

# MIGRATION AS A POLITICAL TOOL: A STUDY OF SLOVAK PARTY MANIFESTOS

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## I. Introduction

Migration is an essential principle underlying the functioning of any society. It is by no means exclusive to humans – it affects virtually all living organisms within the animal kingdom. Its character has continuously evolved throughout the development of human civilization and technological advancement. In the present day, it is common for a portion of the population to change their place of residence during their lifetime. The reasons for such movements may take various forms and are often classified into so-called pull factors and push factors. As the terminology suggests, pull factors attract potential migrants, whereas push factors compel individuals to leave their place of origin for another destination.<sup>1</sup> The typology of migration is highly dependent on the perspective of the author and the theoretical framework adopted. Some typologies strive for comprehensiveness by incorporating multiple indicators. For instance, scholars Mathias Czaika and Constantin Reinprecht base their typology on nine “driver dimensions” and 24 “driving factors.”<sup>2</sup>

Alexander Onufrák notes that, when comparing the present century with the past ones, two distinct migration-related phenomena can be identified in the European context. While previous centuries were often characterised by significant emigration from Europe, the

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<sup>1</sup> Walter, 35–49.

<sup>2</sup> Czaika, Reinprecht, 49–82.

continent has recently become a primary destination for migratory flows.<sup>3</sup> This shift also affects Slovakia, which historically experienced emigration rather than immigration. In fact, historical context may shape public attitudes toward migration in specific regions, including Slovakia. Karen Henderson points out this connection by highlighting several potential reasons for the negative perception of migration within the Visegrad Group region. Among other factors, she emphasizes the legacy of communism, which continues to influence public perception.<sup>4</sup>

In Slovakia, migration has been a recurring topic in political discourse. Its prominence has fluctuated over time and has undergone subtle transformations. It can also be observed that at certain times, migration has emerged as a significant factor influencing voter behaviour. As such, it serves as a tool for political differentiation and positioning among political rivals.

The aim of this article is to explore to what extent and in what form the selected Slovak parties communicate the issue of migration in their manifestos for the 2023 elections. The following two research questions are formulated in this context: 1) to what extent do the selected political parties deal with the issue of migration in their election manifestos? and 2) what issues do these actors address in this field?

According to the stated aim of the article, the identification of a separate chapter/subchapter and its scope is examined. The next step is to identify the specific content focus of the political party in this area. Four thematic categories are created to cover this area. Each category is explained in the table below.

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<sup>3</sup> Onufrák, 32–79.

<sup>4</sup> Henderson, 47–60.

TABLE 1: Categories created for the monitoring of the content of the manifestos of selected political parties

Description / Category	Description
<b>Category 1</b>	It includes the question of dealing with incoming migration itself, how to deal with it, the question of cooperation, etc. This category is mostly associated with negative connotations and with the form of migration that is undesirable or problematic for political parties and society.
<b>Category 2</b>	It covers potential migration in a more positive way. It refers to desirable migration that is necessary for society and its future. It is about the arrival of foreigners to work in specific professions, or the arrival of students. It also includes the creation of conditions for their arrival.
<b>Category 3</b>	It includes the area of dealing with migration already in the case of presence in Slovakia / in their daily life. This means, for example, creating conditions for their life, integration into society, etc.
<b>Category 4</b>	It covers the topic of Slovaks living abroad and their potential return, as well as the issue of emigration from Slovakia.

In the case of the political parties of the government coalition, the mutual programmatic coherence is also reflected, as well as how the priorities of the election manifestos have been translated into the government's programme statement. Based on the focus of the text, the main source of data are the manifestos of the selected political parties for the early elections to the National Assembly of the Slovak Republic in 2023, which reflect all key attributes related to the migration issue. The key elements of the analysis are the words migration, foreigner, foreign / abroad, including their linguistic equivalents in Slovak. Based on the results of the 2023 elections, the group of monitored political parties includes those that fulfilled the conditions for entering the parliament. The monitored group of political parties includes SMER-SD, Hlas-SD, SNS, Progressive Slovakia (PS), Freedom and Solidarity (SaS), Ordinary people and independent personalities and friends (OLaNO a friends), and The Christian Democratic Movement (KDH).

The article is divided into two main chapters. Chapter II provides an overview of researchers' current findings on the nature of political discourse relating to the topic of migration in Slovakia. Chapter III analyses the relevant election manifestos and the government's programme statement.

## II. The topic of migration in the political discourse in Slovakia

Shortly after the formation of the party system, the development of political parties in Slovakia began to diverge from the classical cleavages conceptualised by Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan.<sup>5</sup> Since the 1990s, Slovak society has been consistently shaped by one dominant cleavage, accompanied by various secondary cleavages. This primary cleavage has significantly influenced the configuration of the party system and, to a certain extent, has fostered the creation of two opposing political camps. In several periods, these camps have also been personalized, for example, during the 1990s, as Mečiar vs. Anti-Mečiar,<sup>6</sup> and later as Fico vs. Anti-Fico. Amidst these cleavages, the issue of migration has also gradually entered political discourse.

In the Slovak context, the topic of migration has become a key area of interest across various academic disciplines. A prominent role is played by research into political discourse, whether through the analysis of political communication by individual actors across different platforms and communication channels or through the examination of party manifestos.<sup>7</sup> Slovakia and its representatives have been studied within comparative frameworks, for instance, alongside Hungary,<sup>8</sup> the Czech Republic,<sup>9</sup> and other countries,<sup>10</sup> as well as inde-

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<sup>5</sup> Lipset, Rokkan.

<sup>6</sup> See more on cleavages in the early years of the Slovak Republic: Krno, 61–71.

<sup>7</sup> E.g.: Futák-Campbell, 541–561; Zvada, 216–235; Mihálik, Jankoľa, 1–25.

<sup>8</sup> Futák-Campbell, 541–561.

<sup>9</sup> Navrátil, Kluknavská, 250–268.

<sup>10</sup> Henderson.

pendently as a standalone case.<sup>11</sup> These studies frequently adopt an individualized approach, focusing on key leaders and public figures such as the prime ministers of Slovakia and Hungary,<sup>12</sup> or on political parties – although even in the latter case, individual politicians often remain central to the analysis.<sup>13</sup> In examining political discourse, traditional media such as print media,<sup>14</sup> television, and radio<sup>15</sup> are not overlooked. Research also does not overlook another significant actor in political discourse in recent years – namely, the alternative media.<sup>16</sup>

The Slovak political discourse on migration is characterised by negative emotions and connotations. In the Slovak context, migration is often associated with potential security threats.<sup>17</sup> Research often concludes that securitization dominates in the context of migration, meaning that it is primarily viewed through a security lens, while other significant aspects are overlooked.<sup>18</sup> The nature of political discourse on migration in the past has contributed to the emergence of anti-migration sentiment in society, often pragmatically employed for electoral gain. As noted by Viera Žúborová and Ingrid Borárosová, an indicator of this is the noticeable decline in negative rhetoric by political representatives in the media after elections.<sup>19</sup> It is also important to emphasize that Slovak political figures – such as Prime Minister Robert Fico – have repeatedly linked migrants with terrorism.<sup>20</sup> Anti-Muslim and anti-Islam rhetoric is also present in the political discourse.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, Christianity is often instrumentalized as a means of draw-

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<sup>11</sup> Mihálik, Jankola, 1–25; Zvada, 216–235; Grančayová, Kazharski, 259–277.

<sup>12</sup> Futák-Campbell, 541–561.

<sup>13</sup> Mihálik, Jankola, 1–25.

<sup>14</sup> Žúborová, Borárosová, 1–19.

<sup>15</sup> Kissová, 743–766.

<sup>16</sup> Ižak, 53–57.

<sup>17</sup> Futák-Campbell, 541–561.

<sup>18</sup> Androvičová, 319–339; Androvičová, Bolečeková, 7–27.

<sup>19</sup> Žúborová, Borárosová, 1–19.

<sup>20</sup> Futák-Campbell, 541–561.

<sup>21</sup> Zvada, 216–235.

ing boundaries and emphasizing a distinct collective identity.<sup>22</sup> Research by Michaela Grančayová and Aliaksei Kazharski, which focuses specifically on the portrayal of Muslims in Slovak political discourse, highlights several key findings. Among them is the observation that while direct contact with Muslim communities is often positive or at least neutral, the portrayal in the media – where political messaging dominates – is shaped by factors not grounded in real experience, but rather in constructed narratives.<sup>23</sup> Despite this, it is important to note the presence of a deliberately constructed dichotomy in political discourse: a positive “us” versus a negative “them”.<sup>24</sup> This media narrative inevitably filters into public opinion. Existing surveys, including research conducted among residents of the Nitra region, demonstrate that respondents frequently associate migrants with predominantly negative perceptions.<sup>25</sup>

Several scholars<sup>26</sup> agree that the topic of migration is often employed in a pragmatic manner, as previously mentioned, with the aim of increasing electoral support. It can also be argued that multiple political parties have adopted rhetorical narratives traditionally associated with the far right.<sup>27</sup> Some scholars go even further, claiming that migration has become one of the core electoral issues in selected elections,<sup>28</sup> or that it has significantly shaped pre-election discourse.<sup>29</sup> The issue of migration gained greater prominence in Slovak political discourse following the major migration crisis between 2015 and 2016.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Kisoová, 743–766; Walter, 2016, 39–60.

<sup>23</sup> Grančayová, Kazharski, 259–277.

<sup>24</sup> Kisoová, 743–766.

<sup>25</sup> Filipec, Vargová, 165–175.

<sup>26</sup> E.g.: Futák-Campbell, 541–561.

<sup>27</sup> Androvičová, 2016, 39–64.

<sup>28</sup> Zvada, 216–235.

<sup>29</sup> Walter, 2016, 39–60.

<sup>30</sup> Androvičová, 319–339; Androvičová, 2016, 39–64; Štefančík, Biliková, Goloshchuk, 173–185.

In effect, one can identify two distinct thematic waves related to migration in the Slovak political discourse in recent years. The first one began in 2015 and 2016, while the latter is associated with the war in Ukraine.<sup>31</sup> It is also important to note that the nature of the discourse and the perceived threats communicated in the context of migration have evolved over time. As the findings of Radoslav Štefančík and his colleagues indicate, while the discourse around 2015 predominantly emphasized cultural differences, in the case of refugees from Ukraine, this aspect has been relatively marginalized. Instead, economic concerns – such as the idea that support for refugees might come at the expense of domestic citizens – have come to the forefront, along with discussions about threats to personal safety. The authors also emphasize that the construction of a negative image and perception of threat is not always directly initiated by politicians. Social media users, particularly those operating anonymous accounts, play an important role by extending or amplifying the critical remarks made by politicians with their own highly negative commentary in online discussion threads.<sup>32</sup>

### III. Migration issues and political party manifestos

In the election manifestos of the monitored political parties, the issue of migration was reflected in different ways. First of all, it is worth noting that the Slovak political parties in general take a different approach in their manifestos. Basically, there are two heterogeneous groups. The first group has a more elaborate document. It covers several sectors and tries to be more detailed. The SaS party, for example, has long been profiled according to the scope and quality of the content elaborated in the manifesto. On the other hand, there are parties that offer only short manifestos, often expressed in just a few points. For ex-

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<sup>31</sup> Práznovská, 95–117.

<sup>32</sup> Štefančík, Biliková, Goloshchuk, 173–185.

ample, in 2016, the most successful political party in modern Slovak history, the SMER-SD, offered a five-point manifesto with priorities in the areas of economy, state security, public services, raising living standards and strengthening the rule of law.<sup>33</sup> The 15-point electoral manifesto of the SNS for the 2023 elections, presented in a three-page document, is also a good example that falls into this category.<sup>34</sup> With this in mind, it is appropriate to consider the following table and the possibilities for addressing the issue. The opposite approach is taken in the case of the SaS or the OĽaNO and friends. For the elections they have prepared election manifestos of more than 200 pages, the OĽaNO and friends 241 pages<sup>35</sup> and the SaS 260 pages.<sup>36</sup>

The focus of this chapter is therefore on the issue of migration in the context of the treatment of the issue by selected political parties. The first step is an examination of the extent to which the issue is addressed in each party's manifesto. This is followed by an examination of the content itself. Four thematic categories are created to cover this area.

As can be seen in Table 2, only two political parties devoted a separate, comprehensive section of their manifestos to the issue of migration. This is the case of the Hlas-SD and the KDH. In the case of the Hlas-SD, the relevant part of the manifesto is 401 words long and is located in the sub-chapter entitled Borders and Migration under the broader theme of Security and Defence. A second example of a separate section can be found in the KDH manifesto. It is 166 words long and entitled 'Migration'. It is included in the section on 'Slovakia's Position in the International Community'.

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<sup>33</sup> SMER-SD, *Priority programu strany SMER – SD pre roky 2016 – 2020* (2016), <https://stwebsmer.strana-smer.sk/priority-programu-strany-smer-sd-pre-roky-2016-2020-0>.

<sup>34</sup> SNS, 15 programových priorít Slovenskej národnej strany pre Slovensko (2023), [https://www.sns.sk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/VP\\_Web.pdf](https://www.sns.sk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/VP_Web.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> OĽANO a priatelia, *Vyhrá mafia alebo ľudia. Ty rozhodneš* (2023), <https://www.obycajniludia.sk/volebny-program-2023/>.

<sup>36</sup> Sloboda a Solidarita, *Program ekonomického rastu* (Bratislava: Sloboda a Solidarita, 2023), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LtK9nyf9Rl1KKWEbGn3ro3l0zAqbawwk/view>.



As can be seen from the above, the other party manifestos did not have a separate chapter on migration. In several cases, the issues related to migration were presented in several parts, depending on the issue. For example, in the case of the OĽaNO and friends, migration issues can be found in the section on research and innovation, people in material need and at risk, or security. At the same time, there is also a situation where, despite the absence of a separate chapter/subchapter dedicated to this topic, the issue of migration is concentrated in the specific section/sections. The very short SNS manifesto is such an example; this topic is concentrated in a section entitled “The Rule of Law and the Secure State.”

The government’s manifesto reflects the approach of two of the three ruling parties. There is no separate chapter on migration, although the issue is addressed in several parts.

TABLE 2: Election manifestos of political parties – basic characteristics

Political Party	Separate chapter / subchapter	Extent of a separate chapter	Title	PDF / docx File
<b>SMER-SD</b>	no	401	-	yes
<b>Hlas-SD</b>	yes	0	Security and defence → Borders and migration	yes
<b>SNS</b>	no	0	Part of item: Rule of law and security	yes
<b>Government’s programme statement</b>	no	0	-	yes
<b>KDH</b>	yes	166 words	Slovakia’s position in the international community – Migration	yes
<b>SaS</b>	no	0	-	yes
<b>PS</b>	no	0	-	no
<b>OĽaNO and friends</b>	no	0	-	yes

Source: Author based on the manifestos of political parties

This chapter also includes an analysis of the content of political parties' manifestos. As mentioned above, different political parties approach the issue of migration in different ways. The table below summarises the coverage of the four categories created. The SMER-SD party covers the fewest categories. In fact, in its manifesto, it deals almost exclusively with the issue that falls under category 1. The SNS, despite its rather sparse manifesto, was able to cover two categories with its issues. The election manifesto of the SaS is similar. It also covers two defined categories. The PS manifesto does not include the solution of migration problems related to the presence of migrants on the territory of Slovakia and their potential life, and therefore, the topics falling under category 3. The other political parties, namely the Hlas-SD, the OĽaNO and friends and the KDH, covered all the established categories in their electoral programme documents. It should also be noted that there are also political parties that, paradoxically, do not have the most thematically covered category 1, but develop another one of the created categories to a greater extent. It is positive that practically all other political parties, with the exception of the two governing parties, reflect the needs of the Slovak market and that the arrival of either workers or students from abroad can be important for Slovakia as such.

TABLE 3: Coverage of migration issues in the manifestos of selected political parties in the 2023 elections

<b>Political Party</b>	<b>Category 1: Migration from the perspective of incoming migrants (rather negative)</b>	<b>Category 2: Migration as a need for Slovakia (rather positive)</b>	<b>Category 3: Solving the problem of migrants, on the territory of Slovakia</b>	<b>Category 4: Foreign Slovaks; emigration</b>
SMER-SD	covered	uncovered	uncovered	uncovered
Hlas-SD	covered	covered	covered	covered

SNS	covered	uncovered	uncovered	covered
Government's programme statement	covered	covered	covered	covered
PS	covered	covered	uncovered	covered
SaS	covered	covered	uncovered	uncovered
OLaNO and friends	covered	covered	covered	covered
KDH	covered	covered	covered	covered

Source: Author based on the manifestos of political parties

The analysis of election manifestos reveals several rather paradoxical situations. Although the topic of migration was one of the key themes for several political parties during the election campaign – frequently communicated to voters and often used as a tool to evoke negative emotions – it is not strongly reflected in their official manifestos. One of the more prominent examples of this is the political party, SMER-SD, which mentions the topic of migration in only a single instance. It states that any solution to European migration policy must reflect the interests of Slovakia.<sup>37</sup> This point can be interpreted as a negative stance in this area, as the party has long positioned itself in opposition to migration itself, as well as to European migration policy. This statement only fulfils the first of the monitored categories related to this issue. A similarly sparse treatment of the topic is found in the election manifesto of the SNS. There are two points that fall under category 1: the rejection of mandatory quotas and of the Marrakesh Pact on migration.<sup>38</sup> In both cases, the issue is addressed through a negative stance. However, the SNS also addresses a topic falling under category 4 in its manifesto: it expresses an ambition to create conditions to limit the brain drain abroad – thus touching upon a certain form of emi-

<sup>37</sup> SMER-SD, *Volebný program strany SMER – slovenská sociálna demokracia* (2023), <https://www.strana-smer.sk/aktuality/blogy/post/volby-2023>.

<sup>38</sup> SNS, *15 programových priorít*, 2023.

gration. As can be seen, two of the three political parties forming the governing coalition based on the 2023 election results addressed this issue in only a very limited way.

In stark contrast stands the third governing party, the Hlas-SD. It belongs to the smaller group of parties that address the issue of migration in greater detail. The drafters of its manifesto even dedicated an entire chapter or subchapter specifically to this topic. Despite this deeper focus, certain commonalities with its coalition partners can still be found. Similar to the SNS, the Hlas-SD program rejects mandatory quotas and emphasizes the principle of voluntariness – stating that the scope of solidarity among states should remain fully within their national competence. Like the SMER-SD, it declares that Slovakia should be an active contributor to developing solutions in this area (both of which fall under category 1). Like the SNS, the Hlas-SD also highlights the need to prevent the emigration of Slovak citizens (category 4).<sup>39</sup>

The Hlas-SD party addresses all four defined categories in its manifesto. In addition to the points already categorized, it also emphasizes the necessity of European cooperation in solving issues related to migration. It calls for the joint protection of external borders and supports return policies that would increase the rate of return of illegal migrants. The manifesto reiterates a long-standing idea present in Slovak political discourse: the need to address the root causes of migration in the countries of origin. The program also contains a negative observation that uncontrolled migration poses a potential threat. Nevertheless, in some instances, the Hlas-SD manifesto treats migration as a positive phenomenon. According to the party, state-regulated and controlled migration can contribute to economic growth, particularly by addressing labour shortages in key professions.<sup>40</sup> Given the current demographic trends – for example, the year 2024 marked a historically

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<sup>39</sup> Based on: Hlas-SD, *Rezortný program* (2023), <https://strana-hlas.sk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Rezortny-program-HLAS.pdf>.

<sup>40</sup> Based on: Hlas-SD, *Rezortný program*, 2023.

low number of births<sup>41</sup> – this may represent one of the viable solutions to stabilize the population outlook. This ambition falls under category 2. Additionally, the manifesto includes proposals to simplify or revise the conditions for foreign labour and potentially to recruit international students in the critical fields of study.<sup>42</sup>

Category 3 is represented in several areas within the Hlas-SD election manifesto. Notably, the party expresses the ambition to create conditions for the integration of migrants and aims to reform the current system of recognizing migrant qualifications. The manifest also reflects the party's self-identification as a "party of the regions," as it acknowledges the role of self-governing regions in this area. These regional authorities are expected to act as relevant stakeholders in migration matters, and they should receive the necessary support.<sup>43</sup>

The Hlas-SD also addresses category 4 in its manifesto. Specifically, it declares an interest in creating conditions that would encourage current students to remain in Slovakia and promote the return of Slovaks living abroad. The party aims to increase support for expatriate Slovaks, establish a dedicated centre for this purpose, and direct attention toward them via public television and radio broadcasting.<sup>44</sup>

To some extent, the 2023–2027 Government's programme statement is shaped by the extent to which the governing parties have elaborated on their respective election manifestos. That said, a more detailed examination of the government document reveals that a significant portion of its content related to migration policy is indeed grounded in the election manifestos of these parties, predominantly the Hlas-SD.

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<sup>41</sup> It is also worth noting that fewer than 50,000 live births were recorded in both 2023 and 2024. See more: STATdat. *Narodení podľa pohlavia, hmotnosti, legitimacy a vitality – SR, oblasti, kraje, okresy, mesto, vidiek.* (2025). accessed April 21, 2025. <https://lnk.sk/foys>.

<sup>42</sup> Based on: Hlas-SD, *Rezortný program*, 2023.

<sup>43</sup> Based on: Hlas-SD, *Rezortný program*, 2023.

<sup>44</sup> Based on: Hlas-SD, *Rezortný program*, 2023.

The most significant overlap between the manifestos of the governing political parties and the Government's programme statement is found in the rejection of mandatory quotas. This element is repeatedly emphasized in the government document. Additionally, it explicitly rejects punitive financial mechanisms related to the redistribution of migrants. Similarly, the document reflects the ambition for the EU migration policies to align with Slovakia's national interests. Additionally, the long-standing emphasis by the SMER-SD on a sovereign foreign policy – extended to include migration, particularly illegal migration – is also present. However, the rejection of the Marrakesh Pact on Migration, a point included in the SNS manifesto, is not reflected in the Government's programme statement.<sup>45</sup>

Given the limited elaboration of the SNS and the SMER-SD election manifestos, the Government's programme statement shows the greatest degree of alignment with the Hlas-SD election manifesto. The manifesto explicitly addresses the need for regulated migration – migration that reflects the needs of the labour market while not compromising national security. It also raises the issue of the recognition of foreign qualifications. Illegal migration is characterized as a negative phenomenon and a security threat, with the protection against this form of migration defined as a strategic goal. To this end, the Government's programme statement emphasizes the need to establish a repatriation system in cooperation with other countries. The Hlas-SD manifesto is also reflected in the document's assertion that migration challenges should be addressed at their point of origin. The manifesto underscores the importance of securing the integrity of the EU's external borders and calls for decisive EU action against illegal migration. At the same time, it expresses the ambition to prevent the migration agenda from being used as a tool for political pressure against individ-

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<sup>45</sup> Based on: Vláda Slovenskej republiky, *Programové vyhlásenie vlády Slovenskej republiky* (2023), Accessed April 21, 2025. <https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Dynamic/DocumentPreview.aspx?DocID=535376>.

ual states. The broader thematic framework of the manifesto builds upon these foundational points. In terms of short-term priorities, in addition to the development of a repatriation system and the inclusion of illegal migration as a key element in national defence strategy (including the strengthening of relevant armed forces), the document also stresses the need to allocate sufficient resources to combat illegal migration. The medium-term priorities outlined in the Government's programme statement are, to a large extent, a direct reflection of the governing parties' election manifestos – especially of the Hlas-SD.<sup>46</sup>

Beyond these aspects, the Government's programme statement identifies the need to develop legislation aimed at preventing the exploitation of migrants. It also highlights the migratory flow from Asia and Africa to Europe, as well as, to a lesser extent, issues related to Ukraine, framing them as major challenges. In response, it calls for enhanced cooperation with international partners to monitor risks and the adoption of necessary legislation in the field. Finally, the manifesto includes objectives such as attracting Slovaks living abroad back to the country, preventing their potential emigration, and encouraging foreign nationals to come to Slovakia to study or work in professions where there are labour shortages.<sup>47</sup>

As it can be seen, the Government's programme statement in many respects mirrors the election manifestos of the governing political parties. It draws most heavily from the manifesto of the Hlas-SD, which addressed the topic of migration in the greatest depth. However, it is important to note that, under the terms of the coalition agreement, the ministry responsible for foreign affairs was allocated to the SMER-SD party. From the perspective of the predefined analytical categories, topics categorised as category 1 clearly dominate the Government's programme statement's overall thematic orientation.

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<sup>46</sup> Based on: Vláda Slovenskej republiky, *Programové vyhlásenie*, 2023.

<sup>47</sup> Based on: Vláda Slovenskej republiky, *Programové vyhlásenie*, 2023.

The election manifestos of the political parties that remained in opposition, similar to those of the governing parties, differ in the extent to which they address the issue of migration. For example, the currently strongest opposition party, the PS, addresses this topic in only a few points. Its focus falls within category 1, category 2, and category 4. Within category 1, they propose certain changes or reforms in policies or even institutions. As a result, they aim to adjust migration policy and the Dublin system, reform Frontex, implement an effective return policy, and provide financial assistance to third countries. They also advocate for closer cooperation in asylum policy at the EU level. Like the previously mentioned parties, they consider illegal migration a problem that needs to be actively addressed. Under category 2, they emphasize the need to attract professionals in specific fields such as science and healthcare. Regarding category 4, they propose measures to prevent the emigration of students and workers abroad. The program also mentions the importance of communication with Slovaks living abroad.<sup>48</sup>

In its manifesto, a long-standing critic of European migration policy, the political party SaS presents both certain criticisms and constructive proposals in this area. First and foremost, it highlights failures in both legal and illegal migration. The performance of the immigration police and cross-border cooperation should be improved. The relevant ministry is expected to play an active role in addressing problems in this field. The political party also proposes the development of contingency plans for potential migration waves and cooperation with diplomatic missions of non-European countries. These topics fall under category 1. However, SaS also views migration from the perspective of labour market needs, thereby addressing category 2 as well. In this context, it proposes the introduction of a points-based system to de-

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<sup>48</sup> Based on: Progresívne Slovensko, *Plán pre budúcnosť* (2023), <https://progresivne.sk/program/>.



termine the necessity of foreign workers for the labour market and calls for the reduction of existing bureaucracy related to the employment of foreigners. The party also expresses an ambition to improve conditions for the arrival of international students to Slovakia.<sup>49</sup>

The election manifesto of the political party OĽaNO and friends can be considered relatively comprehensive in the area of migration, covering all four established categories. In category 1, the party rejects mandatory quotas (similarly to Hlas-SD and the SNS) and proposes a reform of the EU asylum system. It also emphasizes the need to protect Schengen borders, combat smugglers, ensure thorough registration of migrants, and improve return policies. Topics falling under category 2 reflect the needs of the Slovak labour market. The party calls for an identification of market needs and the establishment of principles for recruiting workers from outside Slovakia, thus creating conditions for immigration in specific sectors such as science and education. They also aim to attract foreign students, including postdoctoral researchers. In relation to category 3, the program outlines measures to be taken once a foreigner or migrant is already in Slovakia. It stresses the need to develop a long-term integration policy and views migrants as partners in addressing their challenges within Slovak conditions. Additionally, there is an ambition to collect, analyze, and evaluate data on migrants. Topics under the final category, category 4, are particularly well-developed in the OĽaNO's manifesto. The party focuses on attracting foreign Slovaks and their children, with the ambition to develop relationships with Slovak communities abroad and to involve them in state governance. It also seeks ways to reduce emigration from Slovakia.<sup>50</sup>

One of the oldest political parties within the Slovak party system belongs to the group of those with a more comprehensively elaborated electoral manifesto. This is reflected in the fact that its proposals

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<sup>49</sup> Based on: Sloboda a Solidarita, *Program ekonomického rastu*, 2023.

<sup>50</sup> Based on: OĽaNO a priatelia, *Výhrá mafia alebo ľudia*, 2023.

address all four designated categories relating to migration. The KDH has extensively developed positions particularly within category 1. In several respects, it aligns with other relevant political actors operating within the Slovak political system. First and foremost, the KDH declares that Slovakia should be a reliable partner. The program expresses support for maintaining the status quo in a strict asylum policy, emphasizes the protection of the Schengen borders, supports investments in border protection, and aims to minimize illegal migration by addressing its root causes. The KDH advocates for solving problems in regions of origin (including the concept of migrant zones in third countries) and strengthening participation in development aid. The manifesto also includes a call for an effective return policy. A sense of threat is present regarding illegal migration, yet the approach remains constructive, as the party also emphasizes a moral obligation to help. Simultaneously, it stresses the importance of identifying those who genuinely need assistance while underscoring the necessity for accepted migrants to respect societal norms. The program also outlines potential solutions and necessary steps for managing this issue. Themes falling under category 2 involve support for migration policy in a way that facilitates the gradual filling of labour shortages. Related to this, the program proposes adjustments (or rather simplification) of the process for employing foreigners. The KDH also expresses interest in attracting foreign professionals and encouraging international students to pursue education at Slovak institutions. Category 3 is represented by a single objective – supporting the recognition of qualifications from foreign educational institutions. In the final category 4, the KDH addresses the issue of Slovaks living abroad. The manifesto includes an ambition to support the return of foreign Slovaks to Slovakia. It also includes support for Slovaks who remain abroad.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Based on: KDH, *Lepšie 2023: Volebný program* (2023), <https://kdh.sk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/KDH-program-2023-web.pdf>.

## IV. Conclusion

An analysis of the content of the election manifestos of the selected political parties with a focus on the issue of migration has revealed several facts. As expected, each political party approached the issue in a different way. Despite the fact that this issue has been a significant part of the Slovak discourse for a long time and that several political parties have tried to address the electorate through this issue, it remains rather marginal in their election manifestos. This creates a paradoxical situation. Some political parties (in particular the SMER-SD and the SNS), which have a rather negative profile in their rhetoric on this issue and which work with the negative emotions of the electorate, are rather strict in their electoral manifestos in this area. The opposite of these two parties is the third governmental party, namely the Hlas-SD. It has been working with negative emotions in this area for a long time, but in its manifesto, it deals with this issue more extensively and even with some positive connotations. There are, therefore, certain differences between the ways in which political parties communicate with their voters and the content of their electoral manifestos.

As the analysis of the content of the election manifestos has shown, practically every political party at least minimally addresses the issue of migration and its possible solutions. There is also a great deal of overlap in the fact that there should be cooperation within the EU. However, Slovak interests should be reflected here. On the positive side, we can point to the fact that several political parties are aware of the need to open up to the outside world and that it is necessary to attract workers or even students to Slovakia in the areas where they are needed. The need to stop the emigration of Slovaks abroad and to attract Slovaks living abroad back to Slovakia is also perceived by several political parties.

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