

STRENGTHENING TRUST IN GOVERNMENTS AND INSTITUTIONS

Exclusive roundtable discussion

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Trust in public institutions is a vital element of a functioning democracy, fostering social cohesion and economic stability. In Slovakia, a deficit of public trust has hindered societal progress and highlighted the need for comprehensive reforms. Citizens encounter inefficiencies in governance, perceive a lack of transparency, and face limited opportunities for meaningful engagement with both public and private institutions. Recognizing these challenges, a roundtable discussion with key stakeholders from the public, private, and non-governmental sectors was held on November 6, 2024, to define strategies for enhancing institutional effectiveness and transparency as well as to

explore actionable steps to rebuild trust and enhance institutional credibility. Despite a high importance of trust in public institutions, Slovakia faces significant challenges, with only 31% of Slovaks reporting moderate or high trust in the national government—below the OECD average of 39%—as revealed by the [2024 OECD Trust Survey](#). Trust is notably higher for local governments and the police, but alarmingly low for political parties and news media. Drawing on these insights, this executive summary outlines actionable recommendations to rebuild public trust in Slovakia's institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUILDING TRUST IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS AND GOVERNANCE IN SLOVAKIA

Addressing the trust deficit requires a nuanced approach informed by data, strategic reforms, and inclusive communication. A coherent effort across

sectors is vital to restore public confidence and ensure Slovakia's institutions are resilient, efficient, and responsive.

1. MAPPING AND UNDERSTANDING TRUST

A comprehensive understanding of trust dynamics is critical to devising effective solutions. Existing research and data should be consolidated and expanded to fill crucial gaps. It is essential to collect data at the regional level, incorporating perspectives from all districts. Additionally, trust assessments should extend beyond traditional state institutions to include actors such as churches, businesses, non-governmental organizations, and the military. Mapping citizens' identities and their perceptions of both domestic and foreign actors will further illuminate the factors shaping public trust.

2. ENHANCING INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY AND INDEPENDENCE

Institutions must be seen as capable, independent, professional, and results-driven to inspire public confidence. A framework for improving institutional quality should emerge from broad societal consensus and focus on several key areas. Political influence must be clearly separated from the operations of independent institutions, ensuring impartiality and integrity. Professional civil servants should enjoy career and financial stability, with their roles balanced by accountability for achieving measurable results. Institutions must focus on transparent, outcome-oriented governance, leveraging best practices from other sectors to enhance operational efficiency. Regulatory frameworks, particularly in areas such as procurement and EU funding, must be restructured to prioritize trust and integrity, replacing systems rooted in mistrust with streamlined, efficient alternatives.

3. DEVELOPING A LONG-TERM VISION

Slovakia lacks a unified, long-term vision that transcends political cycles and provides stability for institutions, businesses, and citizens alike. A strategic roadmap should outline clear national goals, ensuring continuity across administrations. Highlighting successful local initiatives as scalable examples can help foster optimism and demonstrate tangible progress.

4. FOSTERING COLLABORATIVE COMMUNICATION

Trust-building is a collective responsibility that requires collaboration across the government, private sector, and civil society. A national communication strategy should underscore the role of trust in ensuring a high quality of life and sustainable prosperity. Particular attention should be paid to engaging youth aged 15–25, who are increasingly disillusioned and prone to emigration. Targeted communication campaigns can showcase opportunities within Slovakia, using relatable success stories and innovative platforms to strengthen their connection to their home country.

5. STREAMLINING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Efficiency and transparency in governance are essential for rebuilding trust. Slovakia's public administration should be simplified, automated, and made more transparent to reduce bureaucratic barriers. Digital tools and open data initiatives can help demystify institutional processes and enhance public understanding. Empowering regional governments and encouraging resource-sharing among smaller municipalities will also ensure that public services are delivered more effectively and equitably.

6. ENCOURAGING PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Collaboration between the public and private sectors is a powerful tool for innovation and trust-building. Public-private partnerships should be expanded to address challenges in infrastructure, education, and healthcare. These partnerships can also showcase the private sector as a key ally in improving institutional efficiency and delivering results.

7. STRENGTHENING CIVIC AND VALUE-BASED EDUCATION

Education plays a pivotal role in fostering trust and civic responsibility. Civic education initiatives should be expanded to increase public understanding of institutional roles and responsibilities. Additionally, value-based education can combat misinformation and polarization, encouraging critical thinking and shared societal values.

8. RECOGNIZING LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Trust is closely tied to leadership and results. Recognizing and celebrating individuals and organizations that deliver tangible progress is essential for inspiring confidence. Transparent mechanisms for measuring and reporting government performance can further reinforce public trust by providing clear evidence of accountability.

CONCLUSION

Rebuilding trust in public institutions is both an urgent challenge and an opportunity for Slovakia to reaffirm its commitment to democratic values and societal progress. By pursuing data-driven reforms, fostering collaboration, and embracing a vision that transcends political divides, Slovakia can create institutions that

earn public confidence, enhance social cohesion, and drive sustainable development. Trust is built not through promises but through actions, transparency, and tangible results—and by prioritizing these, Slovakia can chart a course toward a more prosperous and united future.