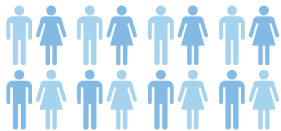


SLOVAKIA

Slovakia is a mountainous, landlocked country in Central Europe bordered by Austria, Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Ukraine. Located in the heart of Europe, Slovakia is known for its dramatic natural landscapes with castles dating as far back as the medieval 12th century. The capital city, Bratislava, lies near the Austrian border and Danube River, and features a pedestrian-friendly Old Town with an active cafe culture. Slovakia was once a part of the Kingdom of Hungary and formed its first independent state and political program in 1939. The end of World War II led to the restoration of Czechoslovakia, and soon after the communist party seized power, until the democratic revolution took hold in 1989. In 1993 the Slovak Republic reclaimed its independent sovereign statehood, and became a member of the European Union in 2004. Its currency is the euro.

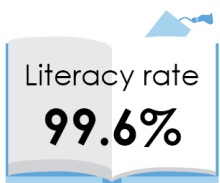


Population
5,462,172



18,933 MI²

About twice the size of
New Hampshire

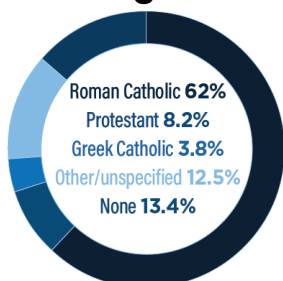


Literacy rate
99.6%

Ethnicities



Religions



FAMILY LIFE

In a typical Slovak household there are, on average, two children. In recent years families are becoming smaller and grandparents usually live close by, but not in the same house. In general both parents work and are financially responsible for providing income. In most cases, parents have equal authority, but it is not uncommon for the man of the house to have the final word, particularly in rural communities.

Children are expected to contribute to the cleanliness of the home. If a family lives in an apartment, chores are not typically assigned to children with respect to gender, but this is not the case in houses, where girls will help clean the house and boys will help with maintaining outdoor tasks. Parents are usually responsible for cooking. If children do offer to help or are integrated in the process, it is usually the daughter who is involved.

Internet is not strictly monitored or restricted by parents. Parents highly discourage children from sharing personal information online. Technology is commonly shared in the home among members, but items like clothing are not usually shared property. It is also common for teenagers to receive pocket money from their parents and it is their responsibility to manage the money. Some teenagers work part-time as well.

Some parents are actively involved in their child's activities, while others are not. Parents are also not usually involved in transporting their children. Children are expected to figure out public transportation to their social activities.

Teenagers are encouraged to think about their future career and the final decision is up to them, not their parents. However, it is not uncommon for parents to try to influence this decision.

Pets are not common in Slovakia, and families in general do not let their pets enter the home.

FRIENDSHIP

It is acceptable for teens to have friends of the opposite sex and to socialize with them one-on-one. Teenagers make most of their friends at school and through extracurricular activities, but they often have close friendships with their neighbors. It is not common for teenagers to share money with each other, and if teenagers borrow money from a friend, they're expected to pay it back. The term "friend" is *not* reserved for very close friendship, but Slovak teenagers also would not call someone they only know in passing a friend.

Eye contact is considered important and a sign of respect when you are speaking to someone. Teenagers feel comfortable showing negative emotions quite freely amongst their peers and family.

They may complain, express disappointment or offense, or express dislike of something. Teenagers also maintain physical space between each other. Teenagers are taught to show respect to older generations. It is not common for teenagers to call adult neighbors or parents of friends by their first name. People are also very punctual and are expected to arrive on time, or five minutes early.

SCHOOL LIFE

Students are generally enrolled in 10 courses at a time and classes are 45 minutes long. Students have some subjects every day (i.e. Slovak literature, English or mathematics), and other subjects only 2-3 times per week. Students are also evaluated on a variety of tasks: daily homework, tests (mostly open-ended questions), and participation in class. Students are also often examined orally in front of their classmates. Some schools recently started implementing a similar system to the United States, where students will change classrooms and teachers through the day, but in most schools, students stay in one class during the day. One class has 20-30 students and they take all their lessons in the same classroom. Students are expected to be polite and show respect to their teacher. In some schools, they all have to stand up when the teacher enters the room.

Teenagers wear jeans and t-shirts to school and most of their clothes are ironed by their mothers. High schools also have rules about what clothes are acceptable for students to wear to school.

Teachers often call students by their first name, but the relationship remains formal. Informal relationship between students and teachers are uncommon. Students often find activities outside of schools, such as sports clubs or learning an instrument.

Schools do have harassment and bullying policies, and students can be expelled for harassment.

Parent-teacher meetings happen every few months, but aside from this, parents do not typically have direct contact with their children's teachers throughout the year.

FOOD

People will often offer guests food or drink, but it is not considered rude for a guest to politely decline. Portions are typically large, especially when served in restaurants. It is common for people to ask the restaurant to wrap up any uneaten food to take home. In most families, mothers prepare a bag lunch for their children to take to school. It is also common for teenagers to receive pocket money from their parents to buy their own lunch. People are aware of food allergies or medical conditions that necessitate specific diets. Vegetarianism is not common.

RELIGION

Most families do not attend church. Religious families generally attend a church once a week, but the church doesn't play a "civic" role and does not serve as community centers. For major holidays like Christmas or birthdays, teenagers are expected to give gifts to family members and close friends. The most important holiday is Christmas. Families often come together and everyone enjoys the holiday spirit. Christmas dinner is served on December 24, and families will open presents together under the Christmas tree. The next day families visit other relatives. New Years is also an important event that teenagers often celebrate with their friends.

PERSONAL CARE

Teenagers are often expected to shower daily, and twice a day if they're involved in physical activities. Teenagers don't usually wash their clothes after one use. It is more common to wash shirts after one use, and to wear pants more than once before washing them. Teenagers are not expected to wash their own clothes and most would not know how to use American style washing and drying machines. Teenagers are expected to keep the bathroom clean. Most people have one towel per member in the home which may be used more than once before it is washed.



The Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. FLEX provides competitively selected secondary school students from 22 countries in Europe and Eurasia with the opportunity to spend the academic year in the U.S. living with a volunteer host family and attending a host high school. Begun in 1993, FLEX now has over 29,000 alumni.