate collection and recycling of waste and expanded producer responsibility, Slovakia still lags behind the EU average.⁶⁸ Total waste generation remains high and, despite partial decoupling from economic growth, reducing it remains a significant challenge.⁶⁹ Slovakia is one of the EU countries that lack sufficient capacity to treat and process certain types of waste, and where the highest proportion of waste ends up in landfill.⁷⁰

Progress in reducing emissions has been achieved despite the economy being based on energy-intensive industry. Further targets must be based on EU regulations, which set a target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 90% by 2040.⁷¹ In industry, transport and services, these targets will need to be achieved in a balanced, technologically feasible and economically viable manner. Low-carbon energy sources play a key role in the transformation. In 2023, Slovakia gen-

erated 62% of its electricity from nuclear power.⁷² In 2025, almost 16,000 new photovoltaic installations were connected to the grid.⁷³ The construction of larger solar plants and wind farms faces obstacles. The share of energy from renewable sources is among the lowest in the EU. Under the binding targets, the share should reach 25% by 2030, with the corresponding target for electricity set at 26%.^{74, 75} Further increases in this share will require effective balancing of the variability of renewables through energy storage and investment in technologies for demand-side management, modernisation of transmission and distribution networks and the deployment of smart grids.

The environment is also a matter of public health. Water and waste water infrastructure has expanded significantly. In 2005, 57% of the population was connected to public sewerage; by 2024, the connection rate had reached 72%.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, there are still a large number of agglomerations that do not meet the requirements of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive. Air quality in Slovakia is improving, but in many regions people are exposed to excessive concentrations of pollutants such as fine particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, benzo[a]pyrene and ground-level ozone.⁷⁷ This pollution contributes to a reduction in life expectancy, in some locations by up to two years.⁷⁸ The main sources are household heating, transport and industry, and a key challenge is new legislation and the tightening of emission limits that comes with it.⁷⁹

According to the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, everyone has the right to a healthy environment. The transition to a sustainable and climate-resilient country must therefore be socially and regionally just, based on reducing regional disparities, tackling energy and transport poverty, and ensuring a healthy and safe environment.

Modern state

Slovakia has three decades of building the institutions of a democratic state behind it. Membership of the European Union and NATO has firmly anchored it within Europe's administrative, legal and security space. Many parts of the state today function more reliably than we tend to admit in our everyday criticism. Slovakia has an extensive network of public services, experienced professionals in state administration and local government, the capacity to draw on and use European funds, developing digital tools, and relatively good availability of basic services across the country. It has also had several positive experiences in introducing change. The creation of analytical units in ministries, work with data, preparation of the Recovery and Resilience Plan, and the launch of certain proactive e-government services all show that the state is capable of setting up systems well.

At the same time, however, good ideas, pilot projects and partial successes do not always translate into lasting state capabilities. In many cases, functioning solutions remain isolated within individual projects, units or informal networks and, once political, personnel or financial support ends, they fail to develop further. Slovakia's weak point is therefore not the absence of positive examples, but rather the capacity to learn from them, scale them up and transform them into stable public-sector capacity.^{80, 81}

The approach to building the state is therefore often more concerned with form than substance.⁸² It follows the letter of regulations and project milestones, yet often loses sight of the purpose for which public institutions were created and exist. Today, Slovakia does not need a more efficient state in the sense of a cheaper state, but a better-organised, more professional and higher-performing state. The current public administration is gradually losing institutional memory, is overly fragmented, locked into ministerial silos and often focused on the formal performance of its activities rather than on delivering measurable results for citizens.^{83, 84, 85} At the same time, public administration support activities remain fragmented across a multitude of organisations, which repeatedly carry out similar processes instead of standardising, automating and pooling their expertise.

At the local level, Slovakia is among the most territorially fragmented states in Europe, with almost 3,000 municipalities, more than 1,400 of which have fewer than 10 employees, and in the smallest of these political competition is also weakening.^{86, 87} The problem is not only cost, but also capacity, accountability and the ability to provide quality services.⁸⁸ The smallest municipalities spend more than 55% of their revenues on their own running costs, whereas regional capitals outside Bratislava and Košice spend less than 10%.⁸⁹ The result is uneven quality and availability of public services, and the fragmentation of resources across a multitude of separate local authorities and facilities of the same kind. This leaves fewer resources and less investment available for the professional management and delivery of results, and for the renewal and development of basic technical infrastructure, such as water supply, sewerage and local roads.

At the central level, the existence of line ministries is not in itself the problem. Ministerial responsibility is a natural part of governing and can strengthen both expertise and political accountability. The weak point lies in ministerial logic without shared priorities, without a clear link between strategy and budget, without an authority to resolve conflicts and without ongoing implementation oversight. Cross-cutting issues such as climate adaptation, security, housing, digitalisation, education and regional development therefore often run up against the limits of the current institutional set-up and overlapping competences between the state,

self-governing regions, municipalities, cities and city districts. This overlap is intended to serve as a safeguard for the availability and continuity of public services for citizens, but at the same time it allows responsibility to be evaded or shifted between stakeholders and undermines the ability to manage spatial development.^{90, 91}

Digitalisation of public administration has so far largely meant digitalising existing bureaucracy rather than simplifying it. Isolated information systems and data silos have been created in which institutions exchange documents instead of data.⁹² As a result, citizens and businesses often act as intermediaries between government offices.^{93, 94} Without a unified data policy, system interoperability and strong analytical capacities, the state is unable to make predictable, evidence-based decisions. Experience with selected IT projects also shows that without clear ownership, management and evaluation of benefits, new state digital capacities do not necessarily translate automatically into better services for citizens.⁹⁵

Making the state more efficient is often mistaken for across-the-board job cuts. However, a state that is run on a shoestring and, in some areas, understaffed ultimately ends up costing more in the form of poor-quality legislation, investments with low returns, public procurement of little public value, the purchase of expensive external consultancy services, and inconsistent quality of public services.^{96, 97} Although capacity for assessing value for money has been established at the central level for selected major investments, this principle is still not a general standard in public policy-making. It is often only applied after a fundamental policy decision has been taken and focuses on the solution that has already been chosen.^{98, 99} In other parts of the public sector and public administration, its use remains limited or is restricted to the lowest price, without sufficient consideration being given to quality, life-cycle costs and long-term public benefit. Yet it should form part of the entire decision-making cycle: from the formulation of objectives, through the assessment of alternatives, costs, benefits and risks, to the evaluation of results and the lessons the state draws from them.^{100, 101, 102} Public procurement has become a legal discipline that prizes procedural correctness over the value it ultimately delivers to citizens.¹⁰³

A modern state is a professional, capable and efficient state that is able to transform public resources into high-quality services, resilience and long-term development. It is not a state that does everything, but one that knows how to set priorities, plan, coordinate and implement policies, work with data, engage the market and civil society, enforce rules and take responsibility for results. Its quality will therefore not be judged on the basis of whether it is cheaper or more expensive, but on whether it creates public value where citizens, communities and the economy actually need it.

Such a state does not limit itself merely to correcting market failures. Through investment, regulation, public procurement and coordination, it can help to create the conditions for innovation, resilience and long-term development. This requires not only professional public institutions, but also trusted partners in the scientific and business sectors who are able to bear some of the risk and transform knowledge into usable and scalable solutions.¹⁰⁴

In this sense, public administration reform is also a matter of state-building: strengthening the state's professional core, its institutional memory and its capacity to act across ministries and electoral cycles. The true test of this capacity is genuine security and resilience in the face of hybrid threats.¹⁰⁵ These affect the information space, cyber security, critical infrastructure, trust in institutions and the state's ability to communicate in a crisis.¹⁰⁶ Weakening analytical, monitoring and coordination capacities in this area cannot be regarded as routine organisational change, but must be seen as a loss of state capability.¹⁰⁷

Future: what may be ahead of us

Slovakia's development will not depend only on the decisions we make. It will also be shaped by structural conditions and long-term global trends that determine the direction of change in society, the economy and the environment. Based on an analysis of megatrends, we present four theoretical scenarios of possible development. These are not a prediction of the future. They describe a spectrum within which Slovakia may move with higher or lower probability. The purpose of the scenarios is to deepen understanding of the risks, opportunities and vulnerabilities that may or may not affect our trajectory. In a period of growing geopolitical and economic uncertainty, solutions will require an active approach and systematic strengthening of Slovakia's resilience.

Megatrend 1: Shifting global power dynamics and multipolarity

The global system is gradually shifting from an order based on the dominance of a single centre and stable rules of international cooperation towards a multipolar world with several centres of economic, technological and political power. The role of the United Nations and international agencies in guaranteeing and implementing rules is weakening. The world's economic centre of gravity is moving to Asia, which fundamentally affects international relations as well as the functioning of the global economy. New trade opportunities, investment flows and forms of international cooperation are emerging. At the same time, the importance of power politics and competition between different centres of influence is increasing. The downside of multipolarity is a higher risk of geopolitical conflicts, trade disputes and military confrontations, which increase pressure for investment in defence and security.

Megatrend 2: Intensifying global competition over resources

Ongoing economic, industrial and technological development is increasing demand for natural resources: renewable biological resources as well as non-renewable reserves of minerals, metals and fossil fuels. Despite large-scale investment in low-carbon technologies, fossil fuels remain an important factor in economic development and energy security. At the same time, critical raw materials needed for digitalisation, electromobility and modern technologies are becoming strategically significant. As a result of climate change, water is also gaining importance as a fundamental prerequisite for the functioning of society, agriculture and the economy. The vulnerability of global supply chains creates pressure to secure access to resources, but it also supports innovation, recycling of materials, the development of a circular economy and more efficient use of available resources.

Megatrend 3: Economic fragmentation and new limits of growth

In the global economy, financial market volatility is increasing and the risk of financial, economic and debt crises is rising. Many advanced economies face slowing growth, inflation and growing pressure on public finances. For small economies, this means greater vulnerability and strain on public finances, together with the need to diversify exports, enhance the resilience of supply chains and build a stronger domestic innovation and capital base. The concentration of technological capacities in a small number of countries and corporations is also becoming a challenge, as it can deepen the dependence of peripheral economies and limit their development prospects. At the same time, pressure is mounting to finance research and development, social protection, healthcare, education and environmental policies. Despite these risks, global economic growth will be supported by innovation and productivity in developed countries, as well as by ongoing urbanisation, industrialisation and the integration of large populations in Asia and Africa into global markets.

Megatrend 4: Accelerating technological change

Artificial intelligence models, cloud infrastructure and major digital platforms are having an ever-increasing impact on the economy, the labour market, the way

people live and the way society functions. The convergence of nano-, bio-, information and cognitive technologies (NBIC) is becoming especially important, enabling new products, services and business models. These can substantially increase labour productivity, quality of life and the ability to address complex societal challenges. At the same time, they

bring significant risks: deepening social and regional inequalities, technological dependence on a limited number of countries and companies, the transformation or loss of jobs, the concentration of economic and data power, and growing cyber and security threats. The ability of societies to draw on the benefits of technological progress while managing its negative consequences is becoming one of the key factors in future development.

Wild cards

“Wild cards” refer to rare but foreseeable, high-impact events that can fundamentally alter the development of society and politics. In the context of these scenarios, we do not work with the possibility of an open, potentially nuclear war in Europe, nor with another devastating pandemic. The scenarios also do not consider the complete collapse or dissolution of the European Union, or withdrawal from it. On the basis of analysis, this alternative appears unlikely. However, the scenarios do assess different degrees of European integration.

Megatrend 5: Demographic change

Social and economic development is fundamentally changing both the size and age structure of populations. In most advanced countries, populations are ageing and their numbers are stagnating or declining, while many less developed countries continue to experience significant population growth. Europe, including Slovakia, will in the coming decades face a decrease in the number of people of working age and a rising share of older age groups. Demographic change will increase pressure on productivity, the labour market, wages, public finances, healthcare, migration and regional structures. In Gemer and in southern and eastern Slovakia, the population may fall by 10 to 13%. These regions, too, will need a strategy to maintain living standards and employment opportunities. Technological and social innovation, higher labour productivity, more effective inclusion of marginalised groups in the labour market, older people staying economically active for longer and well-managed, socially accepted labour migration can all play a key role.

Megatrend 6: Urbanisation and spatial change

Demographic changes in the EU will be accompanied by significant changes in the spatial distribution of the population. Migration to cities will affect regional disparities, patterns of land use and demand for housing and infrastructure. Migration to the economically most developed EU member states will continue. The strongest population growth is expected in urban agglomerations and their hinterlands, while many rural

and peripheral regions will face ongoing depopulation and population ageing. In some areas, the number of residents experiencing social disadvantage, poverty or exclusion may increase. Changes in the spatial structure of demand for investment, housing, transport and public services can create scope for innovation, new technologies and more efficient use of existing and planned infrastructure.

Megatrend 7: Climate change

According to climate projections, global climate change will bring rising average temperatures, more frequent droughts, changes in precipitation patterns and a higher frequency of extreme weather events. Compared with the reference period 1991–2020, air temperature in Slovakia may increase by a further 1.0 to 1.5 °C by 2040. This will have significant consequences for agricultural production, food security, tourism, water availability and quality, the condition of forests, biodiversity and soils, as well as for technical infrastructure. At the same time, the need to mitigate the consequences of climate change and adapt to it creates opportunities for the development of research, technological innovation and new solutions – from breeding more resilient crops and modern water management systems to the transformation of energy, industry and infrastructure.

Megatrend 8: Degradation of ecosystems and biodiversity

Growth in the world's population, consumption, and demand for food and energy is creating increasing

Figure no. 2: Population decline will affect most of Slovakia
Percentage change in the number of people between 2025 and 2040



pressure on natural resources and ecosystems. Deterioration of the landscape further amplifies the impacts of extreme climate phenomena such as droughts, floods and soil erosion. The consequences are not only environmental damage, but also greater vulnerability of agriculture, forestry, industry and tourism. Major systemic risks include threats to the stability of global commodity markets and rising environmentally driven migration. Ecosystem restoration, sustainable land and water management, and food security are becoming key prerequisites for resilience and economic prosperity.

Black swans

“Black swans” are events that are hard to imagine before they occur and arrive as a surprise. Artificial intelligence may be such a factor. The scenarios address it in depth, but some of its effects cannot yet be identified; nonetheless, they may fundamentally disrupt labour market stability, the economy and the overall functioning of society.

Megatrend 9: Deepening social and economic inequalities

Despite continued growth in global wealth, its benefits remain very unevenly distributed between countries, regions, generations and social groups. The economic stability of the middle class – one of the main pillars of social cohesion, economic stability and democratic order – is weakening. Deepening inequalities constitute an economic and systemic risk that undermines trust in institutions, reduces social cohesion, hinders the full use of talent and contributes to political polarisation. This may create pressure to seek innovative solutions

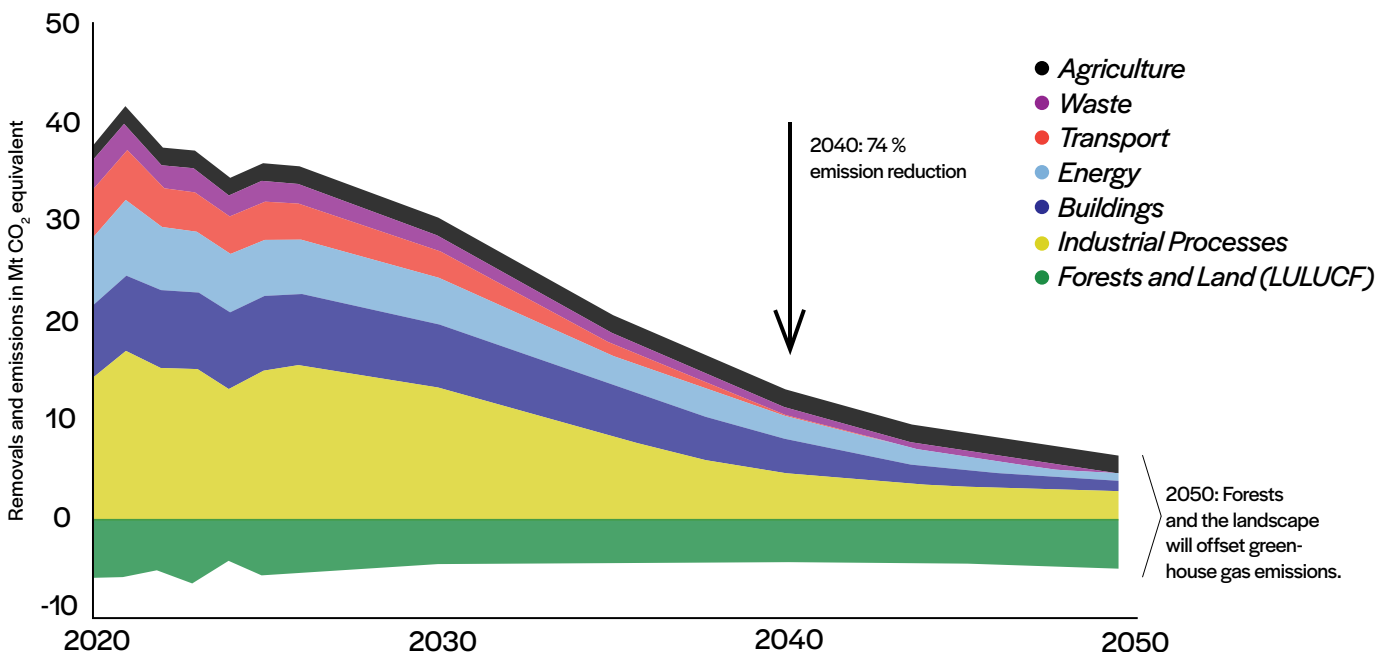
in tax systems, social policy, education, digitalisation and support for local economies. The ability to mitigate inequalities is becoming an important precondition for social stability and long-term economic development.

Megatrend 10: Crisis of governance

There is a growing mismatch between the complexity of long-term global challenges and the ability of the state and existing institutions to respond effectively, and to adopt

and implement long-term, strategic and coordinated solutions. Political systems operate in short electoral cycles and have limited tools for addressing systemic problems. Tensions are increasing between national interests and global or European economic and political priorities. People are increasingly retreating into their own social and information bubbles; social ties are weakening, trust in institutions is declining and social polarisation is deepening. At the same time, the growing complexity of problems creates space for innovation. This may involve strengthening regional and local self-government, greater citizen participation in decision-making processes, the use of digital tools or building institutions capable of coordinating long-term development strategies.

Figure no. 3: Slovakia can be carbon neutral by 2050
Greenhouse gas removals and emissions



Future scenarios and megatrends

Scenario Megatrend	Spiral of decline (Scenario 1)	Stagnation and falling behind (Scenario 2)	Pragmatic resilience (Scenario 3)	Intelligent transformation (Scenario 4)
Shifting global power dynamics and multipolarity	Marginalisation	Declining international position	Partial use of opportunities	Active co-creator
Increased global competition over resources	Resource shock	Deepening dependence	Partial diversification	Efficient resource use
Economic transformation and new limits of growth	Open crisis and decline	Stagnation	Stabilisation	A new model of prosperity
Accelerating technological change	Technological marginalisation	Slow adoption	Uneven development	Innovation environment
Demographic change	Decline and resignation	Population decline	Stabilisation	Comprehensive approach
Urbanisation and spatial changes	Decline of peripheral regions	Widening regional disparities	Partial territorial cohesion	Strong territorial cohesion
Climate change	Resignation	Partial / inadequate adaptation	Partial adaptation	Climate adaptation and carbon neutrality
Degradation of ecosystems and biodiversity	Accelerated ecosystem collapse	Gradual degradation	Stabilisation	Ecosystem restoration and resilience
Deepening social and economic inequalities	Polarisation and paralysis	Moderate increase	Partial mitigation	Inclusive prosperity
Crisis of governance	Crisis and conflict	Polarisation and institutional erosion	Stabilisation and limited progress	Strategic and inclusive governance



Scenario 1: *Spiral*

of decline

There is no single dramatic collapse; instead, external and internal factors lead to gradual, increasingly hard-to-reverse erosion and decline. Confrontation between great powers results in the fragmentation of the global economy into blocs with their own rules, extensive trade barriers, tariffs and economic sanctions. This marks a shift from a relatively stable financial system to one that is more fragmented, geopolitically contested and less predictable, with highly unstable financial markets, pronounced price volatility and a slowdown in global economic growth. Defence spending rises dramatically, yet there is no shared vision of a new international order, and the world gradually slips into a new form of cold war.

The European Union loses ground in the global contest for technological sovereignty. It falls behind in the development and ownership of artificial intelligence, digital capacities and infrastructure, and lacks competitive energy sources. Slovakia misses the decisive phase in which the automotive industry restructures and transitions to electromobility and autonomous vehicles. Competition from other EU countries and Asia intensifies. International corporations leave and foreign investment shrinks significantly. Slovakia loses markets, undergoes de-industrialisation and simultaneously finds itself outside the main EU integration initiatives, which increasingly focus on linking the economically strongest member states.

The situation in the Union is exacerbated by an unrealised energy transition. A unified European market, common policies and strategic investments are not launched or brought to completion. Prices of electricity and fossil fuels remain high. They hold back the emergence of new economic activities and technological sectors and contribute to the loss of competitiveness in existing ones.

Technological change deepens social problems. Without effective public policies to regulate the impacts of artificial intelligence and automation, jobs disappear faster than new ones are created. In regions with low economic diversification, this gives rise to a large group of long-term unemployed people.

Mandatory expenditure and debt-servicing costs become unsustainable, and space for strategic investment virtually disappears. Defence spending grows, but its contribution to job creation and broader economic development remains limited because of a high degree of automation.

Real wages fall and quality of life deteriorates. An increasing number of educated and skilled people leave to seek opportunities abroad. Migration policy remains

focused primarily on low-skilled labour, which finds fewer and fewer opportunities in the Slovak labour market. The state lacks resources to support social innovation or to bring older workers and marginalised groups more effectively into the workforce.

Unemployment, combined with population ageing, creates growing pressure on the social system, health-care and pensions. In the absence of adequate resources and reforms, the quality of public services gradually erodes. Financial-market volatility threatens household savings and the stability of the pension system. In response to the worsening situation, the European Commission and the European Central Bank introduce a stabilisation programme for Slovakia.

Less developed regions face a combination of depopulation, a lack of public services, economic decline and a growing concentration of marginalised communities. The absence of territorial self-government reform and low levels of investment accelerate negative trends. The deterioration of forests, agricultural land and ecosystem services worsens under the impact of climate change and insufficient investment, raising the country's vulnerability.

Slovakia ceases to be a trustworthy and predictable partner and gradually becomes isolated in the international arena. Society becomes radicalised. Digital technologies and social media are widely misused by foreign and domestic actors to spread disinformation and further polarise society. The critical infrastructure of the state and businesses is poorly prepared and protected against cyber-attacks. The state's main task becomes preserving basic economic, social and institutional functionality. Slovakia locks itself into a self-reinforcing spiral of decline from which it becomes ever more difficult to find a way out.

Scenario 2: Stagnation and falling behind

The global environment remains polarised but relatively stable. The European Union gradually loses part of its global economic competitiveness, yet key industrial and technological sectors are transformed and adapt to new conditions. EU resources are concentrated in these sectors, benefiting mainly the more developed member states. The uneven performance of European economies generates growing internal tensions between ambitions for deeper integration and demands for greater decision-making autonomy.

The development trajectory is characterised by an absence of major structural change, but also by the absence of dramatic economic or societal collapse. Slovakia responds to external pressures more as an object than as an actor; it does not systematically shape its own path. Periods of modest economic growth alternate with stagnation and decline. Political cycles shorten the horizon for strategic decision-making. The country postpones necessary reforms, fails to implement them systematically and does not seize the opportunities offered by artificial intelligence, digitalisation and the green transition. The gap with the most technologically advanced countries of the EU and the world widens. The gradual accumulation of deferred strategic decisions creates the conditions for a future economic and social crisis.

The core of the economy continues to be export-oriented industrial production, whose competitiveness is weakened by rising competition from other EU countries and Asia. Geopolitical uncertainty leads to increased spending on defence and security. This partly supports industrial output, but at the same time diverts resources away from investment in education, healthcare, research and ecological transformation.

Economically stronger regions at the core of the EU, which also offer more attractive life opportunities, increasingly attract young and skilled people from peripheral countries, including Slovakia. Dependence on foreign capital and technology persists; intense global competition for strategic resources drives up input prices and weakens competitiveness.

A high share of low-carbon energy functions as a passive safety net that prevents collapse, but is not a strategic driver of development. Stabilisation of global fossil fuel markets helps slow negative trends and the decline of export-oriented industry. Energy availability also helps to moderate the widening digital gap with more advanced economies. Shortages of critical raw materials are only partially offset by the introduction of circular-economy principles.

Digitalisation and artificial intelligence penetrate the economy mainly through foreign investors, while domestic innovation capacity grows in selected sectors. Technological change increases structural unemployment, especially in vulnerable regions in the south and east of Slovakia. Mandatory state spending rises and EU funds shrink, concentrating in more developed countries. This increases tensions both within the Union and within Slovakia. The costs of servicing public debt and financing defence and security grow, reducing investment in healthcare. Waiting times lengthen and access to health and social care deteriorates.

The population gradually declines and the proportion of older age groups rises. This is partly offset by ad-hoc, mostly low-skilled immigration from third countries. While this alleviates some labour-market problems, it also becomes a source of cultural tension and political conflict. The population concentrates in larger cities, which remain relatively stable, providing jobs and a decent quality of life.

Biodiversity and landscape quality gradually deteriorate. Adaptation to climate change remains largely reactive and unsystematic, with measures adopted mainly after major climate events. Emissions and dependence on fossil fuels decrease more as a result of EU regulation than as the outcome of a long-term national strategy.

The accumulation of adverse trends leads to rising social tensions. Political competition is increasingly shaped by new technologies and built on polarisation and radicalisation. The critical infrastructure of the state and firms remains vulnerable to hybrid threats and cyber-attacks. Trust among citizens and in public institutions declines, making it harder to push through necessary reforms in healthcare, education and public administration. The state, its institutions and the economy remain functional, but this very relative functionality creates a sense of stability that masks the gradual erosion of the country's development potential.

Scenario 3: Pragmatic resilience

The global order stabilises, but the world is increasingly divided into geopolitical and economic blocs. The dominant axis remains the competition between the United States and China. Trade wars and the fragmentation of global markets weaken export-oriented economies, especially Germany and the Central European countries, including Slovakia. The European Union struggles with periods of low growth and recession; technological lag deepens and leads to the gradual weakening of its global position. EU cohesion is fragile and maintained more by external pressure than by a shared project of prosperity. Investment under cohesion policy declines, while defence spending rises.

Despite this unfavourable external environment, Slovakia actively shapes its own path. Pragmatic compromises, targeted modernisation and resilience-building are conscious strategic choices. The core of the economy remains subcontracting industries dependent on foreign markets, but industry and services gradually modernise. They build on the existing industrial base in the automotive and engineering sectors, which becomes increasingly interconnected with expanding defence and cyber-security industries. The EU's policy of strategic autonomy offers the advantages of market protection, but retaliatory measures by third countries complicate the long-term competitiveness of the export-driven model.

Energy, treated as a strategically managed priority, becomes a pillar of stability. The development of nuclear power and renewable sources strengthens energy security and creates favourable conditions for investment. Digitalisation and automation increase productivity in industry and partly offset labour shortages. Slovakia does not become a technological leader, but it effectively adapts foreign technologies in specialised fields such as the automotive sector, defence, cyber security, water management and energy management, and in doing so builds a reputation as a reliable implementer. Tourism and agriculture develop further, benefiting from the country's natural capital, while knowledge-intensive services and higher value-added segments of the economy gain in importance.

The decline in the number of people of working age overlaps with job losses driven by digitalisation and artificial intelligence. Migration of low- as well as medium-skilled workers from third countries continues. This helps sustain competitiveness based on relatively lower labour costs, but also creates new social and political tensions. The negative effects of population ageing are partially mitigated through deliberate, managed steps involving technological solutions, targeted re-

training, raising the retirement age and developing the so-called silver economy.

Slovakia reforms public administration and consolidates public finances. Painful measures are pushed through, stabilising debt-servicing costs and maintaining standards of social and health protection despite a growing share of mandatory expenditure. The narrowing scope of EU cohesion policy limits the funds available for investment, yet the country preserves macro-economic stability. This is partly supported by the large number of citizens working abroad who retain strong ties to Slovakia and contribute to the domestic economy through investments and remittances.

Investment in health and social policy remains constrained by the state's fiscal capacity and is relatively low, but the number of preventive programmes increases and new technologies make it possible to improve service quality in the regions. Metropolitan areas continue to develop, while many rural areas face the consequences of depopulation. Targeted public policies and new service-delivery models mitigate the negative effects of these trends.

Slovakia approaches climate change as a complex challenge, with the focus gradually shifting from mitigation towards systematic adaptation. The country manages its natural resources with the aim of preserving environmental quality and the long-term sustainability of ecosystems. Raw-material and food security become major strategic priorities.

Social consensus remains fragile but functional, even though trust in institutions and among citizens fluctuates. Polarisation exists but does not escalate into radicalisation. The state succeeds in forging strategic compromises and harnessing part of the technological change for the benefit of the population. In this context and under these conditions, Slovakia is able to build pragmatic resilience and preserve its development potential.

Scenario 4: Intelligent transformation

After a period of turbulence, the global situation stabilises and begins to move in a positive direction. A multipolar environment creates favourable conditions for the development of international trade, investment and technological cooperation based on mutual benefit. The European Union achieves stable economic growth while also strengthening its ability to coordinate strategic policies in industry, energy, technology and security. Partnerships with countries in the Americas, Asia and Africa expand, and political and economic integration deepens, underpinned by a well-functioning single market for labour, capital, energy and services. International relations rest on respect for international law and predictable rules of cooperation. New security agreements contribute to greater stability, reducing geopolitical risks and defence costs.

In this environment, Slovakia is able to take active advantage of new opportunities and gradually establishes itself as a dynamic and attractive Central European economy. It becomes an active hub of international cooperation in research, technological development and innovation. Slovakia has a strong, long-term sustainable and price-competitive energy base built on successfully implemented investments in low-carbon energy sources. Energy stability supports the growth of existing enterprises and attracts new high value-added investments. Advanced technology sectors based on artificial intelligence expand, while effective policy frameworks and measures mitigate their negative impacts. The economy is characterised by high labour productivity, low energy intensity and a substantially smaller ecological footprint.

Industrial firms invest on a large scale in robotics, automation and artificial intelligence, making Slovakia a setting where new technological and organisational solutions are tested, validated and then scaled to European markets. A vibrant innovation ecosystem emerges, in which universities, research institutes, businesses, public administration and local communities collaborate intensively. Successful technological adaptation creates new, higher value-added jobs.

Demographic challenges are managed systematically and over the long term. Transparent and predictable rules for managed migration help address labour shortages. Slovakia becomes an attractive destination for qualified professionals, researchers and entrepreneurs from abroad. A safe environment, high living standards, high-quality food and a healthy and resilient natural environment create conditions for an inflow of talent, which, together with domestic capacities, drives the development of a knowledge-based economy. Slovakia

takes a proactive approach to climate change. Systematic adaptation in the landscape and forests, and in water management not only reduces vulnerability to climate extremes, but the preserved natural capital becomes a competitive advantage and a source of quality of life.

Mandatory expenditure remains under control thanks to structural reforms and growing public-sector revenues. A productive economy generates sufficient resources to finance high-quality education, healthcare, social services and other public goods. Comprehensive reforms of the tax system, public administration, healthcare, education and other sectors make it possible to create investment resources which, together with efficient use of European structural and investment funds, bring about a substantial improvement in quality of life.

Regional disparities are systematically reduced through a combination of investment, modern technologies and targeted development policies. Access to public services improves even in demographically weakened regions. Community and cultural life develop systematically, and the creative industries become an important part of the economy.

Trust between people and in public institutions is strengthened; the level of public debate rises and, despite pluralism of views, there is an ability to find consensus on the fundamental issues of how the country functions and where it is heading. Modern technologies are used effectively to design proactive public policies and to manage climate, social and security challenges. Although growing digitalisation brings new vulnerabilities, Slovakia keeps pace with technological developments, offers a high quality of life and possesses the institutional capacity and social consensus needed to tackle problems and make the most of emerging opportunities.

Path to the vision: where we must focus

This chapter defines six areas of transformation and 25 key changes that are essential for Slovakia's future. They are the prerequisites for achieving the ambition set out in each pillar of the Vision. At the same time, they strengthen the country's ability to manage potential crises and to become a resilient state capable of decisive action. If we neglect this preparation, our path will become more uncertain and we will move further away from the vision described in the chapter Vision: what we want to achieve.

On the path to a better quality of life, we must engage and mobilise everyone and draw on the best that Slovakia has to offer. An important milestone is the National and Regional Partnership Plan (NRPP) for 2028–2034, now in preparation, which gives us the opportunity to incorporate major reforms and investments. These should be designed to strengthen Slovakia's resilience and its capacity to prosper in times of stability as well as to withstand periods of crisis.



Reform the state

- Restore healthy public finances
- Reshape the tax mix
- Improve public service quality and accessibility
- Modernise territorial organisation of the state



Transform the economy

- Strengthen research and innovation
- Create a more attractive business environment
- Develop regional innovation ecosystems
- Build strategic industries and dual-use technologies
- Ensure affordable and diversified electricity



Invest in people

- Educate for the age of artificial intelligence
- Build internationally attractive universities
- Unlock the potential of underrepresented groups
- Attract, retain and better harness talent



Prevent disease

- Promote healthy diets and reduce addiction
- Foster a culture of physical activity and sport
- Strengthen prevention and personal responsibility for health
- Improve air quality, water quality and public spaces
- Invest in mental health



Unite and cultivate society

- Unite people around a shared national story
- Strengthen trust
- Build strong civil society
- Strengthen cultural vitality



Protect Slovakia from emerging threats

- Be an credible ally
- Integrate response to security threats
- Protect critical infrastructure and build a resilient society

Reform the state



The state is the driving force behind the systemic changes that are needed.¹⁰⁸ The longer it delays these changes, the higher the price society will pay. Deteriorating public finances will translate into lower living standards and weaker infrastructure quality. Young people will stop seeing their future in Slovakia, and climate change will increase pressure on the environment and public health. If, at the same time, investment in innovation weakens, Slovakia will gradually lose its competitiveness.

The state must be better at meeting public goals, providing quality services and caring for all its citizens. It must be able to respond promptly and effectively to emerging challenges and changing conditions. This requires greater openness to innovation and a willingness to move beyond familiar, established solutions. Taking decisions is not enough; they must be translated into practice. Public resources must be seen as valuable and limited, and this must be reflected in overall fiscal management. Slovakia needs to generate its own resources for strategic investment and reserves for times of crisis. It needs an optimised tax system and regulation that increase competitiveness without undermining individual dignity or social cohesion. All four of these changes are equally important. Some of them are prerequisites for others, and they must therefore be prioritised over time.

Restore healthy public finances

Positive scenarios for further development require, first and foremost, a gradual reduction of the public-finance deficit towards balanced general-government budgets, combined with investment in growth-enhancing reforms. The focus must be on more efficient use of public resources, especially temporary funds from the EU. Emphasis must be placed on investment in the public interest, including reducing corruption and improving the enforceability of law. Corruption reduces the benefit society derives from public spending. Lack of trust in the fair functioning of rules and lengthy court proceedings weaken people's and firms' willingness to pay taxes, invest and contribute to the country's development. Slovakia must significantly improve the targeting of social transfers to households. There is also room

to increase the efficiency of the state's operating costs that are financed from the national budget. Public investment must be allocated transparently, in line with strategic objectives and in accordance with the value-for-money principle. If reforms succeed in delivering stronger economic growth, the same level of public debt will be easier for Slovakia to manage.

Reshape the tax mix

The current tax mix is unable to effectively meet the demands placed on it. By changing it, we can support economic growth, increase the fiscal independence of local self-government, strengthen its accountability to residents and, at the same time, enable better regulation of negative social and environmental externalities. Its main features should include

an overall simplification of the tax system, lower taxation of labour, incentives for both work and investment, greater emphasis on property and environmental taxes and a closer link between tax revenues and the territories concerned. The system should also promote healthy lifestyles by introducing taxes on products with negative impacts on health, and ensure readiness for the challenges of the digital economy and technological change.

Improve the quality and accessibility of public services

High-quality services and innovation in the public sector require the courage to step out of the comfort zone of established routines. They require an acknowledgment that tried-and-tested procedures are no longer sufficient, that the formal completion of tasks is not the same as real outcomes for citizens, and that public administration cannot remain merely a custodian of the status quo. Caution is therefore understandable and often encountered: the public sector works with public resources, is subject to scrutiny, and mistakes can have political as well as personal consequences. The problem arises when caution turns into inaction, and when it becomes safer to do nothing than to try a different, potentially better solution. Courage to innovate does not mean reckless experimentation or disregarding rules. It means the ability to create space for sensible pilot solutions, to test them, learn from mistakes and then scale up what works. Slovakia needs a public sector that is not afraid to identify weaknesses, cross ministerial boundaries and seek solutions based on people's needs rather than institutional convenience. The first important innovation must be the decision whether we reward only flawless compliance with procedures, or also responsible efforts to achieve better outcomes. Without the courage to change this, innovation will remain only on paper or in isolated pilots. With it, innovation can become a practical tool of a modern state.

Modernise the territorial organisation of the state

Territorial self-government plays a key role in the everyday provision of public services, from education to preventive care. Its current structure has, however, weakened this capacity and has gradually become a constraint on further spatial development and on residents' quality of life. Reform of territorial self-government is therefore a necessary precondition for kick-starting change across the country. Reducing the number of administrative units will strengthen local governments. Institutional changes will improve their ability to design and implement local public policies. The pool of capable candidates in politics will expand and competition between them will be reinforced, which should be reflected in higher-quality electoral programmes. The reform will also bring significant benefits in the financial sphere. Administrative units with larger budgets will be able to implement more ambitious infrastructure projects. A revised tax mix will increase the fiscal autonomy of local governments, strengthen their regulatory tools and enhance accountability to residents. Reducing the number of administrative units will release substantial financial resources currently tied up in the fragmented structure. A suitably chosen scale will respect residents' natural daily movements and their needs. This will strengthen the relationship and motivation of territorial units to participate actively in governing their area and will build public trust in regional self-government.

Transform the economy



The current economic model, based on foreign investment and a strong automotive industry, has been and remains the core of Slovakia's prosperity. At the same time, it is our greatest economic vulnerability, especially in the face of geopolitical and technological change. Slovakia therefore needs a new economic model that better rewards the work invested, creates higher value, raises household incomes and attracts talent despite demographic projections. If we fail to act, accelerated demographic decline without growth in added value and firm-level productivity will reduce the resources available for investment in quality of life.

Economic transformation will require higher levels of investment than the average in the countries we aim to converge towards. Investment must therefore be channelled into improving the quality of research, innovation and education at all levels, and this investment must be systematically transformed into new products, services and technological solutions with high added value. Priority should be given to areas in which Slovakia already has a competitive base and, at the same time, a national security or development need. Higher levels of investment and changes in investment patterns will lead to economic diversification, the scaling up of businesses and a shift towards higher value-added activities within global value chains. A stable and predictable business environment, and the ability to compete with peer countries both on the quality and cost of labour and other inputs, will motivate firms to invest in Slovakia. The foundation of a competitive economy is a diversified low-carbon energy sector that delivers affordable energy, reduces dependence on other countries and creates stable conditions for investment.

Strengthen research and innovation

Investment in research and innovation delivers high returns for society, but it requires a much greater intensity and more targeted focus on excellent research and development than at present. Universities, the Slovak Academy of Sciences and sectoral research organisations need to be transformed into open, highly professional institutions capable of competing in the global race for top talent. The state must continuously

strengthen its ability to identify excellent research and create conditions for internationally outstanding teams to work with the best possible institutional support and to grow. Funding for excellent teams must be intensified. Success at European or global level should be an undisputed criterion of quality. Once excellent institutions have been funded up to a competitive level, opening up significantly to talent from around the world will further improve the quality of research and higher education. A fundamental change in science

governance that more closely links research to societal needs is also a necessary condition if investment in research is to be increased effectively.

Create a more attractive business environment

A predictable and fair business environment is based on effective enforcement of the law, transparent law-making and intelligent regulation. If the state establishes a functioning system of economic competition and limits monopolistic and oligopolistic structures, costs across the economy will fall and the creation of new firms and innovative behaviour will be supported. The state should curb excessive regulatory interventions, simplify business conditions and prepare major changes through constructive dialogue with employers and trade unions. Targeted support is needed above all for small and medium-sized enterprises in accessing growth capital so that they can succeed in international markets. A competitive level of social contributions on labour, the removal of distortions in the electricity market, access to growth finance and retraining of the population in line with labour-market needs will also contribute to a more attractive economic environment.

Develop regional innovation ecosystems

Businesses, the public sector, civil society and research institutions need to work together to build an ecosystem that responds flexibly to the needs of the business environment and supports regional development. Regional capitals, as centres of economic and social life, provide a unique space for connecting research, entrepreneurship and talent. They have the potential to foster job creation, region-specific innovation and regional innovation hubs. Academic institutions should be able and motivated to link their research teams and infrastructure to local development needs, connect with potential users of knowledge and support the creation of new firms. Businesses and the public sector must, in turn, learn to articulate their challenges, commission research teams to address them and create suitable conditions for testing and scaling solutions. A well-designed territorial reform can provide stakeholders with both financial incentives and powers to develop the local economy and its links to talent over the long term.

Build strategic industries and dual-use technologies

Future success also depends critically on the ability to support the creation of new firms and the development of existing ones in areas that represent our greatest challenges. These include climate change, energy security, defence, the incomplete transformation of the automotive industry and population ageing. The ability to diversify economic activities is decisive for economic resilience. Slovakia can build on its strengths: an advanced sectoral and industrial base with potential for new materials, robotics, dual-use mobility, nuclear energy and cyber security. The state should strengthen selected innovation domains through funding, regulation and support for talent, with the aim of achieving global leadership in them. It should also link these domains to interdisciplinary applied research. At the same time, it can create conditions for the emergence and mutual connection of innovative firms. The country's favourable size and location make it possible to test innovations and technologies on a smaller but sophisticated market.

Ensure affordable and diversified electricity

Economic transformation, maintaining the existing industrial and service base, and the rise of artificial intelligence and data-driven technologies all presuppose a stable, price-competitive, low-carbon energy system and access to strategic raw materials. Slovakia must therefore gradually transform into a more electrified and low-carbon economy. The electrification of industry, services and transport will create conditions for smart demand management, dynamic tariffs and more extensive use of artificial intelligence in the energy sector, thereby contributing to a more efficient and flexible energy system. Growing demand for electricity will be met through a combination of nuclear power, renewable sources and alternative fuels. Optimising the energy mix will strengthen national security by reducing dependence on individual suppliers and volatile fossil-fuel markets. This optimisation must proceed in a technologically neutral and economically sustainable way and must not undermine competitiveness. The reform of the EU electricity market and the system of end-user electricity prices for both industry and households should be designed in the public interest, and the costs of the transition should be shared fairly.

Invest in people



Human capital was Slovakia's competitive advantage at the beginning of the new millennium. Relatively low-cost but skilled labour became one of the main drivers of foreign investment inflows and subsequent economic growth. Slovakia's standard of living moved closer to that of EU countries. Today, for the first time in modern history, we face a decline in the number of people of working age. With falling fertility and overall demographic decline, each person becomes more important for the economy. Investment in people's development yields increasingly high returns. If we want to avoid a crisis scenario or economic contraction, the shrinking workforce will have to be offset by higher productivity among the remaining workers, including through the use of new technologies.

If talent is to be the engine of development, we need a substantial improvement in education at all levels, including lifelong learning. The rise of artificial intelligence can be an opportunity for faster growth, but only if society is prepared for it. In addition to technical knowledge, we must therefore develop people's ability to learn, collaborate, adapt to change and navigate an increasingly complex world. Competences that are key to further learning are becoming more important. Beyond improving the quality of education, individuals must be supported during breaks and changes in their career paths. Managed labour migration can also be used to target shortages in specific occupations. Migration through higher education in particular attracts people at an age that benefits the economy and makes it possible to direct recruitment more precisely towards higher-skilled professions.

Educate for the age of artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence is dramatically transforming people's lives. Its exact impacts cannot be predicted with certainty, but we already know it affects people's cognitive, emotional and social capacities. The answer to its risks lies in a flexible and high-quality education system – from pre-primary education, through an attractive secondary and higher-education environment linked to practice, all the way to systematic and accessible lifelong learning in every

region and for every group of the population. Curricula are gradually reducing the volume of detailed knowledge and focusing on developing the key competences needed for further learning. More flexible teaching places greater demands on teachers and on their quality, and also on the support they receive in their work. Better teaching of key competences will make further education during a person's working life easier. To realise the potential of all children and adults, it is necessary to remove barriers related, for example,

to language skills, ethnicity, intergenerational poverty or family background, and to strengthen the inclusiveness of education.

Develop internationally attractive universities

Slovakia needs universities that can systematically attract the best Slovak and foreign secondary-school graduates through the quality of their study programmes, environment and opportunities. Achieving this goal requires improvements in several areas: the quality of teaching, the range of attractive disciplines on offer, links to practice, student support, communication with applicants, and the appeal of internal and public spaces and facilities. Progress in any of these areas calls for an effective increase in investment in the sector so that conditions at Slovak universities are internationally comparable. The internationalisation of universities will attract students and future workers from other countries in the age and education groups Slovakia needs. A necessary condition, however, is their integration, which must begin during their university studies.

Unlock the potential of underrepresented groups

Better-developed key competences will prepare individuals for repeated retraining. As career changes and interruptions become more frequent, people will need expanded support from public employment services in the form of professional career counselling and a wide range of accessible training courses. The long-term unemployed should receive comprehensive, individually tailored activation support, including professional courses that raise or formalise their level of education. The greatest activation potential lies in integrating marginalised residents, people with disabilities and those just before or after retirement age into the labour market. Activation services should also be extended to additional groups, such as stay-at-home parents, people currently outside the labour market and citizens of other countries residing in Slovakia.

Attract, retain and make better use of talent

To avoid negative scenarios, we must improve our ability to attract, retain and make better use of talent. Higher-quality, more inclusive education should help us identify talent more effectively, so that it can be nurtured from an early age. Even then, domestic labour-force resources will not be sufficient to meet the needs of the economy. It will therefore be necessary to mitigate the decline in the working-age population through labour migration, managed in an efficient way that minimises barriers for workers from other countries who wish to come and work in Slovakia. For occupations facing acute labour shortages, it is worthwhile investing in active recruitment. Slovakia can become an attractive destination for work and life if it combines building a strong brand for the country and its largest cities with effectively removing barriers to the arrival and integration of workers and their families. Maintaining ties with Slovak citizens who have left the country is also economically advantageous. These are valuable contacts with emotional and cultural ties to Slovakia who may be willing to contribute economically through their experience, launch entrepreneurial activities or eventually return home. Investment in maintaining contact with the diaspora and with people who have a connection to Slovakia therefore has the potential for high returns.

Prevent disease



A healthier population enjoys a better quality of life, remains economically active for longer and reduces pressure on public finances and healthcare capacity. It is also more resilient to health and climate shocks such as epidemics or extreme heatwaves. In extreme situations, it strengthens the state's defence capability. Even in the most favourable scenario, healthcare capacity will struggle to keep up, because the population is ageing rapidly and medicine is becoming ever more technologically demanding. A shift towards prevention, which is the most effective way to reduce demand for care, is therefore one of the key preconditions for Slovakia to achieve its Vision by 2040 and improve the quality of life of its residents.

Strengthening prevention is not only about promoting healthy lifestyles, even though our diet, consumption of addictive substances, physical activity, environmental quality and mental wellbeing have the greatest impact on whether we are healthy in adulthood and old age. It is also about taking responsibility for one's own health, because without basic health literacy even the best measures fail when people do not know how to use them or how to behave responsibly. Prevention also depends on the environment in which we live: what we breathe, what we drink and the spaces in which we spend every day. Last but not least, it is about mental health, which influences everything else – from our motivation to be active, through relationships, to our functioning at school and at work.

Promote healthy diets and reduce addiction

The state should create conditions that make healthy food more accessible and more affordable than unhealthy alternatives. Particular attention must be paid to children and young people – from higher-quality meals in school canteens to education on the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Slovakia should set itself ambitious goals to reduce smoking, excessive alcohol consumption and the use of other addictive substances. The aim is for the emerging generation not to adopt addictive behaviours at all. Both the motivation and the opportunity to turn to these

substances will be lowered by consistent implementation of existing tools, the involvement of all stakeholders, and a systematic mix of awareness campaigns, tax and price policies, restrictions on availability, marketing regulation and a reduction in the social normalisation of use in public spaces. Adults with established addictions should have access to early diagnosis and, where needed, counselling, harm-reduction measures and treatment.

Foster a culture of physical activity and sport

Sport and regular physical activity must become a natural part of healthy and active living, and a nor-

mal element of disease prevention, mental-health support and healthy ageing. Slovakia will create conditions for daily movement across all age groups and regions, including safe public spaces, cycling routes, accessible sports facilities, school gyms and inclusive opportunities for people with disabilities. Organised, regular, group-based and inclusive sports activities can also strengthen local social ties, especially when they deliberately connect different generations, social groups and people with disabilities. Paralympic and inclusive sport must have equal status with other forms of sport and be systematically supported at school, regional and national level.

Strengthen prevention and personal responsibility for health

Healthy choices require sufficient information and the ability to navigate health care. Slovakia must systematically strengthen health literacy through health education in schools, trustworthy public communication, counselling, and active support from primary care and health insurers. As a result, people will be able to distinguish reliable information on nutrition and healthy lifestyles, prepare healthy meals, understand food labelling, appreciate the importance of physical activity, know about prevention and screening options, and take better care of their own health and that of their loved ones. These measures will increase people's awareness that they are responsible for their own health and health status.

Improve air quality, water quality and public spaces

Tightening air-quality standards and increasing pressure to reduce pollution, together with rising public awareness of environmental risks, will create room for cleaner air and lower rates of hospitalisation due to asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, heart attacks and strokes. At the same time, investment is needed to expand access to public water supply and sewerage systems, reducing the risks of water-borne diseases, parasitic infections and exposure to heavy metals and nitrates. It is also essential to support natural environments and urban greenery, which affect both mental and physical health. Vegetation in cities, especially mature trees, cools public spaces by 3 to 7 °C, which, in a changing climate with more heatwaves, has a significant impact on health and quality of life.

Invest in mental health

Mental health is an integral part of overall health, fundamentally affects population health outcomes and is becoming one of the defining public-health challenges of the 21st century. It is therefore essential for Slovakia to recognise mental-health care as an equal part of public health and primary care, supported systematically in schools and provided through accessible outpatient and community care, as well as crisis intervention for all age groups. Measures should also focus on new forms of addiction, particularly those linked to digital technologies and social media. The expected result will be fewer suicides and chronic mental disorders, reduced pressure on acute psychiatric and social services, and more people able to function fully in school, work and family life.

Unite and cultivate society



Society needs to rebuild trust and establish a basic consensus on what truly matters for Slovakia. A divided society cannot collaborate effectively in managing crises or implementing necessary changes. By contrast, trust between people, in public institutions and in the social system itself strengthens the country's resilience, facilitates cooperation and supports both economic and social development. Slovakia has long ranked among the countries with the lowest levels of generalised trust in Europe and is simultaneously facing growing polarisation, social isolation and weakening trust in public institutions. These factors reduce society's ability to cooperate, conduct constructive dialogue and accept necessary reforms. Strengthening social trust, civic participation and cultural vitality is therefore not an optional add-on to development, but one of the conditions for Slovakia's successful future and its capacity to cope with technological, climate, demographic and geopolitical challenges.

Unite people around a shared national story

Building a shared story of Slovakia is one of the fundamental preconditions for greater social cohesion, resilience and long-term prosperity. A shared story does not mean uniformity of opinions or suppression of legitimate social conflict. It means that different groups within the population are able to see themselves as part of one democratic community and to participate in shaping its future. Such a story must be grounded in an open reflection on the past, a critical understanding of the present and the ability to imagine the future in a changing world. It should reflect the diversity of society and take into account the experiences of people from different regions, generations and social groups, as well as members of national minorities and other communities that together form the country. At the same time, it should recognise Slovakia's historical and current ties to Europe and the awareness that the country is part of a wider European and global community. The education system, culture and the arts, media, scientific and memory institutions, public administration, local governments, civil society and other actors in public life play a key role in creating and transmitting this shared story. They provide

space for dialogue, exchange of experience and collective search for answers to contemporary challenges, and they help strengthen trust, a sense of belonging and democratic culture in society.

Strengthen trust

Trust between people and trust in public institutions are among the basic prerequisites of a functioning democracy and a prosperous country. Societies with higher levels of trust can cooperate more effectively, manage crises better and make long-term decisions. Low trust, by contrast, weakens relations between groups, fosters social fragmentation and reduces the state's capacity to implement necessary reforms. Building trust requires, above all, high-quality, competent and predictable public institutions that provide services fairly, reliably and without barriers. It is also necessary to create more opportunities for cooperation between different population groups, to support community life and to strengthen local ties. Local governments, schools, churches, cultural, sports and community organisations, as well as informal networks, all play an important role. In 2040, churches in Slovakia will continue to contribute to the development of humanity, solidarity and mutual respect in society. An es-

sential condition for building trust is the culture of public communication. Public institutions, political leaders, media and other actors in public life should contribute to a factual, respectful and inclusive dialogue based on evidence, transparency and accountability.

Build a strong civil society

From local communities and church associations, through volunteering, to non-profit, professional and cultural organisations, civil society is the backbone of democracy and an important source of social resilience. Its role ranges from providing services to vulnerable groups and individuals to bringing forward innovations and creating space for public debate. The crises of recent years have shown that civil-society organisations can often respond more quickly and flexibly than state institutions. Civil society is also a guardian of transparency and helps build social cohesion and trust. At the same time, it creates opportunities for people to participate in public life and strengthens the country's democratic culture. It is therefore necessary to systematically reduce administrative barriers, stabilise the financing of the civic sector and create conditions for the long-term development of community initiatives, volunteering and participatory decision-making. Without a stable and thriving civil society, it will be difficult to transform the economy, improve the quality of democracy, strengthen the country's security and resilience, and enhance quality of life.

Strengthen cultural vitality

Culture is another key source of social cohesion, creativity and national resilience. Through art, architecture, cultural heritage, media and everyday cultural experiences, it helps people understand the world around them, build relationships and find meaning in times of rapid social change. Access to culture and opportunities to participate actively in cultural life strengthen the sense of belonging, support intergenerational and intercultural dialogue and contribute to the development of a democratic society. Culture is also an important driver of regional development, the attractiveness of cities and towns and the growth of the creative economy. Supporting a free, open and diverse cultural sphere is therefore an investment in quality of life, social resilience and the future prosperity of Slovakia.

Protect Slovakia from emerging threats



Security is a fundamental condition for preserving and developing the state and for ensuring quality of life. Against a backdrop of growing geopolitical rivalry, the climate crisis and technological change, it is not merely a question of defending the state against external attack. Stability and security shape companies' willingness to invest, the country's attractiveness for talent, and the state's capacity to finance improvements in quality of life. Slovakia must actively and strategically prepare for climate, resource, food, cyber and security risks, including military threats.

The external dimension of security lies in active engagement in international security structures and participation in their development. The internal dimension concerns protection against threats that directly affect the population: from climate risks such as floods and droughts, through food security and the resilience of critical infrastructure, to maintaining safe streets, towns and cities. Without strong alliances, Slovakia would have to spend disproportionate resources on its own defence at the expense of development. Without professional coordination of security risks, every crisis will be addressed too late, at higher cost and with lower chances of success.

Be an indispensable ally

Slovakia will systematically consolidate its position as a trustworthy and strategically relevant partner and ally: a transparent country, grounded in its values, with a clear direction. This will be underpinned by a firm anchoring within the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the predictability of its foreign policy, and the consistent fulfilment of its commitments. This will translate into security guarantees, access to intelligence, and investor confidence. However, in a climate of growing geopolitical uncertainty, a commitment to shared values and a financial contribution to collective defence may not be enough. Slovakia will also need to develop selected strategically important capabilities and engage in a targeted manner in key European and transatlantic value chains in defence, cyber security, energy, logistics, research and critical technologies.

Integrate the management of security risks and crises

Slovakia needs an integrated approach to managing security risks that takes into account the interconnections between energy, food and raw materials security, climate risks, hybrid and cyber attacks, the protection of critical infrastructure and military threats. It will include an integrated crisis management system with clearly defined responsibilities for system development and expert leadership of the response according to the type of crisis, underpinned by systematic risk assessment, scenario planning, regular joint exercises and learning from their outcomes and from crises that have been successfully managed.

Protect critical infrastructure and build resilient society

Slovakia must systematically build resilience across the whole of society – from individuals and communities, through municipalities and regions, businesses, all the way to state institutions. This is not about preparing for a single crisis, but about the ability to face different types of threats: hybrid and information operations, cyber attacks, climate and environmental change, risks related to water, energy, food security and defence. The foundation is a society that understands the value of democracy and freedom, can recognise the origins of risks, and appreciates the need to defend the public interest and invest in building and protecting critical infrastructure, even at the cost of some discomfort.

Citizens cannot be left to face these challenges alone. They need education, accessible information, functioning infrastructure, civil protection and support from both the state and local governments. Equally important is a state with sufficient professionals, well-designed policies and institutions capable of detecting and managing risks in time. Building resilience must therefore be a permanent public policy priority – from civic education, strategic communication and cyber security, through civil-defence training, dual-use skills and regular exercises, to local solidarity networks. It is precisely at the local level that resilience is transformed from abstract strategy into the practical ability of communities to withstand crises and maintain the basic functioning of society.



Vision: what we want to achieve

The chapter Path to the vision: where we must focus described the essential conditions Slovakia needs to meet in order to navigate an uncertain future. The chapter Vision: what we want to achieve shows where this path leads. It offers a concrete picture of how the vision of a good quality of life by 2040 can be fulfilled across each of the four pillars: a dignified life, a successful Slovakia, a sustainable country and a modern state. Each pillar rests on several core ambitions that define what Slovakia aims to achieve in that area. The Vision also sets out the key preconditions on which its fulfilment depends.

Such a description of the future is not a guarantee, but a direction of travel. It comes closer to reality the more clearly we are able to imagine it, because policies, investments and everyday decisions can only be built on a concrete target state. This is precisely the task of the following sections of the chapter: to elaborate each pillar in a way that shows not only where we are heading, but also which framework conditions are critical for turning that direction into reality. Detailed development of implementation tools, investment policies, required changes and priorities will be set out in the follow-up document Strategy Slovakia 2040.

Improving quality of life as the main goal of the Vision

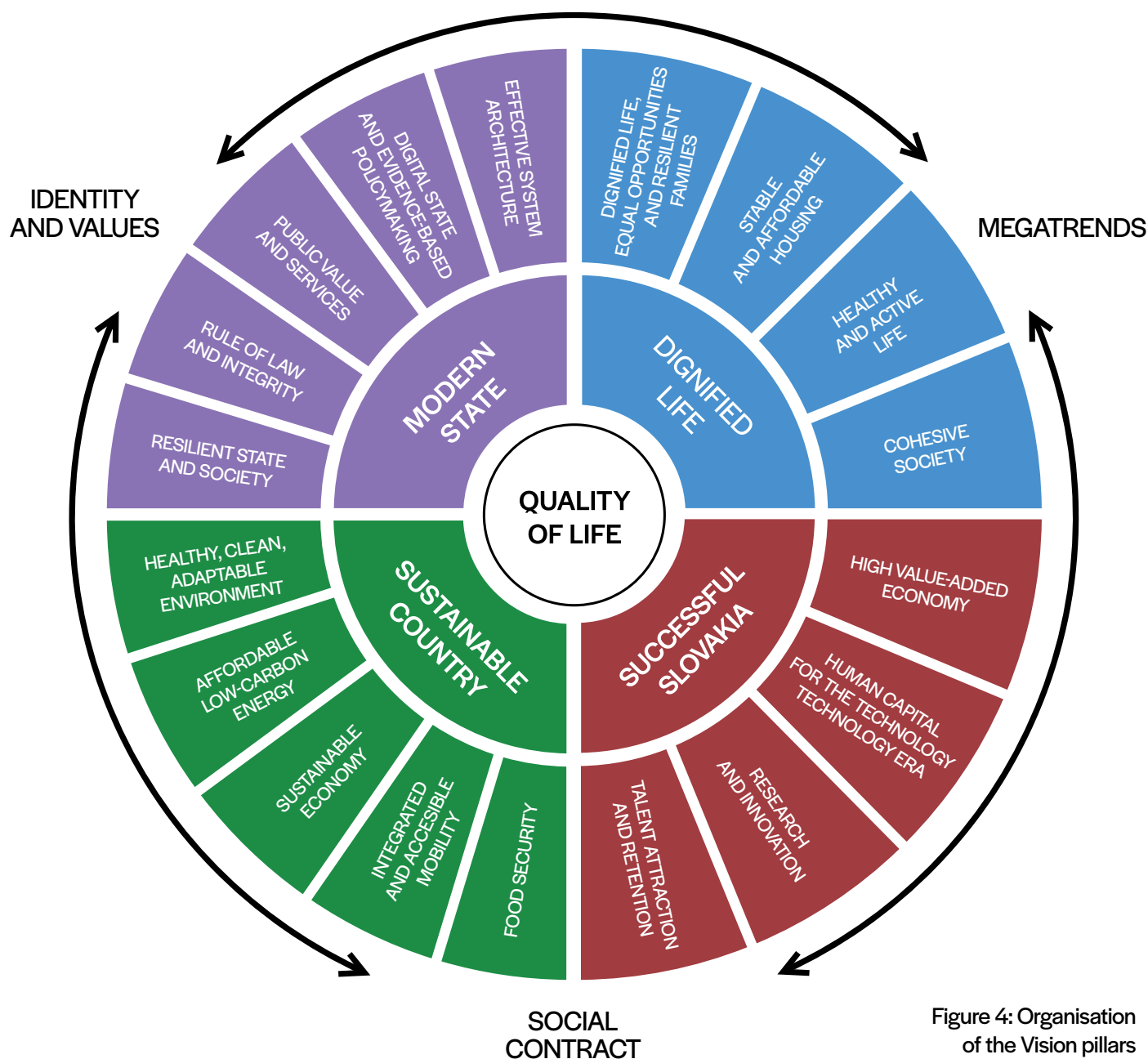


Figure 4: Organisation of the Vision pillars

The main objective of the Vision is to improve the quality of life of people in Slovakia, as illustrated in Figure 4. Surrounding this objective are four broad themes, which we call the pillars of the Vision: a dignified life, a successful Slovakia, a sustainable country and a modern state, further broken down into specific areas that give these pillars concrete form. These pillars are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. A dignified life is only possible where the economy generates sufficient resources, the state functions properly and the country remains healthy for future generations. At the same time, these pillars cannot be assessed in isolation. The international environment is changing and Slovakia must adapt to these changes. Clearly defined values and a cohesive society will help the country respond successfully.

Dignified life



By 2040 Slovakia aspires to be a country where a dignified life is the standard available to everyone, regardless of where they were born, where they live or what they do. Creating the conditions for a good quality

of life requires improving the situation in several interconnected areas. A person living in economic insecurity usually lacks the space or means to look after their health or mental wellbeing. Someone without decent housing finds it difficult to build a stable family life. In places where people do not know each other and do not trust one another, it is hard to push through solutions that require compromise and collective will. That is why quality of life cannot be built piece by piece. The individual areas are interdependent and must be developed simultaneously.

Dignified life, equal opportunities and resilient families

The foundation of a rising quality of life in Slovakia will be a decent standard of living and resilience to social risks. It must be the state's ambition that by 2040 Slovakia moves closer to the average living standard of EU

countries, and that work becomes a source of higher living standards and better quality of life not only for working people themselves but also for their families. The risk of poverty and social exclusion should be kept low, as should the incidence of material deprivation. Households should become more financially resilient, and regional differences in living standards should gradually diminish.

The aim is for disadvantages to be passed on less and less from one generation to the next, and for the life chances of people from different social backgrounds to converge. In periods of life when people face higher risks, it is essential that the state improves access to effective and adequate protection while also supporting self-reliance and intergenerational mobility. People who depend on the help of others should have access to high-quality, affordable services. Families with children should be able to rely on an accessible network of child-care. Effective support from families, public and non-public actors should make it possible for people to choose social services as close as possible to their family and community.

Poverty and social exclusion will be reduced

Slovakia should move towards a society in which poverty and social exclusion cease to be systemic problems. The state will continue to develop the system of social benefits and social services so that it provides adequate assistance and support in difficult situations and at different stages of life, and encourages the meaningful integration of unemployed and economically inactive people into the labour market. The goal will be to help them find work, create conditions for rising employment and reduce the share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

This system should include a reformed subsistence minimum as a widely accepted minimal but decent standard of living. In this way Slovakia will mitigate differences in social risks while taking into account the types of regions and localities. In marginalised communities the state should create conditions to systematically break the cycle of intergenerational poverty and material deprivation, and remove barriers that prevent people in those communities from living a dignified life and being fully included in society. Paid work in the formal labour market will remain the key mechanism for reducing poverty and social exclusion.

Work will underpin rising living standards

Higher incomes are the basis of a decent standard of living. This goal also includes reducing the high tax and contribution burden on labour and continuing to support the protection of employees, including those who work in high-risk occupations. Social dialogue and collective bargaining should help improve the overall quality of working conditions. Growth in workers' incomes will in turn help household incomes catch up with the EU average. The state also needs to create stable conditions for balancing private and working life, especially, though not only, for the most vulnerable groups, such as parents in single-parent and large-family households.

Financial stability of households will increase

The objective is to strengthen the financial resilience of Slovak households. If households build up reserves to a greater extent, they will be better able to manage unexpected expenses without falling into poverty or excessive debt. Building reserves will become an important preventive tool against poverty and social exclusion. The result will be greater overall household resilience to economic turbulence, external shocks and unforeseen life events. The state's basic instruments for achieving this goal should be conditions that allow disposable labour income to grow so that households can create

financial reserves, and cooperation with the education system and the financial sector to raise the financial literacy of people in Slovakia.

Equality of life chances will be strengthened

The vision is for Slovakia to be a society in which individuals' life chances are less and less predetermined by social origin, health disadvantages or family status. Cooperation across several areas of state responsibility, including the system of social benefits, the social-services sector and the education system, must therefore become standard. Institutional conditions will be created for a society built on equal opportunities and a high degree of social mobility. Child poverty will gradually decline, access to pre-primary education for children from vulnerable households will improve, and the conditions for full participation in education at all levels will be strengthened. A modern system of social and legal protection for children and social guardianship, together with the ongoing deinstitutionalisation of alternative care in favour of family-based care, will also contribute to equal opportunities.

Availability and quality of social services will be strengthened

In an ageing society, resilient families and a strong social-services sector will become pillars of social-risk management. The availability, sustainability and quality of social services for people dependent on the help of others should improve so that these services reduce social risks and ease the burden on families, supporting both the client and their relatives.

By 2040, the public sector, in cooperation with civil society and the private sector, should increase the availability of long-term care services, with a particular focus on regions that have a higher share of older people and insufficient service capacity. Community-based and non-institutional forms of care, along with services supporting families and children, will thus become more accessible and of higher quality. The state should create a cross-ministerial, coordinated system that effectively supports people at risk of social exclusion or poverty, including during emergencies and crises. It should cover crisis intervention, preventive activities, accessible services, mental-health support and professional counselling in the health, education and social sectors. The positive impact of social services on quality of life depends on their long-term financial and staffing sustainability.

Stable and affordable housing

help secure social and residential mobility and support inclusion and social mix. The goal is for settlements in Slovakia to develop in a compact, polycentric and sustainable way. If cities ensure efficient land use, this will contribute to creating a high-quality environment, including public spaces. Housing development should be functionally linked to the development of towns and rural areas across regions, while housing costs should gradually represent a smaller financial burden for people.

Housing quality will increase and the financial burden on households will decrease

A further objective is to make housing more affordable and a smaller financial risk. It is important that the share of households with high housing costs systematically declines and that the ratio between housing prices and incomes becomes more reasonable. This

By 2040, Slovakia's vision is to ensure more affordable housing for everyone by increasing the supply of homes and adjusting its structure so that it responds to social demand.

A higher share of rental housing will

will be achieved through faster growth in household incomes, state support for vulnerable groups and improved energy efficiency of residential buildings. At the same time, the qualitative aspects of both the existing and newly built housing stock need to improve.

Decent, high-quality and functionally adequate housing should be promoted, corresponding to the size and social structure of households. A lower rate of overcrowding among socially and economically disadvan-



taged groups will raise housing standards and quality. This ambition also includes improving the quality of the living environment, strengthening community life and cultivating the surrounding environment. Urban planning will be crucial in this, responding to demand for high-quality and accessible services and public spaces.

Housing demand and supply will be aligned

If cities and economic centres in Slovakia respond actively to growing housing demand, the imbalance between supply and demand will be reduced. The supply of affordable housing by 2040 can grow steadily thanks to efficient building procedures, well-designed public policies and incentives for the market, especially in cities and economically attractive areas. The priority should be construction in areas with good transport links and access to services and employment opportunities.

A compact and spatially efficient settlement structure that makes effective use of existing infrastructure will lower overall costs and improve quality of life. It is also necessary to speed up and simplify spatial-planning and building-permit processes and remove regulatory barriers that slow down the market's response to demand. A suitable alternative for housing development may be the conversion of unused, abandoned, neglected and derelict sites and buildings (known as 'brownfields'). However, their use is often limited by environmental contamination and the high cost of re-

generation, both of which will require targeted support to resolve.

The housing market will be more affordable and balanced

By 2040, Slovakia needs a housing market that is more stable, more diversified and able to offer affordable, high-quality solutions for different social groups. To preserve a rich social mix, the principle of residential inclusion should be proactively applied, preventing exclusion and segregation of disadvantaged population groups. Available support services should respond more flexibly to the changing life situations of households.

A higher share and greater diversity of rental housing, together with innovative approaches such as applying the Housing First principle, will improve access to housing for vulnerable households, including people experiencing homelessness. Rental housing will become a functional and long-term sustainable alternative to owner-occupied housing. While maintaining responsible lending standards, the state must also eliminate unequal treatment of groups at risk of poverty in the housing market, such as bias, discrimination and marginalisation when they buy or rent property. These practices block access to decent housing even when their purchasing power increases.

Healthy and active life in an ageing society

population ageing or reduce the strain on public finances. Slovakia's ambition is therefore to approach the EU average by 2040 not only in terms of life expectancy but, above all, in the number of years lived in good physical and mental health, and to significantly reduce today's health disparities among regions, educational levels and income groups.

This progress is based on three interconnected ambitions. Thanks to stronger prevention, early detection and higher-quality, more accessible care, the number of preventable deaths will decrease. Better management of chronic diseases and accessible, well-coordinated follow-up and long-term care will extend the portion of life lived in good health, allowing people to age more actively and with greater dignity. Healthier ageing, together with generational renew-

In this vision, health is both a key goal of a high quality of life and a cross-cutting prerequisite. Without a longer and, above all, healthier life, it is impossible to maintain a productive workforce, manage

al supported by a more favourable family climate, a more stable environment for parenthood and managed migration, will mitigate the dynamics of ageing and the economic burden on the working-age population.

A key prerequisite for these ambitions is accessible, high-quality health-care. This must be underpinned by a strong public health system and outpatient sector, sufficient staffing levels, the integration of health and social care, high-quality health data, funding and reimbursement mechanisms that incentivise providers to deliver high-quality care, and close links to science and innovation. Healthcare spending as a share of gross domestic product will continue to rise anyway, driven by an ageing population and the increasing technological complexity of medicine. This makes it all the more important that every additional euro be tied to measurable health outcomes and not merely to an increasing volume of care.

Preventable and premature mortality will be reduced

Slovakia's goal by 2040 should be to significantly reduce the number of preventable deaths. For deaths that can be prevented through intervention before the onset of disease, the focus must be on strengthening public health: more targeted management of risk factors, greater health literacy and promotion of healthier lifestyles, all of which will reduce the incidence of disease. Prevention is therefore also a key prerequisite for fulfilling the other parts of the vision, as outlined in the chapter Path to the vision: where we must focus.

For deaths from treatable diseases, early detection and high-quality, accessible treatment are crucial. Better organisation and higher participation in screening will detect diseases at an earlier stage, when treatment is more effective. The availability of healthcare personnel and better organisation of care, which removes financial and geographical barriers in access to treatment, will also be crucial. The shortage of healthcare professionals is a nationwide problem, but one that hits hardest in regions where the population's health is poorest. It will therefore be necessary to support training capacity, encourage people to enter the profession and retain staff within the system, with a particular focus on underserved areas. The main focus should be on nurses, the shortage of whom will be most acute, but also on pharmacists and other non-medical healthcare professionals. Their broader remit will enable them to take on some of the tasks currently carried out by doctors, bring care closer to patients and reduce waiting times for appointments.

Care should be systematically linked to science and innovation and move towards personalised medicine. Artificial intelligence should serve as an explainable and trustworthy decision-support tool for healthcare professionals in clinical practice. Access to early detection and high-quality treatment must not exclude vulnerable groups or the earliest stages of life. This will reduce infant mortality as well as regional, educational and gender disparities in mortality rates, and bring us closer to the vision of accessible, high-quality care for everyone, regardless of where they live, their education or their social status.

People will live more years in good health

Another health-related goal is for people in Slovakia to live longer without serious health limitations, to age with greater dignity and to enjoy greater mental stability. As the number of people living with chronic conditions and in need of care continues to grow, the key will be how well the system can care for them. Health and social care must therefore be systematically integrated, particularly in the areas of chronic conditions and mental health. The goal is to ensure that patients no longer have to navigate their way between outpatient clinics, hospitals and social services. Their journey through the system should be understandable, supported, effectively guided and enforceable.

Effective outpatient care, high-quality rehabilitation including spa care, and accessible follow-up, long-term, and home care will enable them to manage their limitations and remain active and self-sufficient for as long as possible. This will reduce the extent of health limitations in older age, extend the productive phase of life and decrease the incidence of serious mental disorders and crisis situations. People should spend the end of their lives

as much as possible in a natural, familiar, and supportive environment, thanks in part to systematically developed – and therefore accessible – palliative and hospice care. High-quality, interconnected health data and functional electronic health services will enable this continuity and a clear patient pathway, while also helping to monitor outcomes and improve care in a targeted manner.

Demographic trends will stabilise

Extending healthy life expectancy will ease the economic burden on the working-age population, as people will remain active longer and become dependent later in life. However, we will not be able to reverse the ageing trend by 2040, so in addition to healthier ageing, it must also be mitigated by generational renewal and managed migration. Slovakia needs to actively address demo-

graphic challenges and create conditions in which people can fulfil their aspirations for family life. To strengthen generational renewal, it is therefore essential to stabilise and, in the long term, increase the fertility rate.

Across generations, the trend towards childlessness and having only one child should be slowed. The environment for family life could be more supportive, ranging from stable relationships to the availability of childcare services and better work-life balance. Slovakia must also respond to the consequences of population ageing through an appropriate immigration policy that will help alleviate pressure on the economy and public finances. Thanks to this set of changes, it will be possible to mitigate the rapid pace of ageing and the economic burden on the working-age population of Slovakia.

Cohesive society

beyond the boundaries of the family and close-knit social groups. People will be able to cooperate even with those who are different from them, and they will view diversity as a natural part of society. Trust among people, as well as trust in public institutions, will foster cooperation, social stability and the ability to address shared challenges. This shift will be built on stronger community and civic ties, high-quality public spaces for dialogue and gathering, accessible culture and sports, as well as functioning and trustworthy institutions.

Slovakia's vision for 2040 is a society characterised by a high degree of trust and solidarity that extends

Public policies based on subsidiarity, solidarity and justice will help mitigate social inequalities, prevent social exclusion and strengthen a sense of belonging. Slovakia will be a society in which people actively participate in public life, respect differences and work together for the common good.

Social trust and relations between people will grow stronger

By 2040, Slovak society should transcend the boundaries of narrow social ties. It is necessary to increase people's ability to cooperate beyond their immediate circle, particularly by strengthening generalised trust and reducing social distance between groups. The priority must be the development of so-called 'bridging social capital', which connects various social, ethnic and generational groups and enables cooperation across differences. By 2040, this could help strengthen trust in society, increase acceptance of minorities and foster contact and cooperation among different population groups.

Trust in public institutions will be strengthened

Public institutions in Slovakia, including state and local government bodies, should become trusted partners of residents. They need to reduce uncertainty in social interactions, reinforce the perceived fairness of rules and thereby facilitate cooperation even among people who do not know one another. The priority should be to strengthen the professionalism and ethics of public administration and to increase the transparency, fairness and predictability of decision-making. This will improve people's experience when interacting with public institutions and make public policy-making more participatory.

Civil society and communities will be stronger

Civil society should be one of the cornerstones of a cohesive society in Slovakia. Civil society organisations, initiatives and volunteer associations should have a stable and supportive environment for their operation and development so that they can contribute to addressing social challenges and strengthening trust. At the same time, they should serve as partners to public institutions in the formulation and implementation of public policies, while maintaining their independence. Residents should be more involved in decision-making on public affairs and community life. This will be facilitated by the development of accessible community infrastructure and participatory processes that foster mutual trust between people, creative collaboration, civic engagement and solutions to local challenges.

Culture will strengthen social cohesion

Culture should be an integral part of a cohesive society and provide a space for people to come together, express their creativity and build mutual understanding among different groups. Participation in cultural life should be accessible regardless of region, age, social background or disability, and should help strengthen trust, empathy and community life. This requires high-quality, accessible cultural infrastructure, stable cultural institutions and a supportive environment for both public and independent cultural actors. A transparent system of support for culture and cultural heritage should ensure their development, protection and accessibility over the long term in every region, including in digital form. This should include the preservation of cultural monuments and support for their restoration and adaptive reuse as a stimulus for local economies and tourism. Culture should also promote dialogue across society, critical thinking and resilience to disinformation. The creativity and innovation generated by culture will contribute both to Slovakia's modern identity and to its economic growth.



Successful Slovakia



The goal of this vision is to increase the economy's ability to reward labour, as this determines the standard of living of the population. Further growth in labour productivity requires a qualitative shift

towards a new economic model. The existing, technologically advanced industrial base provides a suitable starting point for this. The resources generated must be invested to a greater extent in supporting activities with higher added value, the outputs of which are competitive in international markets. The role of the state and public investment is crucial in this area. It begins by enhancing the attractiveness of the business environment and encouraging investment, but also involves actively supporting internationally competitive businesses with innovative potential.

High-quality public services improve the quality of life and make the country more attractive to both domestic and international talent. A key step will be investing in high-quality and inclusive education at all levels. Higher education and excellent science and research, which will be more closely linked to real-world economic activities, are of particular importance. Another priority will be supporting individuals during career transitions so they can retrain or relocate for work where opportunities exist. This will facilitate the economy's shift towards higher-value-added activities.

Slovakia must also make the most of the potential of its workforce, whose numbers are already declining, by engaging the long-term unemployed, marginalised communities, stay-at-home parents and people approaching retirement. Even with the more intensive involvement of these groups, it will be necessary to sensibly design a migration policy that attracts a skilled workforce from abroad.

It is essential to incorporate all the priorities we are addressing throughout our vision into the new economic model. It will require investment that boosts productivity, an inclusive labour market, innovative thinking, the deep integration of knowledge from excellent research and development into all sectors, a fundamental reduction in bureaucracy in business and public administration, increased targeting of the social welfare system alongside a reduction in the social security burden on labour, and public administration reform.

A more productive economy

The basis of the proposed economic model is to generate greater value from the same amount of labour, capital and other factors, thereby enabling healthy income growth.

The goal is to raise labour productivity to at least 85% of the EU average. Labour productivity reflects the ability to generate income through work, and is therefore linked to quality of life as the overarching goal of the vision. Furthermore, it reflects changes in the nature of economic activities and is the result of structural and technological changes. Growth in labour productivity in the economy will be achieved, on the one hand, by reallocating workers towards sectors with better productivity prospects. This can be facilitated by supporting the movement of workers so that a large part of the workforce is not tied up in low-productivity activities, as well as through a flexible and attractive business environment and policies to support structural change. On the other hand, it is necessary to support measures to improve workers' capital endowment, the availability of capital for business growth, technological advancement and innovation.

In parallel with improving the return on labour, the rate of return on other inputs – capital, raw materials and energy – must also increase. We need to grow intensively – that is, through quality – which is not possible without increasing the rate of investment. Public investment must be directed where it is needed to support the flow of private investment. Sustainable public finances capable of effectively complementing private investment will become a prerequisite. A predictable, stable and attractive business environment is also a given. Only in such an environment can business activities emerge and thrive over the long term. When these two conditions are met, innovation, intellectual capital and the utilisation of talent will become the driving forces.

The priorities outlined here create a framework that will enable the economy to resume more robust growth while simultaneously undergoing a qualitative transformation towards a new model. Stable public finances, a better business environment and investment, together with forward-looking structural changes, form the foundation for improved long-term growth potential.

Public finances will be stabilised

Stable public finances are not an end in themselves; they are a factor in competitiveness and a driver of growth. The ambition by 2040 is for Slovakia to become a high-value-added economy, where public finances will not be a barrier to economic growth but, on the contrary, will contribute to productivity growth through efficient and well-targeted public investment. Public revenue will be shaped in a way that avoids in-

troducing selective, sector-specific taxes, and changes to the tax framework will be predictable and multi-year in character.

On the expenditure side, the state will move away from a passive redistributive role in favour of strategic and effective investment. The goal is to make social protection spending more targeted, as its total amount is a barrier to fiscal sustainability and a balanced budget. Public administration reform, including territorial reform,

will make public administration more efficient and financially sustainable. These and other measures will help maintain balanced public finances in the long term and free up resources for investing in economic growth, quality of life and reducing environmental burdens. The state should use EU funds primarily for high-value-added projects and the green transition. Investment in digital public services will reduce the bureaucratic burden on businesses and free up resources for innovation. The main driver of growth will be a skilled workforce capable of working with new technologies.

The state should shift the tax mix from labour taxes to indirect taxes, environmental taxes and property taxes. The tax and contribution burden on labour should be reduced systematically to the EU or OECD median, on a set timetable and with the shortfall offset by that shift. This will increase the incentive to work and start businesses, which will strengthen the country's competitiveness. As a result of these measures, public debt will fall below 50% of gross domestic product by 2040. The country will thus be prepared for the period of accelerated demographic decline that awaits it after 2040.

The business environment will contribute to competitiveness

Another objective is a predictable and fair business environment based on effective enforcement of the law and free from retroactive intervention. This will help increase the competitiveness of the corporate sector. If the state establishes the principles of smart regulation and functional competition by limiting monopolistic and oligopolistic structures, the cost of doing business will also decrease. This will support flexibility in the creation and dissolution of firms in the spirit of creative destruction, which will strengthen innovative behaviour in the long term.

The state should limit the number of regulatory interventions and reduce bureaucracy in the business environment. The government should not intervene in the business environment without discussion, but only after genuine consultation with employers and employee representatives. Gradually reducing the social security burden on labour to a competitive level will contribute to the attractiveness of the business environment. The state will reassess its energy pricing policy in the domestic market, particularly regarding electricity, and advocate for a more efficient structure of the European energy market.

The financial system will help innovative companies expand

The Slovak financial system will retain its stable, bank-oriented character, which will ensure financing for established entities. The banking sector will thus retain its position as a key partner in financing the transformation, and policies that reduce banks' lending capacity should be avoided. The capital market will gain in importance by investing in innovative small and medium-sized enterprises with the potential to expand into international markets and by supporting their growth into the category of medium and large enterprises. Venture and growth capital must draw on all sources, allocated effectively according to the enterprise's stage of growth: public, private, domestic and international. The tax system will provide positive incentives for private investors to diversify their portfolios. The public sector will assist in facilitating access to the deepening regional and pan-European capital markets as part of the Union's Savings and Investment Initiative, which will enable Slovak companies to secure resources for further scaling up their growth.

An attractive environment will attract investment

Regardless of whether capital in Slovakia is of domestic or foreign origin, it will require an attractive environment even if public funds to support it are significantly limited. The complementarity of domestic and foreign investment will ensure a sufficient flow of capital and prevent the problem of so-called 'dependent development', in which development is unilaterally dependent on the motivations of external actors. It will ensure the integration of large, foreign-owned enterprises with other structures in the business sector.

The investment rate should be higher than in the countries the Slovak economy aims to emulate. Productivity and the quality of investment are even more important for long-term economic growth. It is essential to prepare the economy to finance its own development needs even under conditions where foreign capital transfers are limited. It will therefore be necessary to expand all channels of investment funding. The creation of higher value added will translate into growth in household income (an increase in the marginal propensity to save) and in the corporate sector, which will raise the rate of return on capital, that is, its profitability as a factor in the business sector's attractiveness to domestic and foreign owners.

The state should support the recovery and growth of profit generation in the corporate sector by appropriately adjusting the tax and contribution mix to reflect the need to make the social security system more targeted. Through a combination of incentives from the tax and contribution system and the mobilisation of internal sources of growth, such as flexibly structured depreciation, investment in high-value-added activities will be supported.

Companies will be better capitalised

There should be a shift towards diversification in favour of multiple sources of capital. Effective capital formation will result from a preference for combining internal and external corporate sources, depending on the company's growth stage and size. Within the regulatory framework, special attention should be paid to the operations of new, innovative firms that face constraints in accumulating capital. Using existing functional structures and building an interconnected innovation ecosystem will stimulate investment activity across sectors and regions, including in firms that are reaching the limits of their growth and need to scale up further: that is, firms transitioning into the medium-sized enterprise sector.

At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen companies' motivation to accumulate intellectual capital through investment in science, research and innovation. Targeted support for the acquisition of so-called intellectual property assets will also change the structure of capital endowment. While maintaining the advantage of a relatively good level of equipment for work with machinery and devices, it will be necessary to address the weakness in the availability of those types of capital that are prerequisites for intellectually demanding work. These include research and development outputs, databases, software and similar products, the accumulation of which enables a shift in the nature of work towards more sophisticated activities. Such assets are not a substitute for, but rather an essential complement to, investment in machinery and equipment. They enable the implementation of forward-looking structural changes in production, supported by accelerated digital transformation. In modern economies, they are one of the drivers of growth. This will strengthen the digitalisation of firms and help small and medium-sized enterprises to scale up as intended.

Foreign direct investment can continue to play a significant role, but the approach to attracting it needs to be revised. When actively attracting foreign investment, the number of jobs created is becoming less and less important. A more important role is played by its contribution to value-added growth and the dissemination of technology to cooperating domestic companies. Such investment will create momentum for a network of com-

panies that will link up with it. Efforts by state agencies to attract investors do not and cannot replace an attractive investment environment; they are meant only to complement it with professional management by the state, with minimal interference from political representatives.

The economy will generate higher added value

Increasing the value-added rate has long been a declared priority. The rate is determined by the structure of economic activities; in industrial production, the share of value added in total output is relatively lower, while in services it is higher. It is also determined by a company's position in production chains, as well as by the characteristics of the product being created, with a higher rate of value added found in unique, technologically and intellectually more demanding products.

The traditionally strong role of industrial production in the economy must be viewed as an advantage and used as a foundation for the development of related, more intellectually demanding services. By 2040, Slovakia will succeed in combining its legacy of strong industrial orientation with elements of a new model of innovative activity featuring high value added. The share of industrial production in gross domestic product will decline, not through the curtailment of industry – which will continue to grow – but through the expansion of services that build upon advanced industry as their essential foundation.

In industrial production itself, we need to adjust our position in the production chain. Slovakia has managed to transition from being an exporter of simple, low-value-added goods to a leader in mass automobile production, and we should build on this success to become a leader in the development and manufacture of smart devices for industrial production. Examples include robots, smart manufacturing facilities and sophisticated, digitally interconnected production systems and tools that utilise artificial intelligence in industrial manufacturing and sophisticated services. A logical step towards a new model, which will be feasible by 2040, is to complement mass production with the development of robotic and smart solutions based (in part) on in-house research and development and supported by knowledge-intensive services – that is, by leveraging expertise, data and technologies. A mature manufacturing industry can serve as a magnet for applied research and development. This integration of research and development into industrial production must be supported to enrich industrial activity.

The manufacturing phase itself must be expanded to include earlier stages of the production chain, such as product conception and innovation, design, and research and development. Likewise, it should extend to lat-

er stages, such as marketing and customer service. This will create higher-quality, more intellectually demanding jobs and increase the level of added value. Material and energy intensity will decrease, while environmental sustainability will improve. A low-emission electricity mix, a high-performing energy sector and modern energy infrastructure will become a competitive advantage for Slovak industry and for the economy as a whole.

Creativity, innovation, and expertise will enhance our services

The service sector must also respond to emerging trends. Traditionally strong service sectors, such as IT security, shared services, and tourism, will be more closely linked to public research and development at universities, thereby increasing their innovative performance and ensuring access to skilled workers. Slovakia can build on its original advantage in the field of shared service centres and take them to the next level by moving toward more sophisticated activities. In its original form, this advantage is already being lost to countries with lower labour costs.

These processes are already evident in the services segment, and we can build on them or extend their principles to the broader services sector. This requires a shift from a model based on the use of cheap labour to a mod-

el of centres of expertise. It will be necessary to support their transformation into development centres and centres of excellence, where standards for processes, financial flows, IT, and digital technologies are set and tested on an international scale. To foster the development of these cutting-edge services, the government should ensure that labour legislation is modernized to reflect hybrid forms of work and new digital professions.

Cultural and creative activities are another area that can contribute to strengthening elements of the economy based on creativity, knowledge, intellectual property, and higher-value-added services. Sustainable tourism and the cultural and creative industries, together with agriculture and related industries, hold significant potential for the development of less developed regions.

The systematic use of digital technologies, automation and artificial intelligence can support a step change in productivity across sectors. Slovakia can become a development laboratory, where firms define the problems and innovators create scalable solutions. State support for digitalisation and the adoption of artificial intelligence should be technologically neutral and open to firms of all sizes.

Preparing people for technological progress

become a country with an educated population possessing the skills needed to manage changes in qualifications. At the same time, it aims to be a country that provides individuals with exceptional support during career transitions and offers realistic opportunities for changing career paths or upgrading their qualifications.

The accelerating socioeco-nomic impact of new technologies is transforming career paths and increasing the need for reskilling. Slovakia's vision for 2040 is to be prepared to capitalise on technological change and

Pupils and students will acquire key competences

Educational curricula at all levels will need to emphasise the acquisition of key competences that pupils and students gain in pre-career education but use throughout their lives.¹⁰⁹ These competences are also important for the ability to learn and make decisions about further education and career paths. These include knowledge and skills such as basic literacy, digital skills and multilingualism. They also encompass entrepreneur-

ial thinking, active citizenship and cultural awareness and expression. At the same time, Slovakia needs an education system that, in addition to knowledge and skills, also emphasises the mental health and psychological resilience of young people. Schools must be environments that help students cope with pressure to perform, develop critical thinking and foster a culture of dialogue and resilience against disinformation and hybrid threats. Fostering key competences also requires the appropriate development of the humanities and social sciences,

which are essential for critical thinking, social cohesion, democratic resilience and the responsible use of technology.

A necessary prerequisite for strengthening key competences within pre-career education and training is to increase the availability and quality of pre-primary education. Among other things, this will help reduce the disadvantages faced by pupils from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds when they enter primary school. At the start of primary education, this will also create opportunities for more inclusive education and supportive measures in the classroom.

Curricula will adapt to changing needs

Educational curricula should be able to respond flexibly to the changes brought about by technological advancement. The volume of knowledge should be reduced relatively, and greater emphasis should be placed on the acquisition of key competences. Slovakia's alarming decline in international comparisons of knowledge levels and basic skills among pupils in the younger year groups can be reversed if educational curricula are flexible and able to capitalise on the availability of new technologies.

Schools and teachers should have the freedom, conditions and support to co-create both educational content and teaching methods. If schools evaluate their innovative practices as successful, they will have the opportunity to expand them throughout the region and the country. This will help curb formalism and create an environment conducive to grassroots initiatives. At the same time, continuity will be maintained, and innovative methods and curricular content will gradually bring improvements to ongoing education. In order for curricular reform to be implemented at the secondary school level as well, the regional network of institutions and the structure of programmes must be streamlined.¹¹⁰

Non-formal education will serve as an active complement to formal education

A high-quality education system will also include accessible arts, extracurricular and non-formal education, which, through elementary arts schools, leisure centres and other forms of work with children and young people, fosters creativity, talent, cooperation, cultural literacy and a connection to societal values. More professional non-formal education in schools and pre-primary settings could also engage pupils and students with diverse educational needs in the learning process.

Both formal and non-formal education will be supported by auxiliary staff and the involvement of third-sector organisations, particularly for children from disadvantaged or otherwise marginalised backgrounds. This will reduce the proportion of pupils and students with low literacy levels, weaken the link between low literacy and socioeconomic background, and result in better inclusion of pupils and students with disabilities. The system should also devote adequate attention to gifted pupils and students through extracurricular and non-formal activities designed specifically for them, with appropriate incentives for organising such activities.

The teaching profession will be attractive

The role and quality of teachers are key to improving the quality of education. International experience shows that the return on investment in teacher quality is among the highest of all public investment. The state should therefore provide professional support and motivation to teachers in their work. This can take the form of adequate salaries, as well as non-wage benefits, such as preferential access to housing, stabilisation loans for education students, or opportunities for career advancement within the teaching profession. Support should primarily consist of expanded access to continuing education, including mentoring, soft skills training, professional support in developing curriculum content and in using new technologies in the classroom.

In the context of teacher education, special attention must be paid to working with new information technologies, children's mental health, and working with pupils and students with special needs, including the development of intercultural competences for working with children who speak a different native language. These elements must also be strengthened in the training of future teachers by faculties of education, whose activities will become even more closely aligned with educational practice thanks to an emphasis on innovation in education.

Last but not least, higher-quality teachers should also help increase the proportion of pupils with excellent results. Teachers will be encouraged to organise extracurricular activities, which will strengthen the non-formal component of pupils' and students' education. In these activities as well, they will be able to rely on the support of competent and motivated support staff.

Vocational education will be supported throughout working life

Given the increasingly frequent need to respond to technological changes, vocational specialisation should be shifted to later stages of education. The wide range of vocational secondary schools should therefore be supplemented by shorter vocational higher education programmes and incorporate lifelong learning to a greater extent, for example through second-chance education for adults who did not complete their secondary education and who are significantly disadvantaged in the labour market. At the same time, the range of shorter programmes with a stronger vocational component, such as micro-credentials or micro-qualifications, should be expanded at both the secondary and higher education levels. It will be necessary to transform the less effective pre-career education programmes into preparatory programmes with a stronger focus on basic and soft skills and to supplement them with mentoring and career counselling. These will help prepare students for the transition to mainstream vocational education or directly into the labour market.

As the level of adults' key competences gradually increases, it will be necessary to diversify the range and improve the quality of educational programmes in continuing education. The range of programmes can be expanded by creating short tertiary programmes or courses leading to micro-credentials under performance-based contracts with universities or at secondary schools. The state should introduce a system for validating informally acquired skills, which will enable people to obtain a certificate for the practical work they have performed. Lifelong learning programmes should be linked to the European Qualifications Framework through defined learning outcomes or performance standards for learning outcomes.

All segments of the population will be more actively engaged in the workforce

People will be forced to change career paths more and more often, so supporting individuals will become a priority, ensuring that every career break strengthens a person's future career. Workers who make more effective use of their qualifications on the job are more productive and, consequently, earn higher incomes. Professional career counselling provided through public employment services should contribute directly and responsively to aligning labour market needs with the skills and circumstances of individuals. In addition to retraining opportunities, employment services should also support workers' mobility to seek work where opportunities exist, so-called geographical mobility.

The existing capacity of employment offices should not be overburdened, despite the expected increase in temporary – that is, frictional – unemployment resulting from more frequent career interruptions. Population ageing will keep structural unemployment at a relatively low level over the long term. This new situation will therefore require a shift in thinking. Activation and retraining will be viewed as a cost-effective investment accessible to the broadest possible population. Resources and attention should be directed towards improving the quality of public employment services, as well as expanding the client base of these services. For example, marginalised citizens, as well as excluded or unregistered clients, will receive individualised support and counselling to help them find their way to employment services and job opportunities. Thanks to increased access to career counselling, continuing education and activation programmes, long-term unemployment should be reduced to a minimum.

Another large group of potential clients consists of parents on parental leave, who will need to be integrated into career counselling and retraining programmes so that, once their parental responsibilities allow, they can return to more suitable occupations. Similarly, as the population ages, there will be an increasing number of people who care for a close family member or who, for health reasons, are unable to work until retirement. One group that deserves special attention is older workers themselves, whose numbers in the labour market will increase as the retirement age rises. This group will require strengthened measures to adapt working conditions to their specific needs.

An excellent academic environment with regional roots

Demographic trends will also have an impact on higher education, science and research by 2040. The primary consequence will be an impact not only on the quantity but also on the quality of future university students. Given the smaller age cohorts, the number of high-quality applicants

will be lower, a fact that will need to be reflected in the content and structure of education at all levels of study. The emphasis on improving the quality of education and achieving excellence in science and research will enhance the reputation of the academic sector, thereby increasing its societal significance and contributing to an adequate increase in funding. Alongside universities, leading research institutions, including the Slovak Academy of Sciences, will also play a significant role, particularly in basic and applied research, doctoral studies and the development of research infrastructure.

The activities of the academic sector should be aligned with local needs, including those of the public and private sectors, in the creation of knowledge, technologies, public policies and innovative solutions, which will contribute to increasing Slovakia's competitiveness and the development of new economic sectors. The quality of higher education will improve, and its content will be better integrated across all levels of formal education while reflecting the latest international trends. This will help reduce the rate at which secondary-school graduates leave the country to study abroad. Slovakia will be an attractive destination for researchers from home and abroad, and will systematically translate research results into economic and social development. Larger cities, which serve as regional centres of economic and social life, will play an important role. The quality of life in regional centres is one of the main factors influencing decisions regarding education and career paths.

We will support excellent research

The Slovak academic sector will be motivated to significantly enhance its excellence in both research and education, with the aim of catching up with its European competitors through the natural development and support of leading scientists and the improvement of the quality of research and educational outputs. Excellent science and research, as identified, for example, in the Verification of Excellence in Research (VER) evaluation, will be encouraged to develop further through increased support from public funds and ambitiously set performance contracts. Evaluations identifying excellent research will be continuously improved so that changes do not jeopardise the continuity of work in the academic sector. Independent interna-

tional experts will be involved in the evaluation processes to identify excellence more accurately, selected on the basis of their expertise and with rigorous safeguards against conflicts of interest. Members of the Slovak academic diaspora who meet the same criteria of independence and expertise may also form part of this expert base. Applied and corporate research stands alongside excellent academic research as an equal part of the research ecosystem. Excellence is demonstrated by international visibility and by research outputs being taken up in science and in the economy, and reaching the regions through knowledge transfer.

Thanks to sufficient and targeted support, independent basic research will serve as a robust foundation

for applied research, technological development, innovation and the country's ability to respond to long-term societal challenges, as well as a space for preserving Slovakia's cultural identity. The social sciences and humanities will play a crucial role, contributing to the quality of public policies, an understanding of social change, historical memory, trust and social cohesion. Available domestic competitive funding will be allocated more effectively thanks to higher-quality evaluations conducted by grant agencies with the participation of leading international experts.

Internationally successful academic institutions will continue to grow

An undisputed criterion of scientific and research excellence should be international visibility, success in securing funding from international grant schemes, as well as from private-sector sources with the potential for practical application in an internationally competitive environment, while respecting the distinct nature of individual scientific fields and their societal contributions. In order to improve the quality of teaching, procedures that have been successfully proven at leading institutions abroad will be adapted, along with innovative links to professional practice.

The principle of rewarding teaching quality should become an important element of internal quality assurance systems. As part of the evaluation of these systems by the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education, emphasis will be placed on gradually reducing the formalism and bureaucracy associated with their implementation. Conditions will be created for centres of excellence to significantly increase the international visibility of their outputs, both by attracting international researchers from leading institutions and by nurturing domestic talent.

Research will have stable funding from multiple sources

The foundation of research will be stable, predictable and internationally competitive institutional and grant funding. A significantly larger portion of available funds will be directed towards excellent research and high-quality education, as well as the necessary capital resources, including ensuring access to modern research infrastructure, laboratories, data capacities and technological infrastructure, as the basic prerequisites for excellent science. At the same time, increased funding will raise societal expectations for a greater number and higher quality of excellent research outputs, higher-quality education and the ability to attract non-budgetary resources. These societal expectations will be reflected in performance contracts with universities and the Slovak Academy of Sciences, and in the institutional and competitive components of funding, taking into account their different roles in education, basic research, applied research and knowledge transfer. This will define the responsibility of the leadership of academic institutions for meeting societal expectations.

Thanks to their excellent research outputs, research institutions will be able to generate additional revenue beyond institutional funding, primarily from international grant schemes and the commercialisation of research such as patenting activities, including support for the creation of new companies (start-ups and spin-offs), contract research, knowledge transfer and the shared use of research infrastructure with the private and public sectors. Funding will be more closely linked to local stakeholders, thereby fulfilling the objective of the principle of 'leveraging' private resources to co-finance activities in education, research and development, jobs in this field, and cooperation with the business sector, in part through active collaboration with successful alumni.

The academic community will open up to the world

Higher education, research and development will be actively integrated into the global research landscape. This will happen through the recruitment of high-quality post-doctoral researchers and academic staff from foreign institutions, through competing successfully for international grant funding, and through joint publications with international teams. A prerequisite for the successful recruitment of both young and top-tier academic staff is competitive compensation and working conditions, including access to grant funding and the opportunity to build a research team and infrastructure. When recruiting all academic staff, it will be necessary to ensure the openness and transparency of the process, with selection criteria comparable to those of leading international institutions.

As a small country, Slovakia should also benefit from the internationalisation of research evaluation, for example by involving the Slovak academic diaspora. At all levels of education, it will be standard practice to participate in international academic consortia, support joint study programmes with leading foreign institutions and take advantage of opportunities for (long-term) research and study stays abroad. At the doctoral level and in top-tier master's programmes, collaboration between outstanding research teams and institutions, the Slovak Academy of Sciences and other research organisations will be strengthened, including joint supervision, the involvement of researchers in teaching and the use of state-of-the-art infrastructure. Study programmes, as well as the administration of higher education, including the admissions process, will also be available in English, which will make it possible to attract and select high-quality applicants from abroad.

Given that academic institutions in Slovakia have long employed their own graduates, a practice that has contributed to the system's insularity, the circulation of the academic workforce will be an important change at every level of implementation, as well as in the management of the education and research process. Professionalisation and openness will be fostered by the need for systematic human re-



source development, more transparent career guidelines and high-quality management of scientific and research institutions. An internationally open and competitive academic sector will enhance the potential for the socio-economic relevance of scientific and research outputs, as well as the education provided to society as a whole, including better transfer of knowledge into public policies, cultural life, business practices and regional development.

Research and innovation ecosystems will drive the success of regions

Higher quality and international competitiveness in the academic sector will help build mutual trust with businesses and local governments, which will foster networking among them and stimulate investment and development activities by local businesses. This will have a positive effect on job creation and closer collaboration between academic research teams and the business community. Building on existing elements such as industrial parks, research incubators, university science parks, secondary school incubators and laboratories, a regional innovation ecosystem will thus develop, based on collaboration among universities, the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the private sector and secondary schools, with an emphasis on knowledge transfer and the shared use of modern infrastructure. It will organically connect the individual actors so that their activities complement one another within a knowledge ecosystem that generates new technologies, products and services with high added value.

The individual ecosystems will build on examples of successful research conducted by the academic sector and industries operating in the given field, with

a focus on strategic and critical technologies and with an awareness of the long time needed to achieve commercial success. Collaboration with innovative companies at the regional level, including industrial research and development organisations and IT companies, will be carried out through multi-party applied research projects, by contributing research capabilities to new joint ventures (spin-offs) and by transferring practical knowledge into higher and secondary education. This will create a broad portfolio of creative economy activities. It will thereby increase the social engagement and responsibility of the academic and business sectors, which will contribute to solving the problems facing Slovakia and its regions.

At the same time, the role of regional self-government should be strengthened, both through the active involvement of secondary schools and through the provision of support services. It should help to coordinate and foster deeper integration of the various components of the developing innovation ecosystem at a regional level. An effectively functioning innovation ecosystem should be a key element in retaining and attracting talent and subsequently preparing a highly skilled workforce, entrepreneurs and innovators, so that it not only responds to market needs at the local and national levels but also motivates the creation of new, internationally competitive market opportunities. Greater interconnectedness and mutual trust, built through cooperation at the local level, will thus benefit all stakeholders and contribute to the growth of internal cohesion within regions.

Talent attraction, retention and use

even the demand for labour caused by workers retiring. Slovakia's economic success will depend on its ability to effectively utilise its own potential and attract a talented workforce from abroad. This will require opening the country to international talent and adjusting migration policy so that it responds strategically and flexibly to the needs of the economy and society at large.

Talent will not be limited to workers with the highest skill levels. In this sense, talent will represent a prerequisite for getting value from work at all levels of education and across the whole occupational structure. It means a potential workforce with the aptitude to perform any occupation in any sector. The optimal use of talent is in the common interest of society.

For the first time in modern history, Slovakia will face a long-term decline in its working-age population. Domestic labour resources will be depleted and will not be able to meet

More secondary-school graduates will stay in Slovakia to continue their studies

Thanks to higher-quality higher education, support for excellence, improved communication with the public, the promotion of positive examples and investment in the attractiveness of both indoor and public spaces as well as the availability of student housing, more Slovak students will apply to universities at home. Slovak universities will therefore produce enough graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) by 2040 to enable the economy to shift towards higher added value. The share of STEM students in the student population as a whole will approach the EU average through systematic action in primary and secondary education, good teaching of science and technical subjects, and cooperation between universities and employers. The availability of STEM talent will cease to be a constraint on attracting high value-added investment.

These goals must also be reflected at the level of university leadership and in performance contracts with universities. These areas were elaborated upon in the form of individual reforms in the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic. It is essential to continue these reform efforts even after funds from this instrument have been fully used. Nurturing talent does not begin only at universities but already in primary and secondary schools. Therefore, it is necessary to support activities that identify areas of talent in pupils so that their further development can be fostered, including exposure to the business world and leading scientific institutions, with opportunities to participate in research and creative activities.

Universities will integrate international talent

Just as Czech universities today are the main driving force behind the exodus of Slovak secondary-school graduates, Slovak universities should also be attracting students from abroad by 2040. Increasing the number of international applicants should also contribute to improving the quality of education, provided that universities focus on selecting rather than simply recruiting students. A necessary prerequisite is addressing their language barriers during the admissions process and later on during their studies. One option is to offer admission processes and instruction in English across a wide range of programmes. Higher education will thus become attractive to international talent due to its linguistic and financial accessibility, its quality and expertise, and the employability of its graduates, not only in Slovakia but also in other labour markets.

International students will be more likely to remain in Slovakia after they graduate, thanks to linguistic and cultural support and integration already provided during their studies. Minimising administrative barriers is also a prerequisite. The role of higher education institutions, university towns and employers will be crucial, and for research-oriented programmes, collaboration with the Slovak Academy of Sciences, research organisations and innovative companies will also be important. Student loans and scholarships will be available to international students, particularly those from lower-income countries, to encourage them to study in Slovakia and subsequently remain in the Slovak labour market after graduation.

Slovakia will become more attractive to international talent

To increase Slovakia's appeal to international talent, it will be necessary to adopt flexible migration and integration policies that strike a balance between the interests of the economy and the needs of society in light of the demographic decline. Migration and integration policies will be managed in an integrated, cross-sectoral manner and in close cooperation with employers to address labour shortages in the market.

Simplifying the system for recognising qualifications, especially in regulated professions facing acute labour shortages, will support the faster integration of foreign workers into society. Communication between the state and applicants for residence permits for the purpose of work or business must be transparent, prompt, flexible, client-oriented and electronic. Visas for highly skilled workers and their family members will be issued under an expedited process. Administrative barriers to business activities by foreign nationals will be minimised. The state will allocate sufficient resources to develop the integration capacity of local governments, including access to education, healthcare and affordable housing as key institutional tools for long-term integration. Migration will thus be managed at all levels of government, with an emphasis on the long-term integration of talent into communities, workplaces, the academic environment and innovation ecosystems.

The Slovak diaspora will contribute to the country's development

A key priority will be to foster high-quality cooperation with Slovak talent working abroad. The state will support networking with experts from the Slovak diaspora and building bridges between these communities and Slovakia. A key tool for strengthening ties to the country is not only improving the services provided by diplomatic missions or facilitating the exercise of civil rights from abroad, but also the strategic modernisation of citizenship policy, particularly if this were to result in the influx of foreign labour. Therefore, it is necessary to remove legislative barriers.

The abolition of the generational limit for acquiring citizenship will enable the formal renewal of ties with the diaspora, which preserves its cultural identity. The state needs a flexible mechanism for granting citizenship or special status based on demonstrable innovative, scientific or social contributions to Slovakia. It will actively create and financially support specific opportunities for cooperation in science, research and business; short-term and long-term returns; knowledge exchange; and the involvement of Slovaks living abroad in domestic projects and their evaluation. This includes collaboration in basic research, applied research, the social sciences and humanities, culture and public policy-making. The state should also assist the return of the so-called 'new diaspora' to ensure that the return process itself is as straightforward as possible, including for family members. The valuable experience of citizens working abroad can then be used more often for the benefit of Slovakia.



Sustainable country



A sustainable country creates space for a high quality of life and provides resources for economic and social development without undermining the foundations on which it rests. It responds to the broader context

of the so-called ‘triple planetary crisis’, which includes climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. It borrows from future generations only what it can repay. It does not view prosperity and the environment as rivals, but as two sides of the same coin.

The protection and enhancement of natural capital are the foundation of overall quality of life. Cleaner air, accessible water supply and sewerage, and more green spaces will have a positive impact on public health. Environmental measures will generate investment in quality of life in both cities and regions. A sustainable country also means a thriving agricultural sector that helps protect nature and ensures food security, as well as nature-friendly forestry that harmonises the use of productive and non-productive ecosystem services provided by woodland areas.

Quality of life is built on a competitive economy based on the principles of circularity and sustainability. The starting point is the systematic reduction of dependence on fossil fuels and raw material imports. A key prerequisite is sufficient energy from low-carbon sources and the use of opportunities offered by the green and digital transformations. Approaches to efficient and sustainable mobility based on modern infrastructure and technologies will support the economic and social development of cities, regions and residents.

The catalyst for development must be an informed and engaged society that views sustainability as an integral part of our culture and a shared goal. Strengthening our commitment to preserving our cultural and natural heritage goes hand in hand with conscious behaviour and informed decisions regarding consumption and investment.

A healthy, diverse and climate-adapted landscape

The vision for 2040 is for Slovakia to move towards a functional system and to use resources and natural capital sustainably. The goal is to reduce the proportion of land used for intensive farming and to increase the extent

of landscape structures that support biodiversity. Water retention and management, as well as resilience to climate extremes, will be improved. The structure of agricul-

tural crops will be adapted to changing climatic conditions. It will be more diverse and will favour more resilient varieties. We will succeed in stabilising forests, the habitats most affected by climate change, adjusting their tree species composition and mitigating the negative effects of pests and pathogens. Forests will remain a key tool for both climate change adaptation and decarbonisation, and represent a significant carbon sink. Protection of old-growth forests and ancient, untouched forest will improve, as will the protection of rivers and wetlands. The economic dimension of protecting ecosystems and ecosystem services will be strengthened, and these will gradually be included in national wealth and national accounting. Nature conservation and restoration, climate change adaptation and the sustainable use of natural resources will be coordinated and planned with a long-term perspective.

The landscape will be more resilient to climate extremes

The goal is to use, restore and manage the landscape in a comprehensive manner. Protecting one type of natural resource will not jeopardise another. The state will move towards a coordinated, cross-ministerial approach, which will result in a reduction in the risks of loss and degradation of natural ecosystems. Pressures from urbanisation and intensive agriculture will be addressed systematically and comprehensively. This will enhance the landscape's capacity to provide ecosystem services and reduce its vulnerability to climate extremes. Integrated landscape management and solutions that go beyond individual ministries will incorporate ecosystem services into decision-making and investment processes. The starting point will be systematic regulation of land take and building density, along with clear rules for the maximum proportion of built-up area and the minimum proportion of green space in new developments. Soil quality and fertility will be taken into account.

Nature-based solutions will be implemented

Intensive land use, which currently causes the fragmentation of near-natural habitats, limits animal migration and reduces spatial ecological stability, will be reduced. Fragmentation will subside, migration corridors will be restored and the ecological stability of the landscape will improve. The starting points will be positively influencing the water cycle in the landscape and addressing landscape fragmentation and the loss of connectivity between natural areas, which are among the main factors contributing to biodiversity loss and reduced ecosystem resilience. The landscape will be better prepared for climate change and will build capacity to mitigate the effects of climate extremes, such as droughts, floods and heatwaves.

Forests, as the most widespread ecosystems, will play an important role. Nature-based forest management will

be promoted as a powerful adaptation measure to increase the stability, biodiversity and resilience of forests against pests; it will strengthen the non-productive functions of forests, increase water retention in the landscape and reduce damage caused by torrential rainfall in populated areas. There will be widespread implementation of the 'blue-green infrastructure' system, which is based on nature-based solutions supplemented by necessary technical measures. This approach will help preserve biodiversity and retain water in the landscape, create conditions for the natural water cycle, improve air quality and the microclimate, and, last but not least, have a positive impact on the mental and physical health and quality of life of residents. New financing models will be developed that will enable diversification through the involvement of local governments and private capital. Public support for the importance of green measures will be strengthened.

Nature and ecosystem conservation will be effective

Slovakia will establish and implement an effective system for nature conservation, ecosystem restoration, and for ending unsustainable land-use practices. This will prevent further deterioration of ecosystems and biodiversity. The starting point for positive change will be the consistent enforcement of the Nature and Landscape Protection Act throughout the country and the creation of space for nature conservation authorities. Ecosystem restoration will be a key tool for increasing the landscape's resilience, ensuring ecosystem services and adapting to climate change. The system will increase its resilience to investment pressures leading to inappropriate and excessive use of protected areas. Progress will be made in resolving the chronic problem of unsettled land ownership. These objectives are based on the systematic development of public awareness and education, fostering a society that adapts flexibly to change, has a high level of environmental awareness and supports the implementation of adaptation measures.

Low-carbon, affordable energy

Low-carbon, secure, competitive and affordable energy forms a fundamental pillar of the country's economic stability and resilience, ensuring the functioning of industry, services

and the daily lives of its residents. By 2040, Slovakia's energy system will undergo a comprehensive transformation of energy generation, grid infrastructure, flexibility, storage and industrial processes. The goal is to make the system more efficient, more integrated and more adaptable to technological possibilities and trends. Geopolitical factors, technological changes and efforts to increase competitiveness, as well as climate and social commitments, will more effectively link generation, distribution and consumption.

In line with Slovakia's goals for 2040 and its climate neutrality plan, greenhouse gas emissions will be further reduced. Lower dependence on fossil fuel imports will have a positive impact on the trade balance and energy security. A stable and predictable energy environment will strengthen the economic resilience and long-term competitiveness of industry and services. Smart meters will be installed at all supply points, enabling full-scale dynamic pricing. Slovakia will actively address the social issue of energy affordability for households and reduce energy poverty through a combination of energy literacy initiatives and investment.

Electricity will be the foundation of development

Nuclear power and hydroelectric power plants are a stabilising element of the energy mix; therefore, they should be renewed, maintained and developed to their full potential. New nuclear power sources and next-generation reactors will be supported, and emphasis will be placed on training specialised personnel. The development of renewable energy sources will be based on cost-effectiveness analyses and supported by effective solutions for stabilising variable generation.

A key approach is the electrification of the economy. Slovakia will invest in smart grids, digitalisation and energy management systems. These will enable flexible balancing of supply and demand and the effective integration of renewable sources into the power system as part of the development of a single energy market and the flow of energy commodities, both commercial and physical. The development of battery storage, pumped-storage power plants and other technological solutions, together with economic instruments for managing consumption, will enable stable operation of the energy system even with variable energy production. Support for community energy will expand local schemes for low-carbon energy generation, sharing and consumption. Municipalities, households

and local businesses could actively participate, thereby contributing to local development and social cohesion.

Energy supplies will be secure and reliable

The distribution and transmission grid will respond readily to the growing electrification of the economy, particularly in transport, industry and heating. Supply and demand will thus be balanced flexibly. The modern energy system will be built on advanced technological solutions such as the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, digital twins and new communication networks.

It will be essential to press for a change in the design of the EU electricity market, so that the price is not set by the most expensive source, and to combine a stable regulatory environment with full use of the opportunities provided by EU legislation. Networks will need to be modernised and their capacity and throughput increased, supported by investment in modern technologies and the development of an efficient energy market. The goal is for the system to ensure a stable, reliable and long-term sustainable energy supply, as well as fair end-user energy prices, for all consumers. This will involve optimising the use of resources and supply routes, as well as developing and modernising energy infrastructure. At

the same time, the energy system's resilience to external shocks, including geopolitical risks, cyber threats and extreme weather events, will be strengthened.

Efficient and cost-effective heating solutions will be implemented

By 2040, there will be a strong focus on reducing the carbon footprint and optimising heating costs by improving energy efficiency, modernising infrastructure and supporting technological innovation. Buildings represent a significant sector for reducing emissions and operating costs; therefore, they should undergo systematic renovation and decarbonisation of their heating systems. This will reduce costs for the state, industry and households. New buildings will be designed with climate change in mind and will incorporate passive cooling elements. Changes to legislation, standards and financing will enable a greater number of zero-emission buildings, with state and public buildings serving as examples for the private sector and for the renovation of historic and cultural sites.

Investment in existing and new low-carbon technologies and in district heating based on renewable sources will reduce dependence on fossil fuel imports. Alternatives such as waste-to-energy, combined heat and power (CHP), and biomethane production will be supported. The ambition will be to explore emerging opportunities for us-

ing modular nuclear reactors as heat sources in industry and, potentially, for residential heating. The development and use of geothermal energy as a domestic renewable source with untapped potential will be supported. Slovakia will harness the transformative potential of heat pumps, district heating systems connected to renewable energy sources. In addition to addressing social issues, the development of alternative approaches should strategically support areas with potential for the advancement of domestic science, industry and job creation.

A stable regulatory environment will support competitiveness

A stable and predictable business environment in the energy sector will be a key prerequisite for the successful transformation of the energy system and the competitiveness of the economy. Energy-intensive industries, the service sector, and small and medium-sized enterprises are sensitive to energy price trends and regulatory changes. Therefore, it will be important to create pricing and regulatory conditions that enable economic actors to operate and plan long-term investment. The foundation will be a transparent and stable regulatory framework based on making full use of all possibilities and opportunities within the EU, as well as support for the effective functioning of energy markets, competition and predictability in energy pricing.

Sustainable circular economy

with higher added value, and will protect both the domestic market and the competitiveness of its exporters. The vision for transitioning to a sustainable, low-carbon and circular economy by 2040 is to align climate goals with support for industry and services and the development of green and clean technologies that stimulate employment. Investment will focus on research and development, support for international cooperation and domestic activities in the areas of low-carbon technologies, green and pink hydrogen, and the dematerialisation of production and consumption across the technological spectrum, in accordance with the principles of technological neutrality.

Industrial policies must be based on a technologically feasible and economically viable transformation that strengthens the competitiveness of Slovak companies within the single European market and in competition with third countries. Measures will therefore be implemented at multiple levels – national, regional and local – and will take into account the specific characteristics and needs of individual regions. The goal is to shorten supply chains and support the local economy.

A strong industrial, energy and processing base is a strategic asset for the country. Slovakia will develop domestic processing capacity, turning its own raw materials into finished products

Industrial processes will undergo significant innovation

The technological transition to a carbon-neutral industry will be realistic and both socially and economically viable. The focus will be on a combination of innovation, technology neutrality, improving energy efficiency and optimising material flows towards circular economy principles. Where technically feasible and cost-effective, processes will be electrified, and fossil fuels will be replaced in electricity and heat production. For process emissions that cannot be reduced through technological change at a reasonable cost, the development and use of carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) technologies will be supported. Digital and data infrastructure, industrial production, energy systems, district heating and water management will be linked systematically, so that waste streams from one area become inputs for another.

The circular economy will be strengthened

By 2040, thanks to investment and innovation, industry and services will reduce their dependence on primary resources such as oil, gas, metals and rare earth elements. Extending the lifespan of products, promoting design for reuse, and recycling will systematically reduce the consumption of primary raw materials and the generation of waste. Slovakia's key industrial sectors, particularly the automotive, construction and food industries, will move towards innovative circular production models that conserve materials and energy. The state will gradually adopt a cross-ministerial approach to such comprehensive solutions. It will create an effective system of economic instruments to support them.

Slovakia will develop water management and innovation in how water is used, including the reuse of treated waste water and treated industrial water. The circular economy will become a significant part of the economy. Wood will primarily be processed into high-value-added products, mainly by domestic processing facilities. Investment will lead to increased employment in rural areas. The construction sector will make greater use of timber structures, which will also contribute to meeting commitments related to carbon sequestration, that is, the capture and storage of carbon.

Industrial symbiosis, mutual links and efficient supply chains will be supported. Banks and financial institutions will be encouraged to invest based on clearly defined circular economy indicators. Environmental and circular economy criteria will be incorporated to the greatest extent possible into public procurement by the state, local governments and public institutions. This will significantly increase demand for products and services with a lower environmental footprint and support local economies and innovation in the business sector. The comprehensive system thus

created will reduce costs and increase the competitiveness of industry and services.

Society will prevent waste generation

By 2040, the country will strive to maximise waste prevention and achieve zero waste sent to landfills, in line with the waste hierarchy. If waste is generated, the rate of its material and energy recovery will increase significantly. Key elements will include a functional, strengthened separate collection system, the development of recycling infrastructure and more efficient processing of biodegradable waste. Part of this systemic change involves supporting solutions that enable the energy recovery of waste using state-of-the-art zero-emission technologies and the conversion of biowaste into biogas, biomethane or organic fertilisers.

The reuse rate of products and materials will be increased to extend product lifecycles and reduce waste through the development of reuse centres, repair shops and material banks. Such a system conserves resources and helps create new jobs. Public funds will be used effectively to develop infrastructure and innovative solutions, while fair waste fee systems will strengthen incentives for households and businesses. Hazardous waste that poses a threat to human health and the environment will be treated in line with the waste hierarchy, or where necessary disposed of at a hazardous waste landfill. Where technologically and economically feasible, historically landfilled waste will be used as a secondary source of raw materials. An essential part of these changes will be increasing public awareness and engagement.

Less pollution will improve health

Reducing emissions and developing circular models will have a strong positive impact on the level of environmental risks and, together with mitigation and adaptation measures addressing climate change, will contribute to improving public health. By 2040, Slovakia will systematically improve air quality with the aim of minimising residents' exposure to pollution. If a large share of emissions from industry, domestic and commercial heating, and transport is reduced, the number of people exposed to excessive concentrations of fine particulate matter and other harmful pollutants will also decrease. This will be reflected in fewer premature deaths and fewer hospitalisations due to respiratory diseases, heart attacks and strokes.

Investment in water supply infrastructure, sewerage, and wastewater treatment will improve people's quality of life while also reducing environmental pollution. Circular models will reduce waste generation, soil and water contamination, and exposure to toxic substances. The electrification of transport will limit emissions in settlements and reduce noise pollution. Lower emissions and pollution will also help reduce health inequalities, especially in poorer regions and among low income groups.



Integrated and accessible system of sustainable mobility

infrastructure will not depend on political cycles.

Individual transport should be largely zero-emission and complemented by widely available shared services. Public transport will be the backbone of the system and a genuine alternative to the private car, and not only on long-distance routes. Slovakia's transport system should, as far as possible, connect with those of neighbouring countries, and be fully integrated with the European system and, more widely, with the global one. The result will be significantly safer transport and very few serious accidents. The whole system will be secure against attack, resilient, intelligently managed (to a significant degree autonomously) and ready for both climate and security challenges.

Low emissions will be the foundation of transport

Transport in Slovakia should gradually transition to a low-emission and efficient system by 2040, thanks to regulatory measures, targeted investment and economic instruments. Rail will become the backbone of passenger and freight transport. It will be efficient, environmentally friendly and based primarily on electric traction, supplemented by alternative solutions such as battery-powered or hydrogen-powered trains where electrification is not economically viable. In individual mobility, sustainable low-emission forms of transport should be systematically prioritised. The foundation of passenger transport will be integrated public transport, drawing on the way rail, bus, urban and on-demand services complement each other, according to the character of the area and travel patterns.

The priority will be to strengthen non-motorised and active transport, such as walking and cycling. The share of electric vehicles and other low-emission vehicles will increase, and it will also be necessary to develop all forms of shared mobility. Greening efforts will also extend to freight transport and deliveries. The focus will move towards multimodal transport, which combines multiple modes of transport, with the aim of shifting as much transport as possible to rail. Emphasis will be placed on rail and container transport, as well as on international water transport where geographically feasible.

By 2040, transport infrastructure should meet current and expected demand as fully as possible. For the transport system to work effectively, measures must be planned and delivered in a coordinated way at national, regional and local level. Building and modernising transport

Transport will be accessible and barrier-free for everyone

A key priority by 2040 will be to implement a system of accessible, barrier-free and socially inclusive public and shared transport for everyone. The urbanised areas of large cities should be largely transformed in accordance with the concept of the 15-minute city, reducing the need for daily mobility and enhancing the availability of services in residential areas. The goal is for public transport to be fully integrated, digitally managed on a fixed-interval schedule and systematically connected to walking, cycling and other forms of micromobility, based on 'first and last mile' solutions, that is, the journey from the starting point to public transport and then on to the final destination. It will be important to develop flexible forms of public transport, including on-demand services, in a way that does not jeopardise vulnerable population groups. Modern digital and IT tools will ensure the efficient management of transport services and their accessibility to all.

Transport infrastructure will support economic development

The development, modernisation and maintenance of transport infrastructure support regional development, competitiveness and the state's defence capability. Bottlenecks that lack sufficient capacity to handle the volume of vehicles or passengers should be ad-

dressed so that they do not hinder the economic development of regions or the smooth and safe mobility of people. The state must continue modernising the railway network, with the aim of electrifying all lines where this is technically and economically justified. Main lines will be electrified via overhead catenary systems, while secondary lines with lower traffic volumes will be supported by battery-powered vehicles. All lines will be operated using digital safety systems with minimal human intervention.

At the same time, the state must complete the construction of the motorway network in accordance with current needs, which correspond to traffic volumes on major international and domestic routes. Systematic repair and maintenance of bridges and the construction of bypasses will increase the system's sustainability. Supporting local and regional production and consumption will reduce the economy's reliance on transport. The development of air transport as a tool for mobility and the economic development of the country and its regions should gradually increase the share of low-carbon fuels. The result will be an efficient, interconnected and environmentally sustainable transport system that will support Slovakia's competitiveness. This will also include the development of sustainable logistics, in particular low-emission delivery and solutions that reduce the negative effects of supplying goods in densely built-up areas.

Food security and food system resilience

A robust agricultural and food policy will ensure a sufficient supply of high-quality, safe, sustainable and healthy food. The key priorities are increasing domestic food production, modernising agriculture and the food industry, particularly processing capacities, and building resilient supply chains. The food system will be able to respond to climate change, geopolitical risks, disruptions in international trade and other global shocks. Self-sufficiency will be strengthened in strategic sectors, particularly in dairy, meat processing, fruit and vegetable production, grain processing and beverage production.

Development will be based on increased investment in infrastructure, the implementation of effective policies and regulations, sustainability, innovation and the application of the One Health approach, which links the health of people, animals, plants and ecosystems. The result will be a competitive,

Traffic safety will improve

Systematically improving safety and reducing traffic accidents is a cross-cutting priority for a safer transport system that protects health and lives. Emphasis should therefore be placed on protecting road users, particularly vulnerable groups such as pedestrians, cyclists, children, older people and people with disabilities. To minimise the risk of accidents, it will be necessary to improve transport infrastructure, accident prevention, traffic education and the technical condition of vehicles. In individual transport, the focus will be on both passive and active safety features; in public transport, the focus will be on digitalisation and automation. Reducing crime and other security threats should also be a priority in transport and transport infrastructure.

Infrastructure will be climate and security-resilient

Transport infrastructure needs to adapt to existing and emerging climate and security risks. Key transport networks should be modernised to withstand natural disasters, the effects of climate change and new security threats. The transport system should be better prepared for crises and service disruptions. Emphasis will be placed on increasing the operational and energy resilience of the infrastructure. The goal is a stable and reliable transport system capable of functioning even under extraordinary conditions.

Slovakia will systematically strengthen its food security through the development of competitive agriculture, and will ensure a high level of production self-sufficiency in key crop and livestock commodities. A

modern and environmentally responsible food system that ensures high-quality and affordable food for all residents of Slovakia. Agri-food value chains and local supply chains will be strengthened to increase the resilience and stability of the food supply. The share of domestically produced food in public procurement will increase, particularly in schools, hospitals and other public facilities.

The competitiveness of the agri-food sector will improve

Slovakia will overcome its investment deficit in the agri-food sector and transition from exporting primary raw materials to producing food with higher added value. Production, processing, storage and logistics capacities will be modernised through automation, robotics and digitalisation. Agri-food value chains linking crop and livestock production with domestic raw material processing, distribution, research and innovation will be strengthened, thereby increasing the stability of the food supply and the country's food security. Local and regional food supply chains will be supported, and the share of domestically produced food in public procurement will be increased, particularly in schools, hospitals and other public facilities. Tools will be developed to manage risks related to climate extremes, geopolitical instability, trade shocks and the spread of animal and plant diseases. This will also include operational contingency plans and mechanisms to ensure the continuity of food production and supply.

The business environment in the agriculture and food sectors will improve. It will ensure easier access to financing for agri-environmental measures and enable the use of low-carbon and renewable energy sources. Agriculture will respond to the ageing farming population by supporting generational renewal and the entry of young and new farmers. Farmers' economic access to land will improve, the transparency of land ownership will increase and a diversified farm structure will be supported. Rural development will be accompanied by investment in transport, energy and digital infrastructure, including broadband internet. These measures will contribute to job creation and make rural areas more attractive places to live and do business.

Options for streamlining land consolidation and strengthening fair, transparent and long-term sustainable access to agricultural land will be reviewed. Emphasis will be placed on mitigating excessive fragmentation, as well as on addressing concentrations of land ownership and use and on limiting speculative land purchases. These measures will be complemented by more intensive support for nature-friendly agricultural practices that improve water management, protect soil and biodiversity and enhance the long-term resilience of the agri-food system.

Protection of natural resources will be sustainable

Food security will be based on the long-term protection of soil, water and biodiversity, as well as on adaptation to climate change. The priority will be to preserve the productive capacity of agricultural land by protecting it from land take, erosion, compaction and the loss of organic matter. Slovakia will increase the resilience of agriculture to drought, high temperatures, floods and other extreme weather events by supporting the development of blue and green infrastructure, appropriate crop patterns and the ability of production systems to adapt more effectively. Protection of agricultural land, its fertility and its resilience to degradation and erosion will be strengthened. Investment will be directed toward irrigation systems, water infrastructure, and water retention measures.

Organic farming, agroecological approaches and the enhancement of functional biodiversity, including pollinators and natural pest control, will be expanded to support the stability and resilience of food production. Active measures will also be taken against the spread of animal and plant diseases, pests, and invasive and regulated species. Agriculture will use water, energy and nutrients efficiently, increase nutrient cycling in agricultural systems and reduce the negative environmental impacts of production.

Support will be provided for agri-food innovation, research and digitalisation

The modernisation and technological renewal of the food industry will be supported, with the aim of reducing the sector's investment debt and increasing the added value of domestic production. In crop production, particular attention will be paid to the protection and use of plant genetic resources, such as seed collections and traditional varieties, and to plant breeding. A system linking agricultural and food practices with research institutions, universities and innovation centres will be developed. Support will be provided for applied research, the transfer of knowledge into practice and the adoption of modern technologies, including precision agriculture, smart monitoring and advanced

food processing technologies. The development of biotechnologies, including new genomic techniques (NGTs), fermentation processes and other biological innovations, will contribute to higher quality, safety, nutritional value and sustainability in food production. Innovation and new technologies will go hand in hand with the provision of high-quality advisory services and training for farmers, food producers and rural development stakeholders.

Food will be high-quality, safe and affordable

The One Health approach will be an integral part of food policy. All residents will have access to safe, high-quality, nutritious and affordable food that promotes health and helps prevent non-communicable diseases. Mechanisms for crisis preparedness and the continuity of food production and supply during emergencies

will be strengthened. Risk assessment, management and communication will be strengthened, including for microbial, chemical, toxicological and emerging environmental threats. Innovations leading to healthier food composition, diversification of protein sources and healthier dietary habits among the population will be supported.

An effective system for redistributing surplus food will be established and food waste will be significantly reduced throughout the entire chain from production to consumption. Food and nutrition literacy among the population, including children, will be improved in the areas of food quality, safety, nutrition and origin, thereby strengthening confidence in domestic production and promoting responsible consumer behaviour. The result will be a healthier population, greater consumer confidence and a resilient food system that supports Slovakia's long-term prosperity.



Modern state



A modern state is capable of learning, taking action and assuming responsibility. It has a clear and non-duplicative architecture of public authority, professional institutions and interconnected data; it provides high-quality services,

fair financing and effective regulation that is resistant to undue influence from interest groups, and it guarantees the rule of law and the ability to withstand both internal and external pressures. In 2040, Slovakia will not be a state that merely manages agendas, adopts strategies, creates new bodies and institutions, or formally fulfils its legal obligations. It will be a state that fulfils its functions lawfully, openly, transparently, in a coordinated and effective manner and delivers public value to citizens, businesses and communities regardless of where they operate or live.

A modern state is not merely a more efficient administration. It is a state that is capable of protecting human dignity, fundamental rights, legal certainty and equal access to public services in everyday life. Efficiency, digitalisation, professionalisation and better management of public resources are the means by which people can exercise their rights, navigate life's challenges without undue burden and live in a safe, free and pluralistic society. The quality of the state will not be judged solely by the internal performance of its institutions, but also by whether public authorities act in a predictable and respectful manner that enables people to trust the rules and participate in public affairs.

The Vision for 2040 is not bound by today's institutional or legislative framework where it falls short of delivering public value. The solid foundations remain the democratic rule of law, Slovakia's anchoring in the European and transatlantic community of values, the protection of human dignity and the expansion of people's actual ability to exercise their rights. Slovakia will protect these rights against attempts to undermine them and, at the same time, strengthen their protection against new social and technological risks, especially where the power of the state, the market or digital platforms infringes upon human autonomy, privacy, security or freedom of choice.

A state understood in this way is not defined by its size, but by its capacity. It is not a passive system of unconnected agencies, but a functional, secure and accountable framework for the exercise of public power. It is able to set priorities, coordinate public policies, work with data, protect the public interest, regulate the market, collaborate with local governments, civil society, businesses, the academic sector and communities, and guarantee the delivery of public services regardless of who technically provides them. It does not do everything on its own, but it bears responsibility for ensuring that public value is created lawfully, transparently, effectively, fairly and sustainably.

An effective architecture of public authority

By 2040, Slovakia will have a public administration whose structure is based on purpose, not historical inertia. The fundamental principle will be a functionally organised public authority with a smaller number of stronger, professionally equipped and accountable institutions in areas where today's fragmentation hinders quality, accessibility and accountability. The goal will not be the mechanical dismantling of institutions or the automatic centralisation of decision-making, but rather the strengthening of the level of public administration best suited to deliver a given service or policy.

Public services will be delivered closer to the people

The modernisation of the state will be based on multilevel governance and the principle of capacity-based subsidiarity. Public services should be delivered as close to the people as possible when the relevant level of government can guarantee the required standards of quality, accessibility, financial sustainability and democratic oversight. If it cannot ensure these standards, the service should be delivered jointly, regionally or at another level of public administration. Part of a region's capacity will also be the ability to recognise in a timely manner situations in which people's rights or safety are at risk, and to act before the problem affects an individual, a family or a community. Proximity to decision-making is valuable only when it is linked to a real capacity to act, clear accountability and the ability to deliver results. Only then can people exercise their rights and enjoy equal protection regardless of where in the country they live.

For service users, what matters is not knowing the entire map of the state's jurisdiction, but having a clear point of entry, an understandable process and the possibility of redress. Local governance will therefore be more transparent. It will be clear who owns the process, who funds the service, who makes decisions and who is responsible for the outcome. Maps of jurisdictional responsibilities, uniform interpretations, minimum standards and data-driven monitoring of results will not be ends in themselves, but tools to ensure that citizens and businesses do not bear the costs of a complex public authority structure.

Competences, decision-making powers, revenue frameworks and accountability must be internally consistent. Funding for local and regional self-government will be predictable and commensurate with the scope of its tasks, but will not mechanically reimburse historical or declared costs without regard to results. Where

appropriate, the system may also include authorities' own revenue-generating tools, fees or user contributions. Changes to the financing of public services will be prepared well in advance so that local and regional authorities can plan responsibly, reprioritise their spending and explain their decisions to residents.

The territorial structure of public authority will better reflect the functional connections of everyday life. Public services and territorial development often do not take place within the boundaries of a single municipality, but rather in functional urban areas connecting the city centre with its surrounding areas. Functional urban areas will therefore serve as the starting point for assessing the territorial organisation, the allocation of competences and the organisation of public services. Their specific boundaries and institutional form will be determined on the basis of expert analysis and a political decision.^{111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116} By 2040, Slovakia will therefore create conditions enabling residents to politically influence decisions regarding the territory in which they actually live, work, conduct business and use public services.¹¹⁷

Policies will take into account cities, rural areas and peripheral regions

When designing public policies, Slovakia will take greater account of the differing conditions of cities, suburban areas, small towns, rural communities and peripheral regions. Rural areas will not be viewed merely as agricultural spaces or as scaled-down versions of cities, but as a distinct type of territory with its own unique combination of demographic, economic, environmental and social challenges. Specific policies for rural areas, peripheral regions and functional urban regions will not be exceptions to common standards, but rather a means of achieving these standards under different conditions. In developing these policies, the state will draw on demographic trends, daily mobility, access to services, the capacity of local govern-

ments, the state of infrastructure and the area's ability to generate its own public value. As the population falls, joint and professional management and renewal of technical infrastructure will be particularly important, since its unit costs will rise in areas with fewer residents and fragmented administration.

Ministry-based management will give way to inter-institutional cooperation

Cross-cutting issues such as climate adaptation, security, housing, energy, digitalisation, education and regional development will not be confined to a single ministry. Ministerial responsibility will remain the foundation of democratic governance, but it will be complemented by a stronger centre for coordinating government policies with a clear mandate to link strategic priorities, the budget, data, analytical capabilities and oversight of implementation. Such a centre will not replace the responsibilities of the ministries or manage local governments; its role will be to help resolve conflicts between priorities, monitor the achievement of common goals and ensure that sectoral policies are reflected at the local level in a coordinated and predictable way, with respect for the role of local and regional authorities.

This system will also include units responsible for delivering results – implementation teams focused on fulfilling priorities. Their role will not be to replace ministries, higher-level territorial units, cities or municipalities, but to help them translate decisions into concrete results. They will monitor the achievement of goals, identify implementation barriers, connect the responsible actors and regularly evaluate the progress made. Strategic governance will not be exclusively a central function of the government, but a shared capacity of the state, regional and local governments.

The professional core of the civil service will be strengthened

Slovakia will continue to build and develop a public administration that is fairly compensated, professionally respected and offers predictable career paths. It will expand and strengthen the professional core of the civil service. The civil service will be based on the principles of legality, professionalism, political neutrality in the performance of official duties, open recruitment, career predictability, continuity and accountability for performance. The professionalism of the civil service will also be reflected in the respectful treatment of people, equal access and the ability to help them exercise their rights. Political decision-making will remain in the hands of elected officials, but the state's expert, analytical, regulatory, implementation and oversight capacities will not be repeatedly weakened with every political change.

Strengthening the civil service will also include a stable institutional infrastructure for developing the state's expertise. Slovakia will develop the institutions, methodologies and professional standards necessary for the training, selection, ongoing development and methodological support of public administration employees. This infrastructure will support the state's analytical, legislative, regulatory, project management, data, technological, security, forensic and expert capacities so that the public administration can prepare high-quality decisions, assess their impacts, manage implementation, procure complex solutions, manage crises and protect the public interest.

At the same time, the state will professionalise selected support functions of public administration and concentrate standardisable activities in shared service centres serving several state administration bodies and public organisations. Their expert, data and technological capacities will also be available to local governments under clear rules, particularly where building such capacities on their own would be inefficient. This will reduce duplication and strengthen the ability of public institutions to prepare and implement policies and carry out the tasks entrusted to them. Such specialised centres will also be able to develop outside the capital.

Institutional memory will be stored not only in individuals, but also in processes, methodologies, data, documented decisions and stable teams. The same principle will apply at the regional and local levels as well. Every territory should have access to professional expertise, although not every municipality needs to have all specialised expertise within its own administration. The shared use of expert and service capacities will complement, not replace, the creation of local government units with greater capacity and a functional territorial organisation. Together, these changes will ensure that the quality of local government does not depend on the size of the municipality.

The digital state and evidence-based decision-making

come. The ‘once-only’ principle will remain an important tool, not a substitute for process change: if the state already has certain data, it will not request it repeatedly; at the same time, however, it must have a clear service owner, interoperable systems, legislative barriers removed and a service that has been tested with users. Digitalisation will enhance the accessibility of services, ensure equal treatment and provide greater oversight of how public authorities use data and make decisions.

Public administration will begin managing data instead of documents

The fundamental change will not be the mere existence of digital registries and information systems, but the state’s ability to use data as a shared public administration infrastructure. Data will be generated in a structured and machine-readable format wherever this reduces the administrative burden and improves service quality. A unified data policy will define ownership, quality, sharing, protection, interoperability and accountability for data. Data will be a strategic resource for the state, not merely a by-product of administration or the isolated property of individual ministries.

Evidence-based decision-making will become the standard

Legislative proposals, investment and public policies will be accompanied by analytical justifications, assessments of alternatives, expected impacts, feasibility and implementation capacities. Evidence-based decision-making will not create a false dichotomy between expert recommendations and political decisions. On many issues, there is no single technically correct answer, but rather multiple legitimate options with differing costs, benefits, risks and distributional impacts. The role of analysis is to highlight these options and trade-offs; the role of policy is to choose among them and explain the decision clearly. Building the state’s own data, analytical and technological capabilities will reduce its dependence on external suppliers. The state will promote open standards, interoperability, data portability and modular architecture. Open technologies will be preferred where they enhance security, control, sustainability

The digital state in 2040 will not be an electronic copy of today’s bureaucracy. Its primary goal will be to redesign public services based on life and business situations, user experience and the expected out-

and the state’s independence from any specific supplier. Companies will remain important users, innovation partners and solution providers, but they will not replace the state’s ability to understand its own systems and manage key data.

The state will use automation and artificial intelligence responsibly

Artificial intelligence will be a natural part of how public administration functions, but it will not replace legal, administrative or political accountability. It will be used primarily where it can improve the quality of supporting data, identify risks, reduce the administrative burden or speed up service delivery, not where it would undermine the individual’s right to an explanation, human review and responsible decision-making. Every recommendation generated by artificial intelligence will be traceable and reviewable. Trust in the digital state will be based not only on technological security but also on procedural fairness and the explainability of decision-making. If public administration uses data, algorithms or automated recommendations in decision-making, it must be possible to trace which data were used, what key criteria the system applied, who is responsible for the decision and how to request human review or redress. A stronger and more data-driven state must also be more accountable and transparent.

Public value, services and regulatory quality

ability and quality, not the same organisational structure in every municipality or region. The fundamental question will not be whether a service is formally present, but whether the user receives the necessary outcome with appropriate quality, timeliness, accessibility and clarity. Slovakia will thus not be forced to maintain inefficient infrastructure where it fails to serve its purpose, yet at the same time, it will not compromise on the quality of life of its residents.

The state will guarantee quality, not the method of delivering public services

The public service standard will not prescribe a single delivery model, but rather the expected outcome: accessibility, quality, processing time, clarity and protection of user rights. The specific method of service delivery will be determined at the most appropriate level, drawing on local knowledge, user experience, service design and social innovation. A digital service, a shared service centre, a mobile service, fieldwork, a regional office or a combination of these will be legitimate if they deliver the desired outcome. Such a model will make it possible to reconcile equality of outcomes with territorial diversity. Equality in public services will not mean the same solution everywhere, but rather outcomes of comparable value for people, businesses and communities in different areas. Slovakia will develop territorially sensitive policies that respect the different conditions of cities, rural areas, suburban areas and disadvantaged regions, while also guaranteeing a minimum standard of public service.

People will help improve public services

Public services will also be designed and improved through co-creation of solutions. The state and local governments will involve service users, civil society, experts, businesses and local communities in the design, testing and evaluation of services. Local flexibility will not mean compromising on minimum standards of quality, accessibility and the protection of rights.

In 2040, public service will not be defined by the physical presence of a building, but by the functional outcome for citizens, businesses or communities. The state will guarantee standards of accessi-

The public sector will communicate clearly

Clear language will remain a fundamental principle of how public authority functions, even in the context of digital services and automated assistants. Forms, decisions, notices, digital services and information intended for the public will be written in such a way that residents and businesses can understand them without an intermediary, wherever the nature of the matter permits. Legal precision will not be used as an excuse for obscurity: even formal decisions will be accompanied by a clear explanation of their meaning, consequences and options for redress.

Predictable regulations will minimise the administrative burden

The modern state is not only a provider of services, but also a rule-maker and administrator of public incentives. The quality of regulation will therefore be assessed based on whether the rules address a real problem, have a clear owner, account for their costs and impacts, are workable and are evaluated over time. Impact assessments will not be reduced to a box-ticking exercise at the end of the process, but will be an integral part of the development of alternatives, consultations, the implementation plan and ex post evaluation. Slovakia will reduce unnecessary administrative burdens, limit unjustified tightening of rules beyond EU requirements (known as gold-plating) and regularly review regulations that have outlived their purpose or impose disproportionate costs. The result will be a predictable regulatory environment that adequately protects the public interest without creating unjustified costs. When implementing European law, Slovakia will leave room for national and local solutions where justified by its specific conditions, the protection of the public interest or the need to achieve a higher standard of protection.

Taxes and incentives will support public objectives

Taxes, fees and financial incentives will be viewed not only as a source of revenue, but also as regulatory tools. Both the state and local governments will use them to encourage desirable behaviour, limit negative externalities and ensure a fairer distribution of the costs of public services. The tax system will be simpler, more understandable and more predictable, so that citizens and businesses know what they are paying for, what their obligations are and what public value they receive in return for shared resources. Local taxes and fees will become an active part of local policy, not merely a passive supplement to shared tax revenues. The goal will not be to increase the tax burden for its own sake, but to align financial instruments with public policy objectives and with the actual costs of decisions made by citizens, businesses and public institutions.

This approach will establish a new fiscal settlement among the state, local governments, citizens and businesses. Citizens and businesses will be responsible for properly fulfilling their tax and fee obligations, while

the state and local governments will be responsible for ensuring the stability, fairness and clarity of the rules, as well as for the demonstrable use of public resources for the public good. The state will cease to be an unpredictable actor that unilaterally changes the rules of financing or increases the tax burden. Local governments will assume greater responsibility for local needs, and both businesses and residents will be able to view taxes not merely as a burden, but as a contribution to the quality of the environment in which they live, work and do business.

Value for money will be omnipresent

Strategic priorities, analytical capabilities, the budget and performance evaluation will all be part of a single cycle. Policy will set the goals, but public administration will be required to compare options, risks, costs, benefits, feasibility and expected public value before committing public resources to a specific solution.

Public procurement will evolve from a predominantly legal and procedural discipline into a strategic tool of public policy and government management. The state and local governments will procure solutions that



deliver the highest public value over the entire life cycle, not merely the lowest initial price. Slovakia will build strong professional procurement capacity for the entire public sector. For routine purchases, it will utilise centralised tools, electronic catalogues and framework agreements; for complex and strategic purchases, it will provide procurers with expert support in defining needs, engaging with the market, establishing quality criteria, managing risks and monitoring contract performance. At the same time, the integrated digital public procurement environment will reduce the administrative burden, enhance transparency and generate data for evaluating the functioning of procurement as a system of public oversight.

Rule of law, integrity and democratic legitimacy

for public authority. The state will design its services, regulations, digital systems and security policies to protect human dignity, equal access, privacy, freedom of expression and the ability to effectively seek redress.

Justice will be swift, predictable and accessible

The courts will continue to develop specialisation where the nature of the caseload requires it, and judges will work with specialised teams that will allow them to focus on adjudication. Existing options for electronic communication with the courts and digital case management will be further expanded and linked to investigative files, the prosecutor's office, expert witnesses and other authorised entities in order to reduce duplication, administrative burdens and the risk of delays without undermining the procedural rights of the parties. Law enforcement and judicial authorities will have stable leadership, predictable career rules and adequate personnel and budgetary autonomy, while also being subject to strong democratic safeguards against political abuse.

The state will be able to act and account for its actions

The integrity of public life will be based on a combination of clear rules, interconnected data, analytical tools, independent oversight and enforceable accountability. Transparency will no longer mean merely pub-

Public investment will not be guided by the timing of the political cycle, but by long-term social returns. The evaluation of investment prior to its implementation will integrate the country's strategic goals, regional needs, available alternatives, risks, operating costs and expected public value. Projects underway will be continuously monitored and evaluated upon completion so that lessons learned from both successes and failures are incorporated into methodologies, standards, future decisions and the state's institutional memory.

A modern state must not only be effective, but also bound by law, trustworthy and capable of protecting human dignity. By 2040, human rights will not merely be a declared value, but a practical standard

lishing a contract or document that only a small circle of experts can understand. A modern state will be able to explain the reasons behind its decisions, the data used and the options for oversight or redress.

The growing analytical, digital, regulatory and security capabilities of public authorities must be balanced by democratic oversight, transparency in decision-making and effective avenues for redress. The stronger the state becomes in its work with data, regulation, security and technology, the stronger the rules governing the explanation of decisions, the protection of rights and the availability of effective remedies must be.

The legitimacy of the state and local and regional authorities will stem not only from elections, but also from the day-to-day experiences of citizens, businesses and communities with the fairness, predictability and clarity of public authorities. A state that seeks the trust, loyalty and willingness of its citizens to share in common costs, must be able to demonstrate that it makes decisions according to rules, not arbitrarily; that it can admit mistakes; and that it uses public resources for the public good. A strong state, therefore, must not be a distant state. It must be capable of acting, but also of being accountable.

Security will be accessible in both physical and digital spaces

Security will not be limited to a single service or to police activities. It is a fundamental public function of the state and a prerequisite for freedom, trust and the day-to-day functioning of society. It will be ensured by professional institutions with adequate staff and technology that will cooperate effectively, prevent crime and other threats, detect them in time, protect people and public spaces, and enforce the law effectively while upholding legality, proportionality and the protection of fundamental rights. Thanks to digitalisation

and improved management, the police will be relieved of some of their administrative burden and will be able to focus more on protecting life, liberty, property and public order. At the local level, a professional municipal public order capacity operating throughout the entire territory will be developed based on municipal police forces. Smaller municipalities will not have to establish such a capacity on their own but will be able to provide it jointly with other municipalities or through a stronger local government unit.

Resilience of the state and society

not arise solely from defence against external interference. Hybrid operations also exploit internal weaknesses: low trust in institutions, a sense of injustice, regional disparities, polarisation, poor communication by the state and people's experiences with services that were never delivered. Slovakia will therefore build permanent expert capacity to identify, assess and respond in a coordinated manner to hybrid threats, while simultaneously strengthening fairness, legal certainty, the quality of services and the democratic cohesion of society.

A fundamental test of a state's capability is its resilience to crises, hybrid threats and hostile external actions. However, resilience does

The state will strengthen society's democratic resilience

The protection of the democratic system against hybrid threats will be bound by law, proportionate to the risk and subject to democratic oversight. The state will not confuse coordinated manipulative or hostile activities with normal pluralism of opinion. Freedom of expression will remain a fundamental value of democratic society, but it will not absolve actors of responsibility for actions that deliberately threaten security, democratic decision-making, the rights of others or public order. Democratic resilience will be based not only on security measures, but also on trust in institutions, quality education, independent public service media, legal certainty and people's everyday experience of a fair state.

ic institutions, while keeping strategic communication separate from political influence. Independent public media will play an important role in conveying and explaining credible information to the public, especially in crisis situations. The state will pay particular attention to young people, involving them in public debate as relevant citizens and taking seriously the issues that affect their lives and future. State authorities, local governments, schools, the media, the academic sector, civil society, businesses, communities and individuals will all be involved in building resilience.

State strategic communication will be truthful, timely and credible

The goal of state communication will be to build trust over the long term through truthful, expert, transparent and timely communication. The state will explain its decisions clearly, provide timely and verified information, counter manipulation and strengthen trust in democrati-

In the area of preventing radicalisation, extremism and terrorism, Slovakia will strengthen society's democratic resilience. It will promote education, prevention, digital and media literacy, community engagement, trust in institutions and the protection of human rights so that it can identify and mitigate security and social risks in a timely manner. Measures against radicalisation will not undermine the principles of the rule of law, freedom of expression, or pluralistic democracy; their aim will be to protect people, democratic decision-making and social cohesion from violence, intimidation and organised hostile activities.

The population will be prepared for different types of crises

Slovakia's resilience will include civic, constitutional, media, digital, crisis and appropriate national defence education. Its goal will not be to indoctrinate or militarise schools, but to enable young people and adults to understand the functioning of a democratic state governed by the rule of law, recognise manipulation and hostile information campaigns, navigate crisis situations and actively contribute to the security and cohesion of society. The education system will therefore appropriately link schools, the state, local governments, emergency services, the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, civil society and specialised institutions in the development of practical skills, civic responsibility and crisis preparedness.

Public systems will be protected against cyberattacks

Cybersecurity and cyber resilience will be an integral part of the state's architecture from the outset. Public systems and critical services will be designed to prevent cyber incidents, detect them in a timely manner, manage them, restore operations and learn from them. The state will establish a coordinated cybersecurity and resilience system that will link public institutions, operators of critical services, local governments, security agencies, the academic sector and private companies in the areas of prevention, information sharing, response and recovery.

Crisis management will be professional and simpler

The Fire and Rescue Service will form the foundation of strong operational support for crisis response thanks to its territorial presence, deployability, discipline and field experience. At the same time, however, the crisis management system will remain based on co-operation among multiple stakeholders. It will connect public authorities, components of the integrated rescue system, local governments, healthcare, social services, schools, critical infrastructure, businesses, civic organisations, volunteers and local communities. The preparedness and resilience of the crisis management system, and cooperation between institutions, will be built and tested regularly through joint exercises and reviews of earlier crises. The lessons learned will feed into plans, capacities and decision-making procedures. Civil protection will not be a formal obligation, but a practical capability of society as a whole. Households, schools, social service facilities, local governments, businesses, communities and state institutions will be able to ensure basic functioning during the first 72 hours of a crisis, until coordinated assistance is fully underway.

Food security will be part of national security

Part of a state's resilience will be its ability to ensure the availability of basic foodstuffs, the functioning of key processing and logistics capacities, the protection of water and soil and the resilience of agri-food chains in the event of disruptions to markets, energy, transport or the supply of inputs. Food security will be an integral part of national security to the extent that it relates to crisis management, public value, sustainability and the resilience of key supply chains.

National defence will be the responsibility of society as a whole

The country's defence will remain firmly anchored in NATO's collective defence and European partnerships, while also being complemented by the systematic, flexible and long-term building of its own capabilities. The Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic (OS SR) will be prepared not only for conventional threats, but also for unconventional, hybrid and cyber threats, as well as systemic crises. Their capabilities will be based on the professionalism of their personnel, mobility, situational awareness, modern technology and immediate interoperability with allies.

In the initial phase of a crisis, the Armed Forces will defend the territory of the Slovak Republic, the protection of critical infrastructure and decision-making centres and the creation of conditions for the full deployment of allied support. At the same time, they will be prepared to support civilian authorities in the event of natural disasters, widespread disruptions to essential services or other non-military crises. However, national defence will not be an isolated task of the military, but a responsibility shared by all of society. It links the state's professional capabilities, the preparedness of the population, the National Defence Forces, the reserves and other citizens prepared to participate in the defence of the state, local governments, businesses, industry, research and development, education, emergency services and civil society.

Slovakia will develop the defence readiness of society, the technological transformation of the armed forces and its own research, innovation and production capacities in the defence industry in order to reduce strategic dependence on external suppliers and be able to respond flexibly to new types of conflicts. The integration of artificial intelligence, autonomous systems and modern technologies into planning, information processing, command support and combat capabilities will be accompanied by clear legal and ethical rules. Responsible human control will be maintained in deci-

sions related to the use of force. Patriotism will combine an attachment to Slovakia as a shared home with civic responsibility for the common good and active care for a free, democratic, safe, and resilient state.^{118, 119, 120, 121}

Slovakia will be strategically relevant to its allies

Slovakia will strengthen its defence capability not only by building its own capacities and anchoring itself in collective defence, but also by increasing its strate-

gic relevance to its allies. It will develop its own research, innovation and production capabilities in the defence industry and actively engage in key European and transatlantic value chains in defence, cybersecurity, energy, logistics, research, maintenance and critical technologies. The goal will not be isolated self-sufficiency, but rather the ability to contribute to the resilience of the broader allied community, strengthen the domestic economic and technological base and enhance Slovakia's credibility as an ally.



Conclusion: the way forward

The success of this vision will not depend solely on the quality of this document. What will be decisive is whether subsequent strategic documents respect its spirit and objectives, whether these are reflected in Slovakia's reform and investment priorities and whether they are then implemented consistently. To succeed, we will therefore need the resolve to make difficult decisions, consensus on the country's common direction and the courage to translate the vision into everyday life. The public sector will have to gain public support for the legitimacy of this vision and not be afraid to prioritise measures, act in a changing world, manage complex changes and make use of national and European resources.

Legitimacy

First and foremost, it is essential to build the vision's legitimacy. Vision Slovakia 2040 cannot remain a document limited to experts and institutions. If it is to have long-term legitimacy, it must become part of the public discourse and the country's shared narrative. It is not enough simply to publish the vision. The government, the opposition, regional leaders, representatives of civil society, the Slovak Academy of Sciences and the experts involved in its development must actively bring it closer to the people and create space for ongoing discussion. It will be essential to explain it, test it critically, supplement it, revise it, adapt it to new conditions and connect it to people's concrete life experiences. It is particularly important to engage the younger generation. Young people must see for themselves that the country has ambition, direction and the ability to change for the better – and that they have a place in this change.

Such a process is not a communication campaign. It is the beginning of building trust and social cohesion. It requires long-term effort, organisational capacity and resources. The advantage is that Slovakia has a strong network of civic, cultural and religious associations, schools, universities and local communities that can become natural partners in this process. Public discussions, community events, cultural activities and participatory programmes for young people can help foster a sense of belonging and shared direction. The goal is to strengthen collective identity and encourage patriotism among all residents of Slovakia.

Prioritisation as the basis for a successful strategy

Perhaps the most important task in preparing the follow-up strategy will be to prioritise the issues correctly. The chapter Path to the vision: where we must focus already identifies key areas, but there are differences even among them. The follow-up strategy will need to elaborate on the priorities from this chapter in even greater detail so that they are manageable and so that the people of Slovakia understand why reform efforts are essential in the coming years.

In the next phase of strategy development, it is necessary to clearly prioritise the critical turning points that will move the country forward. A useful mental exercise is to prioritise the chapter Path to the vision through the lens of the worst-case scenario from the chapter Future: what may lie ahead, for example by using a matrix of impact against difficulty of implementation. This will make it possible to identify areas requiring generational and existential reforms, areas where results come sooner and areas that amplify the success of the most important changes. Difficulty may mean different things

in different situations. How that difficulty may be defined should be settled through expert dialogue. That dialogue should take account of the investment and reform framework of the National and Regional Partnership Plan, the electoral cycle and the time required for implementation.

Ability to react to change

The vision must be adaptable to new situations and, when implementing changes, take advantage of the coinciding of the new electoral cycle and EU funding. It must not remain isolated from other national strategic documents or from political priorities, which are adjusted with each change in the electoral cycle. Nor can it remain static in the face of technological, economic and geopolitical changes. The vision must be continuously evaluated, adjusted and adapted to new opportunities and risks, while maintaining its core values and long-term direction. Vision Slovakia 2040 will be followed by Strategy Slovakia 2040 and the National and Regional Partnership Plan as a binding document within the European cohesion budget for the years from 2028 to 2034.

Follow-up strategies and implementation documents should not approach the vision in a purely formalistic manner. They should regard it as a framework for the target state, build upon its objectives and translate them into solutions that correspond to current conditions and needs. Future government programme statements should also refer to the shared long-term vision in key areas. For Slovakia, the coinciding of the start of the electoral cycle at the end of 2027 and the next EU budget period beginning in 2028 will be crucial, as it presents an opportunity to prioritise significant reforms and investments at the beginning of the electoral term. The good news is that several issues already have high-quality, government-approved strategies awaiting a better implementation model or data-driven concepts prepared by analytical units and the academic sector.

Governance and delivering on goals

The follow-up strategy must also clearly identify better ways to manage and implement reforms. The fragmentation of responsibilities and departmental silos undermine the state's ability to effectively address complex problems. The most important reform components of this vision therefore cannot be implemented in isolation by individual ministries. They will be successful only if the state learns to address common problems across ministries, regions, and the research, business and civil sectors. We therefore recommend establishing cross-ministerial and interdisciplinary teams to develop measures and propose a new division of responsibilities, coordination methods and implementation mechanisms. Subsequent implementation must have its own dedicated capacity, clearly defined responsibilities, ongoing impact assessments and strong coordination

teams within the Office of the Government. The goal is to find forms of government management that will reduce siloed working, at least with regard to the most important issues. The Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic is already collaborating, with the support of the OECD, on establishing a Centre of Government.

It will be equally important to change the way the state manages public and European funds. Slovakia has long suffered from excessive bureaucracy, complicated processes and a limited ability to support and implement high-quality projects quickly and effectively. The path to the effective use of European funds lies primarily

in streamlining the entire implementation cycle – from project preparation, consultation on calls for proposals and public procurement to checks, auditing and the digitalisation of processes.

At the same time, Slovakia has successful experience with managing the Recovery and Resilience Plan with a focus on results. The preparation of the strategy must therefore also include the search for procedural innovations that will reduce administrative burden, improve the quality of projects receiving support, save resources and strengthen Slovakia's connection to the European research and innovation area.¹²²



Participation as the basis for social acceptance

Stakeholder engagement provides a unique opportunity to co-create, validate and continuously refine successive versions of the document while building broad societal consensus around the country's core values, long-term direction and strategic goals. The engagement process was supported by facilitators with expertise in foresight, together with an expert team from the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of Slovakia for the Development of Civil Society. At different stages, specialists from the public, private, academic and civil society sectors were involved to ensure a balanced mix of perspectives, experience and expertise through a range of participatory methods. Building broad societal ownership and acceptance of the vision does not end with its publication. It is a long-term, guided process based on ongoing dialogue and collaboration across different groups of society, with the aim of establishing the vision as the beginning of a new national story that must be shaped and nurtured together.

Introduction to the process (January–February 2026)

The project team presented the process and key milestones of the Vision's development to representatives of central government institutions.

Expert workshops (March–April 2026)

Validating the vision's strategic goals (6 March 2026): More than 50 experts used foresight methods to assess the proposed strategic goals, suggest refinements and formulate new proposals. At the conclusion of the workshop, each group described what successful achievement of the goals would look like in 2040.¹¹³

A day in the life of a young person in 2040 (13 March 2026): At the invitation of the Slovak Student Council for Higher Education, the project team delivered an interactive workshop during the Youth Participation Forum for 20 student representatives. The objective was to introduce possible future scenarios and engage young people in thinking about what Slovakia could look like in 2040.¹²³

Identifying core values and defining megatrends and future scenarios (24 March and 9 April 2026): The workshop design was developed in collaboration with the international consultancy Demos Helsinki. More than 100 participants contributed to identifying, refining and prioritising the values considered most important for Slovakia's future development. Participants then analysed the selected megatrends and their implications for the country. The second workshop focused on backcasting from the year 2040. Working backwards from the envisioned future, participants identified the actions and strategic decisions that Slovakia should begin implementing, continue pursuing, scale up or discontinue. The future scenarios were subsequently stress-tested against unexpected disruptive events, including so-called black swans and wild cards.

Roundtable discussions (February–April 2026)

The roundtable discussions focused on presenting successive drafts of the document, gathering feedback from the expert community, and incorporating their recommendations. A total of 162 experts participated across twelve roundtable discussions.

Regional consultations (May 2026)

More than 150 experts participated in regional consultations held in Bratislava, Žilina, Košice, and Banská Bystrica.

Written consultation process (March–June 2026)

The written consultation process enabled a broad range of more than 450 stakeholders to express their views and identify inaccuracies or areas for improvement. Across all consultation rounds, stakeholders submitted more than 2,300 comments.

International peer review (July 2026)

The document was submitted to an international panel of reviewers to assess its overall quality.

Authors and acknowledgments

Steering and Coordination Team (Slovak Academy of Sciences):

Mgr. Martin Venhart DrSc., Ing. Marek Radvanský, PhD., Ing. Petra Dzurovčinová, Iva Kleinová MPA, Mgr. Barbora Belovická, Mgr. Ivana Drobňá

Working group of expert advisers to the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Social Dialogue

Eduard Bárány, Zuzana Berčíková, Ján Grman, Klaudia Halászová, Jozef Holjenčík, Rudolf Kropil, Peter Kukliš, Peter Magvaši, Milan Muška, Rudolf Sivák, Peter Šimko, Ivan Šramko a Libor Vozár

Graphic design:

Samuel Čík

English edition revised and edited by:

Neil Stewart McLaren

Facilitators:

Jakub Adámek, Lucia Ciranová, Eduard Donauer, Silvia Ďurechová, Zuzana Hromcová, Iveta Hupková, Adriana Kováčová, Anna Krištofič, Dominika Lendacká, Eva Miháliková, Hana Mravcová, Kajetána Nováková, Alena Petrželková, Oliver Rafaj, Nadežda Rázusová, Peter Rod, Martin Štrbka, Alexandra Suchalová, Lucia Švecová

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List of appendices

Appendix 1 – Performance Indicators

Appendix 2 – Methodology

Appendix 3 – Alignment of the Vision with the European Commission's 2026 Country-Specific Recommendations (available via QR code)

Appendix 4 – Extended version of the participatory process (available via QR code)



Appendix 1:

Performance Indicators

The indicators given here are indicative and will be refined further during the preparation of Strategy Slovakia 2040.

Desired change:

Slight increase or decrease: up to 25%

Significant increase or decrease: 25% to 50%

Substantial increase or decrease: over 50%

Some indicators are not monitored, so only a general trend or a qualitative assessment is given (decrease, increase, and so on).

Dignified Life

Dignified standard of living and resilience to social risks

Performance indicators	Baseline	Desired change
At-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate (2025) Breakdown by: total population, single-parent households, households with three or more children, children	16.7 %	significant decrease
Severe material and social deprivation rate (2025) Breakdown by: total population, single-parent households, households with three or more children, children	7.0 %	decrease
Median disposable household income (PPS) as % of the EU median (2024)	54 %	significant increase
Share of people living in households unable to face unexpected expenses (2025) Breakdown by: total population, single-parent households, households with three or more children	26 %	significant decrease
Share of the population dependent on the assistance of another person who receive long-term care services Breakdown by: residential facilities, outpatient and community-based care	monitoring to begin	decrease

Sources: Eurostat, Statistical Office of the SR

Stable and affordable housing

Performance indicators	Baseline	Desired change
Share of households at risk of poverty overburdened by housing costs, % (2024)	36 %	significant decrease
Housing construction intensity in urban areas, number of completed dwellings per 1,000 inhabitants (2023)	3.8	substantial increase
Share of housing costs in total household expenditure, % (2024)	28 %	slight decrease
Ratio of the median price of a medium-sized 55 m ² apartment to annual gross wage in urban areas (2023)	10:1	significant decrease
Household overcrowding rate in urban areas, % (2024)	35 %	significant decrease
Population density in urban areas, inhabitants per km ² (2024)	360	slight increase
Share of rental housing in the total housing stock, % (2024)	7 %	substantial increase

Sources: Eurostat, Statistical Office of the SR, OECD, market reports, Institute for Financial Policy.

Note: urban areas are defined according to the Eurostat Degree of Urbanisation (DEGURBA) classification.

Healthy and active life and mitigating the impacts of future demographic change

Performance indicators	Baseline	Desired change
Healthy life years at birth (2023)	57.5	slight increase
Ratio of healthy life years to life expectancy at birth (2023)	73%	slight increase
Age-standardised avoidable mortality rate per 100,000 inhabitants under 75 (2023)	366	slight decrease
Infant mortality rate, per mille (2025)	5.6	significant decrease
Breakdown: Slovakia as a whole, marginalised Roma communities		
Total fertility rate, children per woman (2025)	1.36	halt the decline and reverse it into growth
Economic dependency ratio of the working-age population (2025)	53.5	slowing growth

Sources: Eurostat, Statistical Office of the SR, SAS

Cohesive society

Performance indicator	Baseline	Desired change
Generalised trust (2022)	21.9 %	significant increase
Social distance towards minorities (2017) (share of people who would not want as neighbours people of a different race, immigrants and foreign workers, people from the LGBTIQ community, Roma, Jews or Muslims)	78 %	significant decrease
Trust in public administration (2024)	33 %	significant increase
Share of people participating in formal volunteering activities (2022)	7.5 %	substantial increase
Share of people participating in cultural or sports activities (2015)	68.3 %	slight increase

Sources: World Values Study (WVS), European Values Study (EVS), OECD Trust Survey, Eurostat

Successful Slovakia

Increasing the economy's capacity to add value to the work performed

Performance indicator	Baseline	Desired change
Productivity gap between the SR and the EU-27 in % (calculated at current prices) (2024)	34 %	significant decrease
Real GDP growth rate in % (average 2022-2025)	1.3 %	substantial increase
Fixed assets per worker as a share of the EU-27 average (2022)	73 %	substantial increase
Investment rate (gross fixed capital formation as a share of GDP) (average 2021-2025)	20.5 %	slight increase
Value added rate in the economy (gross value added / output) (2024)	42 %	slight increase
Total venture capital to GDP ratio, % of GDP (2025)	0.021 %	substantial increase
General government deficit, % of GDP (2025)	4.6 %	significant decrease
Gross general government debt, % of GDP (2025)	61.4 %	significant decrease

Sources: Eurostat, OECD

Internationally competitive universities, science and research linked to regional centres

Performance indicator	Baseline	Desired change
Share of foreign academics (2025)	6 %	substantial increase
Gross domestic expenditure on R&D, % of GDP (2024)	0.98 %	substantial increase
Business enterprise expenditure on R&D, % of GDP (2024)	0.59 %	substantial increase
European Innovation Index, score (2025)	62.6	substantial increase
Number of ERC grants awarded to universities per 1,000 academic staff, (2022)	0	substantial increase
Share of co-publications with an industry partner, % (2022)	6.9 %	slight increase
Joint cooperation with an industry partner in European international projects per 1,000 FTE (2022)	73.28	substantial increase

Sources: Eurostat, European Innovation Scoreboard 2025, European Higher Education Sector Scoreboard

Preparing individuals for careers amid accelerating technological progress

Performance indicator	Baseline	Desired change
Share of 15-year-old students with low achievement, % (2022)	33.2 %	significant decrease
Share of 15-year-old students with top achievement, % (2022)	7.3 %	substantial increase
Participation of jobseekers in training programmes, % (2024)	1.5 %	substantial increase
Long-term unemployment rate, % (2025)	3.4 %	significant decrease
Labour market participation rate of people with the lowest educational attainment, % (2024)	27.5 %	substantial increase

Sources: Eurostat, OECD PISA, European Commission – Labour Market Policy Database

Retaining, attracting and using talent

Performance indicator	Baseline	Desired change
Share of Slovak students studying abroad, % (2022)	21.6 %	significant decrease
Share of foreign students at Slovak universities, % (2025)	20.3 %	slight increase
Return of secondary school graduates who completed their studies abroad 10 years after the school-leaving examination, % (2012)	40 %	substantial increase
Talent attractiveness index for highly educated workers (2023)	0.50	slight increase
Number of certificates of Slovak living abroad issued (2025)	922	substantial increase

Sources: OECD Education at a Glance, Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information: Statistical Yearbook – Higher Education, ODLIV MOZGOV III: VRÁŤ MI TIE HVIEZDY, OECD Indicators of Talent Attractiveness – ITA, Eurostat, Office for Slovaks Living Abroad

Sustainable Country

A healthy and diverse landscape that adapts to climate change

Performance indicators	Baseline	Desired change
Share of ecosystems in favourable or improving condition, %	37.6 %	significant increase
Annual land take resulting from land use changes, ha, % (Index 2005 – trend in changes of agricultural land use)	97.2 %	substantial decrease
Minimum ecological flows in watercourses, %	40 %	slight increase
Share of inhabitants practising environmentally responsible behaviour, % (2019)	20 %	substantial increase
Average connectivity of forest landscape (2021)	86.1 %	slight increase

Sources: EEA

Affordable low-carbon energy

Performance indicator	Baseline	Desired change
Total greenhouse gas emissions, Mt CO ₂ eq (2024)	33.9	substantial decrease
Energy intensity, ktOE/million EUR of output	0.19	slight decrease
Eco-innovation index (2024)	94.4	significant increase
Primary energy consumption (PEC), Mtoe (2024)	16	slight decrease
Share of RES in gross final energy consumption % (2023)	17 %	significant increase
Fossil fuel subsidies, EUR billion (2023)	1.8	significant decrease

Sources: Eurostat, EEA

Sustainable circular economy

Performance indicator	Baseline	Desired change
Material footprint, tonnes of raw material equivalent per capita – RME (2024)	14.9	significant decrease
Share of secondary raw materials in the economy, (2022) %	9.1 %	significant increase
Municipal waste generated, kg per capita (2024)	489	significant decrease
Recycled waste, kg per capita (2024)	186	significant increase
Development of separate collection of biodegradable municipal waste, t (2024)	623,536	significant increase
Food waste at the level of food manufacturers, retail and distribution, t	163,000	significant decrease

Sources: Eurostat, European Commission

An integrated and accessible low-carbon sustainable mobility system

Performance indicator	Baseline	Desired change
Greenhouse gas emissions from transport, CO ₂ eq., Mt/year, thousand tonnes (2024)	7.7	substantial decrease
Share of public transport in passenger transport performance, % (2024)	22.5 %	slight increase
Share of rail in freight transport performance % (2024)	30.1 %	slight increase
Number of road traffic fatalities, number of persons (2024)	262	substantial decrease
Share of road bridges in poor, very poor and emergency condition (categories V, VI and VII) on class I, II and III roads, motorways and expressways, % (2024)	33.4 %	substantial decrease

Sources: SHMI, Eurostat, Statistical Office of the SR

Food security and resilience of the food system

Performance indicator	Baseline	Desired change
Foreign trade balance in agri-food products, EUR million (2025)	-2,877	slight increase
Share of Slovak food products on retail shelves, % (2026)	40.4 %	slight increase
Production self-sufficiency rate, % (2024)		slight increase
Temperate fruit	29.5	
Vegetables	25.3	
Cow's milk	73.1	
Beef	75.0	
Pork	43.0	
Podiel ekologicky obhospodarovanej pôdy z poľnohospodárskej pôdy, % (2024)	12.9 %	significant increase
Podiel katastrálnych území s ukončenými pozemkovými úpravami, % (2025)	14.9 %	substantial increase
Potenciálne zavlažovaná poľnohospodárska pôda, ha (2023)	337,626	slight increase

Sources: Eurostat, Commodity situation and outlook reports of the MARD SR, Cadastre of the SR, Spatial Information Register, studies, Slovak Food Chamber, studies, Commodity situation and outlook reports of the MARD SR.

Modern State

Performance indicator	Baseline	Desired change
European Quality of Government Index (EQI), ranking Monitoring and evaluation of sub-indices as well The index has a regional dimension	-0.4 to -1.2 below average	significant increase

Source: Quality of Government Institute, University of Gothenburg

Digital state and evidence-based decision-making

Performance indicator	Baseline	Desired change
Rate of automated data exchange between institutions, new indicator	monitoring to begin	significant increase
Number of users of e-government services, % of internet users, DESI indicator (2024)	76.15 %	slight increase
User-friendly design of e-government services, score 0-100, DESI indicator (2024)	52.99	significant increase
Pre-filled forms in e-government services based on available data on the citizen, score 0-100 DESI indicator (2024)	60.83	significant increase
Share of relevant legislative proposals with an impact assessment clause, % new indicator	monitoring to begin	slight increase

Source: DESI (EC)

Strategic investment and efficient public procurement

Performance indicator	Baseline	Desired change
Percentage of contract value (in EUR) awarded on the basis of criteria other than the lowest price (MEAT), % (2025)	5.1 %	substantial increase
Percentage of municipal investment projects above the set threshold implemented on the basis of a standardised analytical assessment of benefits, %	monitoring to begin	increase

Source: Public Procurement Office

Accessibility and quality of public services

Performance indicator	Baseline	Desired change
Index of multiple deprivation (share of inhabitants), new indicator	monitoring to begin	decrease
Degree of variation in the quality and accessibility of key services between regions, %, new indicator	monitoring to begin	decrease

Justice, integrity and the rule of law

Performance indicator	Baseline	Desired change
Disposition time by main court case type (core case types, length of proceedings mainly in commercial and civil cases), number of days (2025)	218	decrease
Trust in the judiciary index, percentage of inhabitants who trust it a lot or somewhat (2024)	33	substantial increase
Corruption Perceptions Index (2024)	48/100	substantial increase
Index of perceived safety in the community, new indicator	monitoring to begin	increase
Share of legislation adopted in fast-track legislative procedure, %, new indicator	monitoring to begin	decrease

Sources: Eurobarometer, Transparency International, Ministry of Justice of the SR

Security and resilience of society

Performance indicator	Baseline	Desired change
Index of institutional trust in crisis situations (information provided by the state in times of uncertainty is trustworthy), new indicator	monitoring to begin	increase
Media and political literacy index, new indicator	monitoring to begin	increase
Availability of critical infrastructure, new indicator	monitoring to begin	increase
Operational readiness of the armed forces and relevant components of the security and crisis management system, new indicator	monitoring to begin	increase
Share of households prepared to cope with the first 72 hours of a crisis without external help (%) new indicator	monitoring to begin	increase

Appendix 2: Methodology

This appendix describes the methodology used to prepare each chapter of the vision, in the order in which the chapters appear in the document. The chapters Path to the vision: where we must focus and Vision: what we want to achieve were developed by bringing together values, the present situation, and the challenges and opportunities of the future. The prioritisation of individual areas was expert-led and developed through a participatory process. The extended version of the participatory process is described in Appendix 4. Appendix 3 describes the link to the country-specific recommendations for Slovakia (CSRs).

Values and principles: what we protect

The mandate for the vision specified four pillars of analysis: Quality of life (later renamed Dignified life), Successful Slovakia, Sustainable country and Modern state. These pillars were well suited to quantitative and qualitative analysis, but some areas, such as the democratic system, foreign policy orientation or the country's aspirations, would not have been covered at all. Identifying these principles of conduct also matters for the direction Slovakia takes. The vision therefore also needed to be anchored in core values, as one of its three sources.

The first, longer selection of key values drew on the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, the 2021 National Values Survey of Slovakia carried out for the Slovak Global Network, the long-term work of the DEKK Institute on the study of values, the expertise of specialists from the Institute for Research in Social Communication of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, and discussions with experts in sociology, anthropology and other social sciences. Nine areas, each with a short description, were selected from these sources. The proposed values for Slovakia in 2040 were: democratic, resilient, anchored and trustworthy, operating in a higher league, experimenting and learning, cohesive, fair, open, and responsible.

The final selection of values and their wording was arrived at primarily through a participatory workshop on 24 March, attended by 53 experts from public administration, the economy, the business environment, innovation and technology, social affairs and civil society, regional development, security, transport, architecture and youth. The workshop was prepared in cooperation with the Finnish consultancy Demos Helsinki, which has many years of experience in preparing strategic documents at national and international level. Working in five groups of eleven, the experts discussed the longer list of values and used qualitative methods to assess which to keep, merge or leave out. The aim of the workshop was to agree on no more than five values. The qualitative data from the workshops, including comments on the wording of individual descriptions, were then incorporated into the first version of the document. This selection subsequently went through several series of roundtable discussions and two rounds of written consultation. It was also presented at regional events in four cities.

Present: what we build on

The analytical basis for preparing Vision Slovakia 2040 is the methodology for measuring quality of life developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).¹²⁴ This methodology offers an alternative to the traditional approach of measuring progress solely through GDP growth. The approach follows from the main goal of the vision set out in Government Resolution No. 561 of 19 November 2025 on the starting points and procedure for preparing the vision and strategy for the development of Slovakia to 2040.

The ongoing cooperation between the Office of the Government and the OECD, together with existing detailed and internationally comparable data sources for quality-of-life outcome indicators, speeded up the initial data analysis. Outcome indicators were selected from available, regularly collected datasets from Eurostat, the OECD and the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. Appendix 1 contains all the data sources and background material, and Appendix 2 the selected indicators.

Quality of life is understood as the dependent variable, with all other areas, such as education, innovation or support for industry, serving as means of improving it rather than as ends in themselves.

The analytical work was organised around eight quality-of-life domains, based on the OECD's original framework of 11 domains and supplemented by indicators from the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE):

Material living standards and economic security

1. Work and quality of working life
2. Housing
3. Health
4. Education and skills
5. Governance and civic engagement
6. Social relations and leisure
7. Environmental quality

During the preparation of the vision, the expert team reviewed the strategic documents of other European countries and analysed those of the European Commission relevant to individual areas of the vision.

The structure of the vision is partly set by the government resolution, but the expert teams for each pillar validated the division of the strategic goals, the links between them and horizontal priorities such as the regional dimension, security, culture and cohesion. The strategic goals and priorities were tested in several rounds of participation, through:

- the first round of roundtable discussions (24–26 February, with 56 experts)
- an exploratory participatory workshop (6 March, with more than 50 experts)
- meetings with representatives of ministries
- regional consultations
- individual consultations with specialist experts
- the first round of written consultation, in which we received more than 1,100 comments
- the second round, in which we received more than 650 comments
- the third round, in which we received more than 550 comments.

A detailed description of the present situation is given in Appendix 1: Supplementary analysis of the present situation. The proposed performance indicators are set out in Appendix 4, which describes the baseline in 2025–2026 and the desired trajectory for each indicator. Appendix 2: SWOT analysis and Appendix 3: PESTLE analysis complete the analytical basis for preparing the vision.

Future: what may lie ahead of us

Exploratory scenarios were prepared to identify Slovakia's possible development trajectories. The scenarios represent alternative, possible worlds in which Slovakia may find itself, depending on how it responds to global megatrends and to internal challenges and opportunities. They were prepared by experts from the Institute for Forecasting of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, drawing on the global megatrends identified in the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2026, foresight material from the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC), a 2022 report on strategic developments in international and Slovak policy prepared for the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs in cooperation with the OECD, and the institute's own analyses and models, particularly in demographic and climate forecasting.^{125, 126, 127}

Slovakia's possible future development, and the megatrends that will fundamentally shape it, were identified in two consecutive exploratory workshops attended by more than 100 experts from a range of fields. The workshops were designed under the guidance of foresight and participation specialists from the international consultancy Demos Helsinki, and the half-day sessions were led by experienced facilitators. These activities enriched the scenarios and identified key points in Slovakia's development on the way to achieving the strategic goals by 2040.

Notes

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117. The preparation of a systemic change in public administration will therefore be based on how Slovakia actually functions across its territory. The starting point will be an analysis of commuting links, functional urban regions, territorial capacity, access to services, demographic trends and projections to 2040 with an outlook to 2060. Such an analysis will make it possible to identify which territorial arrangements are capable of carrying out public tasks, and where current boundaries, competences or capacities are insufficient to deliver an outcome that the state can guarantee and finance in the long term. Only on this basis will it be possible to allocate competences between the central, sub-regional, regional and supra-local levels and to determine what standard of service should be ensured in each type of territory. The reform will thus not be based solely on the administrative map or historical boundaries, but on real links, accessibility, capacity and the financial sustainability of the territory. Decisions on service standards will therefore not be separated from decisions on competences, territorial organisation and resources.
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123. In this document we use the English word foresight, which is also used professionally in Slovak in its English form. Foresight is a broader concept that explores uncertainties, discontinuities and alternative scenarios, and uses forecasting (prognostika) as one of its methods. The best Slovak translation, although it is not used in the professional literature, would be “predvídanie budúcnosti” (anticipating the future).
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AUTHORS AFFILIATIONS

Ing. Marek Radvanský, PhD. – Institute of Economic Research Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; Martin Smatana, MSc. – Slovak Medical University; Mgr. Miroslav Štefánik, PhD. – Institute of Economic Research Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; Mgr. Richard Filčák, PhD. – Centre for Social and Psychological Sciences of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; doc. Mgr. Ing. Tomáš Černěnko, PhD. – Department of Public Administration and Regional Development, Faculty of National Economy, University of Economics in Bratislava; Ing. Petra Dzurovčinová – Office of the Slovak Academy of Sciences; Iva Kleinová, MPA – Office of the Slovak Academy of Sciences; Mgr. Barbora Belovická – Office of the Slovak Academy of Sciences; prof. Ing. Emília Sičáková Beblavá, PhD. – Institute of Public Policy, Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Comenius University Bratislava; RNDr. Dušana Dokupilová, PhD. – Centre for Social and Psychological Sciences of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; Ing. Karol Frank, PhD. – Institute of Economic Research Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; Mgr. Michal Garaj, PhD. – independent expert; doc. Daniel Gerbery, PhD. – Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University Bratislava; Mgr. Tomáš Goga, PhD. – Institute of Geography of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; Ing. Patrik Haburaj – NEST Institute – Institute for New Security Threats; RNDr. Ľuboš Halada, CSc. – Institute of Landscape Ecology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; doc. Mgr. Marcel Horňák, PhD. – Faculty of Natural Sciences, Comenius University Bratislava; doc. Ing. Martin Hudcovský, PhD. – Institute of Economic Research of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; prof. RNDr. Zita Izakovičová, PhD. – Institute of Landscape Ecology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; Ing. Tomáš Jeck, PhD. – Institute of Economic Research of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; prof. Ing. Adriana Kolesárová, PhD. – Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra; doc. JUDr. Marek Kordík, PhD., LL.M. – Department of Criminal Law, Criminology and Criminalistics, Faculty of Law, Comenius University Bratislava; Mgr. Ivana Maleš – INCIEN – Institute of Circular Economy; Mgr. Tomáš Miklošovič, PhD. – Institute of Economic Research Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; Matúš Mišík, PhD. – Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University Bratislava; doc. Ing. Karol Morvay, PhD. – Institute of Economic Research Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i., Faculty of Economics and Finance, Bratislava University of Economics and Business; Mgr. Marianna Mrva, PhD. – Institute of Sociology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; Mgr. Maroš Paulini – independent expert; prof. Ing. Ján Pokrivčák, PhD. – Faculty of Economics and Management, Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra; RNDr. Mgr. Radoslav Považan, PhD. – Institute of Landscape Ecology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; Ing. Martina Repíková – Centre for Social and Psychological Sciences of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; Mgr. Miloš Rusnák, PhD. – Institute of Geography of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; RNDr. Pavol Siman, PhD. – Earth Science Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i., Office of the Slovak Academy of Sciences; Ing. Mária Širaňová, MA., PhD. – Institute of Economic Research Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; Mgr. Daniel Škobla, PhD. – Institute of Ethnology and Social Anthropology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; Ing. Jozef Škultéty, CSc. – Consultant to the Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic; doc. RNDr. PhDr. Branislav Šprocha, PhD. – Centre for Social and Psychological Sciences of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; Ing. Jana Špulerová, PhD. – Institute of Landscape Ecology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; doc. Mgr. Martin Šveda, PhD. – Faculty of Natural Sciences, Comenius University Bratislava, Institute of Geography of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; Mgr. Martin Venhart, DrSc. – Institute of Physics of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; JUDr. Jana Venhartová, PhD., LL.M. – Food Chamber of Slovakia; doc. JUDr. Jozef Vozár, CSc. – Institute of State and Law of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; Mgr. Ján Výboštok, PhD. – Institute of Geography of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, v. v. i.; Ing. Domicián Zahorjan, MBA – NEST Institute – Institute for New Security Threats

