

**Statement delivered by
Her Excellency Gabriela Matecná
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development
of the Slovak Republic
on the occasion of the
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Mr José Graziano da Silva, Director-General of FAO,
Mr Qu Dongyu, Director-General elect,
Mr Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Migration – a phenomenon of twenty first century – is considered to be one of the main global issues international community is currently dealing with. Migration is an increasingly complex phenomenon that presents economic, social, population, cultural, political, security and environmental challenges. Migration, however, does not bring challenges only. Migration is a historical social phenomenon that is a source of development and economic growth.

Nowadays, most of the attention is devoted to the international migration, which, as indicated in the State of Food and Agriculture 2018 report, is only part of a much bigger picture that includes internal migration, including rural migration.

Distinguished colleagues, allow me to briefly outline the situation in Slovakia. Slovakia is a country that has not been dramatically affected by migration flows during the twentieth century. The situation has changed with the accession of Slovakia to the European Union and the Schengen area.

Like other countries, Slovakia faces a situation when the nature and character of the countryside is changing and depopulation of rural areas is taking place. Situation regarding the workforce in the countryside is alarming. Workplaces in rural areas lack labour force, farmers face labour shortages and the number of people willing to work in rural areas is declining from year to year. Just to compare, three decades ago, there were three hundred sixty thousands (360 000) people working on farms. In 2017, there were only forty-eight thousands people (48 000). In addition, due to lack of staff, farmers are forced to reduce the number of animals. Obviously, revitalization of rural areas is necessary and it represents one of the main challenges for Slovakia. If we do not want to see rural areas to decline, we need to act.

One of possibilities is to focus on rural development, invest in agriculture and thus attract inhabitants to move back to countryside and rural areas and ensure that people, who are willing to move back, have decent living standards. This is what we are doing in Slovakia. For example, we have developed action plans for the least-developed regions, through which the Slovak Government supports agricultural projects with the aim of creating new jobs in lagging areas. Increasing rural standards is also implemented through activities and measures within the Rural Development Program of the Slovak Republic for years 2014-2020.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Migration, despite the challenges it presents, is part of economic, social and human development and a mean of reducing inequalities both within and between countries. If managed well, migration helps countries to prosper. Thus, it is important to devote due attention to it, particularly in the context of agriculture and rural development. Migration, agriculture and rural development cannot be seen in isolation, but rather as inter-linked areas.

In closing, let me commend the significant and unique work of FAO in promoting rural migration and the positive impact the Organization has on rural populations, agriculture and food system, all with the aim of achieving zero hunger and eradication of poverty.

Thank you very much for your attention.