



Weekly Briefing

Slovakia social briefing:
Social Development Outlook for 2021
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Social Development Outlook for 2021

The year 2020 was marked by the coronavirus pandemic in the social field as well. Cultural and social life was almost completely stagnant. The government subordinated its decisions to current needs, so in many cases there were no more vigorous reforms than might have been expected after the elections. The beginning of the new year is not yet in a better light. The pandemic is getting worse despite a few weeks of lockdown (even with strict measures since 31 December). Nevertheless, some changes can be announced in several areas, namely:

Changes in pensions and pregnancy benefits

As every year, the valorization of pensions can be expected in 2021. Although this year's budget options will not look predictable given the current unfavorable situation, pensions will nevertheless be valorized by 2.6%. However, the amount of the minimum pension will remain the same. The changes brought by the new law, which came into force on 1 January, will also lead to a change in the retirement age of citizens born in 1957-1965. Every insured person who brought up children had a reduced retirement age by six months for each child brought up compared to the retirement age of a childless insured person born in the same calendar year. The law stipulated the method of compensating the pension rights of insured persons who had already retired and their upbringing was not taken into account for the purposes of determining the retirement age. Compensation will be paid in the form of a lump sum. The law addresses the long-standing retirement gap of women born in specified years, where disadvantage occurred precisely because the upbringing of children was not adequately taken into account. An interesting feature of the law is a one-time, new compensation for veterans of the anti-communist resistance, in the form of lump sum of 1989 euros, which will be paid already in January.

In 2021, future mothers will also significantly improve their income. From the 12th week of pregnancy, a pregnant woman will be entitled to the so-called pregnancy allowance. The conditions for obtaining entitlement to a pregnancy allowance are essentially identical to the conditions for obtaining maternity allowance. This means the woman needs to be insured to be able to get the allowance. However, a significant change is the right to an allowance for female students - which is different from the maternity benefit. Until now, the students, as they were not working, were not entitled to maternity benefit after the birth, only to parental allowance.

The new law reflects this fact and thus allows pregnant students to partially compensate for the increased costs during pregnancy. Pregnancy allowance, as well as maternity allowance, is provided for days. The amount of the pregnancy allowance is 7.12 euros per day. Therefore, if the month is 31 days long old, the pregnant woman will be paid 220.72 euros. This amount can be compared to the parental allowance. Originally, the changes to the law were supposed to come into force as early as January, but for the comments of the Social Insurance Agency, the changes will not come into force until April this year.

Education reform

The old year brought a case of plagiarism of the highest political figures, which both created pressure to change the law and the process of awarding academic degrees. The new amendment to the Act also includes the Declaration of Invalidity of the State Examination or its Part, the Declaration of Invalidity of the Rigorous Examination or its Part, the Withdrawal of a Scientific-Pedagogical Title or Artistic-Pedagogical Title, a Proposal for Dismissal of a Professor and Resignation of an Academic Title. The most important part of the amendment is clearly the paragraph on final theses, while proceedings on the withdrawal of the title can be initiated against a person who has demonstrably not prepared the final work independently or misappropriated the subject matter of another person's intellectual property protection, and in doing so obtained an advantage which affected the proper completion of the study or the fulfillment of the conditions for admission to this study. An issue that has been much discussed is the withdrawal of titles already acquired. Due to the sensitivity as well as the difficulty of proving, the procedure for the withdrawal of titles will not apply to titles obtained before 1.1.2021 and the withdrawal procedure must subsequently be initiated within 5 years of its acquisition.

The year 2020 also brought the creation of a long-term plan for education reform by 2030. From the new year, its individual priorities should gradually begin to be met, including the introduction of compulsory pre-school education and tackling the lack of pre-school facilities, promoting inclusive education and desegregation, opening textbook market or a jump in teachers' salaries.

Education reform will also greatly affect universities. The aim of the Minister of Education is to reduce the number of universities in Slovakia with the intention of increasing the quality of scientific research and improving the employment of graduates in practice. At the same time, schools should not disappear, but should be merged in larger, more complex and

more competitive institutions. The system of financing higher education institutions should be set up with performance, based on science and research activities. Teachers should also have performance contracts. However, the question remains that higher education in Slovakia is ready for such a change. Several universities in Slovakia do not have established workplaces where it is possible to carry out research at the highest level, or do not have the necessary technologies, networks or finances. It is therefore unrealistic to expect area-top outputs. The hourly range of teaching at the university also remains to be considered. Teaching and learning is the primary goal of universities, along with research. It is therefore not right to look at university teachers purely as researchers.

The rebirth of the creative industries

In 2020, culture was one of the most affected sectors. Artists had to stop practicing their professions almost overnight, and many got into existential problems. The Ministry of Culture has issued support for artists and workers in the cultural and creative industries. However, in addition to rescue financial compensation, the Ministry of Culture has revitalized the Platform for Cultural and Creative Industries, which brings together professionals working in culture and the creative industries as well as affiliated institutions such as universities, which play a key role in research. So far, almost 70 organizations have confirmed membership in the Platform, which launched its first online discussion in December 2020. Through specific activities, the platform will point out the contribution of cultural and creative industries to various areas of society, from the economy, through employment, culture, tourism to the environment. Due to the broad focus of the cultural and creative industries it will also focus on several topics related to the support and development of culture and creativity, entrepreneurship and innovation, sustainable development of regions, education (with emphasis on arts education) and also development in the social field and other spheres.

In addition to the platform, a satellite account will also be available, which will combine valuable data on individual subsectors of the creative industry, so to speak, in one place. It will be possible to monitor long-term developments and trends in individual areas, which have not yet been numerically mapped in Slovakia. Such mapping is particularly important for the proper setting of support policies. This has proved to be crucial, especially nowadays. Although artists and workers in the creative sector were seriously affected the lockdown, only a very small percentage of them registered for the financial help provided by the ministry. For the most part, this involved the demotivation of the actors themselves, who did not feel sufficient interest from

the government for the creative sector. At the same time, Slovakia lags behind in comparison with other European countries in the support of culture and creative industries, although the capital Bratislava and its surroundings represent one of the most significant points on the map of employment in the creative industries in the EU. The new platform responds to these negative trends and its effort in the new year is to activate support and coordination activities between the various actors of the cultural and creative industries.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Slovakia naively hoped that the restrictions and the disease would disappear in a month or two, later these positive prospects were carried throughout the summer. The occurrence of cases was sporadic and the economy, tourism, culture began to function again in a more limited mode. However, the arrival of winter rapidly worsened the situation and brought more lockdowns. Nevertheless, the arrival of the vaccine also means hope for the new year that the situation will start to improve. Therefore, it is to be hoped that there will be not only a recovery of the economy, but also of social life and culture. However, this process will only be gradual.

Sources:

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Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic

<https://www.culture.gov.sk/>

Platform for Cultural and Creative Industries

<https://www.facebook.com/Platforma-pre-kult%C3%BArny-a-kreat%C3%ADvny-priemysel-113051400099243/>