

MIGRATION – SOME ASPECTS IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC IN 2025

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the labour market in the Slovak Republic in 2025, highlighting the coexistence of historically low unemployment and persistent structural inefficiencies. Unemployment fell to 5.3% in 2024 and remained stable in 2025, while employment reached high levels and real wages resumed growth due to declining inflation. Despite these positive indicators, the labour market is constrained by structural factors, including regional disparities, skills mismatches, and demographic decline. Labour shortages are concentrated in economically developed regions, particularly around Bratislava, while higher unemployment persists in eastern regions. At the same time, outward migration and the rising number of foreign workers reflect imbalances in labour allocation and increasing dependence on external labour supply.

Keywords: Slovak Republic, migration, flows, indicators, 2025

Introduction

Migration in the Slovak Republic in 2024–2025 reflects a transition from crisis-driven displacement to structurally embedded, regionally concentrated mobility. The post-2022 Ukrainian displacement shock has not disappeared but has been absorbed into a hybrid migration system combining humanitarian protection, labour-market demand, and circular intra-European mobility.

This transformation aligns with long-established migration theory suggesting that migration systems become self-reinforcing over time, where initial movements generate networks and institutional pathways that sustain further mobility. This mechanism is captured in cumulative

causation theory, which shows how migration restructures origin and destination contexts in ways that make further migration more likely rather than less likely (Massey, 1990).

At the same time, contemporary migration theory emphasizes that migration is not mechanically driven by income gaps alone, but by the interaction between individual aspirations and structural capabilities, including legal access, networks, and institutional constraints. This framework explains why migration from and to Slovakia increasingly takes the form of selective, status-dependent mobility rather than uniform mass movement (de Haas, 2010).

Within this theoretical context, the Slovak migration system can be understood as a regionally embedded labour and protection regime rather than a globally diversified migration hub.

Population Mobility and Citizenship Dynamics

In 2024, 6,824 persons immigrated permanently to Slovakia, while 4,425 emigrated, resulting in a positive net migration balance (Table 1). Migration flows remain overwhelmingly European: 87% of immigrants originated from Europe, and 94% of emigrants relocated within Europe. This confirms Slovakia's position as a regionally embedded migration system rather than a global migration hub.

A defining feature is the high share of return migration. Slovak citizens accounted for 53% of all immigrants (Table 2), indicating that circular and return mobility dominates over classical immigration. EU citizens represented 14% of inflows, while third-country nationals accounted for 33%, with Ukrainians comprising 19% of total immigration. This concentration reflects both geographic proximity and geopolitical drivers.

Citizenship dynamics reinforce these patterns. In 2024, 881 foreigners acquired Slovak citizenship, with women representing 47.1%. Ukrainians constituted the largest group (177 persons, 20.1%), followed by EU nationals (37.2%), including 125 Czech citizens. At the same time, 136 individuals lost Slovak citizenship, predominantly acquiring Austrian citizenship (113 cases), suggesting continued outward integration into higher-wage labour markets (Table 3).

This combination of return migration, selective naturalization, and outward mobility indicates a highly fluid migration system shaped by economic optimization rather than permanent settlement.

Residence Regimes and Legal Migration Structure

In 2024, Slovakia issued 96,162 residence permits to third-country nationals, representing a slight decrease of 0.7% compared to 2023. Ukrainians dominated this category, receiving 59,191 permits. However, the first half of 2025 saw a sharper contraction, with 38,170 permits issued, marking a 20.2% decline year-on-year (Table 4).

Temporary residence remains the dominant legal channel, granted to 60,344 individuals in 2024. Within this category, business-related permits declined (25,218; -2.7%), while employment-related permits increased (18,959; +2.7%), confirming sustained labour demand. Family reunification rose significantly (8,610; +11.8%), indicating consolidation of migrant communities, while study-related permits fell sharply (5,266; -20.4%) (Table 4).

Permanent residence increased markedly to 8,976 persons (+71%), with long-term residence more than doubling (+102%). This shift suggests a gradual transition from temporary to more stable legal status among migrants already present in the country (Table 4).

Tolerated stay decreased to 26,842 persons, almost entirely composed of temporary refuge for Ukrainians. Asylum remained marginal, with only 50 individuals granted protection in 2024 (Table 4).

Overall, Slovakia's residence regime reflects a dual structure: high-volume humanitarian protection coexists with economically driven migration channels and a growing base of long-term residents.

Labour Market Integration and Economic Role of Migration

Migration in Slovakia is increasingly driven by labour market demand. In 2024, 64,791 foreign nationals entered the labour market (+9.1% year-on-year), with nearly half (48%) coming from Ukraine (Table 5). By the end of 2024, 113,941 foreign workers were employed in Slovakia, increasing to 131,738 by August 2025 (+21% year-on-year).

At the same time, outward labour mobility remains significant. In 2024, 117,300 Slovak citizens worked abroad, representing 4.5% of total domestic employment. This dual dynamic—importing foreign labour while exporting domestic workers—reflects persistent wage differentials within the European labour market (Table 6).

Migration thus plays a structural role in sustaining economic activity. Foreign workers increasingly fill labour shortages in lower-wage sectors, while Slovak workers continue to seek higher wages abroad. This segmentation stabilizes the labour market but introduces long-term risks related to wage convergence and social stratification.

Asylum and International Protection

The asylum system in Slovakia remains quantitatively limited. In 2024, 165 asylum applications were filed, a 60% decrease from 416 in 2023. In the first eight months of 2025, 124 applications were recorded, confirming low and stable pressure (Table 7).

Applicants originated primarily from conflict-affected regions, including Ukraine, Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, and Syria. However, the scale remains minimal compared to other EU countries. Protection is instead largely delivered through temporary refuge mechanisms, particularly for Ukrainians.

This institutional configuration reduces administrative burden but limits the development of a comprehensive asylum infrastructure.

Irregular Migration and Border Control

Irregular migration declined sharply between 2023 and 2024. Total detected cases fell from 47,610 to 2,664, driven primarily by a collapse in detected illegal stay within the interior (from 46,932 to 586 cases). This suggests a combination of reduced inflows and changes in enforcement practices (Table 8).

Illegal border crossings increased to 2,078 cases in 2024, indicating a shift in migration routes. However, in the first half of 2025, total irregular migration declined further to 688 cases, with both illegal stay and border crossings decreasing.

Unaccompanied minors also declined significantly, from 143 in 2023 to 17 in 2024, and 8 in the first half of 2025. This indicates reduced vulnerability flows compared to crisis conditions.

Overall, irregular migration has transitioned from high-volume disruption to low-intensity, controlled movement.

Conclusion

Migration in the Slovak Republic in 2024–2025 can be characterized by stabilization rather than reversal of post-crisis dynamics. The system has absorbed large-scale displacement from Ukraine into structured legal channels, while simultaneously expanding labour-market-based migration and maintaining low levels of asylum pressure.

From a theoretical perspective, these developments are consistent with cumulative causation processes, where migration becomes self-reinforcing through labour demand, institutional adaptation, and network formation. Once established, migration flows tend to persist even when initial push factors weaken, because the social and economic infrastructure of migration becomes embedded in both origin and destination countries (Massey, 1990).

However, the Slovak case also reflects the importance of constrained mobility frameworks. Migration outcomes are not solely determined by structural demand but by the interaction between aspirations and capabilities, including legal access routes, labour market entry conditions, and humanitarian protection regimes. This explains the coexistence of strong Ukrainian inflows, continued Slovak emigration to higher-wage EU economies, and selective third-country migration into specific labour sectors (de Haas, 2010).

Overall, Slovakia represents a mid-transition migration system: no longer purely emigration-driven, but not yet a fully diversified immigration hub. Its trajectory is structurally dependent on regional geopolitics and labour segmentation within the European Union.

Table 1**Components of population change (in persons), 2024-2025**

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

	Population beginning of year	Natural increase	Net migration	Immigratio n	Emigration
2024 1st	5 422 687	-3 602	1 199	3 253	2 054
2024	5 422 687	-7 635	2 399	6 824	4 425
2025 1st half	5 419 451	-6 607	1 019	3 218	2 054

Table 2**Inflows and outflows of migrants by country of origin and citizenship – OECD countries, 2023-2024**

Origin	2023		2024		Citizenship	2023		2024	
	In	Out	In	Out		In	Out	In	Out
Total	5923	4522	6824	4425	Total	5923	4522	6824	4425
Europe	5096	4195	5939	4149	Europe	5487	4520	6307	4425
EU	3404	3610	3259	3636	EU without SR	934	17	922	13
OECD 36	x	x	x	x	OECD 36	x	x	x	x
OECD 37	x	x	x	x	OECD 37	x	x	x	x
OECD 38	4477	4397	4329	4304	OECD38 without SR	948	18	965	11
Slovakia	x	x	x	x	Slovakia	3783	4500	3633	4408

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

Table 3

Previous citizenship	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Men total	154	247	322	335	299	281	320	351	274	465
Women total	155	237	323	386	287	267	272	326	278	415
Ukraine	51	52	81	89	48	58	45	62	64	86

**Granted Slovak citizenship to foreigners by previous citizenship and gender (persons),
2015-2024**

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

Table 4

2024	Inflow 2024			
	Total	of which		
		Temporary	Permanent	Tolerated
Ukraine	59 191	27 996	4 499	26 696
Total	96 162	60 344	8 976	26 842

Inflow of residence permits for third-country nationals in Slovakia in 2023-2024

Source: Presidium of the Police Corps, Bureau of Border and Alien Police.

Table 5

Indicator (persons)	Inflow 2024		Stock 31.12.2024		Inflow half year 2025		Stock 30.6.2025	
	Total	Wom en	Total	Wom en	Total	Wom en	Total	Wom en
Total nationals working on the basis:	64 79 1	24 516	1139 41	42 35 1	41 42 5	13 346	1268 27	45 858
1. of the authorization granted at work	24 96 5	5 106	29 21 9	6 070	21 837	4 109	36 887	7 854
2.a of information cards (EU/EEA)	8 668	2 519	32 44 4	9 572	4 451	1 269	32 903	9 371
2.b of information cards (other countries)	31 15 8	16 891	52 27 8	26 70 9	15 137	7 968	57 037	28 833

Foreign workers – total foreign nationals in 2021-2025 (half year) by gender and by form of access to the labour market

Source: Centre of Labour, Social Affairs and Family.

Table 6

(thousands of persons)			
	2023	2024	½ 2025
Employed total	2610,0	2620,8	2606,9
Employed abroad	116,6	117,3	121,5
Males	83,2	86,1	94,8
Females	33,4	31,2	26,7

Age brackets			
15-24	9,8	10,8	9,4
25-34	32,1	29,6	29,2
35-44	27,7	33,7	33,4
45-54	25,8	24,8	30,9
55+	21,2	15,9	17,8
Education			
Basic	2,6	2,4	6,6
Lower secondary	32,8	30,7	32,8
Higher secondary	63,1	64,4	62,4
University	18,0	17,5	19,8

Slovaks employed abroad 2023 – 2025

Source: Ministry of Interior SR, Migration Office.

Note: From 2021 according to the new LFS methodology (IESS) the employed include persons on parental leave. Employed persons working abroad up to 1 year with cross-border commuters. Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, Labour Force Survey (LFS).

Table 7

	2023	2024	2025*
Applications	416	165	148
Granted refugee status	37	41	39
Additional protection	43	22	25
Negative decisions	77	59	41
Procedure terminated	323	58	50
Nationality granted	19	10	

2025* until 31.10.

Results of granting procedure for asylum (refugee) status in the Slovak Republic, 2015-2025

Source: Ministry of Interior SR, Migration Office.

Table 8

(in persons)	2024			2025– half year		
	Tot al	In	Out	Tot al	In	Out
Total	2 664			688		
Illegal State border crossing:	2 078	2 057	21	437	431	6
External land border between BCPs	2 055	2 036	19	435	429	6
External land border at BCPs	9	9		2	2	
External air border (non-Schengen flights)	14	12	2			
Illegal stay	586			251		
Inland	555			234		
At BCPs at the exit from SR	10			7		
After return from other Member States	21			10		

Pressure at the state border - illegal migrants, 2024-2025 (half)

Source: Presidium of the Police Corps, Bureau of Border and Alien Police

*Note: ** During temporary reintroduction of border control at internal borders that have been introduced by Government decree from 08/04/2020 to 26/06/2020

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