EXECUTIVE BRIEFING DOCUMENT | PLATFORM FOR DEMOCRACY | FEBRUARY 2026

Defunding of Non-Governmental Organizations in Slovakia 2024–2025

How the Fourth Fico Government Systematically Restricted Civil Society Access to Public Funding

€15–16M	4 Sectors	~€400–500M
Total defunding 2024–2025	Human Rights · Culture · Environment · Dev Aid	Annual public funds to NGO sector (baseline)

CONTEXT

Slovakia's non-profit sector receives approximately €400–500 million annually from public sources (local government service contracts, tax designation, subsidies) — nearly 50% of the sector's total revenues, reflecting two decades of gradual progress towards a European partnership model. The Fico government (in office since late 2023) reversed this trajectory through a deliberate, multi-instrument strategy of defunding targeting NGOs in human rights, culture, environment, and development aid.

Crucially, formal justifications (fiscal consolidation, procedural reform) mask the real purpose: **silencing critical civil society voices and replacing independent NGOs with government-aligned entities.**

SCOPE OF DEFUNDING BY SECTOR

SECTOR	SCOPE & MECHANISM
Human Rights (Ministry of Justice)	€1.1–1.2M lost — 2024 call cancelled the day before presentations; selective non-awarding to high-quality applicants; €305,501 further reduction through selective defunding
Culture (Arts Council)	€3.5M lost — newly politicised board overruled expert evaluation committees on 513 projects (Jan–Jun 2025 alone); budgets of approved projects also slashed
Environment (ZVF + LIFE co-financing)	€5.8M lost — NGOs administratively excluded from the Green Education Fund (ZVF), ~€410K/yr); state refused to co-finance EU LIFE programmes, forfeiting ~€5M in EU funds
Development Aid (SlovakAid)	€4.5–5.5M lost — total SlovakAid call budget cut; portion redirected to commercial/business entities; civil society marginalised from decision-making

HOW DEFUNDING WAS IMPLEMENTED — KEY MECHANISMS

Budget reduction	Administrative decisions to shrink grant envelopes — used in development cooperation, environment (2024–2026), and human rights.
Cancelled calls	Abrupt, unexplained cancellation of expected grant rounds — MoJ human rights call cancelled the day before scheduled pitch presentations.
Selective decision-making	Same total budget redistributed to a smaller, politically preferred group of recipients; high-quality applicants excluded without adequate justification.
Politicised governance bodies	Decision-making committees in culture, development aid and human rights reconstituted with politically loyal appointees who override expert recommendations.
Regulatory changes	Decree 129/2024 Coll. amended subsidy allocation rules: reduced transparency, eliminated two-round evaluation, weakened civil society representation in decision-making.
Co-financing refusal	State refused to provide statutory co-financing for EU LIFE environmental projects — effectively blocking approximately €5 million in EU funds from entering Slovakia.

CONSEQUENCES AND IMPACTS

ORGANISATIONAL IMPACTS

Staff layoffs: Organisations reduced headcount and restructured due to funding loss.

Programme disruption: Long-term programmes terminated or suspended; continuity broken.

Competitiveness decline: Development NGOs losing standing in international funding competitions.

Chilling effect: Self-censorship: CSOs stop applying, fearing rejection or political harassment.

Reputation damage: Defunding framed as proof of NGO inefficacy, eroding public credibility.

SYSTEMIC IMPACTS

Public value lost: Reduced human rights protection, weakened nature conservation, cancelled cultural events, curtailed humanitarian aid.

EU funds forfeited: State's co-financing refusal means EU LIFE funds bypass Slovakia — net fiscal loss for public institutions and local governments.

Democratic erosion: 20 years of civil society partnership dismantled; shrinking independent public sphere; increased state control of public discourse.

International isolation risk: Declining participation in EU cooperation frameworks reduces Slovakia's leverage and access to future programmes.

CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONSE

Defunding has paradoxically galvanised civil society. The cultural community is maintaining a permanent state of alert, organising protests, marches and performative actions. Organisations are:

- Submitting formal complaints to the Prosecutor's Office, Supreme Audit Office, and the Public Defender of Rights
- Diversifying funding through crowdfunding, corporate partnerships and international consortia
- Building cross-sector alliances (academic, private sector, international NGO partners)
- Documenting violations and publishing analyses to counter government narrative

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

AUDIENCE	RECOMMENDED ACTION
NGOs	Maintain unity; diversify funding via corporate partnerships, crowdfunding and EU consortia; prioritise staff well-being; increase public visibility of results
Public Administration	Restore trust-based partnerships; introduce multi-year funding frameworks; increase decision-making transparency; re-engage civil society in subsidy governance
Local Governments	Fill the funding gap through transparent local subsidy programmes; provide multi-year non-financial support to cultural and civic organisations
EU / European Commission	Explore standalone co-financing mechanisms for LIFE-type projects to safeguard EU funds where member-state governments obstruct co-financing obligations

Source: Blaščák, Kaba, Nápoký, Oravec, Sloboda, Strečanský & Szabová — Defunding Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations in Slovakia in 2024–2025 (Platform for Democracy, December 2025) | Prepared: February 2026

Link to the full report: https://www.predemokraciu.sk/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Defunding-kompletna-analyza.pdf

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