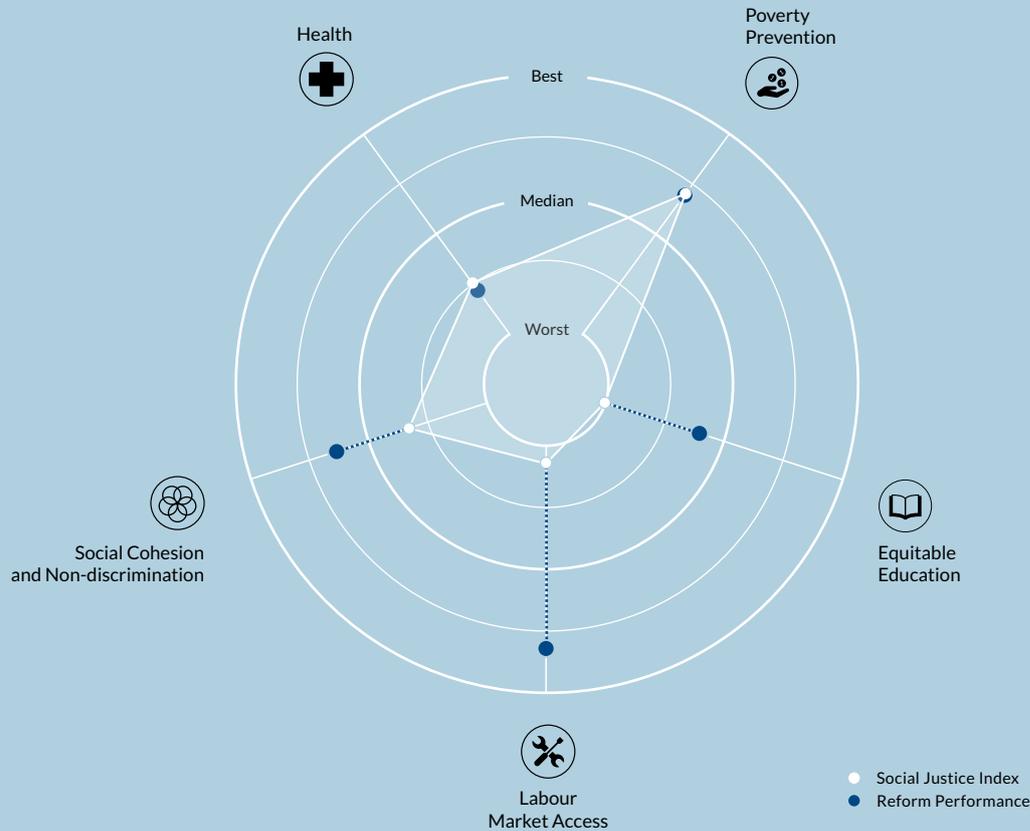


Findings by Country



Slovakia

How does the country rank in the EU?



Overall Findings

Need Based on the experts' assessment, Slovakia has the fourth-lowest overall need for social reforms (1.75) and also ranks among the top five in four dimensions. The experts assess the need as being particularly low with regard to improving Social Cohesion and Non-discrimination (1.54, rank 2/18), advancing Poverty Prevention schemes (1.46, rank 3/27), ensuring the provision of Equitable Education (1.63, rank 4/22) and reforming Labour Market Access (1.83, rank 4). Only with regard to improving the Health system is the need to reform comparatively high (2.30, rank 14/20). These results partially stand in contrast to the 2015 Social Justice Index (SJI): While Slovakia achieved considerable success in the dimension of Poverty Prevention (6/28), it ranked among the bottom 10 in the other four dimensions, namely, Equitable Education (28/28), Labour Market Access (26/28), Social Cohesion and Non-discrimination (20/28) and Health (21/28). Furthermore, the 2015 SJI pointed out that improving education opportunities as well as access to the labour market are the most pressing issues for Slovakia.

Overall Reform Performance Ranking



Overview of Reform Barometer Scores

| | Performance | | | Quality | | | | | |
|--|-------------|--------|------|---------|----------|------|----------------------|-------|--------|
| | Score | Rank | Rank | Need | Activity | Gap | Rank | Score | Rank |
| Slovakia <i>Overall</i> | +0.27 | 12 /20 | 12 | 1.75 | 32% | 1.43 | N 4 /23 A 22 /23 | +0.83 | 5 /20 |
| Poverty Prevention | +0.38 | 8 /24 | 8 | 1.46 | 36% | 0.80 | N 3 /27 A 16 /27 | +1.04 | 7 /24 |
| Equitable Education | +0.10 | 13 /21 | 13 | 1.63 | 18% | 0.45 | N 4 /22 A 18 /22 | +0.54 | 11 /21 |
| Labour Market Access | +0.45 | 4 /17 | 4 | 1.83 | 49% | 0.34 | N 4 /19 A 11 /19 | +0.91 | 2 /17 |
| Social Cohesion and Non-discrimination | +0.37 | 5 /12 | 5 | 1.54 | 43% | 0.11 | N 2 /18 A 9 /18 | +0.86 | 6 /12 |
| Health | +0.10 | 15 /19 | 15 | 2.30 | 19% | 0.41 | N 14 /20 A 20 /20 | +0.54 | 13 /19 |

When looking at specific societal groups, the experts consistently assess the need for reforms addressing the foreign-born population and refugees as being low. For instance, the need to reduce the risk of poverty for these subgroups was only evaluated at 0.60 and 0.67, respectively, compared to 1.36 for the total population. The integration of refugees in the education system is assessed at 1.25, compared to an overall need on the dimension of Equitable Education of 1.63. Furthermore, the need to increase their employment is assessed as being significantly lower (1.11 each) than for the total population (2.45). Finally, the need for integration policies is assessed as being equally low (0.87). Most experts explain their assessment by referencing the low numbers of refugees and foreign-born people in Slovakia, while one describes the country’s asylum policies as extremely restrictive.

Activity Overall, Slovakia has one of the lowest activity rates. According to the experts, the government has addressed only 32 percent of the need to reform, ranking the country second to last, only in front of Spain. The activity rate is particularly low on the dimensions of Health (19%, rank 20/20) and Equitable Education (18%, rank 18/22), which was identified by the 2015 SJI as one of the most pressing issues.

However, it has to be pointed out that government activity addressing foreign-born people and refugees is consistently evaluated as being extremely low across various dimensions. The activity rate is close to or in fact zero for the objectives of reducing poverty (foreign-born 8%, refugees 0%), integrating refugees into the educational system (0%), increasing employment (0%) and improving integration policies (0%). This is not very surprising, as the need for reforms on these issues is assessed as being very low, as well.

Quality The quality of the reforms is assessed as being high (0.83), ranking the country in 5th place. Looking at the dimensions, the experts expect a positive impact from reforms on Poverty Prevention (1.04, rank 7/24), Labour Market Access (0.91, rank 2/17), Social Cohesion (0.86, rank 6/12) and, to a lesser extent, Health (0.54, rank 13/19).

Dimension Findings



Poverty Prevention

Need According to the experts, the need for reducing poverty in Slovakia is comparatively low (1.46, rank 3/27). These results accord with the findings of the 2015 SJI, which explains that the low need is due to the country's relatively even income-distribution patterns. Furthermore, the report stressed that Slovakia has achieved considerable success on this dimension, especially with regard to preventing poverty for senior citizens, since 2007. However, it did point out that the risk of poverty is much higher for children and young people. The experts' evaluation is also in accord with this: While the need to introduce poverty prevention schemes directed at elderly people is assessed at 1.65, the need is much higher for children (2.05), but also for single parents (2.41). One expert comments that the minimum income should be raised to improve children's living conditions, and that measures addressing work-life balance should be designed to help single parents. The comments of most experts focus on employment and the need to reform labour market access in order to prevent poverty. One expert explains: "There is a general lack of opportunities to work. Several regions have extremely high long-term unemployment (more than 25%), [and] several groups have virtually no access to employment (poorly educated, Roma communities)."¹ One expert also points out that the majority of poor people in Slovakia are long-term unemployed. Therefore, he argues, policies should focus on increasing their employment.

Activity Overall, the activity rate for this dimension is comparatively low. According to the experts, the government has addressed only 36 percent of the need for reform. Policies have mostly aimed at reducing the risk of poverty for senior citizens (68%), for children (52%) and, to a much lesser extent, single parents (21%). Virtually no policy has been introduced to specifically address the risk of poverty for the foreign-born population and refugees.

Schemes reported by the experts include the 'National Action Plan for Children 2013–2017', which aims at building and developing a system for protecting the rights and interests of children by promoting policies that enable parents of children at risk of social exclusion to remain in the labour market. Furthermore, child care benefits have been raised, and the administrative

¹ Michal Páleník, Employment Institute, Bratislava

hurdles for recipients have also been reduced. With regard to senior citizens, the experts report that a minimum retirement pension was introduced in 2015. It targets elderly people who have worked for a minimum period of 30 years and would otherwise depend on social assistance benefits. The minimum pension is equal to 136 percent of the subsistence minimum.

Quality The reforms introduced by the government are expected to have quite a positive effect on poverty prevention. The experts assess the quality of new policies at 1.04, ranking the country 7th out of 24. The quality is assessed as being even higher for children (1.27) and the total population (1.30). Nonetheless, a number of experts comment critically on these policies. One expert states that the measures taken are very general in nature and do not reflect the needs of specific groups or regions. Another expert adds: “The majority of reforms are not targeted at some specific group of people who need help. For older people (in the area of pensions), greater solidarity is needed. The specific groups of people endangered by poverty (single-parent families, young people without work) gain no benefit from lower taxes (...) specific measures have to be prepared.”² Furthermore, one expert criticises the fact that the steps taken towards poverty prevention are too small to have any sustainable impact. For example, the allowance of free train rides for students and pensioners or the provision of a minimum pension are not effective in the fight against poverty in Slovakia.

Equitable Education

Need Although the 2015 SJI identified education as the dimension most urgently in need of reform, the experts assess the need for Slovakia as the fourth lowest among 22 assessed EU member states. The need is seen as being particularly low in the policy objectives of improving the quality of teaching (1.13, rank 2/22), integrating refugees (1.25, rank 5/18) and reducing the rate of early school leavers (1.40, rank 5/21). In contrast, the experts assess a higher need to better ensure equal opportunities in education (1.66, rank 7/25), especially with regard to early and pre-primary education (2.13 each), but even more so to improve structural conditions regarding financial and human resources (2.11, rank 15/23), again particularly in early and pre-primary education (2.40 and 3.00, respectively). Though still fairly low in comparative terms, the need for reducing the dependence of learning success from a child’s socioeconomic background is assessed as being the highest in this dimension (2.25, rank 5/21). As the 2015 SJI report states: “The PISA performance of Slovak students depends on their socioeconomic background more so than in any other EU country.”

Activity The activity rate in the dimension of Equitable Education is particularly low. Only 18 percent of the assessed need has been addressed, ranking the country 18th out of 22. Most worryingly, the activity rate is assessed at 0 percent for three policy objectives: the rate of early school leavers, the integration of refugees and – arguably the most pressing issue for Slovakia – the independence of learning success from children’s socioeconomic background.

² Ján Košta, Institute of Economic Research, Bratislava

One expert comments: “There has been no significant reform, and demographic changes will make the problems greater (mainly due to an increasing proportion of kids growing up in segregated communities and ghettos).”³

When looking at the pressing challenges of improving opportunities and structural conditions in early and pre-primary education, a much higher activity is observed: 57 percent with regard to equal opportunities at both educational levels, 26 percent regarding structural conditions in early education, and 60 percent for pre-primary education. The experts report that these activities mainly focus on increased funding for pre-primary education so as to increase capacity at this level. The main aim is to enrol 95 percent of children between the ages of four and five by the year 2020.

Labour Market Access

Need The main need in this dimension is assessed as increasing employment (2.16, rank 8/22). The need is much higher for most subgroups – with the exception of women (1.91), foreign-born people and refugees (1.11 each). While a need to increase job opportunities for the total population is assessed as being very high (2.45), it is even higher for the young (2.73), low-skilled workers (2.82) and the long-term unemployed (3.00). As for the latter, an expert comments: “For the long-unemployed (for example, Roma people living in shacks in Roma settlements), there is a need to undertake educational activities – owing to a lack of basic education – and then to do training activities for selected professions.”⁴

Activity The activity rate in the dimension of Labour Market Access is 49 percent, which is exactly the EU median (11/19). However, the activity rate is even higher with regards to increasing employment for the entire population (73%), the young (89%) and the long-term employed (70%), which is the subgroup most urgently in need.

The experts report a number of specific measures taken in this regard: Health and social security contributions for employees with low wages have been reduced, and subsidies have been provided to companies for employing the long-term unemployed or young people in their first job. With regard to women, child care benefits have been increased and maternity leave benefits introduced.

Quality The quality of the reforms introduced so far is assessed at 0.91, ranking the country 2nd out of 17 EU member states. The positive impact on the employment of the long-term unemployed people is evaluated as being particularly high (1.25). However, some experts also comment critically, stating that “generally, the money for active labour market policies is insufficient”⁵, especially when considering the high unemployment rate. Furthermore, as one expert notes: “Financial aid is relatively very low from the point of view of entrepreneurs. Employers should receive more services free of charge, and special information from specialized state agencies should be at their disposal, to be successful in the tough competition in the market. The state

³ Michal Páleník, Employment Institute, Bratislava

⁴ Rastislav Bednárík, Institute for Labour and Family Research, Bratislava

⁵ Ján Košta, Institute of Economic Research, Bratislava

should help them to sell their products.”⁶ Another adds: “The policies are slight; they target only 1 to 5 percent of the problem.”⁷

Social Cohesion and Non-discrimination

Need The need to improve Social Cohesion is evaluated as being very low (1.54, rank 2/18), especially with regard to gender equality (1.38, rank 2/17), integration policies (0.87, rank 2/17) and the NEETs rate (1.75, rank 3/15). The need to decrease income and wealth inequality is assessed as being slightly higher (2.18, rank 7/22).

Activity In the dimension of social cohesion, 43 percent of the need to reform has been addressed (9/18). With regard to the most pressing objective of decreasing income and wealth inequality, only 33 percent of the need has been met. While the experts assess that no action has been taken to promote integration policies for foreign-born people or refugees, 70 percent of the need to advance gender equality has been addressed, ranking the country 3rd out of 17 for this policy objective. Here, a number of experts specifically point to the ‘National Strategy for Gender Equality in the Slovak Republic 2014–2019’. The strategy does not set specific targets, but rather identifies main goals, such as strengthening women’s economic independence by removing gender gaps in the labour market, reducing gender differences in the participation of women and men in executive positions, as well as improving gender equality in education, science and research.

Quality The experts expect the measures taken to have quite a positive effect on social cohesion and non-discrimination; quality is rated at 0.86, ranking the country 6th out of 12. An even stronger impact is expected on income and wealth inequality (1.00, rank 2/9).

Health

Need Based on the experts’ assessment, the reform of the health system should be a priority for policymakers, as the need is evaluated as being the highest in this dimension (2.30, rank 14/20). For five of the eight policy objectives, the need is assessed as being much higher than in other EU countries: Reforms are needed to improve health care governance (2.50, rank 16/19), the outcome performance of the health system (2.55, rank 15/19), public health (2.57, rank 15/24), the quality of health care (2.58, rank 17/22) and – most urgently – the efficiency of the health system (2.73, rank 17/20). One expert explains: “There is a strong need for public health system reform. There is a strong need to highlight that a health impact assessment is crucial within any policy decision-making. Public health is a result of health- and non-health-sector activities and cooperation, under the leadership of public health experts. Public health is not a priority for politicians today because health priority is focused on the health care system and its organiza-

⁶ Ján Košta, Institute of Economic Research, Bratislava

⁷ Michal Páleník, Employment Institute, Bratislava

tion, and not on prevention based on the determinants of a health model. We need to improve advocacy for good health through all society segments. There is a big gap between the theory of public health and practice. Lack of awareness and interest in public health issues among policymakers outside health needs remedying.”⁸ Another expert adds: “We are lacking evidence-based public health policy.”⁹

Activity Slovakia is awarded the lowest activity rate: Only 19 percent of the need for reforms was addressed. No activity is registered for two policy objectives: health care governance and outcome performance of the health system. With regard to the most pressing issue in this dimension, improving the efficiency of the health system, only 18 percent of the need has been addressed (19/20).

Quality Though the experts expect a positive influence from the reforms in the Health dimension, they don’t anticipate a strong impact. The quality of reforms is assessed at 0.54 (13/19). With regard to the improvement of public health, reforms are assessed as being ineffective (0.00, rank 18/19).

⁸ Daniela Kállayová, Public Health Department, Trnava University

⁹ Tomáš Szalay, Health Policy Institute, Bratislava