

DEVCOBA

Developing Collective Bargaining in the Care Sector

WP2 Country Report SLOVAKIA

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Introduction

This report, developed as part of the DEVCOBA project, provides an overview of key characteristics, actors and collective bargaining in Slovakia's Long-Term Care (LTC) and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sectors. It addresses key questions:

What are the most **relevant characteristics of collective bargaining institutions in the two care subsectors** (e.g., structure, coverage, etc.)? This question frames the sector's institutional configuration and identifies its main gaps and weaknesses.

- What are the most essential **characteristics of collective representation in the two care subsectors for employees and employers** (e.g., structure, density, strategies, etc.)? This question frames the configuration of relevant collective actors in the sector.
- What is the position of social partners regarding **the issue of job quality and labour shortages in the care sector**? What potential role can they play? To what extent do they consider further ad hoc policies and practices as necessary and useful to close existing gaps, supplement other efforts, or compensate for their failures to close the gaps?

The report is based on secondary data, such as statistics, documents, literature, reports, and semi-structured interviews conducted with relevant and representative social partners in Slovakia.

To enhance this analysis, it is essential to outline the organisational structure of care providers in these sectors, as it reflects the broader dynamics of employment relations. Understanding the roles of public, private, and non-profit organisations can shed light on workforce conditions and diversify the collective representation and the gaps of particular workers in the care sector.

The Slovak Republic has a family-based long-term care (LTC) and childcare system, which means that LTC and childcare primarily depend heavily on informal personal care provided by parents or family members, subsidised by allowances (Schmahl, 2022, Holubová, 2023; Holubová, 2024).

The care system is not perceived as a single sector but is divided based on the target groups of individuals who are cared for based on age and social dependency.

Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC services are known as social services for children under 3 (nurseries) and pre-primary education and care for children from 3 to 6 (kindergartens). The nurseries are primarily private and present only a niche in the labour force.

As of 2023, in childcare facilities for children under three years of age, social services were provided to 3,177 recipients - children (with data reported for 157 services out of 227). According to the register of social services, the highest share in the provision of this service is held by non-public providers, who provide the service in 158 cases (76%), while municipalities only in 49 cases (24%). These social services employed 628 employees, mainly in the positions of childminder, and 30 volunteers (MLSAF, 2024).

The number of classroom teachers and academic staff by education ISCED0 (in kindergartens) comprised 14,5 thousand persons in 2019, out of which men represented a considerably small proportion (0,4% to 0,9%). The number of teachers and academic staff ISCED0 increased in 2013-2019 by approximately 300-400 persons per year. Women in ECEC working as school-management personnel comprise 100% of the workforce. Most of the ECEC teachers work full-time, and the part-timers present 0,1% over time.

According to Eurostat, the age structure of ECEC staff is skewed to the older age categories. While the age bonds from 25 to 39 years present from 3,5 to 10 % each, the most represented categories are from 50 – 54 (20%) and 55-59 years (18,5%). During 2013 – 2019, the proportion of oldest age categories increased over time. ¹ (Holubová, 2023).

Long-term care

Social services for dependents on the help of another person (hereinafter referred to as "OPIO social services"). In accordance with the Act on Social Services, OPIO social services are provided to persons who are dependent on the help of another natural person, i.e., they involve the provision of home care services and social services in facilities conditioned by dependency (hereinafter referred to as OPIO facilities). OPIO facilities include facilities for the elderly, social services homes, specialised facilities, daycare centres, supported living facilities, rehabilitation centres, and nursing care facilities. As of 31.12.2023, a total of 50,179 places in all OPIO social service facilities, of which year-round care was provided in 43,004 places - 87% out of total (MLSAF, 2024).

Employees in OPIO facilities: As of 31.12.2023, 30,456 employees worked in OPIO facilities. The average age of employees working in OPIO facilities was 48.14 years. The average weekly working

¹ Eurostat, Distribution of teachers at ECEC education level by age groups [educ_uoe_perd01]

hours of one employee were 21.33 hours per week. Of the total number of employees in OPIO facilities, foreigners accounted for 0.8% - 238. The largest number of employees work in facilities for the elderly (35%), in social service homes (31%), and in specialised facilities (25%). In 2023, 4,599 volunteers worked in OPIO facilities, working more than 91 thousand hours together. Up to 68% of volunteers worked in social service homes and facilities for the elderly (MLSAF, 2024). The largest number of employees in OPIO social service facilities work in client care -63%—while the most represented positions in this area were adult caregivers (10,413), nurses (1,957), and health assistants (1,374). The next most numerous category is auxiliary activities, where 23% of employees work, mainly as cooks, cleaners, and other auxiliary workers. In the area of administration, there are 3,201 employees - 10.5%. Almost all job positions are dominated by women (87% of the total number of employees) (MLSAF, 2024).

Care services support persons with disabilities (PwD) through informal caregivers—family members or friends who are not professional caregivers. They receive compensation via a care allowance. Informal caregivers are officially termed “receivers of care allowance” in state administration. To qualify, recipients must have a disability requiring assistance; only those at dependency level V or VI qualify (Holubová, 2024).

In Slovakia, informal family care is the primary support for dependent adults and PwD in long-term care, often provided in home settings. This support includes 28% intergenerational care (adult children caring for parents) and 19% by partners. Other caregivers include unmarried partners, siblings, and parents of dependent children. While some receive cash allowances, these are often means-tested, causing financial strain for those who do not qualify (Salomonová, 2023).

In 2019, an average of 57,048 individuals received a monthly care allowance, with 59% being of working age. The actual number of informal caregivers likely exceeds benefit recipients, as allowances are for those caring for individuals with severe disabilities, about 20% of all requiring long-term care. Thus, many caregivers provide long-term support without state assistance (Eurocarers, 2023). Eurocarers (2020) reported 428,496 informal caregivers in Slovakia, making up 7.9% of the population (Holubová, 2024).

The care sector, mainly services for elder-dependent people, is characterised by high intra-EU workers’ mobility, so called care drain. The latest estimate of Slovak caregivers working in Austria is 16,000 (Thissen L., Mach A. ed., 2023). These are mostly elderly women working in live-in care arrangements and as self-employed in precarious working conditions.

Recent policy developments in the ECEC and LTC sectors

Starting January 2025, kindergarten funding will shift to the state budget. Currently, kindergartens are funded through local revenues, mainly individual income tax. Municipalities retain these funds and control their allocation. This change supports the Recovery and Resilience Plan for a transparent pre-primary education system with stable funding. It also links to other funding law changes. Transitioning to state management will reduce municipalities' income tax share from 70% to 56.1%.

The amendment to the School Act grants parents a legal right to a kindergarten spot for children starting at age 3. If a parent wishes to enrol their three-year-old, the municipality must provide this spot. Starting September 2024, this extends to all four-year-olds, and by September 2025, all three-year-olds will be included. Therefore, parents will have the right to a kindergarten placement for their three-year-old beginning in the 2025/26 school year. If a catchment kindergarten is unavailable, the mayor must secure a spot in a neighbouring municipality. Municipalities can also set up kindergartens in accessible facilities for the next two school years.

A reform in social services funding is supported by the Long-Term Care Strategy after years of discussion. Legislative drafting will occur in 2025, with a rollout in January 2026. A key change links state funding to client social dependency levels. A 'personal account' system will be introduced, allowing clients to manage their care funds flexibly and choose options like family or residential care. This personal budget enables long-term dependents to guide their support while ensuring alternatives are available for caregiver shortages. The system will continue local government co-financing. Expected benefits include more service availability, better appeal for home caregivers, equitable funding for all service types, and improved integration of social and healthcare services.

1. Literature review on trends and industrial relations in the care sector

The literature review showed that the LTC and ECEC sectors are seldom examined as a single field; instead, they are viewed separately as distinct care service systems or within the context of public services, health and social services, or social policy development. Slovakia is studied individually in a few minor research efforts, but the country is usually considered within the broader scope of Central and Eastern European countries. The overview of topics covered by the literature is covered in the next subsections.

Employment Relations and Collective Bargaining

Some studies examine employment policies and industrial relations, particularly focusing on collective bargaining practices and their impact on labour standards in Central and Eastern Europe. Some works discuss the broader European context, including the effects of European Union policies on collective bargaining and labour relations (e.g., Keune, 2015 and Bernaciak, 2015). Other literature explores labour law developments in Central Europe (Casale, 2002) and the shift toward decentralised collective bargaining (Bernaciak, 2015).

Farnham (2009), Stacenko (2012), and Keune (2015) examine employment relations in Europe, focusing on how collective bargaining has evolved in different contexts. Farnham provides a comparative review, assessing the impact of labour policies across various European nations. Stacenko discusses the relationship between employment policies and industrial relations in the context of European integration, which directly affects Slovakia's labour market dynamics. Keune (2015) addresses how EU-level policies, such as austerity measures, have impacted collective bargaining processes, leading to decentralisation and weaker labour protections.

Casale (2002) focuses specifically on collective bargaining and labour law in Central and Eastern Europe. It highlights the recent trends in these regions, including Slovakia, as countries adapt to European standards and navigate the tensions between public sector demands and financial constraints. This work is particularly relevant for understanding how collective bargaining operates within the Slovak public and social services sectors.

Bernaciak (2015) provides an analysis of how collective bargaining trends in Central and Eastern Europe have shifted toward decentralisation, which is a major theme in Slovakia's social care sector. This reference contributes to understanding the broader forces driving collective bargaining changes in post-communist European countries.

Social dialogue, collective bargaining, and public sector salary determination in light of economic crises and market forces

These studies collectively underline the complexity of labour relations in Slovakia (and Czechia) shaped by external economic shocks, structural reforms, and shifting strategies in union activities. In summa, The studies highlight the complexities of labour relations in Slovakia and Czechia, influenced by economic shocks and reforms. Kahancová (2013) notes that while national social partnerships weakened after the 2008 crisis, sectoral bargaining improved in healthcare. Sedláková & Kahancová (2015) advocate for inclusive social dialogue in public services to enhance outcomes amidst austerity challenges. Kahancová & Staroňová (2024) analyse the relationship between wage setting in the private export sector and the public sector. Lastly, Martišková et al. (2021) observe varying union responses to wage inequality, with high-wage unions focusing on benefits and low-wage unions advocating for wage increases amidst global pressures on union strength.

Engaging in more detail with the above-mentioned literature, Kahancová (2013) focuses on how the 2008 crisis affected collective bargaining in Slovakia. At the national level, social partnerships continued to weaken. However, at the sectoral level, especially in the metalworking and healthcare industries, bargaining became stronger through mutual crisis responses, contributing to a balanced recovery. This shift shows the importance of sector-level over national-level dialogue.

Sedláková & Kahancová (2015) explore new challenges in public service social dialogue. They call for more inclusive approaches, integrating the workforce and service users into social dialogue to improve outcomes and address the strains caused by austerity and reforms.

Kahancová & Staroňová (2024) examine the impact of developments in the export sector, as the driver of export-led growth models in Czechia and Slovakia, on wage setting institutions and wage levels in the public sector, focusing on healthcare and education. Although public sector wages are typically insulated from market forces, the paper identifies the influence between broader growth model policies, fiscal policies and public sector bargaining.

Finally, Martišková, Kahancová, Kostolný (2021) discuss how unions and collective bargaining in high-wage and low-wage sectors in Czechia and Slovakia help mitigate wage inequality. While high-wage sector unions protect existing benefits, low-wage sector unions push for wage growth, highlighting the common challenge of diminishing union power due to globalisation and economic pressures.

Workforce related challenges in Long-Term Care

A significant portion of the literature reviewed focuses on the challenges faced by the long-term care workforce, such as workforce shortages, financing issues, and the impacts of care migration (Neubert et al., 2019; Sekulová & Rogoz, 2018). There is also a focus on the working conditions, health and safety, and psychosocial risks for workers in the social care and healthcare sectors (Konstantinou et al., 2020; Llorens Serrano et al., 2022). The documents address the need for reforms in these sectors, especially post-crisis and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Keune, 2020). Fujisawa & Colombo (2009) and Neubert et al. (2019) give an overview of the long-term care workforce in Europe, focusing on strategies to meet the growing demand for care services. These references are foundational for understanding the pressures on the workforce in Slovakia, where similar challenges, such as worker shortages, low wages, and poor working conditions, are prevalent.

Sekulová & Rogoz (2018) and Bahna & Sekulová (2019) explore the impacts of care migration on the long-term care sector, particularly in Slovakia and Romania. Their research is crucial for understanding how cross-border care arrangements influence labour conditions and collective bargaining in Slovakia, as a large number of Slovak care workers seek employment in neighbouring countries like Austria.

Ariaans et al. (2021) present a typology of long-term care systems in OECD countries, offering a comparative lens through which Slovakia's LTC policies and practices can be assessed. This reference could help contextualise Slovakia's social care sector within broader European trends, particularly in terms of funding, quality, and labour relations.

Courtin et al. (2014) maps out support policies for informal carers across the EU, providing insights into how different European countries address the intersection of formal and informal care, a key issue in Slovakia's care workforce, where informal and unregulated care services are common.

Social Policy and Care Services in Slovakia

Numerous sources focus on particular elements of care services in Slovakia. For example, Sekulová and Rogoz (2018) examine the effects of care migration in the country, while Lezovic and Abraham (2009) investigate long-term care in the Slovak social and health services system. Furthermore, Bahna and Sekulová (2019) offer insights into the experiences of Slovak care workers abroad, especially in Austria.

Health and Safety in the Workplace

Konstantinou et al. (2020) and Llorens Serrano et al. (2022) delve into health and safety issues in the care sector, focusing on psychosocial risks and the working conditions in healthcare and long-term care sectors across Europe. These studies are highly relevant to the Slovak social care sector, where health and safety standards have become a growing concern, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. These works provide a framework for analysing how collective bargaining can address worker safety, mental health, and stress in high-demand care environments.

Early Childhood Education and Care

The literature includes studies on early childhood education and care policies in Europe, particularly in Slovakia, such as informal childcare markets and the impact of these on labour relations (Motiejunaite, 2021; Sekeráková Búriková, 2019).

European Integration and Social Dialogue

Some references explore the broader European integration process and its impact on labour and social care policies in post-communist societies. For example, Tresa et al. (2022) compare health policies across Western Balkan countries, while other works look into the Europeanization of industrial relations in Slovakia and surrounding regions (Stacenko, 2012).

Tresa et al. (2022) and Dimitrova & Petkov (2005) examine the Europeanization of health and labour policies, particularly in post-communist societies. These references are essential for understanding how Slovakia has navigated its integration into the EU framework, particularly in terms of aligning its social and healthcare policies with EU standards while dealing with its unique post-socialist legacy.

Ramos Martin (2018) and Keune (2020) discuss sector-level social dialogue and the pressures faced by Europe's public sectors since the economic crisis. These works provide insights into how public sector bargaining, including in social care, has been shaped by broader fiscal constraints and austerity measures across Europe. These pressures have significantly influenced collective bargaining outcomes in Slovakia's public care sector, where funding limitations are a constant barrier.

Key Focus Areas in Collective Bargaining

The literature covers collective action rights, including the right to strike under European law (Clauwaert, 2016), as well as the impacts of collective bargaining on wages and working conditions in Central and Eastern Europe (Kosanović et al., 2017). Moreover, it addresses sector-specific

challenges, such as labour shortages and the retention of workers in long-term care sectors (Bergfeld et al., 2019).

Overall, the literature review appears to focus on the intersection of collective bargaining, social policy, and employment relations in Slovakia. It also situates these discussions within broader European trends, addressing how EU policies and labour law reforms have shaped industrial relations in Slovakia over the years.

Potential theoretical gaps to be filled

The existing body of literature regarding Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and social bargaining specifically associated with kindergartens and the pre-primary education subsector is notably limited. This scarcity can be attributed to the tendency for collective bargaining agreements to focus primarily on the education sector as a whole, overlooking the unique dynamics and needs of specific educational tiers, such as primary education and pre-primary education.

This generalised approach fails to recognise the distinct challenges and opportunities emerging in Slovakia's rapidly evolving landscape of pre-primary education. Current policy shifts emphasise the increasing significance of early childhood learning, yet the literature does not adequately reflect or support this critical area of educational reform.

Given the ongoing transformations within Slovakia's pre-primary education sector—characterised by new policies aimed at enhancing educational quality, accessibility, and inclusivity—there is an urgent need for more focused research. Such studies would contribute to a deeper understanding of how social bargaining practices and agreements could be tailored to address the specific requirements of early childhood education. This could facilitate better outcomes for children and families by ensuring that pre-primary education receives the attention, resources, and policy support it necessitates, aligning with broader educational goals.

2. Collective bargaining in Slovakia's care sector

Basic information on collective bargaining in the two sub-sectors

In the early 1990s, Slovakia established industrial relations through social partner organizations. Union membership has significantly decreased since then, yet the structure of unions remains intact despite the transition from state socialism. Social dialogue occurs on both tripartite and bipartite levels, with the government consulting social partners for tripartite dialogue and engaging in two-tier collective bargaining at sector and company levels for bipartite dialogue (Czírja, 2021).

The Slovak bargaining system is characterized by transparent negotiating entities that benefit from legislative support and the extension of collective agreements. Although collective bargaining is not obligatory, the agreements reached possess legal enforceability. Both single-employer and multi-employer agreements are established in the private and public sectors, with the latter being predominant across various sectors of the economy. In addition, the extension of collective agreements is permissible, and within the public sector, distinct multi-employer (multisector) agreements are formulated specifically for civil and public service strikes (Czírja, 2021).

In addition to the decline in participation by unions and employers, as well as reduced negotiation coverage, modifications in union structure and the evolution of union tactics pose new challenges to the future of collective bargaining. Generally, labour and management partners contend that statutory solutions demonstrate a higher rate of compliance compared to collective agreements. Unions are increasingly seeking influence through means other than collective bargaining, such as forming political alliances and organizing public protests, demonstrations, and media campaigns to influence policy-making. Furthermore, both unions and employers are placing greater importance on the implementation of legislative remedies for employment and working conditions issues rather than depending on collective bargaining. This transformation has arisen from an increasing lack of trust between employers and unions in industry-level and multi-employer negotiations, as well as the necessity for stronger enforcement of collective agreements (Kahancová et al., 2019).

The majority of kindergartens and LTC social care facilities, specifically formal ECEC and LTC institutions, operate as public services. These establishments significantly influence collective bargaining and the coverage of collective bargaining agreements, as such agreements are negotiated on behalf of the entire public sector. Furthermore, collective bargaining and agreements exist at the sectoral level within education, extending beyond the scope of the collective bargaining agreement applicable to public employees.

The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and Family serves as the principal public authority tasked with the legal regulation of industrial relations. Through the Labour Code, the Ministry governs critical aspects of individual and collective labour relations, employment conditions, working environments, and remuneration, all while promoting bipartite social dialogue (Czíria, 2021).

The regulations governing the representativeness of social partners are delineated solely in relation to the national-level tripartite body, known as the Economic and Social Council (HSR). In accordance with Tripartite Act No. 103/2007, only peak-level trade unions and employer organizations that represent a minimum of 100,000 employees and employers across at least five out of eight regions (higher territorial units, VUC) are deemed eligible for participation in the HSR. Furthermore, the trade unions must demonstrate active involvement in various sectors. Notably, there are no criteria for representativeness concerning trade unions in the context of collective bargaining and the conclusion of collective agreements (Czíria, 2021).

A recent study on the coverage of **collective bargaining** (Eurofound 2021) indicates that, **in the education sector**, multiple-employer bargaining is most prevalent. This is reflected in the activities of the sectoral trade unions. The Union of Workers in Education and Science of Slovakia strives for sectoral collective agreements, especially targeting wage increases for all pedagogical and non-pedagogical employees in the education sector, including those in ECEC facilities. However, this applies only to public employees.

In social services and the human health sector, collective bargaining involves both multi- and single-employer bargaining. The percentage of employees covered by multi-employer bargaining in the human health sector is estimated at approximately 57%, and for all social services together, it is around 49%. There is no specific information available for the sub-sectors of residential social services, child day-care activities, or social work without accommodation (Eurofound 2021). Bednárík and Turkovič (2023) estimate the sector-related bargaining coverage on 69,800 employees.

Collective bargaining in the care sector in Slovakia is conducted exclusively by trade unions. However, their coverage is decreasing. Single-employer agreements are prevailing. However, in some sectors, multi-employer collective agreements are concluded, which can then be further extended onto other employers upon meeting legally established criteria for extension. There is a framework collective agreement for multiple employers in the public services sector signed by the central government and eight regional governments as employers' representatives. This can be considered as covering part of the care sector (under the responsibility of public authorities) with a collective agreement, but this agreement is so general in that it does not address specific issues in

this sector. However, the Slovak Trade Union of Health and Social Welfare (SOZZaSS) does not organise ECEC (Surdykowska, 2024).

Collective bargaining in Slovakia is strongly decentralised, and the dominant level of collective bargaining in Slovakia is at the enterprise level. Moreover, the negotiated content of the collective agreements (CBA) can be characterised as minimalist in terms of its comparison with the legal level of employee rights. For a long time, most CBAs have generally only copied the legal regulation. If they regulate some rights differently, it is usually a so-called soft law (recommended provisions or conditional obligations) or a reference to the regulation contained in the company collective agreement (Benedeková, Čambaliková, 2023).

The so-called opt-out clauses are also quite common; they allow the employer to avoid the application of a specific provision of the CBA. The minimalist content of CBAs has several reasons. One of them is the significant asymmetry in the negotiating position of employers' associations and trade unions, which is also largely conditioned by the potential of creating pressure on one or the other contracting party (Benedeková, Čambaliková, 2023).

Topics covered in collective agreements

1. A higher-level collective agreement² for employers who proceed with remuneration in accordance with Act no. 553/2003 Coll. on the remuneration of certain employees for the performance of work in the public interest for the years 2023-2024³

This CBA presents a formal agreement, a cross-sectoral national bargaining level agreement for all social services and employees in education, including ECEC, working according to Act no. 553/2003 Call, on the work in the public interest. The number of workers covered by the agreement is estimated to be a total of 230,000 (Bednárík, Turkovič, 2024).

The CBA is valid and binding for all employers who employ workers under Act 553/2003 Call, regardless of whether they are public or church organisations. This agreement was signed by all relevant social partners in ECEC and LTC, including the Independent Christian Trade Unions of Slovakia.⁴ The CBA is a formal agreement that sets guidelines for public service employment, a

² This kind of CBA is a multi-employer collective agreement.

³ <https://www.ozskolstva.sk/files/kzvs-2023-2024-verejna-sluzba.pdf>

and <https://sozzass.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/KZVS-2023-2024-verejna-sluzba.pdf>

⁴ <https://nkos.sk/2024/05/14/otazka-a-odpoved/>

comprehensive overview of the working conditions for public sector employees, specifically focusing on wage settings for 2023-2024.⁵

It includes detailed provisions about salary adjustments, pay grades, and other financial conditions affecting public sector workers. The "clauses" refer to final decisions or resolutions regarding these wage settings, marking the conclusion of negotiations or discussions on this topic for the specified period.

Wage Settings: the CBA specifies the wage structures for public service employees, including base salaries, salary increases, and other compensation-related matters. It outlines how wages will be adjusted over the period, detailing the percentage increases or specific amounts applicable to different pay grades or positions. The salaries increased by 7% since January 2023 and by 10% since September 2023. For the employees in education, the increase was 10% since January 2023 and 12% since September 2023.

Working Time: the agreement includes provisions related to working hours, establishing standard working times at 37 and ½ per week and any allowable deviations or flexibilities. It also addresses overtime policies and compensation, ensuring employees are fairly remunerated for extra hours worked beyond the standard schedule.

Vacations: the CBA sets out the number of vacation days/weeks employees are entitled to, including any additional leave for long service, special circumstances, or public holidays. It also details how vacation time is accrued and any conditions under which it can be carried over to the following year. The basic duration of the vacation is six weeks for all employees, 33 years old or older, in the respective year.

Social clauses: the CBA covers broader social issues affecting public sector employees, including health and safety measures, work-life balance support, family leave provisions, and other benefits contributing to employee welfare. It also encompasses guidelines for dealing with workplace disputes or grievances.

These clauses represent the final agreed terms for the specified period, reflecting the outcomes of negotiations between the relevant parties.

⁵ The additional rounds of collective bargaining on the CBA, which is to be valid from September 1, 2024 to December 31, 2025, took place in July 2024.

2. *An example of the company-level CBA is the collective agreement between primary schools and kindergartens in Bratislava.⁶ Here are examples of interesting clauses from the CBA:*

- **VARIABILITY SURCHARGE:** The employer pays the working employee in two-shift operations a monthly shift supplement in the amount of 1.3% of the salary scale of the first salary level
- **ALLOWANCES, REWARDS AND EMERGENCY COMPENSATION:**
 - The employer undertakes if he decides to pay the employee a reward for work merits when he reaches 50 and 60 years after working for the organisation for five years.
 - The employer may pay the employee remuneration for work a) on the occasion of the summer vacation period and b) on the occasion of the Christmas holidays

General characteristics of the CBA contents:

- In Slovakia, pay rates set in collective agreements are often lower than the statutory minimum wage, and the employer must pay the employee the difference from the applicable statutory minimum rate. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of the sampled agreements contain a rate lower than the statutory minimum, while more than half of the negotiated rates were set below the statutory minimum for an average period of almost five years. Moreover, half of the agreements are in the public sector and refer to Act No. 553/2003 Coll. on the remuneration of certain employees for the performance of work in the public interest, which sets wages below the statutory minimum wage (Eurofound, 2024).
- In Slovakia, the agreements are often outdated, resulting in basic negotiated rates being lower than the statutory minimum wage by 13% to 22% (Eurofound, 2024).

As of 2023, Collective bargaining According to Act No. 2/1991 Coll. on collective bargaining, as amended (hereinafter referred to as the "Act on Collective Bargaining"), in 2023 the binding nature of the higher-level collective agreement (hereinafter referred to as the "KZVS") did not extend to other employers and the validity of the representative KZVS also expired. In 2023, a total of 26 KZVS and amendments were filed with the MPSVR SR, of which 12 KZVS and 14 amendments to KZVS; 8 KZVS in the private sector and 4 KZVS in the public sector (public and civil service). Of the 14 amendments, 10 were concluded in the private sector and 4 amendments in the public sector. Overall, it can be assessed that the number of concluded KZVS and amendments is the same compared to previous years, both in the private and public sectors (MLSAF, 2024)

The European Union Directive on adequate minimum wage setting has been on the agenda of trade unions for a long time as a reference policy document. Even before its formal transposition into national law, the Directive influenced the minimum wage setting in Slovakia. The directive on

⁶ <https://mojplat.sk/pravo/databaza-kolektivnych-zmluv/bzince> :

determining minimum wage has been in the sights and requirements of trade unions for a long time, in connection with the request for an increase of the minimum wage rates in Slovakia last year. Determining the minimum wages is the subject of tripartite negotiations each year. Based on the current Act on the minimum wage (Act 663/2007 Coll.), if an agreement between the employees and employers' representatives is not reached by 1 April each year, the amount of the monthly minimum wage for the following calendar year is 57% of the average monthly nominal wage of an employee in the economy of the Slovak Republic published by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic for the calendar year two years before the calendar year for which the amount of the monthly minimum wage is determined minimum wage.

Despite the government's failure to take formal action to implement the Directive in its complexity, long-term pressure on some related issues returned to a very recent amendment of the Act on the minimum wage, including some changes related to collective bargaining. The proposal is currently in the Slovak Parliament, waiting for its readings in October.

Here are the most relevant suggested changes related to the EU Directive as indicated in the Explanatory memorandum of the draft law (Slovak Government, 2024):

The draft law is submitted to transpose and implement Directive (EU) 2022/2041 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on adequate minimum wages in the European Union (OJ L 275, 25.10.2022), increase the rate of coverage by collective bargaining, improve the quality of social dialogue, and adjust some current labour law issues that are of interest to employers, employees, and the state.

The draft law creates a framework for the adequacy of legal minimum wages to achieve dignified living and working conditions and support collective bargaining on wage determination:

- *at the level of 60% of the average monthly wage, which was reduced by three percentage points at the time of the pandemic.*
- *to establish rules for assessing the criteria for establishing the minimum wage from the point of view of the requirement for the adequacy of the established minimum wage.*

In order to transpose and implement Directive (EU) 2022/2041, it is proposed to amend Act No. 2/1991 Coll. on collective bargaining, as amended, and to adjust the process of creating and updating an action plan to support collective bargaining if the rate of coverage by collective bargaining is less than 80% with the aim of increasing its coverage.

To increase the rate of coverage of employees by collective bargaining and collective agreements, it is proposed again to introduce a legal arrangement binding the representative collective agreement of a higher level also on other employers in the sector or part of the sector. This arrangement was effective until February 28, 2021, and was repealed by amendment to the Labor Code no. 76/2021 Coll.

To increase interest in the activity of mediators and arbitrators in collective bargaining as well as the quality of this activity, thereby also supporting collective bargaining and the conclusion of collective agreements, it is proposed in Act No. 2/1991 Coll. on collective bargaining as amended and in Act no. 103/2007 Coll. on tripartite consultations at the national level to specify the rules on their remuneration, valorise the rewards and set up a mechanism for their automatic valorisation linked to the growth of the average wage.

The law was transposed by the final deadline set for November 15, 2024 (Slovak Government, 2024); however, an action plan how to meet specific targets, e.g., on bargaining coverage, and being prepared in 2025.⁷

⁷ All the documents related to the draft law are available at <https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=zakony/cpt&ZakZborID=13&CisObdobia=9&ID=410>

Table 1a. Collective bargaining in ECEC

Analytical Dimension		Research Questions	Slovakia
CB structure	Main level where CAs are signed	At what level CAs are signed? (national/sectoral, regional, local)	At the national level, higher-level collective agreements are negotiated between sectoral trade unions and employers' associations. For instance, the Union of Workers in Education and Science of Slovakia (OZ PŠaV) engages in multi-employer bargaining that encompasses public kindergartens and other educational institutions.
	Second main level		At the local level, enterprise-level collective agreements are negotiated directly between individual employers (e.g., kindergarten directors) and local trade union representatives.
	Degree of fragmentation in CB	High would you evaluate the degree of fragmentation? High, medium, low?	High - While higher-level (sectoral) collective agreements exist, particularly in the public sector, many agreements are negotiated at the enterprise level. This decentralization leads to variability in employment conditions across different institutions.
	Country-specific addendum	Are there any country-specific dimensions to add?	The employees of childcare and elder care are represented mostly by sectoral trade unions covering all employees in education or social and health sectors. In the childcare sector, several social partners operate at the sectoral level. However, a specific social partner specifically targeting pre-primary childcare services does not exist in Slovakia. At the higher level, pre-primary education falls into the industrial relations structures in the whole education sector.
Coordination in CB	Vertical coordination between different levels	Are there mechanisms in place to coordinate CB across different co-existing levels?	Direct vertical coordination does not exist, yet downward derogation is not possible at the lower level of bargaining. In some cases, where a single-employer CBA does not exist, only the higher-level agreement covers employees.
	Inter-sectoral horizontal coordination between public/private CAs	Are there mechanisms in place to coordinate CB in public/private sectors?	The higher-level agreement for public service covers a wide range of sectors. Pay tariffs can be however negotiated separately per sector and occupational group. These agreements are also valid for private institutions if the workers are being remunerated according to the same legislation as workers in public institutions.
	Intra-sectoral horizontal coordination between private sector CAs	Are there mechanisms in place to coordinate CB between	No direct mechanisms, but benchmarking and informal pattern bargaining. Coordination depends on the state capacities and funding opportunities, and

		different CBAs in the same sector?	also on the power resources of particular occupational groups and their trade unions to negotiate better conditions for this group.
	Country-specific addendum	Are there any country-specific dimensions to add?	Separate bargaining for public service and civil service. Education, including ECEC is covered by public service.
Collective agreements	Number of CAs applied	Enumerate the main CBAs signed in the sub-sector	Higher-level collective agreement for public service, plus a high number of single-employer agreements
	Characteristics of the main CAs signed	<p>For each CA, please specify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - signatory parties (TUs & EOs) - % coverage - sector (public and/or private) 	<p>CA no.1: A collective agreement of a higher level for employers who proceed with remuneration in accordance with Act no. 553/2003 Coll. on the remuneration of certain employees for the performance of work in the public interest for the years 2023-2024</p> <p>- covers 230,000 employees in the public sector and serves as a benchmark for employers in the private sector too.</p>

Table 1b. Collective bargaining in LTC

Analytical Dimension		Research Questions	Slovakia
CB structure	Main level where CAs are signed	At what level CBAs are signed? (national/sectoral, regional, local)	Company level
	Second main level		Sectoral level (public sector)
	Degree of fragmentation in CB	High would you evaluate the degree of fragmentation? High, medium, low?	High
	Country-specific addendum	Are there any country-specific dimensions to add?	<p>The higher-level agreement for public service, including LTC, is serving as an informal benchmark for private providers.</p> <p>This higher-level agreement for public service stipulates wage tariffs in social services. The first two tariffs fall, upon the increase of the statutory minimum wage level, beyond the minimum wage and the actual pay for employees remunerated according to this category needs to be subsidized from other sources not to fall below the minimum wage. This is seen as a relevant policy issue and regularly criticised for taking capacities from other serious issues.</p>

Coordination in CB	Vertical coordination between different levels	Are there mechanisms in place to coordinate CB across different co-existing levels?	Yes, mechanisms in form of specific, targeted social dialogue at the local level of particular LTC providers. Here are examples of the targeted interventions in a dedicated social dialogue: The Slovak Trade Union of Employees in Health and Social Services provides qualified legal counselling and advice on labour regulation violations. They defend the rights of employees and represent care workers in cases of unjustified prosecution and alleged negligence in care. For example, in one case, a care worker was accused of serious damage to the client's health. The Union successfully defended the employee's innocence and unfair dismissal due to negligence. It turned out the employer was responsible for the negligence of the work safety regulations. Assistance in local social dialogue and negotiation is a frequent activity of these trade unions. Negotiations directly on the spot, in the premises of the social facility with the social service founder, paid off as a good way to negotiate better working conditions than the employer offered. Unions support increasing the capacity of employees for social negotiations and concluding collective agreements, both by using the basic model of collective agreements and by providing education in this area. In addition, a union specialist in occupational health safety provides extra services at the level of concrete employers, drawing attention to violations of H&S regulations and preventing occupational accidents and fatal injuries.
	Inter-sectoral horizontal coordination between public/private CAs	Are there mechanisms in place to coordinate CB in public/private sectors?	No formal mechanisms, but the public service CBA can serve as a benchmark also for private providers
	Intra-sectoral horizontal coordination between private sector CAs	Are there mechanisms in place to coordinate CB between different CAs in the same sector?	Not in place, company-level agreements depend on who the founder and budget holder is. In general, there is no significant deviation from the higher-level agreement.

	Country-specific addendum	Are there any country-specific dimensions to add?	n/a
Collective agreements	Number of CAs applied	Enumerate the main CAs signed in the sub-sector	One higher-level agreement and a high number of single-employer agreements in care homes across the whole country
	Characteristics of the main CAs signed	For each CA, please specify: - signatory parties (TUs & EOs) - % coverage - sector (public and/or private)	CA no.1: A collective agreement of a higher level for employers who proceed with remuneration in accordance with Act no. 553/2003 Coll. on the remuneration of certain employees for the performance of work in the public interest for the years 2023-2024 - covers 230,000 employees A high number of single-employer agreements across the whole country in LTC care homes

3. Collective representation in the Slovakian care sector

Basic information on collective representation in ECEC

The Union of Workers in Education and Science of Slovakia (Odborový zväz pracovníkov školstva a vedy na Slovensku, OZPŠaV) is the largest and the oldest sector-level union in education. Currently, the structure of the Union has no special unit for pre-primary education. However, the Union also presents itself as an expert organisation for pre-primary education. The Union currently has more than 48,000 members - pedagogical, vocational and non-teaching staff at all levels and types of schools and school facilities. It is thus the second-largest trade Union in Slovakia and the largest Union in the non-industrial sphere. The Union is a member of the Confederation of Trade Unions, Economic and Social Council of the Slovak Republic and a founding and active member of international organisations, Education International and the European Trade Union Committee for Education. The Union has three sub-sections (trade union's bodies), an association of primary schools, an association of secondary schools, and an association of tertiary schools. Nevertheless, the issues of pre-primary education fall into the category of primary schools and the association of primary schools has a separate sub-section representing pedagogical employees in pre-primary education.

The New Education Trade Union (Nové školské odbory, NŠO) is a new vocal social partner in education that emerged after the series of teachers' strikes in 2012- 2013. Its membership is, however low, and currently, no activities dedicated to pre-primary education are evident. Since 2020 the NŠO became a part of a larger TU called Common Trade Unions of Slovakia, which are a separate, independent and professional association of trade unions and organisations. They have the ambition to be an expert think-tank in the field of labour law and employment in Slovakia.

Basic information on collective representation in LTC

The Slovak Trade Union of Employees in Health and Social Services (Slovenský odborový zväz zdravotníctva a sociálnych služieb, SOZZaSS). SOZZaSS has been active in Slovakia since 1990. The union is a sectoral trade union representing both health and social care employees in Slovakia. SOZZaSS is involved in multi-employer collective bargaining separately with three sector-related employers' associations. Simultaneously, SOZZaSS member unions engage in single-employer bargaining. SOZZaSS engages in bipartite and tripartite sectoral social dialogue. It is represented in the national tripartite social dialogue in the Economic and Social Council (HSR) through the Confederation of Trade Unions of the Slovak Republic (KOZ SR). As of 2022, the

unions represent 46 hospitals, 37 hospitals with polyclinics, 118 social service facilities, 36 regional public health offices, 8 spas and 14 other facilities, which is a total of 259 basic trade unions and at the same time, 17,641 members.⁸

The Trade Union prepares for the basic organisations the model of the collective organisational agreement for collective bargaining at the level of the organisation. Many issues must be clearly addressed to the founders. Collective agreements are negotiated annually across the board for staff working in the public interest and in civil services. Collective bargaining takes place at the enterprise level, where trade unions operate. The trade union organisation within the tripartite operates in various committees, working groups, and government councils at the national level and is a member of EPSU at the EU level. The union represents employees only. The union does not represent the self-employed workers. Even though the Trade union of employees in Healthcare and Social Services represents mostly residential health and social care workers.

The Slovak Trade Union of Public Administration and Culture (Sloves) represents most public administration and public service employees. Its structure also involves a section for social services. The sectoral trade unions strives for concluding a collective agreement, to decides on the salary conditions of the employees, work and service rules, working hours and holidays, severance pay and the creation and use of the social fund.

Employers' organisations in ECEC

The Association of Towns and Communities (ZMOS) represents employers in the ECEC, SAC, and LTC subsectors. It associates employers established by cities and municipalities to provide public services. In 2016, employer organisations from the industry left AZZZ SR and RUZ and established a new peak employer organisation - the Association of Industrial Unions (APZ). AZZZ SR, RUZ, APZ and ZMOS participate in the national-level tripartite consultations at the Economic and Social Council of the Slovak Republic. In 2019, they represented more than 930,000 employees in the economy. ZMOS also participates in multi-employer collective bargaining to conclude collective agreements for public servants (employees performing activities for the public interest). Organisations affiliated with ZMOS employ around 142,000 people (Czíria, 2021).

Employers' organisations in LTC

The Association of Social Service Providers in Slovakia is another employer organisation in the sector. They represent 290 providers and more than 850 service facilities (mostly residential),

⁸ <https://sozzass.com/referencie/>

either non-public or public. The association was perceived in the public discourse as representing only non-public social services providers and fighting mostly for equal conditions between public and non-public providers. However, recently, the association presented that one-third of its members are public-municipal social service providers.⁹ (Holubová, 2024). It is a professional and interest organisation that brings together social service providers to uniformly formulate and enforce their demands, interests and ideas on legislation, funding and the entire social services system. It unionises experts in social services to move providers professionally and their employees to an ever-higher quality of social services to the satisfaction of recipients of social services. The association is a National Union of Employers (RUZ) member. The association publicly criticises towns and municipalities (especially ZMOS) for their inability to secure enough care workers in Slovakia. The Association of Social Service Providers is an apolitical and independent organisation that professionally points out shortcomings in legislation, funding and application practice in social services to bring effective and functioning solutions, which must always aim to respect the interests and rights of the participants: that is, the recipient, the employee and the employer. The organisation also promotes a global view of the social system in Slovakia, which must be prepared for the radical rise of dependent seniors (Holubová, 2023). APSS is a member of the Social Employers Europe and European Ageing Network (Holubová, 2024).

⁹ <https://apssvsr.sk/aktuality/vysledok-valneho-zhromazdenie-29-5-2024/>

Table 2a. Collective representation in LTC

Analytical Dimension		Research Questions	Slovakia
TUs structure	Degree of TUs fragmentation	How many TUs organise in the sector?	Two: The Slovak Trade Union of Employees in Health and Social Services (SOZZaSS) and the Slovak Trade Union of Public Administration and Culture (SLOVES), to some extent also the Trade Union Federation of Nurses and Midwives (OZSaPA)
	Membership of TUs	Do the TUs cover the same membership? Do the different TUs compete to recruit care workers?	Although the Slovak Trade Union of Public Administration and Culture mostly focuses on different workers, it does also have a section for social services Competition in care worker recruitment is marginal, but may exist eg. between the base unions affiliated to SOZZaSS and unions affiliated to OZSaPA. Also, competition may arise between unions and non-union actors that serve as the voice of care workers.
	Nature of the relationship between TUs	How would you define the relationships between TUs? Collaborative or competitive?	collaborative
	Degree of centralization in decision-making	At what organizational level decision-making takes place within TUs?	Decision-making within the Slovak Trade Union of Employees in Health and Social Services takes place at several levels, with the Congress serving as the highest authority responsible for strategic decisions, supported by the Council and Presidency for coordination and day-to-day operations. At the local level, basic organizations within workplaces handle member representation and collective bargaining with employers. Decision-making within the Slovak Trade Union of Public Administration and Culture also occurs at multiple organizational levels.
	Structure of workers' representation	Are care workers organised through dedicated union categories? Or together with other groups?	Upon the fragmentation of higher-level bargaining in the hospital sector and LTC, and later with the legislative anchoring of

			wages of healthcare workers, it was unclear how certain categories will be covered, e.g. doctors and nurses working in LTC homes and not in hospitals.
	Inter-sectoral coordination between public/private sector workers	Does the TUs represent care workers in both the public AND the private sector?	The Slovak Trade Union of Employees in Health and Social Services represents care workers in both the public and the private sector. The Slovak Trade Union of Public Administration and Culture represents care workers in the public sector.
Characteristics of TUs	Characteristics of the most representative TUs	For each TU, please specify: - membership (absolute no. and % in the sector) - sector (public and/or private) - professional profiles of members	The Slovak Trade Union of Health and Social Services Membership absolute no.: 17,641 members, percentage not available Public and private sector Organizes mostly workers in care homes, also some higher-ranked medical professional and nurses (which also have their own trade unions and agreements) The Slovak Trade Union of Public Administration and Culture Other data not available
EOs structure	Degree of EOs fragmentation	How many EOs organise in the sector?	Association of cities and municipalities (ZMOS), Union of cities and towns Ministry of Social Affairs Association of the Social Services Providers of Slovakia
	Membership of EOs	Do the EOs cover the same membership? Do the different EOs compete to recruit care providers?	ZMOS covers public providers. The Association of the Social Services Providers of Slovakia covers both public and private providers. No data on possible competition among Eos.
	Nature of the relationship between EOs	How would you define the relationships between EOs? Collaborative or competitive?	Probably competitive, as an example – The Association of the Social Services Providers of Slovakia criticized ZMOS for their proposal to abolish the obligation of municipalities to co-finance the operating subsidy for a dependent citizen placed with a non-public service provider.

	Degree of centralization in decision-making	At what organizational level decision-making takes place within EOs?	Decision-making at ZMOS takes place at multiple organizational levels. The bodies of the association are: a) the Assembly of the Association, b) the Chairperson of the Association, c) the Supervisory Commission. of the Association, d) the Council of the Association. At the Association of the Social Services Providers, the decision-making also takes place at multiple organizational levels. The association is made up of several bodies: a) the General Assembly, b) the Presidency, c) The Ethics Committee, d) The Audit Committee, e) Expert Sections.
	Structure of care providers' representation	Are care providers organised through dedicated structures? Or together with other firms?	The Association of the Social Services Providers organizes care providers only. ZMOS and UMO organize cities and municipalities offering public services in general.
	Inter-sectoral horizontal coordination between EOs	Do the diverse EOs adopt mechanisms/procedures to coordinate in CB?	There is no coordination in place, rather APSS remains critical of ZMOS in approaches to bargaining and working conditions.
Characteristics of EOs	Characteristics of the most representative EOs	For each EO, please specify: - membership (absolute no. and % in the sector) - sector (public and/or private) - kind of firms organised	The Association of the Social Services Providers: Absolute no: 290 providers and more than 850 service facilities Percentage not available Sector: public and private Kind of firms organised: social care homes ZMOS Membership: Absolute no.: 2,873 – data Eurofound 2022 - Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Local and regional government sector and social services % in the sector only available from Eurofound - 95%

Table 2b. Collective representation in Slovakia in ECEC

Analytical Dimension		Research Questions	Slovakia
TUs structure	Degree of TUs fragmentation	How many TUs organise in the sector?	The sector is represented by several trade unions, though none are exclusively dedicated to it. The primary unions involved include: 1) The Union of Workers in Education and Science of Slovakia (Odborový zväz pracovníkov školstva a vedy na Slovensku, OZPŠaV), 2) The Independent Christian Trade Unions of Slovakia (NKOS) which are part of The Union of Workers in Education and Science of Slovakia and 3) The New Education Trade Union (Nové školské odbory, NŠO)
	Membership of TUs	Do the TUs cover the same membership? Do the different TUs compete to recruit care workers?	Yes, the TUs cover the same membership. The TUs do not seem to compete to recruit care workers, since The Independent Christian Trade Union of Slovakia is part of the Union of Workers in Education and Science of Slovakia and also because the New Education Trade Union is fairly new and struggling to recruit workers either way.
	Nature of the relationship between TUs	How would you define the relationships between TUs? Collaborative or competitive?	The relationship between the trade unions can be defined as collaborative, since they all wish for a continued dialogue, a stronger collaboration and support each other's protest activities.
	Degree of centralization in decision-making	At what organizational level decision-making takes place within TUs?	Decision-making within OZ PŠaV takes place at multiple levels, with the Congress as the highest authority responsible for strategic decisions, supported by the Council for coordination and the Presidency for day-to-day operations. At the local level, basic organizations handle workplace-specific issues and represent members in direct interactions with employers. Decision-making within NŠO takes place at multiple organizational levels, with the highest authority being the National Congress (Snem), composed of all members. Delegates with voting rights are members of NŠO present at the Congress. The Congress is considered quorate if more than 50% of the Presidency and at least one-third of the basic organisations' (ZO) presidents are present. Similarly as the previous two, decision-making within NKOS also takes place at multiple organizational levels.
	Structure of workers' representation	Are care workers organised through dedicated union	Early childhood care workers in Slovakia are not organized through dedicated union categories. Instead, they are represented alongside other groups—those in kindergartens fall under unions covering the broader

		categories? Or together with other groups?	education sector, while nursery workers are typically represented within unions active in the social services sector. There is no trade union specifically focused only on pre-primary childcare services.
	Inter-sectoral horizontal coordination between public/private sector workers	Does the TUs represent care workers in both the public AND the private sector?	Yes, the trade unions represent care workers in both the public and the private sector.
Characteristics of TUs	Characteristics of the most representative TUs	For each TU, please specify: - membership (absolute no. and % in the sector) - sector (public and/or private) - professional profiles of members	OZPŠaV Membership absolute no.: around 48 000 % in the sector not known Sector: public and private The union organises teachers and pedagogical and non-pedagogical employees, mainly from public facilities, but also private ones.
			New Scholl trade unions (NŠO) Sector: public and private Professional profiles of members not known
			Christian unions in the education sector - NKOS Sector: public and private Professional profiles of members: affiliated/working at Christian schools
EOs structure	Degree of EOs fragmentation	How many EOs organise in the sector?	On the employers' side, public early childhood education and care (ECEC) services are primarily provided by the state and municipalities, represented through the relevant ministries and the Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia (ZMOS) . At the local or organisational level, collective agreements are negotiated directly between representatives of the local trade union branch and the head of the kindergarten.
	Membership of EOs	Do the EOs cover the same membership? Do the different EOs compete to recruit care providers?	The Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia covers workers working in the public ECEC services. There does not seem to be competition present.
	Nature of the relationship between EOs	How would you define the relationships between EOs? Collaborative or competitive?	Neither collaborative nor competitive
	Degree of centralization in decision-making	At what organizational level decision-making takes place within EOs?	Decision-making at the Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia takes place at multiple organizational levels . The bodies of the association are: a) the Assembly of the Association, b) the Chairperson

			of the Association, c) the Supervisory Commission of the Association, d) the Council of the Association.
	Structure of care providers' representation	Are care providers organised through dedicated structures? Or together with other firms?	Public and private, no distinct representation of each group
	Inter-sectoral horizontal coordination between EOs	Do the diverse EOs adopt mechanisms/procedures to coordinate in CB?	No
Characteristics of EOs	Characteristics of the most representative EOs	For each EO, please specify: - membership (absolute no. and % in the sector) - sector (public and/or private) - kind of firms organised	ZMOS: Membership absolute no.: 2,873 % in the sector: 95 according to Eurofound Sector: public Kind of firms organised: cities and municipalities, which are in most cases the providers and budget holders of public ECEC services

4. Labour shortage

Shortage of labour in LTC

Based on the interviews, the labour shortage in Slovakia's long-term social care sector is becoming increasingly severe, particularly due to the ageing workforce, as the majority of employees, who are predominantly women (95%), are approaching retirement age. The average age of workers is over 50, and many could retire soon, potentially leading to a collapse of the system. Additionally, there are significant shortages in blue-collar roles, such as cleaners, maintenance workers, and drivers, driven by low salaries, tough working conditions, and burnout (INT3).

The trade unions are trying to address these issues by advocating for better wages and working conditions. They are actively involved in the legislative process, providing input during inter-ministerial comment procedures and working with organisations within the tripartite (including ministries) to push for policies that address labour shortages. They alert the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Health about the employment crisis in social services and highlight the risk that financial constraints could lead to wage freezes, worsening the situation.

One of the core solutions identified by the unions is improving the social status of workers through education and training. They emphasise the need for relevant courses that would raise the skill levels of workers, as well as better working environments and infrastructure in social care facilities. There is a sense that workers would be more committed and motivated if they were properly trained and had a better work environment. Additionally, improvements in working conditions and the use of assistive tools that are practical and functional are seen as crucial to easing the physical burden on employees.

Remuneration is a major focus, with the unions stressing the need for higher salaries to attract and retain workers. They argue that competitive pay would help entice some of the estimated 400,000 Slovaks living abroad to return. However, societal attitudes, poor working conditions, and a lack of political commitment to making care work more attractive create barriers to reversing the labour exodus. Unions believe that without significant changes in status, remuneration, and working conditions, the outflow of young workers abroad will continue, leaving Slovakia's care sector even more vulnerable.

Shortage of labour in ECEC

In regard to skills shortages, the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector does not face this issue. The ECEC labour force possesses the specified qualifications and requirements

necessary for employment within this sector; specifically, individuals must hold or complete pedagogical education as precisely delineated. Furthermore, it is emphasised that a university professor is not automatically qualified to serve as a kindergarten teacher due to the unique skill set required in this role. Although there have been some adjustments, our workforce is equipped with the requisite pedagogical skills pertinent to kindergarten education (INT1).

Slovak pedagogical secondary education programs primarily excel in preparing candidates for work in kindergartens. Additionally, there are numerous individuals undergoing retraining; many of these individuals are in their forties and come from sectors such as banking, having transitioned to education due to a desire for change. The nature of the work is creative and fulfilling, yet it remains significantly undervalued, prompting continuous advocacy for improved working conditions and benefits, including various discounts whenever feasible within the system.

However, in terms of the quality of the ECEC labour force, no high level of shortage has been asserted. However, only some candidates with appropriate qualifications can be readily employed. Concerning teaching staff, Slovakia continues to adhere to legislative requirements; otherwise, individuals cannot be accepted into positions without completing their educational credentials (INT1).

It is more accurate to state that there is some degree of shortfall in non-pedagogical roles, such as those in school canteens and cleaning and hygiene workers—non-pedagogical employees with kindergartens. Indeed, a shortage parallels the overall employment deficits; however, there appears to be a tendency to underestimate the severity of this situation.

Trade unions related to ECEC focus on various initiatives to address the shortage of teachers, emphasising the need for lifelong education and recent legislative support for adult education. While not uniformly severe across regions, teacher shortages are particularly pronounced in areas like Bratislava. The speaker notes improvements to teachers' salaries in 2022 and highlights the ongoing pressure for better working conditions. Trade union efforts in collective bargaining and specific projects aimed at enhancing the teaching profession's attractiveness, including the mentorship of younger teachers. Lastly, there are references to international cooperation, such as Erasmus projects, to share best practices and counteract workforce shortages.

Policies and social partners initiatives to address labour shortages

Initiatives in organising workers

Initiatives in organising LTC workers may be upheld by the local social dialogue vertically coordinated by sectoral trade unions. Low-quality working conditions and the violation of health

and safety issues in residential LTC facilities are the challenges addressed by the social partner. The permanent operation of the Slovak Trade Union of Health Care and Social Services focuses on improving the conditions of night shift work, establishing a decent working environment and preventing the violation of health and safety rules at the level of particular social care providers in the LTC sector. The effort to achieve the working standards in care work was coordinated vertically from the sectoral to the local level. Support in capacity building, providing the templates for collective agreements, legal counselling, and assistance in workplace-level bargaining is a solution to mitigate the low job quality in the sector (Holubová, 2023).

The activities of the KOS—the Chamber of Caregivers of Slovakia (Komora opatrovateľiek Slovenska)—are a good practice in organising adult care workers. KOS started to emerge in response to a tragic car accident in 2017 when several caregivers coming from Austria died due to violation of the resting rules. Therefore, KOS also demands control of the Slovak transportation companies to see whether their drivers transporting the Slovak care workers abroad follow the mandatory resting periods. Better working conditions should, according to the KOS representative, encourage Slovak women to return from Austria back home (Holubová, 2024). KOS gained momentum during the COVID-19 crisis when the borders between Austria and Slovakia closed. Caregivers working abroad were stranded at the borders and not allowed to go home due to quarantine restrictions. KOS's multiple activities, such as press realises, working group membership, and interrelationships with EU-level Eurocarers, allow it to be a strong voice in the PHS sector. The organisation prefers not to be transformed into a trade union organisation despite defending caregivers' rights intensively and addressing their working conditions (Holubová, 2024).

Role of organisations of service users

The LTC trade union, SOZZaSS, abstains from collaborating with any other organization that represents LTC service recipients. Nevertheless, it possesses experience with the Public Defender for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, also known as the Ombudsperson. This office has undertaken multiple inspections in social service facilities for the elderly and individuals with disabilities. The resulting reports have predominantly been critical of LTC employees, emphasizing deficiencies in their engagement with clients and their respect for the clients' rights to dignity. Trade union representatives contend that these reports exhibit an imbalance in criticism and impose unreasonable demands, such as stipulations that clients must have access to balconies and unobstructed windows in each room. However, this perspective fails to consider the safety of clients as well as the limited time resources available to employees, especially given the high client-

to-caregiver ratio. Trade union representatives have characterized the collaboration with the Ombudsperson as inadequate, asserting that the evaluation of clients' rights is conducted from a singular perspective, neglecting the necessity to also consider the rights, safety, and health protections for employees at work.

In the domain of ECEC, no singular national organization exists that represents the interests of ECEC users, specifically the parents of children enrolled in such programs. Trade union representatives express a desire for the establishment of such an organisation in Slovakia, as it would facilitate the resolution of issues at a national level. However, the parents of children in ECEC are represented within the Kindergarten Council, through the Association of Parents and Friends of the School. This typically functions as a civic association in each kindergarten, providing parents with the opportunity to engage in the governance of the kindergarten. For instance, they possess the authority to initiate the dismissal of the kindergarten director. Nevertheless, parents generally do not influence working conditions. Trade union representatives advocate for enhanced collaboration between trade unions and parent representatives of children involved in ECEC.

Conclusions

In this report, developed under the DEVCOBA project, the authors attempted to provide a comprehensive overview of collective bargaining structures, representation, and challenges within Slovakia's LTC and ECEC sectors. It explores the institutional setup and coverage of collective bargaining, the structure and strategies of employee and employer representation, and social partners' perspectives on job quality and labour shortages. The analysis draws on secondary data and interviews with key stakeholders, highlighting the fragmented nature of the care system, which is largely family-based and reliant on informal care supported by allowances. The study also emphasizes the importance of understanding the organisational diversity within the care sector—spanning public, private, and non-profit providers—to fully grasp the dynamics of employment relations and the varying degrees of collective representation.

The literature review highlights that LTC and ECEC are rarely studied together as a unified care field, with most research treating them separately within broader frameworks like public services or social policy. Slovakia is often grouped within Central and Eastern Europe in studies, with only a few country-specific investigations. The review in this report covers employment relations, collective bargaining trends, and the influence of EU policies, particularly focusing on decentralisation and weakened national social partnerships post-2008 crisis. It underscores how sector-level bargaining, particularly in healthcare, gained importance amidst austerity. Studies also point to challenges in LTC, such as workforce shortages, migration, low wages, poor working conditions, and health and safety risks exacerbated by the pandemic. In ECEC, there is a significant research gap in social dialogue and bargaining related specifically to kindergartens and pre-primary education, despite recent policy emphasis on early learning. This gap calls for targeted research to align bargaining practices with the unique needs of pre-primary education amid evolving reforms. The collective bargaining system in Slovakia is marked by transparency, legal enforceability, and legislative support, particularly through mechanisms such as the extension of collective agreements. Although participation in collective bargaining is not mandatory, agreements are binding once concluded. Both single- and multi-employer agreements are practiced across the public and private sectors, with multi-employer agreements prevailing, especially in the public sphere. Public institutions, including kindergartens and LTC facilities, significantly influence bargaining coverage since agreements are negotiated on behalf of the broader public sector. The Ministry of Labour plays a central regulatory role through the Labour Code, overseeing individual and collective labour relations and fostering social dialogue. However, representativeness rules apply only at the tripartite

national level, leaving collective bargaining without specific criteria for union recognition. Although sectoral bargaining is strong in education — driven by trade unions like the Union of Workers in Education and Science of Slovakia — it remains limited to public employees. It does not extend to ECEC under private or non-unionised frameworks.

In social services and health, collective bargaining is split between multi- and single-employer agreements, with coverage varying by sector but estimated around 49–57%. Yet, bargaining in these sectors is conducted exclusively by trade unions, whose influence is waning. Enterprise-level bargaining dominates, and collective agreements tend to mirror existing legal standards with minimal substantive improvements — often including opt-out clauses and soft provisions due to the unequal negotiating power of unions and employers. Despite a general framework agreement in public services signed by the government and regions, it lacks sector-specific detail, especially for ECEC, which is notably absent from union organization efforts by key actors like SOZZaSS. As such, Slovakia's bargaining landscape is becoming increasingly decentralized, fragmented, and reliant on statutory regulation over collective negotiation, reflecting both institutional limitations and shifting union strategies.

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List of interviews

Code	Subsector	Type of stakeholders	Name of the organisation	Date of interview
INT1	ECEC	Trade Unions	The Union of Workers in Education and Science of Slovakia	September 2024
INT2	ECEC	Statutory authority	Ministry of Education	Archive interview
INT3	LTC	Trade Unions	Slovak Trade Unions of Health and Social Services Employees	September 2024
INT4	LTC	Employers' organisation	Slovak Association of social services providers	Archive interview
INT5	LTC	Employers' organisation	Union of towns and municipalities	Archive interview