



Ecology Awareness of Sustainable Green Development:
Collaboration of Universities and Local Actors
2023-1-SK01-KA220-HED-000161639
SLOVAKIA
COUNTRY-BASED LEGAL ANALYSIS



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document provides a **country-based legal analysis for Slovakia**, focusing on the legal framework governing **sustainable green development** and the role of universities in collaborating with local actors. The analysis covers key areas such as the **green economy, sustainable finance, social responsibility, environmental protection, agriculture and food systems, sustainable urban development, and smart cities**, as well as **the legal framework for university-local government cooperation**.

In the **green economy**, the report examines Slovakia's environmental taxes, incentives, and green public procurement policies. It highlights the alignment of national regulations with EU directives aimed at promoting environmentally responsible economic activities. In the area of **sustainable finance**, the study reviews Slovakia's implementation of the **EU Taxonomy for Sustainable Activities, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), and the Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation (SFDR)**, which require companies and financial institutions to enhance transparency in sustainability reporting.

The section on **environment and agrifood** analyzes Slovakia's legal framework for **water management, sustainable agriculture, and biodiversity protection**. National action plans for organic farming and climate change adaptation strategies are key components of this regulatory landscape.

Regarding **sustainable urban development and smart cities**, the analysis covers Slovakia's policies on **urban digitalization, green infrastructure, and sustainable transport**. Special attention is given to legislation supporting **public transport investments, multimodal transport integration, and urban sustainability initiatives**.

Finally, the **legal framework for university-local government cooperation** is examined, highlighting how Slovakia's laws facilitate partnerships between higher education institutions and municipalities. This includes the regulatory basis for **joint projects, knowledge transfer, and sustainable development initiatives at the local level**.

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COUNTRY-BASED LEGAL ANALYSES

The comparative legal analyses in respect of green economy, sustainable financing, social responsibility, green environment and agrifood, sustainable urban development and smart cities and collaboration of universities and local actors is required for modern society and the environment.

This fostered cooperation between universities, local government, communities and citizens to achieve sustainable projects and promote environmentally friendly and economically responsible practices. Laws and regulations play a crucial role in how different countries implement policies and interdisciplinary cooperation. Their institutional systems may foster sustainability and innovation differently, and their comparison will help identify the positive and negative aspects and gaps that need to be mitigated for better intersectoral cooperation.

Using comparative analysis, partners will examine the impact of laws and policy on the achievement or obstruction of goals such as sustainable green development. For example, understanding how laws facilitate and promote SGD is a starting point for developing networking strategies and action plans between universities and other local actors in a more productive way.

Legal comparison allows partners to appreciate the matters which need to improve in the policies of their countries. That target may translate to concrete proposals for legal changes or modifications that would render collaboration more effective. These proposals will assist the universities and local governments in ways that will research to the SGD Guide and Action Plan, allowing for greater coordination, efficiency, and impact of their activities towards global sustainability.

Universities can serve as an innovation engine and instruct communities on how to adopt less harmful practices. Under enabling legislation and regulations, the universities can help in facilitation of the transfer of information, support local actors to solve problems, and assist university students and citizens in active problem solving of the local environmental issues.



GREEN ECONOMY

1.1 Environmental Taxes

Environmental taxation in Slovakia plays a pivotal role in addressing ecological challenges and steering the nation towards sustainable development. While the country has made commendable progress in certain areas, there remains substantial room for enhancing the effectiveness of its environmental tax system.

Slovakia's environmental tax revenue is notably below the European Union (EU) average. In 2017, such taxes constituted 1.76% of the nation's GDP, compared to the EU-28 average of 2.4%. This disparity underscores the potential for Slovakia to leverage fiscal tools more effectively to promote environmental objectives.

Energy Taxation and Carbon Pricing

Energy taxes in Slovakia are primarily governed by the EU Energy Tax Directive of 2003, which sets minimum rates for energy product taxation across member states. Slovakia imposes fuel excise taxes and electricity consumption taxes; however, these rates are relatively low compared to other EU countries. Notably, the country lacks an explicit carbon tax, relying instead on the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) to price carbon emissions. Approximately 35% of Slovakia's total emissions are covered by the ETS, with the remaining sectors, such as transport and agriculture, facing minimal carbon pricing.

Efforts Towards Green Fiscal Reform

Recognizing the need for a more robust environmental fiscal framework, Slovakia has initiated steps towards green fiscal reform. Proposals include:

- Introducing automatic indexation of environmentally related taxes to maintain their real value over time.
- Differentiating energy tax rates based on the emission intensity of fuels to incentivize cleaner energy sources.

- Broadening tax bases to encompass all emission sources, ensuring a more comprehensive approach to carbon pricing.
- Reforming preferential fiscal treatments, particularly those related to household fuel use, which contribute significantly to local air pollution.
- Increasing landfill taxes and introducing waste incineration taxes to promote waste prevention, composting, and recycling.

Phasing Out Environmentally Harmful Subsidies

Slovakia has historically provided subsidies that inadvertently encourage environmentally detrimental practices. For instance, subsidies for domestic coal production and consumption have been identified as environmentally harmful. The government announced plans to phase out coal subsidies by 2023, aiming to eliminate all such subsidies by 2030.

Challenges and Considerations

Despite these initiatives, several challenges persist:

- **Energy Poverty:** A significant portion of the Slovak population faces energy poverty, with the poorest 40% spending between 20-25% of their annual income on energy costs. This situation necessitates careful consideration to ensure that environmental taxes do not disproportionately burden vulnerable populations.
- **Administrative Capacity:** Implementing and managing new tax structures requires adequate administrative resources and capacity, which may be limited, especially at local government levels.
- **Public Acceptance:** Gaining public support for environmental taxes is crucial. Transparent communication about the purpose and benefits of such taxes can aid in building trust and acceptance among citizens.

Environmental taxes in Slovakia are state-regulated fiscal instruments intended to mitigate environmental degradation and promote sustainable practices. These taxes aim not only to raise public revenues but to influence consumption and production behaviors, internalize environmental externalities, and encourage pollution reduction. The key objectives of environmental taxes in Slovakia include:

1. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and other forms of environmental pollution
2. Promoting sustainable development and efficient resource use
3. Encouraging behavioral change through financial disincentives for environmentally harmful actions
4. Financing environmental protection projects and climate adaptation measures
5. Harmonizing Slovak tax policy with EU environmental frameworks and targets

In line with the European System of Accounts (ESA 2010), Slovakia classifies environmental taxes according to the impact of the taxable base on the environment. These include:

Energy Taxes

These comprise taxes levied on energy products such as fuels, electricity, and natural gas. Slovakia imposes excise duties on:

- Motor gasoline and diesel
- Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG)
- Natural gas used for heating and transportation
- Coal and electricity (in some cases)

CO₂ taxes are integrated into energy taxation, though Slovakia does not currently impose a separate, explicit CO₂ tax outside of the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS). Energy taxes are regulated under:

- **Act No. 98/2004 Coll. on Excise Duties on Mineral Oils**
- **Act No. 609/2007 Coll. on Excise Duty on Electricity, Coal and Natural Gas**

Transport Taxes

These taxes apply to vehicle ownership and usage. Slovakia imposes:

- **Motor vehicle tax** for legal entities and self-employed individuals, based on engine capacity, age, and CO₂ emissions.
 - **Vehicle registration fees**, partly emission-based.
- Transport-related taxes are primarily regulated under:
- **Act No. 361/2014 Coll. on Motor Vehicle Tax**
 - **Act No. 145/1995 Coll. on Administrative Fees**, which includes vehicle registration

Pollution Taxes

Slovakia levies fees on air and water emissions, including:

- Charges for air pollutants like sulfur dioxide (SO₂), nitrogen oxides (NO_x), and volatile organic compounds
 - Fees for the discharge of wastewater into surface waters
- These are governed by:
- **Act No. 401/1998 Coll. on Charges for Air Pollution**
 - **Water Act No. 364/2004 Coll.**

Natural Resource Taxes

Fees for the extraction of natural resources include:

- Water abstraction fees
 - Charges for forest and mineral exploitation
 - Fees for the use of geothermal energy
- These are regulated under:
- **Water Act No. 364/2004 Coll.**
 - **Mining Act No. 44/1988 Coll.**
 - **Act No. 51/1988 Coll. on Mining Activities**

Legal Basis and Administration

Environmental taxation is administered by the **Financial Administration of the Slovak Republic**, with oversight and policy formulation by the **Ministry of Environment** and **Ministry of Finance**. Proceeds from some environmental fees are directed to the **Environmental Fund**, which supports eco-projects.

1.2. Other Regulations

Slovakia has a comprehensive legal and regulatory framework for environmental protection. Key laws include:

Environmental Protection Act (No. 17/1992 Coll.)

This umbrella legislation provides a general framework for environmental conservation, including pollution prevention, public participation, and environmental impact assessment (EIA). It incorporates principles such as the polluter-pays principle and sustainable development.

Air Protection Act (No. 137/2010 Coll.)

Sets emission limits for air pollutants, establishes air quality zones, and mandates continuous air quality monitoring. Implements EU directives on ambient air quality and emissions from industrial sources.

Waste Management Act (No. 79/2015 Coll.)

Establishes rules for waste collection, separation, recycling, and disposal. It supports the circular economy and introduces obligations for producers (extended producer responsibility - EPR). It prohibits landfilling recyclable waste and promotes waste-to-energy processes.

Water Act (No. 364/2004 Coll.)

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Covers water protection, usage rights, wastewater treatment standards, and flood management. Enforces the Water Framework Directive and includes rules for cross-border water cooperation.

Nature and Landscape Protection Act (No. 543/2002 Coll.)

Regulates biodiversity conservation, protected areas, and ecological networks like Natura 2000. Provides legal instruments for habitat protection, species conservation, and environmental damage liability.

Noise and Vibration Regulation (No. 549/2007 Coll.)

Governs noise limits for industrial, transport, and urban sources. Municipalities can issue additional noise control regulations.

Chemicals and Biocides Act (No. 67/2010 Coll.)

Implements REACH and CLP regulations. Regulates the safe handling, labeling, and distribution of chemicals, pesticides, and biocides.

Light Pollution Act (Draft Law Stage)

Slovakia is currently preparing legislation aimed at limiting light pollution from urban lighting, advertising, and transport infrastructure.

Climate Change Strategy

Slovakia's **Low Carbon Strategy 2050** and **Climate Law (in drafting stage)** aim to set national greenhouse gas reduction targets and pathways in accordance with the EU's Fit-for-55 package and climate neutrality goals.

1.3. Incentives

Slovakia supports the transition to a green economy through various incentive mechanisms:

Environmental Fund (EF)

Established under **Act No. 587/2004 Coll.**, the EF co-finances:

- Renewable energy projects (solar, biomass, wind)
 - Energy efficiency retrofits in buildings
 - Air and water quality improvement measures
 - Sustainable urban mobility and public transport
- The EF distributes both national and EU funding (e.g., from the Recovery and Resilience Plan).

State Housing Development Fund

Supports energy-efficient renovations of residential buildings, insulation projects, and installation of green roofs or solar collectors.

Support for Electric Mobility

Through **National Recovery Plan funds**, the government offers:

- Grants for electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles
- Support for EV charging infrastructure
- Reduced registration fees and highway tolls for EVs

Agricultural and Rural Incentives

The **Slovak Paying Agency** provides eco-incentives under the CAP Strategic Plan:

- Organic farming support
- Agroforestry and biodiversity schemes
- Carbon farming pilot initiatives

Green Loans and Credit Schemes

The **Slovak Guarantee and Development Bank (SZRB)** and **Slovenská sporiteľňa** offer green loans with preferential interest rates for energy retrofitting and sustainable entrepreneurship.

Industrial Decarbonization Grants

Under the **Modernization Fund**, industries can apply for co-financing of carbon reduction technologies, waste heat recovery, and electrification of industrial processes.

Building Renovation Program

Slovakia aims to renovate 30,000 buildings by 2030 under the **Long-Term Renovation Strategy**, supported by EU funds, to meet near-zero energy standards.

1.4. Green Public Procurement (GPP)

Green Public Procurement (GPP) in Slovakia is recognized as a key policy tool for sustainable consumption and circular economy. Though voluntary for most institutions, GPP has become mandatory in some areas as of 2023.

Legal Basis and Strategy

- **GPP Action Plan 2022–2025** outlines measurable targets for integrating environmental criteria in public tenders.
- Aligned with the **Circular Economy Roadmap** and the **EU Green Public Procurement Criteria**.

Mandatory GPP Requirements

State-funded institutions are required to apply GPP principles for:

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- Office paper and printing services
- Energy-efficient IT and lighting equipment
- Clean vehicles under the EU Clean Vehicles Directive
- Construction projects meeting energy and material sustainability standards

EU Ecolabel and Energy Label Criteria

Products and services bearing the **EU Ecolabel**, **Energy Star**, or **Blue Angel** receive procurement preference. For electronics, only A-class or higher products are accepted, and for construction, at least 30% of building materials must be recyclable or reused content.

Monitoring and Compliance

GPP implementation is monitored via the **Public Procurement Office (ÚVO)**. Reporting is done through the **Electronic Public Procurement System (EKS)**, with annual evaluations submitted to the Ministry of Environment.

GPP Goals

- At least 30% of all public procurement to meet GPP criteria by 2025
- 50% of procured electricity to be from renewable sources by 2026
- 50% of public vehicle fleet to be low- or zero-emission by 2030
- Promote the domestic eco-industry and sustainable SMEs

Slovakia's evolving environmental legislative and policy framework increasingly aligns with EU environmental goals. The country is gradually transitioning from a traditional regulatory model to a balanced approach combining fiscal instruments, market-based incentives, and strategic public procurement. While implementation challenges remain—particularly in administrative capacity and enforcement—Slovakia is positioning itself to leverage EU funding and policy frameworks to strengthen its green transition.



SUSTAINABLE GREEN FINANCING AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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2.1. EU Taxonomy for Sustainable Activities

The EU Taxonomy for Sustainable Activities serves as a pivotal framework within the European Union's sustainable finance agenda, aiming to direct investments toward environmentally sustainable economic activities. This classification system delineates specific criteria to ascertain the environmental sustainability of various economic undertakings, thereby facilitating the EU's transition toward a net-zero emissions economy by 2050.

Slovakia's adoption of the EU Taxonomy for Sustainable Activities represents a major strategic pivot in aligning national environmental and economic policies with the European Green Deal and the broader EU sustainable finance agenda. The EU Taxonomy provides a unified classification system for environmentally sustainable activities and is central to directing capital flows towards projects and sectors that contribute meaningfully to climate neutrality and environmental sustainability.

At the national level, the implementation of the EU Taxonomy is coordinated through a multi-agency approach involving:

- **The Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic**, which leads the development of environmental criteria and integration of the Taxonomy into environmental permits and climate strategies.
- **The Ministry of Finance**, which supports green budgeting and financial oversight.
- **Národná banka Slovenska (NBS)**, which supervises financial institutions and ensures compliance with disclosure requirements.

The Taxonomy framework classifies economic activities based on their contribution to six environmental objectives:

1. **Climate Change Mitigation**
2. **Climate Change Adaptation**
3. **Sustainable Use and Protection of Water and Marine Resources**
4. **Transition to a Circular Economy**
5. **Pollution Prevention and Control**
6. **Protection and Restoration of Biodiversity and Ecosystems**

In order to be recognized as sustainable, an economic activity must:

- Make a **substantial contribution** to one or more of these objectives.
- **Do no significant harm (DNSH)** to any of the other objectives.
- Comply with **minimum social safeguards**, such as human rights and labor standards.
- Meet **technical screening criteria** (TSC) set by the EU for each sector and activity.

Slovakia's publicly traded companies, large enterprises, and financial market participants under the scope of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) are now legally required to report the share of their turnover, capital expenditures (CapEx), and operating expenditures (OpEx) that qualify as Taxonomy-aligned. The reporting obligations apply not only to companies based in Slovakia but also to non-EU companies with significant operations within Slovak territory.

Initial national assessments suggest that the sectors most aligned with the Taxonomy criteria include:

- **Energy (renewable electricity generation and distribution),**
- **Transport (electrification and rail infrastructure),**
- **Real estate (green building construction and renovations),**
- **Manufacturing (energy-efficient technologies).**

To support Taxonomy integration, the Slovak Environment Agency has launched a **technical assistance platform** offering guidance, training, and sector-specific Taxonomy mapping tools for companies and municipalities. Moreover, the government is working on embedding Taxonomy principles into public procurement, infrastructure planning, and the national recovery and resilience plan.

While the framework aims to drive green investment and reduce greenwashing, its implementation presents challenges, especially in data availability, sector-specific know-how, and alignment of business models with Taxonomy criteria. Further development of compliance infrastructure is expected through digital registries and sustainability impact audits by 2026.

2.2. Sustainability Reporting

Slovakia has undergone a fundamental shift in its corporate reporting obligations with the transposition of the **Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)**. The CSRD extends the scope of non-financial reporting to a broader set of entities, ensures consistency through the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS), and introduces mandatory **external audit** of sustainability information.

The Accounting Act of Slovakia was amended in 2023 to reflect these changes. Under the revised framework, large undertakings and public interest entities must disclose:

- Their **sustainability strategy**, policies, and governance.
- The **material sustainability risks and opportunities** they face.
- **Impact metrics** for environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance.
- Detailed **forward-looking and historical KPIs**.

Additionally, sustainability reports must be:

- **Digitally tagged** using the European Single Electronic Format (ESEF).
- **Audited for limited assurance** initially, progressing toward reasonable assurance over time.
- Published as part of the **annual management report** and accessible to investors and regulators.

Parallel to the CSRD, Slovakia has enforced the **Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation (SFDR)** for financial market participants and advisors. The SFDR requires:

- Transparency on how ESG factors are integrated into investment decisions.
- Disclosure of **principal adverse impacts (PAIs)** on sustainability factors.
- Classification of financial products under Articles 6 (non-sustainable), 8 (ESG-promoting), or 9 (sustainable investment objective).

In Slovakia, the central bank (NBS) plays a key supervisory role in enforcing these disclosures. It has established a **Sustainable Finance Unit**, which collaborates with the European Supervisory Authorities (ESAs) to monitor compliance, provide interpretive guidance, and conduct sectoral reviews. The NBS has also developed a **regulatory sandbox** to encourage ESG innovation among fintechs and asset managers.

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On a voluntary level, an increasing number of Slovak companies, particularly those with international investors or supply chain exposure, are adopting additional frameworks such as:

- **Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Standards,**
- **Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD),**
- **SASB Standards,** especially in the energy, manufacturing, and banking sectors.

Nevertheless, implementation barriers persist. Smaller companies and local financial institutions often face resource constraints, lack of internal ESG expertise, and limited access to standardized data. The government is currently developing **capacity-building programs**, especially for SMEs, in cooperation with the Slovak Business Agency and the European Investment Bank (EIB).

2.3. Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence (CSDDD)

The upcoming **Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD)** will establish a robust legal obligation for large companies operating in Slovakia to monitor and mitigate adverse impacts across their global value chains. The Directive, set to be transposed into Slovak law by 2026, aims to promote responsible corporate conduct and increase accountability for human rights and environmental violations.

Entities subject to the CSDDD include:

- Slovak and EU companies with more than **500 employees** and global turnover over **€150 million**.
- Non-EU companies doing business in Slovakia with similar thresholds.
- Specific high-impact companies (e.g., textile, agriculture, mineral sectors) with **over 250 employees** and turnover exceeding **€40 million**.

Key due diligence obligations will include:

- **Risk identification and impact assessment** across the company's own operations, subsidiaries, and direct and indirect business relationships.
- **Preventive and corrective measures**, including contractual clauses, codes of conduct, and on-site audits.
- **Public reporting** of due diligence procedures and key findings.
- **Stakeholder engagement**, particularly with affected communities and workers.
- Integration of **sustainability risks into executive remuneration** and corporate strategy.

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Slovakia's Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Justice are jointly preparing the legal transposition, likely involving:

- Amendments to the **Commercial Code** and the **Act on Trade Licensing**.
- The establishment of a **national supervisory authority**, which will have investigatory powers and the ability to impose sanctions or remediation orders.

Though SMEs are not directly subject to the Directive, they will be indirectly affected as downstream suppliers. Large Slovak firms are expected to cascade ESG requirements through **contractual obligations, ESG risk scoring systems, and supply chain audits**.

To ease the transition, the Slovak government plans to offer **legal templates, compliance toolkits, and financial support** for SMEs to implement due diligence measures. Pilot projects with Slovak industry associations (e.g., automotive and electronics) are also underway to establish model ESG supply chain programs.

2.4. Slovak National Laws and Regulatory Guidelines

Slovakia's regulatory environment for ESG and sustainable finance is increasingly harmonized with the evolving EU legal landscape. Key national instruments and strategies include:

1. **Amendment to the Accounting Act (2023)** – Implements the CSRD requirements for corporate ESG reporting and introduces third-party assurance for sustainability data.
2. **Act on Financial Market Supervision** – Grants the NBS authority to enforce ESG-related disclosures under SFDR and to coordinate with EU supervisory agencies.
3. **Draft Slovak Climate Law** – A forthcoming legal framework designed to enshrine climate neutrality targets into law and facilitate green investment screening mechanisms.
4. **National ESG Strategy 2023–2030** – A comprehensive policy document developed by the Ministry of Environment outlining ESG priorities, regulatory tools, and transition finance mechanisms.
5. **Green Bond Framework (2024)** – Issued by the Ministry of Finance, aligned with the EU Green Bond Standard, providing guidelines on eligible green projects, verification, and reporting obligations.

Slovakia has also endorsed several cross-border initiatives such as:

- The **OECD Slovakia Green Finance Roadmap**.

- The **CEE ESG Forum**, promoting regional coordination on ESG regulation and disclosure practices.
- The **EU NextGenerationEU Recovery Plan**, allocating a significant portion of funds toward climate and digital objectives.

The table below summarizes the transposition of key EU ESG instruments:

Aspect	EU Regulation	Slovak Legal Instrument
Corporate ESG Reporting	CSRD	Accounting Act (2023 amendment)
Financial Market Disclosures	SFDR	Act on Financial Market Supervision
Sustainable Activities	EU Taxonomy	Ministry of Environment Guidance & NBS Enforcement
Due Diligence	CSDDD	Pending amendment to Commercial Code

2.5. Policy Initiatives and Outlook

Slovakia’s commitment to sustainable finance and social responsibility is reinforced by various strategic and institutional measures designed to support systemic ESG integration across the economy. Notable policy initiatives include:

- **Slovak ESG Observatory:** A national data platform for ESG indicators, company disclosures, and public transparency tools, managed by the Ministry of Environment and Statistical Office.
- **Green Financing Guarantees:** Operated by **Slovenská záručná a rozvojová banka (SZRB)** to support ESG-aligned projects and innovation in SMEs.
- **Public-Private ESG Task Force:** A coordination mechanism between regulators, investors, and corporations to monitor policy impacts and foster market development.
- **ESG Capacity-Building Hub:** Supported by the EU Technical Support Instrument and delivered through the Slovak Business Agency.

Looking ahead, Slovakia will need to address key implementation bottlenecks, such as:

- The **limited ESG literacy** among SMEs and local authorities.
- The need for **standardized ESG data infrastructure** and digital compliance tools.
- **Cross-border ESG risks**, especially in complex supply chains.

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Despite these challenges, the outlook remains positive. ESG integration in Slovakia is gaining momentum due to investor pressure, regulatory imperatives, and growing awareness among stakeholders. Strategic ESG alignment is likely to become a core component of business resilience, access to finance, and international competitiveness for Slovak enterprises over the next decade.



GREEN ENVIRONMENT AND AGRIFOOD

3.1. Water Governance

Climate change has a major impact on the quantity and quality of water for agriculture, energy, industry, population and ecosystems. The solution to water problems must therefore be comprehensive, based on the cooperation of ministries, relevant institutions, universities and research institutes with the inclusion of farmers, the population, municipalities, and the energy sector. The aim of week 3 dedicated to water governance is to explain the importance of strong, integrated, sustainable and inclusive water management and need for inclusion all key stakeholders and decision-makers.

Water is a finite resource that is critical to the well-being of people, ecosystems, and economies. There are multiple stakeholder groups that are involved in the formulation of policies, laws, governance, management and use of water as a resource for various services and activities. Engagement with stakeholders, both formal and informal becomes crucial when the resource needs to be shared with various sectors competing for the same resource. Apart from the basic need of water for human consumption, some key sectors that are increasingly competing for water are energy, food and ecosystems (WEFE). It is important to recognize that WEFE Nexus is a multi-stakeholder process.

Water governance and management is a global issue. The OECD has been developing its Water Governance Programme (WGP) since 2009, with the aim to help governments at all levels identify and fill critical gaps in the design and implementation of their water governance. To do so, the WGP relies on economic analysis, policy dialogues, commonly accepted standards, and international best practices. This programme stands on the premises that water management should not be confined to the limits of a sectoral or environmental issue, but it must be approached as a crucial economic issue for sustainable and inclusive growth, territorial development and well-being at large.

In order to cope with current and future water challenges, the OECD argues that policy responses will be viable only if they are coherent, if stakeholders are properly engaged, if well-designed regulatory frameworks are in place, if there is adequate and accessible information, and if there is sufficient capacity, integrity and transparency. Furthermore, policy responses should be adapted to territorial contexts, recognizing that optimal governance solutions respond to context-specific circumstances.

Based on these considerations, OECD developed a set of twelve principles on water governance to support effective, efficient and inclusive water policies, and thus improve the 'water governance cycle' from policy design to implementation. They are articulated around three mutually reinforcing and complementary dimensions of water governance, namely effectiveness, efficiency, and trust and engagement. These dimensions apply across different water management functions, water uses, and

set-ups of water management, resources and assets. The resulting OECD Principles on Water Governance were adopted in 2015 by the 35 OECD member countries.

Principles 1 to 4 target water governance effectiveness, improving coordination by defining clear goals and targets, specifying roles and responsibilities, managing water at appropriate scales, and encouraging coherence and sufficient capacity. Principles 5-8 focus on the efficiency of implementation processes and stimulate continuous improvement in order to maximise the benefits at the least cost to society. Principles 9-12 emphasize the roles of different actors, as well as the importance of trust and engagement, through more transparency and better communication. These can indeed enhance democratic legitimacy and fairness for society.

The OECD Principles on Water Governance¹:

Enhancing the effectiveness of water governance

Principle 1 Clearly allocate and distinguish roles and responsibilities for water policymaking, policy implementation, operational management and regulation, and foster co-ordination across these responsible authorities

Principle 2 Manage water at the appropriate scale(s) within integrated basin governance systems to reflect local conditions, and foster co-ordination between the different scales

Principle 3 Encourage policy coherence through effective cross-sectoral co-ordination, especially between policies for water and the environment, health, energy, agriculture, industry, spatial planning and land use

Principle 4 Adapt the level of capacity of responsible authorities to the complexity of water challenges to be met, and to the set of competencies required to carry out their duties

Enhancing the efficiency of water governance

Principle 5 Produce, update, and share timely, consistent, comparable and policy-relevant water and water-related data and information, and use it to guide, assess and improve water policy

Principle 6 Ensure that governance arrangements help mobilise water finance and allocate financial resources in an efficient, transparent and timely manner

Principle 7 Ensure that sound water management regulatory frameworks are effectively implemented and enforced in pursuit of the public interest

Principle 8 Promote the adoption and implementation of innovative water governance practices across responsible authorities, levels of government and relevant stakeholders

¹ <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/water-governance/the-oecd-principles-on-water-governance-and-implementation-strategy.html>

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Enhancing trust and engagement in water governance

Principle 9 Mainstream integrity and transparency practices across water policies, water institutions and water governance frameworks for greater accountability and trust in decision-making

Principle 10 Promote stakeholder engagement for informed and outcome-oriented contributions to water policy design and implementation

Principle 11 Encourage water governance frameworks that help manage trade-offs across water users, rural and urban areas, and generations

Principle 12 Promote regular monitoring and evaluation of water policy and governance where appropriate, share the results with the public and make adjustments when needed

3.2. Water governance in the EU

EU water policy is one of the priorities set out in the European Green Deal. The European Commission works closely with the member states to help achieve the objectives of preserving, protecting and improving the quality of water resources EU-wide. The water situation in each Member State is monitored by set of water indicators².

EU water policy main instruments are the Water Framework Directive and its associated directives, the Floods Directive, the Drinking Water Directive, the Bathing Water Directive, the Nitrates Directive, the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).

The main findings from the 2022 Environmental Implementation Review covering all EU member states and water regulation are as follows:

- 1.** Implementation of the Water Framework Directive objectives continues but, although the assessment of the 3rd river basin management plans (RBMPs) is pending, it can be said that progress towards achieving good status for water bodies is generally slow, even though the 2027 deadline is drawing near. This is due to a mix of factors, including failure to set reference conditions for the characterization of water bodies and incomplete assessment of pressures, insufficiencies in the monitoring of water, meaning that the status of water bodies is unknown, assessments of the impact of activities on water bodies are incorrectly performed, and the exemptions invoked are not sufficiently justified.
- 2.** The EIR country reports present the latest information on the percentage of water bodies not achieving good ecological and chemical status, the abstraction of water per sector as well as the water exploitation index. Increased investments are essential if objectives are to be met, and EU funding

² https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Water_statistics#Water_as_a_resource

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continues to support the implementation efforts by EU member states, mainly through the cohesion policy, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and Horizon Europe.

3. The Commission has shared its findings on the 2nd RBMPs with the Member states in question, and expects to see the shortcomings addressed when the 3rd RBMPs are submitted. The Commission is also verifying how the national systems (e.g. permits and inspections) ensure that the Water Framework Directive is correctly applied on the ground by each member state as regards abstraction of water, point source and diffuse pollution. The member states were due to report to the Commission their 3rd RBMPs and 2nd flood risk management plans (FRMPs) by 22 March 2022.

4. The 1998 Drinking Water Directive is well implemented overall in the EU. However, it is a cause for concern in a few countries. By 12 January 2023, all member states have to transpose the recast Directive in order to comply with the revised quality standards and the Commission is providing support in order to ensure the timely and correct transposition of the new rules.

5. Overall, the Bathing Water Directive shows high rates of excellent or good performance in the EU. However, there are some differences between member states.

6. In many cases, despite sometimes well-defined and specific obligations such as those in the Nitrates Directive and the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, implementation on the ground has been very slow, due to planning and organisational flaws and a lack of funding and prioritisation.

7. Many member states have problems in relation to the implementation of the Nitrates Directive and should step up their efforts to further reduce nitrates pollution from agriculture in groundwater and eutrophication by designating all nitrates-vulnerable zones and by including appropriate measures in their action plans.

8. Despite a degree of progress, urban wastewater is still not collected and treated as it should be in many member states, which is why several of them are facing infringement proceedings and a few have been subjected to financial penalties.

3.3. Current trends and the future agenda of EU water policy

EU water governance has evolved over the years, mainly based on lessons learned with the implementation of the water-related legislation in the EU member states.

Overall, the following trends in EU water governance can be identified:

- Rise of multi-level and multi-sector governance;
- Increased attention for policy integration and coherence;
- Emergence of innovative governance approaches where public actors share responsibilities with private actors (e.g. multi-stakeholder partnerships);

- Emergence of new concepts and arrangements (e.g. water footprint, water justice, river contracts, rivers as legal persons);
- Citizen engagement and participation have become more and more important; and
- Increased attention for co-creation processes of policy makers together with stakeholders.

Based on a recent analysis of water governance diversity across Europe, there is a need to implement a hybrid approach to water governance and WFD implementation. Such an approach should combine elements of centralised and decentralised governance. Decentralisation (discretionary) is needed to ensure collaboration and engagement of stakeholders at the local level, whereas a centralised (mandatory) governance and regulatory system should enable national environmental standards to be set and enforced. They conclude that such a hybrid approach may provide the best of both worlds (bottom-up involvement of stakeholders meeting top-down goal achievements) and is worthy of further research.

EU water policy is still in flux. In recent years, new initiatives have been introduced and existing ones integrated for example under the umbrella of the European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity Strategies, zero pollution ambitions and European Climate Law. In the years to come,

3.4 Water Resources Management and Regulation in Slovakia

Slovakia is endowed with substantial water resources, including numerous rivers, groundwater reserves, and lakes, making it one of the countries with relatively abundant freshwater availability in the European Union. The territory of Slovakia lies within the Danube River Basin, one of the largest in Europe, with the major rivers including the Danube, Váh, Hron, and Hornád. The country's hydrological network plays a crucial role not only in water supply and energy production but also in ecosystem health, agriculture, flood management, and recreation.

The management of water resources in Slovakia is centrally governed by the **Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic**, in cooperation with various national bodies, such as the **Slovak Water Management Enterprise (Slovenský vodohospodársky podnik – SVP)**, which is responsible for the maintenance of watercourses and water structures. Additionally, the **Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute (SHMÚ)** oversees monitoring and research, while the **Public Health Authority** plays a role in safeguarding drinking water quality.

Slovakia's water governance is based on a well-developed legal and strategic framework that seeks to balance environmental protection with water use for economic and public needs. Key legal documents and regulations include:

- **Water Act (Act No. 364/2004 Coll. on Water, as amended)** – This is the principal legislation governing water protection and management in Slovakia. It sets the legal status of water, defines water bodies and their usage, regulates water quality protection, determines water abstraction rights, and outlines flood protection measures. The Act also incorporates the principles of integrated water resources management in line with EU legislation, including the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC).
- **Act No. 305/2018 Coll. on Waters of the Slovak Republic** – Strengthens aspects of sustainable water use, introduces new water pollution controls, and provides for ecosystem-based management of watercourses.
- **Flood Protection Act (Act No. 7/2010 Coll., as amended)** – Establishes responsibilities for flood risk assessment and management, outlines floodplain mapping, early warning systems, and cooperation with neighboring countries in shared river basins.
- **Government Decree No. 269/2010 Coll. on Indicators and Limits for Surface Water and Groundwater Quality** – Defines specific environmental objectives and sets out parameters for the chemical and ecological status of water bodies, aligned with the EU Water Framework Directive.
- **National River Basin Management Plan (NRBMP)** – Updated regularly in accordance with the Water Framework Directive. It presents strategic objectives for water management, identifies pressures on water bodies, and outlines the program of measures for improving or maintaining the status of waters. The current cycle covers the years 2022–2027.
- **Operational Programme Quality of the Environment (OPQE)** – Funded by EU Cohesion Policy, it supports investment in water infrastructure, including wastewater treatment plants, flood mitigation, and water-saving technologies. It also supports adaptation to climate change and implementation of nature-based water management solutions.
- **Regulation on Water Fees (Decree No. 221/2005 Coll., amended 2022)** – Specifies the calculation and collection of fees for surface and groundwater abstraction, wastewater discharge, and related environmental services. Revenues from these fees support investments in water infrastructure and environmental protection.
- **Regulation on Concessions for Water Use (Act No. 136/2010 Coll.)** – Establishes procedures for granting and supervising concessions for hydropower, irrigation, commercial abstraction, and other significant uses of water resources.
- **National Adaptation Strategy to Climate Change** – Includes specific chapters addressing water management, emphasizing drought preparedness, water retention in landscapes, ecological restoration of rivers, and the construction of sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS).

In addition to legal instruments, Slovakia actively engages in regional and international cooperation on water issues through the **International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River**

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(ICPDR) and bilateral commissions with Hungary, Austria, Czechia, and Poland. These platforms promote data sharing, joint risk assessment, and harmonized flood management and water quality measures.

Slovakia is also committed to supporting sustainable water use in industry and agriculture. The **Ministry of Economy**, in cooperation with the **Environmental Fund**, provides subsidies and tax incentives for businesses that invest in technologies for water recycling, greywater use, and efficient cooling systems. Water-saving practices are particularly encouraged in energy-intensive industries and food processing.

3.5 European Union Biodiversity Regulation

The **European Union (EU) Biodiversity Regulation and Policy Context** form a comprehensive and evolving framework aimed at halting biodiversity loss, restoring natural ecosystems, and integrating nature protection into wider policy areas. This framework operates under the broader goals of the European Green Deal and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, complemented by numerous legislative instruments, funding mechanisms, and international commitments.

The EU's biodiversity policy is rooted in a growing recognition of the ecological, economic, and social value of nature. Biodiversity — the variety of life on Earth — underpins ecosystems that provide vital services such as food, water, pollination, climate regulation, and disease control. However, biodiversity in the EU has been in steep decline for decades due to habitat loss, pollution, overexploitation, climate change, and invasive species.

To address these challenges, the EU has developed a robust legal and strategic policy framework. Adopted in May 2020 as a central part of the **European Green Deal**, the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 aims to reverse biodiversity loss and build Europe's ecological resilience. It outlines key targets to be achieved by 2030, including:

- **Legally protecting at least 30% of the EU's land and sea area**, with one-third of these areas under strict protection.
- **Restoring degraded ecosystems** through legally binding nature restoration targets.
- Reducing the use and risk of **pesticides by 50%**.
- Planting **at least three billion trees** across the EU.
- Restoring at least **25,000 kilometers of free-flowing rivers**.
- Halting and reversing the decline of pollinators.
- Promoting sustainable agriculture and forestry practices.

The strategy also aims to integrate biodiversity considerations across all EU policies, particularly in agriculture, fisheries, trade, and climate policy, and emphasizes nature-based solutions to address environmental challenges.

Legislative Instruments

The EU has a suite of legal acts that form the backbone of its biodiversity policy:

A. Birds Directive (Directive 2009/147/EC)

First adopted in 1979 and updated in 2009, the Birds Directive aims to protect all wild bird species naturally occurring in the EU. It establishes Special Protection Areas (SPAs), which are part of the Natura 2000 network, and requires the maintenance of habitats to ensure the survival and reproduction of birds.

B. Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC)

Adopted in 1992, this directive aims to ensure the conservation of a wide range of rare, threatened, or endemic species and habitats. Together with the Birds Directive, it forms the legal basis of the **Natura 2000** network — the largest coordinated network of protected areas in the world.

C. EU Regulation on Nature Restoration (proposed 2022)

This is the first major legislative initiative to explicitly require legally binding nature restoration targets for all Member States. It sets restoration obligations for degraded habitats and ecosystems, including

peatlands, grasslands, wetlands, marine environments, and urban green spaces. The proposed regulation mandates:

- Restoration of at least 20% of EU's land and sea areas by 2030.
- Specific ecosystem-based restoration targets by 2050.
- Monitoring and reporting obligations for Member States.

The regulation is part of a growing shift from protection-only measures toward proactive ecological restoration.

Natura 2000 and Protected Areas

The **Natura 2000 network** lies at the heart of EU biodiversity policy. Comprising over 27,000 sites, it covers more than 18% of EU land and 9% of its marine territory. It ensures the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats.

Sites are designated under the Birds and Habitats Directives, and Member States are responsible for ensuring their effective management. While not strictly prohibiting human activities, Natura 2000 promotes sustainable land use, including eco-tourism, organic farming, and traditional practices that support conservation goals.

Mainstreaming Biodiversity into Other Sectors

One of the major challenges in biodiversity conservation is aligning other policy areas with biodiversity goals. The EU addresses this through cross-sectoral integration:

A. Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

The CAP has historically been a driver of biodiversity loss due to intensive farming. However, recent reforms aim to better align agricultural subsidies with environmental and biodiversity objectives through "eco-schemes" and conditionality on biodiversity-friendly practices.

B. Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)

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The CFP sets rules for the sustainable use of marine resources. Biodiversity goals are advanced through catch limits, marine protected areas, and measures to protect sensitive species and habitats.

C. EU Forest Strategy

This strategy promotes sustainable forest management and protection of primary and old-growth forests, supporting the EU Biodiversity Strategy's goals.

D. Climate and Energy Policies

The EU emphasizes **nature-based solutions** as key to climate adaptation and mitigation. Peatland restoration, afforestation, and preserving blue carbon ecosystems (e.g., seagrass beds) are examples where biodiversity and climate goals align.

Monitoring and Enforcement

Biodiversity conservation efforts are only effective if monitored and enforced. The **European Environment Agency (EEA)** provides regular assessments, such as the **State of Nature in the EU** report. The European Commission oversees implementation, with the power to initiate infringement proceedings against Member States that fail to comply with biodiversity laws.

The **Biodiversity Information System for Europe (BISE)** and tools like **Copernicus** (EU's Earth observation program) support data collection, transparency, and public access to biodiversity information.

Funding Mechanisms

Biodiversity conservation in the EU is supported by several funding instruments:

- **LIFE Programme:** The EU's flagship fund for environment and climate action, including nature and biodiversity projects.
- **Horizon Europe:** Supports research and innovation on biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- **CAP and European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD):** Fund eco-schemes, agri-environmental measures, and landscape restoration.

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- **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Cohesion Fund:** Support biodiversity-friendly green infrastructure.
- **NextGenerationEU:** The recovery plan includes funds for green transition, including nature restoration and ecosystem resilience.

Challenges and Outlook

Despite its ambitious framework, the EU faces several challenges:

- **Implementation gap:** Many Member States lag in translating EU biodiversity laws into national action.
- **Funding shortfalls:** Conservation remains underfunded relative to other sectors.
- **Data gaps and enforcement:** Reliable data and effective enforcement mechanisms are uneven across Member States.
- **Pressure from economic sectors:** Agriculture, infrastructure, and energy sectors often conflict with biodiversity goals.

However, growing public awareness, climate urgency, and recognition of nature's economic value offer momentum for progress. The **EU Nature Restoration Law**, if adopted and implemented effectively, could be a transformative step toward a nature-positive economy.

The EU's biodiversity regulation and policy context represent one of the world's most comprehensive approaches to nature conservation and restoration. Grounded in strong legal instruments, supported by funding and science, and aligned with global goals, it offers a model for biodiversity governance. The key to its success lies in ambitious implementation, cross-sectoral integration, and sustained political will to place nature at the heart of Europe's future.

3.6 Agriculture and Biodiversity Protection in Slovakia

Slovakia's approach to agriculture and biodiversity conservation reflects the principles of sustainability, resilience, and alignment with EU Green Deal priorities. The agricultural sector is a key land user and has significant influence on biodiversity. To address environmental challenges, Slovakia

has adopted a series of strategies and regulations that aim to reduce the ecological footprint of agriculture while promoting the conservation of ecosystems and genetic diversity.

The **Slovak Agricultural and Food Strategy to 2030** and the **Strategic Plan of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023–2027** serve as the primary national frameworks for transforming agriculture into a climate-resilient, environmentally friendly, and economically viable sector. These strategies set goals for reducing emissions, enhancing biodiversity, improving soil health, and supporting small farms and organic producers.

- **Act No. 220/2004 Coll. on the Protection and Use of Agricultural Land** – This law regulates land use, prohibits degradation of agricultural land, and introduces soil conservation measures. It supports land consolidation and sustainable land-use planning practices, helping to preserve landscape features vital to biodiversity.
- **Act No. 405/2011 Coll. on Organic Farming** – Provides rules for organic production, processing, labeling, and certification. It encourages the use of traditional breeds and varieties, rotational grazing, and biodiversity-friendly practices. Organic farming areas in Slovakia are growing steadily, supported by national and EU subsidies.
- **Nature and Landscape Protection Act (Act No. 543/2002 Coll., as amended)** – This is the cornerstone of biodiversity protection in Slovakia. It defines protected areas, regulates activities in Natura 2000 sites, and establishes biodiversity-friendly land management obligations. The law includes provisions for ecological networks, green infrastructure, and landscape connectivity.
- **National Biodiversity Strategy 2020–2030** – This strategic document outlines actions to halt biodiversity loss, enhance ecological corridors, and integrate biodiversity into all sectors, especially agriculture, forestry, and spatial planning. It is aligned with the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the Convention on Biological Diversity.
- **Decree No. 24/2003 on the Establishment of Protected Sites** – Defines management regimes and zoning within national parks and nature reserves. It also facilitates cooperation with farmers for agri-environmental measures in buffer zones.
- **Program for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Genetic Resources in Agriculture (2021–2027)** – This program ensures the preservation of Slovak autochthonous breeds, landraces, and heritage crop varieties. It supports gene banks, seed-saving programs, and on-farm conservation through subsidies and education.
- **CAP Eco-schemes and Agri-environmental Measures (AEMs)** – Slovakia provides financial support for farmers who apply biodiversity-friendly practices, such as buffer strips, field margins, flowering meadows, reduced pesticide use, or habitat restoration. These payments are conditional on environmental outcomes and monitored through GIS and satellite imagery.
- **Green Infrastructure Strategy and Landscape Revitalization Program** – Encourage the integration of natural elements into agricultural landscapes, including wetland restoration,

hedgerow planting, and riparian buffer zones. The programs contribute to biodiversity, flood prevention, and pollination services.

- **Slovak Climate Adaptation Strategy** – Identifies agriculture and biodiversity as priority sectors for climate resilience. It supports traditional grazing practices, landscape water retention, and carbon sequestration through sustainable farming.

Slovakia also maintains a network of **protected areas and Natura 2000 sites**, covering over 29% of the national territory. The management of these areas involves coordination between the Ministry of Environment, municipalities, NGOs, and landowners, including farmers. Public-private partnerships play a key role in implementing conservation actions.

To promote public awareness and education, the **Slovak Environment Agency** and the **Ministry of Agriculture** organize training, demonstration farms, and biodiversity monitoring involving schools, research institutions, and citizen science initiatives.

Slovakia has created a comprehensive legal and strategic environment for harmonizing agriculture and biodiversity conservation. While considerable progress has been made, further efforts are needed to strengthen enforcement, scale up eco-schemes, and integrate biodiversity into all phases of agricultural planning. By enhancing cooperation between sectors and leveraging EU resources, Slovakia can ensure the long-term health of its ecosystems and sustainable food systems for future generations.



SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND SMART CITIES

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4.1 Sustainable Urban Development in Slovakia

Sustainable urban development in Slovakia is framed by both EU-level directives and national policies aimed at promoting environmental protection, social inclusion, and economic resilience in urban settings. As an EU Member State, Slovakia integrates European environmental and urban policies into its national legislative framework, while also addressing specific domestic challenges such as regional disparities, post-industrial urban transformation, and demographic shifts.

Slovakia's regulatory and strategic approach to sustainable urban development is shaped by the following EU and national instruments:

1. **European Union Cohesion Policy and Urban Agenda for the EU:** Under the EU Cohesion Policy (2021–2027), sustainable urban development is a mandatory investment priority, with at least 8% of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) allocated to integrated urban strategies. The Urban Agenda for the EU further promotes better regulation, funding, and knowledge sharing to support sustainable urban growth.
2. **European Green Deal and Fit for 55 Package:** Slovakia aligns with EU climate goals, including achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. Sustainable urban development is integral to this transition, through actions such as improving energy efficiency in buildings, investing in green mobility, and enhancing air quality in cities.
3. **Slovak National Development Plan 2021–2030:** This strategic document outlines Slovakia's long-term development vision, including commitments to sustainable urbanization, digital transformation, and environmental resilience. It integrates sustainable mobility, renewable energy, circular economy principles, and smart urban planning as cross-cutting priorities.
4. **Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) and Integrated Strategies for Sustainable Urban Development (SUDs):** Under EU-funded Operational Programmes (e.g., OP Slovakia 2021–2027), Slovak urban areas are required to adopt Integrated Strategies for Sustainable Urban Development (IÚSD). These strategies are co-developed by urban authorities and stakeholders, ensuring place-based approaches tailored to local contexts.

Legal Framework and Planning Instruments

The legal basis for sustainable urban development in Slovakia is established through several key laws:

1. **Act on Spatial Planning and Building Code (Building Act) No. 200/2022 Coll.:** This comprehensive reform of Slovakia's spatial planning framework strengthens the integration of sustainability principles in land use decisions. It mandates climate adaptation, environmental protection, and efficient use of space in urban development processes.

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2. **Act No. 539/2008 Coll. on Regional Development Support:** This law underpins the preparation and implementation of regional development programs, including urban regeneration projects and sustainable infrastructure development, especially in less developed regions.
3. **Environmental Impact Assessment Act (EIA Act) No. 24/2006 Coll.:** Urban development projects in Slovakia are subject to environmental review processes that assess their impact on biodiversity, air quality, and local ecosystems. The law promotes early integration of environmental considerations in project planning.
4. **Act on Nature and Landscape Protection No. 543/2002 Coll.:** This act ensures the integration of green infrastructure, such as urban parks and ecological corridors, into spatial planning, reinforcing the biodiversity and climate resilience of urban areas.

Strategic Urban Development Initiatives

Slovak cities and metropolitan regions are increasingly adopting strategic initiatives aimed at sustainable development:

- **Bratislava Sustainable Urban Development Strategy:** As the capital city, Bratislava has implemented a 2030 strategy prioritizing climate adaptation, low-emission mobility, energy-efficient buildings, and the protection of natural resources. The city is also a signatory to the Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy.
- **Košice Urban Innovation Agenda:** Košice's development strategy emphasizes post-industrial transformation through culture, digital innovation, and green urbanism. Projects include sustainable housing development, green corridors, and smart waste management.
- **Urban Green Infrastructure Pilot Projects:** Funded through EU cohesion and LIFE programmes, several Slovak cities have piloted the introduction of urban wetlands, rooftop gardens, and permeable surfaces to address urban heat islands and stormwater management.

Despite the policy progress, Slovakia faces several challenges in implementing sustainable urban development:

- **Fragmentation of urban governance:** Slovakia's municipal structure (with over 2,900 municipalities) leads to difficulties in regional coordination and integrated planning.
- **Capacity constraints:** Many municipalities lack sufficient expertise and resources to develop and implement complex sustainable urban strategies.
- **Legacy infrastructure:** Post-socialist urban areas often struggle with outdated housing stock, car-dependent urban design, and insufficient green public spaces.

Nonetheless, EU structural and recovery funding, combined with digital and environmental innovation, presents an opportunity to transform Slovak urban centers into more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable living environments.

4.2 Regulatory Framework for Smart Cities in Slovakia

As a member of the European Union, Slovakia aligns its national policies with EU-wide initiatives for digital transformation, climate neutrality, and sustainable urban development. The Slovak government has progressively developed legal and strategic frameworks to foster smart urban growth, focusing on digital infrastructure, environmental sustainability, and quality of life.

Slovakia's regulatory approach is significantly shaped by several key EU frameworks:

1. **Smart Cities Marketplace:** Slovakia participates in this EU platform that facilitates collaboration between municipalities, investors, and innovators to implement solutions in areas such as sustainable mobility, digital governance, and clean energy.
2. **European Green Deal:** Slovakia supports the EU's goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050. Slovak urban policy increasingly integrates digital tools and green technologies to reduce emissions and improve urban resilience.
3. **Digital Decade Policy Programme:** This directive guides Slovakia in setting measurable targets for digital transformation by 2030, focusing on secure digital infrastructure, public e-services, and digitally empowered citizens.

Slovak National and Local Initiatives

At the national level, Slovakia has adopted several strategic documents to align with EU standards while tailoring its policies to local challenges:

1. **Smart Cities Concept (Concept of Smart City Development in the Slovak Republic, 2020):** This foundational document introduces Slovakia's vision for smart cities. It emphasizes integrated solutions in transport, energy, environment, and data management. The document promotes inter-municipal cooperation and the use of EU structural funds to pilot smart city projects.
2. **Digital Transformation Strategy of Slovakia 2030:** Adopted by the Ministry of Investment, Regional Development, and Informatization, this strategy outlines a roadmap for a digital society. It supports the development of e-governance tools, data-driven public administration, and digital infrastructure across cities.

3. **National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP):** Funded by the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility, Slovakia's NRRP allocates substantial investment to digital innovation and urban sustainability. Among its components are smart transport systems, energy-efficient public infrastructure, and green public procurement.

Slovakia's approach is characterized by strong alignment with EU policies but also grapples with localized barriers, including fragmented municipal governance, disparities in broadband coverage, and limited technical capacities in smaller towns.

Integration of Green Infrastructure in Urban Development Laws

Green infrastructure is increasingly embedded in Slovakia's urban planning legislation as a tool to address environmental degradation, heat island effects, and urban sprawl.

1. **Act No. 50/1976 Coll. on Land Use Planning and Building Order (Building Act):** This foundational law includes provisions that require the inclusion of green spaces in urban development. Urban plans must incorporate green areas as functional zones, and larger developments are mandated to maintain a minimum proportion of permeable or vegetated surfaces.
2. **National Spatial Development Perspective of the Slovak Republic (2021):** This strategy emphasizes the integration of green and blue infrastructure in all levels of planning. It promotes the restoration of ecological corridors, urban forests, and green belts.
3. **Slovak Environmental Strategy 2030:** This document explicitly recognizes green infrastructure as a nature-based solution to climate adaptation. It calls for increasing green coverage in cities and integrating water management systems such as retention basins, green roofs, and permeable pavements.
4. **Local Implementation – Bratislava and Košice:** Major cities have started to incorporate green infrastructure into local strategies. Bratislava's "Adaptation Strategy to Climate Change" promotes green corridors, tree planting, and sustainable drainage systems. Similarly, Košice has implemented projects under the EU's URBACT and LIFE programs to enhance urban greenery and biodiversity.

Although Slovakia has adopted significant measures, implementation remains uneven across municipalities, highlighting the need for greater coordination, funding, and technical support at the local level.

4.3 Traffic Management Legislation

Slovakia's transport regulation provides a legal backbone for managing urban mobility in smart and sustainable ways:

1. **Act No. 8/2009 Coll. on Road Traffic:** This law governs traffic safety, the behavior of road users, and the rights and responsibilities of transport authorities. It allows municipalities to implement intelligent traffic systems (ITS), low-emission zones, and traffic-calming measures.
2. **Act No. 135/1961 Coll. on Roads (Road Act):** Regulates the construction and use of roads, including the provision for special lanes (e.g., for public transport or bicycles) and smart signage. It enables local governments to regulate vehicle access and implement modern traffic technologies.
3. **National Transport Development Strategy of Slovakia (2021–2030):** Emphasizes smart mobility and digitalization in urban transport. It encourages the deployment of ITS, development of integrated ticketing systems, and real-time traffic data platforms.
4. **Act No. 56/2012 Coll. on Road Transport:** Regulates public passenger transport, including the licensing and quality standards for urban and intercity transit services. The act allows municipalities to introduce digital tools for fare collection, schedule planning, and mobility-as-a-service (MaaS) systems.

Public Transport Investments and Legal Provisions under Transportation Policy

The legal and financial framework for public transport in Slovakia supports sustainability and modernization:

1. **National Programme for the Development of Public Passenger Transport (2023):** Focuses on increasing the attractiveness of public transport through digitalization, vehicle electrification, and multimodal integration. It prioritizes environmental efficiency and inclusivity.
2. **EU Cohesion Funds and NRRP:** Major public transport investments are co-financed through the EU's Structural and Investment Funds and the NRRP. Projects include:
 - Electrification and modernization of regional railways.
 - Purchase of electric buses and trams.
 - Development of intermodal terminals and park & ride facilities.
3. **Act No. 513/2009 Coll. on Railways:** Governs rail infrastructure, safety, and operation. Recent amendments enable the co-financing of smart technologies and support for climate-resilient infrastructure.
4. **Integration of Transport Systems:** Cities like Bratislava and Košice are working to integrate different modes of transport under unified regional operators, supported by digital platforms for ticketing and real-time information. These initiatives align with the EU's Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy.

5. **Maritime and Air Transport:** While not a major component in urban areas, Slovakia's legal framework (e.g., Act No. 143/1998 Coll. on Civil Aviation) includes provisions for low-emission ground services and the use of digital air traffic management systems. Inland waterway transport, regulated by the **Act No. 338/2000 Coll.**, is being considered in the context of sustainable freight logistics.

Slovakia's approach to smart cities is a multi-level legal and strategic effort guided by EU directives and supported by national initiatives. The framework includes:

- Integration of digital and green infrastructure.
- Legal support for intelligent traffic systems.
- Strategic investment in public and low-emission transport.
- Local adaptation strategies, particularly in major urban centers.



**COLLABORATION OF
UNIVERSITIES WITH LOCAL
ACTORS**

5.1 NGO-Municipality Cooperation

The collaboration between universities and local actors in Slovakia plays an increasingly important role in fostering regional development, innovation, and knowledge transfer. As the country navigates complex socio-economic transformations—ranging from digitalization and decarbonization to demographic shifts and urban regeneration—higher education institutions (HEIs) are emerging as key partners in local and regional governance. This collaboration is particularly significant in addressing place-based challenges, supporting smart specialization strategies, and promoting sustainable urban and rural development.

In recent years, Slovak universities have expanded their traditional roles in education and research to become active agents in their communities. Through partnerships with municipalities, regional development agencies, non-governmental organizations, and local businesses, universities co-develop applied research projects, public policy strategies, and innovation ecosystems. Initiatives such as living labs, technology transfer offices, and urban innovation hubs have facilitated hands-on collaboration in fields like smart mobility, climate adaptation, circular economy, and cultural heritage preservation. Notable examples include the University of Žilina's leadership in smart transport solutions and Comenius University's work in social inclusion and health policy.

This growing collaboration is reinforced by European and national funding instruments, including the Horizon Europe programme, the Slovak Recovery and Resilience Plan, and the Operational Programme Slovakia 2021–2027. These frameworks emphasize the importance of the quadruple helix model, where academia, government, industry, and civil society co-create knowledge and innovation. Moreover, Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs) and Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3 SK) actively encourage the involvement of academic institutions in regional planning and development.

Legislative Acts on NGO-Municipality Cooperation

1. Act No. 369/1990 Coll. on Municipal Establishment

This foundational law outlines the competencies of municipalities, including the authority to support and collaborate with NGOs. It empowers local governments to issue generally binding ordinances and to engage in activities that promote the welfare of their communities.

2. Act No. 83/1990 Coll. on Association of Citizens

This act governs the establishment and operation of civic associations, providing the legal basis for NGOs in Slovakia. It ensures the freedom of association and outlines the procedures for registration and operation of NGOs.

It's important to note that recent legislative changes in Slovakia have introduced stricter regulations for NGOs, including increased reporting requirements and potential penalties for administrative infractions. These developments have raised concerns among civil society organizations and international observers regarding the potential impact on NGO operations and cooperation with local governments.

3. Act No. 523/2004 Coll. on Budgetary Rules of Public Administration

This legislation regulates the financial management of public funds, including provisions for municipalities to allocate resources to NGOs. It sets the framework for transparent and accountable financial cooperation between local governments and NGOs.

4. Act No. 343/2015 Coll. on Public Procurement

While primarily focused on procurement processes, this act allows NGOs to participate in public tenders, enabling them to provide services or implement projects in partnership with municipalities.

5. Act No. 406/2000 Coll. on Energy Efficiency

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This act encourages municipalities to collaborate with NGOs on projects aimed at improving energy efficiency and environmental protection, reflecting a commitment to sustainable development.

6. Act No. 282/2008 Coll. on Support of Youth Work

This legislation promotes the involvement of NGOs in youth work, providing a framework for municipalities to support youth organizations and initiatives.

7. Act No. 448/2008 Coll. on Social Services

This act defines the provision of social services and allows municipalities to contract NGOs for delivering such services, fostering partnerships in social welfare.

8. Act No. 308/1991 Coll. on Freedom of Religious Belief and the Position of Churches and Religious Societies

This law recognizes the role of religious organizations, many of which operate as NGOs, and outlines their cooperation with municipalities in various community activities.

9. Act No. 34/2002 Coll. on Foundations

This act governs the establishment and operation of foundations, providing a legal framework for their collaboration with local governments on philanthropic and community development projects.

10. Act No. 147/1997 Coll. on Non-Profit Organizations Providing Public Benefit Services

This legislation defines non-profit organizations that offer public benefit services, facilitating their cooperation with municipalities in areas such as education, culture, and social services.

5.2 Legislation on NGOs – Slovakia

The legal framework governing non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the Slovak Republic is primarily based on the **Act No. 83/1990 Coll. on the Association of Citizens**, as amended. This law outlines the conditions for the establishment, registration, operation, and dissolution of civic associations (a common form of NGOs in Slovakia), as well as their rights and responsibilities.

According to this law, an association is defined as a **voluntary association of individuals or legal entities**, formed to achieve goals that are not for profit and that align with constitutional and legal norms. NGOs may be established for a wide range of purposes, including the **protection of human rights and freedoms, environmental protection, education, social care, science and research, cultural and community development**, and more.

Core Legal Principles:

- **Voluntary nature:** Participation is open and based on the free will of individuals or legal entities.
- **Independence:** NGOs are self-governed, determine their internal structure, objectives, and activities independently.
- **Non-profit orientation:** NGOs must reinvest any potential income into the fulfillment of their mission and cannot distribute profits.

Other Related Laws:

Slovakia recognizes several **legal forms of non-profit organizations**, each governed by a specific law:

- **Act No. 147/1997 Coll. on Non-Profit Organizations Providing Public Benefit Services**
- **Act No. 34/2002 Coll. on Foundations**
- **Act No. 213/1997 Coll. on Civic Associations**
- **Act No. 35/2002 Coll. on Churches and Religious Societies**
- **5.3 Act No. 111/2001 Coll. on Public Benefit Organizations**

Each of these acts provides a different structure and operational framework, depending on the NGO's specific mission and form of registration.

Focus Areas and Strategic Roles

Slovak NGOs are active in numerous areas:

- **Environmental protection**
- **Social services and welfare**
- **Human rights and civil liberties**
- **Cultural heritage and minority rights**
- **Youth, sports, education, and lifelong learning**
- **Health promotion**
- **Community development and rural revitalization**

NGOs play a key role in **advocacy, monitoring public policy**, and **providing services** in sectors where public institutions may not have sufficient reach.

Collaboration with Public Institutions and Universities

Slovak law encourages **cooperation between NGOs and public institutions**, including municipalities, ministries, and universities. Forms of collaboration include:

- **Public tenders and procurement** for services of general interest (regulated by **Act No. 343/2015 Coll. on Public Procurement**)
- **Joint research projects**, particularly in environmental and social innovation fields
- **EU and nationally funded programs**, which require partnerships between NGOs and academia (e.g., through Horizon Europe or the Slovak Research and Development Agency)
- **Community engagement programs** driven by civil society and universities, focusing on democratic participation, inclusion, and innovation

The **Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Development** acts as a key coordinating body between NGOs and public administration.

Financial and Institutional Support

NGOs in Slovakia may apply for funding from:

- **State budget grants**
- **EU structural funds**

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- **Norwegian and Swiss grants**
- **Municipal support programs**
- **Private and corporate donations**
- **1% or 2% income tax assignments from individuals and companies (unique to Slovakia)**

This mechanism allows taxpayers to redirect a portion of their taxes to an NGO of their choice, providing essential and predictable support to civil society organizations.

Challenges and Criticism

Despite a generally enabling legal environment, NGOs in Slovakia face several ongoing challenges:

- **Regulatory complexity:** Particularly for small or emerging NGOs, navigating compliance and reporting obligations can be burdensome.
- **Financial instability:** Many NGOs rely on project-based funding with little core or administrative support.
- **Political pressure and public distrust:** Certain political narratives have at times portrayed NGOs negatively, undermining public trust.
- **Legislative tightening:** As of 2024–2025, Slovakia has introduced more stringent NGO reporting requirements, prompting concerns among watchdogs and international observers about possible restrictions on civic space.

5.3 Higher Education Law – Slovakia

In the Slovak Republic, the legal framework for higher education institutions (HEIs) is established by **Act No. 131/2002 Coll. on Higher Education Institutions**, as amended (most recently in 2024). This law governs the **status, organization, funding, autonomy, and responsibilities** of universities and other higher education entities. Although the **direct role of universities in cooperating with NGOs and municipalities** is not always explicitly stated, the law supports engagement with society through principles and objectives related to **public accountability, research application, and knowledge transfer**.

Key Legal Provisions

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Article 1–3: Fundamental Principles

- HEIs are recognized as **autonomous institutions of public interest**, expected to contribute to **education, science, culture, and the economy**.
- HEIs are obliged to ensure that **teaching, scientific research, and artistic activities are in harmony with ethical standards and societal needs**.
- A key principle is **academic freedom**, but this is balanced with an **expectation of responsibility to the public and cooperation with stakeholders**.

Article 4–5: Social Mission and Autonomy

- Universities possess **academic, scientific, administrative, and financial autonomy**.
- Autonomy includes the **freedom to define their own strategic goals**, which increasingly include **engagement in regional development**, participation in **EU innovation projects**, and collaboration with **civil society**.
- The law mandates HEIs to **develop partnerships** with institutions in Slovakia and abroad, indirectly supporting cooperation with NGOs and municipalities.

Article 54+: Study Programs and Student Development

- Curricula are expected to develop **critical thinking, civic responsibility, and ethical judgment**, aligning with principles of **sustainable development and public service**.
- HEIs must include elements of **practical experience and social relevance** in programs, preparing students for societal engagement.

Strategic Role in Regional and Societal Development

While not always directly stated in the Higher Education Law, **strategic policy documents complement the legal mandate**, such as:

- The **National Strategy for Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) 2021–2030**
- The **Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3 SK)**
- The **Plan for the Recovery and Resilience of the Slovak Republic**

These documents support the **integration of higher education into regional development**, with a focus on:

- **Research excellence and international cooperation**
- **Public-private-academic partnerships**
- **Socio-economic impact and innovation transfer**

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HEIs are encouraged to act as **engines of regional innovation**, linking with **local governments, NGOs, and the private sector**.

Partnerships with NGOs and Local Communities

Although cooperation with NGOs is not always formalized through legislation:

- **Universities may enter into public-private or public-civic partnerships** to implement social projects, particularly in **healthcare, sustainability, inclusion, and digitalization**.
- Via **project funding (EU, national grants, or civic contracts)**, universities can act as project partners with **municipalities and NGOs** in fields like:
 - Community development
 - Cultural heritage and tourism
 - Environmental protection
 - Social innovation

Some Slovak universities also maintain **institutional frameworks for civic engagement**, such as:

- **Centers for Service Learning**
- **University-wide volunteer programs**
- **Research-to-community transfer centers**

Smart Specialisation and Innovation

Slovakia's Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3 SK) outlines a **vision for the integration of HEIs in innovation ecosystems** by:

- Supporting **smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth**
- Fostering **technology transfer**, particularly in digital, green, and industrial modernization sectors
- **Bridging gaps between academia, industry, and civil society**, emphasizing local needs and territorial cohesion

The RIS3 strategy encourages HEIs to:

- Actively include **students and young researchers** in innovation ecosystems
- Serve as hubs for **digital skills, circular economy, and applied science**
- Contribute to **entrepreneurship education and start-up incubation**, often in partnership with NGOs or public agencies

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Challenges and Opportunities

While the Slovak Higher Education Law creates space for civic and community engagement:

- The **implementation of socially-oriented missions is uneven** across institutions.
- Some universities lack **dedicated units or funding** for sustained cooperation with NGOs or municipalities.
- **Administrative burden and short-termism** in funding pose challenges for long-term civic-university partnerships.

However, with increasing emphasis on **regional innovation platforms** and **EU program participation**, the opportunity for meaningful collaboration between **HEIs, NGOs, and local government** is steadily growing.



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