

REPORT:

# ISLAMOPHOBIA

IN SLOVAKIA

**2021**

by THE ISLAMIC FOUNDATION IN SLOVAKIA



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## About the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia

The Islamic Foundation in Slovakia (INS) is the most active organization representing the interests of the Muslim community in Slovakia nowadays, thus carrying out various duties. It provides religious services for the Muslim community in Slovakia, supports their spiritual and community life and plays the role of an information center for Muslims visiting in Slovakia. While working with the Muslim community, INS also fosters the relationships between the Muslim minority and the Slovak majority. It offers lectures at schools, universities and other public institutions and operates a small center. INS firmly believes in the importance of an interfaith dialogue in the context of a diverse society. It participates in various inter-religious activities with Christian, Jewish and other religious communities.

In order to establish friendly relationships with the Slovak majority, the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia has to refute various misconceptions and conspiracy theories about Islam, Muslims and currently also migrants and refugees of Muslim background. In order to do so, it monitors media outlets, public statements, social networks and collects information about anti-Muslim bias, hate speech and attacks against Muslims. It is the only organization in Slovakia whose focus is solely on the sentiments against the adherents of Islam. Thanks to its role within the Muslim community, it is also able to collect data directly from Muslims, who aren't always willing to speak about their experiences to the public authorities or the media.

In 2021 it conducted the largest research on islamophobia in Slovakia in the modern history of the Slovak republic. The findings were reported in two national TV channels, press conference and textual analysis was published in 2022.

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## Foreword

Muslim population in Slovakia is rather small. In 2021, for the first time in Slovak history, Slovak population could explicitly choose Islam as their religion in the national census. The data that was published indicates that believers in Islam count up to 3862. Some of the previous estimates from 2001 and 2011 were much smaller, almost by half, so this number is a very good indicator of how big the community is. The community is composed of three main groups - Slovak converts, migrants and refugees. All three groups are rather well integrated in the society and are rarely instigators of incidents that are publicly discussed. Thus it would seem the grounds for islamophobia amongst the Slovak population is intensified by political discourse or news presented in the media. Oftentimes, political discourse is negative towards Muslims with patterns of hate speech when politicians hope to gain political capital. This was the case in 2015 and 2016 during the European migration crisis. Islamophobic narratives reached its peak in this time even though the actual numbers did not support the fears that were spread by politicians and publicized in media. Since then, the islamophobic tendencies were on decline.

In 2021, INS observed hate speech mostly from the far right political parties - LSNS and SMER-SD, however their frequency was limited due to more pressing topics, such as Covid-19 pandemic.

Even though no new legislation was passed that would be discriminating towards Muslim community, the law from 2017 regulating registration of new religions is repeatedly considered as discriminatory. Communities from other religious minorities in Slovakia are also constrained. The discourse that preceded passing of this law was highly anti-Muslim and could be considered as expression of islamophobia by the most influential personas at the time.

INS monitors hate speech in online space and press and focuses mainly on politicians, state authorities and other distinctive representatives. Mentions of Muslim community is mostly on the negative side, either directly offensive or unknowingly diminishing. The impact is that even positive stories published by the media typically ignite a lot of hateful comments by the public.

In 2021, INS conducted a large-scale survey among all members of the community. The survey asked about experiences with hate crimes targeted at members of the community or their relatives. The results of the survey are astonishing, reporting a large portion of members experiencing hate crime at least once in their life in Slovakia. The report also showed that there is fear and reluctance to report these crimes which distorts the official statistics and diminishes the importance of the problem.

This report summarizes the context in Slovakia that is relevant for islamophobic incidents and reports on the most significant events in 2021 in relation to the discussed topic. The report is organized in three main categories. The first part introduces the Muslim community in Slovakia. The second part discusses islamophobic incidents and hate crime with special focus on hate speech from public figures and general public opinion. The last part provides recommendations.

## Muslims in Slovakia

For the first time in Slovak history, the national census of 2021 allowed people to explicitly choose Islam as their religion in its census form. The census, being mandatory for all people residing in Slovakia including those with various forms of temporary residence, created an unprecedented opportunity to learn how many Muslims actually live in Slovakia. The results will bring more representative data about the actual size of the Muslim community in Slovakia, even though it is reasonable to expect that not all of the community members were willing to share their religion in the census form.

While the census took place in 2021, the data were not shared until early 2022. As of writing this report the data were already publicized. The census has recorded 3862 Muslims living in Slovakia<sup>1</sup>. We know that some Muslims did not record their religion because they were either reluctant to reveal their religion publicly or because they did not know about it. Thus, our estimate of the actual size of the community is between 5000 to 7000 believers.

This is slightly more than we expected, our estimate prior to the census was up to 5000 believers. It is also worth noting that while in previous censuses there wasn't an option to choose Islam as a religion, one could choose to write it in the "others" section. 1212 Muslims were recorded this way in 2011 and 1934 in 2011. Such a significant rise in the number of believers in 2021 is most likely associated with a clearer and more specific way of formulating available choices to the question. There was no significant migration or any other noteworthy increase in Muslim population between 2011 and 2021.

Another reason that might have contributed to a more representative outcome of the census with regards to the size of the Muslim population was a promotional campaign of the Islamic Foundation in Slovakia towards Slovak Muslim community.

As for an ethnic composition, the relative majority is composed of Arabs. Other ethnic groups are Albanians, Bosnians and Afghans. In fewer numbers there are Turks, Pakistanis, as well as Muslims from the former USSR and several hundreds of Slovak converts. There are slightly more males than females with the exception of converts, who are slightly more dominated by women.

While it is important to avoid generalization, economic and social status of some of the ethnic groups can be characterized as following: As for the Arabs, for the most part they are either students, university graduates or entrepreneurs, while Albanians are working mostly in gastronomy and confectionery. Quite a large portion of Afghans are doctors or engineers who graduated from universities in Slovakia. This is due to a former bilateral treaty between Slovakia and Afghanistan that resulted in a significant number of Afghan high school students coming to Slovakia in the 80s of the 20th century. Many of them continued with their college studies and remained in Slovakia

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<sup>1</sup> ISLAMONLINE.sk:

<https://www.islamonline.sk/2022/01/zverejnili-udaje-zo-scitania-obyvateľov-k-islam-u-sa-prihlasilo-3862-moslimov/>  
(accessed on 14/07/2022)

ever since. In recent years there is also a growing number of Afghan refugees. Bosnians work often as traders and entrepreneurs.

Muslims live in all parts of Slovakia but their main concentration is in the capital city of Bratislava, the second largest community is in the city of Kosice and smaller but noteworthy communities are in Nitra, Levice, Trnava, Martin and Piestany. Due to Slovakia government's position since the beginning of the refugee crisis in 2015, the influx of refugees to Europe did not have any significant impact on the size and composition of Muslim community in the country.

## Islamophobic Incidents, Events and Discourse

When it comes to the frequency of anti-Muslim incidents, 2021 can be described as a calm year. The interest of Slovak political figures, media and society in Islam and Muslims had its peak during the so called “migration crisis” in 2015 and 2016. That was also the time when the cases of hate-speech against Muslims were most frequent. In the following years such cases were still present, but their frequency has decreased. In 2021, the topic of migration was not very important for Slovak political discourse, yet we did record some cases worth noting.

*“We fully respect you Mr. Lenč, you have freedom of religion. But then, dear Mr. Lenč, don't work as a political scientist in a Christian country.”*

Former prime minister Róbert Fico

In the election to The National Assembly in March 2016, the far-right party LSNS won 14 seats in the Assembly and 17 seats in the following election 4 years later. While in opposition, their members of parliament (MPs) are often extremely outspoken in any topic related to Muslims, Islam and migration. Some examples of their speech presented in the National Assembly since 2016 include “Islam has no place in Slovakia” (Natália Grausová, LSNS), “Islam is more than just a religion, it is cruel, disgusting and inhuman political system” (Milan Mazúrek, LSNS) or “Every European, Christian or atheist has to fear this satanic-pedophile creation of devil, which is the religion of Islam“ (Stanislav Mizík, LSNS).

There were incidents recorded with regards to LSNS in 2021 as well. On 25th of January 2021 LSNS's SMPs of parliament committee for defense didn't participate at the committee meeting. The Minister of Defense (Jaroslav Nad', OĽANO) ironically commented that they would be missing their intellectual input. LSNS issued a statement where it rejected participation of Slovak army forces in operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina saying that they are against occupation, especially when it comes „to our Slavik brothers, even though turkognized ones.“ „Turkognized“ is old Slovak saying referring to the era of Ottoman presence in the Balkans, when some of the local males were being taken to the Ottoman army at a young age, converted to Islam, trained and then fought as a special forces (Janissaries) on the side of Ottomans. In Slovak language it carries negative emotion and is meant to be offensive.<sup>2</sup>

On 16th of September 2021 during the discussion in the National Assembly MP for LSNS Stanislav Mizík during his speech quoted Muammar Gaddafi and finished with words: “And this is the holy truth, even if a Muslim said it, it is the holy truth.”

Aforementioned Milan Mazurek left LSNS in January 2021 and in March joined together with other ex-LSNS MPs newly formed party REPUBLIKA. In an attempt to clear his name, he

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<sup>2</sup> The event was described and statement of LSNS summarized by MP for ZA LUDÍ party Ján Benčík on his Facebook page in a post from 25/01/2021.



publicly apologized for the attack on Muslim family in front of Bratislava train station that he participated in.<sup>3</sup> The attack took place in June of 2015.

Another political party famous for anti-Muslim hate speech of its members is Smer-SD. Its leader and former prime minister Robert Fico started to spread stereotypes and conveyed hate speech against Muslims during the migration crisis from early 2015. Some of his statements over the last three years include: “We could hardly tolerate that 300-400 thousand Muslims would come here and start to build their mosques”<sup>4</sup>, “We are monitoring every single Muslim, who is currently present in the territory of Slovakia”<sup>5</sup> or “Islam has no place in Slovakia.”<sup>6</sup>

Other statements followed in the years to come, and not only by Mr. Fico. On 25th of May 2021 MP for Smer-SD Ľuboš Blaha wrote on his Facebook page about university teacher and political scientist Jozef Lenč, where he was mocking him for his Muslim faith.<sup>7</sup>

Lenč was also a target of Robert Fico a few months later. On 22th of August 2021 Mr. Fico shared a post on his Facebook page suggesting that Lenč is critical in his political analysis towards Smer-SD, because the party didn't accept more refugees during the refugee influx in 2014 and 2015. Fico also said: „I don't know what led the political scientist Lenč to become a Muslim in Slovakia and that he speaks about it publicly. He himself says without hesitation that being a Muslim is wonderful. All right, we fully respect you Mr. Lenč, you have freedom of religion. But then, dear Mr. Lenč, don't work as a political scientist in a Christian country.”<sup>8</sup> Fico's suggestion that one shouldn't do his profession in Slovakia due to his religious background generated a number of condemnations by public figures and journalists. On 24th of August Ľuboš Blaha responded to criticism regarding Mr. Fico's statements and defended his position.

Another party participating in the coalition government since 2020's election was Sme Rodina with its leader Boris Kollár becoming the head of National Assembly. Mr. Kollár and other members of his party produced numerous anti-Muslim statements during his career as a politician. In 2017 Mr. Kollár supported the discriminatory law preventing Muslims and other minor religious communities from obtaining state recognition (more on the topic of the law in separate chapter of this report). In support of the law he said: „We will support this law, I am even ready to increase the quota by amendment up to 100.000 and I will be very happy that when my children grow up, there will still be a double cross in our state symbol and not the crescent.” During the last approval round on 31st of January 2017 Boris Kollár said: „By this law we are helping to preserve the traditions of our roots, our civilization and our way of life. We are protecting our homeland, we are protecting

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<sup>3</sup> Apology of Milan Mazurek: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=145577974064259> (accessed on 16/7/2022)

<sup>4</sup> Fico: We could hardly tolerate thousands of Muslims with mosques  
<http://www.webnoviny.sk/slovensko/clanok/915511-fico-tisicky-moslimov-s-mesitami-by-sme-tolerovali-tazko/>  
(accessed on 1/3/2015)

<sup>5</sup> TA3: Security of Slovakia: <http://www.ta3.com/clanok/1072856/bezpecnost-slovenska.html> (accessed on 27/01/2016)

<sup>6</sup> Politico.eu: Robert Fico: 'Islam has no place in Slovakia'  
<http://www.politico.eu/article/robert-fico-islam-no-place-news-slovakia-muslim-refugee/> (accessed on 22/9/2016)

<sup>7</sup> The post was published in Ľuboš Blaha's official Facebook page on 25/4/2021. The page was later deleted by Facebook due to numerous hateful and misleading posts.

<sup>8</sup> Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/robertficosk/posts/1758170101033671> (accessed on 16/7/2022)

our people, we are protecting our families. Whether someone likes it or not, we have Christian traditions and Christian history in Slovakia.”<sup>9</sup>

On 28th of April 2021 Boris Kollár organized a press conference under the title “Let’s stop the EU pact on migration” He was also accompanied by MP Ľudovít Goga. Kollár repeated his position against migration and Goga added warnings about illiterates remaining in our social system, bringing more crime and ruining parts of our cities.<sup>10</sup>

After the election in 2020, the head of the winning party OĽANO, Igor Matovič became the new prime minister. After a year, however, due to struggles in the coalition government he was replaced by OĽANO member Eduard Heger. Albeit his statements were not hateful, they were stereotyping Muslim women in his comment about Afghan filmmaker living in Slovakia. While praising her life story he said: “She doesn’t know if she can feel safe in her own country. She does not fit into the dogma of an ordinary Muslim woman. She has education, courage and ambition.”

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## State Institutions

*“All the time you can see them taking breaks or praying.”*

Ministry of Economy blaming Muslim workers in Dubai

Several representatives of state institutions had comments that are worthy of mention. Since they are not elected representatives, we do not include them in the previous “Politics” section.

The general election finally took place on February 29, 2020 and SaS became part of the new coalition government with Mr. Sulík serving as a Minister of Economy. In 2020 Slovakia was preparing for Dubai Expo 2020, which took place in 2021 and 2022. The Ministry of Economy was managing construction of the Slovak Pavilion at the Expo.

In September 2021 the pavilion was still not completed. Aktuality.sk looked into what is going on and their source from the Ministry of Economy blamed it on the religion of Muslim workers. “All the time you can see them taking breaks or praying,” reports the newspaper.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> ISLAMONLINE.sk

<http://www.islamonline.sk/2017/02/poslanec-ktory-si-hovori-posledny-kriziak-navrhol-zakazat-na-slovensku-mesity/> (22/10/2017)

<sup>10</sup> Denník N:

<https://dennikn.sk/2368996/boris-kollar-odmieta-pakt-eu-o-utecencoch-v-rovnaky-den-bude-od-bruselu-pytat-miliardy/> (accessed on 18/07/2022)

<sup>11</sup> Facebook page of Eduard Heger: <https://www.facebook.com/premier.sk/posts/385247493165308> (accessed on 18/07/2022)

<sup>12</sup> Aktuality.sk

<https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/0b8w9k3/slovensku-hrozi-blamaz-nas-pavilon-na-svetovej-vystave-expo-nestihnu-dokoncit-vcas/> (accessed 18/07/2022)

In January 2021 Ján Orlovský became the new director of the National office for Migration. Up until then Mr. Orlovský served as a director of the Open Society Foundation in Slovakia (OSF). OSF, as a part of the world network of Open Society Foundations recognized as a project of businessman George Soros, was, for a number of years, subject to opposition from various far-right and conspiratorial communities and circles in Slovakia. This used to be blamed for the migration crisis in Europe, among other things. Therefore, moving the former director of its Slovak branch to such a specific office stimulated plenty of hateful and conspiratorial comments both by some parts of the public (mostly online<sup>13</sup>) as well as in the National Assembly itself. For example, Head of Smer-SD Mr. Fico said that the Assembly should speak out against this nomination. "I say this because this foundation openly makes a migration policy that is contrary to the interests of Slovakia, and makes a policy in favor of the financier Soros."<sup>14</sup>

## Legal System

Until this day, Islam is not an officially recognized religion by Slovak state and thus Muslims are denied certain rights to practice their religion. This is due to a legislation from 2017 which requires religious communities to fulfill a set of requirements to be eligible for official recognition.

Among these rights is the right to perform religious marriages equal to civil state marriages, the right to teach Islam as a part of religious education at state schools, the right to offer religious support of Imams to prisoners and soldiers or the right to perform funeral rituals in the accordance with the islamic religious tradition. The lack of recognition by the state was especially problematic during the COVID-19 pandemic. Spiritual leaders of recognized religions were allowed to visit patients in hospitals dying from COVID-19, who were separated from everybody else, including their families. Spiritual leaders of islam - imaams were not allowed to provide counseling to these patients.

The unusually strict law that regulates official registration of religion, states the requirements for the religious community. Since November 2016, it is required to provide 50.000 signatures of adult members of the religious community. Only then can the community apply for recognition by the state. The amendment to the law regulating the minimum number of followers required for registration of religion was part of a political campaign of party SNS in 2015 whose head, Andrej Danko wanted to prevent "islamization" of Slovakia<sup>15</sup>. According to him, as many as 20 thousand Muslims were living in Slovakia at that time and he warned against their growing

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<sup>13</sup> Official Facebook page of the Ministry of Interior of Slovak republic:

[https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=3534128276642388&id=239366402785275&anchor\\_composer=false](https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=3534128276642388&id=239366402785275&anchor_composer=false) (accessed on 25/7/2022)

<sup>14</sup> Denník N: <https://dennikn.sk/minuta/2242267/> (accessed on 25/7/2022)

<sup>15</sup> ISLAMONLINE.sk: Keď ešte Danko nebol vo vláde, prezradil pravý dôvod, prečo chce SNS sprísniť registráciu cirkví <http://www.islamonline.sk/2016/09/sns-vravi-ze-sprisenie-registracie-ma-zabranit-spekulantom-nie-je-to-cela-pravda/> (15/12/2016)

number. In 2016, SNS became part of the government and proposed the amendment in November which was passed by a vote<sup>16</sup>. Even though the president at the time, Andrej Kiska refused to sign the amendment, the definitive vote in the National Assembly in early 2017 passed, supporting the amendment.

The current registration law is repeatedly mentioned in the International Religious Freedom Report conducted annually by the U. S. Department of State.<sup>17</sup> The report criticizes the law as discriminatory towards small religions citing examples such as inability to perform religious marriages with official recognition or religious funerals. “A group without 50.000 adult adherents required to obtain status as an official religious group may seek registration as a civic association, which provides the legal status necessary to carry out activities such as operating a bank account or entering into a contract,” states the International Religious Freedom Report in Slovak Republic 2017 by U. S. Department of State.<sup>18</sup> “In doing so, however, the group may not call itself a church or identify itself officially as a religious group, since the law governing registration of citizen associations specifically excludes religious groups from obtaining this status,” the report continues.

In 2021 another unrecognized religious community, so called Old Catholic Church, launched promotional campaign with the intention to bring the attention of the public to the issue of the discriminatory law.<sup>19</sup> The campaign featured a series of Facebook posts, articles in the newspaper<sup>20</sup> and interviews.<sup>21</sup> The activists also issued an open letter to the newly appointed representative of the government of the Slovak Republic for the protection of freedom of religion or belief Anna Záborská.<sup>22</sup> They appealed to her to propose legislative change. Her representatives met with the activists and agreed that there is a need for change, but nothing beyond this vague statement happened since.

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<sup>16</sup> New York Times: A Blow-Slovak Muslims Critical of New Church Law

[http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2016/12/02/world/europe/ap-eu-rel-slovakia-islam.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2016/12/02/world/europe/ap-eu-rel-slovakia-islam.html?_r=0) (accessed on 15/12/2016). Independent: Slovakia bars Islam from becoming state religion by tightening church laws

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/slovakia-bars-islam-state-religion-tightening-church-laws-robert-fi-co-a7449646.html> (accessed on 15/12/2016). Reuters: Slovakia toughens church registration rules to bar Islam

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-slovakia-religion-islam-idUSKBN13P20C> (accessed on 15/12/2016)

<sup>17</sup>United States Department of State: International Religious Freedom Report for 2013 – Slovak Republic <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/222479.pdf> (accessed on 30/3/2015)

<sup>18</sup>United States Department of State: International Religious Freedom Report for 2017 – Slovak Republic <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/281202.pdf> (accessed on 25/11/2018)

<sup>19</sup> One of the posts as a part of the campaign <https://www.facebook.com/starokatolici.ba/posts/4232952763478015> (accessed on 25/7/2022)

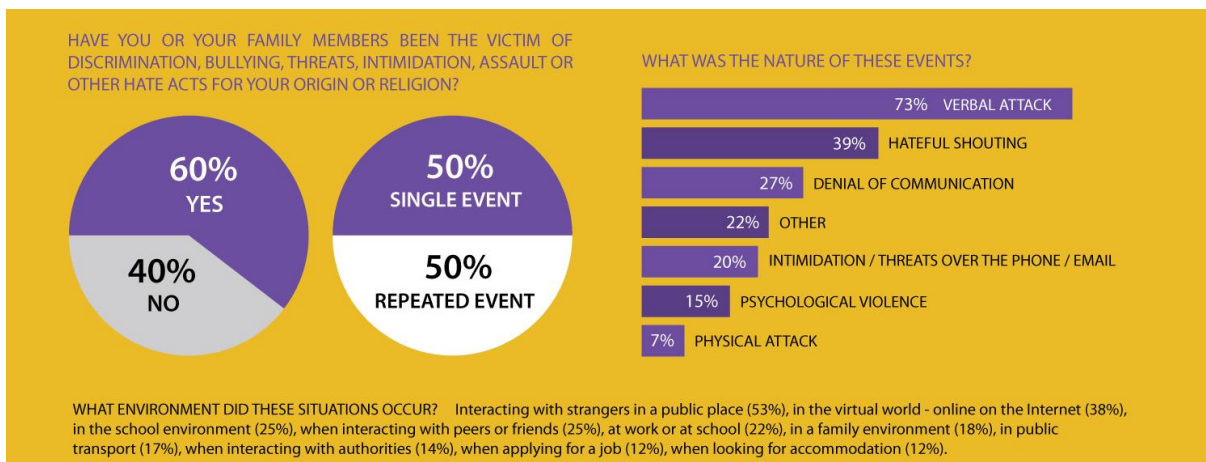
<sup>20</sup> Article in SME: <https://komentare.sme.sk/c/22802405/latka-pre-nove-a-male-cirkvi-je-privysoko.html> (accessed on 25/7/2022)

<sup>21</sup> Interview for Dobré noviny: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2GZZ7ach0IM> (accessed on 25/7/2022)

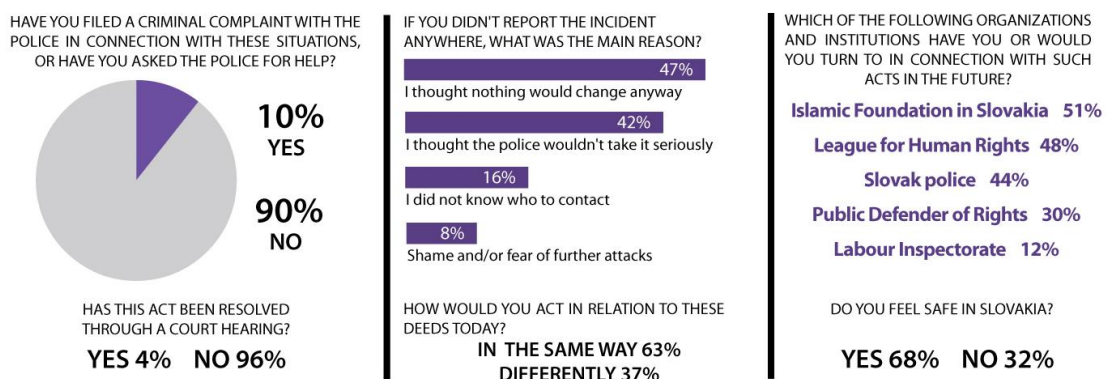
<sup>22</sup> Open letter to Anna Záborská [https://www.mojapeticia.sk/campaign/otvoreny-list-starokatolicok-a-starokatolikovutrechtskej-unie-na-slovensku-anne-zaborskej-zasadte-sa-za-zmenu-zakona-o-registracii-cirkvi/c418dd6d-cda0-40de-8f2b-2e7d28aa25e0?fbclid=IwAR1re3tdbD\\_G6OynlGuUY8zugDT1b3bj-qmIYE-a58hDpn8DQuEA4v1\\_2I](https://www.mojapeticia.sk/campaign/otvoreny-list-starokatolicok-a-starokatolikovutrechtskej-unie-na-slovensku-anne-zaborskej-zasadte-sa-za-zmenu-zakona-o-registracii-cirkvi/c418dd6d-cda0-40de-8f2b-2e7d28aa25e0?fbclid=IwAR1re3tdbD_G6OynlGuUY8zugDT1b3bj-qmIYE-a58hDpn8DQuEA4v1_2I) (accessed on 25/7/2022)

## Physical and Verbal attacks

INS has conducted a survey among members of Muslim community and their relatives to record their experiences with anti-Muslim hate crimes. In this survey, we asked about overall experiences in Slovakia, not limiting to the year 2021. The findings are very important because they portray the scale of hate-crimes.

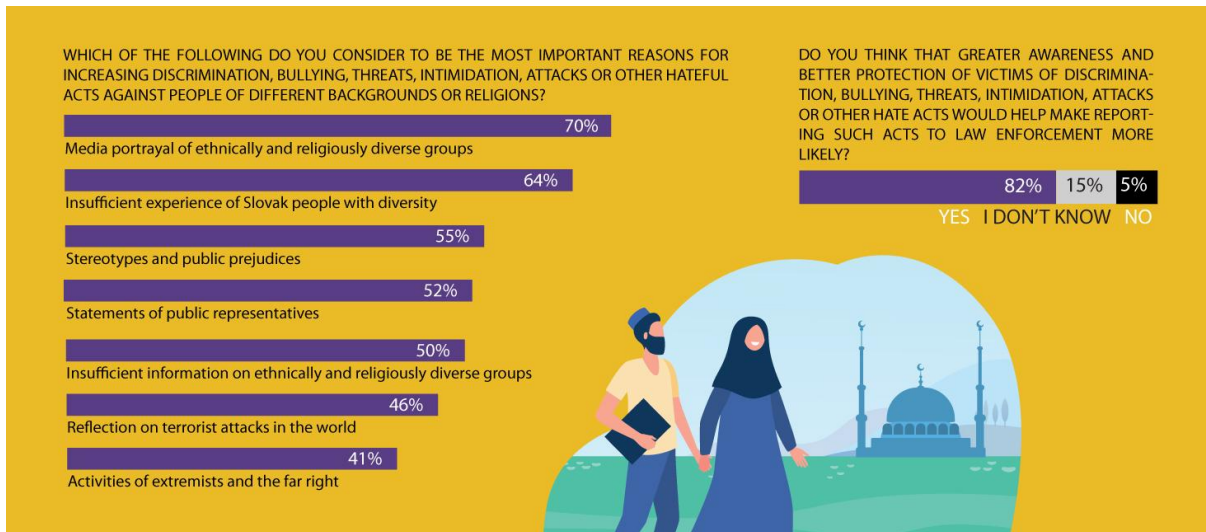


Online survey with over 50 questions was filled by 127 individuals. 60% of them said they or their family members were victims of discrimination or assault due to their origin or religion. Half of them said that the attacks have been repeated. Most of them were of verbal nature, but 7% reported physical attacks during their time in Slovakia.



In the survey we were also interested in knowing to what extent the respondents trust state authorities. We assumed that the trust wasn't very high and the survey confirmed it. As much as 90% did not report the events to the authorities. Most of the time they didn't think it would be useful and preferred to report to NGOs.





The survey was conducted for most of 2021 and the results were published in December 2021.<sup>23</sup> The most powerful aspect of the survey was the ability to describe the incidents by our respondents. Here, multiple narratives of hate crime originating from respondent's skin color or religious background were described.

Few of such incidents were reported also by the news agencies. One such episode happened to Lucia and her husband Ahmed, who is from Egypt.

On 9th of June 2021 Lucia was walking with her husband through the downtown area of Bratislava, the capital city. At one point they were faced by an apparently drunk person, who began to verbally attack Ahmed for his skin color and pushed him several times into the chest. Ahmed took out tear spray and sprayed it into the attacker's face. This made him stop for a while but then he started following them again and threatened to be the first to call the police. The police were already called by a passerby and they caught the attacker. According to Bratislava regional police spokesman Michal Szeiff the Police was doing all necessary procedures in the case.<sup>24</sup>

Bringing positive stories of Muslims living in Slovakia to the wide public is considered a good way to combat islamophobia. By learning about differences and similarities and bringing a familiarity to the Muslim community, one can influence a public opinion. Such attempt was done by the television Markíza when they published a story of a refugee from Afghanistan and member of Muslim community<sup>25</sup>. Unfortunately, the story generated an exceptionally high number of hateful comments online.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> ISLAMONLINE.sk: <https://www.islamonline.sk/salamsk/> (accessed on 15/8/2022)

<sup>24</sup> Nový čas: <https://www.cas.sk/clanok/2540027/lucia-sa-stala-svedkom-rasistickeho-utoku-v-bratislave-odporne-urazky-na-adresu-manzela/2/> (accessed on 28/7/2022)

<sup>25</sup> TV Markíza: <https://tvnoviny.sk/domace/clanok/127349-nie-kazdy-moslim-je-terorista-roky-sa-to-snazi-vysvetlit-afganc-zijuci-na-sl-ovensku> (accessed on 25/7/2022).

<sup>26</sup> Facebook page of TV Markíza: <https://www.facebook.com/TelevizneNoviny/posts/10159504371691410> (accessed on 25/7/2022).

In January 2021 one of the most famous Slovak arabist and translator Ján Pauliny died. In her interview for daily paper Pravda, publisher Gabriela Belopotocká talked about Mr Pauliny's project from 2010 to translate the Quran: "It's a shame that this project couldn't be finalized. I really wanted to publish the Quran, but when we once did a little research, the merchants were against the publication. Today it would be interesting, but we didn't finish it."<sup>27</sup> We find it interesting that shops were against the idea of publishing the translation of the Quran (even though some were already published) and worth noting in this report.

Hate-speech online is wide-spread and it would be difficult to cover all cases. Therefore we have focused on expressions on social network Facebook that were written by public figures and authorities. Since their profiles have a high impact on the public opinion, we consider their activity on social media as crucial and highly influential. One such case is the information published by the official Facebook page of the Police of Slovakia. The police informed that 10 refugees were caught when inspecting the truck traveling through the country. Refugees were processed according to the legislation. This post has triggered some very extreme comments, including calls to execute the refugees due to their religious background.<sup>28</sup>

In 2021 INS organized several public events in the Islamic center Cordoba in order to give the public a chance to visit the center and talk to local Muslims. These events were promoted on the Facebook page of INS, sometimes even boosted to reach more audiences. Unfortunately, the posts have generated more hate than genuine interest. For example the "Common livingroom with Bratislava's imam", informal meeting for public with the local Muslim religious leader, triggered mostly hateful comments, including pictures of ham or sarkastic remarks such as "this is going to be booming event".<sup>29</sup>

Luckily, in 2021 INS was not aware of any physical attack on islamic buildings that was reported and confirmed by Slovak authorities to be a hate crime against Muslims.

## Public attitude towards Muslims

There was no specific research on Muslims in 2021, but there was research on attitude towards refugees among university students. The research was done in 2018 and 2019 and its results were published in 2021. The research revealed, for example, that the word "refugee" is perceived much more negatively than words "migrants" or "foreigners".<sup>30</sup>

The research by Milan Šimečka Foundation and Centre for the Research of Ethnicity and Culture published in September 2021 looked into opinions of people in Slovakia with regard to

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<sup>27</sup> Pravda:

<https://kultura.pravda.sk/kniha/clanok/576034-zomrel-profesor-jan-pauliny-zanechal-po-sebe-kompletny-preklad-tisic-a-jednej-noci/> (accessed on 25/7/2022).

<sup>28</sup> Facebook page of the Police Force of Slovakia:

[https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=4105045906192267&id=1488631054500445](https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=4105045906192267&id=1488631054500445) (accessed on 28/7/2022)

<sup>29</sup> Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/IslamOnline.sk/posts/10159489307917629> (accessed on 28/7/2022)

<sup>30</sup> Denník N: <https://dennikn.sk/minuta/2253913/> (accessed on 28/7/2022)

foreigners living in Slovakia. 56,5 % of respondents think that “in the case of Muslim residents from other countries, we should not allow anyone to come and live in Slovakia.” The research also found that “only two percent of respondents agreed to allow the majority of Muslim residents from other countries to come and live in Slovakia.” Only less than a tenth of people think that Islam is a religion like any other and we should respect it. Almost half (43.4%) of the people think that Islam is dangerous for us and should not be allowed in Slovakia.<sup>31</sup>

## Civil Society and Political Initiatives to Counter Islamophobia

In order to counter islamophobia in Slovakia, members of the civil society not only react to cases that have already happened but also offer their own constructive narrative of how coexistence with Muslims may look like.

Interfaith project that aims, among other things, to counter islamophobia and bias against other religions was an ongoing activity throughout the year 2021. Due to restrictions related to COVID-19 pandemic the activities were mostly online, but especially towards the end of the year a number of real life activities were made possible too.

Typically, a festive dinner during the fasting month of Ramadan has a positive effect on the perception of Islam and Muslims. Muslims shared their dinner with representatives from various fields of public life including Jewish, Catholic and Protestant religious leaders, diplomats, state representatives and NGOs. Each of them delivered a speech where they spoke about their experience with Muslim community or multireligious environment. In 2021, due to COVID-19 pandemic, the event took place in an online space.<sup>32</sup> In September, however, the situation finally allowed for real life events to be organized. Similar to the festive iftar dinner, INS has organized a dinner to celebrate tolerance and interfaith dialogue with the representatives from various areas of public life.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Research by CVEK (PDF): [http://cvek.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Cudzie\\_nehceme\\_Analyza\\_final\\_edited.pdf](http://cvek.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Cudzie_nehceme_Analyza_final_edited.pdf) (accessed on 15/8/2022)

<sup>32</sup> ISLAMONLINE.sk <https://www.islamonline.sk/2021/05/slavnostny-iftar-piaty-rocnik-opat-v-znameni-korony/> (28/7/2022)

<sup>33</sup> ISLAMONLINE.sk <https://www.islamonline.sk/2021/09/islamska-nadacia-na-slovensku-usporiadala-v-bratislave-galavecer-s-kulturnym-programom/> (28/7/2022)



## Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

During the last couple of years we saw a decrease in the frequency of anti-Muslim hate speech from politicians. Unlike in recent past, when almost all of the parties in National Assembly had someone speaking out against Islam or Muslims, in 2021 the statements came mostly from LSNS and Smer-SD. It is also worth noting that no new law that could be connected to Islam or Muslims was proposed in the National Assembly in 2021, unlike in some of the previous two years, such as 2017.

Some of the statements of politicians and state institutions recorded above could be considered more as an act of ignorance, rather than intentional attack on Muslim religion or culture. This is the case especially with Mr. Heger as well as the Ministry of Economy.

We also recorded fewer cases of verbal and physical attacks on Muslims in Slovakia. The survey that we have conducted, however, shows how distorted the official numbers of these crimes are with as many as 90% of victims not reporting the crimes to official authorities. There is a need for more systematic collection of these cases which should be the responsibility of state authorities. More proactive approach from state representatives by providing encouragement, support and counsel to the victims is needed to motivate reporting of these cases. Absent trust towards the state authorities and fear of ostracizing the victim by the state representatives are two major reasons why these cases go unreported.

## Chronology

Chronological list of all cases of hate speech against Islam and Muslims and all verbal and physical attacks in 2021:

- **25/01/2021:** LSNS issued a statement where it rejected participation of Slovak army forces at operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina saying that they are against occupation, especially when it comes „to our Slavik brothers, even though turkognized ones.“
- **28/04/2021:** Boris Kollár organized a press conference under the title "Let's stop the EU pact on migration" He was also accompanied by MP Ľudovít Goga. Kollár repeated his position against migration and Goga added warnings about illiterates remaining in our social system, bringing more crime and ruining parts of our cities.
- **25/05/2021:** MP for Smer-SD Ľuboš Blaha wrote on his Facebook page about teacher and political scientist Jozef Lenč, where he was mocking him for his Muslim faith.
- **09/06/2021:** Slovak lady was walking with her husband Ahmed from Egypt though the downtown area of Bratislava, the capital city. They were faced by an unknown person, who began to verbally attack Ahmad for his skin color and pushed him several times into the chest.
- **22/08/2021:** Ex-prime minister Robert Fico shared a post on his Facebook page mocking once again Mr. Lenč and saying that “we fully respect you Mr. Lenč, you have freedom of religion. But then, dear Mr. Lenč, don't work as a political scientist in a Christian country.“
- **16/09/2021:** During the discussion in the National Assembly MP for LSNS Stanislav Mizík during his speech quoted Muammar Gaddafi finishing with words: “And this is the holy truth, even if a Muslim said it, it is the holy truth.”
- **28/09/2021:** The Ministry of Economy was managing construction of the Slovak Pavilion at the Dubai Expo. In September 2021 the pavilion was still not completed. Ministry of Economy blamed it on the religion of Muslim workers. “All the time you can see them taking breaks or praying,” reports the newspaper.