

Periodic Assessment of Research, Development, Artistic and Other Creative Activities VER 2026

Final Report of the Social Sciences Panel

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the Social Sciences Main Panel under Slovakia's VER26 research evaluation, assessing performance across research outputs, societal impact, and the research environment.

Overall, the Social Sciences in Slovakia rest on a solid and credible foundation. A substantial share of research is internationally recognised, reflecting consistent engagement with established academic standards and active participation in disciplinary communities. At the same time, only a small number of outputs reach internationally excellent or world-leading levels. This points to a system that is functioning well but has not yet fully realised its potential at the highest levels of international scholarship.

Across disciplines, common challenges include a tendency towards descriptive rather than analytically ambitious research, limited use of advanced methods and larger datasets, and uneven engagement with international literature and collaborations. Patterns of publication, including the prevalence of Slovak-language outputs and lower-visibility outlets, also reduce the international reach of otherwise solid work. In addition, current incentive structures appear to favour volume over selectivity, which may constrain the development of more ambitious research agendas.

The introduction of impact and research environment as assessed elements represents an important step forward. While strong examples of societal impact and supportive

institutional structures were identified, these remain uneven and would benefit from clearer evidence and more systematic development.

With targeted support, sustained investment, and deeper international engagement, the Slovak Social Sciences are well placed to strengthen their global standing and societal contribution.

Introduction

This report presents the outcomes of the periodic evaluation of research in the Social Sciences conducted under Slovakia's national research assessment process, VER26. As members of the Main Panel for the Social Sciences, we have collectively overseen a rigorous, collaborative, and reflective evaluation process spanning multiple sub-panels and a wide range of disciplines. VER26 represents an important milestone in the continued development of Slovakia's research ecosystem, providing both an assessment of current performance and a foundation for future progress.

The evaluation was guided by internationally recognised principles of research assessment, structured around three core dimensions: (1) the quality of research outputs, (2) the reach and significance of impact, and (3) the strength of the research environment. Together, these dimensions offer a comprehensive perspective on the vitality, sustainability, and future potential of the Social Sciences in Slovakia. This cycle marks the first full integration of research impact and research environment into the VER process, aligning Slovakia more closely with established international approaches—such as the UK's Research Excellence Framework (REF) and the Excellent in Research for Australia (ERA) —while remaining attentive to national priorities and contexts.

Across the Social Sciences, the findings indicate a research landscape that is stable, competent, and clearly engaged with established academic traditions. A substantial proportion of work was assessed as internationally recognised, reflecting sound scholarship

and active participation in disciplinary conversations. At the same time, the evaluation highlights a more limited share of outputs reaching internationally excellent or world-leading standards. Where such higher-level contributions were identified, they were typically characterised by strong theoretical ambition, methodological rigour, and clear positioning within international debates—often supported by collaboration and external funding.

A central structural tension identified across the evaluation is the balance between nationally oriented, high-volume research production and internationally visible, high-impact scholarship. Addressing this tension will be critical for future system development.

Several further cross-cutting themes emerged consistently across sub-panels. These include the opportunity to further strengthen conceptual and theoretical development, enhance methodological sophistication, and increase engagement with international data and comparative perspectives. Publication practices also play a significant role in shaping visibility and influence, with the prevalence of Slovak-language outputs and publication in lower-visibility outlets sometimes limiting international reach. These practices appear partly driven by an emphasis on quantity over fewer, more ambitious outputs with stronger international impact. This could limit the creation of research meeting or exceeding international standards of excellence. At the same time, the panels identified encouraging developments, including pockets of excellence, growing interdisciplinary collaboration, and emerging examples of research that has begun to demonstrate meaningful societal impact.

The inclusion of impact and environment as assessed elements in VER26 has generated valuable new insights. Stronger submissions in terms of societal impact of research were those that demonstrated clear, evidence-based links between research and real-world outcomes, alongside well-articulated strategies for engagement beyond academia. However, there remains scope to further develop systematic approaches to evidencing impact, particularly through stronger connections with stakeholders and clearer articulation of pathways from research to application. Similarly, the strongest research environments

were characterised by strategic clarity, investment in doctoral training, well defined incentives for producing high quality outputs, supportive infrastructure, protected research time and institutional flexibility that supports ambitious research agenda, and attention to researcher development and wellbeing.

This report is intended not only as an evaluation but also as a constructive resource for institutions, policymakers, and the wider research community. The recommendations outlined in the following sections aim to support the continued evolution of the Slovak Social Sciences towards greater international visibility, intellectual leadership, and societal relevance. The overall picture is one of solid foundations combined with considerable upside potential. With targeted support, sustained investment, and deeper engagement with international research communities, there is a clear opportunity to build on existing strengths and further enhance the global standing of Social Sciences research in Slovakia.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to all members of the sub-panels for their expertise, diligence, and commitment throughout the evaluation process. Their careful and thoughtful work has been central to the robustness and credibility of the outcomes presented here. We also extend our gratitude to the Ministry staff responsible for designing and administering VER26, whose professionalism, coordination, and support were essential to the successful delivery of this complex international evaluation and review exercise.

Section 1: overall themes along lines of quality of outputs, impact and CE

Overall, sub-panels across the social sciences found relatively small proportions of world-leading or internationally excellent research. This was often linked to a lack of theoretical ambition, scale, methodological rigor enabling the identification of causal mechanisms, or results which would expand the current state of knowledge internationally in the respective

research fields. There was, however, a greater proportion of work judged as ‘internationally recognised’.

Across submissions, common methodological weaknesses included: small sample sizes, descriptive designs, limited innovation, and insufficient use of international sources such as international data sets or most recent academic findings.

Frequent publishing in Slovak, rather than in English, which was often limited to less well-known journals, further limits the international impact of the research.

Cross-panel “quality levels” summary

The aim of this section is to provide institutions with general feedback of what sub-panels across all Social Sciences were looking for when assessing submitted work:

In interpreting differences in quality profiles across sub-panels, it is important to note that a structured calibration process was undertaken throughout VER26 to support consistency in the application of assessment criteria. Sub-panels engaged in both initial and ongoing calibration exercises, including the review of shared sample outputs and regular cross-panel discussions, to align expectations around the definitions of quality levels. While some variation in scoring distributions is evident across disciplines, this primarily reflects differences in publication practices, methodological traditions, and stages of field development rather than inconsistency in evaluation standards. The Main Panel is satisfied that the assessment process achieved an appropriate level of comparability and fairness across the Social Sciences.

World-leading

Work in this category broke new conceptual or theoretical ground and demonstrated a high level of originality, with clear relevance beyond the national context. These outputs typically

engaged directly with, and in some cases helped shape, international debates. Work was based on rigorous and transparent methodologies and often showed the potential to influence the direction of research in the field. The research used state-of-the-art methods for analysis, focused on the understanding of causal mechanism rather than providing correlational evidence. Work in this category was more likely to be externally funded than those in other categories and often included international co-authors.

Internationally excellent

Internationally excellent work made a strong and clearly identifiable contribution to international discussions. It was generally characterised by well-developed research design, appropriate and robust use of data, and clear analytical framing. While not necessarily field-defining, such work extended existing knowledge in meaningful ways and demonstrated a high standard of scholarship. Such work was also self-aware of its limitations. Work in this category was more likely to be externally funded than those in other categories.

Internationally recognized

Work in this category was competent and clearly situated within the relevant literature. It typically demonstrated sound academic practice, although it was more often descriptive or confirmatory rather than innovative. Contributions at this level tended to engage with existing debates without substantially advancing them, and showed more limited development in theoretical or methodological terms.

Nationally recognized

Work assessed as nationally recognised was generally relevant within a local or national context but with more limited originality or wider applicability. It was often descriptive or applied in nature, and in some cases more closely aligned with pedagogical or professional outputs. Frequently, it would include adapting or extending previous findings to the Slovak context. While such work could be of value in context, its contribution to broader academic

debates was typically modest. Often, such work can be developed to be internationally recognised by linking local case studies with international debates.

Below standard

Outputs in this category were characterised by a lack of clear research focus or contribution. In several cases, methodological weaknesses or issues of relevance were evident, and the work did not engage sufficiently with existing knowledge in the field. As a result, these outputs were not considered to make a meaningful contribution to research. Some work in this category did not meet the definition of research and was closer to professional or administrative activity. At least one panel suggested that it would be helpful to separate ‘not research’ from research submitted that was below standard.

Impact and Environment

The impact and environment elements were new parts of the VER process for the 2026 exercise. Here, submissions with higher scores demonstrated explicit attention to the structures and mechanisms supporting research, including doctoral training, institutional infrastructure, sustainable funding and wellbeing.

Sub-panels usually distinguished between academic quality and impact. High-quality outputs did not automatically demonstrate impact. Across the panels, the strongest impact case studies supported their submissions with evidence of direct impact with a clear causal link between the research and the outcome – for example, legislative change or being cited by statutory bodies or agencies as influential, and direct changes to policy or practice resulting from the research.

While the assessed environments are generally functional, organised, and designed to sustain a steady, quantitatively large, flow of applied and locally relevant research, they appear less consistently targeted towards supporting high-risk, high-reward ideas, sustained methodological innovation, or genuinely agenda-setting scholarship at the

international frontier. This type of research often requires long financial and time investments, collecting of original data, state-of-the art analytical tools, and/or setting-up international collaborations and developing and keeping top researchers. It is often the most impactful but can conflict with systemic demands to produce a greater quantity of research. While the academic environment is highly organised, there is a risk that this may constrain flexibility and innovation. Maintaining an appropriate balance between administrative and research tasks is also helpful for supporting the development and flourishing of researchers.

Going forward, the impact and environment section would be strengthened by asking for more evidence from users and clearer linkages between research evidence uptake and impact beyond academia. Further, evidence of the number of beneficiaries of the impact was highlighted by several sub-panels as important in order to assess the reach of the impact being claimed.

Recommendations:

1. Further Develop Theoretical Ambition and International Positioning

The sub-panels identified opportunities to strengthen the proportion of work reaching world-leading levels, particularly through greater emphasis on conceptual and theoretical development. Enhancing rigour here could be encouraged through funding criteria, international collaboration, and encouraging publishing in widely recognised international outlets with an aim to be part of international debates while acknowledging that using journal status in any evaluation exercises should be done within the international agreements of the use of responsible metrics in research (e.g. the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)) and its successors.

2. Enhance Methodological Rigor and Use of Data

Sub-panels noted scope to further strengthen methodological approaches. In particular, expanding the use of larger samples, more analytical designs, and international datasets would support more robust and generalisable findings. Investment in advanced methods training and data infrastructure would help underpin this development. Also, there seemed to be a lack of ‘innovative’ methodological designs.

3. Encourage Scale and Collaboration in Research Activity

The current landscape includes a number of smaller-scale projects, which may limit the potential for broader impact and visibility. There is an opportunity to support more collaborative and larger-scale research initiatives, including partnerships across institutions and disciplines. Also, sub-panels noted that research that was part of international collaborations often scored higher and thus such work could be further encouraged and supported. Such approaches can help build critical mass and strengthen the overall quality and reach of research and can have cumulative or snowball effects in enhancing and lifting entire research clusters into an internationally connected sphere.

4. Build on Strong Foundations of Internationally Recognised Work

A clear strength across submissions was the presence of internationally recognised research that is well grounded in existing literature but not always leading the field or developing new conceptual approaches. With targeted support—such as opportunities for international engagement, dissemination, participation on journal boards, and publications in international projects —there is strong potential for this work to develop further towards internationally excellent levels.

5. Strengthen Impact Pathways and Research Environment

The introduction of impact and environment elements has highlighted positive developments, particularly where strong support structures are in place. Looking ahead,

there is scope to further strengthen the articulation and evidence of impact beyond academia, including through closer engagement with stakeholders or users of academic research and clearer pathways to engage with policy makers. Continued investment in doctoral training, infrastructure, and sustainable funding will remain important in supporting this progress.

The introduction of a longer-term vision for the development and advancement of ambitious research at the institutional level would be beneficial. Setting up international collaborations will help ensure the transfer of best practices from world-leading institutions. Securing international financing should become a priority. Existing finances should be distributed according to the quality of research outputs as judged by international standards of excellence, rather than based on metrics focused on the quantity of inputs or outputs. Promising researchers should be identified and supported both with financial resources and otherwise (e.g., reduced teaching load, ability for longer-term research visits abroad, etc.). In particular, young researchers need dedicated protected time for research, enabling them to develop and launch ambitious research agendas. The most ambitious projects are often high-risk, high-reward, as was emphasized by the European Research Council grant evaluation criteria. Such projects can be encouraged by providing talented researchers with a flexible, secure, and nurturing work environment.

6. Target Leading International Journals in All Domains

We highly encourage Slovak Universities and Research Institutes to prioritize and reward quality over quantity. While an output can be of great quality and constitute a genuine contribution of knowledge, it can easily be overlooked if it is not published in leading English-language journals. Furthermore, research published in highly ranked international journals has to meet these journals' stringent publication criteria. Some panels supported using journals as a proxy for quality while others were opposed to this. Again, using international standards for evaluation research such as the previously mentioned DORA agreement will

be a helpful international yardstick for considering the responsible use of metrics in evaluating research. We recommend exploring whether an output's citations by international researchers could be looked at separately from citations within Slovakia bearing in mind disciplinary differences, e.g. local education research might genuinely only want to reach local teachers and policy makers whereas developing a new economic theory would seek to reach international audiences.

International impact could also be enhanced through targeted support for open access publications in highly regarded outlets, for instance by providing funding for the payment of open access fees in top tier journals. Finally, incentivizing research produced in the English language will aid the dissemination of the scientific findings generated in Slovakia and help further integrate Slovak researchers within the broader international community with pathways to maintain the policy relevance to the Slovak context through other communication means such as knowledge exchange and blogs and policy interchanges.

Section 2: relevant issues to each panel

Political Science

The reviewed topics, theoretical frameworks, approaches, and methodologies span the full breadth of political science, indicating a robust and diverse academic environment. Approximately one fifth of submissions qualified as internationally excellent, demonstrating that a significant part of reviewed Slovak scholarship is actively shaping international academic debates through theoretical innovation, original empirical research, and rigorous, transparent analytical practices. A further two fifths achieved internationally recognisable work, evidencing a sustained capacity among Slovak political scientists to engage with and contribute meaningfully to international discourse. The remaining two fifths, recognised at the national level, offered valuable insights, albeit with more limited broader applicability.

The benchmarks for these categories included: new conceptual ground broken, analytical explications with wide implications; going beyond incremental development of existing knowledge (world-leading work); new datasets or case; substantial contribution internationally; professional use of methods and research design (internationally excellent work); new empirics without theoretical depth; synthesis of existing knowledge; competent but often descriptive analysis (internationally recognised work); no contribution to international debates; overviews or textbook style accounts; lacking clear research question (nationally recognised work).

In terms of social impact, the strongest cases were those in which research had been demonstrably adopted by non-academic actors—such as policymakers, civil society organisations, and public institutions—supported by clear evidence of collaboration and engagement. These cases reflected carefully designed, long-term strategies in which research expertise was deliberately mobilised to reach clearly defined audiences through multiple, coordinated channels. By contrast, weaker cases relied primarily on publication output, media presence, or general public engagement. Such activities constituted dissemination rather than impact in the evaluative sense, often reflecting short-term approaches lacking clearly articulated target audiences or systematic evidence of influence.

Assessment of the creative environment proved challenging due to limited contextual information accompanying submissions. Greater strategic clarity and articulation of institutional identity within the Slovak political science landscape were however clearly associated with stronger evaluations. The most compelling submissions demonstrated explicit attention to the structures and mechanisms supporting research, including doctoral training, institutional infrastructure, sustainable funding, and doctoral researchers' mental health.

Media and Communications

The process of the Media and Communications sub-panel was highly deliberative and reflexive throughout with all outputs in each of the three categories discussed even when there was close agreement, making the assessment process transparent and helping the sub-panel to continue to calibrate throughout the six months even post their structured and formal calibration exercise with a small number of outputs.

Following this process the sub-panel's qualitative comments on the Outputs, Impact and Creative Environment evidence reviewed are in line with the final scores awarded. Scores and comments places Media and Communications scholarship in Slovakia in the 'internationally recognised' category of quality. This means that research is recognizable as academic research engaging with literature, but lacks a strong, overarching theoretical framework or compelling argument for broader significance.

The research assessed is competent but descriptive (this echoes a number of the deliberative discussions the sub-panel had). Methodologically the research adopts basic methods and standard approaches across a range of methodological possibilities from quantitative to creative methods. In particular, the convenience samples were noted, as were the absence of hypothesis testing research for quantitative methods and the relatively few outputs that used creative and arts-based methods. Overall, internationally recognised means that the research confirms existing theories rather than expanding them.

Regarding Impact the quality of statements submitted varied considerably making the task of judging quality hard. The requirement of the VER for "an objectively verifiable source confirming the impact" was not always honoured. For Creative Environment, the higher scoring entry shared institutional strategy for "supporting and realising societal impact for the next five-year period", outlining the strategic objectives and providing relatively specific timebound goals through which to achieve them.

Sociology and Social Anthropology

The research focus in submissions was usually in this field, as presented in the applications for periodic evaluation, focused on Slovakia and the surrounding regions in the context of post-socialism. Methodologically the field is dominated by quantitative studies with also some excellent ethnographic work.

Statistical techniques were often relatively basic, demonstrating competence, but not excellence and highlighting training needs to reach international or world-leading excellence standards. In terms of research foci, the sub-panel noted that while a continued focus on Czech and Slovak paths (and intra-Slovakian) comparisons remained useful, the vibrancy of the research field would be enhanced by seeing a greater diversity of research topics covered and expanding theoretical horizons used in research.

Stronger outputs were often those associated with external, international funding.

The sub-panel also found that the more interdisciplinary outputs they received were of higher quality and that this could be further encouraged.

Psychology and Cognitive Sciences

The research domain of psychology and cognitive sciences in Slovakia demonstrates a certain level of maturity, both in terms of scientific rigour and social impact. Overall, the quality of reviewed outputs was seen as very good given limited staff and personnel resources at smaller institutions. Several world-leading contributions were identified, many of which investigate cross-national populations and address topics of high societal relevance. However, the sub-panel identified a lot of heterogeneity in the quality of the examined outputs. The best research was ambitious, original, and substantially contributed to knowledge in its respective domain. However, lower-rated outputs often produced only

incremental advances, adapted existing international research to the Slovak context, or focused on descriptive analyses.

The vast majority of submissions in psychology and cognitive sciences were rated as ‘internationally recognized’ with virtually no work falling below the nationally recognized threshold. This reflects the active and meaningful role that Slovak researchers in psychology and cognitive sciences play in shaping the international discourse in the field. A number of submissions rated as ‘nationally recognized’ were written in Slovak, limiting their accessibility to an international readership. These submissions also tended to focus on topics of relevance to specific national institutions, or on niche areas that are harder to situate within the broader development of the two disciplines. This is an understandable outcome.

Sub-panel members put forward several recommendations to advance further open science practices and to strengthen experimental methodology – particularly regarding experimental sample sizes, methods focused on the understanding of mechanisms, and participant diversity. They also recommended improving the research environment by increasing the amount of available resources. These could be used to, for example, hire more high-quality staff or faculty, enable the collection of larger longitudinal datasets, or to expand doctoral programs.

While the sub-panel generally viewed the social impact of the assessed studies as excellent, largely due to the applied orientation of many submissions, discussions in the sub-panel highlighted a recurring challenge: disentangling impact from scientific merit in the evaluation process. The field seems to lack a common framework for valorisation and would benefit from deepening its ties with non-academic stakeholders, including governmental and non-governmental organizations, the healthcare sector, as well as industry partners. Strengthening these collaborations would help ensure that research agendas are shaped not

only by academic curiosity, but also by real-world needs, ultimately producing outputs with greater societal readiness and applicability.

Education

The sub-panel found an improvement in the quality of work since 2022. It is not clear to what extent this reflects substantive improvement or improved selection and alignment of submissions.

A continued issue also noted in the VER pilot was that too many submissions were still rated as 5 (below national recognition) due to irrelevance to education rather than quality necessarily. Education is particular in the sense that all panels are located in higher education research and sometimes issues that are simply ‘higher education related’ might come to the education panel. Thus, a text book entry in health sciences might be submitted to the Education panel, although educational researchers would only consider it ‘education’ if it was about pedagogy in the discipline or teaching innovation.

Despite improvements, the quality of most submitted work was still not reaching world-leading with no study judged as world-leading. Studies generally lacked research designs. Most were small snapshots concerning relatively minor issue for education. There were no systematic reviews of prior evidence, and no robust evaluations of either policy or practice (randomised control trials or similar). There was very limited use of existing datasets, and nothing involving freely-available international datasets like PISA or TIMSS. There were no substantial sample sizes, no apparent consideration of data quality or missing data, and their impact on results. Much of the reporting was brief and formulaic, with background considerably longer than the methods, results and implications combined. There appears to be no culture in the present research landscape in education to discuss limitations to research. Indeed, the sub-panel noted that overall the body of submissions suggested that there was scope for further fuelling passion for discovery among researchers and increasing the research methods and skills used by researchers. This capacity building includes skills

in communicating research to larger audiences and situating it within international debates. Also, where good work was found, it was not usually published in international journals and thus not necessarily accessible to the international research community.

The small number of outputs deemed Internationally Excellent shared (1) Clear and relevant research aims (2) Suitable analysis and interpretation and (3) Findings that could contribute meaningfully to the field. It was noted that maybe because the overall profile of submissions was not reaching international standards of excellence, there could have been some generosity in even awarding ‘internationally excellent’ to this work.

The sub-panel judged some work to be internationally recognised work and noted that this would be the ‘standard’ rather than exception in countries such as the UK. Most of the work submitted was, however, below this and judged as Nationally recognised. A high proportion of work submitted was graded as Below National Recognition. In practice this meant non-research or research so flawed or of so little consequence that it contributes nothing to the body of existing knowledge on any topic.

The five grades for impact and environment

This new element was more difficult to judge for the education panel. Here, they found little evidence of attributing policy and practice changes to research and noted that statements relied largely on institutional self-reporting and not externally verified claims. There were some positive indications around research environments being supportive but possibly short of delivering the impact to policy yet. No ‘excellent’ grades were awarded for impact or environment.

Social Work

Just less than 5% of all outputs were judged to be world leading. This body of work addressed research gaps, was grounded in and advanced theoretical understandings, and moved an international conversation forward. Methods were appropriate, solid and transparent.

The largest category of outputs (45%) were internationally recognised. These contributions were sound and credible, but did not provide an outstanding contribution in terms of originality or significance. Innovation was rare, both in methodology and theory.

Law

Law judged indicators of quality to include engaging with new and/or complex legal issues, providing new insights, arguments or theoretical frameworks for contemporary legal problems and advancing the knowledge and theory across legal fields. Outputs falling into the highest category of quality introduced new ideas and/or evidence, addresses gaps in knowledge of theory, providing outstanding contributions to academic knowledge with the capacity to produce major changes in legal knowledge and/or practice. The panel used the criteria of originality, significance and rigour (as per the UK REF criteria).

The body of work submitted to the Law sub-panel reflects a broad spectrum of legal scholarship, encompassing doctrinal (black-letter) analysis, legal theory, and, to a lesser extent, interdisciplinary approaches. The reviewed outputs demonstrate that legal research in Slovakia is firmly grounded in established academic traditions, with a clear emphasis on engaging contemporary legal problems and contributing to ongoing discussions within specific fields of law. At the same time, the overall profile suggests that while the research base is stable and competent, its capacity to shape wider international debates or to introduce significant theoretical innovation remains more limited.

In terms of quality distribution, the majority of outputs were assessed as internationally recognised or nationally recognised, indicating a solid level of scholarly activity that is appropriately situated within existing literature and demonstrates sound academic practice. These outputs typically engaged with relevant legal sources and provided structured argumentation, but were more often confirmatory or descriptive rather than innovative. A smaller proportion of submissions reached the level of internationally excellent work, where outputs made clearer and more substantial contributions to international legal debates through well-developed arguments, stronger analytical depth, and more explicit positioning within the broader scholarly landscape. Only a few outputs were clearly identified as world-leading, which aligns with patterns observed across other social science disciplines.

The sub-panel applied a consistent evaluative logic based on originality, significance, and rigour. The highest-quality outputs were those that moved beyond descriptive accounts of legal provisions or case law and instead developed new interpretations, conceptual frameworks, or critical perspectives on legal issues. These works demonstrated a clear awareness of gaps or tensions within existing scholarship and provided well-substantiated contributions aimed at addressing them. They often combined doctrinal precision with theoretical reflection and, in some cases, extended their relevance beyond national legal systems by engaging with international scholarship or comparative perspectives.

At the level of internationally recognised work, outputs were typically competent and clearly embedded in the relevant literature, but their contribution tended to be incremental. These studies often confirmed or illustrated existing interpretations rather than challenging or extending them in a substantial way. Their analytical scope was more limited, and engagement with broader theoretical or interdisciplinary debates was less evident. Nevertheless, they formed an important core of the research landscape, demonstrating the capacity of legal scholars to participate in ongoing academic discussions.

Outputs assessed as nationally recognised were generally more narrowly focused, frequently addressing local legal issues or practical applications. While such work could be valuable within its specific context, it often lacked a clearly articulated research question, broader conceptual framing, or engagement with international scholarship. In many cases, these outputs were descriptive in nature and more closely aligned with professional or pedagogical objectives than with advancing academic knowledge.

The lowest category included outputs that did not meet the standard of nationally recognised research. These were characterised by a lack of substantive legal analysis, limited or absent engagement with academic literature, and insufficient clarity regarding their contribution. In some cases, these outputs resembled reports or summaries rather than research, or were primarily addressed to practitioners without incorporating scholarly discussion.

A key differentiating factor across all quality levels was the extent and clarity of originality. Higher-quality outputs demonstrated not only novel insights but also a clear articulation of their relevance and significance within the field. They positioned their contributions in relation to existing debates, explained why the identified gaps mattered, and showed how their findings advanced understanding. In contrast, lower-quality work tended to display implicit or weak originality, with contributions that were insufficiently justified or narrowly framed. The strength of engagement with academic scholarship also played a crucial role: higher-scoring outputs were well embedded in the literature and often engaged with adjacent fields, while lower-scoring outputs showed limited scholarly interaction.

Several recurring weaknesses were identified across submissions. A significant proportion of outputs were overly descriptive, including case commentaries without deeper academic analysis or conference reports summarising discussions rather than developing independent arguments. Limited engagement with international scholarship and a tendency

to publish in formats that restrict analytical depth (e.g. short articles) were also noted. Additionally, some submissions raised questions regarding appropriate panel allocation, particularly where interdisciplinary work lacked a sufficiently strong legal component.

In terms of social impact, the strongest case studies demonstrated a clear and verifiable link between research and its societal effects, such as influence on legislation, judicial practice, or public policy. These cases were supported by concrete evidence and reflected sustained engagement with stakeholders. Weaker cases, by contrast, relied primarily on dissemination activities, such as publications or media presence, without demonstrating a direct or measurable impact, indicating a need for more structured and evidence-based approaches to impact development.

The assessment of the research environment highlighted generally favourable conditions, including transparent recruitment processes, support for early career researchers, and initiatives promoting equality and career development. Stronger submissions demonstrated clear strategic direction, alignment between institutional priorities and research strengths, and active collaboration at both national and international levels. Sustainability, including long-term planning and stable funding, was also identified as an important factor contributing to higher evaluations.

Overall, the Law sub-panel identified a well-established and competent research landscape with a strong base of internationally recognised work. At the same time, the findings point to opportunities for further development, particularly in strengthening theoretical ambition, deepening engagement with international scholarship, and enhancing the clarity and impact of research contributions. These steps would support the progression of more outputs towards internationally excellent and, ultimately, world-leading standards.

Economics and Business

Overall, research in economics and business in Slovakia was found to be of high social relevance but in most cases below the internationally excellent level of research standards. The quality of the outputs was found to be heterogeneous with strong disparities between institutions: only 1 out of the 16 assessed institutions was found to have a large majority of its outputs attaining the internationally excellent level whereas 25% of the examined institutions had over 80% of their outputs only attaining relevance limited to the Slovak national context.

The strongest outputs clearly referenced, and built upon, the international state-of-the-art in the literature, examined questions of high economic and societal relevance, focused on the rigorous identification of causal mechanisms, and demonstrated a strong generalisability and robustness of results. In contrast, the weaker outputs focused on descriptive correlational analyses, which in the worst cases masqueraded as being causal. In addition, the lower rated papers made more incremental contributions, producing limited advances in economic theory or in our understanding of mechanisms underlying economic and societal phenomena.

Even though publication quality was not used as an input into the evaluation process, the expertly agreed-upon output evaluations showed a strong correlation with outlet quality. On the one hand, higher-ranked outputs were in general published in stronger peer-reviewed international journals. This points to a congruence between objective output evaluation criteria and the typical requirements of more selective and internationally visible outlets. On the other hand, lower-ranked outputs were frequently, though not systematically, published in local, regional, or lower-visibility journals which have more limited requirements in terms of the clarity, importance, and methodological rigor of a contribution. Importantly, some of these outputs were published in predatory outlets, which are known for limited peer-review

processes, high publishing fees, and fast publishing times. While these features may be tempting to some researchers operating in an environment which rewards quantity over quality, they are not conducive to good science. The use of such outlets should therefore be actively discouraged at the institutional level.

Conclusion

The findings of VER26 point to a Social Sciences research landscape in Slovakia that is grounded, credible, and actively engaged with established academic traditions, with a strong base of internationally recognised work across disciplines. At the same time, the evaluation highlights clear opportunities to further develop theoretical ambition, methodological sophistication, and international positioning to increase the proportion of research reaching internationally excellent and world-leading standards. Addressing the balance between research quantity and quality will be central to achieving this transition.

The introduction of impact and environment as assessed elements has also marked an important step forward, providing a more holistic understanding of how research contributes to society and is supported institutionally. It helped identify clear opportunities for improvement: targeting quality over quantity in research and encouraging international collaborations and grant applications.

Looking ahead, the continued evolution of the system will depend on sustained investment in people, infrastructure, and international collaboration, alongside a clear strategic focus on quality, scale, and engagement beyond academia. With these elements in place, the Slovak Social Sciences are well positioned to build on their current strengths and to enhance their visibility, influence, and contribution at the international level.

We would also like to express our appreciation to the Ministry for entrusting the Main Panel with this important evaluation process. The openness and collaborative spirit that characterised VER26 have been essential to its success. Panel members have valued the opportunity to contribute and to learn more about the Slovak research system and would welcome the possibility of continued engagement, particularly in supporting future capacity-building activities for researchers and the further strengthening of the research environment in Slovakia.

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