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Cross-border commuting between Slovakia and Austria:
Economic Gains, Social Costs and Language Use

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ABSTRACT ENGLISH

This thesis examines cross-border commuting between Slovakia and Austria, focusing on the economic benefits, social costs, and language-related experiences of Slovak commuters working in Austria. Since cross-border commuting is often perceived as a mainly economic decision, this study examines the other side of this phenomenon and focuses on a broader set of factors, including workplace context, language use, social integration, and social costs. A questionnaire survey was distributed to 82 Slovak cross-border commuters. The results provide a detailed overview of the wage differences, social trade-offs and the importance of language in the Austrian labour market. The survey showed higher earnings in Austria than in comparable positions in Slovakia, confirming economic incentives. At the same time, the results indicate that commuting is associated with considerable social and psychological costs, including exhaustion, loss of free time, mental stress, and difficulties maintaining personal relationships. Therefore, the findings emphasize that cross-border commuting should not be understood solely as a rational economic decision. Rather, it represents a multidimensional experience in which financial advantages are negotiated against social costs, language requirements, and the everyday challenges of working across borders.

Key words: cross-border commuting, language, Austria, Slovakia, social costs

ABSTRACT GERMAN

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht das grenzüberschreitende Pendeln zwischen der Slowakei und Österreich und konzentriert sich dabei auf die wirtschaftlichen Vorteile, sozialen Kosten sowie sprachbezogenen Erfahrungen slowakischer Pendlerinnen und Pendler, die in Österreich arbeiten. Da grenzüberschreitendes Pendeln häufig vor allem als wirtschaftliche Entscheidung wahrgenommen wird, betrachtet diese Studie auch die andere Seite dieses Phänomens und berücksichtigt ein breiteres Spektrum an Faktoren, darunter den Arbeitskontext, den Sprachgebrauch, die soziale Integration und soziale Kosten. Die Daten wurden mittels einer Fragebogenerhebung unter 82 slowakischen Grenzpendlerinnen und Grenzpendlern erhoben. Die Ergebnisse liefern einen detaillierten Überblick über Lohnunterschiede, soziale Abwägungen und die Bedeutung von Sprache auf dem österreichischen Arbeitsmarkt. Die Befragung zeigt, dass die Befragten in Österreich höhere Einkommen erzielen als in vergleichbaren Positionen in der Slowakei, was die Bedeutung wirtschaftlicher Anreize bestätigt. Gleichzeitig weisen die Ergebnisse darauf hin, dass Pendeln mit erheblichen sozialen und psychologischen Kosten verbunden ist, darunter Erschöpfung, Verlust an Freizeit, psychische Belastung und Schwierigkeiten bei der Aufrechterhaltung persönlicher Beziehungen. Die Ergebnisse verdeutlichen daher, dass grenzüberschreitendes Pendeln nicht ausschließlich als rationale wirtschaftliche Entscheidung verstanden werden sollte. Vielmehr stellt es eine multidimensionale Erfahrung dar, bei der finanzielle Vorteile gegen soziale Kosten, sprachliche Anforderungen und die alltäglichen Herausforderungen des Arbeitens über Grenzen hinweg abgewogen werden.

Schlüsselwörter: grenzüberschreitendes Pendeln, Sprachgebrauch, Österreich, Slowakei, soziale Kosten

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1. INTRODUCTION

Cross-border commuting has become an established form of employment in the European Union. In contrast to permanent migration, individuals are active in a foreign labour market while maintaining their residence, family life, and social ties in their home country. This form of mobility is especially present in border regions where geographical closeness is combined with substantial differences between the two labour markets in several aspects. According to the European Commission, a cross-border worker is a person who works in one EU country while living in another and returns to the country of residence daily or at least once a week (European Migration Network, 2018).

The established conditions within the European Union actively support and open up opportunities for cross-border commuting, particularly through the free movement of workers under Article 45 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and the removal of systematic border controls within the Schengen Area (European Union, 2012; Recchi, 2015). These conditions opened new horizons and opportunities and, above all, removed the obstacles that had previously hindered cross-border mobility and labour integration. However, cross-border commuting is more than an institutional or economic phenomenon. It is present in the daily lives of commuters and affects their social relationships, workplace experiences, and sense of belonging.

To understand this phenomenon in greater detail, this thesis pays attention to the Bratislava–Vienna corridor. This region represents a highly relevant case because of its geographical proximity, strong wage differences, and dense transport connections. At the same time, it provides an important context for examining how economic benefits, social costs, and language use shape the experiences of Slovak commuters working in Austria.

1.1 Research Gap, Study Purpose and Research Questions

Although cross-border commuting has become a stable part of European labour mobility and received increased attention in research, it primarily focused on economic determinants such as wage differentials, commuting flows and institutional integration (Niebuhr & Stiller, 2006; Sohn et al., 2013; Recchi, 2015). These perspectives are important for explaining why individuals decide to work across borders, but they provide a limited understanding of how commuters experience this mobility in their everyday lives.

A first research gap concerns the social and psychological consequences of cross-border commuting. While higher wages and better employment opportunities are commonly treated as the main drivers of mobility, less attention has been paid to the non-economic trade-offs that commuters face, such as long travel times, exhaustion and stress. Therefore, cross-border commuting should not be understood only as a rational economic decision, but also as a form of mobility that affects commuters' well-being and everyday social life (Stutzer & Frey, 2008; Olsson et al., 2013; Hilbrecht et al., 2014)

A second gap relates to the role of language in cross-border work contexts. Previous research has shown that host-country language proficiency can influence labour market outcomes, workplace participation, wages, and integration (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Chiswick & Miller, 2015). However, less is known about how language operates in the specific context of cross-border commuting, where workers do not fully relocate to the host country. Instead, they continuously move between two national and linguistic environments. As a result, their workplace integration may depend not only on general language proficiency but also on the specific language practices within the workplace.

Third, the Bratislava–Vienna corridor has received limited attention as a specific cross-border labour region, despite its economic and geographical relevance. While Austria is an important destination for Slovak workers, existing research often treats mobility at a broader national or European level and does not sufficiently examine the everyday experiences of Slovak commuters working in Austria.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is not only to understand why Slovaks commute to Austria for work, but also to examine what compromises they need to make and whether this commuting model ultimately proves beneficial. By looking at the cross-border commuting from multiple perspectives, the thesis seeks to provide a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of cross-border commuting in the Bratislava–Vienna region.

The main research questions guiding this thesis are:

RQ1: *How do economic returns from cross-border commuting to Austria vary across occupational sectors and workplace contexts among Slovak commuters?*

RQ2: *How do language proficiency and workplace language use shape social integration among Slovak cross-border commuters?*

1.2 Outline of Chapters

This thesis is structured into six main chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 provides the theoretical background of the study. It first defines cross-border labour mobility and distinguishes cross-border commuting from other forms of migration and labour mobility. The theory chapter also discusses various institutional frameworks of the European Union, the main drivers of commuting, and broader patterns of cross-border mobility in Europe. It also introduces the main theoretical frameworks of this thesis, including neoclassical labour mobility theory, human capital theory, transnationalism, Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, and social identity theory (SIT). The final part of the chapter focuses specifically on the Bratislava–Vienna corridor and develops the conceptual framework and hypotheses.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology of empirical research. Empirical evidence is collected through a questionnaire survey distributed to Slovak employees working in Austria. The collected data gives an overview of the experience with cross-border commuting of Slovak employees and the advantages and disadvantages of commuting. Moreover, there is a detailed description of the data collection, the questionnaire structure, the scales used, the sample of respondents, the method of data collection and distribution, and the evaluation of results.

The fourth chapter presents the results and the statistical analysis of the collected data. The first subchapter deals with descriptive statistics of demographic data, and the following subchapters connect descriptives with statistical inference, including hypothesis testing.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to the theoretical framework and previous literature. It interprets the key results and reflects on the relationship between economic benefits and social trade-offs. The chapter also discusses the role of German and English in workplace integration and highlights differences across skill levels, sectors, and workplace contexts.

The sixth chapter concludes the findings and the whole research. This chapter also describes the study's practical implications and limitations, as well as suggestions for future research. After this chapter, the bibliography and an appendix follow.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Cross-Border Labour Mobility in the European Union

2.1.1 Concept and Definitions of Cross-Border Labour Mobility

Europe, the *old continent*, has historically been characterised by mobility across territories, meaning migration – populational **mobility that** shaped the economic and social development. This mobility has never been incidental or in any way “random”. Migration is consistently linked to factors such as better living conditions, more desirable climate, labour demand, and general economic differences – access to education, wealth distribution – to only name a few. Generally speaking, the ultimate motive for mobility can be defined as a search for “better opportunities”. With the intensity of this mobility, important trade routes and commercial centres were formed, many of which remain economically significant to this day. These early *mobility patterns* progressively defined the interconnectedness of labour market across the continent.

This kind of migration was not happening in a few isolated cases; it was happening all over Europe. In Eastern Europe, for instance, large German-speaking minorities were present in today’s Czech Republic and Slovakia, mainly because of mining and craftsmanship, as well as industrial activities. On the other hand, Vienna became an important destination for migrants from other parts of the monarchy, especially from the Bohemian lands during the late 19th and 20th centuries (Gardiner, 1997; Kladiwa, 2014). Large Italian communities migrated to France, Belgium, or Switzerland due to labour shortages in mining, construction, and manufacturing sectors during the post-war period (King, 2002; Bade, 2003). In Northern Europe, Finnish workers migrated to Sweden in the mid-20th century in search of better opportunities (Korkiasaari & Söderling, 2003). This phenomenon persists to this day, as people continue to migrate, mostly to economically stronger European countries such as Germany, France, and Austria. Prior to Brexit, the United Kingdom was also a significant destination due to the higher wages and broader employment opportunities (Recchi, 2015).

Cross-border labour mobility takes different forms, which need to be clearly distinguished. **Migration** is typically defined as a change in the country of residence for at least one year (United Nations, 1998), implying more permanent relocation and deeper integration into the host country. On the other hand, **commuting** is described as “the activity of traveling regularly

between work and home” (Cambridge, n.d). By adding “cross-border” to it, it refers to a unique situation where a person travels between work and home across more than one state. A commonly used definition was provided by Eurostat, which describes cross-border commuters as individuals who “work in a country other than that of their residence and who return to their country of residence on a daily or weekly basis” (European Migration Network, 2018). This definition highlights the repetition in the cross-border mobility, differentiating itself from more permanent types of mobility. Moreover, in the academic literature, cross-border commuting is often described as a form of circular mobility, characterised by frequent border crossings and sustained ties to the home country (Recchi, 2015). In addition to migrants and commuters, there are also other forms of labour mobility that involve movement across countries, such as **posted workers**, who are temporarily sent to another country by their employer to provide services (European Commission, 2024). Although these categories share certain features, they differ in terms of duration, legal status, and the degree of integration into the host labour market.

This differentiation is especially relevant in the European Union, where regions alongside the border have become interconnected. Individuals are now in position where they can benefit from wage advantages and employment opportunities abroad, while maintaining their social networks, family life, and often lower living costs in their home country. As a result, cross-border commuting raises specific economic, social, and institutional questions that differ from those associated with traditional migration.

A particularly relevant example is the Bratislava-Vienna artery, in which the people from the capital of Slovakia – which *should* provide both sufficient and adequate job opportunities for its residents – commute to Vienna, mostly due to the fact, that the Austrian capital can offer them 2 to 3 times higher salary for the same work, with only approx. an hour-long commute.

2.1.2 Institutional and Policy Framework in the EU

The key factor contributing to the development of cross-border labour mobility is the gradual integration of the European Union, particularly the establishment of the free movement of workers and the removal of internal barriers. Prior to these establishments, cross-border commuting was strongly limited by the administrative restrictions and border controls (Recchi, 2015; Favell, 2008). This development shows that cross-border commuting has become deeply embedded in the structure of the European labour market and highlights the importance of

institutional integration by not only enabling mobility but also enhancing the conditions under which individuals access and participate in foreign labour markets.

Within the European Union, two institutional frameworks are particularly relevant for the free movement and working conditions for European inhabitants. Firstly, the Schengen Area secures the removal of border controls, allowing individuals to cross the borders without passport controls, reducing the time associated with daily commuting (European Commission, 2025). However, this does not automatically grant access to foreign labour markets. Article 45 of the Treaty of the European Union guarantees EU citizens the right to seek employment, work, and reside in another Member State under equal conditions to national workers (European Union, 2020).

Together, these institutional frameworks create favourable conditions for cross-border commuting: while EU law guarantees legal access to employment opportunities in other member states, the Schengen Area facilitates physical mobility (Recchi, 2015; Geddes & Scholten, 2016). Furthermore, the European Union coordinates the social security systems of the member states, ensuring that workers remain covered under a single social system and with the option to transfer benefits such as healthcare, pension, and unemployment insurance across borders (European Commission, 2021). This coordination saves a lot of time and administrative effort, playing a crucial role in reducing uncertainty for workers, thereby making cross-border commuting more accessible.

Despite these supportive steps, there are still several barriers like administrative procedures, different taxation systems, and lack of unified recognition of qualifications. Additionally, language is the main non-institutional barrier that EU policy does not directly address. While institutional frameworks remove formal restrictions, they are not able to eliminate communication challenges in the workplace. As a result, language proficiency continues to play a crucial role in the labour market and in access to career opportunities, explaining why language is a form of capital in itself.

2.1.3 Economic Drivers of Cross-Border Commuting

Cross-border commuting becomes particularly attractive when neighbouring labour markets offer substantially different economic opportunities. This can be explained by the neoclassical migration theory, which understands labour mobility as a rational decision to maximise

income. From this perspective, individuals are expected to compare potential earnings across regions and choose a location that offers better conditions (Borjas, 1989; Todaro, 1969).

However, the economic factors alone do not fully explain the patterns of cross-border commuting. Labour shortages that spread across multiple specific sectors create an additional pull factor for foreign workers. In Austria, AMS reported 108,000 open vacancies in 2023 in sectors like healthcare, elderly care and construction (Arbeitsmarktservice Austria (AMS), 2023). The scale of this problem is especially visible in healthcare, where it is estimated that by 2030, 51,000 additional nursing and caregiving staff will be needed to meet both replacement and demographic needs, compared to 2023 (Juraszovich et al., 2023). These shortages are linked to demographic developments, including aging and mismatches between the supply of domestic workers and the required employees. This is also linked to structural changes in labour markets, where domestic workers increasingly prefer higher-skilled or service-oriented occupations, contributing to shortages in manual and lower-paid sectors.

In addition to sectoral and economic factors, geographical proximity is the decisive factor, as this is what enables cross-border commuting. The possibility of mobility is determined by travel time and distance, and therefore the commuting cost must remain low to the expected benefits. As a result, cross-border commuting is spread along the borders of two countries, especially where the economic differences are significant, with short distances between the economic centres. For example, Bratislava and Vienna are among the closest capital cities in the world, separated by only 60 km, offering ideal conditions for daily cross-border commuting. This spatial dimension demonstrates that cross-border commuting is not only driven by individual economic incentives but also shaped by geographic characteristics.

2.1.4 Patterns and Trends in EU

A significant shift occurred in 2004 and 2007, when multiple European countries joined the European Union, integrating Central and Eastern European states into the EU single market. These enlargements significantly increased various mobility patterns, creating new commuting flows and labour supply from lower-wage countries toward the higher-income neighbouring states (Kahanec & Zimmermann, 2016). While transitional arrangements initially restricted access to some Western labour markets, their gradual removal led to a measurable increase in both migration and cross-border commuting (Kahanec et al., 2014). Beyond these immediate mobility effects, increased labour mobility has also raised concerns about the long-term availability of qualified labour in lower-wage countries. The migration of highly skilled

individuals to higher-income economies may reduce the availability of qualified labour, also known as “brain drain”, in the countries of origin and contribute to widening regional inequalities within the European Union (Kahanec & Zimmermann, 2016).

Despite the growth, cross-border commuting still represents a relatively small share of total employment at the EU level. According to Myklatun (2026), approximately 1.9 million individuals in the EU are cross-border workers, accounting for 1% of the total European workforce. As cross-border labour mobility is concentrated in geographically close regions with strong economic asymmetries, it masks the strong regional concentration (Niebuhr & Stiller, 2006; Sohn et al., 2013). The most prominent example is Luxembourg, where almost 230.000 individuals commute daily from neighbouring states such as France, Belgium, and Germany, accounting for nearly half of the country’s workforce (STATEC, 2024). Similarly, in Switzerland, there are around 413.000 cross-border commuters, mainly from France, Italy, and Germany (Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2026). Other significant cross-border regions include Germany–Poland and the Benelux–Germany region, characterised by dense and highly integrated labour markets (Sohn et al., 2013). These examples show that cross-border commuting is usually present in regions where economic asymmetries are combined with geographical proximity.

This pattern can also be observed in the Slovakia-Austria border region. The close geographical proximity between Vienna and Bratislava and significant wage differences have led to an increase in daily commuting flows. However, the case of Vienna is particularly noteworthy, as it represents the capital city of a high-income state located right on the border of two lower-wage countries, Slovakia and Hungary. In both Slovak and Hungarian cases, cross-border commuting often serves as an alternative to permanent migration, enabling individuals to benefit from higher wages abroad while maintaining lower living costs in their country of residence (Williams & Baláž, 2012).

Overall, these findings show that cross-border labour mobility in the EU is highly uneven and regionally concentrated. Rather than being a uniform phenomenon, it is caused by a combination of economic incentives, geographic closeness, and institutional integration. In this context, cross-border commuting serves as a mechanism for regional labour market integration while also generating new socioeconomic dynamics, which are especially noticeable in Central European border regions.

2.1.5 Theoretical Perspectives on Cross-border Labour Mobility

Cross-border labour mobility is a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained by a single theoretical perspective. Therefore, this issue is examined from multiple perspectives, which are gradually expanding from purely economic explanations toward a social understanding of mobility.

The foundation of most migration theories is the neoclassical perspective, which explains labour mobility primarily through wage differentials between countries (Harris & Todaro, 1970; Borjas, 1989). From the perspective of this theory, individuals act as rational decision-makers who compare possible earnings across multiple locations and choose to work in regions where labour is highly rewarded. In this sense, cross-border commuting can be interpreted as an economically rational response to existing imbalances between neighbouring countries. Therefore, in the case of Slovakia and Austria, significant wage differences create strong motivation for Slovaks to look for employment abroad while continuing to reside in Slovakia. However, while this theory provides an intuitive explanation, it remains analytically limited, since it reduces mobility decisions to purely individual and financial considerations. This perspective overlooks other factors that might be crucial in the broader social and structural context that affects the final decision.

In response to this limitation, the New Economic theory of Labour Migration shifts the focus from the purely individual point of view to the household level. According to this theory, mobility is more than just a way to increase one's income. From this perspective, cross-border commuting is also driven by the need to secure more stable and predictable financial resources, especially in regions where domestic labour markets may be less developed or volatile (Stark & Bloom, 1985; Stark, 1991). This is particularly relevant in Central and Eastern Europe, where cross-border work often represents a long-term household strategy rather than a short-term individual decision.

Another perspective on cross-border commuting is provided by the push-pull framework, which considers both positive and negative effects and how individuals evaluate them before deciding to participate in cross-border commuting. This framework does not focus just on the wage differences as the New Economic theory of Labour Migration but considers other conditions that either “push” individuals out of their home country or “pull” them towards another. The push factors might be represented by limited career opportunities, low wages and a weaker institutional environment, while the pull factors represent the corresponding attractive

conditions in the destination country (Zimmermann, 1996, pp. 96–97) . In cross-border regions such as Bratislava and Vienna, mobility arises from multiple factors, rather than from a single economic reason.

Taken together, these theories treat the economic aspect as the main factor and pay less attention to social experiences when deciding whether to participate in cross-border commuting or not. In contrast to this, transnationalism offers a different perspective. Transnationalism views mobility not as a one-time decision, but as a continuous process of living across borders (Glick Schiller et al., 1992). From this perspective, cross-border commuters are embedded in multiple social, institutional, and cultural contexts simultaneously, which influences their sense of their identity, belonging, and integration. Therefore, transnationalism is relevant for understanding the non-economic dimensions of cross-border commuting, including the role of language in social integration and workplace experiences.

2.2 Economic Gains from Cross-Border Commuting

2.2.1 Wage Differentials and Wage Premiums

Cross-Border commuting represents an economic strategy through which individuals improve their income by accessing more advantageous labour market conditions abroad. While regional wage differentials represent the initial incentive for mobility, the key question on the individual level is to what extent these differences translate into actual economic gains.

Therefore, the concept of cross-border wage premium is central. In the context of cross-border commuting, wage premium refers to additional income earned by individuals working in a higher-wage labour market compared to similar employment opportunities in their country of residence. Empirical research shows that cross-border commuters often achieve significantly higher earnings than comparable workers in their domestic labour market (OECD, 2018a; Sohn et al., 2013). This premium reflects the most immediate and measurable economic advantage from cross-border employment.

In addition to higher regular wages, the economic attractiveness of cross-border employment may also result from differences in other employment benefits that might not be common in other labour markets. In Austria, it is common to receive 13th and 14th salaries, which are incorporated in the collective agreements or employment contracts. These additional payments increase the annual income and may therefore strengthen the perceived better working

conditions in Austria (Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2026). By contrast, in Slovakia, 13th and 14th month salaries are legally possible but rarely seen on the job market. According to data reported by Forbes Slovensko (2024), the 13th salary was mentioned in only about 10% of all job offers on the Slovak career site Profesia.sk, mainly in sectors such as automotive and engineering and the 14th salary only in 5% of all job offers.

Another form of compensation, that is less common in Slovakia, is the overtime compensation, with two options as in Austria: wage premium of around 50 % or compensatory time off, depending on the applicable agreement. In Austria, working hours may reach up to 12 hours per day with a limit of 48 hours over an average of 17 weeks (Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2026). In Slovakia, overtime is legally limited to 150 hours per calendar year ordered by the employer, while the total amount of overtime work performed by an employee may reach up to 400 hours per year. Overtime work is compensated by the earned wage and an additional payment of at least 25 % of the employee's average earnings (Act No. 311/2001 Coll., Labour Code, Sections 97 and 121), but the compensatory time off is rarely seen in praxis. While both systems provide financial compensation, the Austrian framework may offer higher monetary returns and greater flexibility, which can further increase the perceived economic attractiveness of cross-border employment.

However, these economic gains need to be considered in net terms. Cross-border commuting is associated with additional costs, including transportation expenses as well as the time required for daily travel. As a result, the overall economic benefit depends on whether the wage premium and additional compensation are sufficient to outweigh these costs. Cross-border commuting can therefore be interpreted as a trade-off, in which individuals exchange time and effort for higher income and improved economic conditions. The extent to which this trade-off is beneficial depends on individual circumstances, including commuting distance, costs, and working conditions.

2.2.2 Skill Levels, Firm Types and Career Opportunities

Building on the previous discussion of the wage differentials and economic gains, this chapter moves beyond this to focus on how skill levels, firm types, and career opportunities shape cross-border commuting. In contrast to a purely macroeconomic perspective, this dimension highlights the micro-level dynamics of labour markets, where individual characteristics and

firm structures determine the outcomes of cross-border mobility. Understanding these aspects is essential, as they influence not only immediate economic gains but also long-term professional development.

What is important to mention is that the commuters do not represent a homogeneous but diverse group. The cross-border commuters are employed across a wide spectrum of sectors, ranging from low-skilled occupations, such as construction or services, to medium-skilled technical and healthcare sectors, to high-skilled professions in finance, business services, or information technology. Human capital theory helps explain this diversity by showing that cross-border mobility is not only driven by wage differences, but also by the possibility of converting education, skills, and work experience into better professional outcomes abroad (Sjaastad, 1962, pp.87-88). Similarly, Borjas (1987) argues that migration is shaped by self-selection, as individuals are more likely to move when the destination labour market offers higher returns to their skill profile. Although originally developed in the context of migration, this argument can also be applied to cross-border commuting, where individuals choose to remain resident in their home country while working abroad.

According to labour market segmentation theory, labour markets can be divided into primary segments, which are associated with more stable employment and career progression, and secondary segments, which are often characterised by lower job security, weaker career advancement, and more limited upward mobility (Doeringer & Piore, 1971, pp. 271- 272). From this perspective, multinational and international firms usually provide access to primary-sector positions, offering structured career paths and more flexible linguistic environments. In contrast to this, employment in smaller or locally oriented firms is often associated with specific language requirements and more limited upward mobility. Empirical evidence shows that cross-border workers are concentrated in sectors facing persistent labour shortages, such as construction, healthcare, manufacturing, and services (European Commission, 2022), reinforcing their uneven distribution across labour market segments.

While people working in higher-skilled positions in international firms may experience clear career progression, those in lower-skilled occupations often remain at the same level. These structural differences highlight that cross-border commuting outcomes are not uniform but depend strongly on individual characteristics and employment context.

OECD (2018b) research indicates that workers in more advanced firms, benefit from higher skill levels and more specialised knowledge, which results in more career opportunities over

time. However, these benefits are not the same among all labour market sectors, and factors like specific language requirements or recognition of qualifications limit the extent to which it is possible to convert cross-border employment into upward mobility.

In general, cross-border commuting should be viewed as a complex process influenced by a variety of factors, including skill levels, company characteristics, and labour market arrangements, in addition to economic incentives. Ultimately, these factors determine whether people can convert cross-border movement into long-term, sustainable career advantages.

2.3 Social Costs of Daily Cross-Border Commuting

2.3.1 Commuting, Well-Being, Mental Strain

Commuting has become a part of everyday working life and can take a substantial amount of daily time. Research shows that it can occupy between 4 to 10 % of individuals' waking hours on a workday (Olsson et al., 2013, p. 256). In the European Union workers spend on average around 25 minutes commuting one way, which results into 45 to 60 minutes of daily travel time (Eurostat, 2023). However, a notable share of the people commutes considerably longer distances. According to the OECD (2020), approximately 13 % of workers must take a long commute, defined as more than 60 minutes one way. In densely populated and economically strong regions, this can exceed 20 %, further reflecting the increasing geographical distance between living and working locations.

From a classical economic perspective, commuting represents a rational trade-off between the costs of travel and the benefits of employment or residential location. Moreover, in traditional urban economic models, individuals choose their place of residence and workplace in a way that the disadvantages of commuting are compensated by higher wages or better housing conditions (Alonso, 1964; Muth, 1969).

However, recent research in behavioural economics and happiness studies shows that longer commutes are associated with lower levels of subjective well-being and life satisfaction, and individuals are starting to accept commuting without being adequately compensated by economic benefits. This phenomenon has been described as the “**commuting paradox**” (Stutzer & Frey, 2008, p. 363). For example, they argue that a daily commute of around 23 minutes each way already lowers life satisfaction, and individuals would need a higher income

to compensate this negative effect. However, it is important to mention that some aspects of this relationship may be influenced by self-selection, as people have various preferences or have become accustomed to having a longer commute to work.

Building on this, from a psychological perspective commuting can be described as a form of chronic environmental stressor, since individuals are facing uncertainty, time pressure, and unfavourable travel conditions on a daily basis (Evans & Wener, 2006). This may be explained by the fact that the long-term psychological cost of daily commuting may be less visible at the moment when individuals decide to accept longer commute. While they may adapt quickly to increased income and better economic conditions, daily commuting repeatedly exposes them to multiple stressors, such as congestion, delays, and time pressure during travel, as well as environmental factors, such as noise, overcrowding, and air pollution, which trigger psychological stress. After being exposed to these factors for a long time, it can result in health issues (Hansson et al., 2011). In addition, commuting is described as one of the daily activities associated with the lowest level of positive emotional experiences and a relatively high level of negative effect (Kahneman et al., 2005). Therefore, emotional pressure and the direct effects of commuting may persist even when economic gains remain constant.

Longer commuting times have been associated with increased levels of exhaustion, poorer sleep quality, and higher perceived stress. This situation is often described as a “**time squeeze**”, where fixed commuting time reduces individuals’ flexibility in allocating time across different life domains (Southerton, 2003, pp. 5, 22-23). This loss of time can also affect individual work behaviour and daily routines. Some studies suggest that workers with longer commuting distances are increasing their working hours as an attempt to compensate for the fixed time costs of traveling to work (Gutiérrez-i-Puigarnau & van Ommeren, 2010). However, such adjustments of working time can further compress time for recovery or health-promoting activities, such as physical or leisure activities, thereby indirectly affecting overall well-being (Hilbrecht et al., 2014). Overall, it can be stated that commuting influences not only the work domain but also the broader aspects of everyday life and impacts the balance between professional and private life.

However, the relationship between commuting and well-being does not have to be entirely negative. Research suggests that commuting by walking or cycling is often associated with higher satisfaction due to the benefits of physical activity. In contrast, commuting by public transport or by car may be more strongly associated with stress since the travel conditions are

unpredictable (Olsson et al., 2013). Moreover, commuting experiences may vary depending on social and demographic factors. For example, while men often commute on average longer distances, women might experience stronger time pressure because of combined responsibilities in work and at home (Hilbrecht et al., 2014).

Alternatively, some papers view commuting as a meaningful transition period rather than merely as lost time. Commuting can also function as a form of psychological “buffer” that allows individuals to mentally prepare for work or relax. Jain and Lyons (2008) described this phenomenon as “**the gift of travel time**”, claiming that commuting can provide a valuable personal time allowing activities like reading books, listening to music or simply reflecting. In this sense, commuting represents a liminal space between two different parts of life, helping people to manage the boundaries between work and private life.

While the economic point of view sees commuting as a rational trade-off between travel costs and economic benefits, new studies highlight the significant psychological and social consequences of daily mobility. Understanding these broader effects is particularly important in the context of cross-border labour mobility, where commuters do not only face longer commuting distances but are also exposed to additional factors, such as institutional differences, administrative barriers, and language differences, which may increase the psychological and time-related burdens.

2.3.2 Work–Life Balance, Social Integration and Isolation

Beyond its geographical effects, commuting also shapes family life and how people coordinate their relationships and divide their professional and family responsibilities. Since commuting consumes a fixed portion of the day, it can reduce time available for partners, family, friends, or community participation. As a result, commuting has increasingly been discussed in the literature as an important factor influencing work-life balance.

Several papers suggest that commuting makes the balance between family life and social life more difficult. One of the reasons may be that commuting is a key factor decreasing the discretionary time available during the day, as Denstadli et al. (2017) claim. Bai et al. (2021), show that commuting affects people’s subjective perceptions of time pressure in addition to objective time limitations. Their findings suggest that both absolute commuting time and commuting time relative to others in their surroundings may increase work–family conflict.

Christian (2012) finds that individuals with longer commutes spend significantly less time with their partners and family members, suggesting that commuting may indirectly influence the quality of social relationships within households. Similarly, Sandow (2014) argues that long-distance commuting can create tensions within families, as the commuter's absence from daily household activities may lead to an unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities. Moreover, empirical evidence suggests that long-distance commuters are associated with lower levels of social capital and reduced participation in their community. For example, Mattisson et al. (2015) show that longer commuting times are connected to lower levels of social participation and weaker social networks, which contribute to social isolation. The authors further argue that commuting may influence the extent to which people feel connected to their local communities since their daily routines are mostly centred around their work rather than the residential environment. Putnam (2000) estimated that in the United States, for every additional 10 minutes spent on commuting, involvement in community affairs decreases by 10 %.

Besides these direct effects, commuting generates so-called “**spillover effects**”, where experiences in one aspect of life influence others. Specifically, psychological factors associated with commuting, such as stress or satisfaction, may have a direct effect on both work performance and interactions at home (Wener et al., 2005). For example, Abou-Zeid and Ben-Akiva (2011) find that higher levels of commute satisfaction are positively associated with overall well-being. This suggests that when people assess their capacity to balance work and family obligations, they take commuting experiences into account. Consequently, commuting may not only affect the time dedicated to social relationships but also alter the quality of these interactions.

To conclude, the existing literature indicates that commuting has direct consequences that extend beyond the travel time. More importantly, it shapes how individuals organise their daily lives, maintain social relationships, and participate in family and community activities. These broader social implications are particularly relevant in the context of cross-border commuting, as commuting distances may be longer, increasing the burdens associated with daily mobility.

2.4 Language in Cross-Border Work Contexts

2.4.1 Language as Linguistic and Cultural Capital

“Language is a system of conventional spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves. The functions of language include communication, the expression of identity, play, imaginative expression, and emotional release” (Crystal, 2026).

Language is often understood mainly as an instrument for communication and expression. In everyday thinking, this simplified understanding of language is sufficient, however, looking at it from the perspective of cross-border labour contexts, language is key to understanding society beyond basic communication.

The extent to which language is important and useful depends on the country, the labour market, and the specific occasions on which it is used. As a result, language represents a value that can create structural advantages for some individuals, while placing others at a disadvantage (Bourdieu, 1986, 1991). According to Bourdieu, every individual holds various resources, which can be understood as different forms of capital. He distinguishes between three forms of capital, where economic capital refers to material assets and money, social capital refers to relationships, and cultural capital to education, knowledge, and skills that people value (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). These forms of capital are interconnected and affect people's positions within social groups, where they further determine access to opportunities and resources.

Bourdieu (1991, p. 55-56) conceptualises language as a form of linguistic capital, whose value depends on the social context in which it is used. It operates within a “linguistic marketplace”, where certain languages, accents, and forms of speech are recognised as legitimate, while others may be devalued or marginalised.

These hierarchies are shaped by dominant institutions, such as the state, the education system, and the labour market, which define linguistic norms and reward individuals who master them. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 54). In increasingly internationalised labour markets, linguistic capital can therefore be converted into social and economic advantages, as it facilitates access to professional networks, better employment opportunities, and career advancement.

The value of linguistic capital is highly dependent on the environment, and the value of language competences that are valued and demanded in one country may lose their value in another one. In this sense, mobility across borders is not only about geographical movement but also movement across different linguistic environments where the value of language may change.

According to Bourdieu, these dynamics are intrinsically connected to broader power relations (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 37). When a particular linguistic variety is established as the norm, speakers of other varieties may experience disadvantage or exclusion (Bourdieu, 1991, pp. 45–46). Bourdieu refers to this process as symbolic violence, meaning that social hierarchies are reproduced because they are perceived as natural or self-evident. In cross-border workplaces, linguistic hierarchies may therefore create status differences between employees, even in the absence of formal discrimination (Bourdieu, 1991, pp. 50–52).

In the Austrian labour market, German is the dominant and institutionally legitimised language in most professional contexts. While English may operate as a working language in internationally oriented firms, German often remains central for informal communication, administrative processes, and long-term career progression. For Slovak cross-border commuters, German proficiency therefore serves as an important capital, which further shapes their success on the job market. Therefore, limited proficiency may hinder participation in workplace interactions and reduce perceived competence, even when formal qualifications are equivalent.

Understanding language as linguistic and cultural capital allows a structural interpretation of labour market outcomes and workplace experiences. Rather than treating language proficiency solely as an individual characteristic, this perspective highlights how linguistic resources are embedded in institutional power structures and how their value varies across national and organisational contexts. This theoretical lens provides the foundation for analysing how language shapes both economic trajectories and social positioning in cross-border work environments.

2.4.2 Language and Social Identity in the Workplace

The language people speak represents their community, cultural background, and social environment, while it shapes their daily experiences and their perceptions of themselves and

others (Edwards, 2009). The groups in which language positions individuals do not necessarily have to be defined solely by geography; they can also be shaped by professional or social factors, meaning that linguistic differences may reflect and reinforce differences between these groups.

While Bourdieu focuses on language as a form of capital and power, Social Identity Theory (SIT) shifts attention to how language contributes to group identification and belonging. Therefore, to better understand how such a group affiliation influences behaviour and perception of an individual, especially in a workplace context, this thesis draws on SIT developed by Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner. SIT explains how individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups. It refers to those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which they perceive themselves as belonging (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40).

The key concept of this theory is social categorization, which enables individuals to locate or define themselves within the social environment. This refers to people classifying themselves and others into various social categories such as organisational membership, religious affiliation, gender, and age. According to SIT, these categories are usually structured around specific prototypical characteristics such as bodily attributes, abilities, and psychological traits that define the perceived attributes of group members (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 20). Through this categorization process, individuals are able to distinguish between so-called in-groups to which they belong and out-groups, which represent other social groups, which can result in prejudice and intergroup conflict. Social identification refers to the extent to which individuals perceive themselves belonging to a particular social group. As such, being a member of a group becomes a source of self-definition and helps answer the question of who they are (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 21),

Furthermore, social categorisation is complemented by depersonalisation, whereby individuals perceive themselves less as unique persons and more as representatives of a particular group. People often match their behaviour and attitudes with the perceived standards of the in-group prototype when a specific social identity becomes prominent. Members of the group may therefore behave as interchangeable representatives of the group rather than as unique individuals (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 26). These identification processes affect how workers view coworkers, establish boundaries within groups, and feel they belong at work.

Although SIT explains how individuals define themselves through belonging to a group, it does not specify what characteristics of each individual group are the most relevant in specific contexts (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 41). Therefore, in today's international society, language functions as one of the most visible and meaningful markers of group belonging and social differentiation. Building on this idea, Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory focuses specifically on language as an important factor through which social ideas are expressed and maintained (Giles & Johnson, 1987, p. 71).

According to this theory, language becomes an essential tool for achieving psycholinguistic distinctiveness, which means that groups may use linguistic characteristics to maintain symbolic boundaries between themselves. One key element in this framework is ethnolinguistic vitality, which refers to the fact that a linguistic group is able to sustain its distinct identity within a larger social environment. Vitality is typically understood as a combination of three key factors: the status of the language within society, the demographic strength of its speakers, and the degree of institutional support for its use in public and organisational settings (Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977, pp. 308-309).

This theory also explains the phenomenon that individuals often strategically adjust how they speak during interactions with members of other groups to achieve their objectives. One of the strategies is called divergence, in which the speakers use distinctive linguistic features to set and maintain boundaries. In contrast, convergence occurs when speakers adapt their speech to each other's communication behaviour (Giles et al., 1991, pp. 7-9). Both strategies clarify that a language can be used as an active tool through which individuals express their identities in interaction with others.

In linguistically diverse workplaces, such dynamics may influence how employees manage daily interactions, fit into the group, and position themselves within organisational hierarchies. Since language differences can affect informal communication and participation in workplace discussions, employees may adjust their speech with coworkers to reduce social distance.

2.4.3 Language in International Work Environments

In today's globalised society, English has become the dominant language of communication. It is estimated that around 1.5 billion people worldwide speak English, of whom only around 25 % are native speakers (University College London, 2022). In Europe, most people learn

English as a foreign language; around 38 % of Europeans report conversational proficiency, while among young people this share reaches 60-70 %. Moreover, Eurostat data from 2026 indicate that in 90 % of secondary schools, students learn English as a foreign language (Eurostat, 2026a). Therefore, it is expected that the trend of English fluency will continue to rise in the future.

Due to the widespread use of English and internationalisation of business activities, English is often adopted as the main corporate language, in linguistically diverse multinational companies (Neeley, 2013, pp. 476-477). In this context, English is often described as a *lingua franca*, a language adopted by speakers whose native languages differ (Seidlhofer, 2005).

However, the increased use of English does not eliminate the importance of the national language in the workplace. Multinational corporations are rarely monolingual in practice and instead, multiple languages coexist within firms and each of them is used in different situations depending on context (Piekkari et al., 2014). Language therefore shapes the dynamics between coworkers in multinational teams. Although Neeley's (2013, p. 477) study focuses on English as a mandated *lingua franca*, its findings suggest more generally that speakers of the dominant or required workplace language may gain status advantages, while non-native or less fluent speakers may experience insecurity, reduced confidence, or status loss. Differences in language skills might for this reason create subtle power distances, where individuals who speak more fluently are perceived as more competent or authoritative (Tenzer & Pudelko, 2017). Even when the business-related discussions might be in English, domestic employees might switch to their native language in informal interaction in the office, and foreign employees who do not speak the language might feel disconnected from the group. Thus, even in organizations where English is listed as the working language, linguistic inequalities may continue to influence everyday workplace interactions

At the same time, the importance of language and the required level vary across different segments of the labour market. Research in labour economics shows that host-country language proficiency remains a key factor that influences employment opportunities, wages, and workplace integration (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Chiswick & Miller, 2015). While English might be sufficient in international companies or in knowledge-intensive environments, many occupations require communication with local colleagues, supervisors, clients, or customers in the local language.

2.5 The Bratislava–Vienna Corridor as a Cross-Border Labour Region

2.5.1 Economic Integration and Labour Market Linkages

Within the European Union, the norm for work and mobility has changed in recent decades. Open borders create opportunities for people to work abroad and take advantage of the economic opportunities of the foreign labour market, while maintaining their family and social ties in their country of origin (OECD, 2018a).

In Central Europe cross-border commuting has gradually developed into a stable, long-term, sustainable phenomenon. It is partly rooted in historical developments, especially the division of Europe during the Cold War, which led to different economic trajectories between Western, Central and Eastern European countries. While countries such as Austria and Germany experienced more stable economic development, countries such as Slovakia, Czechia, Poland, and Hungary followed a different path, which is still reflected in wage levels and labour market conditions today. At the same time, the relatively short distances between cities and border regions make daily commuting across borders a realistic option for many workers. As a result, cross-border mobility in this region is not only driven by economic incentives but also supported by geographical conditions that make regular commuting possible (Perkmann, 2003).

A particularly relevant example of these dynamics is the Bratislava–Vienna corridor. The region has a long history of economic and social connections, dating back to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In the modern context, an important turning point came with Slovakia's accession to the European Union in 2004, which enabled access to foreign labour markets. The subsequent entry into the Schengen Area in 2007 further simplified cross-border mobility by removing systematic border controls (European Union, n.d.). Although Austria applied transitional restrictions on its labour market until 2011, after their abolition, employment opportunities for Slovak workers expanded significantly (Kahanec et al., 2014). Together with short distance of around 60 km between Bratislava and Vienna and persistent wage differences, these developments have contributed to the emergence of one of the most integrated cross-border labour regions in Europe. This makes the Bratislava–Vienna corridor a particularly relevant case for analysing the economic and social dynamics of cross-border commuting.

Austria represents a major destination for Slovak cross-border workers, particularly in sectors such as construction, healthcare, manufacturing, and services, where labour shortages remain persistent (EURES, 2025; AMS, 2023). These shortages reflect structural imbalances in the

Austrian labour market, increasing the demand for foreign workers. In this context, cross-border commuting is driven not only by individual wage incentives, but also by employer needs and recruitment practices.

As mobility increases, the question of its social consequences also arises. Commuters constantly move between two institutional, linguistic, and cultural environments, which might evoke a feeling of “**in-betweenness**”. This means people feel a sense of incomplete belonging to neither environment. In this context, language takes on particular importance as a factor that can facilitate integration or, conversely, deepen social distance (Blommaert, 2015). Despite the growing importance of this issue, the role of language in studies of cross-border commuting in Central Europe remains relatively under-researched. The majority of the research focuses primarily on macroeconomic indicators, such as wage differences and employment, with less attention paid to the everyday experiences of the commuters themselves. This work, therefore, builds on the existing literature while broadening its perspective to include the social and linguistic dimensions crucial to understanding this phenomenon.

2.5.2 Wage Differences between Austria and Slovakia

The central driver of cross-border commuting in the Bratislava-Vienna corridor is the persistent wage gap between Austria and Slovakia. Despite being neighbouring states, Eurostat data show that average monthly earnings in Austria are almost three times higher than in Slovakia. In 2024, the average full-time adjusted salary per employee exceeded 58.600 € in Austria, while in Slovakia it was only 20.287 € (Eurostat, 2025). Figure 1 shows that Slovakia is 4th from the end of the European Union in average yearly income, with only Hungary, Greece, and Bulgaria behind. The difference between Slovakia and Bulgaria, which is in last place, is less than 5.000 €, whereas Austria ranks fifth among EU countries, with Luxembourg, Denmark, Ireland, and Belgium overcoming it. In addition, these claims are also supported by OECD data, which consistently show higher wages and overall income per employee in Austria than in Slovakia (OECD, 2024).

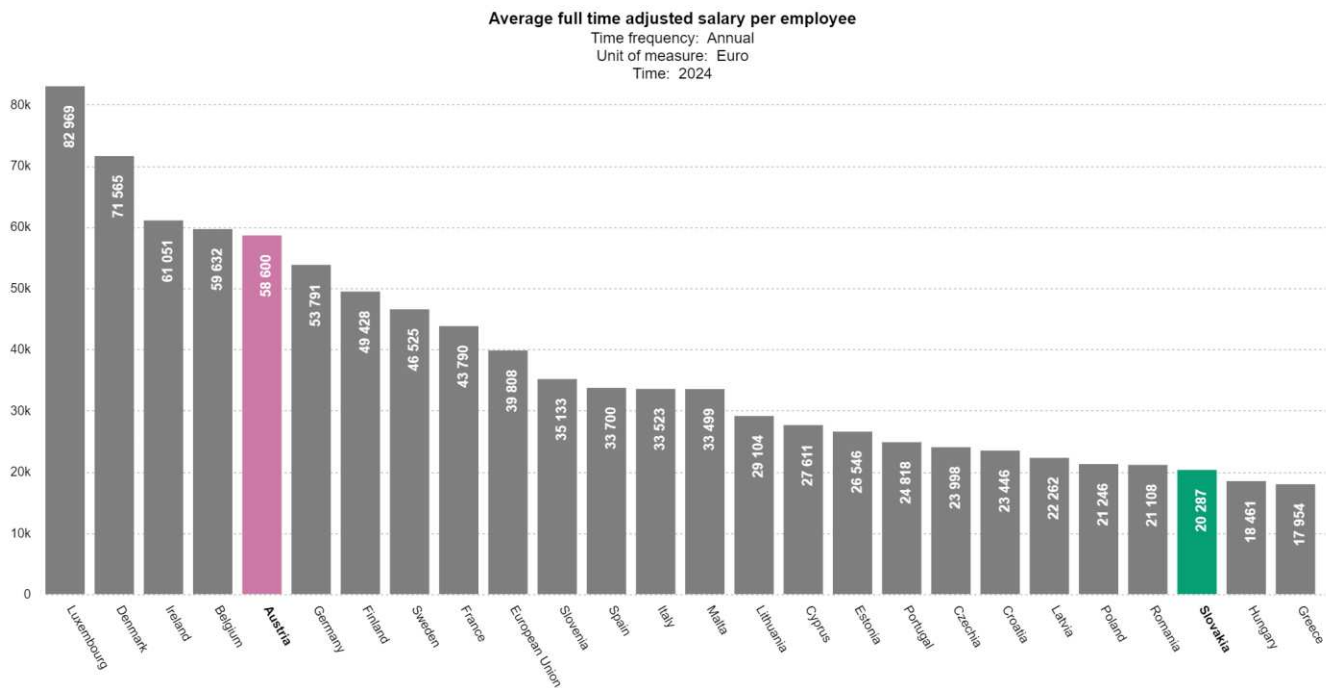


Figure 1. Average full time adjusted salary per employee

These wage differentials reflect the structural imbalance within the region and are the main reason Slovak employees commute to Austria for work while maintaining their residence in their home country.

The gap is also further reinforced by differences in the structure and institutions of the labour market. Slovakia has a nationally defined minimum wage, which was increased to 915 € gross, equivalent to 728,9 € net as of January 1, 2026 (Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, n.d.). In comparison with other countries in the EU that have a nationally defined minimum wage, Slovakia is again in the lowest third. In contrast, Austria does not have a nationally defined minimum wage, instead wage levels are largely determined by the sectoral collective agreements, which tend to ensure relatively high-income levels across industries (Eurostat, 2024).

The economic motive becomes even clearer when wage differences are considered together with purchasing power. According to a Eurostat price level index, Slovakia's price level is around 85 % of the EU average, while Austria exceeds 110 % (Eurostat, 2026b). The data suggest the prices and wages are not proportionally aligned. This creates a favourable situation for cross-border commuters, who benefit from lower living costs in Slovakia and higher wages

in Austria. Therefore, cross-border commuting can be a form of economic arbitrage, where individuals are maximising their economic well-being.

However, the actual economic advantage depends strongly on household composition, housing costs, and commuting intensity. In addition, whether the economic benefits are sufficient is determined by many other factors such as commuting time, transportation costs, taxation, and social security contributions. Daily commuting entails direct transportation costs, and indirect costs related to time and effort. Nevertheless, it should be noted that for many individuals, the net benefits of working in Austria outweigh the costs; however, they often do not consider whether it is sustainable in the long term.

2.5.3 Linguistic Environment and Institutional Context

The Bratislava-Vienna corridor represents a unique linguistic environment that reflects a coexistence of two labour markets, operating in different national languages, German and Slovak. At the same time, since the globalisation of labour markets, the third language – English has entered the market and serves as a business language.

In Austria, German is the official and dominant language in the Austrian labour market. It is the main language of the administration, the legal system and most of the workplaces (Migration.gv.at, n.d). Therefore, proficiency in German is usually expected and needed for most occupations, particularly in roles involving customer interaction, communication with local stakeholders or integration into predominantly Austrian teams. This expectation is also reflected in many job offers, where German language skills are often listed as a necessity.

On the other hand, Slovak, despite being a native language of a large share of workers, has no formal recognition in the Austrian labour market. The language is limited to informal communication among Slovak colleagues or specific niche environments where Slovak-speaking employees are gathered. This creates an asymmetry in linguistic values. While Slovak may be socially useful within migrant or commuter networks, it has limited exchange value in the Austrian labour market, where German remains the dominant institutional language and English is mainly relevant in internationalized professional settings. This reflects Bourdieu's understanding of language as a form of capital whose value depends on the specific linguistic market in which it is used (Bourdieu, 1991; Blommaert, 2015). In contrast, German has a relatively high value in the Slovak labour market because higher levels of German proficiency

are less widespread than English proficiency. In line with Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, German holds its value in both the Slovak and Austrian "linguistic marketplace", as it provides access to employment and more career opportunities. This is consistent with research showing that proficiency in a relevant foreign language increases employment opportunities and earnings potential (Chiswick & Miller, 2015)

In terms of foreign language skills in Slovakia, German is the second most learned foreign language after English. However, a considerable number of individuals do not reach the level required by Austrian employers (TASR, 2022a). At the same time, the level of English is much higher and is the working language in internationally oriented firms, especially in sectors such as finance, IT, and consulting (TASR, 2022b). Therefore, since English functions as a *lingua franca*, many commuters may assume that English will be enough and substitute for their lack of German skills.

However, the role of English should not be overstated. The reports on labour market from the European Commission and EURES suggest that even though English is sufficient in a limited segment of the labour market, German remains important for external communication, administrative processes, and everyday workplace interaction. As a result, many positions that appear "English-friendly" still prefer candidates with at least basic German skills. This creates a layered linguistic structure in which English opens doors to specific sectors, but German remains the key language for broader access to the Austrian labour market and long-term career development (Migration.gv.at, n.d).

Limited proficiency in the required language might represent a barrier to entry for Slovak cross-border commuters. This often leads to occupational segmentation, where a large number of commuters are concentrated in roles that either require minimal communication or operate in more international environments. Moreover, even when individuals are able to get hired only with English, limited German proficiency may later restrict their chances for promotion, professional development, and deeper workplace integration.

This is particularly relevant for the present study, as it suggests that cross-border commuters cannot be treated as a homogeneous group. Instead, differences in language proficiency are likely to shape both access to employment and the ability to benefit from cross-border labour mobility, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities between individuals.

2.6 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Conceptual Framework

Building on the preceding theoretical discussion, this paper analyses cross-border commuting as the result of the interaction between economic incentives, social costs, and language factors. While economic benefits represent the primary motivational mechanism, individuals' overall work experience is also conditioned by non-financial costs and the degree of their integration in the workplace.

In this context, language plays a special role as a form of capital that influences both access to job opportunities and the quality of social interactions. Language proficiency may affect not only employment opportunities and workplace communication, but also individuals' ability to socially integrate into the work environment. The degree of integration in the workplace subsequently reflects individuals' ability to function in a given work environment and influences their subjective evaluation of the work experience.

Main dimensions of the model

The conceptual framework is based on four main dimensions:

Economic benefits: higher wages, financial benefits, and career opportunities as the main motivational factor for cross-border commuting.

Social costs: the time required for commuting, stress, and the negative impact on work-life balance as a trade-off for economic benefits.

Language skills: particularly knowledge of German and English as a factor influencing job opportunities and workplace interaction.

Workplace integration: the degree of social inclusion, sense of belonging, and quality of workplace relationships.

Logic of the model

- The conceptual model assumes the following relationships:
- Economic benefits have a positive impact on the overall evaluation of working abroad.

- Social costs have a negative impact on subjective satisfaction.
- Language skills influence both economic performance and the degree of workplace integration.
- Workplace integration influences the relationship between individual characteristics and the overall evaluation of the work experience.
- Social costs can negatively affect the degree of integration.

Hypothesis

H1: *Respondents across different occupational sectors report higher earnings in Austria compared to estimated earnings for comparable positions in Slovakia.*

H2: *German proficiency is perceived as more important in customer-facing and operational work environments, whereas commuters in internationalized professional sectors rely more frequently on English or professional expertise*

H3: *Higher German proficiency is associated with stronger social integration and greater sense of belonging, whereas primary use of English at work may be associated with different forms of workplace integration in Austria.*

H4: *Perceived social and psychological costs of cross-border commuting differ across workplace contexts among Slovak commuters in Austria.*

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the empirical research process. It includes the description of research design, data collection method, sample size, and survey design, which aim to answer the research question. Moreover, variables and their operationalisation, as well as the statistical evaluation of the results and the number of full and missing responses, are described in order to provide a clear understanding of the methodological framework of the study.

3.1 The empirical research process, sample size, and survey design

The aim of this empirical research is to answer the descriptive-explanatory research question. The descriptive part of the theory includes an overview of the main theoretical frameworks related to commuting and language use in social environments, and a closer look at the Bratislava-Vienna corridor from multiple angles, including wage differences, language environments, and labour market integration. The exploratory part aims to explain the main motives for cross-border commuting between Slovakia and Austria, the economic differences between the two labour markets, the effect of language skills on integration in the workplace, and the main social costs caused by commuting.

The research applies a quantitative research design based on cross-sectional data collected via a survey. Most of the answers are convertible into numerical data; they can be statistically analysed and evaluated. The theoretical background is derived primarily from secondary sources, including journal articles, online sources, and official statistical reports and documents. The survey is conducted in the form of a questionnaire, focusing on factors related to commuting, the role of language skills in the workplace, economic benefits, workplace integration, and the social costs associated with commuting. The questionnaire is fully anonymous and was created in Microsoft Forms (<https://forms.office.com/>) in English with Slovak translations to reach people with different language skills, both native and non-native speakers. The questionnaire enabled the collection of quantitative primary data for this survey.

Survey design

The prerequisite for this survey was that the respondents commute regularly to Austria for work, at least once a week. These criteria ensured that the sample included individuals actively

engaged in cross-border commuting, with varying commuting intensity. This means that not only people who commute daily to the target country were able to fill out the survey, but also respondents who are commuting less regularly, however, at least once a week. The research presented in this thesis therefore includes individuals with various contracts, such as full-time, part-time, freelance work or internships, and with different commuting frequencies depending on the sector, contract, and whether hybrid working conditions are possible.

The questionnaire, which is included in the Appendix, is divided into five main thematic blocks and consists of nine sections with a total of 33 questions. The five main thematic blocks reflect the theoretical concept of this thesis and include demographic data, economic gains, commuting conditions, social costs, and language and workplace integration. These are then divided into nine sections in the survey that guide the respondent from basic factual information to more complex questions. This design combines single-choice, multiple-choice, and Likert-scale questions to capture both objective characteristics and subjective perceptions of cross-border commuting.

The first part of the questionnaire introduces the topic of the master's thesis, ensures the anonymity and confidentiality of the collected data, and includes a screening question confirming whether the respondent commutes to Austria at least once a week. If the respondent selects "no", the survey automatically closes in order to prevent irrelevant responses from affecting the quality of the data.

The second block focuses on economic gains and consists of 3 sections: demographic data, employment characteristics, and economic gains. The demographic data ask classical questions such as age, gender, family status, and highest level of education. The employment characteristics section focuses on areas such as how many years the individuals have been commuting to Austria, the sector in which they work, and their position and contract type. On the other hand, the economic gains section compares net income in Austria and approximate net income in Slovakia and asks multiple questions about working conditions and opportunities in Austria, measured on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

The third part of the questionnaire consists of two survey sections and measures various factors directly related to commuting and social costs. The main questions aim to find out the average one-way commuting time, the monthly commuting costs, the frequency, and the main transport method. These questions are single-choice. At the end, there are a couple of questions targeting the side effects/social costs of commuting and how commuting has changed after COVID-19,

since the working schedule is now more flexible thanks to the hybrid working model, measured on a Likert scale from 1 to 7.

The fourth block focuses on language skills and their importance in the Austrian labour market. The respondents were asked to self-assess their English and German proficiency and to answer the following single-choice questions about language use in their workplace. Further, they were asked multiple Likert-scale questions about the importance of language skills and how these skills influence their workplace relationships.

The last part of the questionnaire was divided into two sections: workplace integration & social identity, and perceived discrimination. In both sections, only Likert-scale questions were used, mainly focusing on relationships in the work environment and perceived acceptance. Moreover, it was followed by questions regarding discrimination in Austria and the experiences connected to it.

Sample size

The questionnaire was distributed from 20. April 2026 to 5. May 2026. Slovak cross-border commuters were contacted via social media and through primary data collection at the train station, with an approximate 60/40 split. On social media, around 10 people were contacted via direct message on Messenger, and after that, the survey was posted in three Facebook groups and one WhatsApp group for Slovaks working in Austria. In the direct messages and also in the group posts, people were also asked to further distribute the questionnaire to their family and friends, which gave access to a wide network of various people, known as weak ties (Granovetter, 1973, p.1363).

After data collection ended, the data were downloaded into MS Excel and then uploaded to the statistical program STATA. Before starting the statistical testing of the hypotheses, many responses needed to be transformed into numerical values, and several composite variables based on Likert-scale items were created. In addition, the dataset was cleaned and adjusted to ensure consistency and suitability for further statistical analysis.

The questionnaire received 92 responses, of which around 67 were collected via social media and 25 in person at the train station. Only 10 responses were excluded because these cross-border commuters do not travel to Austria for work at least once a week, and therefore, the questionnaire did not allow them to further fill out the questions. So even by keeping them, the

statistical analysis would not be influenced. These responses were excluded to simplify data processing and because they did not meet the study's inclusion criteria. No responses had missing data, only a couple of respondents answered “prefer not to say” to the question regarding their net income, both in Austria and Slovakia. However, these responses were not excluded as they still remained relevant for the research. The full questionnaire is attached in the Appendix.

3.2 Variables and Operationalisation

This section presents the main theoretical concepts of the study and explains how some variables were transformed into measurable numerical values for empirical analysis. Based on the theoretical framework and research questions, this master's thesis focuses on the four main dimensions: economic gains, social costs, language use, and perceived workplace integration. These dimensions were operationalized through a set of variables reflecting both objective conditions and subjective perceptions related to cross-border commuting between Slovakia and Austria.

This choice of variables aimed to capture not only measurable economic outcomes, but also social and linguistic experiences associated with cross-border employment. Particular attention was paid to the role of language in various daily work occasions in commuters' lives, as well as the potential trade-offs between economic benefits and social costs experienced by commuters.

3.2.1 Economic Gains

Economic gains include both objective and subjective financial and professional benefits associated with cross-border commuting to Austria. In line with the theory concepts of neoclassical labour mobility theory and human capital theory. This dimension captures whether commuting results in higher income, better working conditions, and more career opportunities compared to employment in Slovakia.

The main variable used in the data analysis was the wage premium, calculated as the difference between the monthly Austrian net income and the estimated Slovak net income. Respondents were asked to report both their current Austrian net salary and an approximate equivalent in Slovakia for a comparable position. Since income was originally collected in categorical ranges in the questionnaire, the categories were converted to approximate numerical values for

statistical analysis in STATA. To calculate the average wage premium, the midpoint of each income category was used as a representative value.

Additionally, to direct financial outcomes, several 7-point Likert-scale items were included to measure subjective financial improvement, such as salary compensation, career growth opportunities, skill development and better working conditions. Higher values represented stronger agreement with positive economic outcomes associated with cross-border commuting.

The study also included employment-related variables such as job sector, position level, contract type, and motivations for working in Austria. For selected analyses, individual job sectors were grouped into broader workplace contexts in order to better reflect differences in workplace communication patterns and social integration. Based on the characteristics of daily work interactions, respondents employed in Healthcare and Caregiving, Hospitality and Services, and Operational / Manual Work were grouped into customer-facing, locally embedded environments. These sectors typically involve frequent direct interaction with clients, patients, customers, or local coworkers and therefore rely more heavily on German language communication in everyday work settings.

In contrast, job sectors like Finance, IT / Technology, Business Services, and Science were grouped into the category of an internationalized professional environment. These sectors are generally characterized by more international teams, greater use of English, and a stronger emphasis on expertise rather than local language proficiency.

Sectors with low representation or less clearly defined workplace communication structures, such as Architecture, Education, Energy, and Manufacturing, were categorized as mixed or other workplace environments.

Therefore, these differences are important for the direct comparison of workplace communication patterns, the perceived importance of German, and workplace integration across various job sectors.

3.2.2 Social Costs

Social costs refer to the negative outcomes of cross-border commuting, which may have direct consequences for the personal, psychological, and social well-being of individuals. Drawing on the literature related to long-distance commuting, mobility-related stress, and work-life balance, this dimension focuses on the non-economic aspects of cross-border commuting.

Social costs were mostly measured using 7-point Likert-scale variables, focusing on the extent to which commuting affects respondents' daily lives and well-being. These variables included mental stress, commuting exhaustion, loss of free time, difficulties maintaining friendships, social isolation, and overall perceptions of commuting burdens. Higher values indicated stronger agreement with negative social consequences related to commuting.

The social costs also included variables focused on transportation. There, it was asked about the average commuting time, costs, frequency, transport type, and the availability of hybrid or remote work arrangements. These variables helped examine how commuting conditions may intensify or reduce perceived social costs.

3.2.3 Language Proficiency and Language Use

Language Proficiency and Language Use are among the main dimensions of this thesis, particularly in relation to workplace communication, inclusion, and social integration. Based on Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital and theories of workplace integration, this study examines how German and English function as resources or as barriers in the Austrian labour market.

Respondents were asked to self-assess their German and English skills using CEFR-based categories ranging from A1 to C2, including a native speaker option. For statistical purposes, these values were transformed into numerical variables in STATA to allow comparison across respondents.

Moreover, this study does not focus solely on the language proficiency levels but also on the actual language use in the workplace. This is further divided into the language use with colleagues, clients, and work-related tasks. The survey therefore distinguished between language competence and the practical reality of language use across various work environments.

Likert scale questions further examined whether German proficiency is a necessity for employment in Austria, how important English is in the specific job sectors and whether German contributes to career advancements and workplace integration. Higher scores indicated stronger agreement with the importance of language in workplace functioning and career outcomes.

As already mentioned, job sectors were grouped into broader workplace categories, which helped with distinguishing how the importance of language proficiency differs across different work environments.

3.2.4 Workplace Integration and Perceived Discrimination

Workplace integration examines whether commuters feel socially accepted, included, and connected in their Austrian work environment. At the same time, this paper examines whether language barriers and a foreign background contribute to feelings of exclusion or discrimination.

This dimension was operationalized through several 7-point Likert-scale variables related to workplace relationships, inclusion, and interpersonal experiences. Respondents were also asked to evaluate statements regarding professional relationships with colleagues, workplace comfort, the ability to form friendships at work, and feelings of inclusion in their workplace. Higher values represented stronger perceptions of positive integration.

To capture potential exclusionary experiences, additional variables measured perceptions of coworker distance, language barriers, negative language-related experiences, feeling treated differently, and perceptions that Slovak workers are underestimated in Austrian workplaces. These variables allowed the study to analyse both positive and negative dimensions of workplace integration.

Several variables related to workplace language use and language proficiency were later compared with indicators of social integration and perceived discrimination to examine whether language functions as a mechanism of inclusion or exclusion across different workplace contexts.

3.3 Statistical Evaluation and Analytical Strategy

The collected data were analysed using the statistical software STATA. Prior to the analysis, the dataset was cleaned, recoded, and prepared for statistical evaluation. Several categorical and ordinal variables were transformed into broader analytical categories in order to enable meaningful comparison between workplace environments and occupational contexts. Additionally, selected Likert-scale items were reverse-coded and combined into composite indicators related to perceived social integration and social costs.

Given the exploratory cross-sectional nature of the study, the analysis primarily focused on descriptive and comparative statistical methods suitable for identifying patterns, relationships, and differences among Slovak cross-border commuters working in Austria. The analysis does not aim to establish causal relationships, but rather to examine tendencies and associations related to economic outcomes, workplace language use, and perceived social integration.

Firstly, descriptive statistics were conducted to provide an overview of the sample characteristics. To analyse demographic variables, employment characteristics, commuting patterns, income categories, and language proficiency levels, frequency distributions, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used. Additionally, graphical visualisations such as bar charts and pie charts were used to support the interpretation of selected variables.

To evaluate the first hypothesis regarding the economic outcomes of cross-border commuting, the Austrian and estimated Slovak net income categories were converted to numerical mean values. Mean comparisons were subsequently conducted in order to calculate the average reported wage premium. To determine whether the observed differences in estimated earnings between Austria and Slovakia were statistically significant, paired t-tests were used.

For the second hypothesis, respondents were grouped into broader workplace categories representing customer-facing/local environments and internationalized professional environments. Comparative mean analysis and descriptive subgroup comparisons were used to analyse differences in the perceived importance of German language skills and workplace communication patterns across these workplace contexts.

To examine the relationship between language proficiency and perceived social integration in the third hypothesis, a composite social integration variable was constructed from multiple Likert-scale items related to workplace acceptance, communication comfort, interpersonal relationships, workplace inclusion, and perceived social distance. Negatively formulated items were reverse-coded prior to the construction of the index in order to ensure consistent interpretation of higher values.

Correlation analysis was used to evaluate the relationship between German language proficiency and perceived social integration. In addition, one-way ANOVA tests were conducted to compare mean differences in perceived social integration across German language proficiency groups and workplace language environments.

Throughout the analysis, Likert-scale variables were treated as interval-level, allowing the use of mean comparisons, correlation analyses, t-tests, and ANOVA procedures. Due to the exploratory nature of the research and the relatively limited sample size, the analysis focused primarily on identifying statistically observable patterns, associations, and group differences rather than establishing causal relationships.

4. RESULTS

In this chapter, the survey results will be presented. The first subchapter uses descriptive statistics to provide an overview of the demographic and employment-related characteristics of the sample. The subsequent sections examine the main dimensions of the study, including economic gains, language proficiency and workplace language use, workplace integration, and the perceived social costs of cross-border commuting.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

In an attempt to find appropriate answers to research questions and hypotheses of the paper, an online questionnaire was conducted. The sample consisted of 92 respondents, who were asked about their experiences with commuting between Slovakia and Austria for work. However, 10 of the respondents were removed from further data analysis because they did not commute to Austria for work at least once per week, and therefore did not meet the study's selection criteria. Consequently, the final dataset used for the empirical analysis consisted of 82 respondents.

The sample is proportionally represented by men and women, with men accounting for 48,22 % ($n = 40$) and women accounting for 51,22 % ($n = 42$). Most of the sample is made up of young individuals in age group 26-35 ($n = 26$) and individuals in productive age groups 36-45 ($n = 20$) and 46-55 ($n = 20$). 9 respondents are aged 56 and above representing 11 % of the sample and the smallest sample is the age group 18-25 ($n = 7$) accounting for 8.5 %.

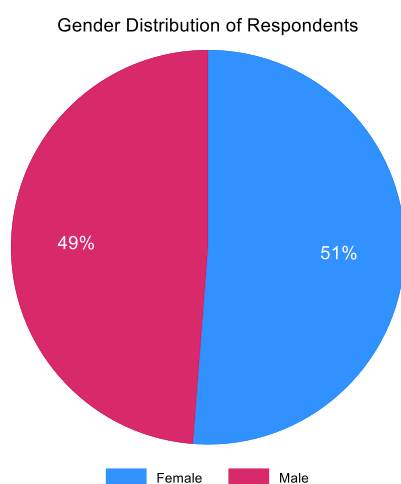


Figure 3. Gender of the sample

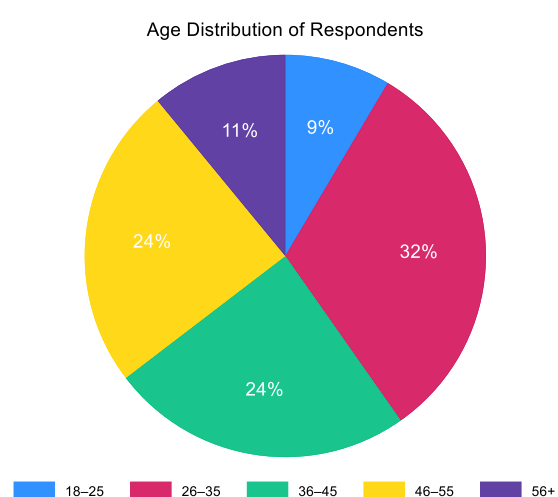


Figure 2. Age distribution

Regarding family status, the sample was relatively evenly divided between married respondents and single individuals. Married participants represented 46,3 % of the sample, while 45,1 % identified as single. Only a small proportion of respondents were divorced (8,5 %). In terms of children, 42,7 % have no children. Among respondents with children, the largest group reported 2 children (35,4 %), followed by one child (12,2 %) and three children (7,3 %). This suggests that a considerable proportion of respondents combine cross-border employment with family responsibilities. These family characteristics in cross-border commuting might be relevant because family obligations may influence commuting experience, work-life balance, and perceived social costs.

The educational profile of the sample was rather high, with almost two-thirds of respondents (65.85 %) holding a university degree. As shown in Figure 4, the largest proportion of respondents reported a background in Business and Economics (31,7 %), followed by Healthcare and Caregiving (22 %), Engineering (13.4 %), and IT / Computer Science (12.2 %). A smaller share of the respondents reported education in Humanities, Hospitality and Services and others.

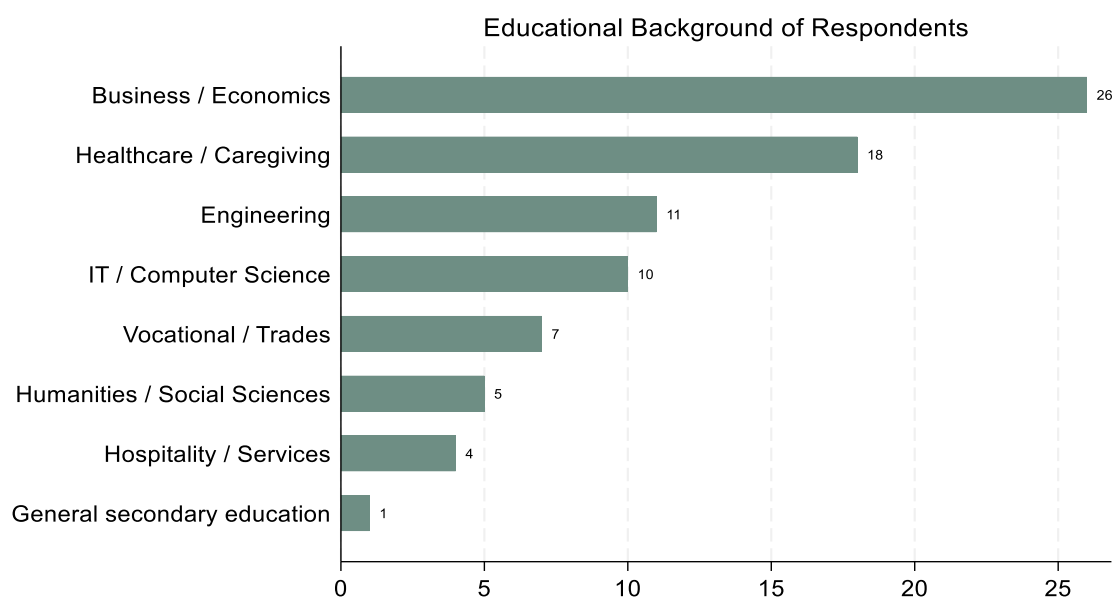


Figure 4. Educational Background

This educational structure was also reflected in job sectors in which Slovak commuters work. The largest proportion of commuters worked in Finance and Business (23,17 %), Healthcare and Caregiving (20,7 %), Hospitality and Services (19.5 %) and IT (18,3 %). The sample predominantly consisted of full-time employees (69,5 %), followed by part-time workers

(24,4 %), and only a small portion reported temporary, self-employed, or other atypical forms of employment. The workplace context was relatively balanced between customer-facing or locally embedded work environments (47,6 %) and international professional environments (43.9 %), with only 8,5 % working in mixed or other workplace environments. This distinction is particularly relevant for later analysis of workplace language use. Regarding positions, the largest employees (52.4 %), followed by senior specialists (17.1 %) and specialists (14.6 %). A smaller share of respondents occupied managerial or entry-level positions.

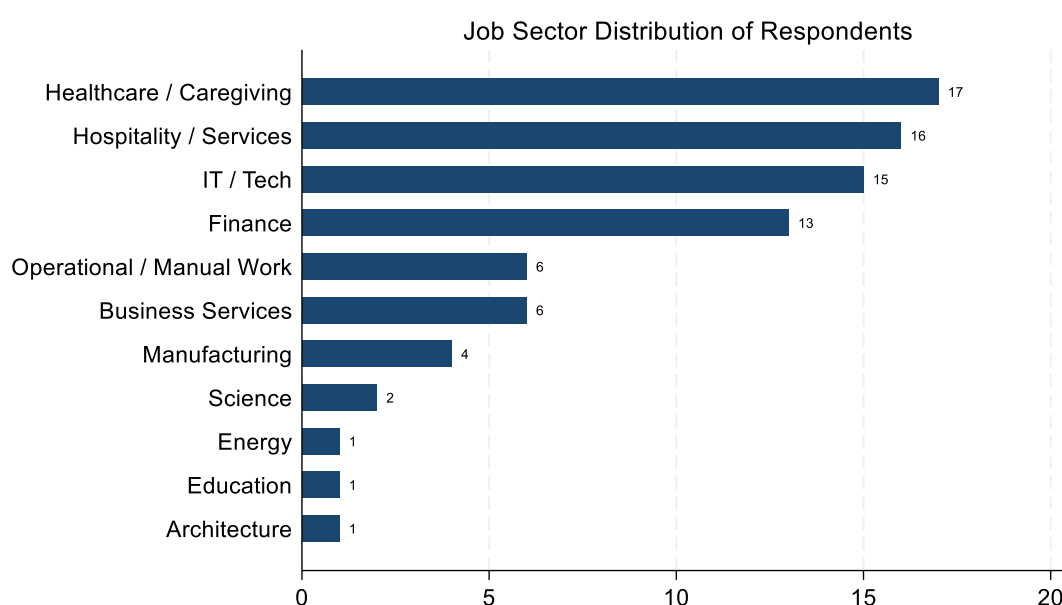


Figure 5. Employment Sectors

Most respondents commute 3-4 days a week (35.4 %), followed by 1–2 days per week (30.5 %). Around one-fifth of respondents commute to Austria 5 days per week (19.5 %), while 14.6 % reported hybrid or variable commuting arrangements. The largest proportion of commuters reported an average one-way duration of 60-90 min (37.8 %). Almost 20 % commute 90-120 minutes, and 13 % of respondents commute more than 120 minutes. Overall, the results demonstrate that cross-border commuting is associated with considerable time demands, with approximately 70 % of respondents spending between 2 and 3 hours commuting daily. Moreover, commuting costs also varied among respondents, with three major groups. The largest group of costs was 50–150 € (32.93 %), second was 150–200 € (30.49 %), and third was under 50 € (12.2 %). The majority of people travel to Austria by public transportation, particularly trains (47.6 %) or by car (41.5 %). A smaller proportion of respondents reported using multiple modes of transportation for commuting to Austria, representing only 8.5 % of

the sample. Buses represented the least frequently used form of transportation, accounting for only 2.4 % of respondents. The relatively high use of train transportation reflects the strong railway connection with two main ways: Bratislava hlavná stanica – Vienna main station and Bratislava Petržalka – Vienna main station, within the Bratislava-Vienna corridor.

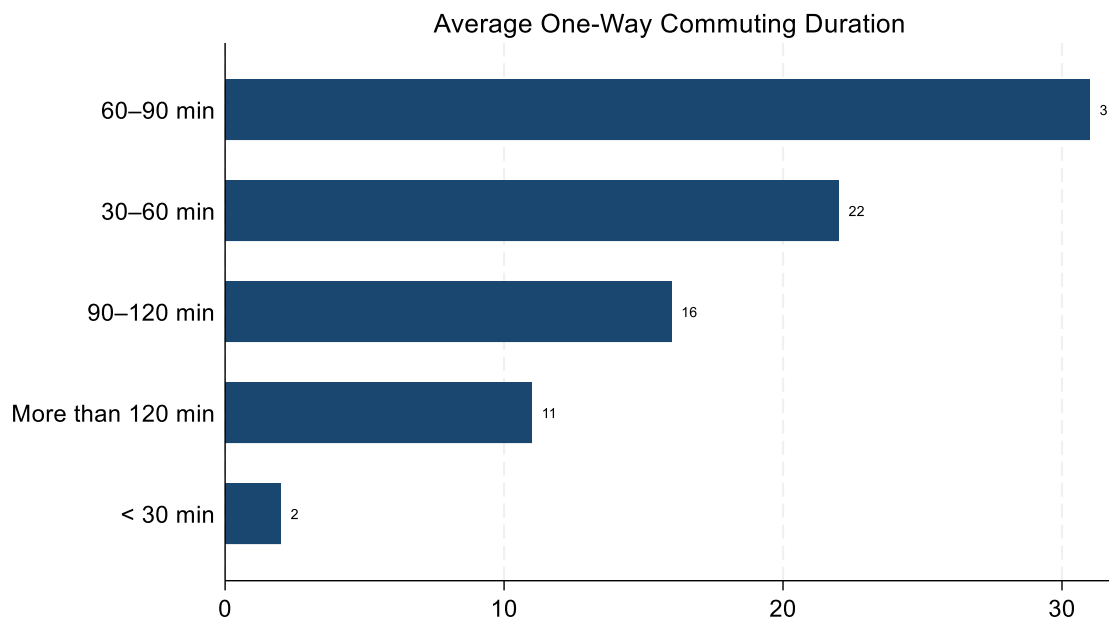


Figure 6. Commuting Characteristics of Respondents

The linguistic profile reflected the multinational nature of Slovak cross-border employees in Austria. The levels of German proficiency varied among respondents, although the largest groups reported intermediate to advanced proficiency, particularly at the B2 (23.2 %) and C1 (20,7 %) levels. Simultaneously, a notable share of respondents reported only basic proficiency in German at the A1 or A2 levels (25.6 %). English proficiency was generally higher, with most of the individuals having advanced English skills, especially at the C1 (34.1 %) and C2 (15.9 %) levels. This reflects the role of English as an international lingua franca, especially among younger and highly educated populations. However, despite generally high English proficiency, many respondents still perceived German as more important for everyday workplace communication and integration in Austria.

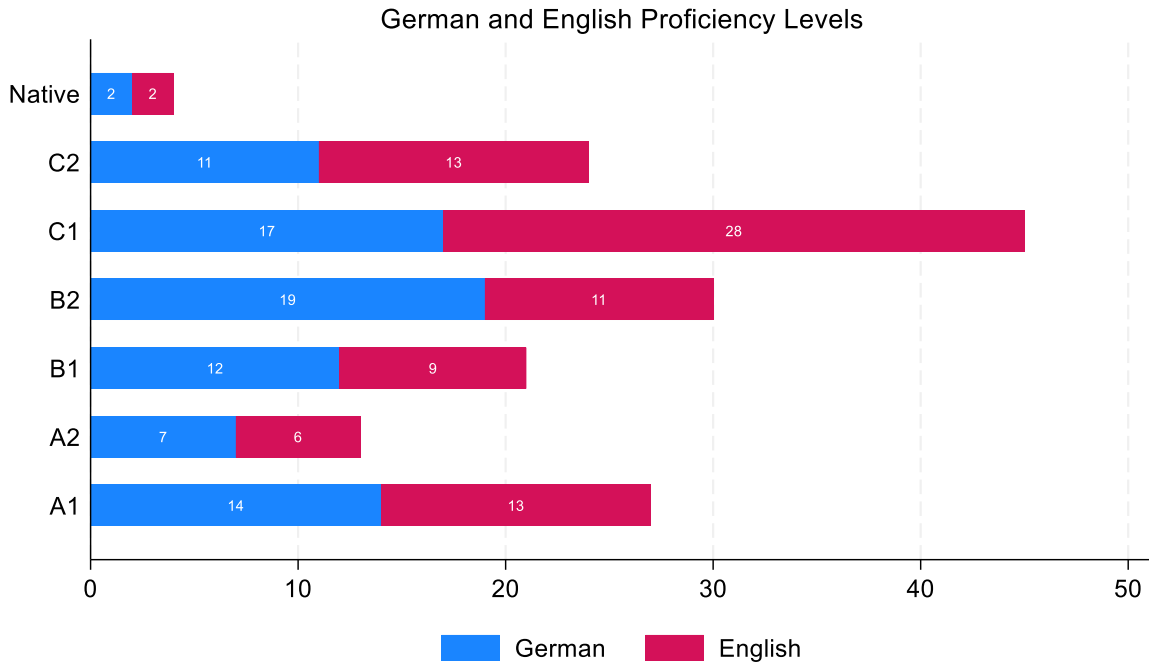


Figure 7. Language Proficiency of Respondents

4.2 Economic Outcomes of Cross-Border Commuting (H1)

This section examines the economic outcomes associated with cross-border commuting to Austria among Slovak workers. Particular attention is paid to differences between reported earnings in Austria and estimated earnings for comparable positions in Slovakia in order to evaluate the economic benefits of commuting.

To examine the first hypothesis, a mean was conducted from the reported net incomes in Austria and the approximate net incomes in Slovakia. Since the questionnaire used income categories rather than exact numbers, the mean was assigned to each income category to enable quantitative comparison and calculation of the average wage premium.

	Mean
net AT num	2897
net SK num	1683
wage premium	1250

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Income Variables

Firstly, a general comparison was conducted of the average net income in Austria and the estimated net income in Slovakia. Table 1 confirms the claims that net salaries are usually

significantly higher than in Slovakia, with the average net income of the sample being 2899 € in Austria and 1683 € in Slovakia. This resulted in an average reported wage premium of 1250 € per month.

To further examine whether the observed difference was statistically significant, a paired t-test was conducted. The test confirmed that the difference between Austrian and Slovak estimated earnings was statistically significant ($t = 16.45$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that respondents view working in Austria as financially more beneficial.

In addition to the overall comparison, sectoral differences in wage premium were also examined.

	net AT num	net SK num	wage premium
Architecture	3500	1750	1750
Business Services	2650	1583	1100
Education	1250	750	500
Energy	4500	2750	1750
Finance	4229	2604	1625
Healthcare / Caregiving	2735	1438	1328
Hospitality / Services	2018	1125	893
IT / Tech	3318	2208	1225
Manufacturing	2000	1000	1000
Operational / Manual Work	2750	1417	1333
Science	2750	1250	1500

Table 2. Wage premium by sector

The findings show that positive wage premiums were observed across all represented job sectors, although the extent varied considerably between industries. The highest wage premiums are visible in sectors such as Finance and Science reporting more than 1500 € difference, followed by Operational / Manual work, Healthcare, IT, and Business services, where the wage premium ranges between 1100 € and 1500 €. Interestingly, even the sectors with the lowest wage premium, such as Hospitality / Service and Manufacturing, reported a significant wage premium relative to estimated salaries in Slovakia. Even though Hospitality / Service is at the bottom of the sample, respondents still reported higher earnings by almost 900 € a month. The sectors such as Architecture and Energy show significant differences however, there was only one respondent ($n = 1$), so it is hard to objectively assess the trend in these industries. On the other hand, Education also had only one respondent ($n = 1$) with a part-time contract, and the wage difference still reached 500 €.

An important note is that all reported incomes represent net monthly earnings. Due to the different taxation systems, particularly because of Austria's progressive taxation, the gross income might be much higher in Austria than in Slovakia and the overall difference between the two countries might be even bigger.

4.3 Language Proficiency and Job Outcomes (H2)

This section focuses on the importance of German language proficiency and the actual language used in workplace communication in different job sectors. For analytical purposes, sectors were grouped into customer-facing/local environments and internationalized professional environments based on their work environment and the need for client/customer communication.

As shown in Table 3, the perceived necessity of German differs substantially across workplace contexts. Respondents employed in customer-facing and locally embedded sectors reported the highest agreement with the statement that German language skills are necessary for their current job ($M = 6.08$, $SD = 1.68$). In contrast, respondents in international corporate jobs reported considerably lower agreement ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 2.21$). This suggests that language requirements among cross-border commuters are dependent on workplace communication structures and the degree of sectoral internationalization.

"German language skills are necessary for my current job."	Mean	SD	N
Customer-facing	6.08	1.68	39.00
Internationalized	3.78	2.21	36.00
Mixed / Other	4.86	2.12	7.00

Table 3. German necessity by workplace context

Figures 8-10 illustrate substantial differences in communication patterns across workplace contexts. The respondents were asked to choose which language they use in communication with their colleagues, clients, and what languages are actually needed for their work tasks.

In customer-facing sectors, German clearly dominates across all three dimensions. The strongest dominance of German is in the work-task language use, with 90 % respondents reporting German as the main language.

In contrast, individuals working in internationalized professional sectors relied predominantly on English, with relatively similar distributions across all three communication dimensions, where English usage exceeded 50 %. Although English was more frequently used for work-related tasks in internationalized professional sectors, German nevertheless remained an important component of interpersonal workplace communication, particularly in communication with colleagues.

Although English dominated work-related communication in internationalized professional sectors, the slight increase in mixed communication with colleagues suggests that German still plays an important role in interpersonal workplace interaction.

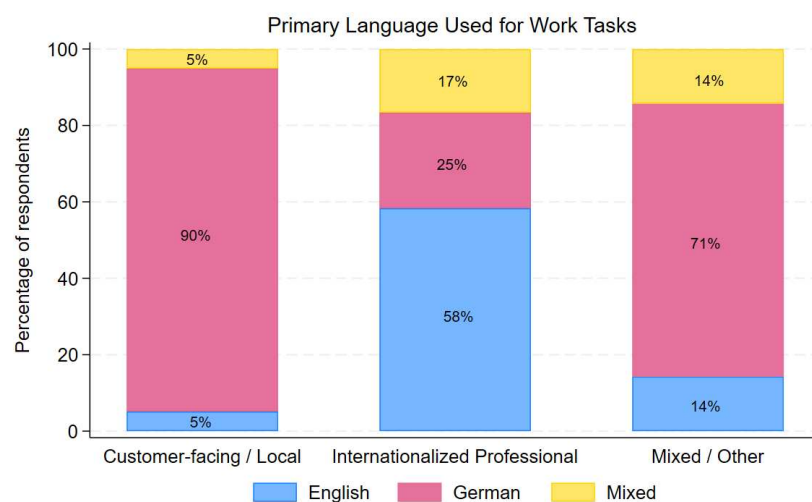


Figure 8. Workplace Language Use with Colleagues

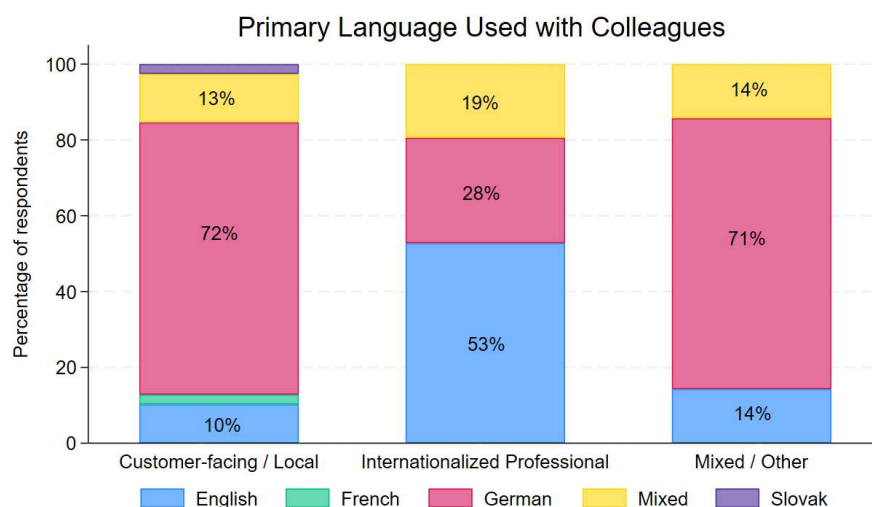


Figure 9. Workplace Language Use with Clients

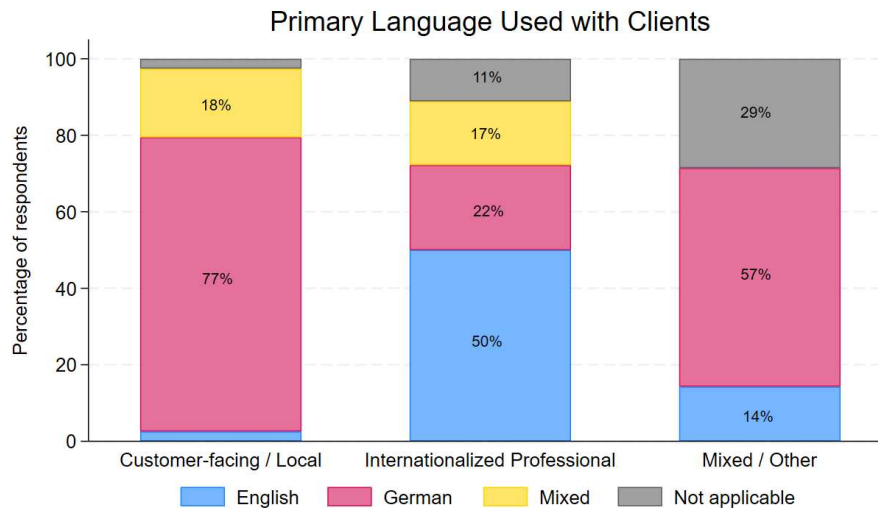


Figure 10. Language Needed for Work Tasks

These findings suggest that the language requirements for the Austrian labour market are shaped by the job sector and whether the occupation requires direct communication with customers. Even though the international corporate jobs do not necessarily require German skills, German still stays a significant part of the workplace life.

4.4 Language and Social Integration (H3)

This section examines the relationship between German proficiency and perceived social integration among Slovak cross-border commuters in Austria. Building on the theoretical concepts of linguistic capital and social identity, the analysis examines whether proficiency in German is associated with greater workplace inclusion and social integration.

To examine this, a new variable, “social integration,” was constructed from multiple Likert-scale items related to workplace acceptance, inclusion, friendships, communication comfort, and perceived social distance and isolation. Negatively formulated items were reverse-coded so that higher values consistently capture stronger social integration.

The distribution of the social integration index appeared relatively balanced without severe skewness, suggesting sufficient variation in perceived integration among respondents.

Mean social integration	SD	N
4.86	1.25	82

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Social Integration Index

To discover the relationship between German language proficiency and perceived social integration, a correlation was used. Contrary to the initial expectation, no statistically significant relationship was found between the social integration variable and German proficiency.

Correlation Between German Proficiency and Social Integration	Correlation (r)	p-value
German proficiency & social integration	0.01	0.925

Table 5. Correlation Between German Proficiency and Social Integration

Although respondents with advanced German proficiency reported relatively high levels of social integration, respondents with low German proficiency also reported similar integration scores. Interestingly, the intermediate group reported the lowest average level of perceived social integration. Overall, the differences between groups were not statistically significant.

German Proficiency Group	Mean social integration	SD	N
Low (A1-A2)	5.10	1.39	21
Intermediate (B1-B2)	4.51	1.25	31
Advanced (C1+)	5.06	1.09	30
Total	4.86	1.25	82

Table 6. Social Integration by German Proficiency Group

To further understand these results, an ANOVA test was conducted. The results suggest that the relationship between language proficiency and workplace integration may be more complex and non-linear than initially expected. While German proficiency may provide more opportunities on the Austrian labour market, social integration may depend on more factors,

such as broader organisational culture, team composition, and workplace communication norms.

Test	F	p-value
ANOVA	2.03	0.138

Table 7. ANOVA Results for Social Integration by German Proficiency

Contrary to the hypothesis, respondents working primarily in English-speaking environments reported slightly higher levels of integration than those working primarily in German-speaking environments. One possible explanation is that internationalized and English-speaking workplaces may provide a more multicultural and inclusive environment, resulting in more friendly circumstances, reducing certain social and linguistic barriers in daily interactions.

“Primary workplace language.”	Mean	SD	N
social integration			
English	5.10	1.16	24
German	4.76	1.28	49
Mixed	4.76	1.35	9
Total	4.86	1.25	82

Table 8. Social Integration by Primary Workplace Language

Respondents employed in customer-facing and locally embedded workplaces reported slightly higher average levels of perceived social integration compared to respondents working in internationalized professional environments. One possible explanation is that locally embedded workplaces may encourage closer interpersonal interaction and stronger workplace belonging.

Workplace Context	Mean	SD	N
social integration			
Customer-facing / Local	5.06	1.26	39
Internationalized Professional	4.74	1.19	36
Mixed / Other	4.36	1.44	7
Total	4.86	1.25	82

Table 9. Social Integration by Workplace Context

	Primary language used for work tasks			
	English	German	Mixed	Total
German language skills are necessary for my current job	2.42	6.33	4.33	4.96
German is essential for career advancement	4.62	6.53	5.78	5.89
Stronger German skills would improve my social integration	5.42	5.41	4.67	5.33

Table 10. German Language Importance by Primary Workplace Language

The data analysis supports the third hypothesis only partially. Proficiency in German alone did not show a statistically significant relationship with perceived social integration. However, German remained strongly associated with career advancement and broader social integration, suggesting that its importance may lie more in long-term structural and symbolic integration than in everyday workplace communication.

4.5 Economic Gains and Perceived Social Costs (H4)

This section examines whether the perceived social and psychological costs of cross-border commuting differ across workplace contexts among Slovak commuters in Austria. Building on previous findings regarding language use and workplace structure, the analysis compares customer-facing and locally embedded occupations with internationalized professional work environments. Particular attention is paid to perceived exhaustion, mental stress, loss of free time, social isolation, and difficulties maintaining personal relationships.

To evaluate these differences, several Likert-scale variables related to commuting-related social costs were analysed separately.

Workplace Context	commuting exhaustion	mental stress	free time loss	social isolation	less family time	friendship difficulty
Customer-facing / Local	4.15	3	3.85	3.33	4.62	3.59
Internationalized Professional	4.92	3.64	4.75	4.06	5.33	4.11
Mixed / Other	5.86	4.43	5.14	4.71	6.29	4.29
Total	4.63	3.4	4.35	3.77	5.07	3.88

Table 11. Perceived Social Costs by Workplace Context

As shown in Table 11, respondents employed in internationalized professional environment consistently reported higher perceived social costs and other psychological burdens than individuals working in a customer-facing / local environment. The largest difference can be observed in factors like commuting exhaustion or free time loss. Respondents employed in internationalized professional environments reported higher levels of commuting exhaustion ($M = 4.92$) than those employed in customer-facing occupations ($M = 4.15$). Similarly, free time loss was reported more strongly by respondents in internationalized environments ($M = 4.75$) than among respondents in locally oriented occupations ($M = 3.85$). The mixed category showed the highest levels of social cost across almost all of the indicators. However, the mixed category has only 7 respondents, and therefore, the results should be interpreted cautiously.

Beyond these differences across workplace contexts, the overall distribution of commuting-related social costs also indicates that exhaustion and loss of free time were among the most pronounced negative effects. More than half of the respondents reported high levels of commuting exhaustion, with 53.7 % scoring 5 or higher on the seven-point scale. Similarly, 51.2 % reported high levels of free time loss. Mental stress was less widespread, but still relevant, with 32.9 % of respondents reporting high levels of commuting-related mental stress. Moreover, commuting exhaustion was strongly and positively associated with perceived mental stress (Spearman's $\rho = 0.75$, $p < .001$), suggesting that commuting-related tiredness is closely connected to psychological strain.

To capture commuting burdens in a single variable, a social cost index was created using multiple indicators related to exhaustion, stress, social isolation, free-time loss and difficulties maintaining personal relationships. Respondents employed in customer-facing occupations reported the lowest average social cost index ($M = 3.76$), while respondents employed in internationalized professional environments reported noticeably higher overall social costs ($M = 4.47$). The highest values were observed in the mixed/other category ($M = 5.12$).

Workplace Context	Mean	SD	N
social costs			
Customer-facing / Local	3.76	1.96	39
Internationalized Professional	4.47	1.66	36
Mixed / Other	5.12	0.51	7
Total	4.18	1.79	82

Table 12. Social Cost Index by Workplace Context

To examine whether these indicators were statistically meaningful, one-way ANOVA tests were conducted across workplace context. Although most indicators did not reach statistical significance, the analysis revealed moderate variation in the perceived negative effect of commuting across the workplace environments. The biggest differences were observed for overall social costs ($F = 2.62$, $p = .080$) and commuting exhaustion ($F = 2.64$, $p = .078$), showing that workplace context may play an important role in commuters' experiences of psychological and social burden.

The results show that there are consistently higher scores among respondents employed in internationalized work environments, suggesting that highly internationalized and professionally demanding work settings may generate specific forms of stress, isolation, and work-life imbalance. However, as this study is exploratory and based on a relatively small sample, the findings should be interpreted cautiously.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Interpretation of Key Findings

The findings of this study suggest that cross-border commuting between Slovakia and Austria represents a complex phenomenon that is shaped by the combination of economic motivations, workplace integration, and social trade-offs. While financial benefits clearly appeared as the primary motivation for commuting, the results indicate that commuters' experiences are also strongly influenced by language use, workplace context, and the social consequences of long-term mobility.

Overall, the results align with the theories on which this paper is based. The economic motives match the theory of labour mobility, which emphasizes the importance of wage differentials (Harris & Todaro, 1970; Borjas 1989). At the same time, the results demonstrate that commuting cannot be understood purely through economic rationality, as respondents also reported important social and psychological costs associated with commuting demands and workplace integration.

The study further highlights the importance of language as both a practical and social factor within cross-border work environments. The study further shows that language matters differently across workplace contexts, with German remaining central in locally embedded environments, while English enables participation in internationalized professional settings.

Taken together, the results indicate that cross-border commuting in the Bratislava–Vienna region reflects not only economic inequalities between neighbouring labour markets, but also broader processes of workplace adaptation, linguistic inclusion, and everyday negotiation between financial gains and personal well-being. The following sections discuss these dimensions in greater detail.

5.2 Economic Benefits versus Social Trade-Offs

As already mentioned, this study confirmed that the economic factor is the main motive why Slovak workers seek job opportunities in Austria. Respondents across all analysed occupations reported significantly higher salaries than the estimated Slovak salary. On average, the reported monthly net salary in Austria was 2899 €, while in Slovakia it was 1683 €, with an average wage premium of 1250 € per month. These findings strongly support the neoclassical theory of labour mobility, which explains cross-border mobility primarily through regional wage

differentials and the rational pursuit of higher economic returns (Harris & Todaro, 1970; Borjas, 1989).

At the same time, the findings suggest that financial gains alone do not fully explain commuters' overall experiences. While respondents generally perceived commuting as economically beneficial, many simultaneously reported considerable social and psychological costs related to long commuting times, exhaustion, stress, and reduced personal time. This indicates that cross-border commuting involves an ongoing negotiation between economic advantages and personal well-being rather than a purely financial decision-making process.

Therefore, the results also align with the human capital perspective on labour mobility, which sees commuting as a long-term investment to improve individuals' economic opportunities and career prospects (Sjaastad, 1962). The respondents perceived working in Austria not only as financially beneficial but also as an opportunity for professional development and better working conditions. Individuals in higher positions, especially in professional international environments, may also commute to Austria for broader career-oriented reasons.

However, the study found that regular commuting is accompanied by multiple time-related and psychological costs. More than half of the respondents reported high levels of commuting exhaustion and free time loss, while almost one-third reported high levels of commuting-related mental stress. The strong positive association between commuting exhaustion and mental stress further suggests that the burden of commuting is not limited to time loss alone but also affects commuters' psychological well-being. These findings align with previous research suggesting that long commuting negatively affects well-being, social relationships, and subjective life satisfaction (Novaco et al., 1990; OECD, 2020).

It is important to note that the relationship between economic gains and social costs is not identical across all commuters. This indicates that higher-skilled or internationally oriented work does not automatically reduce the burden of commuting. Instead, these commuters may experience a combination of mobility-related pressure and professional work demands, which can intensify exhaustion, reduce free time, and weaken the boundary between work and private life.

The role of flexible and hybrid work arrangements also appears more complex than initially expected. While working from home may reduce the practical burden of commuting, the additional analysis did not indicate a significant association between perceived flexibility and lower overall social costs. This suggests that flexibility may help commuters manage some

aspects of mobility, but it does not necessarily eliminate the broader social and psychological consequences of cross-border commuting.

5.3 The Role of German and English in Workplace Integration

The role of German and English within cross-border commuting came out of the results as highly dependent on workplace context and the degree of internationalisation of the work environment. The need for German knowledge remained strongly associated with local integration and customer-oriented occupations, while only English knowledge was acceptable in international environments.

The results from H2 showed substantial differences in the perceived importance of German across workplace contexts. Respondents employed in customer-facing and locally embedded occupations strongly agreed with the statement that German language skills are necessary for their current job ($M = 6.08$), while respondents working in internationalized professional environments reported considerably lower agreement ($M = 3.78$). Therefore, German proficiency was reported as important in sectors like Healthcare, Services, or operational work, where daily encounters with locals are expected. These claims are consistent with previous research emphasizing that the knowledge of local language is crucial for participation in labour markets characterized by intensive interpersonal interaction and locally embedded communication structures (Esser, 2006). On the other hand, English was relied on in international environments where English usage exceeded 50 % across most communication dimensions. This finding supports previous research on English as a lingua franca in multinational workplaces, where English functions as a common communication tool among employees from different linguistic backgrounds (Seidlhofer, 2005; Neeley, 2013). In such settings, communication is often organised around a shared corporate language rather than the host country's domestic language.

This distinction between professional communication and social integration became particularly visible in the analysis of H3. In contrary to the initial expectations, German proficiency alone was not significantly associated with stronger perceived social integration ($r = 0.01$, $p = 0.925$), and there was no statistical significance between different levels in German proficiency. Interestingly, respondents with low German proficiency (A1–A2) reported relatively similar integration scores ($M = 5.10$) as respondents with advanced German proficiency ($M = 5.06$), while the intermediate group reported the lowest average social integration ($M = 4.51$). Furthermore, the findings also revealed that respondents working

primarily in English-speaking environments actually reported slightly higher levels of perceived social integration ($M = 5.10$) than respondents working primarily in German-speaking environments ($M = 4.76$).

One possible explanation is that people working in international and multicultural workplaces know that these companies are likely to recruit employees from diverse linguistic backgrounds and therefore anticipate language diversity. As a result, the use of English as a lingua franca becomes normalized, reducing the expectation of an advanced proficiency in the local language.

Nevertheless, German still remained strongly associated with broader workplace participation and long-term integration opportunities. Respondents using German as the primary language for work reported very high agreement with statements such as “German is essential for career advancement” ($M = 6.53$). Similarly, respondents across all language groups generally agreed that stronger German skills would improve their social integration in Austria (overall $M = 5.33$). These findings support Bourdieu’s concept of linguistic capital, suggesting that German proficiency may function less as a direct determinant of immediate workplace inclusion and more as a long-term resource connected to career mobility, symbolic belonging, and access to broader Austrian social structures (Bourdieu, 1991).

The results, therefore, support Social Identity Theory and assumptions regarding ethnolinguistic integration only partially. While shared language may contribute to better communication and relationship-building, workplace integration among cross-border commuters appears to depend also on additional factors.

Overall, the findings show that German and English have different roles but complement each other on the Austrian labour market. As already mentioned, German remains highly important for customer interaction, while English opens doors to international environments where expertise is more important than fluency in the local language. Therefore, the experiences of Slovak commuters regarding social integration cannot be understood solely through language skills, but rather through the complex interaction among language, workplace, and organisational structure.

5.4 Differences across Skill Levels and Work Contexts

The results further showed that cross-border experiences among Slovak commuters in Austria cannot be treated as a homogeneous phenomenon, as substantial differences emerged across different work environments, skill levels, and workplace contexts. While all sectors reported financial benefits, the requirements for language skills, perceived integration, and social costs varied significantly and depend on the nature of individuals' work and professional positions.

Although the multinational environment may be less strict about languages, the burden falls on social costs. Interestingly, people working in international environments reported greater negative commuting effects than those working in customer-oriented environments. Even though the multinational environment often offers various work arrangements and hybrid work opportunities, people reported high levels of commuting exhaustion, free-time loss, social isolation, and less family time. Similarly, the overall social costs index was noticeably higher among these respondents ($M=4.47$) than in customer-facing occupations ($M=3.76$).

A possible explanation is that highly skilled professional sectors are often associated with greater performance pressure, longer working hours, coordination across multiple teams, and psychological demands beyond commuting itself. Although these individuals might have better-paying jobs and more flexible schedules, they may simultaneously experience higher work intensity and weaker separation between work and private life. This claim is also aligned with the literature on work-life balance and commuting stress, which implies that in highly demanding professional occupations, where employees face both mobility pressure and high cognitive workload simultaneously (Hilbrecht et al., 2014; Gutiérrez-i-Puigarnau & van Ommeren, 2010).

The findings also demonstrate that workplace internationalization may influence integration experiences differently than originally expected, suggesting that integration within cross-border labour mobility may not depend exclusively on domestic language proficiency, but also on organisational culture and workplace diversity.

This indicates that internationalized workplaces may provide more inclusive communication environments because linguistic diversity is already normalized within everyday professional interaction. This aligns with the transnational perspective on mobility, which emphasizes that individuals working in international environments are already used to operating within hybrid social and professional environments that are less closely tied to national cultural norms (Glick Schiller et al., 1992). From this perspective, integration may increasingly occur through

participation in international professional culture rather than exclusively through assimilation into domestic linguistic structures.

Overall, the findings show that the experiences of Slovak cross-border commuters differ considerably across workplace contexts and skill levels. While local and customer-facing occupations remain more dependent on German, internationalized professional sectors provide more space for English and professional expertise. At the same time, these sectors may also involve higher social and psychological costs. Therefore, cross-border commuting should be understood as a differentiated experience shaped not only by economic benefits, but also by workplace structure, language regime, and occupational demands.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Summary of Findings

The aim of this research was to examine cross-border commuting in greater detail by looking beyond economic benefits and focusing on the social costs and language-related experiences of Slovak cross-border commuters working in Austria. Building on theories of labour mobility, human capital, linguistic capital, and social integration, the study explored how economic motivations interact with workplace integration and commuting-related challenges in the everyday experiences of commuters.

The findings confirmed that the main motivation for Slovaks to cross-border commute to Austria is economic advantage. Respondents across all job sectors reported significantly higher earnings in Austria than in comparable positions in Slovakia. In addition, many respondents perceived the Austrian labour market as the one offering better working conditions, more career opportunities, and greater financial stability. However, the findings indicated that these economic benefits are accompanied by considerable social and psychological trade-offs. Commuters mostly reported high levels of exhaustion caused by commuting, loss of free time, mental stress, and difficulties maintaining personal relationships. Although the financial benefits were highly evaluated, the results show that cross-border commuting can create long-term pressure on everyday well-being and social life. The analysis further indicated that flexible work arrangements and higher wage satisfaction may partially mitigate the negative effects associated with commuting burdens.

Another key finding of the thesis is the role of language in workplace integration and employment outcomes. The analysis showed that German proficiency is highly important in customer-facing / local environment, where communication with clients, patients or local colleagues is a central part of everyday work. On the other hand, individuals working in internationalized professional sectors relied more frequently on English or professional expertise than on German proficiency. However, German still represents an important role in the international environment for better social inclusion and interaction with colleagues.

Surprisingly, the data analysis did not confirm a direct relationship between German proficiency and perceived social integration and suggests that the relationship is more complex than initially expected. While German proficiency remained highly important for career advancement, the relationship was not statistically significant. On the other hand, primary

reliance on English did not always guarantee the same level of social inclusion, especially in informal social contexts outside strictly professional communication.

To conclude, this thesis demonstrates that cross-border commuting cannot be understood purely as an economic decision. While financial advantages remain as the main motive, commuters' experiences are further shaped by workplace structures, language, and social integration. The findings suggest that the economic benefits of commuting are accompanied by substantial social and psychological costs. Therefore, the findings highlight that cross-border labour mobility within integrated European regions should not be understood solely through economic indicators, but also through the social and linguistic conditions that shape commuters' everyday experiences.

6.2 Contributions to Research on Cross-Border Mobility

This thesis contributes to existing research on cross-border labour mobility by shifting the focus from commuting as a primarily economic phenomenon to commuting as a multidimensional everyday experience. While previous studies often emphasise wage differentials, labour market opportunities, and regional integration, the findings of this study show that the economic advantages of cross-border commuting are closely connected to social and psychological trade-offs. In this sense, the thesis contributes by demonstrating that higher earnings alone do not fully explain commuters' experiences, as financial benefits are accompanied by exhaustion, loss of free time, commuting-related stress, and challenges in maintaining work–life balance.

A second contribution lies in the analysis of language use within cross-border work contexts. The findings show that language does not function only as a practical communication tool, but also as a form of workplace resource whose value depends on the specific occupational environment. German remains highly important in customer-facing and locally embedded occupations, where direct communication with clients, patients, customers, or local colleagues is central to everyday work. At the same time, English plays an important role in internationalized professional environments, where it enables participation in multinational teams. This distinction contributes to a more nuanced understanding of language in cross-border commuting by showing that the role of German and English cannot be evaluated independently from workplace context. The thesis also contributes empirically by focusing on the Bratislava–Vienna corridor, a highly relevant but still relatively under-researched cross-border labour region. Although this region is characterized by strong geographical proximity, significant wage differences, and regular commuting flows, limited empirical attention has

been paid to the everyday experiences of Slovak commuters working in Austria. By analysing this specific case, the study adds insight into how cross-border commuting operates in a Central European border region where economic asymmetries, language requirements, and workplace structures intersect.

Finally, the thesis contributes by combining economic, social, and linguistic perspectives within one analytical framework. By bringing together theories of labour mobility, human capital, linguistic capital, and workplace integration, the study shows that cross-border commuting should not be understood only as a rational response to wage differences. Rather, it is shaped by the interaction between financial incentives, occupational context, language regimes, and the social consequences of daily mobility. This broader perspective helps explain why commuting may be economically beneficial while still carrying significant personal and social costs for commuters.

6.3 Policy Implications

The findings of this study show that cross-border commuting between Slovakia and Austria is not solely an individual labour market strategy but also an important structural component of regional economic integration along the border. As a result, the phenomenon has wider implications for workforce development, cross-border regional planning, and labour market policy.

The higher and consistent wage premium identified across occupational groups is evidence that the economic differences between the labour markets of Slovakia and Austria remain the main reason why Slovak workers pursue employment opportunities outside of their home country. From a long-term policy perspective, these findings raise important questions for Slovakia. While cross-border commuters help address labour shortages in Austria, their employment abroad may simultaneously deepen labour shortages in Slovakia, particularly in sectors such as healthcare, caregiving, services, and technical or manual occupations. This suggests that cross-border commuting should not be viewed only as an individual opportunity, but also as a potential challenge for the Slovak labour market. If domestic wages, working conditions, and career opportunities remain significantly less attractive than in Austria, Slovakia may continue to lose workers in sectors where labour is already needed. Therefore, strengthening wage competitiveness, improving working conditions, and creating better career prospects in Slovakia may be necessary to reduce long-term dependence on neighbouring labour markets and to retain qualified workers at home.

The findings also show the growing importance of languages. It was confirmed that fluency in the domestic language, German in Austria, is an important aspect in customer-oriented and local environments. On the other hand, in international companies, English is sufficient for work itself, however German skills play a crucial role in further career advancement.

Further, the results indicate that cross-border commuting is associated with high social and psychological costs. Therefore, to maintain cross-border commuting, the expansion of hybrid work arrangements may be crucial for the long-term sustainability of commuting and employees' well-being. This may indicate that the future of cross-border labour mobility will depend not only on wage incentives, but also increasingly on organisational flexibility and working conditions.

Lastly, the study highlights highly congested transport channels, where further cooperation between the two states should continue, especially in areas like infrastructure, labour mobility and regional workforce planning. As commuting within the Bratislava–Vienna corridor intensifies, managing cross-border labour mobility may increasingly require coordinated regional approaches rather than isolated national solutions.

6.4 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite providing important insights into the experience of Slovak cross-border commuters working in Austria, this paper has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the research was based on a relatively small, exploratory sample consisting of 82 respondents. Although this sample was sufficient for establishing and identifying broader relationships, it does not allow generalization to the entire population of Slovak cross-border commuters. Future research should therefore aim to gather a larger, more diverse sample, allowing much more detailed analysis. Since the data were collected at a single point of time and represent a cross-sectional design, the study cannot fully capture long-term developments or causal relationships. Future research could therefore employ a longitudinal design to examine economic satisfaction, work-life balance, language adaptation, and the long-term effects of commuting.

Secondly, the study relied on self-reported questionnaire data, which may be influenced by subjective perceptions and individual interpretations of questions. Variables such as perceived stress, social integration, or estimated salaries in Slovakia are inherently subjective and may differ depending on personal expectations and experiences. Furthermore, respondents also

estimated their levels of English and German on their own, which may be subject to misinterpretation based on one's feeling, however the reality might be different. Additionally, since the questionnaire was distributed partly through social media groups, the sample may contain a certain degree of self-selection bias, as individuals with stronger opinions or experiences may have been more likely to participate.

The study also focused specifically on the Bratislava–Vienna cross-border region, which represents a highly integrated and geographically unique labour market, linking **two** bordering countries with significantly different levels of economic power within the European Union. As a result, the findings may not be fully transferable to other cross-border commuting contexts with different institutional conditions, commuting distances, wage differentials, or language environments. Comparative studies across different European border regions could therefore provide a deeper understanding of how local economic and institutional conditions shape cross-border commuting experiences. Moreover, if two countries with similar economic conditions would be analysed, the sacrifice and psychological burdens of cross-border commuting might be better explained.

Finally, while the study primarily looked beyond the economic benefits and examined whether there is a trade-off between financial advantages, social costs, and language-related factors. Future research could examine additional dimensions to get a deeper understanding of commuter experiences. Particularly relevant areas may include mental health outcomes, family dynamics, long-term career development, identity formation, or the impact of remote and hybrid work arrangements on cross-border mobility. Future studies could also benefit from combining quantitative and qualitative methods to capture the more nuanced personal experiences of commuters that cannot be fully explained by statistical analysis alone.

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8. APPENDIX

Questionnaire in English distributed by MS Forms

Cross-Border Commuting between Slovakia and Austria

Master's Thesis Survey

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at:
V prípade akýchkoľvek otázok ma neváhajte kontaktovať na:
a11802077@unet.univie.ac.at

Dear respondent,

I am currently working on my Master's thesis focusing on cross-border commuting between Slovakia and Austria. I would greatly appreciate your support by completing the following questionnaire based on your experience. Please note the following:

- This survey is intended only for individuals who currently commute from Slovakia to Austria for work (at least once per week).
- If you do not meet this condition, please refrain from completing the questionnaire.

All responses will be treated with strict confidentiality. Your answers will be anonymized and analyzed in aggregate form only. No personal data will be shared with third parties and will be used exclusively for the purpose of this research. By completing the questionnaire, you consent to these conditions. The questionnaire will take approximately **5-7 minutes** to complete.

Thank you very much for your time and valuable input.

Vážený respondent,

momentálne pracujem na svojej diplomovej práci, ktorá sa zameriava na cezhraničné dochádzanie za prácou medzi Slovenskom a Rakúskom. Veľmi by som ocenila Vašu pomoc pri výskume vyplnením nasledujúceho dotazníka na základe Vašich skúseností. Prosím, venujte pozornosť nasledujúcim podmienkam:

- Tento dotazník je určený len pre osoby, ktoré aktuálne dochádzajú zo Slovenska do Rakúska za prácou (aspoň raz týždenne).
- Ak túto podmienku nespĺňate, prosím, nevyplňujte tento dotazník.

Všetky odpovede budú spracované anonymne a dôverne. Získané údaje budú analyzované výlučne v agregovanej forme a nebudú poskytnuté tretím stranám. Údaje budú použité výhradne na účely tejto diplomovej práce. Vyplnením dotazníka zároveň vyjadrujete súhlas s uvedenými podmienkami.

Vyplnenie dotazníka Vám zaberie približne **5-7 minút**.

Podpisujem: 14.06.2023. Značím a odhlasujem: 14.06.2023. na dotazníku: a11802077

1. Screening Questions

1. Do you currently commute from Slovakia to Austria for work at least once per week?
(Dochádzate momentálne zo Slovenska do Rakúska za prácou aspoň raz za týždeň?)*

☐ Yes / Áno

☐ No / Nie

2. What is your main place of residence?
(Kde máte trvalé bydlisko?) *

- ☐ Bratislava
- ☐ Bratislava region (okolie Bratislavy)
- ☐ Iné

3. Where in Austria do you work?
(Kde v Rakúsku pracujete?) *

- ☐ Vienna (Viedeň)
- ☐ Lower Austria (Dolné Rakúsko)
- ☐ Burgenland
- ☐ Iné

2. Demographics / Background Variables

4. Age (Vek) *

- ☐ 18-25
- ☐ 26-35
- ☐ 36-45
- ☐ 46-55
- ☐ 56+

5. Gender (Pohlavie) *

- ☐ Male (Muž)
- ☐ Female (Žena)
- ☐ Other (Iné)

6. Family status (Rodinný stav) *

- ☐ Single (Slobodný/á)
- ☐ Married (Ženatý/Vydatá)
- ☐ Divorced (Rozvedený/á)

7. Do you have children? (Máte deti?)

- ☐ No (Nie)
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4+

3. Employment Characteristics

11. How many years do you commute to Austria?
(Koľko rokov dochádzate za prácou do Rakúska?)

- ☐ Less than 1 year (Menej ako 1 rok)
- ☐ 1–2 years
- ☐ 3–5 years
- ☐ 6–10 years
- ☐ 10+

12. Job sector in Austria (V akej odvetvi pracujete v Rakúsku?)

- ☐ Services (Služby / hotelierstvo)
- ☐ Retail (Obchod)
- ☐ Healthcare (Zdravotníctvo)
- ☐ Logistics (Logistika / manuálna práca)
- ☐ Manufacturing (Výroba)
- ☐ Finance (Bankovníctvo / financie)
- ☐ IT / Tech
- ☐ Business services (Kancelárska / korporátna práca)
- ☐ Iné

13. Main type of contract (Typ pracovnej zmluvy) *

- ☐ Full-time (Plný úväzok)
- ☐ Part-time (Skrátený úväzok)
- ☐ Freelancer
- ☐ Temporary (Dočasná práca)
- ☐ Iné

14. Position level (*Pozícia*) *

- ☐ Intern (Stážista / Brigádnik)
- ☐ Entry-level (Začiatok)
- ☐ Regular Employee (Bežný zamestnanec)
- ☐ Specialist
- ☐ Senior specialist
- ☐ Team lead
- ☐ Manager
- ☐ Executive

15. What are your main motivation factors for working in Austria? (Select max 2)

(Aké sú vaše hlavné dôvody, prečo pracujete v Rakúsku?)

(Vyberte max. 2 odpovede) *

Vyberte tento počet možností: 2

- ☐ Higher salary (Vyšší plat)
- ☐ Better career opportunities (Lepšia kariéra)
- ☐ Better working conditions (Lepšie pracovné podmienky)
- ☐ Limited opportunities in Slovakia (Málo možností na Slovensku)
- ☐ International environment (Medzinárodné prostredie)
- ☐ Iné

4. Economic Gains

16. Monthly net income in Austria

(Aký je Váš čistý mesačný príjem v Rakúsku?) *

- ☐ < 1,000 €
- ☐ 1,000 – 1,499 €
- ☐ 1,500 – 1,999 €
- ☐ 2,000 – 2,499 €
- ☐ 2,500 – 2,999 €
- ☐ 3,000 – 3,999 €
- ☐ 4,000 – 4,999 €
- ☐ 5,000 € or more
- ☐ Prefer not to say (Nechcem uviesť)

17. If you were employed in Slovakia in a comparable position, what net monthly income would you expect (approximate estimate)?

(Keby ste mali porovnateľnú prácu na Slovensku, aký by bol váš približný čistý mesačný príjem?) *

- ☐ < 1,000 €
- ☐ 1,000 – 1,499 €
- ☐ 1,500 – 1,999 €
- ☐ 2,000 – 2,499 €
- ☐ 2,500 – 2,999 €
- ☐ 3,000 – 3,999 €
- ☐ 4,000 – 4,999 €
- ☐ 5,000 € or more
- ☐ Prefer not to say (Nechcem uviesť)

18. How much do you agree with the following statements?

(1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree)

(Do akej miery súhlasíte s týmito výrokmi?)

(1 = vôbec nesúhlasím, 7 = úplne súhlasím) *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My job in Austria improves my long-term career prospects (Práca v Rakúsku zlepšuje moje dlhodobé kariérne možnosti)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Working in Austria allows me to develop valuable professional skills (Práca v Rakúsku mi pomáha rozvíjať dôležité pracovné zručnosti)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The higher salary in Austria compensates for the disadvantages of commuting (Výšší plat v Rakúsku vyváži nevýhody dochádzania)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I believe I am financially better off than similar workers in Slovakia (Mám sa finančne lepšie ako obdobní pracovníci na Slovensku)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Compared to Slovakia, my working conditions in Austria are better
(Pracovné podmienky v Rakúsku sú lepšie ako na Slovensku)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Compared to Slovakia, my work-life balance is better in Austria (V porovnaní so Slovenskom mám v Rakúsku lepšiu rovnováhu medzi prácou a voľným časom)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

5. Commuting

19. Average one-way commuting time

(Koľko priemerne trvá vaša cesta do práce jedným smerom?) *

- ☐ < 30 min
- ☐ 30–60 min
- ☐ 60–90 min
- ☐ 90–120 min
- ☐ More than 120 min (Viac ako 120 minút)
- ☐ Iné

20. Main transport method

(Akým dopravným prostriedkom najčastejšie dochádzate do práce?) *

- ☐ Train (Vlak)
- ☐ Car (Auto)
- ☐ Bus (Autobus)
- ☐ Mixed (Kombinované)
- ☐ Iné

21. Average monthly commuting cost

(Koľko približne miniete mesačne na dochádzanie?)

- ☐ < 50 €
- ☐ 50–150 €
- ☐ 150–200 €
- ☐ 200–250 €
- ☐ 250–350 €
- ☐ 350–450 €
- ☐ 450 € +
- ☐ Iné

22. Commuting frequency

(Ako často dochádzate do práce?) *

- ☐ 1–2 days/week (1–2 dni)
- ☐ 3–4 days/week (3–4 dni)
- ☐ 5 days/week (5 dni)
- ☐ Hybrid / variable (Kombinované / podľa potreby)

23. How much do you agree with the following statements?

(1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree)

(Do akej miery súhlasíte s týmito výrokmí?)

(1 = vôbec nesúhlasím, 7 = úplne súhlasím) *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Since COVID-19, flexible work has improved my work-life balance (Od COVIDu mi flexibilitná práca zlepšila work-life balance)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Working from home reduces the burden of commuting (Home office)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. Social Costs

24. How much do you agree with the following statements?

(1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree)

(Do akej miery súhlasíte s týmito výrokmí?)

(1 = vôbec nesúhlasím, 7 = úplne súhlasím) *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Commuting reduces the time I can spend with family or partners (Dochádzanie mi berie čas, ktorý by som mohol stráviť s rodinou alebo partnerom)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I often feel tired or exhausted due to commuting (Často sa cítim sa unavený/a kvôli dochádzaniu)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Commuting limits my ability to maintain friendships in Slovakia
(Dochádzanie obmedzuje udržiavanie mojich sociálnych vzťahov na Slovensku)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I sometimes feel socially isolated because of my work schedule
(Niekedy sa cítim sociálne izolovaný/a kvôli pracovnému času)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I experience mental stress specifically caused by commuting
(Zažívam psychickú záťaž (stres), ktorá je spôsobená hlavne dochádzaním)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Commuting takes up a lot of my free time
(Dochádzaním strácam veľa voľného času)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

If my wage were lower, I would stop commuting to Austria
(Pri nižšom pláte by som prestal/a dochádzať do Rakúska)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

15. 6. 2026 10:08

Cross-Border Commuting between Slovakia and Austria

7. Language

25. German Level

(Úroveň nemčiny) *

- ☐ A1
- ☐ A2
- ☐ B1
- ☐ B2
- ☐ C1
- ☐ C2
- ☐ Native speaker (rodný jazyk)

26. English Level

*(Úroveň angličtiny) **

- ☐ A1
- ☐ A2
- ☐ B1
- ☐ B2
- ☐ C1
- ☐ C2
- ☐ Native speaker (rodný jazyk)

27. Primary language used with colleagues

*(Hlavný jazyk používaný na komunikáciu s kolegami) **

- ☐ German (Nemčina)
- ☐ English (Angličtina)
- ☐ Mixed (Kombinované)
- ☐ Iné

28. Primary language used for work tasks

*(Hlavný jazyk používaný na pracovné úkony) **

- ☐ German (Nemčina)
- ☐ English (Angličtina)
- ☐ Mixed (Kombinované)
- ☐ Iné

29. Primary language used with customers/clients

*(Hlavný jazyk používaný na komunikáciu so zákazníkmi/ s klientami) **

- ☐ German (Nemčina)
- ☐ English (Angličtina)
- ☐ Mixed (Kombinované)
- ☐ Not applicable (neaplikovateľné)
- ☐ Iné

30. How much do you agree with the following statements?

(1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree)

(Do akej miery súhlasíte s týmito výrokmí?)

(1 = vôbec nesúhlasím, 7 = úplne súhlasím)*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
German language skills are necessary for my current job (Nemčina je potrebná pre moju súčasnú prácu)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
English is more important than German for my daily work tasks (Angličtina je pre moju náplň práce dôležitejšia ako nemčina)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
German is essential for career advancement (Nemčina je dôležitá pre kariérny rast)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would integrate socially better if my German was stronger (Lepšia úroveň nemčiny by mi pomohla lepšie zapadnúť)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Communication in German feels more formal and distant than in English (Komunikácia v nemčine pôsobí formálnejšie a menej prirodzene ako v angličtine)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel more socially included when communicating in English (Pri komunikácii v angličtine sa cítim viac začlenený do kolektívu)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Language differences create barriers in my workplace (Jazykové rozdiely vytvárajú bariéry na pracovisku)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

8. Workplace Integration & Social Identity

31. How much do you agree with the following statements?

(1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree)

(Do akej miery súhlasíte s týmito výroky?)

(1 = vôbec nesúhlasím, 7 = úplne súhlasím) *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel fully accepted as part of my workplace (Citím sa prijatý/á v kolektíve)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My relationships are mostly professional (Vzťahy v práci sú skôr pracovné než osobné)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel socially distant from my coworkers (Citím sa voči svojim kolegom sociálne izolovaný)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel more like an "international worker" (V práci sa cítim skôr ako cudzinec)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have meaningful friendships at work (Mám v práci skutočných priateľov)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel comfortable expressing my opinions (Citím sa komfortne vyjadriť názor)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

9. Perceived Discrimination

32. Have you experienced discrimination in Austria?

(Zažili ste diskrimináciu v Rakúsku?)

- ☐ Never (Nikdy)
- ☐ Rarely (Zriedka)
- ☐ Sometimes (Občas)
- ☐ Often (Často)
- ☐ Very often (Veľmi často)

33. How much do you agree with the following statements? ^{...}

(1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree)

(Do akej miery súhlasíte s týmito výroky?)

(1 = vôbec nesúhlasím, 7 = úplne súhlasím)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel treated differently because I am Slovak. (Cítim že sa so mnou zaobchádza inak, kvôli tomu, že som Slovák)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have had negative experiences due to language barriers. (Mal/a som negatívne skúsenosti kvôli jazykovým bariéram)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Austrian coworkers underestimate Slovak workers. (Rakúski kolegovia podceňujú Slovákov)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Tento obsah nevytvorila a neschválila spoločnosť Microsoft. Údaje, ktoré odošlete, sa pošlú vlastníčkovi formulára.

 Microsoft Forms