

War in Ukraine and Slovak development cooperation in 2022

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The Collins Dictionary's word of the year for 2022 is "permacrisis," "a term that perfectly embodies the dizzying sense of lurching from one unprecedented event to another, as we wonder bleakly what new horrors might be around the corner."¹

Regardless of whether we call it a compounded continued crisis or a polycrisis,² it has without doubt become a permacrisis.

In 2022 the external factors of the permacrisis had the most dramatic impact on Slovak internal affairs since independence 30 years ago. Despite multiple warnings such as the Russian invasion of Donbas in 2014, the refugee crisis in 2016 or the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Slovakia was unprepared for the crisis.

The war in Ukraine has had profound implications for the energy crisis and affected the cost of living for many in Slovakia. It has also revealed the true extent of the influence of disinformation, including Russian propaganda, and further polarized Slovak society. Most undiplomatically, it has revealed the capacities and weaknesses in Official Development Assistance (ODA) and deeply embedded systemic flaws in humanitarian aid, which has not been a government priority for many years.

At the international and European level the Russian invasion of Ukraine created the largest humanitarian and refugee crisis in Europe since world war

¹ D. Shariatmadari, "A year of 'permacrisis,'" *Collins Dictionary*, November 1, 2022. Available online: <https://blog.collinsdictionary.com/language-lovers/a-year-of-permacrisis/> (accessed on February 4, 2023).

² "Polycrisis" – a cluster of related global risks with compounding effects, such that the overall impact exceeds the sum of each part. See "Global Risks Report 2023," World Economic Forum, January 11, 2023. Available online: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-risks-report-2023/digest> (accessed on February 4, 2023).

two – 8 million refugees and 5 million internally displaced persons. Almost 18 million people are still in need of humanitarian aid.³

It is a far reaching crisis that has exacerbated inequalities and food insecurity around the globe and has to some extent overshadowed other major crises such as in Yemen, the DRC, Syria and elsewhere.

The first section of this chapter provides insights into how the Slovak humanitarian aid system responded to the mega crisis in Ukraine. The second describes what happened in other areas of Slovak development cooperation in 2022 and the effect of the war in Ukraine on the ODA system. In the conclusion the author discusses ways of strategically shaping ODA, the overall funding situation and predictions for 2023.

■ Slovak humanitarian response to the crisis in Ukraine

Aid figures

In 2022 Slovakia provided Ukraine with official humanitarian aid worth €9 million, in contrast to the €16 million fundraised by civil society. Comparisons with other donor countries, especially neighboring states, also point to a lack of interest in supporting humanitarian work. According to the Kiel Institute's donor tracker, Slovakia ranked 27th in the world⁴ in the provision of humanitarian aid to its neighbor Ukraine. By comparison Slovakia's other neighbor, Czechia, provided 12 times that (€106 mln.) in humanitarian commitments. Even considering that the Czech economy is twice the size of the Slovak one, the amount of aid is still six times larger.

The €9 million includes financial assistance provided to the international organizations UNHCR, OHCHR, WFP, IOM and UNICEF and to local Ukrainian NGOs. It also includes the *SlovakAid* humanitarian projects and material aid shipped by several ministries.

³ "Ukraine Emergency Situation Report #17 (15March 2023)," UNFPA, March 16, 2023. Available online: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-emergency-situation-report-17-15-march-2023> (accessed on February 25, 2023).

⁴ "Ukraine Support Tracker," Kiel Institute for the World Economy. Available online: <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/> (accessed on February 20, 2023).

In military commitments (0.215 per cent of GDP) Slovakia comes 7th. Although important, military aid cannot replace humanitarian aid (0.009 per cent of GDP)⁵ or vice versa⁶. Both are needed. Humanitarian aid is needed by the civilians who remain trapped in the conflict affected areas. Failure to provide it would mean hundreds of thousands more would be badly affected by lack of access to healthcare, water and sanitation, shelter, food, psychosocial support and education and many would be forced to leave Ukraine to flee to neighboring countries, including Slovakia.

Civil society and state cooperation

The response can be divided into three intertwined streams of aid, namely the immediate assistance provided on the Slovak-Ukrainian border, material aid shipped to Ukraine by multiple civil society organizations, volunteers and informal initiatives including the official ODA provided by Slovak bodies and the implementation of humanitarian projects managed and staffed by Slovak humanitarian organizations and local partners in Ukraine. Not all the aid is counted in the official ODA. The three streams differed in terms of factors and dynamics such as the level of cooperation among key actors, resource mobilization and so on throughout the year.

Despite the dire humanitarian situation caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine there were some positives such as the rapid response, numbers volunteering and the generosity displayed in fundraising.

Public solidarity broke all records in previous international disasters or crises and to some extent made it easier for the humanitarian NGOs as they did not have to rely on the slow bureaucratic processes of official humanitarian aid under *SlovakAid*. Thanks to individual donors and private companies civil society organizations were able to fundraise close to €17 million in 2022.^{7,8}

Civil society was quick to respond: literally hours after the invasion on February 24, 2022 humanitarian and other NGOs, volunteers and informal initiatives began providing humanitarian assistance to refugees fleeing the

⁵ Ibid

⁶ According to the Kiel Institute donor tracker, in Czechia the ratio between military aid and humanitarian aid is 4:1 whereas in Slovakia it is 24:1.

⁷ According to data collected by the Office of Civil Society.

⁸ Only one member of Ambrela, People in Need Slovakia, managed to fundraise €10 million.

horror of the war in Ukraine on both sides of the border crossing points at Vyšné Nemecké and Ubľa. They provided shelter, food, healthcare, psychosocial support and transportation and also coordinated volunteers and mobilized resources. At the peak approximately 15,000 people a day were crossing the border into Slovakia. To a large extent Slovak NGOs and volunteers replaced the state, which lacked strategic planning and coordination, resource management and logistics including material aid. After several weeks had passed, the state began to manage the situation more systematically and appointed a coordinator for cooperation between civil society and the state.

Another positive move was the memorandum signed in November 2022 between the interior ministry and 11 Slovak NGOs. It relates to cooperation in tackling the emergency situation caused by the arrival of large numbers of people from Ukraine as the armed conflict in Ukraine escalated. According to the interior ministry: “the main motivation for creating the memorandum was the situation at the beginning of 2022, following the Russian military invasion of Ukraine which revealed major shortcomings for which the state was not prepared.”⁹ That same month the Slovak government adopted a contingency plan to tackle the emergency situation relating to the mass arrival of residents of Ukraine.¹⁰ The plan is for October 2022 to March 2023 but could be replicated and used in future. Hence there are opportunities for cooperation between state and civil society and it sets a good precedent for the continuation of efforts to improve the humanitarian aid system and thereby strengthen Slovakia’s resilience.

⁹ “Minister vnútra podpísal memorandum o spolupráci s neziskovými organizáciami pri riešení mimoriadnej situácie v súvislosti so situáciou na Ukrajine,” [The Minister of the Interior signed a Memorandum on Cooperation with non-profit organizations in solving the emergency situation in connection with the situation in Ukraine] Interior Ministry of the Slovak Republic, November 8, 2022. Available online: <https://www.minv.sk/?tlacove-spravy&sprava=minister-vnutra-podpisal-memorandum-o-spolupraci-s-neziskovymi-organizaciami-pri-rieseni-mimoriadnej-situacie-v-suvislosti-so-situaciou-na-ukrajine> (accessed on February 12, 2023) The memorandum clearly sets out the competences of the interior ministry and NGOs, mainly the coordination and provision of humanitarian aid, recruitment, training and coordination of volunteers, material and technical assistance from the ministry, mutual information sharing on activities and plans, and linked to the contingency plan adopted by the government.

¹⁰ “Kontingenčný plán Slovenskej republiky pre riešenie mimoriadnej situácie v súvislosti s hromadným príchodom obyvateľov Ukrajiny na územie Slovenskej republiky spôsobeným eskaláciou ozbrojeného konfliktu na území Ukrajiny pre obdobie október 2022 – marec 2023,” [Contingency plan of the Slovak Republic for solving the emergency situation in connection with the mass influx of Ukrainians to the territory of the Slovak Republic caused by the escalation of the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine for the period October 2022 – March 2023] Interior Ministry of the Slovak Republic, October 26, 2022. Available online: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/27750/1> (accessed on February 12, 2023).

State unprepared to provide large amounts of material aid

Slovakia provided 850 tons of official material aid to Ukraine. Another 2,500 tons of material aid was shipped through the SK UCPM hub near Košice, used exclusively by international organizations and other donor countries. In stark contrast, civil society organizations transported 11,000 tons of material aid to Ukraine.¹¹ Of that Slovak humanitarian organizations in Ambrela transported 4,150 tons worth €22 million.

In the early phase of the crisis in particular, there was a lack of coordination of the humanitarian aid crossing the border. To effectivize the supply of humanitarian aid, a humanitarian corridor was opened up to convey material aid through the Slovak-Ukrainian border crossing points coordinated by Ambrela in cooperation with the Office for Civil Society. The corridor was located at Vyšné Nemecké and Ubľa and has been partially successful.

Inflexibility of the official response

On February 25th, Ambrela – a development organization platform – sent an open letter¹² to the prime minister and foreign minister appealing for extra funding for direct humanitarian interventions and for Slovak humanitarian NGOs to be included in the response. The letter was endorsed by dozens of the largest Slovak NGOs and platforms across civil society. The government responded by allocating €1.5 million. Given the absence of a rapid response mechanism and the ministry’s inability to launch rapid humanitarian calls for proposals and its decision not to channel the money to Ukrainian NGOs, much of the funding was used by other ministries for procuring and shipping material aid to Ukraine. Other instruments of humanitarian aid such as

¹¹ This contains the data relating to CSOs included in the data collection by the Office for Civil Society.

¹² “Výzva občianskeho sektora vláde SR k poskytovaniu humanitárnej pomoci Ukrajine,” [Appeal of the civil society to the Slovak government to provide humanitarian aid to Ukraine] Ambrela, February 25, 2022. Available online: <https://ambrela.org/spravy/vyzva-obcianskeho-sektora-vlade-sr/> (accessed on February 4, 2023).

financial contributions or material aid are important but cannot replace the multiple benefits and added value of humanitarian projects.¹³

The first call for proposals for humanitarian projects was issued by *SlovakAid* on May 24th, three months after the Russian invasion in February 2022. There are many examples of other countries that were able to mount a more rapid response. In the Czech Republic¹⁴ for instance the call for proposals was published on March 9th.

Not only was the Slovak response extremely slow but there was also a failure to use the extra three months from February to May to make quick fixes to the extremely outdated system of official humanitarian aid. As a result the ministry de facto maintained the status quo without attempting to

- improve the management of *SlovakAid* humanitarian projects governed by guidelines primarily meant for development cooperation projects rather than a dynamically changing humanitarian environment;
- reduce the bureaucratic administration of *SlovakAid* grants;
- bring official humanitarian aid including *SlovakAid* grants more in line with the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship.¹⁵

¹³ "AidWatch2022," Ambrela – Platform for Development Organisations, 2022, p. 43. Available online: https://ambrela.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Ambrela_report_Aidwatch_za_rok_2021.pdf (accessed on February 4, 2023). "The projects enable the involvement of Slovak entities in development cooperation. From the donor's point of view, they represent the greatest degree of administrative, financial and content control, provide accessible data for monitoring and evaluation and are far more transparent in allocating funds and on subsequent implementation compared to other ODA mechanisms such as financial contributions. Unlike the latter, projects can be programmed and compared to other SAIDC instruments. In practice most lay the foundations for maintaining and improving the development cooperation system. It also enables Slovak and non-Slovak organizations and donors to gain experience, create partnerships, apply to develop Slovak know-how and enhance the visibility of the *SlovakAid* brand in partner countries. Last but not least they also help with the retention of experienced workers." (accessed February 5, 2023).

¹⁴ "Humanitární dotace k naléhavé pomoci Ukrajině – vyhlášení," [Humanitarian subsidies for urgent aid to Ukraine – announcement] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, March 9, 2022. Available online: https://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/zahranicni_vztahy/rozvojova_spoluprace/humanitarni_pomoc/projekty/humanitarni_dotace_k_nalehave_pomoci.html (accessed on February 5, 2023).

¹⁵ "24 principles and good practice of humanitarian donorship," Good Humanitarian Donorship. Available online: <https://www.ghdinitiative.org/ghd/gns/principles-good-practice-of-ghd/principles-good-practice-ghd.html> (accessed on February 6, 2023).

The current system does not adhere fully to the principle that the donor state should strive to ensure flexible and timely funding, allocate humanitarian funding in proportion to needs, strive to ensure predictability and flexibility in funding and systematically consider the use of cash transfers alongside other modalities according to the situation. Despite civil society having spent many years pointing out the need to include cash transfers in *SlovakAid* projects, that has still not been put in place. Slovakia has long been a member of the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) and so has had time to align its humanitarian aid system with the principles enshrined in the GHD.

Quick fixes and donor fatigue: what lies in the future?

Unlike the array of legislative initiatives relating to the Ukrainian crisis, no attempt was made to adopt legislation to improve the Slovak humanitarian aid system. Not even at the non-statutory level.

In autumn 2022 the foreign ministry rejected civil society's suggestion, represented by Ambrela and the Office for Civil Society, that the evaluation committee should consider humanitarian project proposals within one month rather than two.¹⁶

As the crisis continued, donor fatigue began to set in toward the end of the year.

Therefore in spring Ambrela sent a letter to the foreign and finance ministers suggesting ways of preventing and/or mitigating donor fatigue. The tax exemption applies only to material aid donated to the interior ministry and transported out of Slovakia. The letter stated:

Taking into account the huge disparity between needs and financing, as well as the risk of fatigue in businesses showing huge levels of solidarity that may not continue over the medium and long term, we suggest the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic make the following changes to § 19 2) (u)

¹⁶ MFA non-statutory rules on grants. Ambrela's remaining three proposals were accepted via the interministerial legislation procedure – (i) donors must ensure project proposals are evaluated by external assessors, (ii) donors have to provide the applicant with details of the project proposal evaluation on request, (iii) donors are responsible for ensuring there is no conflict of interest. All three proposals would improve the transparency of the *SlovakAid* grant program.

of Income Tax Act no. 595/2003 Coll. and § 47 13) of Act on value added tax no. 222/2004 Coll.:

- all services and financial donations should be made tax-deductible expenses (not just material donations), (services such as logistics and aid transportation shipping services to Ukraine are in high demand and this amendment would allow greater business financial involvement and produce synergy effects in combination with NGO fundraising; entrepreneurs could file such financial gifts as a tax expense);
- NGOs (not just the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic) should be able to be donation recipients (this would considerably speed up aid and raise effectiveness);
- the Slovak Republic should be considered an authorized territory for the use of donations (today online territories outside Slovakia are eligible, which could present an obstacle given the high number of Ukrainian refugees or persons with temporary protection in need of help);
- There has been no progress so far. It would be useful if the state could fund some research or data collection on the amount of aid collectively provided by the private sector in funding, services and goods.

There is no funding mechanism for ensuring the humanitarian aid system has enough of the right type of funding. The existing system whereby donors can donate through taxes is not geared up for humanitarian crises, where rapidity and flexibility are of the utmost importance. Unless the Slovak government tackles the situation directly, one can expect donor fatigue to continue and even worsen.

■ Other parts of Slovak development cooperation

Slovak ODA in 2022: comfortably coming last

According to the preliminary data, in 2022 Slovak official development cooperation totaled €162.86 million or 0.15 per cent of GNI. This puts Slovakia among the last 30 donor countries in the DAC OECD.¹⁷ Even similarly sized countries like Slovenia (0.19 per cent) or Portugal (0.18 per cent) are ahead

¹⁷ The data may be adjusted slightly in June 2023, but no major corrections are expected.

of Slovakia. The increase in the volume of ODA is so slow that Slovakia will not meet its international commitment of 0.33 per cent ODA/GNI by 2030, or indeed until after 2060.¹⁸

Besides the quantity, the quality of bilateral aid is an equally worrying trend. The multilateral aid of €124.4 million. It includes contributions to the EU (€108 mil.), World Bank (€5.9 mil.), UN (€4.8 million) and others (€5.8 million). Although bilateral aid increased last year from €31 million to €38.4 million, this was mainly due to non-systematic elements that cannot be strategically programmed. The bilateral aid largely consists of two streams. The first is the financial contributions to various international organizations and programs that for several reasons do not come under multilateral aid. The second could be called “what’s left over,” which does not require major resources, effort or systemic changes on the Slovak side. Therefore it is easier to donate something that does not cost us a lot. In the pre-pandemic year for instance there was €16 million in old Czechoslovak debt relief to indebted countries and more recently in vaccines that cannot be used in Slovakia. The largest inflated bilateral aid component, the vaccine donation for 2022 was worth €15 million or close to 1.4 million vaccine doses. Hence there is a need to invest in designing new instruments to meet current needs; in other words, to qualitatively upgrade strategic partnerships, create a humanitarian fund, matching funds and accelerate cooperation between CSOs and businesses.

According to the Kiel Institute’s rough baseline estimate for the world economy, Slovakia was expected to come third in terms of in-donor refugee costs at 0.6 per cent of GDP. That is approximately €0.5 billion, or 50 times more than the humanitarian aid provided to Ukraine. Nevertheless the foreign ministry chose not to inflate Slovak ODA with the enormous in-donor refugee costs as the Kiel institute had predicted, reporting only €1.1 million in-donor refugee costs. This is a positive move and the thinking behind this decision could be replicated in other parts of ODA.

¹⁸ “AidWatch2020,” Ambrela – Platform for Development Organisations, 2020, p. 18. Available online: https://ambrela.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Ambrela_Aidwatch_2020_WEB.pdf (accessed on February 6, 2023). ODA has increased by 0.05 per cent over the last 10 years. The rate of increase has not significantly changed in the last two years.

Inflation: diminishing value of support

In 2022 inflation skyrocketed, breaking new records and climbing to 13.2 per cent in June. The cumulative effect since 2009 and specific effects of it in 2021 and 2022 have reduced the value of Slovak ODA by a quarter. The foreign ministry gave no indication of attempting to mitigate it itself or in response to appeals from civil society. At the project management level the SAIDC raised the threshold slightly for project staff costs. But that is not enough and the ministry needs to adopt a proactive approach. The situation in *SlovakAid* partner countries is not good either. In Kenya, inflation held at 6 per cent in 2021, but reached almost 10 per cent in 2022.¹⁹ Moldova has had record inflation since 2007. In January 2022 inflation rose from 16 per cent to 34 per cent.²⁰ In Georgia it grew by 4.5 per cent year-on-year to over 9.5 per cent in 2021.

Combined with the small nominal budgetary support of ODA, the lukewarm response from the foreign ministry places a serious burden on the capacities of Slovak actors and there is a risk of the real impact of the *SlovakAid* interventions in partner countries being decimated.

Positive moments

The good news is that after two years, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, the SAIDC issued a call for strategic partnerships for Kenya in sectors education and health with a grant of up to €1 million over a four-year implementation period. However, this time the devil is not in the detail but in the main contours: it is not clear how it will differ from other grants (for instance it could be dedicated to providing scope for capacity building, testing, creating partnerships with other donors) or to what extent it is just the budgetary multiplication of small grants by four or five spread over a longer period.

SlovakAid embarked on its first ever EU project under the delegated competence and pillar assessment. The SAIDC issued a €0.8 million grant for EU support for local media in Moldova. After some initial stumbling blocks the

¹⁹ "Kenya Inflation Rate," Trading Economics. Available online: <https://tradingeconomics.com/kenya/inflation-cpi> (accessed on January 20, 2023).

²⁰ "Moldova Inflation Rate," Trading Economics. Available online: <https://tradingeconomics.com/moldova/inflation-cpi> (accessed on January 20, 2023).

SAIDC applied the more effective donor-implementor relation building EC rules to project management and it was launched in autumn 2022. There are other potential projects in the pipeline for Serbia, Kenya and South Africa.

SlovakAid interventions – increase with a hazy future

There was a significant increase in the funding allocated to the *SlovakAid* grants. Compared to 2021 the increase was €1.2 million, which represents an increase of 28 per cent. Although this initially seemed to be positive, it is in fact a decrease on the financial allocation for existing SAIDC grants in *SlovakAid* partner countries. The increase was a result of the provision of €1.3 million in humanitarian aid for Ukraine and a new instrument – a strategic partnership for Kenya (€600,000 budgeted for 3 years).

Along with the other underlying factors this translated into a decrease, with a 43 per cent year-on-year decrease in projects approved for the Western Balkans, 81 per cent for Kenya, 40 per cent for Moldova and 52 per cent for global education.

This was despite the applicant interest in *SlovakAid* calls for proposals (number of submitted vs. unapproved projects) and the "money saving" due to there being no call for proposals for Sub-Saharan Africa (€200,000 in 2021) and the cancellation of the call for development cooperation for Ukraine (€400,000).

Part of the budget allocated for other *SlovakAid* projects went to the humanitarian aid for Ukraine and the strategic partnership for Kenya. But of course the issue is not whether the support for Ukraine should be substantially increased at the expense of another *SlovakAid* program country. Ukraine needs an enormous amount of humanitarian aid. At the same time though to preserve the good results and consistency of *SlovakAid* interventions elsewhere, the political leadership at the ministry need to ensure as far as possible that Slovakia's bilateral aid is increased, even if it is just for the sake of the humanitarian aid for Ukraine, the sustainability of Slovak ODA in partner countries and fulfilling its commitment in the government manifesto.

In 2020 only €300,000 was newly-allocated funding for Ukraine from outside the annually approved SAIDC grant budget.

The message is clear and simple. There is no potential for further cuts to the SAIDC grant budget. Otherwise, exacerbated by inflation, the system will

soon collapse and the cost/benefit ratio and continuation of the *SlovakAid* programs in several partner countries will be at serious risk.

The effect of the war in Ukraine on the Slovak development cooperation system

As one would expect the mega crisis in neighboring Ukraine led to pressure to shift resources, attention and expertise away from other *SlovakAid* partner countries and toward Ukraine and away from development cooperation and toward humanitarian aid.

There was no competition over funding for humanitarian and military aid, but the prime minister, government, parliament, president's office and the foreign ministry were all primarily focused on military aid. And understandably so, but there has to be a balance. Strategic communication on the humanitarian aid by these and other stakeholders has been completely overshadowed by the military aid. As a consequence it is harder to create an environment favorable to increasing both the volume and quality.

Another effect is the shift in geographic focus. The war in Ukraine is clearly a factor here and the ministry has tended to focus more on what remains of the Eastern Partnership and the threat in that region. Then there is the unrelated continuation of a broader process that started two years ago. The ministry has been striving to follow the recommendations of the DAC OECD peer review suggesting it focuses on a limited number of partner countries. Other actors including civil society and the finance ministry have also pushed for a more distinct geographic focus. However, there has been little progress in dialogue in the absence of clear reasoning from main coordinator, the foreign ministry, on the changes suggested and a reliance on the vague overarching motto "because of political priorities." Which political priorities? Whose political priorities? How will these interact with the goals of Slovak development cooperation? Besides the geopolitics, there is competition over the same resources for development cooperation from civil society and academia, businesses working in development cooperation and economic diplomacy. The author both supports and agrees with the idea that *SlovakAid* interventions should be more narrowly focused: more effective resource use can be achieved with a smaller number of partner countries. But the way this has been done in recent years raises concerns. With South Sudan's removal from the partner list, the closure of the Slovak embassy in Addis Ababa and the decision to discontinue *SlovakAid* grant projects in Sub-Saharan Africa, Kenya was the only African country left. But at the end of 2022 in light of the developments in Ukraine, the ministry began to consider cutting Slovak

development interventions in Ukraine based on "political priority" reasoning and deprioritizing the status of Kenya from program to partner country. The decision has not been made yet and requires discussion. The ministry has long argued for *SlovakAid* interventions in sub-Saharan Africa on the grounds of preventing migration by tackling it in the countries of origin. There is only one Slovak embassy in the region and of all the *SlovakAid* partner countries Kenya has the largest number of active Slovak civil society organizations. Although Kenya is a middle income country. Many parts of it are very underdeveloped with part of the population living in poverty with limited or no access to basic services. Kenya has a per capita GDP of €2,000. By comparison the per capita GDP for Moldova and Georgia is €5,000.

For businesses involvement, development cooperation is sometimes the only entry point and there is no point throwing away all the good that has been done over the last 10 years and more.

The humanitarian mega crisis in Ukraine has enormous implications for food security globally and especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.

With Kenya and its neighbors suffering the worst drought in recent history and a hunger crisis, Slovakia should step up its efforts and not diminish its presence.

■ Conclusion: internalization vs. internationalization

The largest humanitarian crisis in Europe since world war two has not led to any major government attempts to modernize the Slovak humanitarian aid system, apart from some minor exceptions.

Despite expectations that the humanitarian aid would attract stronger political support and attention in strategic communication, it has been marginalized by the dominance of the political and military aspects of the conflict. According to the UN OCHA 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan,²¹ the international community is trying to raise \$3.9 billion to cover aid for over 11 million

²¹ "Ukraine: Humanitarian Response Plan (February 2023)," *Relief Web*, February 15, 2023. Available online: https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-response-plan-february-2023-enuk?_gl=1*g5gbmm*_ga*MzlyMjl5MTcxLjE2NjkyNDI5NTQ*_ga_E60ZNX2F68*MTY30-DA1NzMwNi45LjEuMTY3ODAt1NzOC4yOC4wLjA (accessed on February 20, 2023).

people – out of nearly 18 million people in need. It is both important and in the interests of Slovakia to step up humanitarian efforts and become a more supportive international partner.

Slovak ODA desperately needs a modern humanitarian system if it is to become a good international partner and for its own resilience and safety. Rather than a large-scale whole government approach seeking to fully integrate the domestic and foreign side of the humanitarian aid system, having a group of the most active actors design one or two rapid response instruments may prove more doable. This could then be followed up by legislation and sufficient funding.²²

The humanitarian aid for Ukraine could be used as a starting point in negotiations for a mandatory long-term increase (including inflation-indexed) in bilateral aid. In this sense 2022 was a missed opportunity but it is worth fighting for it in 2023.

Strategic communication and the ability to engage in continual high-level policy dialogue with all partners is crucial for spearheading these goals. The ministry has created and/or supported several good high-level policy platforms for strategic dialogue such as Globsec, Export Forum and Human Forum, but surprisingly there is no forum for systemic dialogue and political support in the area of development cooperation.

This is despite the ministry (i) being the national coordinator with the strongest mandate, (ii) the largest part of its budget going on development cooperation (€13 million in 2021), (iii) it having a special development cooperation agency – the SAIDC – in contrast to other areas, (iv) development cooperation being the foreign policy area with the largest civil society community by far. That is why the Ambrela Development Forum was set up in May, 2022, with more than a hundred participants from 25 countries.

There are good intentions and there are things that need completing and fine-tuning, such as the strategic partnership instrument in order to pay off and areas that need more political drive such as the humanitarian aid strategy, which is in limbo, or value based initiatives that do not report in-donor refugee costs (which would inflate ODA by at least €100 million, having a close to 40 per cent share of total ODA) that needs to be replicated in other parts of the Slovak ODA system.

²² The author shared some practical ideas in the previous *Yearbook of Slovakia's Foreign Policy*.

Table 1. Effects of policy and management decisions on the Slovak ODA system

deterioration	damage control	improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Related to Ukraine: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ unprepared humanitarian response on the border ▪ very little humanitarian funding for Ukraine (Slovakia 28th as per cent of GDP) ▪ no significant new funds for <i>SlovakAid</i> humanitarian projects (most resources pulled from other countries and previous savings) ▪ very low to zero strategic communication on humanitarian aid ▪ no Lex Ukraine to enable short or midterm quick fixes ▪ personnel and expert capacities not boosted ▪ lack of willingness to accelerate implementation of the humanitarian <i>SlovakAid</i> project ▪ no or limited adherence to Good Humanitarian Donorship, including but not limited to cash assistance, flexible funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Related to Ukraine: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ limited effort to set up humanitarian corridor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Related to Ukraine: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MoU between interior ministry and 11 CSOs ▪ government adopted contingency plan ▪ public solidarity, fundraising, volunteering ▪ rapid response by CSO at the border ▪ support from businesses ▪ amount of material aid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ missed opportunity to raise bilateral aid at the political level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ publication of results of application process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ launch of first SAIDC EU delegated cooperation project in Moldova launched. ▪ appetite and action steps for obtaining more EU delegated competence funding (Serbia, Kenya and South Africa)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ no response to historic inflation (except on the SAIDC project management side) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ strategic partnership to be launched for first time (Kenya)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ no continuity in humanitarian strategy 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ value based approach that does not count extremely high in-donor refugee costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ inflated aid close to 50 per cent of bilateral aid 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ cooperation between MFA and CSO at Ambrela Development Forum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Slovak commitment of 0.33 per cent of GNI increasingly under threat 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No LDC project/program country 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ODA report not presented to parliament 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ drop in predictability and consistency 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ dwindling budget for the program country Kenya 	

Much of the above illustrates the low ownership of development cooperation at the national level. That means that one of the main drivers of the ODA system is Slovakia's international commitments or obligations to others, rather than a conscious mature awareness, and internalization rather than internationalization. In this sense internalizing means understanding that a thriving ODA system is and should be in Slovakia's national interests. In other words, development cooperation is an important foreign policy instrument and something that we should want for the value of it rather than something the international community wants us to do.

