



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

# SLOVAK REPUBLIC

## EARLY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

30 September 2023

ODIHR Election Assessment Mission  
Final Report



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I.</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>V.</b>	<b>ELECTION ADMINISTRATION .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>VI.</b>	<b>VOTER REGISTRATION.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>VII.</b>	<b>CANDIDATE REGISTRATION.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>VIII.</b>	<b>ELECTION CAMPAIGN .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>IX.</b>	<b>CAMPAIGN FINANCE .....</b>	<b>13</b>
	A. SOURCES OF FUNDING .....	13
	B. CAMPAIGN EXPENDITURE .....	13
	C. DISCLOSURE AND OVERSIGHT .....	14
<b>X.</b>	<b>MEDIA .....</b>	<b>15</b>
	A. MEDIA ENVIRONMENT .....	15
	B. LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK .....	16
	C. MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN.....	17
<b>XI.</b>	<b>ELECTION OBSERVATION .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>XII.</b>	<b>PARTICIPATION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>XIII.</b>	<b>ELECTORAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>XIV.</b>	<b>ELECTION DAY .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>XV.</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>22</b>
	A. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS .....	22
	B. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS .....	22
	<b>ANNEXE: FINAL RESULTS.....</b>	<b>25</b>
	<b>ABOUT ODIHR .....</b>	<b>26</b>

**SLOVAK REPUBLIC**  
**EARLY PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**  
**30 September 2023**

**ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Report<sup>1</sup>**

**I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Following an invitation from the authorities of the Slovak Republic, and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) deployed an Election Assessment Mission (EAM) for the 30 September early parliamentary elections.

The elections were competitive and pluralistic, with fundamental rights and freedom respected. Contestants enjoyed equitable campaign conditions, competing in an environment characterized by high polarization. Voters had a wide variety of choices across the political spectrum and were provided with ample information to ensure an informed vote. The significance of these elections for the electorate was reflected in an increased turnout of 68.5 per cent, the highest in two decades. While the elections were administered efficiently, campaign finance oversight and election dispute resolution could benefit from further improvements to provide accountability and effective remedy.

The legal framework provides an adequate basis for conducting democratic elections. Several changes were made to election laws by the outgoing parliament, implementing a limited number of past ODIHR recommendations, including on simplified postal voting procedures, providing copies of protocols to at the polling stations, and removing the extensive ban on the publication of opinion polls. Yet, several key recommendations remain to be addressed, including ensuring timely and effective electoral dispute resolution, guaranteeing effective participation of persons with disabilities, removing restrictions on candidacy, and improving campaign finance oversight.

The three-tier election administration is led by the State Commission for Elections and Control of Financing of Political Parties (SEC), with significant support from the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and the Statistical Office (SO). While stakeholders had a high level of confidence in the professionalism of these institutions, the extensive involvement of the MoI in almost all stages of the electoral process may undermine the SEC's independence. For these elections, the SEC simplified postal voting application procedures addressing a previous ODIHR recommendation, improved postal vote processing by establishing dedicated commissions, and increased the efficacy of results released through electronic tabulation.

Voter registration is decentralized and continuous, with municipalities being responsible for maintaining voter lists based on a permanent voter register and updates from designated state institutions. Voters can verify their records through individual inquiries and obtain Absentee Voting Certificates (AVC) to be able to vote at any polling station, with safeguards against misuse in place. Stakeholders had confidence in voter list accuracy and inclusiveness. However, voter lists and the number of registered voters are not published before elections, thereby reducing transparency.

Candidate registration requirements were straightforward and applied in an inclusive manner. However, the restrictions on candidacy based on residence, incapacity, and criminal conviction, as well as the lack of provisions for individual candidacy, are not in line with international commitments and standards.

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<sup>1</sup> The English version of this report is the only official document. An unofficial Slovak translation is available.

The contestants could compete on a level playing field with fundamental freedoms respected. However, the polarization, frictions, and divergent views on the country's course that had led to early elections spilled into the campaign, further sharpening the discourse between contestants. Particularly divisive were campaign juxtapositions on the choice between liberal or traditional values, on external relations, and on support for Ukraine. Verbal attacks on opponents, state institutions, and perceived manifestations of liberal policies that were commonplace in the rhetoric of some parties had a harmful effect on public discourse and were not conducive to fostering trust in public institutions. The toxic nature of the campaign, including resorting to inflammatory and hate speech and instances of physical altercations between contestants, were alarming for many stakeholders. While all traditional campaign methods were used, social media moved center stage as a key communication channel for many parties.

The national equality strategy promotes women's political participation, but specific measures to increase the number of women in parliament are yet to be put in place. Issues of relevance to women were addressed by parties mostly through the prism of their role as mothers and caretakers. Women were underrepresented in the SEC, and no sex-disaggregated data was collected on lower-level commission membership. There are no special measures in place to promote women's participation and while the number of women in the newly elected parliament increased by one to 33 of 150 it remained far below the international good practice target.

The law provides overall adequate regulation of campaign finance. However, remaining gaps and loopholes, especially regarding loans, third-party spending, and disclosure through campaign accounts, leave space for circumvention of existing donation and spending limits and transparency safeguards. There is no required reporting ahead of election and this along with the lack of requirements for the MoI to publish its findings limits transparency. The MoI and the SEC lack both a sufficiently strong mandate and capacity to exercise effective oversight.

The media environment is diverse and pluralistic yet affected by persistent issues related to the harassment of journalists, media vulnerability to political influence, and widespread disinformation. Public and private media provided extensive coverage of contestants and the campaign, including through debates. Online resources provided equally ample and diverse information but were more prone to carrying radicalized views and, at times, manipulative narratives, including content attempting to undermine trust in democratic institutions, public officials, and the electoral process. The prevalence of disinformation in the lead-up to the elections and the challenges posed by AI-generated manipulative content distributed over social networks, highlighted the need for robust measures to counteract their influence.

Voter information and materials are provided in several languages, facilitating electoral participation by national minorities. The number of minority candidates and the level of their confidence in running programme-based campaigns has seen a gradual increase. However, the topic of the inclusion of minorities, especially Roma, was often addressed in the campaign in a negative and stereotypical manner, with frequent degrading and hateful remarks. Police investigated several allegations of vote buying in Roma communities; three persons were criminally charged.

Citizen and international observers are entitled to observe voting and counting. However, the legislation is not explicit regarding the observation of other stages of the electoral process and on the status and rights of observers. There were no nationwide citizen election observation efforts.

The law does not set expedited deadlines and due process safeguards for resolving election-related disputes, contrary to international commitments and good practice. While some complaints were

considered by the SEC and the MoI during the campaign, several were not dealt with before election day, raising concerns about effective remedies. Judicial remedies in the final instance are not available in all matters, and standing rights for contesting election results are not granted to citizens, contrary to good practice.

In line with ODIHR's methodology, the EAM did conduct a systematic or comprehensive election-day observation but visited a limited number of polling stations. The election day proceedings were well-administered by knowledgeable Polling Election Commission (PEC) members in polling stations visited, with only minor procedural inconsistencies noted. Approximately half of the polling stations visited were not accessible to voters with reduced mobility, and no assistive tools and accessible election materials were available, including for those with visual impairments. Election results were released by the SO promptly online, adding to transparency, and the final results were published on 1 October.

This report offers a number of recommendations to support efforts to bring elections in the Slovak Republic closer in line with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections. Priority recommendations focus on the need to delineate, in practice, the competencies and enhance the capacity of the SEC and MoI, including in campaign finance oversight, on necessary legislative changes regarding candidacy rights, defamation, and electoral dispute resolution, as well as on making the electoral process more accessible for voters with disabilities. ODIHR stands ready to assist the authorities to further improve the electoral process and to address the recommendations contained in this and previous reports.

## II. INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Following an invitation from the authorities of the Slovak Republic to observe the 2023 early parliamentary elections, and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) deployed an Election Assessment Mission (EAM) from 16 September to 4 October.<sup>2</sup> The ODIHR EAM was led by Ingibjörg Gísladóttir and consisted of five experts drawn from five OSCE participating States, comprising three women and two men. The EAM was based in Bratislava and visited some localities around the capital, including Pezinok and Senec.

The electoral process was assessed for compliance with OSCE commitments, other international obligations, and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation. In line with ODIHR's methodology, the EAM did not observe election day proceedings in a systematic or comprehensive manner but visited a limited number of polling stations.

The ODIHR EAM wishes to thank the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, the Ministry of Interior (MoI), and the State Commission for Elections and the Control of Political Parties Funding (SEC) for their co-operation and assistance, as well as to express gratitude to representatives of other state and municipal institutions, judiciary, election commissions, political parties, media, civil society, academia, resident diplomatic community, and other interlocutors for sharing their views.

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<sup>2</sup> See [previous ODIHR election reports on the Slovak Republic](#).

### III. BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

The Slovak Republic is a parliamentary republic with a government led by the prime minister appointed by the president. Legislative powers are exercised by a unicameral parliament, the National Council, composed of 150 members and elected for a four-year term.

Six parties entered the parliament after the 2020 elections, with four parties - the Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OLaNO), We Are Family (Sme Rodina), Freedom and Solidarity (SaS), and For the People (Za L'udí) - forming a coalition government.<sup>3</sup> However, soon after the elections, the government entered a protracted political crisis. Persistent disagreements among the governing parties forced the prime minister to step down in March 2021. In September 2022, the coalition lost the majority support following the withdrawal of SaS, and in December 2022, the minority government received a no-confidence vote. Re-appointed by the President, the minority government Prime Minister sought to find a new majority but stepped down in May 2023 after further ministers resigned. A technical caretaker government appointed by the President on 16 May also faced a vote of no confidence but was reinstated to remain in office until the elections were held.

Disagreements within the governing coalition resulted in two attempts by the opposition to trigger early elections through a referendum, asking for an early termination of a parliamentary mandate through referenda or resolutions of the National Council.<sup>4</sup> The referendum to change the constitution in this respect eventually took place on 21 January 2023 but failed to meet the turnout requirement to be valid.<sup>5</sup> Still, on 25 January, in line with the political consensus that early parliamentary elections are a way forward to resolve the political stalemate, the parliament adopted a constitutional amendment allowing itself to call early elections and, on 1 February, passed a law to hold early elections on 30 September 2023.

Women are underrepresented in political life. Only 32 of the MPs were elected to the outgoing parliament, and only three out of sixteen cabinet ministers in the previous government were women, and this number remained the same in the government formed after these elections. The current president is a woman.

*To enhance women's participation in political life, the institutions, political parties and other stakeholders should increase efforts to address existing gender stereotypes and reduce the gender gap both through regulatory measures and advocacy.*

### IV. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Parliamentary elections are primarily governed by the 1992 Constitution, the 2014 Act on the Conditions for the Exercise of the Right to Vote and on the Amendments to Certain Acts (Elections Act), the 2014 Act on Campaigning, and the 2005 Act on Political Parties and Political Movements (Political Parties Act). The legal framework provides an adequate basis for the conduct of democratic elections.

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<sup>3</sup> Parliamentary mandates were distributed as follows: OLaNO (53 seats), Direction – Social Democrats (SMER-SD; 38 seats), We Are Family (17 seats), Kotleba People's Party Our Slovakia (L'SNS; 17 seats), SaS – 13 seats), and For the People (12 seats).

<sup>4</sup> Referendum petitions were submitted to the President in May 2021 and then again in August 2022. The referendum initiatives were widely seen as being supported by Smer - SD, Voice (Hlas), Republika, and the Slovak National Party (SNS).

<sup>5</sup> The participation of at least 50 per cent of voters is required. Voter turnout was 27.3 per cent.

During the last parliamentary term, several changes were introduced to the Elections Act and the Act on Campaigning in 2021 and 2022. Among others, these simplified the procedure for postal voting, allowed opinion polls to run until two days before elections, provided for mandatory electronic transfer of results from polling stations, and obliged municipalities to post Precinct Election Commission (PEC) result protocols on their websites. These amendments addressed several prior ODIHR recommendations.<sup>6</sup>

However, certain aspects of the electoral process are under-regulated, and a number of previous ODIHR recommendations remain to be addressed. Prior recommendations include clearly defining procedures and introducing expedited timelines for election dispute resolution, enhancing the possibilities for independent access to the voting process and election-related materials by persons with disabilities, decriminalization of defamation, strengthening the capacity of the campaign finance oversight body, removal of candidacy restrictions based on conviction, incapacity, residence, and political affiliation, and legal provisions for the accreditation and access of observers to all stages of the electoral process. Some ODIHR EAM interlocutors remarked on the lack of broader consultation with all relevant stakeholders on the changes in election laws and the lack of political will to address civil society recommendations.<sup>7</sup> In line with international commitments and good practice, amendments to electoral laws should be developed and adopted following comprehensive and inclusive public consultations.<sup>8</sup>

*To address the remaining gaps and weaknesses in the election law, the authorities should engage in inclusive and comprehensive public consultations and address prior recommendations by election stakeholders and observers well ahead of the next parliamentary elections.*

The one hundred fifty members of the parliament are elected through a proportional open-list system in a single nationwide constituency.<sup>9</sup> Parties must obtain five per cent of the valid votes to participate in the distribution of seats, while the thresholds for coalitions of up to three and four or more parties are set at seven and ten per cent, respectively. Voters may cast up to four preferential votes for candidates on the chosen list. Candidates that receive more than three per cent of preferential votes have a priority in obtaining a mandate. The remaining seats are awarded by list order.

## V. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The parliamentary elections are administered by a three-level election administration comprising the State Commission for Elections and the Control of Political Parties Funding (SEC), 50 District

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<sup>6</sup> The Ministry of Justice also conducted public consultations with a view to amending the Criminal Code to provide for additional safeguards against vote-buying. Related amendments were discussed in parliament but not yet adopted.

<sup>7</sup> In its 2022 [Report on the Observance of Human Rights](#), the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights raises concerns about the recurrent adoption of laws without proper prior consultation with relevant institutions and the public and points to insufficient efforts by the legislature to address long-standing recommendations to align the law with international human rights standards (see p. 25). The European Commission's [2023 Rule of Law Report](#) on Slovakia indicates that the SEC was not invited to comment on the draft amendments concerning criminal penalties for vote-buying.

<sup>8</sup> Paragraph 5.8 of the 1990 [OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states that legislation shall be adopted at the end of a public procedure. Paragraph 18.1 of the 1991 [OSCE Moscow Document](#) states that "Legislation will be formulated and adopted as the result of an open process reflecting the will of the people, either directly or through their elected representatives". See also the [Compilation of Venice Commission Opinions and Reports Concerning the Stability of Electoral Law](#).

<sup>9</sup> Some political parties expressed an opinion that the current system based on a single nationwide constituency is not conducive to full representation of regional interests and stated the intention to initiate parliamentary discussions in the next term with a view to changing it.

Election Commissions (DECs), and 6,014 Precinct Election Commissions (PECs),<sup>10</sup> with considerable support from the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and the Statistical Office (SO). The MoI hosts the SEC, provides methodological support, conducts voter education, and is in charge of technical preparations for elections. The SO is responsible for vote tabulation and publishing of election results. The election administration enjoyed a high level of confidence and ODIHR EAM interlocutors noted that it carried out its work in a manner that was supportive and forthcoming towards various electoral stakeholders. However, the extensive involvement of the MoI in nearly all stages of the electoral process, in practice, may undermine the ability of the SEC to fulfil its mandate as an independent body, as stipulated by law.<sup>11</sup>

*The competencies and activities of the MoI and the SEC should be clearly defined and delineated in a way that permits the SEC to operate in an institutionally and functionally independent manner.*

The SEC comprises 14 members, appointed following every parliamentary elections.<sup>12</sup> DECs and PECs are formed before every election, consisting of at least five members each. Members are nominated by parties contesting the elections, and if nominations are insufficient, municipal or district offices supply additional commissioners. Some municipalities, mainly in Bratislava, faced challenges in identifying a sufficient number of PEC members and secretaries due to many last-minute cancellations, mainly attributed to inadequate compensation. The SEC did not collect detailed information on the composition of the lower-level commissions and was thus unable to provide data on the number of members, their political affiliation, and the breakdown by sex for the composition of DECs and PECs.<sup>13</sup>

*Sex-disaggregated data on the election administration should be collected and published.*

The SEC implemented training for all lower-level commissions, but some PEC members described it to the ODIHR EAM as rushed and lacking important details and time for discussions. Training sessions for PEC secretaries, who are responsible, among other tasks, for the completion of PEC protocols, were held exclusively online, which some interlocutors perceived as insufficient to prepare for the role.

The SEC adopted its decisions during regularly scheduled sessions held once every month. All the minutes of sessions and decisions, including those on complaints, were published on its website, contributing to transparency. Before the two sessions that the SEC held on election day and on the day of the announcement of results, the SEC convened three times after the elections were called.

The SO manages electronic vote tabulation through the Integrated Election Information System (IVIS). As part of its implementation, the SO establishes units with support personnel in all DECs

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<sup>10</sup> These include 1 special DEC and 18 special PECs for the counting and tabulation of postal ballots.

<sup>11</sup> Article 13 (1) of the Elections Act provides for the SEC's institutional independence and politically balanced composition. Paragraph 76 of the Explanatory Report to the [2002 Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters \(Code of Good Practice\)](#) of the Council of Europe (CoE) European Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission) points out that the “co-operation between the central electoral commission and the Ministry of the Interior is possible if only for practical reasons, e.g. transporting and storing ballot papers and other equipment.”

<sup>12</sup> Parties nominate ten members in proportion to their parliamentary representation, with an equal split between the government and the opposition. The remaining four members are nominated by the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, the General Prosecutor, and the Supreme Audit Office. Four SEC members are women.

<sup>13</sup> Article 48d of the 1997 United Nations (UN) Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) [General Recommendation No. 23](#) requires State parties to provide “statistical data, disaggregated by sex, showing the percentage of women relative to men who enjoy those rights.” Paragraph 40.13 of the 1991 [OSCE Moscow Document](#) obliges States to “ensure the collection and analysis of data to assess adequately, monitor and improve the situation of women.”



and at the SEC and provides training for members of lower-level commissions. For the first time, all PECs and DECAs were obliged to use IVIS for processing and transmission of election results, bringing the benefits of greater efficiency, transparency and elimination of human errors. The SO met all the deadlines related to technical preparations as specified in the election calendar, contributing to the professionally and efficiently conducted election process.<sup>14</sup>

IVIS, initially developed in 2013 by a consortium of companies that won a public tender, has undergone continuous upgrades, including after the 2020 elections, and now incorporates clear procedures for rectifying errors and discrepancies in result protocols. Some political parties questioned the integrity of IVIS, alleging political affiliations of its component developers. While the MoI and SO rejected such allegations in public statements that detailed the software development and functionality, in the absence of public scrutiny or audits, the allegations may have had a detrimental impact on the trust in the integrity of results.<sup>15</sup> The Computer Security Incident Response Team Slovakia (CSIRT), a governmental agency in charge of cybersecurity, is responsible for the evaluation and certification of the software. However, the CSIRT did not publish any reports in this regard.

*To bolster public confidence, consideration could be given to make mandatory the conduct and the publication of findings of an independent audit of the election results management system.*

Voters with permanent or temporary residence abroad are entitled to vote by post. For the first time, the MoI developed and successfully implemented an online application system for this purpose.<sup>16</sup> According to a number of ODIHR EAM interlocutors and official data, the level of interest in postal voting has increased considerably compared to the last parliamentary elections.<sup>17</sup> Addressing a previous ODIHR recommendation, the Elections Act was amended on 30 November 2022, detailing the procedures for the processing of postal ballots and removing related responsibilities from the municipalities by delegating them to a specially created DEC for out-of-country votes and several PECs each counting ballots of up to 4,000 voters. Together with the MoI, the Slovak Post developed detailed guidelines for the handling and delivery of sensitive election materials and successfully applied them in practice. Overall, legal and technical improvements related to the postal voting system contributed to greater safeguards of this voting method.<sup>18</sup>

Election authorities conducted modest-scale official voter information and education initiatives across diverse platforms. More prominent were information campaigns run by the police and the MFA, focusing on the integrity of elections and promoting out-of-country voting, respectively. While a majority of ODIHR EAM interlocutors viewed these efforts as sufficient and adequate, they also emphasized the need to enhance the visibility and intensify outreach in order to elevate their impact.

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<sup>14</sup> On 26 September, the SO explained to the ODIHR EOM it conducted a full-scale test of election result processing via IVIS and concluded it functioned accurately and as intended.

<sup>15</sup> The MoI emphasized the security of the IVIS system and the inviolability of results processing as part of its information campaign on social networks. See, for instance, a dedicated Facebook [post](#) and [video](#). In its communications, the SO [stressed](#) it is impossible to manipulate election results processed with the help of IVIS and underlined the system's reliability and accuracy.

<sup>16</sup> Previously, a similar web-based application was operated by a civic initiative Heart at Home (*Srdcom Doma*), but voters still needed to submit the application to the authorities.

<sup>17</sup> It is [estimated](#) that up to 350,000 Slovak citizens reside abroad. A total of 72,993 requests were registered for these elections. This is an increase of 32.4 per cent compared to 2020 when there were 55,141 requests. A total of 80.6 per cent (58,779) of ballots were returned, which is a decrease compared to the 88.7 per cent (48,925) of ballots returned in 2020.

<sup>18</sup> In its [Final Report](#) of observing the elections, NGO Agora asserts that the simplified registration and postal voting procedures facilitated the vote of young Slovak citizens residing abroad.

## VI. VOTER REGISTRATION

Voting rights are held by citizens aged 18 years or older by election day. Voter registration is decentralized, continuous, and passive, with municipalities responsible for the compilation and maintenance of the voter lists. Voters are included in the voter lists based on the place of permanent registration, with updates to lists provided by designated state institutions. Voters can verify their records and request corrections. There was a high level of confidence among election stakeholders in the accuracy and inclusiveness of voter registration.

The Elections Act and the Act on Personal Data Protection regulate access to voters' personal information. Political parties are not authorized to scrutinize the voters' data. Voter lists are delivered to the PECs at least one hour before the opening of the polls by the municipal authorities. Not in line with good practice, voter lists and the preliminary data on the number of registered voters are not published before elections, thereby reducing transparency.<sup>19</sup> The SO publishes the final number of voters together with the election results based on the PEC protocols. A total of 4,388,872 voters were registered in these elections, a decrease of 43,547 since the 2020 parliamentary elections.

*To further enhance transparency and foster confidence in the election process, the SEC should be mandated to regularly collect and publish the number of registered voters at the district, municipal and national levels before election day.*

Voters wishing to vote outside their place of permanent residence may request their municipality to issue an Absentee Voting Certificate (AVC), which allows voting in any polling station. Adequate measures are in place to mitigate the risk of misuse of AVCs, including clearly outlined application procedures and the prohibition to issue replacement certificates in case of loss.

Persons experiencing homelessness and voters whose permanent residence has been cancelled are registered at the addresses of municipal authorities, which facilitates their right to vote. The allocation to polling stations is at the discretion of the municipalities, with voters notified through announcements on official notice boards and PECs instructed to guide these voters in case they appear at an arbitrary polling location.

## VII. CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

Candidacy rights are extended to voters 21 years of age with permanent residence in the country. Candidates may be nominated by political parties and coalitions; individual candidacy is not envisaged by law. Despite that, two individual candidates sought registration but were rejected by the SEC.<sup>20</sup> The lack of provisions for individual candidacy is at odds with the OSCE commitments.<sup>21</sup> Persons with an unexpunged sentence for intentional crimes and those legally incapacitated through a court decision cannot stand in elections, regardless of the severity of the

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<sup>19</sup> Section I.1.2.iii of the [Code of Good Practice](#) provides that “electoral registers must be published”. [ODIHR Handbook for the Observation of Voter Registration](#), p. 32, indicates that “it is good practice for authorities to publish preliminary voter lists and display them for public scrutiny for a prescribed period in locations that are convenient to voters”.

<sup>20</sup> One of the rejected candidates challenged election results in the Constitutional Court; as of 21 November 2023, the case was pending review.

<sup>21</sup> Paragraph 7.5 calls on participating States to “respect the right of citizens to seek political or public office, individually or as representatives of political parties or organizations, without discrimination”.

crime.<sup>22</sup> Restrictions on candidacy based on deprivation of legal capacity due to intellectual or psychosocial disabilities or criminal conviction, irrespective of the seriousness of the crime and residence, are at odds with international commitments and standards.<sup>23</sup>

*Restrictions on candidacy based on residency, criminal conviction, intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, and the impossibility to stand as independent candidates should be reviewed in line with OSCE commitments, international standards, and good electoral practice.*

The candidate list registration process is administratively simple, and it was applied in an inclusive and open manner.<sup>24</sup> By the 12 July deadline, the SEC registered and published the candidate lists of 24 political parties and one coalition that included a total of 2,722 candidates, of which 693 were women (25 per cent). The average candidate age across lists was 48, with only 7 per cent of all candidates younger than 30. Positively, the candidate lists were made accessible to voters with visual impairments by the Slovak Library for the Blind (SLB).<sup>25</sup>

Parties and candidates may withdraw, and candidates can be revoked by nominating subjects up to 48 hours before election day. Voters are notified about withdrawals and revocations through announcements on the MoI website and in polling stations on election day, whereas the already printed and distributed ballots are not adjusted. In these elections, 86 candidates withdrew, were recalled, or died before election day.<sup>26</sup> Of these, 80 candidates received preferential votes.<sup>27</sup> It appeared that some voters were unaware of changes to the lists, as they marked invalid preferential votes on the selected ballot.

*The authorities should adjust the deadline for the withdrawal and revocation of candidates to allow sufficient time for the change to be reflected on the printed ballot papers. To support voters' ability to cast valid and informed preferential votes, voter information and communication about party and candidate withdrawals and revocations should be improved.*

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<sup>22</sup> [The National Programme for the Development of Living Conditions of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030](#) envisages a review of the system of guardianship to bring it in line with the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD). A related 2023 [analysis](#) recommends that provisions on legal incapacity should be replaced with assisted decision-making to enable people with disabilities to participate in public life through individualized support.

<sup>23</sup> Paragraph 15 of the 1996 UN Human Rights Committee's (HRC) [General Comment No. 25](#) states that "Persons who are otherwise eligible to stand for election should not be excluded by unreasonable or discriminatory requirements such as education, residence or descent, or by reason of political affiliation". Paragraph 24 of the 1990 [OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) provides that restrictions on rights and freedoms must be strictly proportionate to the aim of the law. Article 29 of the [CRPD](#) requires States to "guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others". Paragraph 48 of the [2022 General Comment #1](#) to Article 12 of the CRPD states that "a person's decision-making ability cannot be a justification for any exclusion of persons with disabilities from exercising [...] the right to vote [and] the right to stand for election". Section 1.1.d. of the [Code of Good Practice](#) states that i. provision may be made for depriving individuals of their right to be elected, but only subject to the following cumulative conditions: ii. it must be provided for by law; iii. the proportionality principle must be observed; conditions for depriving individuals of the right to stand for election may be less strict than for disenfranchising them; iv. The deprivation must be based on .... a criminal conviction for a serious offence.

<sup>24</sup> A deposit of EUR 17,000 is returned to contestants gaining at least two per cent of the valid votes. In June 2023, the Constitutional Court [repealed](#) the prohibition for party titles to include their founders' names.

<sup>25</sup> The SLB produced and distributed candidate lists in Braille and in an audio format to some 30 public libraries and more than 1,000 regular subscribers to their publications across the country.

<sup>26</sup> Nearly half of the 148 candidates nominated by Common Citizens of Slovakia (*Spoločne Občania Slovenska*) withdrew their candidacies. Candidates are not obliged to provide grounds for withdrawals, and these were not disclosed to the SEC.

<sup>27</sup> A total of 7,573 preferential votes cast for candidates that were no longer standing were disregarded during tabulation. For instance, in the case of Common Citizens of Slovakia, which was not elected, such 'wasted' preferential votes constituted more than half of the total preferential votes cast for the party's candidates.

The national equality strategy includes increased representation of women in decision-making positions as one of its objectives.<sup>28</sup> There is also a strong public opinion about the importance of women's greater representation in the parliament.<sup>29</sup> However, no legislative proposals to increase the participation of women on the lists were considered by the outgoing parliament.<sup>30</sup> Positively, five lists were led by women, and the majority of lists had at least three women in the top ten positions; however, parties met by the ODIHR EAM were not supportive of imposing gender quotas and the majority of lists, 18 out of 25, featured less than 30 per cent of women candidates.<sup>31</sup>

Thirty-three women got elected, one more than in 2020, becoming the highest parliamentary representation in the country thus far. However, this represents only 22 per cent of all members of parliament.<sup>32</sup> Preferential votes cast for women did not have an impact on the number of women elected.<sup>33</sup>

*To increase political participation and representation of women, the adoption of proactive measures such as mandatory gender quotas should be considered. In addition, the law could provide financial incentives to parties for promoting women in their decision-making bodies and for increasing the number of women candidates placed higher on the lists.*

## VIII. ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The election campaign started on 8 June, with the announcement of elections. The polarization, lingering frictions, and divergent views on the country's course that had led to these elections spilled into the campaign, further sharpening the discourse between contestants. Particularly divisive were campaign juxtapositions on the choice between liberal or traditional values, relations with the EU, NATO and the Russian Federation, and on support for Ukraine. Parties not part of the outgoing government campaigned on pledges to end the political chaos and ensure stability and order. Many contestants aligned in their promises to improve the country's economic performance, social welfare, and healthcare system. However, verbal attacks on opponents, state institutions, and perceived manifestations of liberal policies, including those related to the rights of sexual minorities, were prevailing in the rhetoric of several parties on the right and centre-right of the political spectrum. Attacks on various bodies of the state and public figures had a negative impact on public discourse and were not conducive to fostering trust in public institutions. Intolerant and

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<sup>28</sup> [The National Strategy on Equality Between Men and Women and Equal Opportunities for 2021-2027](#), p. 43.

<sup>29</sup> As per the AKO agency [survey](#), published in September 2023, having more women in public positions and in politics was important to 51.7 per cent of the respondents. The Institute for Public Affairs' 2020 [study](#) indicated that 50 per cent of Slovaks think that women are underrepresented in the national parliament.

<sup>30</sup> Article 22 of the CEDAW Committee [General Recommendation No.23](#) states that “political parties must embrace the principle of equal opportunity and democracy and endeavor to balance the number of male and female candidates”. In paragraph 27(a) of May 2023 [Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of Slovakia](#), the CEDAW Committee reiterated its past recommendation to “take measures, including temporary special measures, such as increased quotas, zipper systems for electoral lists of political parties and targeted campaign financing for women candidates, to achieve equal representation of women and men in elected positions”.

<sup>31</sup> SMER-SD's list had the lowest number of women and was the only party with no women in the first ten places. Progressive Slovakia (PS), which nominated the highest number of women, and the Pirate Party - Slovakia applied a zipper-like method for their leading list positions.

<sup>32</sup> This is far below the 30 per cent international good practice target. See the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#).

<sup>33</sup> See a [research paper](#) from 2023 which concluded that women get elected in Slovak elections when placed high up on party lists.

hurtful rhetoric targeting minorities and other vulnerable groups may have had a stigmatizing and silencing effect, undermining dignity and negatively affecting their participation.<sup>34</sup>

In the run-up to the elections, there were many targeted insults and threats from anonymous sources online against officials and civil society representatives, including women politicians and their families and there were limited efforts by the relevant authorities to tackle this issue.

While contestants could compete on a level playing field, the toxic nature of the campaign and instances of physical altercations involving different political sides were alarming for many stakeholders.<sup>35</sup> Several election stakeholders alerted the ODIHR EAM to the high number of cases of disinformation in the run up to the election, The manipulative content was attributed to both foreign sources and politicians themselves and related to various matters, including on the war in Ukraine, accusations of fraudulent electoral practices, misleading information on the economy, and misrepresentation of statements and actions by some political leaders. Some of these practices were used or amplified by several candidates. Notably, the prevalence of disinformation in the lead-up to the elections and the challenges posed by AI-generated manipulative content distributed over social networks, highlighted the need for robust measures to counteract their influence.<sup>36</sup>

Several voter education and get-out-the-vote campaigns sought to provide balanced information about the electoral process and encouraged participation.<sup>37</sup> The significance of these elections for the electorate was reflected in the voter turnout of 68.51 per cent, the highest in two decades.

Campaign programs of several parties included measures targeting women, minorities, and persons with disabilities; however, often only in generic or declarative terms. Issues of relevance to women were often addressed through the prism of their role as mothers and caretakers, with only a few parties devoting attention to their public and political participation. Some party manifestos pledged to stop the spread of "gender ideology", a discourse that inappropriately vilifies and undermines efforts to advance equality and non-discrimination in line with international obligations.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Paragraph 1 of Article 6 of the 2005 Council of Europe's [Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities](#) provides that states "shall encourage a spirit of tolerance and intercultural dialogue and take effective measures to promote mutual respect and understanding and co-operation among all persons living on their territory, irrespective of those persons' ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity, in particular in the fields of education, culture and the media." Paragraph I.B.6. of the 2010 Council of Europe's Committee of Minister's Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)5 provides that "[m]ember states should take appropriate measures to combat all forms of expression, including in the media and on the Internet, which may be reasonably understood as likely to produce the effect of inciting, spreading or promoting hatred or other forms of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons. Such 'hate speech' should be prohibited and publicly disavowed whenever it occurs". See also Articles 1 and 2 of ICERD and paragraphs 2 and 30 of the 1990 Copenhagen Document.

<sup>35</sup> Civil society organizations [expressed](#) concern about the growing number of instances of physical clashes between politicians and their supporters and called on parties to refrain from such conduct.

<sup>36</sup> A notable example was audio clips of an AI-generated conversation between the leader of Progressive Slovakia Michal Šimečka and a Denník N journalist discussing voter malfeasance, was posted on various social networks two days before election day. In another deepfake audio clip, Mr Šimečka claims he intends to drastically increase the price of beer if his party won elections.

<sup>37</sup> *Srdcom Doma* provided voter information and encouraged participation in postal voting. A civil society coalition *I Don't Want to Stay (Nechcem Tu Zostať)* ran an [online voter education campaign](#) aimed at young voters in both Slovak and Hungarian. [Electoral Compass \(Volebný Kompas\)](#) and [Election Calculators \(Volebná kalkulačka\)](#) applications by the Matej Bel University and the European University Institute, and MEMO 98, respectively, assisted various target voter groups, including youth, in identifying parties that matched their policy preferences.

<sup>38</sup> In paragraph 20(b) of the May 2023 [Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report by Slovakia](#), the CEDAW Committee expressed concern about the considerable rise in resorting to such rhetoric and called for "effective measures to [...] counter attitudes that downplay or degrade the pursuit of gender equality, and to adopt legislation to strengthen national standards to prevent hate speech and gender-based discrimination."

In a welcome step, the MoI has recommended that political parties adjust their websites and campaign programs to make them accessible to voters with disabilities.<sup>39</sup> Regrettably, the representatives of parties met by ODIHR EAM were unaware of the MoI recommendation posted on its website, and their websites and other online resources remained largely inaccessible. A few parties provided sign language interpretation during larger campaign events and press conferences.

*To facilitate meaningful participation, political parties should make their programmes, campaign materials, and messages accessible to persons with disabilities. The MoI could develop detailed recommendations on practical measures in collaboration with state and civil organizations active in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities and legislators could consider incentives for parties that make their campaigns more accessible.*

While traditional campaign methods were used, including billboards, meetings, and leaflets, social media moved centre stage as a key communication channel for many parties, including to reach voters abroad. The campaign on social networks and profiles observed by the ODIHR EAM was very active.<sup>40</sup> A considerable amount of content was produced in media formats suitable for posting on social networks and to target specific groups of voters. The majority of posts were dedicated to generic campaigning on policy issues, followed by content criticising political opponents and sharing views on economic and social issues. The criticisms of state institutions and public figures, which were also among the prevailing topics, featured primarily in materials of Republika, SMER-SD, SNS, and sometimes of *Hlas* parties. Most posts were neutral or positive in tone, with a quarter of negatively toned content dominating YouTube and TikTok and mostly in profiles associated with Republika, SMER-SD, and SNS. Only a fraction of posts examined during the monitoring period were assessed as having contained aggressive, inflammatory, or manipulative content or hate speech, with the latter targeting the Roma, sexual and gender minorities, or migrants and refugees.<sup>41</sup>

Campaign activities and the publication of opinion polls are permitted until 48 hours before election day.<sup>42</sup> Campaign silence that starts then applies to traditional media and campaign events but does not apply to earlier-placed posters and billboards, general appeals to vote, and organic, unpaid posts on social networks. The SEC reported to have launched investigations into several allegations of campaign silence infringements.

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<sup>39</sup> Article 38 of the UN CRPD Committee's [General Comment on Article 9: Accessibility](#) states that “it is also important that political meetings and materials used and produced by political parties or individual candidates participating in public elections are accessible”. The Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2011\)14](#) of the CoE Committee of Ministers (CM) on the participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life states that member States should require political parties “to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to information on political debates, campaigns and events which fall within their field of action”.

<sup>40</sup> The ODIHR EAM did not conduct a systematic monitoring of social networks but followed the profiles of 9 political contestants (parties and one coalition), 23 politicians and candidates, and 4 opinion maker groups on Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, and TikTok between 1 September and 2 October 2023. Facebook is by far the most popular and widely used platform in Slovakia.

<sup>41</sup> See the *Media* section for assessments of the overall media environment, including online media and resources. Findings pertaining to campaigning on social networks are based on the monitoring that was limited in time and was focused on a sample of predominantly electoral contestant profiles.

<sup>42</sup> In line with a previous ODIHR recommendation and based on a Constitutional Court [ruling](#), the previous excessive restriction on the publication of opinion polls was shortened and thus brought in line with good practice.

## IX. CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Campaign and political party finance are primarily regulated by the Act on Campaigning and the Political Parties Act. While these overall provide a comprehensive regulatory framework, concerns were raised about the gaps and loopholes in the law, which allow for practices circumventing the existing caps and transparency safeguards. Most prior ODIHR recommendations on campaign finance remain unaddressed.

### A. SOURCES OF FUNDING

Parties can fund their campaigns from their own resources, state subsidies, membership fees, loans, revenues from assets, and donations by individuals and legal entities.<sup>43</sup> The law provides for a EUR 10,000 limit on a membership fee and a EUR 300,000 cap on donations, including in-kind. The high donation limit does not effectively preclude undue influence by entities and individuals, which is at odds with good electoral practice.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the legislation does not set any limits for loans and does not regulate their repayment by other entities or citizens.<sup>45</sup> This aggravates the potential for individual or business influence on a party and leaves space for the circumvention of donation limits.<sup>46</sup> Anonymous, cash, and foreign donations, as well as donations from state institutions, are prohibited, but there is no legal provision preventing loans from foreign banks.

*To prevent undue influence by donors, consideration could be given to lowering the existing limit on donations and enacting detailed regulations related to loans.*

The Political Parties Act sets a limit of EUR 3.5 million for the aggregate income of a party during a parliamentary term, with party liquidation as a possible sanction for violating the limit.<sup>47</sup> A prior ODIHR recommendation to review this disproportionate sanction remains unaddressed. ODIHR EAM was informed that no political party has ever been liquidated on these grounds.

### B. CAMPAIGN EXPENDITURE

The law provides for a limit of EUR 3 million for contestants' campaign expenditures starting from 180 days before calling the elections. By law, payments for sponsored advertisements or content on social networks is to be reported within this limit. The MoI lacks the capacity to track actual spending and detect underreporting. According to some ODIHR EAM interlocutors, online expenditures by far exceeded the reported amounts.

The Act on Campaigning prohibits campaign expenditures by third parties. The complete ban on third-party financing is not in line with the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and

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<sup>43</sup> Parliamentary parties receive annual state subsidies of up to EUR 39,000 per mandate. In addition, parties that won at least three per cent of the valid votes in the 2020 elections received a total of EUR 50.6 million distributed annually and in one-off payments.

<sup>44</sup> Paragraph 213 of the [2020 ODIHR and Venice Commission Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) (Guidelines on Political Party Regulation) provides that “Reasonable limitations on private donations may include the determination of a maximum amount that may be contributed by a single donor. Such limitations have been shown to be effective in reducing the possibility of corruption or the purchase of political influence”. Article 3b ii of the CoE CM [Recommendation Rec\(2003\)4 on common rules against corruption in the funding of political parties and electoral campaigns](#) provides that “States should consider the possibility of introducing rules limiting the value of donations to political parties”.

<sup>45</sup> Several parties took significant loans shortly before this campaign, including from foreign banks.

<sup>46</sup> Paragraph 210 of the [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) recommends that rules on transparency must deal with such sources of funding as loans, so as to avoid the circumvention of limits on private donations.

<sup>47</sup> The EUR 3.5 million limit does not apply to any state subsidies received by a political party.

with good electoral practice.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, numerous concerns were raised with the ODIHR EAM about the perceived campaigning by individuals or entities formally not associated with any contestants and that these practices might have been used to circumvent the expenditure and donation limits.

*Regulations on third-party campaign funding should be reviewed so that freedom of expression is respected while, at the same time, reasonable limits on third-party expenditures are imposed to prevent undue distortion of the campaign.*

### C. DISCLOSURE AND OVERSIGHT

Parties are obliged to use dedicated campaign accounts, with all contributions and expenditures published online in real time. While this provides a valuable transparency mechanism, several ODIHR EAM interlocutors raised concerns that this was circumvented by a number of contestants who reported bulk purchases from advertising agencies with the exact nature of services purchased not disclosed. Parties also transferred significant amounts from their regular party accounts to the dedicated campaign accounts, with the identities of party donors not directly disclosed.<sup>49</sup> Overall, the transparency of campaign finance remains insufficient due to a lack of regulation to prevent circumvention of the law.<sup>50</sup>

The SEC and the MoI have shared responsibilities related to the oversight of campaign finance regulations. The SEC oversees political funding and has overall control over campaign finance, while the MoI monitors campaign expenditures. The law requires political parties to submit annual financial reports; the SEC verifies them and may impose sanctions for violations.<sup>51</sup> Contestants are required to submit financial campaign reports to the MoI within 30 days after the election day, but despite prior ODIHR recommendations, the reporting obligations remain too general, failing to provide a full and detailed disclosure of all contributions to the campaign funds. No interim reporting is required which along with the fact that the MoI is not required to publish reports on its oversight activities and does not practice this on a voluntary basis, detracts from transparency. The MoI is empowered to apply sanctions for violations of campaign finance rules, but no such sanctions were applied during the campaign. The MoI's extensive responsibility in campaign finance oversight is contrary to good practice, which underscores the importance of vesting this duty with an independent body.<sup>52</sup> The MoI and the SEC lack both a sufficiently strong mandate and capacity to exercise effective oversight.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Paragraph 256 of the [Joint Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#) states that third party activities should not be unconditionally prohibited and paragraph 220 adds that “to avoid the creation of loopholes through which unlimited funding can be channeled and financial transactions can be veiled, laws should set proportionate and reasonable limits to the amount that third parties can spend on promoting candidates or parties, ideally by applying existing ceilings for donations to political parties to these actors, as well”. See also the 1998 ECtHR case [Bowman v. The United Kingdom](#) the Court has found that a very low third-party spending limit set by law was a disproportionate measure, violating the right to freedom of expression.

<sup>49</sup> According to [Transparency International](#), approximately 85 per cent of the contestants' campaign funds were transferred from political parties' regular accounts.

<sup>50</sup> In an [analysis](#) published shortly before election day, Transparency International assessed that only three parties, PS, SaS, and the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), had conducted a transparent campaign. In contrast, among the larger parties, campaigns of OL'aNO and SMER-SD were characterized as not transparent. Article 7 (3) of the [UN Convention against Corruption](#) obliges State parties to take measures to improve transparency in campaign and party financing.

<sup>51</sup> All sources of funding exceeding EUR 1,246 (equivalent of two minimal monthly salaries) are subject to disclosure.

<sup>52</sup> See article 14 of the CoE Council of Ministers [Recommendation 2003\(4\) which stipulates that the “states should provide for independent monitoring in respect of the funding of political parties and electoral campaigns”](#).

<sup>53</sup> Several interlocutors praised civil society work on monitoring and reporting on party and campaign finances and wished to see the same level of oversight and communication by responsible state institutions.



*Consideration could be given to vesting an independent body with campaign finance oversight responsibilities. This body should have the mandate and sufficient capacity to exercise effective control over the contestants' income and expenditures, both during the campaign and after the election process is concluded.*

## X. MEDIA

### A. MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

A variety of information sources, including public and commercial broadcasters, print media, and a plethora of online media, all together offer a plurality of content and positions on various issues. Television and online news media constitute the primary sources of information. Although diverse, the media environment is affected by several persistent problems which undermine public trust and challenge the capacity of the media to provide accurate and balanced reporting.<sup>54</sup>

The insufficient editorial independence and financial autonomy of the public service broadcaster, Radio Television Slovakia (RTVS), has been one of the longstanding issues. Despite past ODIHR recommendations, the procedures for the appointment of the RTVS's general director and the supervisory body by the parliament have not been reviewed. The public broadcaster thus remains vulnerable to potential undue influence by the ruling majority. In February 2023, the RTVS Act was amended, replacing the license fee-based model with direct financing from the state budget in the form of a statutory share of the country's GDP.<sup>55</sup> However, following these elections, the new government decided to reduce the portion of the budget allocated to the public broadcaster by 30 per cent.<sup>56</sup> The decision to abolish the license fee mechanism was criticised by a number of media stakeholders, in part due to a reported lack of a proper public consultation process, including with the RTVS management. Independence and freedom of programming are closely linked to the requirement that public service broadcasters can rely on an adequate funding system to provide for economic sustainability.<sup>57</sup>

*As previously recommended, to enhance the independence of the public broadcaster, the procedures for the appointment of its board members and the general director should be reviewed. Decisions on the funding model should be adopted based on inclusive consultations with all the relevant stakeholders.*

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<sup>54</sup> See the 2023 EUI Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom [Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era](#) Slovakia country report, the 2023 Freedom House [Nations in Transit Slovakia country report](#), Reuters Institute [Digital News Report 2023](#), and [Globsec Trends 2023](#) for assessments of the media environment. See also the 9 June 2023 [statement](#) from the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

<sup>55</sup> In its June 2022 [Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era - Country Report: Slovakia](#), the Center for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom of the European University Institute called for sufficient, stable, and reliable funding for the RTVS, including through increased license fees. In December 2022, MEMO 98 [critically assessed](#) the then-planned move away from license fees due to the absence of a wider public discussion on this issue, but also out of concern that the reliance on public funding would make RTVS not more but less independent from any possible political influence.

<sup>56</sup> The budget was reduced from 0.17 to 0.12 per cent of the GDP, or from 186 to 131 million EUR (30 per cent of the total budget). This was [criticized](#) by several national and international actors.

<sup>57</sup> Article 26 of the CoE CM [Recommendation CM/Rec \(2012\)1 on public service media governance](#) provides that the public service media's funding model "cannot be used to exert editorial influence or threaten institutional autonomy." Also, the European Parliament's 2021 [resolution](#) calls on EU member states to "ensure stable, open, transparent, sustainable and adequate funding for public service media on a multi-annual basis in order to guarantee their independence from governmental, political and market pressures and thus ensure the diverse European media landscape."

The safety and ability of journalists to operate in full freedom were highlighted by the ODIHR EAM interlocutors as another key concern.<sup>58</sup> The recent independent initiative by journalists aimed at enhancing the safety of media workers through a platform to report verbal and physical assaults and to access legal assistance was welcomed by many.<sup>59</sup> Also, journalist protection initiatives by the Ministry of Culture and the government's adoption of media freedom and journalist safety commitments constitute positive steps.<sup>60</sup> However, despite these pledges and existing protective mechanisms, journalists remain targeted by verbal attacks, threats, and denigrative smear campaigns, especially in social media.<sup>61</sup>

*To uphold the freedom of expression and of the media and provide a safe working environment, measures to protect journalists should be fully operationalized and consistently enforced. Appropriate additional protective measures, including early warning and rapid response mechanisms, could be considered.*

## **B. LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK**

The Constitution enshrines the freedom of expression and the right to search for, receive, and disseminate ideas and information. Although amendments to the Criminal Code providing for a reduction of the prison term have been discussed in parliament in May 2023, and accusations of defamation have not led to a conviction in recent years, defamation remains a criminal offence, at odds with international standards.<sup>62</sup>

*Defamation and insult should be decriminalized in favour of civil remedies.*

A major reform of media legislation entered into force in August 2022 following the adoption of two new laws, the Media Services Act and the Act on Publications. The new regulatory framework, designed mainly to adapt the legislation to a digital media ecosystem, requires online periodical publications and web portals to register with the Ministry of Culture. Positively, the new laws also increased the transparency of media ownership and funding by requiring outlets to disclose this information and extended the protection of information sources to online media. However, last-minute amendments introduced a controversial “right to expression”. It provides a possibility to request a rectification not only of wrong or incomplete statements of fact that affect a person's honour, dignity, privacy, or reputation but also in response to opinions and value judgements based on such disputed claims. This provision, which was also criticized by media experts, does not contribute to the protection of media freedom.<sup>63</sup>

Under the Media Services Act, the Council for Media Services (CSM) replaced the Broadcasting and Retransmission Council in the exercise of media oversight functions. In this capacity, the CSM

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<sup>58</sup> See alerts pertaining to the safety of journalists in Slovakia reported through the Council of Europe's [Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists](#).

<sup>59</sup> See the [Safe.Journalism.sk](#) initiative.

<sup>60</sup> See the [2024-2026 Action Plan](#) of the Open Government Initiative. The Ministry of Culture's initiatives foresee, among other things, inter-ministerial cooperation to develop an implementation plan for recommendations to enhance the safety of journalists, including the creation of contact points within the police, in line with the European Commission's [Recommendation 2021/1534](#).

<sup>61</sup> These concerns were highlighted in the 2023 EUI Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom [Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era](#) Slovakia country report, the 2023 Freedom House [Nations in Transit Slovakia country report](#), and the International Press Institute's analysis on [Media Capture in Slovakia](#).

<sup>62</sup> See June 2023 [press release](#) by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, paragraph 47 of the 2011 UN HRC [General Comment 34](#), Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe [Resolution 1577 \(2007\) Towards decriminalization of defamation](#) and its [Recommendation 1814 \(2007\)](#), and the [2003 OSCE Bishkek Declaration](#).

<sup>63</sup> See [comments](#) and [statements](#) by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on the reform initiatives related to the right of reply.

monitored the pre-election campaign in television and radio programs and received ten complaints on election coverage by the electronic media. The CSM informed the ODIHR EAM that filed complaints are handled within a 90-day legal deadline. Long deadlines for the review of media complaints raise questions regarding the timeliness of legal redress and the possibility of effective remedies.

*To provide for effective remedy, the law should mandate the Council for Media Services to consider any media-related complaints in the context of the election campaign in an expedient manner.*

These were the first elections since the implementation of the EU Digital Service Act, which requires social media platforms available in the EU member states to combat misinformation and hate speech and to promptly remove illegal content. Within the digital domain, the CSM was vested with the responsibility to track and prevent the dissemination of harmful and illegal content online.

Since June 2022, technology companies are also bound by self-regulatory standards under the EU Code of Practice on Disinformation. Based on its monitoring and reports from other state institutions, the CSM liaised with social media platforms to ensure the effective application of the platforms' community norms and standards on illegal content, including materials created using artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. Despite the established collaboration with companies running social networks, the monitoring efforts by dedicated units within state institutions, especially the police, and several fact-checking and watchdog projects, the amount of manipulative and harmful content spread by an extensive disinformation ecosystem through social networks and other online resources remained high.

*The capacity and coordination of state institutions and communication with social networks to effectively tackle disinformation could be further strengthened. Preventive measures could prioritize awareness-raising and promotion of media literacy while avoiding restrictions on speech and access to information. Collaboration of civil society organizations, fact-checkers, specialist researchers, and media with the state institutions could be preserved and further strengthened.*

### **C. MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN**

Media provided extensive coverage of the elections, both online and traditional media, through information on parties and candidates, campaign manifestos and activities.

The Act on Campaigning regulates broadcast media conduct, laying out detailed rules for paid and free airtime. In line with its requirements, the public broadcaster provided opportunities to all 25 contestants to participate in televised debates and aired interviews with candidates, thus fulfilling its public service remit. Private national broadcasters TV Markíza, TV JOJ, and TV3 also offered the contestants opportunities to engage in televised discussion programs.<sup>64</sup> However, SMER-SD boycotted election debates on TV Markíza, accusing the channel of bias. The party also declined interviews with the daily Denník N, SME, and with the news portal Actuality.sk. Some other parties also refused to give interviews and cooperate with selected media outlets based on mistrust. On its part, some media also chose not to carry interviews with electoral contestants they regarded as anti-democratic and using hateful and discriminatory rhetoric. The distrust and mutual exclusions illustrate a tense and deteriorating relationship between the media and political actors.

The campaign coverage in online resources was equally extensive and diverse, providing users with a wide range of information. However, more often than traditional media, online sources, including

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<sup>64</sup> Public and private broadcasters provided sign language interpretation to make debates accessible for hearing impaired viewers.

social networks, were prone to carrying and spreading radicalized views and, at times, toxic or manipulative narratives, including content attempting to undermine trust in democratic institutions and public officials, the rule of law, electoral process, and media independence.<sup>65</sup>

## XI. ELECTION OBSERVATION

The Elections Act allows citizen and international observers to observe the voting and counting processes, contributing to overall transparency. However, despite a previous ODIHR recommendation and at odds with good practice, it does not provide additional details regarding the observation of other stages of the electoral process or the status and rights of observers.<sup>66</sup>

While there is no formal accreditation mechanism for observers, the ODIHR EAM was granted access to all aspects of the process and enjoyed good cooperation with all institutions and stakeholders. Limited opportunities granted to meet with the SEC and the MoI reduced space for comprehensive and open discussions. However, both institutions jointly and promptly addressed all EAM inquiries through written responses.

*The legislation should be revised to explicitly and unambiguously grant access to citizen and international observers to all stages of the electoral process, in line with the OSCE commitments.*

Agora Election Observation deployed an international election observation mission focusing in particular on youth participation.<sup>67</sup> There were no nationwide citizen election observation efforts.

## XII. PARTICIPATION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES

Based on the 2021 census, over 18 per cent of the population identify themselves as belonging to national minorities, with Hungarians and Roma constituting the largest groups.<sup>68</sup> Minority rights are enshrined in the Constitution, including the right to use minority languages in education and official communication and to participate in decision-making processes affecting national minorities. Municipalities provide official information, including voter information and invitations to vote, in minority languages in localities with at least 20 per cent of minority residents.

Although some party programmes included positive measures targeting national minorities, the topic of minority inclusion, especially of Roma people, was frequently addressed in a negative and stereotypical manner. Roma were frequent targets of belittling comments, insults, and hateful remarks in campaign speeches, on social networks, and on billboards.<sup>69</sup> Several ODIHR EAM

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<sup>65</sup> See Globsec's report on [Pre-election monitoring of Facebook in Slovak Information Space](#) and the Infosecurity.sk [By-weekly report on emerging disinformation trends, September 2023](#).

<sup>66</sup> Paragraph 8 of the 1990 [OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) provides that “the presence of observers, both foreign and domestic, can enhance the electoral process”. Paragraphs II.3.2.a-b of the [Code of Good Practice](#) stipulate that “observers should be given the widest possible opportunity to participate in an election observation exercise” and that “observation must not be confined to the election day itself [...]. It must make it possible to determine whether irregularities occurred before, during or after the elections.”

<sup>67</sup> See the [Preliminary Statement](#) by the Agora Election Observation mission.

<sup>68</sup> Based on the latest [census](#), 422,065 persons (7.75 per cent) identify themselves as Hungarians and 67,179 (1.23 per cent) as Roma. According to the 2019 [Atlas of Roma Communities](#) published by the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, there were over 440,000 Roma.

<sup>69</sup> The Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities [appealed](#) to political parties not to exploit the vulnerable situation of the Roma in the campaign. The plenipotentiary also echoed Roma civil society [appeals](#) to Republika and L'SNS to remove intolerant anti-Roma billboards and videos describing Roma as “asocial” and “parasites”. According to the ODIHR EAM interlocutors, billboards and videos in question were not removed.

interlocutors were alarmed by the frequency and gravity of such attacks.<sup>70</sup> Such rhetoric and discriminatory practices are contrary to OSCE commitments and international standards.<sup>71</sup>

*Political actors, including parties and electoral contestants, should refrain in their campaigns from any rhetoric of discriminatory or hateful nature targeting minorities and other vulnerable groups that may lead to intolerance and the infringement of basic citizen and electoral rights. Authorities should promptly investigate such instances and proactively conduct awareness-raising campaigns for political parties and voters.*

Positively, interlocutors discerned a gradual upward trend in minority candidacies, noting both more openness of mainstream parties to include minority candidates and greater confidence and preparedness of candidates themselves to run program-based rather than solely minority-oriented campaigns. Hungarian and Roma minorities were represented especially through the Hungarian Forum, Alliance, *Modri*, *Most-Hid* alliances and the Principle party, but also featured on mainstream parties' candidate lists, in particular of OL'aNO.

Concerns related to possible vote buying in Roma-populated areas have resurfaced in these elections. Police investigated several allegations of electoral corruption (see *Complaints and Appeals*). Campaign promises by OL'aNO of EUR 500 payments to every voter participating in these elections were seen by many as a clear incentive for voters from disadvantaged communities. These pledges were criticized by some ODIHR EAM interlocutors as irresponsible and manipulative of vulnerable groups.

### XIII. ELECTORAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The law does not provide specific mechanisms for the resolution of election-related disputes. No expedited timeframes are envisaged except in voter and candidate registration cases.<sup>72</sup> The absence of expedited deadlines for electoral complaints may result in protracted adjudication, failing to provide timely and effective remedy, contrary to international standards and good practice.<sup>73</sup>

Campaign-related complaints can be lodged with the MoI and the SEC, but no clear guidelines are in place for the handling of complaints and the separation of responsibilities between the two agencies. In general, appeals against SEC decisions can be lodged with the administrative court;

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<sup>70</sup> In para 18 of the September 2022 [Concluding Observations on the Thirteenth Periodic Report of Slovakia](#), the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concerns “about the persistent hate speech in the media and on the Internet and about the use of racist political discourse among politicians against ethnic minorities, particularly Roma”. The December 2020 European Commission against Racism and Intolerance [Report on the Slovak Republic \(sixth monitoring cycle\)](#), para 33, expressed concern over the increase in hate speech targeting ethnic minorities, including Roma.

<sup>71</sup> Paragraph 40 of 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document states that “The participating States clearly and unequivocally condemn totalitarianism, racial and ethnic hatred, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and discrimination against anyone... in this context, they also recognize the particular problems of Roma... they declare their firm intention to intensify the efforts to combat these phenomena in all their forms.” See also Article 6 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and Article 7 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).

<sup>72</sup> Election-related appeals fall within the general 60-day deadline for the resolution of administrative disputes.

<sup>73</sup> Paragraph 5.10 of the 1990 [OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states that “Everyone will have an effective means of redress against administrative decisions, so as to guarantee respect for fundamental rights and ensure legal integrity.” Article 13 of the [European Convention on Human Rights](#) provides that “everyone whose rights and freedoms as set forth in this Convention are violated shall have an effective remedy before a national authority notwithstanding that the violation has been committed by persons acting in an official capacity.” Guideline II 3.3 (g) of the 2002 Venice Commission [Code of Good Practice](#) in electoral matters recommends that timelines for lodging and deciding on electoral complaints must be short (three to five days at first instance).

however, SEC decisions on penalties for political and campaign finance violations are not subject to appeal, contrary to the OSCE commitments.<sup>74</sup> On 1 October, the MoI informed the ODIHR EAM that the SEC had received several campaign-related complaints and that these will be handled in the next months. Some of the complaints and communications which do not fall within the SEC's mandate were forwarded to the MoI district offices and other responsible institutions for follow-up action.<sup>75</sup> Election administration bodies do not maintain complaints registers, and no aggregated public information on complaints received and considered by various election administration levels is available, reducing transparency.

*The legislation should be reviewed to provide adequate expedited deadlines for election disputes and clear guidelines for handling complaints by election administration bodies and other bodies. All election-related decisions by the SEC should be subject to judicial review.*

Election results can be appealed to the Constitutional Court within ten days of their announcement. No expedited timeline for deciding on such appeals is provided by law; this fails to guarantee a timely remedy.<sup>76</sup> Only contesting parties have the right to appeal, and there is no requirement for the Constitutional Court to hold a public hearing involving the parties to the case, contrary to good practice.<sup>77</sup>

*The timelines for adjudicating complaints on election results should be reviewed to protect the right to effective redress. In line with good practice, consideration should be given to guaranteeing the voters' right to lodge appeals against election results, as well as safeguarding the right to a public hearing involving the parties to the case when adjudicating appeals against final results.*

On 1 October, the police reported receiving 123 complaints concerning the electoral process, with 93 related to election day. Five complaints received during the campaign and six on election day were assessed by the police as involving potential criminal conduct, including vote buying and criminal defamation. On 16 October, the police charged three persons with election corruption involving the bribing of voters in a Roma settlement.

#### **XIV. ELECTION DAY**

In line with ODIHR methodology, the ODIHR EAM did not observe election day proceedings in a systematic and comprehensive manner. On election day, the ODIHR EAM team visited a limited number of polling stations. The voting process ran smoothly and was efficiently administered by PEC members who appeared knowledgeable of their duties. Some minor procedural

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<sup>74</sup> See paragraph 5.10 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#).

<sup>75</sup> The MoI district offices contacted informed the ODIHR EAM that they had launched proceedings to impose administrative penalties, if violations are confirmed, yet without expedited timelines.

<sup>76</sup> Article 162 of the Law on the Constitutional Court leaves an ambiguity whether the stipulated 90-day deadline is for the Court to rule on the complaint or to decide on the admissibility of the motion for the commencement of proceedings. The Constitutional Court informed the ODIHR EAM that appeals concerning results should generally be adjudicated within 90 days, but acknowledged that this deadline is not binding on the Court. By law, the newly elected parliament must be inaugurated no later than 30 days after the announcement of the election results. Guideline II 3.3 (g) of the [Code of Good Practice](#) recommends that a "little more time" than the otherwise short timeframes for the review of electoral complaints may be given only to Supreme or Constitutional Courts for their rulings (paragraph 95 of the Explanatory Report).

<sup>77</sup> The [Code of Good Practice](#) provides in Section II.3.3.3.f that "all candidates and all voters registered in the constituency concerned must be entitled to appeal. A reasonable quorum may be imposed for appeals by voters on the results of elections". Section II.3.3.h of the [Code of Good Practice](#) provides that "the applicant's right to a hearing involving both parties must be protected" and paragraph 100 states that "the appeal procedure should be of a judicial nature, in the sense that the right of the appellants to proceedings in which both parties are heard should be safeguarded".

inconsistencies were noted. This included instances of insufficient protection of vote secrecy due to irregular voting screen placements and some PECs not systematically checking that all unused ballots were placed in a designated box.

*The legal provisions for vote secrecy should be ensured for all voters and enforced by the PECs.*

Approximately half of the polling stations visited by the EAM were not accessible to voters with reduced mobility.<sup>78</sup> These findings align with the results of the 2022 survey on architectural accessibility of polling stations conducted by the Office of the Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities.<sup>79</sup> The law and a SEC instruction provide for certain adaptations to facilitate the participation of voters with disabilities, including the possibility to request mobile voting and to be assisted by a person of choice. In addition, most PECs facilitated curb-side voting using a mobile ballot box to mitigate the lack of independent access for persons with physical disabilities. This practice is not regulated by law, and several ODIHR EAM interlocutors criticized it as degrading and potentially compromising the secrecy of the vote. No assistive tools and accessible election materials were developed and available in polling stations for voters with visual impairments.

*The authorities should increase efforts to allocate adequate premises for polling stations that allow independent access for voters with physical disabilities. Additional measures should be considered, including the use of election materials in accessible formats and assistive tools in polling stations.*

Ahead of these elections, the parliament introduced an obligation for municipal authorities to scan and publish the result protocols of all PECs within their jurisdiction on their websites or, if not available, on the official notice boards. Several interlocutors perceived this provision as redundant since the municipal authorities are instructed to publish only the final verified PEC result protocols. Although there is still no obligation for PECs to post result protocols in polling stations and to issue copies to PEC members and observers present, as recommended by ODIHR before, the publication of PEC protocols by municipalities provides an additional layer of transparency to the tabulation of results, underpinning the detailed polling station results and summary DEC protocols published by the SO and the SEC. As verified by the ODIHR EAM, all municipalities published the PEC result protocols after the announcement of the final results, and the SO published the DEC result protocols together with the final results.

The SO started publishing the preliminary results soon after closing. The preliminary results were disaggregated per district and published in ten-minute intervals. The final election results, disaggregated per municipality, were announced by the SEC and published by the SO on 1 October.<sup>80</sup> For the first time, it was possible to extract the results of voting from abroad as they were reported on through separate PEC protocols from a special DEC, adding to a more transparent and accountable counting process of postal ballots.

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<sup>78</sup> Paragraph 41.5 of the [1991 OSCE Moscow Document](#) calls on participating States “to encourage favourable conditions for the access of persons with disabilities to public buildings and services”. Article 29 of the [CRPD](#) requires states to “ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others; [...] including the right and opportunity for persons with disabilities to vote and be elected [...] inter alia, by ensuring that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use.”

<sup>79</sup> See the [results of survey on architectural accessibility of polling stations](#).

<sup>80</sup> The results from one PEC in the Prešov region were not included in the final results due to an incident where one PEC member introduced an undisclosed number of additional ballot envelopes into the ballot box. Administrative proceedings were initiated against this PEC member.

## **XV. RECOMMENDATIONS**

These recommendations, as contained throughout the text, are offered with a view to further enhance the conduct of elections in the Slovak Republic and to support efforts to bring them fully in line with OSCE commitments and other international obligations and standards for democratic elections. These recommendations should be read in conjunction with past ODIHR recommendations that remain to be addressed.<sup>81</sup> The legislative reforms should be undertaken well in advance of elections and through an inclusive consultation, including with civil society. ODIHR stands ready to assist the authorities of the Slovak Republic to further improve the electoral process and to address recommendations contained in this and previous reports.

### **A. PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The competencies and activities of the MoI and the SEC should be clearly defined and delineated in a way that permits the SEC to operate in an institutionally and functionally independent manner.
2. Restrictions on candidacy based on residency, criminal conviction, intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, and the impossibility to stand as independent candidates should be reviewed in line with OSCE commitments, international standards, and good electoral practice.
3. Consideration could be given to vesting an independent body with campaign finance oversight responsibilities. This body should have the mandate and sufficient capacity to exercise effective control over the contestants' income and expenditures, both during the campaign and after the election process is concluded.
4. Defamation and insult should be decriminalized in favour of civil remedies.
5. The legislation should be reviewed to provide adequate expedited deadlines for election disputes and clear guidelines for handling complaints by election administration bodies and other bodies. All election-related decisions by the SEC should be subject to judicial review.
6. The authorities should increase efforts to allocate adequate premises for polling stations that allow independent access for voters with physical disabilities. Additional measures should be considered, including the use of election materials in accessible formats and assistive tools in polling stations.

### **B. OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Background and political context**

7. To enhance women's participation in political life, the institutions, political parties and other stakeholders should increase efforts to address existing gender stereotypes and reduce the gender gap both through regulatory measures and advocacy.

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<sup>81</sup> In paragraph 25 of the [1999 OSCE Istanbul Document](#), all OSCE participating States committed themselves "to follow up promptly the ODIHR's election assessment and recommendations". The follow-up of prior recommendations from the [Final Report on the 2019 presidential election](#) is assessed by the ODIHR EAM as follows: recommendations 16 was implemented fully and recommendations 4, 8, 15, 19 and 20 were implemented partially. Recommendations 8 and 12, from the [Final Report on the 2020 parliamentary elections](#) were fully implemented, and recommendations 1, 7, 18 and 21 were partially implemented.



## **Legal framework**

8. To address the remaining gaps and weaknesses in the election law, the authorities should engage in inclusive and comprehensive public consultations and address prior recommendations by election stakeholders and observers well ahead of the next parliamentary elections.

## **Election administration**

9. Sex-disaggregated data on the election administration should be collected and published.
10. To bolster public confidence, consideration could be given to make mandatory the conduct and the publication of findings of an independent audit of the election results management system.

## **Voter registration**

11. To further enhance transparency and foster confidence in the election process, the SEC should be mandated to regularly collect and publish the number of registered voters at the district, municipal and national levels before election day.

## **Candidate registration**

12. The authorities should adjust the deadline for the withdrawal and revocation of candidates to allow sufficient time for the change to be reflected on the printed ballot papers. To support voters' ability to cast valid and informed preferential votes, voter information and communication about party and candidate withdrawals and revocations should be improved.
13. To increase political participation and representation of women, the adoption of proactive measures such as mandatory gender quotas should be considered. In addition, the law could provide financial incentives to parties for promoting women in their decision-making bodies and for increasing the number of women candidates placed higher on the lists.

## **Election campaign**

14. To facilitate meaningful participation, political parties should make their programmes, campaign materials, and messages accessible to persons with disabilities. The MoI could develop detailed recommendations on practical measures in collaboration with state and civil organizations active in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities and legislators could consider incentives for parties that make their campaigns more accessible.

## **Campaign finance**

15. To prevent undue influence by donors, consideration could be given to lowering the existing limit on donations and enacting detailed regulations related to loans.
16. Regulations on third-party campaign funding should be reviewed so that freedom of expression is respected while, at the same time, reasonable limits on third-party expenditures are imposed to prevent undue distortion of the campaign.

## **Media**

17. As previously recommended, to enhance the independence of the public broadcaster, the procedures for the appointment of its board members and the general director should be reviewed. Decisions on the funding model should be adopted based on inclusive consultations with all the relevant stakeholders.
18. To uphold the freedom of expression and of the media and provide a safe working environment, measures to protect journalists should be fully operationalized and consistently enforced. Appropriate additional protective measures, including early warning and rapid response mechanisms, could be considered.
19. To provide for effective remedy, the law should mandate the Council for Media Services to consider any media-related complaints in the context of the election campaign in an expedient manner.
20. The capacity and coordination of state institutions and communication with social networks to effectively tackle disinformation could be further strengthened. Preventive measures could prioritize awareness-raising and promotion of media literacy while avoiding restrictions on speech and access to information. Collaboration of civil society organizations, fact-checkers, specialist researchers, and media with the state institutions could be preserved and further strengthened.

## **Election observation**

21. The legislation should be revised to explicitly and unambiguously grant access to citizen and international observers to all stages of the electoral process, in line with the OSCE commitments.

## **Participation of national minorities**

22. Political actors, including parties and electoral contestants, should refrain in their campaigns from any rhetoric of discriminatory or hateful nature targeting minorities and other vulnerable groups that may lead to intolerance and the infringement of basic citizen and electoral rights. Authorities should promptly investigate such instances and proactively conduct awareness-raising campaigns for political parties and voters.

## **Complaints and appeals**

23. The timelines for adjudicating complaints on election results should be reviewed to protect the right to effective redress. In line with good practice, consideration should be given to guaranteeing the voters' right to lodge appeals against election results, as well as safeguarding the right to a public hearing involving the parties to the case when adjudicating appeals against final results.

## **Election day**

24. The legal provisions for vote secrecy should be ensured for all voters and enforced by the PECs.

**ANNEXE: FINAL RESULTS<sup>82</sup>**

Number of	Total	Percentage
PECs	6,014	100
Registered voters	4,388,872	100
Voters who took part in the elections	3,007,123	68,51
Voters who voted in person in polling stations	2,948,344	98,05
Voters who returned postal votes from abroad	58,779	1,95
Valid votes	2,967,896	98,69

**Distribution of valid votes to political parties and the allocation of seats**

#	Party / Coalition Name	Votes	%	Seats
1	Pirate Party – Slovakia	9,358	0.31	
2	Principle	1,817	0.06	
3	PS	533,136	17.96	<b>32</b>
4	Common Citizens of Slovakia	2,401	0.08	
5	OĽaNO and Friends (OĽaNo a Priatelia: Obyčajní Ľudia (OĽano), Nezávislí Kandidáti (Neka), Nova, Slobodní a Zodpovední, Pačivale Roma, Magyar Szívek a Kresťanská Únia a Za Ľudí)	264,137	8.89	<b>16</b>
6	Communist Party of Slovakia (Komunistická strana Slovenska)	9,867	0.33	
7	Hungarian Forum, Civic Democrats of Slovakia, For Regions, Roma Coalition, Democratic Party (Maďarské fórum, Občianski demokrati Slovenska, Za regióny, Rómska koalícia, Demokratická strana)	3,486	0.11	
8	Patriotic Bloc (Vlastenecký blok)	1,262	0.04	
9	Modrí, Most - Híd	7,935	0.26	
10	Justice (Spravodlivosť)	1,335	0.04	
11	Slovak Revival Movement (Slovenské Hnutie Obrody)	1,332	0.04	
12	SaS	187,645	6.32	<b>11</b>
13	Sme Rodina	65,673	2.21	
14	MySlovensko	2,786	0.09	
15	SNS	166,995	5.62	<b>10</b>
16	SMER - SD	681,017	22.94	<b>42</b>
17	HLAS - SD	436,415	14.70	<b>27</b>
18	Alliance	130,183	4.38	
19	Heart Patriots and Pensioners – Slovak National Unity (Srdce vlastenci a dôchodcovia - Slovenská Národná Jednota)	2,315	0.07	
20	SDKU - DS – Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party (SDKÚ - DS - Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia - Demokratická strana)	771	0.02	
21	ESNS	25,003	0.84	
22	Democrats (Demokrati)	87,006	2.93	
23	KDH	202,515	6.82	<b>12</b>
24	Karma	2,407	0.08	
25	Republika	141,099	4.75	

<sup>82</sup> Data according to the [final results](#) published by the SO.

## ABOUT ODIHR

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is the OSCE's principal institution to assist participating States "to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to abide by the rule of law, to promote principles of democracy and (...) to build, strengthen and protect democratic institutions, as well as promote tolerance throughout society" (1992 Helsinki Summit Document). This is referred to as the OSCE human dimension.

ODIHR, based in Warsaw (Poland), was created as the Office for Free Elections at the 1990 Paris Summit and started operating in May 1991. One year later, the name of the Office was changed to reflect an expanded mandate to include human rights and democratization. Today it employs over 150 staff.

ODIHR is the lead agency in Europe in the field of **election observation**. Every year, it co-ordinates and organizes the deployment of thousands of observers to assess whether elections in the OSCE region are conducted in line with OSCE commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation. Its unique methodology provides an in-depth insight into the electoral process in its entirety. Through assistance projects, ODIHR helps participating States to improve their electoral framework.

The Office's **democratization** activities include: rule of law, legislative support, democratic governance, migration and freedom of movement, and gender equality. ODIHR implements a number of targeted assistance programs annually, seeking to develop democratic structures.

ODIHR also assists participating States' in fulfilling their obligations to promote and protect **human rights** and fundamental freedoms consistent with OSCE human dimension commitments. This is achieved by working with a variety of partners to foster collaboration, build capacity and provide expertise in thematic areas including human rights in the fight against terrorism, enhancing the human rights protection of trafficked persons, human rights education and training, human rights monitoring and reporting, and women's human rights and security.

Within the field of **tolerance** and **non-discrimination**, ODIHR provides support to the participating States in strengthening their response to hate crimes and incidents of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. ODIHR's activities related to tolerance and non-discrimination are focused on the following areas: legislation; law enforcement training; monitoring, reporting on, and following up on responses to hate-motivated crimes and incidents; as well as educational activities to promote tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding.

ODIHR provides advice to participating States on their policies on **Roma and Sinti**. It promotes capacity-building and networking among Roma and Sinti communities, and encourages the participation of Roma and Sinti representatives in policy-making bodies.

All ODIHR activities are carried out in close co-ordination and co-operation with OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions and field operations, as well as with other international organizations.

More information is available on the ODIHR [website](#).