Youth Foresight Workshops

Workshop in Slovakia

by European Dialogue

Co-funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Project Title: **For Youth Information**

Project Number: 2024-1-SI02-KA220-YOU-000251355

Report Title/Title of a local workshop: **ED FORESIGHT WORKSHOP**

Date of Implementation: 24. February 2026

Duration: 6 hours

Location: Trnava

Prepared by: European Dialogue

Facilitator(s): Tomáš Janči and Stela Olejárová

1. Executive Summary

This report summarises a foresight workshop held for 21 students of public administration and political science, designed to explore the future of governance, civic engagement, and public policy in Slovakia up to the year 2050. The session aimed to equip future public servants with practical foresight techniques to better understand and shape long-term developments in the public sector. Through interactive scenario-building and trend analysis, participants identified key strategic priorities, including retaining young talent, digitising state services, improving housing accessibility, and addressing climate-induced migration. The workshop concluded with a shared vision of a proactive state that leverages its natural resources and digital infrastructure to ensure stability and prosperity for future generations.

2. Workshop Objectives and Context

The session aimed to equip future public servants and political analysts with practical foresight techniques to better understand, anticipate, and shape long-term developments in the public sector. By fostering a forward-looking mindset, the workshop encouraged participants to move beyond short-term political cycles and

Co-funded by
the European Union

consider the broader systemic shifts required for sustainable governance. Through interactive scenario building and trend analysis, the workshop also created space for participants to reflect on long-term developments likely to affect governance and public policy in Slovakia. Particular emphasis was placed on helping participants connect present-day challenges with future consequences and to think more strategically about possible responses. Ultimately, the session highlighted the importance of integrating future-oriented thinking into public administration education so that the next generation of leaders is better prepared to navigate an increasingly complex and uncertain world.

The main objectives were to:

- Introduce students to foresight methodology and its relevance to public policy, political strategy, and decision-making.
- Encourage critical thinking about current signals of change (weak signals) and their potential long-term impact on the public sector and political landscape.
- Facilitate a debate on controversial and complex topics such as AI in governance, electronic voting, and demographic shifts.
- Empower future public servants and political analysts to envision a proactive, rather than reactive, state administration.

3. Workshop Description

The workshop lasted 6 hours in total and followed a structured but flexible format combining introductory input, interactive methods, group work, discussion, and reflection.

It began with a welcome, introduction, and overview of foresight methods and tools, which introduced participants to the basic principles of foresight and its relevance to governance, civic engagement, and public policy. This was followed by a session on exploring foresight methods, during which participants became familiar with selected future-oriented approaches and their practical applications.

The next part focused on trends and signals, encouraging participants to reflect on current developments and early signs of change that may influence the future of Slovakia. This was followed by the Future Headlines activity and group work, in which participants worked with fictional but plausible future-oriented headlines to discuss possible developments and future challenges.

In the latter part, participants presented their ideas through group presentations and discussions, creating space for comparing perspectives and debating the future of governance and public policy. The workshop concluded with a wrap-up and reflection, allowing participants to summarise their main insights and reflect on what they had learned during the session.

4. Participants

A total of 21 participants took part in the workshop. The group consisted of university students specialising in public administration and political science. These young people demonstrated a strong interest in future governance, civic engagement, and policy-making, representing a diverse mix of backgrounds.

Gender Distribution:

- Female: 13 (61.9%)
- Male: 8 (38.1%)

The workshop group also reflected the project's inclusion dimension, as it brought together participants from different personal, social, and geographical backgrounds (notably, students from the Ukrainian minority). As university students, they are at a stage of life often marked by uncertainty about housing, employment, and long-term prospects, all of which are closely related to the workshop's topics. The participants were selected in collaboration with the Centre for the Support of Participation (CPP), which is part of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, and the intention was to attract a motivated and engaged group of students interested in public affairs and the future of Slovakia, rather than people with experience of foresight methods.

Co-funded by
the European Union

5. Main Results and Outputs

The workshop generated a set of key ideas, reflections, and future visions, and instead of focusing on today's problems, participants attempted to envision what Slovakia would look like in 2050 and what would need to change in order for it to get there.

Through discussion and work on future headlines, common themes emerged that are likely to shape the future of public administration and society, and one of the strongest messages was the need to keep young people in Slovakia. Participants agreed that if Slovakia is to be successful in 2050, it cannot afford to lose a large part of its young and educated population, and they talked about the need for better living conditions, more stable opportunities, and a general feeling that the state cares about its young citizens and wants them to stay.

The role of digital technologies, especially in public administration, was another common theme, and students were interested in the digital identity, and a better, and more widespread mobile application for official documents inspired by examples from abroad. They imagined that communication with the authorities will be simple, safe, and fast, and that digital tools will help reduce the bureaucracy instead of making it more complicated.

Housing was a very concrete and current problem mentioned by many participants, and they described the current housing situation as the decisive factor when it comes to whether young people will build their lives in Slovakia, and they mentioned the need for more accessible rental housing and fair long-term rental contracts, and referred to the Vienna model as a system that could inspire policy changes in Slovakia.

Slovakia's natural resources, especially drinking water, was discussed by the students, and in the context of climate change, and possible future migration caused by drought and extreme weather, the students see Slovakia's water reserves as a potential strategic advantage, and the resource should be protected and managed

wisely, not only from an environmental point of view, but also as an important element of the country's future stability.

A second key challenge mentioned was demographic change and the ageing of the population, and the discussion around positive discrimination and different ways to support families only underlined that this is a very complex and expert topic, and while the students acknowledged that finding good solutions in this field requires deeper analysis and broader political and social debate, the conclusions from the discussion were that finding solutions to this problem would require much more work and consultation with experts in the field.

The last of the workshop outputs touched on the future of democracy and participation, and was partly visible in the short discussion on internet voting, and here again the opinions were divided, with some students seeing it as a natural step forward towards modernisation, and others having strong concerns about security and trust, and this also shows that even among young people there is no easy consensus on how fast and how far democratic systems should be digitalised. In summary, the workshop outputs point towards a shared vision of a more proactive and forward-looking state in 2050, a country that supports its young people, uses technology in a smart and responsible way, takes housing and resources seriously, and is able to think beyond short-term political cycles.

To summarize the outcomes:

- Youth stated that it was necessary to retain them in Slovakia and they also expressed the desire for the state to facilitate their stay in Slovakia.
- They welcomed the concept of digital identity and e-services, and they would like to have an application for documents which would be user-friendly and widespread as in other countries.
- They pointed out that accommodation is a major issue for youth, therefore affordable housing and long-term rental agreements (similar to those in Vienna) are necessary.

Co-funded by
the European Union

- They believe that access to clean water in Slovakia is a major asset, so due to climate change and potential future immigration, they want to preserve and manage it responsibly.
- They recognise that there is an aging population with fewer young people, thus they consider this a significant challenge that requires specialists to discuss and propose long-term solutions.

6. Proposed Future Development Scenarios

The workshop aimed to develop possible development trajectories for the future of Slovakia based on the ideas, experiences and perspectives of young people, and by engaging the participants actively in the conversations about the year 2050, the results reflect real youth voices and real concerns about the long-term future of the country. The group worked not with fully formalised scenarios, but rather with future-oriented questions and headlines to sketch out what kind of Slovakia they would like to live in and what needs to change in order to get there, which also helps with the broader goal of the project to encourage future-oriented thinking among young people and their perception of themselves as actors who can impact long-term developments, and not only observers of current events.

At the workshop, the participants did not explicitly differentiate between positive, negative and surprising scenarios, but several clear lines of development for 2050 emerged, which were closely tied to youth retention, housing, the digitalisation of the state, demographic change and the strategic management of natural resources, because in the desired 2050 future that emerged from the discussions, Slovakia is a country in which young people genuinely want to stay, live and build their lives, rather than a country which they leave as soon as possible. The state and local authorities take youth retention seriously and create conditions in which people can find stable work, accessible housing and a feeling that they are welcome and needed, while affordable rental housing and fair, long-term rental contracts are available, partly inspired by the Vienna model, which gives young people and families stability when planning their future. Moreover, public administration is significantly more digital, efficient and user-friendly than today, with a widely used and trusted digital

identity application that allows citizens to handle most administrative tasks online in a simple and secure way, drawing on best-practice examples from abroad, and consequently, bureaucracy is reduced, and digital tools make everyday interaction with the state more transparent and convenient. At the same time, Slovakia's natural resources, especially its access to clean drinking water, are treated as a strategic asset and managed carefully, because in the context of climate change and possible migration linked to drought and extreme weather, water security is seen as one of the pillars of the country's long-term resilience, connecting environmental protection with a broader strategy for social stability and economic development.

Demographic decline and ageing population are not dismissed but proactively addressed by long-term policies that support families and improve the conditions for starting a family in Slovakia, which is acknowledged by the participants as a complex challenge that requires thoughtful design of measures like positive discrimination and new family support schemes. However, alongside this preferred direction, the participants also outlined what a negative trajectory would look like if certain issues are not addressed, in which the country would suffer from an ageing society, an outflow of young people, growing social tensions and public administration constantly reacting to crises instead of preparing for them. This helped to highlight areas where planning is needed earlier and more systematically, for example in long-term housing policy, user-centred digital public services, demographic planning, climate adaptation, and therefore, several types of strategic steps appeared repeatedly in the discussions, including stronger cooperation between national and local levels on housing and youth policy, so that cities and municipalities have real tools to offer accessible long-term rental options, and investment in the development and communication of digital identity and e-services, making sure these tools are secure, easy to use, and widely recognised. Additionally, treating water and other natural resources as strategic issues within national planning, and creating space for expert debate and public discussion on demographic and family policy, recognising that this area has no quick fixes but very high long-term impact, are also crucial steps.

Overall, the future development scenarios that emerged from the workshop do not describe one fixed picture of 2050 but rather a direction towards a Slovakia that is

Co-funded by
the European Union

able to think ahead, create conditions that encourage young people to stay and use both technology and natural resources in a responsible and forward-looking way.

7. Policy Implications and Recommendations

Policy implications and recommendations, the discussions at the workshop and the futures created during the workshop carry several important messages to policy and decision-makers in Slovakia, although the participants were not asked to write formal policy papers, their reflections lead quite directly to areas where public policy could change in order to better meet the needs and expectations of young people and prepare the country for 2050.

Youth Retention and Attractive Living Conditions

Youth retention and quality of life were strong, repeated messages indicating that, if Slovakia is to be successful in the long term, it needs to retain more young people in the country, which participants linked not only to salaries and jobs but also to a broader sense of stability and fairness in society. Therefore, policy implication is that youth and social policies should place greater emphasis on creating conditions that make it attractive and realistic for young people to stay in Slovakia, including stable job opportunities, clear and predictable rules, and a visible effort from public institutions to listen to youth concerns and include them in planning.

Housing Security as a Pillar of Youth Policy

Housing was one of the most decisive issues for the participants, and a number of them said that the current housing situation had a strong influence on whether they could imagine staying in Slovakia, because they spoke about high prices, insecure short-term rental contracts and a general feeling of instability, while they repeatedly referred to the example of Vienna, where affordable and long-term rental housing is a key element of social policy. For Slovak policy-makers, this means that housing should be treated as an integral part of youth and demographic policy, not just a matter of the market, and national and local authorities should develop measures that support the creation of affordable rental housing, encourage longer and fairer rental

contracts, and integrate urban planning, social policy and youth policy into comprehensive housing strategies that give young people a realistic chance to live independently and securely.

Strategic Management of Water and Natural Resources

In the discussion about the future, students identified access to clean drinking water as one of Slovakia's major assets, because in the context of climate change, and possible future migration caused by drought and extreme weather in other parts of the world, they saw water not only as an environmental issue, but also as a factor of long-term economic and social stability. According to this view, environmental and climate policies should treat water and other key natural resources as a strategic element of national resilience, and policy-makers should work on long-term strategies that simultaneously protect these resources and demonstrate a clear understanding of how they contribute to the country's security and development, while young people should be involved in such debates, so that they are familiar with both the risks and opportunities associated with natural resources.

Long-Term Demographic and Family Policy

Participants recognised that Slovakia is facing demographic change and an ageing population, and considered this one of the greatest long-term challenges. They proposed positive discrimination or stronger support measures for families, but also honestly acknowledged that this is an extremely complex issue that cannot be addressed through simple, short-term solutions. Therefore, for policy-makers this is a signal that demographic and family policy should be regarded as a long-term, cross-cutting area that affects many other sectors, including housing, employment, social services and education, and it will require meticulous expert work, political courage and open public debate, while young people should be included in these discussions, not to replace experts, but to ensure that the proposed measures genuinely reflect the reality and expectations of the generation most affected by them.

Human-Centred Digitalisation of Public Administration

Co-funded by
the European Union

There was strong interest in digital identity and public services, as participants obviously consider digital tools as an opportunity to make public administration more efficient and accessible if they are well-designed and widely recognised. However, digitalisation strategies should focus not only on technical solutions but also on user experience, trust, and accessibility, and policies should support the development of a clear, secure, and widely accepted digital identity system and e-services that genuinely reduce bureaucracy and are easy for all groups of citizens to use, including young people.

Modernising Democracy with Trust and Digital Literacy

The short but intense debate on internet voting made clear that young people are interested in modern forms of participation, but also that they are divided in their opinions, because some saw online voting as a natural and convenient step for a digital society, especially for young voters, while others worried about security, manipulation and trust in the results, which is a mirror of wider debates in society and suggests that any move towards digital democracy will have to be carried out extremely carefully. Consequently, policy-makers considering reforms in this area should balance accessibility and security, invest in clear public communication and in digital literacy, and test new tools in a transparent way, and it is also important to involve young people in the design, testing and evaluation of new participation mechanisms, so that democratic innovations are co-created with them, rather than presented to them as finished products.

Integrating Foresight into Youth Work and Policy Design

The workshop itself demonstrated that foresight methods can be a very useful way of involving young people in thinking about the future of their country, because even though the topics were complex and sometimes quite expert, participants were able to connect current developments with possible future impacts and to think in terms of 2050, not just the next few years. Therefore, policy-makers and institutions working with young people should consider incorporating future-thinking exercises, scenario building and visioning processes into their activities, which could contribute to policies that are more resilient, more in line with the expectations of younger

generations and better equipped to cope with uncertainty, and could also enhance the sense of young people that they have a stake in shaping the future.

8. Evaluation of the workshop

In total, 14 participants filled in the pre-assessment questionnaire, and 18 participants completed the post-assessment questionnaire. Because the answers were given by different numbers of participants, the results should be read more at a group level than as a strict before-and-after evaluation of the same individuals. The pre-assessment showed that the workshop targeted a group that included a significant share of young people with fewer opportunities, and 7 of 14 respondents identified themselves as belonging to this group, although 2 preferred not to say. In the context of this workshop, this group may also have included participants facing social, educational, economic, or geographical barriers, including some of the students from Ukraine, which indicates that the workshop was able to target a relevant and potentially more vulnerable target group. The pre-assessment also confirmed that most participants had limited experience with foresight beforehand, since only 3 of the 14 respondents had previously attended a foresight workshop, and only 2 of the 14 respondents had previously used foresight tools; therefore, for most of the respondents, the workshop was an introduction to new ideas and methods.

The post-assessment results suggest a clear improvement in understanding and confidence, as respondents rated their understanding of foresight as 4.39 (out of 5), their confidence in identifying signals and trends was 4.28 (out of 5), their confidence in imagining and describing different futures was 4.39 (out of 5), and their confidence in planning actions towards a preferred future was 3.94 (out of 5), while their confidence in working with others on future-oriented ideas was 4.22 (out of 5). Taken together, these results suggest that the workshop was most effective in strengthening respondents' understanding of foresight and their confidence in using future-oriented thinking in practice, and the workshop also appears to have strengthened respondents' sense of agency, as the mean for seeing one's own role in shaping the future of the community increased from 3.64 to 4.22, suggesting that the workshop not only built skills but also supported a greater awareness of personal and

collective responsibility for the future. Feedback on the workshop experience itself was positive, because participants scored clarity of explanations and instructions 4.72/5, one of the highest scores, overall satisfaction reached 4.50, enjoyment and engagement 4.44, and relevance of topics to participants' lives, interests, or communities also 4.44, which indicates that the content and format were well received and meaningful for the group.

The methods that participants most commonly mentioned as particularly interesting or useful were creating future stories or scenarios, horizon scanning, and spotting signals, and planning and backcasting combined with group reflection and discussion, while many participants also pointed out the benefits of discussion, teamwork, brainstorming, and scenario analysis more broadly. In terms of learning outcomes, participants referred to increased capacity for future thinking, identifying trends and signals, planning, critical thinking, communication, and teamwork, and several responses also implied that the workshop helped them to better understand that the future is created by decisions taken in the present. When asked what decision-makers and institutions should do to support young people better, participants' answers underscored the relevance of the themes discussed in the workshop, as the most common suggestions were: more financial support, better connections between education and practical life, more job and training opportunities for young people, more youth participation in decision-making, and better support for mental health, digital literacy, and financial literacy. While the feedback was extremely positive, a few participants made some small suggestions for the future, including sharing discussion topics in advance, allowing more time for discussion, structuring some group work more clearly, and explaining certain instructions or unfamiliar terms in more detail, which indicate practical adjustments rather than significant deficiencies in the workshop design.

8.1 Learning Outcomes and Competences Developed

The workshop allowed participants to develop competencies that are directly related to foresight, future thinking, participation, and collaboration, and as the evaluation indicates, the pre- and post-assessment questionnaires demonstrate a clear positive

shift in participants' understanding of foresight and their self-assessed level of confidence in applying future-oriented skills.

Before the workshop, the vast majority of participants had very little experience with foresight, because, of the 14 respondents, only 3 had previously attended a foresight-related workshop and only 2 had previously applied foresight tools, and for most, this was therefore their first structured contact with this kind of approach and methodology.

The post-assessment, which was completed by 18 participants, shows greater confidence in a number of areas, including:

- understanding what foresight is,
- recognising trends and signals,
- imagining different futures, planning actions towards a preferred future,
- working with others on future-oriented ideas, and in their written comments,
- critical thinking, communication, teamwork,
- discussion skills,
- their ability to reflect more systematically on future challenges and opportunities.

The detailed numerical results of the questionnaire are already presented in the previous section, so they are not repeated in full here, but to estimate the overall level of improvement, the average pre-workshop score across the main comparable indicators was compared with the average post-workshop score in the same areas, and the difference between these two averages was then expressed as a percentage of the pre-workshop average. Consequently, the results suggest an overall self-reported skill improvement of approximately 39.5%, which means that the target of at least 20% improvement was clearly exceeded, and beyond skills and knowledge, the workshop also seems to have strengthened participants' sense of agency and responsibility. This reflects a very positive attitudinal outcome that complements the gains in knowledge and practical competences, because the workshop contributed to the development of knowledge and competences of participants, and helped participants to develop a better understanding of what foresight is, build confidence

in their ability to use future-oriented methods, and strengthen attitudes related to participation, responsibility, and active engagement with the future. Therefore, altogether, these results suggest that the workshop made a significant contribution to participants' learning outcomes and competence development.

8.2 Key Insights and Lessons Learned, Youth Reflections and Testimonials

We received a number of useful insights regarding both its content and methodology. One of the clearest findings was that young people are willing and able to engage with complex, long-term public issues when they are presented in an interactive, discussion-based format. Even though the themes addressed during the workshop were demanding, participants responded actively and showed a clear interest in thinking beyond immediate political and social concerns.

A major success factor was the participatory nature of the session. Participants particularly appreciated opportunities for discussion, group work, scenario-building, and the exploration of trends and signals. The workshop format allowed them to connect abstract future-oriented thinking with concrete public issues such as housing, digital public services, demographic change, and democratic participation. This appears to have made the workshop both accessible and relevant.

Among the most important lessons learned was the value of giving young people more structured space for future-oriented reflection. The workshop showed that even a single session can stimulate meaningful debate, but it also suggested that a longer or repeated format could support deeper analysis and more concrete outputs. Some participants indicated that they would have welcomed more time for discussion, clearer structuring of certain group tasks, or advance notice of the discussion topics. These suggestions point to practical improvements for future workshops rather than fundamental weaknesses in the format.

Participants' reflections illustrate the workshop's impact particularly well. For example, one participant wrote that after the workshop, they would approach the future "more consciously and proactively", while another highlighted that they had

learned that “the future is created by decisions taken in the present”. Other participants referred to learning related to critical thinking, teamwork, finding compromise, and making more conscious decisions.

A particularly valuable external reflection came from one of the observers, Martin Daško, a researcher and university lecturer at UCM and a representative of CPP. He noted that he could imagine this type of workshop being further developed into a series of sessions in which participants would move beyond initial reflection and work towards more concrete outputs, such as strategies, draft policy proposals, or policy papers.

Overall, the workshop confirmed that foresight-based activities can be an effective tool for engaging young people in reflection on governance and public policy. It also showed that participants respond particularly well when they are given space to discuss, imagine alternatives, and connect long-term thinking with their own real-life concerns and aspirations.

Co-funded by
the European Union

9. Conclusions and Next Steps

The workshop provided clear evidence that young people are interested in and capable of structured thinking about the long-term future of Slovakia, particularly in relation to issues such as housing, youth retention, digitalisation of public services, demographic change, and the strategic importance of natural resources (e.g. water), and it also showed that foresight methods can be an effective and engaging means of involving them in discussions that otherwise tend to remain at the level of experts and policy-makers.

The evaluation indicated that participants felt that they left the workshop with a clearer understanding of foresight, greater confidence in using future-oriented tools, and a stronger sense of their own role in shaping the future of their communities, because they were able to engage in discussions and activities that helped them develop these skills. As regards dissemination, the results and key messages from the workshop will be shared within the host organisation and with relevant partners, which could involve short internal presentations, sharing the workshop report with colleagues and project partners, and using selected insights in teaching, youth work or further project activities. Furthermore, where relevant, the main findings on youth perspectives (e.g. on housing, digital public services or youth retention) can also be integrated into discussions with local stakeholders (e.g., organisations, youth organisations, public institutions) to show how the young people envision the long-term challenges and opportunities of the country, thus providing a unique perspective on these issues.

For the next steps, the workshop is considered a starting point, not an end point, because one of the possible ways forward is to repeat the format as a follow-up workshop or a short series of workshops, in which the participants (or a new group of students) would have more time to explore the themes and translate their visions into more concrete proposals or policy recommendations.

Co-funded by
the European Union

Another possible direction is to integrate foresight elements (e.g. simple trend analysis or scenario thinking) into existing courses or youth activities, so that future thinking becomes a regular part of learning and reflection, consequently enabling young people to develop a deeper understanding of the issues that affect their communities. The experience and feedback from this workshop will also be used to refine the methodology, for example, by providing some materials in advance, giving a bit more time for the discussion of complex topics, and making certain instructions even clearer, therefore improving the overall quality of the workshop. Overall, the workshop will serve as both a reference and a learning experience for future activities on youth, foresight and public policy, and the plan is to continue using and adapting this format to engage young people in thinking about the future, and, whenever possible, to connect their ideas to broader discussions and decision-making processes at institutional or community level, thus creating a more sustainable and effective approach to involving young people in shaping the future of their communities.

Co-funded by
the European Union