

# Bringing Expertise or Political Responsiveness to Agency Level? Career Paths of Heads of Labour Offices in Slovakia 2010-2022

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**Abstract:** The paper builds upon the theory of patronage appointments and politicization as a lens of studying these practices on agency level in Slovakia, one of the most politicized CEE countries. The research investigates whether personal ties, party affiliation or expertise influence the appointments of senior civil servants as heads of these agencies. Thus, conceptually it adopts the Ramos, Peters and Panizza (2019) as well as Staronova and Rybar (2021) framework of patronage appointments. Empirically, it is based on the unique dataset of all heads of Labour office agencies that held office in the period 2010-2022. This article investigates whether the change in the formal way of recruitment from political appointees to meritocratic selection makes a difference in career paths of the heads of 42 Labour offices. The formal legislative change from political to meritocratic appointment took place in 2015 which enables us to take into consideration also various government types. Therefore, the research with its unique dataset has the potential to contribute to the debate on patronage and politicization on agency level as well as on the professional characteristics of civil servants between different forms of recruitment.

Key words: politicization, patronage, meritocracy, career paths, senior civil servants, agencies, political appointments