

Understanding Slovakia's Whistleblower Protection Law: A Simplified Guide

1. Introduction to Whistleblower Protection in Slovakia

Whistleblower protection is a cornerstone of modern governance, serving as a critical mechanism for ensuring transparency, accountability, and the rule of law. In Slovakia, this framework has evolved into a strategic tool aligned with European Union directives, designed to safeguard the public interest by encouraging individuals to report misconduct they witness in the workplace. The system provides a legal shield for those who expose activities that threaten public funds, safety, and institutional integrity.

Under the Slovak legal framework, a reportable 'wrongdoing' encompasses a broad range of serious misconduct. A person can make a protected disclosure if they have a reasonable belief that any of the following activities are occurring, have occurred, or are likely to occur:

- A criminal offence
- Failure to comply with legal obligations
- A breach of EU law
- Actions that endanger the health and safety of individuals
- Damage to the environment
- Misuse of public funds
- Grossly negligent acts or omissions by a public body
- Any attempt to conceal or destroy information about the above wrongdoings

Slovakia's journey toward robust whistleblower protection began in 2014 with the passage of Act No. 307/2014 Coll. While a significant first step, this initial law proved to be "cumbersome" and "insufficient" in practice, offering more symbolic than effective protection. A major legislative reform in 2019 fundamentally changed this landscape, aligning Slovak law with EU Directive 2019/1937 and, most importantly, establishing a dedicated new authority to oversee the system.

This reform signaled a pivotal shift, moving beyond a formal, paper-based system to one centered on a specialized and independent institution: the Office for the Protection of Whistleblowers.

2. The Central Authority: The Office for the Protection of Whistleblowers (ÚOO)

The establishment of the Office for the Protection of Whistleblowers (Úrad na ochranu oznamovateľov, or ÚOO) in March 2021 marked a fundamental transformation of Slovakia's approach to protecting whistleblowers. Its creation represented a deliberate move away from the previous, less effective system where this agenda was managed by overburdened labor inspectorates. The new Office was conceived as a specialized,

independent body tasked with systematically protecting whistleblowers and fostering a national culture of integrity and transparency.

Institutionally, the ÚOO was established as an independent state authority with its own budget and a clearly defined set of competencies. Its core mission extends beyond simply reacting to reports; it is mandated to proactively promote whistleblowing, provide methodological guidance, monitor compliance with the law, and ensure that those who speak up are shielded from retaliation.

The leadership of the Office is composed of the following individuals:

- **Chairwoman:** Zuzana Dlugošová
- **Deputy Chair:** Matej Uhlík

The establishment of the ÚOO and its leadership provided the institutional foundation necessary to enforce the law. The specific powers and functions vested in the Office are the practical tools that enable it to fulfill its crucial mission.

3. Key Powers and Functions of the ÚOO

The powers of the ÚOO are the practical instruments that enable it to translate legislative intent into real-world protection for whistleblowers. These competencies are broad and multifaceted, covering everything from direct intervention and legal decision-making to proactive prevention, public education, and policy development.

Decision-Making on Protective Status While the legal status of a "protected whistleblower" is formally granted by public prosecutors or labor inspectorates, the ÚOO holds the fundamental power to make this protection meaningful. The Office's critical function is to approve or deny any employment-related action an employer wishes to take against a protected individual. This authority to provide or withhold consent acts as a direct shield against retaliation, such as demotion or termination, making the ÚOO the ultimate gatekeeper of a whistleblower's professional security.

Control and Oversight A core function of the ÚOO is to monitor and enforce compliance with the law. Its staff are authorized to conduct inspections to scrutinize how protection is being implemented, investigate potential instances of retaliation, and assess the effectiveness of the internal reporting systems that employers are legally required to maintain. If the Office identifies an attempt to penalize a whistleblower, it is obligated to inform other relevant authorities, such as law enforcement.

Advisory and Guidance Roles The ÚOO serves as an expert resource for both employers and employees. It provides advice to organizations on how to design and implement effective and compliant internal reporting channels. Simultaneously, it offers consultations to individuals who are considering making a report, helping them understand their options, rights, and the potential risks involved in the process.

Awareness, Training, and Prevention The Office has a significant educational and preventative mission. It is tasked with raising public awareness about the importance of whistleblowing through information campaigns and publications. It also develops and disseminates methodological guidance and organizes specialized training for the "responsible persons" within organizations who are tasked with receiving and handling internal reports.

Legislative Input and Cooperation Drawing on its practical experience, the ÚOO is empowered to propose amendments and additions to relevant legislation. It actively collaborates with domestic partners, including NGOs, as well as with international counterparts such as similar institutions across the European Union. This ensures the Slovak system remains aligned with international standards and benefits from an exchange of best practices.

These functions provide a comprehensive framework for protection. The next section explores how this system operates in practice for an individual seeking to report wrongdoing.

4. The Protection Process in Practice

For a potential whistleblower in Slovakia, the legal framework offers multiple avenues for reporting and a series of safeguards designed to encourage disclosure while mitigating personal and professional risks. The process is structured to provide both legal status and practical support, though its effectiveness is influenced by several key factors.

Gaining and Maintaining Protection The formal status of a "protected whistleblower" is granted by public prosecutors or, in some cases, by labor inspectorates. Once this status is conferred, the ÚOO plays a critical ongoing role. Any employment-related action an employer wishes to take against a protected individual—such as transfer, demotion, or termination—cannot be legally executed without the prior consent of the ÚOO. This requirement acts as a direct shield against retaliatory measures.

The Crucial Role of Anonymity A questionnaire experiment conducted in collaboration with the ÚOO revealed a critical insight into whistleblower motivation. The results demonstrated that the single most significant factor encouraging public sector employees to report wrongdoing is the **possibility of anonymous reporting**. This incentive proved to be more powerful than any form of financial reward. To facilitate this, the ÚOO provides practical tools, including a secure web form on its website that allows individuals to submit reports anonymously.

Financial Rewards and Compensation Slovak law includes a provision for a financial reward for whistleblowers, which can be up to 50 times the national minimum wage. However, this reward is not an entitlement and is granted at the discretion of the authorities. An analysis of the system's performance shows its limited impact; the ÚOO granted **no such rewards in 2024**. Furthermore, the aforementioned research experiment found that the prospect of financial incentives had no significant effect on participants' willingness to report misconduct. This evidence strongly indicates that the

system's resources and policy focus should prioritize strengthening and promoting secure, anonymous reporting channels over a financial reward system that has proven to be both unused and ineffective as a motivator.

The design of the system reflects a modern understanding of whistleblower psychology, but its real-world performance reveals both strengths and weaknesses.

5. An Assessment of the ÚOO's Performance (2021-2024)

A data-driven evaluation of the ÚOO's first four years of operation provides a clear picture of its effectiveness. The assessment covers its commitment to transparency, its institutional independence, the reach of its public campaigns, and key performance metrics that illustrate its day-to-day activities.

Transparency and Openness The ÚOO demonstrates a strong commitment to transparency, proactively publishing financial data such as invoices and purchase orders in user-friendly, machine-searchable formats. A case study test involving a freedom of information request confirmed the Office's responsiveness, with a comprehensive reply provided within the legal deadline. However, some shortcomings persist. A review of its contracts revealed that approximately a quarter were published in non-machine-searchable formats. Additionally, many contracts were published with incomplete metadata, such as a "€0" value, which complicates automated data analysis.

Institutional Independence A formal evaluation by Transparency International Slovakia in July 2024 awarded the ÚOO a score of **73%** for its institutional independence. The assessment highlighted significant strengths, particularly the high legal threshold required to dismiss the Chairwoman, which insulates the leadership from direct political pressure. At the same time, it identified critical weaknesses: the Office lacks constitutional anchoring, meaning it can be abolished by an ordinary law; it suffers from budgetary dependence on the state's general treasury; and its employees receive comparatively low salaries, which poses a risk to its long-term institutional resilience.

Public Awareness and Outreach Despite considerable investment in outreach, public awareness of the ÚOO has grown slowly. As of 2024, only **39%** of the public knew of the Office's existence. This is in the context of a major €400,000 media campaign titled "Silence is not golden," which succeeded in raising awareness from 12% to 23%. This slow growth suggests that media campaigns alone are insufficient to build public trust, particularly when high-profile cases demonstrate the system's vulnerability to political pressure. The Office is active on social media, with 8,700 followers on Facebook and 1,800 on Instagram in 2024, but these figures indicate that achieving broad public recognition remains a significant challenge.

Key 2024 Performance Metrics A quantitative snapshot of the ÚOO's operational activities in 2024 reveals the following:

- **Inquiries from the public:** 404
- **New protected statuses granted (by all bodies):** 29

- **Employer requests for action handled:** 10 (of which 2 were approved)
- **Inspections initiated:** 13 (resulting in 2 fines imposed)

These metrics provide a baseline for the Office's activities but do not fully capture the major real-world challenges and political tests that have shaped public perception and the overall effectiveness of the system.

6. Major Challenges and Systemic Tests

Despite a well-designed institutional framework, the Slovak whistleblower protection system has faced significant real-world tests that have exposed its vulnerabilities, particularly when confronted with politically sensitive cases and direct governmental pressure.

Case Study: The "Čurillovci" Affair One of the most profound tests of the system involved a group of police investigators, known as the "Čurillovci," who were granted protected whistleblower status. This status legally required that any employment-related action against them receive prior consent from the ÚOO. In direct violation of the law, the Ministry of the Interior suspended several of these protected officers from service without seeking or obtaining the ÚOO's approval. In response, the ÚOO initiated administrative proceedings and issued its **highest-ever fine of €90,000** against the Ministry for this illegal retaliatory action. While the case demonstrated the ÚOO's willingness to enforce the law even against powerful state bodies, it also exposed a critical flaw: the system failed to *prevent* the retaliatory measure from occurring. The government's non-compliance, despite the subsequent penalty, significantly undermined public trust.

Political Fragility The fallout from this case revealed a further dimension of the system's fragility. The governing coalition subsequently introduced legislation that would have abolished the current ÚOO and replaced it with a new, transformed body with an expanded but underfunded mandate. In December 2025, President Peter Pellegrini vetoed this law, citing procedural flaws and a potential weakening of protections for whistleblowers and crime victims. Although the veto was successful, the attempt itself sent a clear "negative signal" to the public about the political commitment to whistleblower protection and the stability of the institution designed to provide it.

These events underscore the immense challenges that arise when a theoretically sound legal system collides with the realities of political power.

7. Conclusion: The State of Whistleblower Protection in Slovakia

After four years of operation, the state of whistleblower protection in Slovakia is defined by a paradox. On one hand, the country has a robust, well-designed institutional and legal framework, centered on an independent and specialized authority. On the other hand, it faces a complex and challenging reality of implementation, where political pressures and systemic weaknesses hinder its full potential.



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The Office for the Protection of Whistleblowers (ÚOO) has demonstrated that it fulfills its legal duties responsibly and with a high degree of transparency. However, it continues to grapple with persistent challenges. The erosion of public trust following high-profile political conflicts like the "Čurillovci" affair, the slow growth of public awareness despite significant investment, and the ineffectiveness of the financial reward system all limit the framework's overall impact.

Ultimately, the ÚOO's primary mission—to transform strong legislation into an effective, practical, and trusted system—remains only "partially fulfilled."

8. Where to Seek Information, Support & Advice

Official Information on the Law

- **Whistleblower Protection Office (Úrad na ochranu oznamovateľov):**
www.oznamovatelia.sk

Relevant Authorities

- **Whistleblower Protection Office (WPO / ÚOO):**
 - **Infoline:** 0800 221 213 (Mon, Wed: 13:00-16:00; Tue, Thu: 9:00-12:00).
 - **Email:** poradna@oznamovatelia.sk.
 - **Address:** Námestie slobody 29, 811 06 Bratislava.
- **General Prosecutor's Office of the Slovak Republic** (for filing criminal complaints).

(Trusted) CSOs

- **[Transparency International Slovensko](#):** Provides legal advice, guidance, and whistleblower support.
- **[Stop Corruption Foundation \(Nadácia Zastavme korupciu\)](#).**

Further Reading & Helpful Resources

- **Slov-lex:** [Act No. 54/2019 Coll. on the Protection of Whistleblowers](#).
- **[Annual Reports](#)** of the Whistleblower Protection Office.
- **[Manuals and Methodological Guidelines](#)** issued by the WPO.