

# **National Implementation Plan (NIP)**

## **Slovakia**

**2024 Revision**

## Introduction

The Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, adopted on 24 November 2020, called on the Member States to submit and implement national implementation plans (NIPs) by 31 May 2022. A new cycle of European cooperation in VET has been launched with NIPs referring to this Council Recommendation on VET, the Osnabrück Declaration on vocational education and training endorsed on 30 November 2020, and other strategic documents and policies, such as the Council Resolution on the European Education Area, the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the European Skills Agenda, creating also a basis for setting progress monitoring indicators.

Slovakia submitted the first version of the NIP titled the National Implementation Plan for Slovakia for Vocational Education and Training and Lifelong Learning to the European Commission by 31 May 2022. Seven out of eight measures embedded in the NIP were directly interlinked with the Strategy of Lifelong Learning and Guidance for 2021-2030 adopted by the government on 24 November 2021. The Action Plan for the Strategy of Lifelong Learning and Guidance for 2022-2024 containing timelines and sources of funding relevant also for the NIP was therefore attached to the first version of the NIP.

A revised version of the NIP was finalised by 10 March 2024. This revision

- sticks more precisely to the guidelines and common template for the creation of NIPs;
- reflects the originally selected eight measures adding only updated information on new related developments.

Nevertheless, the NIP must be seen as representing only the relevant priorities and not a full range of policies and measures related to VET and lifelong learning.

Templates and guidelines for the NIP creation have been preserved in the text below to facilitate readers' understanding of the role of the NIP.

## Template and guidelines for National implementation plans

### 1. Brief information on the national context and baseline

*This section **briefly** presents the national context and serves as a baseline for the plan. The participating countries should describe:*

- i. The strategic and legal frameworks that are in place and the national context of the VET system at the time of submission of the NIP that will guide the implementation of the planned measures for VET. The information may refer to relevant points of national long-term visions and strategies (e.g. for 2030 and beyond), main strategic documents related to the development of education, training and lifelong learning and, specifically, VET strategies and/or plans, the EU skills agenda, resilience and recovery plans <sup>(1)</sup>, employment policies, as well as to sectoral and regional strategies, if applicable. The presentation of the national context of the VET system will focus on the factors (e.g. strong involvement of the social partners) that national VET policy can build upon to address the European priorities and to achieve the objectives of the NIPs.*
- ii. main policy initiatives and reforms that have already started and are ongoing at the time of preparing the NIPs. These might include initiatives and reforms that may be completed by May 2022 or will continue. Countries are invited to reflect and describe how these national initiatives will contribute to the implementation of the common priorities.*
- iii. relevant (statistical) evidence, especially regarding the quantitative objectives set in the Recommendation (the Commission will provide more information on these in Spring 2022).*

i. The strategic and legal frameworks

The Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth (hereinafter referred to as the education ministry) is responsible for initial VET and partly for continuing VET, while the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family for labour market training as part of active labour market policies. The Act on VET No 61/2015 Coll. regulates the initial VET system further to the Education Act No 245/2008 Coll. The Act on VET stipulates types of secondary VET schools, places of work-based learning, dual education, relationships and procedural features of dual education, in-company trainer's training and certification, company schools, and

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<sup>(1)</sup> Especially the components related to education and training and labour market and social protection. National recovery and resilience plans will be available here: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility_en)

governance of VET. Following the structural changes on labour market, the experience of stakeholders, and the ongoing digitalization of industry and services, this law was amended in 2021 by Act No 413/2021 Coll.

Regarding the above-mentioned legislation, supplementary measures are being implemented, defined in the 2021 Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP), such as the early warning system (identifying pupils at risk of dropping out) or monitoring and mentoring scheme for pedagogical staff in order to deliver high-quality, targeted assistance for pupils. Reflecting country-specific recommendations, the 2023 amendment of RRP focused within the REPowerEU-related chapter on supporting education and skills development for the green transition.

In November 2021, the government approved the Strategy of Lifelong Learning and Guidance for 2021-2030 (hereinafter referred to as the Strategy) <sup>(2)</sup> aimed at defining forward-looking measures that will enable 'responding to the dynamically changing labour market, the nature of work in the context of the fourth industrial revolution and systemic changes in the field of education for all'. Three three-year periods were envisaged to complement the Strategy. The Action Plan for the Strategy of Lifelong Learning and Guidance for 2022-2024 <sup>(3)</sup> was approved by the government on 20 April 2022.

ii. Main policy initiatives and reforms

The amendment of the Act on VET No 61/2015 Coll. introduces many adjustments towards the practical training of learners such as

- better in-company services;
- internationalisation of practical training as VET can also be delivered by partner schools or companies abroad;
- introducing a longer period for signing the (dual) learning contract, abolishing obligatory signing before the start of the school year;
- expansion of the possibility of provision of dual VET for pre-school education teachers and social services workers-related programmes.

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<sup>(2)</sup> [https://zakladnezrucnosti.sk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/EN\\_Strategia-CZVaP\\_fin.pdf](https://zakladnezrucnosti.sk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/EN_Strategia-CZVaP_fin.pdf)

<sup>(3)</sup> <https://zakladnezrucnosti.sk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Akcny-plan-2022-24-EN-final.pdf>

Three main changes bring VET provision and its real application in practice even closer to the needs of the labour market and society.

Firstly, the responsibility of employers' associations concerning the assessment and introduction of new VET programmes has been expanded to better reflect labour market needs in specific fields of the economy. The previous system based on the dominant decision of the founder of the secondary school has been replaced. It prohibits opening studies not relevant to labour market needs and strengthens alignment to qualifications.

The second large change stipulates bringing more small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) on board to deliver work-based learning (WBL) to more pupils. Supra-company training centres have been introduced and their full effect is expected to come into force on 1 January 2025. Companies can combine their efforts to create an in-company training centre to deliver excellent and inclusive high-quality VET for those segments of VET provision, which cannot be provided either by school or company. For SMEs, the WBL can be offered in these centres entirely or partially. Quality assurance based on the EQAVET is an obligatory precondition for its approval. An in-company centre can also be created within a big company active in dual VET.

The third major change is focusing on early school leavers and pupils in lower secondary vocational education (EQF 2). By amendment of Education Act No 245/2008 Coll., which came into force on 1 January 2022, new VET provision for those pupils in respective fields of study enables them to acquire (general) lower secondary education as an obligatory condition for transition into higher levels of education. Formally, two separated programmes are merged into one single programme provided with the possibility for graduates to continue in a related field of study offering higher qualification, without starting from the first year (e.g. EQF 2 programme – construction production; graduates from this new field of study enhanced by elements of (general) lower secondary education can immediately access the second year of EQF 3 programme – bricklayer).

Parallel to this improvement of accessibility to VET for all, second-chance education has been introduced via Article 31a of the Education Act. The programme is modular and for everyone regardless of age, level of previous education, country of origin, health or mental disabilities. The programme is concluded by the exam awarding to its applicants (general) lower secondary education. If the results of the entry exam to this programme are satisfactory, the programme can be skipped and an applicant can jump directly to the completion exam. Via such a programme, after acquiring (general) lower secondary education (EQF 2), anyone can access mainstream education by successful completion of admission procedures to a respective upper secondary education programme.

Lastly, the national curricula for VET have been changed. Reflecting the 2018 Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, the revision of all key competences on all levels of VET education (EQF 2-5) was introduced in national curricula in 2021. Digital and green transition better aligned to labour market needs is expected from the new national curricula for VET under preparation. A curricular reform is currently piloted on the ISCED 1+2 level and new national curricula were prepared and adopted by the education ministry in 2023. ISCED 3 curricula for both general education and VET should be prepared in relation to the education ministry project 'Modern Education in Secondary Schools' by Q4/2030.

iii. Statistics and quantitative objectives

According to the Council Recommendation on VET, by 2025

- the share of employed graduates from VET should be at least 82%;
- 60% of recent graduates from VET should benefit from exposure to work-based learning during their vocational education and training;
- 8% of learners in VET should benefit from a learning mobility abroad.

The three targets above are also considered the 2025 national targets. Slovakia needs actions to achieve these quantitative objectives, as it stands below in 2022 data, according to the European VET policy dashboard of Cedefop <sup>(4)</sup>.

## 2. Challenges and general objectives of the plan

*The participating countries are invited to identify and describe the main challenges they face (e.g. in the socioeconomic, employment, VET and skills areas) and how they are going to be addressed through the implementation of the planned measures.*

*The general objectives of the NIPs should be presented in the order of priority and supported with evidence. Countries should make a clear link between the challenges to be addressed and the set objectives and explain how their achievement will help addressing these challenges. The description of each objective should refer to the VET Recommendation priorities and the Osnabrück Declaration objectives (see the Annex).*

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<sup>(4)</sup> <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/european-vet-policy-dashboard/data-access>

*The participating countries are invited to explain how they plan to achieve the quantitative objectives set by the Recommendation and other national targets (e.g. those of Skills agenda), as applicable, by 2025 in the medium-term and by 2030 in the long-term and provide the respective evidence.*

*The participating countries should provide:*

- i. a brief overview of the main challenges, reform objectives and main measures <sup>(5)</sup> that comprise the NIP and links between them, explain the coherence of all parts of the NIP as well as its consistency with other national initiatives <sup>(6)</sup>, where applicable;*
- ii. a reference to the main sources of funding for the implementation of the NIP, namely which funds, including EU funds, will be used;*
- iii. timeline and current phase of development of the implementation of the NIP with respect to the timeline of the Osnabrück Declaration and the Recommendation.*

- i. A brief overview of the main challenges

There are still many challenges that need to be addressed:

1. decreasing performance in reading, mathematics and science, visible from PISA, negatively affects participation in mechanical and electrical engineering VET programmes, leading to a shortage of supply of technically skilled graduates in the national economy;
2. early leaving from education and training data of Eastern Slovakia deteriorated, being in a long-term over the EU 2020 target;
3. participation in lifelong learning, as measured by the LFS and referring to four weeks preceding the survey, was well below the EU 2020 target of 15% until 2021 (4.8% compared to 10.8% in EU27). Despite improvement in 2022 with 12.8% caused by methodological change in collecting data, the structure of participation in lifelong learning has remained a challenge.

Council country-specific recommendations (CSR) 2011-2023 are taken into account as instrumental for the prioritisation of national policies although individual recommendations gradually changed in their scope and focus, as visible in the 2023 CSR exclusively addressing only skills needed for the green transition. In contrast to this, the 2012 CSR identified a variety of sensitive agendas, of which three areas for actions are considered by the education ministry still relevant:

1. strengthening labour market relevance of education and vocational training;

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<sup>(5)</sup> A detailed description of those measures will be done in Section 3.

<sup>(6)</sup> E.g. national recovery and resilience plans, national reform programmes.

2. improving education of vulnerable groups, including Roma;
3. ensuring labour market reintegration of adults.

More time is needed to address them fully. Despite substantial progress in reforming VET since 2008, systemic changes, including additional investments, are needed to:

1. secure up-to-date equipment in VET schools to improve the quality of training based on digital and green transition;
2. increase the attractiveness of the VET teacher and trainer professions and improve their in-service training substantially;
3. strengthen VET research and labour market intelligence, focusing on graduate tracking and identification of transferable skills, to improve understanding of labour market and skill needs;
4. support more systematically the mobility of learners, VET staff and experts to learn from international expertise and experience;
5. bridge the worlds of learning and work by ensuring that experts with a business background can inform VET schools on emerging skill needs, particularly by reinforcing the position and role of sectoral (skills) councils;
6. make the qualification system more flexible through continuous revision of the Slovak Qualifications Framework (SKKR) and the development of validation procedures for non-formal and informal learning.

ii. Funding the implementation of the NIP

Funding the implementation of the NIP is predominantly based on resources identified within the Action Plan for the Strategy of Lifelong Learning and Guidance for 2022-2024. The Action plan contains a roadmap of activities, based on the defined thematic areas of the Strategy and the actions proposed therein. Detailed allocation of means is available for national projects funded from Programme Slovakia 2021-2027 and the Swiss Financial Mechanism.

iii. The Osnabrück Declaration and Council Recommendation on VET-related timeline

Reflecting important Council Recommendation on VET and Osnabrück Declaration topics is visible from respective tables embedded in the sections commenting eight individual NIP measures below. Taking into account all measures, all tabled topics are covered.



### 3. Detailed description of main measures and/or their packages <sup>(7)</sup>

*One table to be developed for each measure that forms the core of the plan*

Main measures of the National implementation plan are related to the following topics:

1. Centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs)
2. Supra-company training centres
3. Post-secondary VET transformation – the creation of higher industrial schools
4. Quality assurance in IVET and CVET
5. Prevention of early school leaving (early leaving from education and training)
6. Basic skills
7. Individual learning accounts
8. New system of lifelong learning introduced by the new law on lifelong learning

#### Title of measure 1

#### Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs)

#### Rationale/background, challenges addressed

The Act on VET No 61/2015 Coll. stipulated the creation of centres of VET and the network of these centres has already been established. This network must be revised in terms of the number and quality of centres. Therefore, a new initiative resulted in the creation of a new network of centres of excellence in VET (*centrá excelentnosti OVP*). This initiative is compatible with the European initiative, and, therefore, the European title is further used. Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) are now seen in Slovakia as innovative hubs aimed at the provision of high-quality initial and continuing VET, involving all relevant actors in the VET coordination process. CoVEs aim to cumulate all elements of VET coordination, including career guidance and defining the content of the practical part of VET so that quality and innovation are adjusted as much as possible to labour market and society needs.

<sup>(7)</sup> A package (of measures) is a coherent set of measures that address a particular challenge, one or several priorities and principles of the VET recommendation and/or objectives of the Osnabrück Declaration.

The network of CoVEs will be established by the transformation of existing centres of VET and the creation of new CoVEs based on a pilot phase. CoVEs will have a special position within the secondary school network, inter alia concerning capacity building of staff and the number of learners. CoVEs will offer opportunities for continuing professional development of VET staff including in-service training of VET trainers, vocational subject teachers and career counsellors. Specific practical training also for self-employed and SMEs focusing on modern, digital, innovative technologies (e.g. virtual reality) will be offered. CoVEs will also be instrumental for the validation and recognition of the results of prior learning, and examinations of VET trainers and in-company instructors. The CoVEs infrastructure should be well developed, thus, further support for improving equipment and strengthening staff capacities of CoVEs, is envisaged. CoVEs should gradually develop into an institution able to 'bring together a wide range of local partners, such as providers of vocational education and training, employers, research centres, development agencies, and employment services (among others), to develop 'skills ecosystems' that contribute to regional, economic and social development, innovation, and smart specialisation strategies... (aimed) to provide high-quality vocational skills, support entrepreneurial activities, diffusion of innovation, and act as knowledge and innovation hubs for companies (particularly SMEs) while working with centres in other countries through international collaborative platforms', thus, fully reflecting the European definition of CoVEs. Details of the creation of the network of CoVEs are described in the Strategy, Part 1.2.

#### **Specific objectives of the measure/package and their relation to the general objectives of the plan**

Specific objectives:

- creation of a system of CoVEs in Slovakia sticking to the European definition;
- the creation of functional knowledge triangles composed of universities, research centres and enterprises at the forefront of research and technological development informing CoVEs on challenges relevant for the education sector;
- equipping the CoVEs network for fulfilling their role;
- preparing the network of CoVEs for internationalisation activities.

#### **Description of main actions and activities comprising the measure/package, including implementation milestones and indicative timeline**

The main activities include:

- ✓ identification of eight CoVEs (one in every self-governing region), based on a specific methodology and analyses;
- ✓ identification of institutions to be equipped via Programme Slovakia 2021-2027;
- ✓ retraining CoVEs staff and quality assurance managers;

- ✓ involvement of stakeholders, such as the Alliance of Sectoral Councils, employer and professional organisations (within their capacity of sectoral assignees in particular), higher education institutions, State School Inspectorate, self-governing regions, school establishers and the association representing VET school, in the creation of the systems of CoVEs via specialised cooperation platform;
- ✓ creating conditions for active participation and exploiting knowledge triangles' results;
- ✓ support and creation of smaller qualifications and micro-credentials recognised as micro-qualifications (4<sup>th</sup> sub-framework of the SKKR, modularisation, segmentation);
- ✓ supporting segmentation of qualifications and modularisation of IVET in respective fields of study;
- ✓ implementing procedures for recognition of prior learning;
- ✓ supporting digital and green transition, revision of existing qualifications/fields of study;
- ✓ supporting career guidance and counselling, cooperation with talent centres and basic schools (ISCED 1+2);
- ✓ creating conditions for the involvement of CoVEs in international activities such as the Erasmus+ programme.

All activities are implemented from 2023. The preliminary activity timelines were set by the Action Plan for the Strategy of Lifelong Learning and Guidance for 2022-2024. They were partly revised by the new government within the project 'Improving Quality and Attractiveness of VET', which is one of the currently identified 40 projects specifying commitments of the 2023-2027 Government Manifesto in the area of education:

- ✓ finalising the status description of CoVEs by Q3/2024;
- ✓ identification of existing VET centres for transformation and creating new CoVEs by 12/2024;
- ✓ embedding the concept of CoVEs into legislation by Q2/2025.

A new 2023-2027 national ESF+ project titled 'Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVEs)', funded from Programme Slovakia 2021-2027 in a total amount of EUR 15 585 649, is in progress from 1 October 2023. It is also aimed at fulfilling specific objectives and main activities (except the last ones) described above by Q3/2027.

**EU policy priorities addressed**

<b>Council Recommendation on VET</b>	<b>Osnabrück Declaration</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A. VET is agile in adapting to labour market challenges. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> B. Flexibility and progression opportunities are at the core of VET.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1. Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> C. VET is a driver for innovation and growth and prepares for digital and green transitions and occupations in high demand. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> D. VET is an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training/skills. <input type="checkbox"/> E. VET promotes equality of opportunities. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> F. VET is underpinned by a culture of quality assurance.	<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Establishing a new lifelong learning culture – relevance of CVET and digitalisation. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 3. Sustainability – a green link in VET. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4. European Education and Training Area and international VET.
<b>VET subsystem (IVET, CVET, or both)</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> initial VET (IVET) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> continuing VET (CVET)	
<b>Scope (national, regional, local)</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> national <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> regional <input type="checkbox"/> local	
<b>Beneficiaries/target groups</b>	
VET learners, VET staff, secondary VET schools, companies, self-governing regions, technical universities, talent centres, basic schools, international partners	
<b>Responsible ministries/bodies</b>	
Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth, State Vocational Education Institute, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, State School Inspectorate, Alliance of Sectoral Councils, employer and professional organisations (within their capacity of sectoral assignees in particular)	
<b>Source of funding (National, EU funds, sectoral)</b>	
State budget, EU funds	

<b>Title of measure 2</b>
<b>Supra-company training centres</b>
<b>Rationale/background, challenges addressed</b>
<p>Supra-company training centres (SCTCs) are to be set up to increase the quality, attractiveness, and excellence of the provided vocational education and training in the dual education system or other forms of WBL using the resources of several employers as well as the overall coordination of vocational education and training by employers, trade unions and professional organisations. At least one SCTC per main sector will be created. Authorisation of the SCTC will be granted by the relevant employer and professional organisations ('sectoral assignees') based on conditions stipulated by law.</p> <p>SCTCs will be instrumental for supporting the entry of small and medium-sized enterprises and the self-employed into the dual education system. The preparation of learners in supra-company training centres set up by employers will increase the quality, attractiveness, and excellence of the provided vocational education and training in the dual education system or other forms of WBL using the resources of several employers as well as the overall coordination of vocational education and training by social partners. The SCTC represents an opportunity, especially for self-employed, small and medium-sized enterprises, to prepare their own future workforce without the risk of a decrease in the quality of education provided due to insufficient material, personnel and space capacities. At the same time, SCTC is a tool for increasing the level of innovation in vocational education and training and increases the competitiveness of industry and services in the labour market. SCTCs should be innovators in quality assurance for WBL and VET provision.</p>
<b>Specific objectives of the measure/package and their relation to the general objectives of the plan</b>
<p>Specific objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- translating the existing legislative basis for supra-company training centres (SCTCs) into practice;</li> <li>- increasing flexibility in the provision of WBL;</li> <li>- supporting the entry of SMEs and entrepreneurs into the VET system.</li> </ul>
<b>Description of main actions and activities comprising the measure/package, including implementation milestones and indicative timeline</b>
The main activities include:

- ✓ securing the state-of-the-art equipment for the SCTC network;
- ✓ attracting SMEs and self-employed to contribute to the creation of SCTCs;
- ✓ creating conditions for the involvement of experts from the world of work in VET;
- ✓ supporting the continuing professional development of VET staff;
- ✓ provision of training of in-company trainers (instructors) and lead in-company trainers (head instructors);
- ✓ modification of educational programmes for SCTCs;
- ✓ setting criteria for authorisation/creation of SCTCs;
- ✓ piloting processes of validation of the results of prior learning;
- ✓ setting criteria (standards) to implement the quality assurance system in SCTCs;
- ✓ introducing follow-up training of VET trainers and ‘master exams’ (EQF 5/SKKR 5).

The legislation backing SCTCs was introduced by the 2021 amendment of the Act on VET No 61/2015 Coll. Respective activities are to be supported by the aforementioned 2023-2027 Government Manifesto-related project ‘Improving Quality and Attractiveness of VET’. Experience will also be exploited from the 2024-2029 project with the working title ‘Improving quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training aligned to labour market needs’ already in the pipeline to make the network fully functional. The project will be co-funded by the Swiss Financial Mechanism with an estimated total budget of EUR 6 765 thousand. Co-funding from EU sources to improve the equipment of centres is envisaged.

#### EU policy priorities addressed

##### Council Recommendation on VET

- A. VET is agile in adapting to labour market challenges.
- B. Flexibility and progression opportunities are at the core of VET.
- C. VET is a driver for innovation and growth and prepares for digital and green transitions and occupations in high demand.
- D. VET is an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training/skills.
- E. VET promotes equality of opportunities.
- F. VET is underpinned by a culture of quality assurance.

##### Osnabrück Declaration

- 1. Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET.
- 2. Establishing a new lifelong learning culture – relevance of CVET and digitalisation.
- 3. Sustainability – a green link in VET.
- 4. European Education and Training Area and international VET.

#### VET subsystem (IVET, CVET, or both)

- initial VET (IVET)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> continuing VET (CVET)
<b>Scope (national, regional, local)</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> national <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> regional <input type="checkbox"/> local
<b>Beneficiaries/target groups</b>
VET learners, secondary VET schools, companies, small and medium-sized enterprises, self-governing regions, regional labour offices, international partners
<b>Responsible ministries/bodies</b>
Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth, State Vocational Education Institute, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, State School Inspectorate, employer and professional organisations (within their capacity of sectoral assignees in particular)
<b>Source of funding (National, EU funds, sectoral)</b>
State budget, EU funds, Swiss Financial Mechanism

<b>Title of measure 3</b>
<b>Post-secondary VET transformation – the creation of higher industrial schools</b>
<b>Rationale/background, challenges addressed</b>
<p>Secondary industrial schools are an important part of vocational education in Slovakia. They were designed to prepare professionals in respective sectors of the economy to enter the labour market in middle-management positions and also continue in technical higher education studies. The gradual transformation of selected secondary industrial schools into higher industrial schools (<i>vyššie priemyselné školy</i>) will be carried out in cooperation with employers, the labour market and universities. The priority of transformation of secondary industrial schools is not only to equip graduates with relevant skills, but also to create space for creativity and innovation in the process of modern education.</p>

Higher industrial schools will fill the gap on the labour market in areas where additional higher value for skills and competences is required responding to labour market demand induced by Industry 4.0 challenges. A space will be created for other activities within formal and non-formal learning for all age categories, such as validation of learning outcomes, resulting also in awarding qualifications at EQF 5 and possibly EQF 6 levels.

#### **Specific objectives of the measure/package and their relation to the general objectives of the plan**

Specific objectives:

- interlinking post-secondary studies focusing on technology with the first cycle of higher education (ISCED 6, bachelor studies);
- transforming existing ISCED 5 studies offered by specific secondary VET schools (the so-called secondary industrial schools according to the Act on VET No 61/2015 Coll. (§ 3(1)b);
- transforming secondary industrial schools into higher industrial schools as a secondary school with a new status stipulated by legislation and based on specific criteria;
- revision of ISCED 5 studies offered by secondary VET schools in cooperation with higher education institutions;
- introducing (partial) recognition of revised ISCED 5 study-related learning outcomes by higher education institutions to allow for a short track to a Bachelor's degree.

#### **Description of main actions and activities comprising the measure/package, including implementation milestones and indicative timeline**

The main activities include:

- ✓ analysing the current position of secondary industrial schools in the education and qualification systems for the creation of secondary schools with a new legislative status;
- ✓ identifying criteria for transforming existing secondary industrial schools into higher industrial schools;
- ✓ creating a model and piloting the transformation of secondary industrial schools into higher industrial schools as a secondary school with a new status;
- ✓ piloting cooperation with employers at the regional and sectoral levels to adjust national curricula, especially concerning developing vocational skills, inter alia via long-term internships offered by employers in cooperation with a school;
- ✓ piloting involvement of practitioners or teachers and other university experts in the provision of revised studies;



- ✓ setting procedures for progressing from revised ISCED 5 studies into higher education bachelor studies in cooperation with higher education institutions;
- ✓ piloting procedures of validation of prior learning.

Respective activities are to be supported by the aforementioned 2023-2027 Government Manifesto-related project ‘Improving Quality and Attractiveness of VET’. Implementation will start in Q3/2024 with envisaged completion by Q4/2026. Experience will also be exploited from the 2024-2029 project with the working title ‘Improving quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training aligned to labour market needs’ already in the pipeline. The project will be co-funded by the Swiss Financial Mechanism with an estimated total budget of EUR 6 765 thousand.

#### EU policy priorities addressed

##### Council Recommendation on VET

- A. VET is agile in adapting to labour market challenges.
- B. Flexibility and progression opportunities are at the core of VET.
- C. VET is a driver for innovation and growth and prepares for digital and green transitions and occupations in high demand.
- D. VET is an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training/skills.
- E. VET promotes equality of opportunities.
- F. VET is underpinned by a culture of quality assurance.

##### Osnabrück Declaration

- 1. Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET.
- 2. Establishing a new lifelong learning culture – relevance of CVET and digitalisation.
- 3. Sustainability – a green link in VET.
- 4. European Education and Training Area and international VET.

#### VET subsystem (IVET, CVET, or both)

- initial VET (IVET)
- continuing VET (CVET)

#### Scope (national, regional, local)

- national
- regional
- local

<b>Beneficiaries/target groups</b>
VET learners, VET staff, secondary VET schools, companies, self-governing regions, regional labour offices, technical universities, international partners
<b>Responsible ministries/bodies</b>
Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth, State Vocational Education Institute, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, State School Inspectorate
<b>Source of funding (National, EU funds, sectoral)</b>
State budget, EU funds, Swiss Financial Mechanism

<b>Title of measure 4</b>
<b>Quality assurance in IVET and CVET</b>
<b>Rationale/background, challenges addressed</b>
<p>Quality assurance in VET is a key EU priority, which aims to increase transparency in VET (both initial and continuing vocational training) between Member States, thus strengthening mutual trust, staff and student mobility and lifelong learning. European cooperation in the field of quality assurance has been developing since 2001 when the European Quality Forum in VET was established and gradually moved through the creation of a Common Quality Assurance Framework in VET (CQAF) to the adoption of the 2009 Recommendation on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET (hereinafter referred to as the 'EQAVET Recommendation').</p> <p>The conclusions of the EU Ministerial Meeting in Riga in 2015 confirmed as one of the strategic goals until 2020 'to increase the overall quality and position of vocational education and training in the context of the Copenhagen process'. One of the five priorities by 2020 set out in the Riga Conclusions is 'to further develop quality assurance mechanisms in vocational education and training in line with the EQAVET recommendation and to create continuous information and feedback in initial and continuous VET systems based on results as part of quality assurance systems in education".</p>

Following the Riga conclusions, the New Skills Agenda for Europe envisaged measures to support on-the-job training and flexible VET practices, including through the further development of EQAVET and improved data on VET outcomes in the labour market.

The European Pillar of Social Rights, adopted in 2017, set out quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning as the first principle for every EU citizen. The 2020 Council Recommendation on VET, replacing the 2009 EQAVET Recommendation, is aimed at fulfilling the vision of a European Education Area (EEA) as explained in the 2018 Council conclusion on moving towards a vision of EEA, recalling the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning.

The issue of VET quality was also elaborated in the 2018 Recommendation on a European framework for quality and effective apprenticeships, recommending that quality assurance approaches should be in place taking into account the EQAVET, including a process allowing a valid and reliable assessment of the learning outcomes, and the tracking of employment and career progression of the apprentices.

Quality was addressed by the 2018 National Programme for the Development of Education and by the 2020 National Skills Strategy of the Slovak Republic developed by the OECD, and the need for introducing quality assurance was also discussed in the Strategy of Lifelong Learning and Guidance for 2021-2030 with its 2022-2024 Action plan indicating timelines and sources of measures.

Quality assurance in VET is expected to be implemented by the 2024-2026 national ESF+ project 'Introducing Quality Management in VET and Adult Education' managed by the State Vocational Education Institute from 31 January 2024.

#### **Specific objectives of the measure/package and their relation to the general objectives of the plan**

Specific objectives:

- strengthening the systemic approach to quality assurance in VET;
- establishing the EQAVET quality assurance cycle and EQAVET framework-related quality culture at all VET levels (state - regional self-government - VET providers/employers/adult education providers);
- introducing quality assurance processes in the validation system in relation to the SKKR;
- creating and piloting implementation of graduate tracking tools (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> pillars of the comprehensive graduate tracking system as set by the Strategy of Lifelong Learning and Guidance for 2021-2030);
- developing the cooperation of stakeholders involved in quality assurance in VET and adult education;
- creating permanent conditions for the development of quality assurance-related staff capacities.

### Description of main actions and activities comprising the measure/package, including implementation milestones and indicative timeline

The main activities include:

- ✓ supporting quality assurance management on a systemic level:
  - ✓ developing a strategy paper aimed at introducing quality assurance in VET;
  - ✓ introducing a draft proposal for quality assurance of the provision of in-company practical training;
  - ✓ developing qualification standards for a quality coordinator in school;
  - ✓ introducing peer review in VET schools backed by legislation as an instrument of quality assurance in VET;
- ✓ supporting quality assurance management on a regional level:
  - ✓ analysing current quality assurance-related processes in regions;
  - ✓ developing regional quality action plans;
  - ✓ developing strategic planning and quality assurance capacities at the regional level;
- ✓ supporting quality assurance management on a school level:
  - ✓ piloting peer review action plan development and re-training of quality coordinators in selected 10 schools in all regions (together 80 secondary VET schools);
- ✓ supporting quality assurance management in adult education, developing methodology of certification (institutional accreditation) of adult education providers and the methodology of accreditation of educational programmes of adult education;
- ✓ setting SKKR-related quality assurance procedures in particular;
- ✓ introducing VET school graduate tracking; developing a questionnaire for 2<sup>nd</sup> pillar-related national survey and 3<sup>rd</sup> pillar-related instruments for piloting in 80 secondary VET schools;
- ✓ cooperation with the State School Inspectorate and adjustment of its position within quality assurance in VET;
- ✓ cooperation with employer associations/employers within the framework of quality assurance at secondary vocational schools.

All activities are in the process of implementation from 2024 with expected completion by the end of 2026 within the aforementioned ESF+ project 'Introducing Quality Management in VET and Adult Education'. This project with a total amount of EUR 6 964 586.30 is funded from Programme Slovakia 2021-2027.

<b>EU policy priorities addressed</b>	
<b>Council Recommendation on VET</b>	<b>Osnabrück Declaration</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> A. VET is agile in adapting to labour market challenges. <input type="checkbox"/> B. Flexibility and progression opportunities are at the core of VET. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> C. VET is a driver for innovation and growth and prepares for digital and green transitions and occupations in high demand. <input type="checkbox"/> D. VET is an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training/skills. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> E. VET promotes equality of opportunities. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> F. VET is underpinned by a culture of quality assurance.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1. Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET. <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Establishing a new lifelong learning culture – relevance of CVET and digitalisation. <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Sustainability – a green link in VET. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4. European Education and Training Area and international VET.
<b>VET subsystem (IVET, CVET, or both)</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> initial VET (IVET) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> continuing VET (CVET)	
<b>Scope (national, regional, local)</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> national <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> regional <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> local	
<b>Beneficiaries/target groups</b>	
VET learners, VET staff, school leaders, self-governing regions, adult learners, VET providers (all kinds), international partners	
<b>Responsible ministries/bodies</b>	
Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth, State Vocational Education Institute, self-governing regions, State School Inspectorate	
<b>Source of funding (National, EU funds, sectoral)</b>	
State budget, EU funds	

<b>Title of measure 5</b>
<b>Prevention of early school leaving (early leaving from education and training)</b>
<b>Rationale/background, challenges addressed</b>
<p>According to the Eurostat data, the Slovak Republic deteriorated in the early leaving from education and training (ELET, replacing the former ESL indicator) rate from a favourable 4.7% in 2010 to 7.4% in 2022. Moreover, in regions of eastern and south-central Slovakia lagging behind in development, the ELET rate is over the 2030 benchmark of 9%. In contrast to this, the EU27 average improved over the same period from 13.7% to 9.6%, thus below the original 2020 benchmark of 10%. The consequence of high ELET is a significant reduction in the ability of individuals to participate in working life, hence unemployment and social exclusion.</p> <p>Council conclusions on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school from 2015 suggested developing a system that could</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- enable the regular monitoring of educational progress with a view to the early detection and identification of learners at risk of early school leaving;</li> <li>- help to define criteria and indicators for identifying educational disadvantage;</li> <li>- help to understand the reasons for early school leaving, including by collecting the views of learners;</li> <li>- facilitate the availability of data and information at different policy levels and their use in steering and monitoring policy development;</li> <li>- provide the basis for developing effective guidance and support in schools with a view to preventing early school leaving, as well as follow-up measures for young people who have left education and training prematurely.</li> </ul> <p>Furthermore, the Council Recommendation of 28 November 2022 on pathways to school success and replacing the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving recommended to the Member States to develop by 2025 ‘an integrated and comprehensive strategy towards school success ... with a view to minimising the effects of socio-economic status on education and training outcomes, promoting inclusion in education and training and further reducing early leaving from education and training and underachievement in basic skills.’ The strategy should include prevention, intervention and compensation measures and special attention should be paid to well-being at school as a key component of school success. A detailed policy framework for school success in the annex to the 2022 Council Recommendation supports Member States in developing a quality strategy paper with clearly set preventive, intervention and compensatory measures.</p>

The Slovak Republic has not yet developed such a strategy - but some systemic measures have been introduced with a direct or non-direct effect on the reduction of ELET, such as

- compulsory preschool education for 5-year-old children (from 1 September 2021);
- introduction of a system of dual education and a new system of coordination of vocational education and training with the active participation of employers (from 1 September 2015);
- the creation of legislative preconditions for the creation of a new system of career counselling in regional education (from 1 September 2019);
- introducing alternative ways for completion of lower secondary education, for example, relevant for learners with light mental disabilities (from 1 January 2022);
- introduction of a new type of lower secondary vocational education programme, where students can complete lower secondary education within the vocational education programme (from 1 January 2022).

#### **Specific objectives of the measure/package and their relation to the general objectives of the plan**

Specific objectives:

- creation and enhancement of an information system for early warning about learners at risk of ELET with a link to targeted mechanisms of preventive, intervention and compensatory measures, complemented by a standardised screening instrument for the identification of learners at risk;
- implementing a new type of lower secondary vocational education programme combining completion of (general) lower secondary education with VET containing training in a real working environment;
- strengthening career guidance aimed at working with learners at risk of ELET.

#### **Description of main actions and activities comprising the measure/package, including implementation milestones and indicative timeline**

The main activities include:

- ✓ creating a comprehensive system of data collection on the causes and consequences of school failure and early school leaving, including monitoring the further applicability of students-recipients of intervention and compensation measures, on the labour market or in further study;

- ✓ mentoring of pedagogical and professional staff with a focus on preventing ELET at schools with a concentration of students at risk of ELET (co-financed from the Recovery and Resilience Plan);
- ✓ supporting pedagogical and professional staff in schools with a concentration of learners at risk of ELET and supporting staff in schools with a concentration of learners from the marginalised Roma communities;
- ✓ supporting projects aimed at the active participation of learners in education through local communities and regional players' interventions (e.g. motivation of families via supportive communities to prevent truancy, provision of transporting to school from remote areas, etc.);
- ✓ mainstreaming alternative ways for completion of lower secondary education and a new type of lower secondary vocational education programme combining completion of (general) lower secondary education with VET, all piloted from 1 January 2022.

Respective activities are to be supported by the 2024-2028 ESF+ project 'Preventing Early-School Leaving via Early Warning System and Targeted Support within the Counselling and Prevention System' already in the pipeline. The creation of the early warning system and the screening instrument is expected by 09/2026.

#### EU policy priorities addressed

##### Council Recommendation on VET

- A. VET is agile in adapting to labour market challenges.
- B. Flexibility and progression opportunities are at the core of VET.
- C. VET is a driver for innovation and growth and prepares for digital and green transitions and occupations in high demand.
- D. VET is an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training/skills.
- E. VET promotes equality of opportunities.
- F. VET is underpinned by a culture of quality assurance.

##### Osnabrück Declaration

- 1. Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET.
- 2. Establishing a new lifelong learning culture – relevance of CVET and digitalisation.
- 3. Sustainability – a green link in VET.
- 4. European Education and Training Area and international VET.

#### VET subsystem (IVET, CVET, or both)

- initial VET (IVET)
- continuing VET (CVET)

#### Scope (national, regional, local)

- national



<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> regional <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> local
<b>Beneficiaries/target groups</b>
Secondary learners including VET learners, secondary VET schools, regional labour offices, basic schools
<b>Responsible ministries/bodies</b>
Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, self-governing regions, State School Inspectorate, regional school administration offices
<b>Source of funding (National, EU funds, sectoral)</b>
State budget, EU funds

<b>Title of measure 6</b>
<b>Basic skills</b>
<b>Rationale/background, challenges addressed</b>
The national basic skills initiative and pilot intervention programmes aim to strengthen the inclusiveness of adult learning and improve learning pathways for all, including adults with low basic skills, as well as to increase participation and equity of adults in education, i.e. opportunities also for adults with low skill levels and/or educational attainment.
<b>Specific objectives of the measure/package and their relation to the general objectives of the plan</b>
<p>Specific objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- embedding the concept of basic skills in the legislation;</li> <li>- increasing the institutional capacity to support basic skills training programmes from public sources by establishing the National Network for Basic Skills and Regional Centres for Lifelong Learning and Guidance at the self-governing regions (higher territorial units).</li> </ul>

<b>Description of main actions and activities comprising the measure/package, including implementation milestones and indicative timeline</b>	
<p>The main activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ elaborating a new act on adult education by Q2/2024;</li> <li>✓ developing criteria for developing basic skills of low-qualified adults by Q3/2024;</li> <li>✓ launching a financial scheme in support of the provision of basic skills by adult education providers by Q3/2024;</li> <li>✓ piloting a screening instrument to identify gaps in basic skills in low-qualified adults, assessment instruments (assessment portfolios including achievement tests) Q2/2025.</li> </ul> <p>Respective activities are to be supported by the 2023-2027 Government Manifesto-related project ‘Lifelong Learning’. Implementation will start in Q2/2024 with envisaged completion by Q4/2027.</p>	
<b>EU policy priorities addressed</b>	
<b>Council Recommendation on VET</b>	<b>Osnabrück Declaration</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> A. VET is agile in adapting to labour market challenges. <input type="checkbox"/> B. Flexibility and progression opportunities are at the core of VET. <input type="checkbox"/> C. VET is a driver for innovation and growth and prepares for digital and green transitions and occupations in high demand. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> D. VET is an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training/skills. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> E. VET promotes equality of opportunities. <input type="checkbox"/> F. VET is underpinned by a culture of quality assurance.	<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2. Establishing a new lifelong learning culture – relevance of CVET and digitalisation. <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Sustainability – a green link in VET. <input type="checkbox"/> 4. European Education and Training Area and international VET.
<b>VET subsystem (IVET, CVET, or both)</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> initial VET (IVET) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> continuing VET (CVET)	
<b>Scope (national, regional, local)</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> national <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> regional	

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> local
<b>Beneficiaries/target groups</b>
Low-qualified adults, adult education providers, secondary VET schools, self-governing regions, employers
<b>Responsible ministries/bodies</b>
Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family
<b>Source of funding (National, EU funds, sectoral)</b>
State budget, EU funds

<b>Title of measure 7</b>
<b>Individual learning accounts</b>
<b>Rationale/background, challenges addressed</b>
<p>The education ministry is responsible for the implementation of the EU recommendation for the ILAs.</p> <p>An individual learning account (ILA) is set at EUR 200 in the pilot scheme. It is intended to involve at least 5 000 active participants. It is expected that employers can contribute to the value of the ILA in their own amount. Furthermore, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family and Ministry of Investments and Regional Development can also contribute to this package of funding to ‘their’ specific areas of education. Nevertheless, the original amount of EUR 200 must be seen as the ‘individual right of the individual’ to use this amount for education or training according to their needs. It must also be possible within the ILA scheme to agree with the employer using these means cumulatively with investment in training by the employer, for example, to increase digital skills.</p>
<b>Specific objectives of the measure/package and their relation to the general objectives of the plan</b>
<p>Specific objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- supporting upskilling and reskilling of adults via sustainable financial scheme (ILAs);</li> <li>- improving counselling services for adults;</li> </ul>

- introducing validation of non-formal and informal learning backed by legislation.	
<b>Description of main actions and activities comprising the measure/package, including implementation milestones and indicative timeline</b>	
<p>The main activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ introducing a digital platform in support of ILAs developed from the currently existing qualifications platform ISDV (Information System of Further Education) by Q4/2025;</li> <li>✓ piloting access of adults (aged 16+) to learning programmes via the digital platform Q4/2025;</li> <li>✓ piloting the provision of programmes aimed at improving the digital skills of citizens by Q3/2025.</li> </ul> <p>Respective activities are to be supported by the aforementioned 2023-2027 Government Manifesto-related project 'Lifelong Learning'. Implementation will start in Q2/2024 with envisaged completion by Q4/2027.</p>	
<b>EU policy priorities addressed</b>	
<b>Council Recommendation on VET</b>	<b>Osnabrück Declaration</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A. VET is agile in adapting to labour market challenges. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> B. Flexibility and progression opportunities are at the core of VET. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> C. VET is a driver for innovation and growth and prepares for digital and green transitions and occupations in high demand. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> D. VET is an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training/skills. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> E. VET promotes equality of opportunities. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> F. VET is underpinned by a culture of quality assurance.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1. Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2. Establishing a new lifelong learning culture – relevance of CVET and digitalisation. <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Sustainability – a green link in VET. <input type="checkbox"/> 4. European Education and Training Area and international VET.
<b>VET subsystem (IVET, CVET, or both)</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> initial VET (IVET) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> continuing VET (CVET)	
<b>Scope (national, regional, local)</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> national <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> regional	

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> local
<b>Beneficiaries/target groups</b>
Adults including the low-qualified, VET providers (all kinds), adult education providers, higher education institutions, employers
<b>Responsible ministries/bodies</b>
Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth, Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatisation (digital component), Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family
<b>Source of funding (National, EU funds, sectoral)</b>
State budget, EU funds

<b>Title of measure 8</b>
<b>New system of lifelong learning introduced by the new law on lifelong learning</b>
<b>Rationale/background, challenges addressed</b>
New legislation should create conditions for the development of a fully-fledged lifelong learning system and a new quality-assured qualifications system.
<b>Specific objectives of the measure/package and their relation to the general objectives of the plan</b>
Specific objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- improving access to lifelong learning and adult education via legislation and a newly introduced funding scheme. Achieving national benchmarks in participation in lifelong learning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- four weeks prior to the survey (15% by 2030);</li> <li>- 12 months prior to the survey (47%, aged 25-64).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<b>Description of main actions and activities comprising the measure/package, including implementation milestones and indicative timeline</b>	
<p>The main activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ developing the concept of the Regional Centre for Lifelong Learning and Guidance at the self-governing regions (higher territorial units);</li> <li>✓ embedding the concept of basic skills in legislation;</li> <li>✓ evaluating the effectiveness of the Slovak Qualifications Framework (SKKR);</li> <li>✓ introducing descriptors of lower levels into SKKR;</li> <li>✓ fixing all the elements of the recognition of prior learning outcomes (permeability of the education system);</li> <li>✓ establishing a sustainable system of management and activities of sectoral councils in the Slovak Republic to support the alignment of the lifelong learning system with the needs of the labour market;</li> <li>✓ backing ‘master exams’ (EQF 5/SKKR 5) by legislation;</li> <li>✓ strengthening the importance of civic education in the legislation;</li> <li>✓ introducing the system and IT Platform for Individual Learning Accounts also in relation to micro-credentials;</li> <li>✓ monitoring skills of adults including supporting the OECD PIAAC-linked ‘Education &amp; Skills Online’ assessment tool.</li> </ul> <p>Respective activities are to be supported by the aforementioned 2023-2027 Government Manifesto-related project ‘Lifelong Learning’. Implementation will start in Q2/2024 with envisaged completion by Q4/2027.</p>	
<b>EU policy priorities addressed</b>	
<b>Council Recommendation on VET</b>	<b>Osnabrück Declaration</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A. VET is agile in adapting to labour market challenges.</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> B. Flexibility and progression opportunities are at the core of VET.</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> C. VET is a driver for innovation and growth and prepares for digital and green transitions and occupations in high demand.</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> D. VET is an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training/skills.</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> E. VET promotes equality of opportunities.</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> F. VET is underpinned by a culture of quality assurance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1. Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET.</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2. Establishing a new lifelong learning culture – relevance of CVET and digitalisation.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 3. Sustainability – a green link in VET.</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4. European Education and Training Area and international VET.</li> </ul>

<b>VET subsystem (IVET, CVET, or both)</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> initial VET (IVET) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> continuing VET (CVET)
<b>Scope (national, regional, local)</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> national <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> regional <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> local
<b>Beneficiaries/target groups</b>
Adult learners, adult education providers, secondary VET schools, employers, employer associations, self-governing regions, regional labour offices, higher education institutions
<b>Responsible ministries/bodies</b>
Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatisation
<b>Source of funding (National, EU funds, sectoral)</b>
State budget, EU funds

#### **4. Governance of the implementation of the plan**

*This section describes how the NIP will be implemented.*

*The participating countries should:*

- (i) *provide a summary of the stakeholder involvement, optionally supported by a diagram, explaining their roles and responsibilities contributing to the successful implementation of the plan, more specifically but not exclusively:*
- *authorities – national, regional and/or local – involved;*

- *social partners;*
- *VET providers, representatives of VET learners;*
- *partnerships involving relevant stakeholders, including at regional and sectoral level or international partners, engaged or created for the purpose.*

*(ii) indicate how you will organise monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the NIPs in cooperation with Cedefop's ReferNet and your country's DGVT representatives and in line with the national context and the above described governance arrangements.*

**(i) Stakeholders and their role**

The National VET Council is the coordinating body affiliated to the government that discusses VET policy, such as regional and sectoral strategies. Specialised working groups covering selected study fields support adjustments in VET programmes better matching them to labour market needs. A working group for the verification of labour market needs focuses on assessing self-governing regions' activities related to secondary VET regulation;

Regional VET Councils are composed of representatives of state, self-government, employers and employees. They are advisory bodies to the heads of the eight self-governing regions; they prepare regional VET policy documents, discuss number of places to be offered in respective schools and programmes, etc.;

Sectoral (skills) councils are voluntary independent associations of employers' representatives, trade union representatives, education institutions, state administration and self-government authorities regulated by the Act on Employment Services No 5/2004 Coll. The Alliance of Sectoral Councils is their umbrella organisation. An amendment of the Act on Employment Services from 6 December 2022 redefined the Alliance of Sectoral Councils as an association of interested legal entities, education and labour ministries, bodies representing employers and employees to introduce a fully new VET and lifelong learning governance architecture;

Sectoral assignees (institutions of the world of work selected from chambers and employers' associations) represent employers' interests in each VET study field as professional counterparts to education authorities and experts. Sectoral assignees should play a prominent role in adjusting VET to labour market needs and in assuring its quality. The Employer Council for VET encompassing sectoral assignees involved in dual VET, coordinates their activities;



Expert groups and ad hoc working groups affiliated to the State Vocational Education Institute covering respective fields of study focus on diverse curricula issues and conditions of provision of VET (material, spatial and equipment-related requirements);

Self-governing regions are responsible for maintaining public secondary VET schools and for regulating the inflow of learners into schools in their territory. VET programmes and numbers of students are strictly regulated to address regional labour market needs, based on macroeconomic forecasting data and the opinion of regional stakeholders. The education ministry supports schools by providing regulations for content, pedagogy, qualification of staff, etc. Some VET schools are under the responsibility of the interior and health ministries.

Since 2009, the influence of employers on VET policy has been gradually increased also concerning school-based VET. VET schools must submit their school educational programmes (autonomously elaborated school curricula reflecting and adjusting national curricula to local/regional needs) to sectoral assignees unless they were elaborated in cooperation with companies participating in dual VET or discussed with companies offering practical training within the mixed scheme. In 2017/18, sectoral assignees for the first time checked assignments related to school leaving examinations. There is also a strong engagement of sectoral assignees in dual VET in the assessment and certification of companies offering practical training and in the training of in-company trainers (instructors).

Implementation of the NIP and the role of the aforementioned stakeholders is interrelated with the aforementioned Action Plan for the Strategy of Lifelong Learning and Guidance for 2022-2024 and respective national projects funded from Programme Slovakia 2021-2027.

#### **(ii) Monitoring and reporting**

Monitoring of the NIP implementation by the education ministry is interlinked with achieving goals and outcomes set by the education ministry within respective 2023-2027 Government Manifesto-related projects. ReferNet Slovakia contributed to the revision of the NIP in February 2024. ReferNet Slovakia will further cooperate with the education ministry concerning monitoring the implementation of the NIP.

## **5. Expected effects of the plan**

*The participating countries are invited to assess and explain the expected effects of the implementation of the NIPs in the short-, medium and long-term. Benefits and improvements in relevant socio-economic areas, skills and education and training and on various target groups should be considered.*

*The participating countries should also indicate potential obstacles/risk factors that can hinder the implementation of the NIP and explain how they foresee to overcome those.*

Eight effects of the NIP are expected:

1. Excellent, inclusive and accessible VET for all in place
2. Higher employment rate of graduates
3. Sustainable and competitive fields of study/qualifications in IVET and CVET relevant to labour market needs based on digital and green transition in place
4. Validation and recognition of prior learning in place
5. Increased participation of adults in lifelong learning
6. Second-chance education – reduction of early school leaving rates in place
7. Increased provision of WBL in all qualifications
8. Quality assurance in IVET and CVET in place

## Annex – National level reforms and actions defined in the VET Recommendation and the Osnabrück Declaration

VET Recommendation priorities	Detailed VET recommendation priorities	Osnabrück Declaration objectives	Specific national level actions by 2025
<p>A. Vocational education and training is agile in adapting to labour market changes</p>	<p>A.1 VET programmes that offer a balanced mix of vocational including technical skills well aligned to all economic cycles, evolving jobs and working methods and key competences, including solid basic skills, digital, transversal, green and other life skills which provide strong foundations for resilience, lifelong learning, lifelong employability, social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development;</p> <p>A.2 VET curricula, programme offers and qualifications which are regularly updated, building on skills intelligence (i.e. graduate tracking systems, skills anticipation mechanisms, including at sectoral and regional levels);</p> <p>A.3 an appropriate degree of autonomy of VET providers, flexibility, support and funding to adapt their training offer to changing skills needs, green and digital transitions and economic cycles;</p> <p>A.4 VET programmes at all levels which comprise work-based learning components that are further expanded also in continuing vocational education and training, and complemented by appropriate support and measures to stabilise the offer of apprenticeships and to address specific challenges of small companies to create work-based learning opportunities in different sectors of the economy.</p>	<p>1. Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET</p> <p>4. European Education and Training Area and international VET</p>	<p>1.1. Explore the possibility of setting up a network of voluntary experts and executives, retired or on sabbatical, to support their peers in the fields of VET and apprenticeships as part of the EAfA</p> <p>1.3 Reinforce work-based learning and apprenticeships by implementing the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships and making use of the on-demand support services, and policy learning initiatives. Strengthen the use of quality and inclusive apprenticeships as a tool to support school/training-to-work transitions of vulnerable groups and to improve citizens' qualification levels.</p> <p>1.5. Develop national and regional skills intelligence systems including skills anticipation and graduate tracking; enable social partners, decision-makers, stakeholders and providers to adapt and update VET programmes, curricula and guidelines in a timely and effective manner</p> <p>4.4. Promote intercultural knowledge, skills and competences as part of qualification and curricula requirements in VET qualifications in line with the Key Competence Framework</p>
<p>B. Flexibility and progression opportunities are at the core of</p>	<p>B.1 learner centred VET programmes that offer access to face-to-face and digital or blended learning, flexible and modular pathways based on the recognition of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning and</p>	<p>2. Establishing a new lifelong learning culture – relevance of C-VET and digitalisation</p>	<p>2.1. Develop national skills strategies for quality and inclusive lifelong learning with all relevant national, regional, sectoral stakeholders and social partners. Besides education and training provision, the national skills strategies may include</p>

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vocational education and training	<p>open up career and learning progression; continuing vocational training programmes designed to be adaptable to labour market, sectoral or individual up- or reskilling needs; and</p> <p>B.2 VET programmes which are based on modules or units of learning outcomes and validation mechanisms allowing the transfer, recognition and accumulation of individuals' learning outcomes with a view to gaining a qualification, a partial qualification, as relevant in the national context.</p>		<p>guidance, incentives for improved skills provision by employers, increased participation by employees, validation of prior learning and targeted public approaches for reaching out to inactive and unemployed individuals, NEETs or individuals at risk of unemployment</p>
<p>C. Vocational education and training is a driver for innovation and growth and prepares for the digital and green transitions and occupations in high demand</p>	<p>C.1 integration of VET into economic, industrial and innovation strategies, including those linked to recovery, green and digital transitions; expansion of the training offer fostering the acquisition of entrepreneurial, digital and green skills;</p> <p>C.2 establishment of Centres of Vocational Excellence, which act as catalysts for local business investment, supporting recovery, green and digital transitions, European and regional innovation and smart specialisation strategies, development of vocational education and training, including at higher qualification levels (EQF levels 5-8), in line with national context and provide innovative services such as clusters and business incubators for start-ups and technology innovation for SMEs, as well as innovative reskilling solutions for workers at risk of redundancy; and</p> <p>C.3 access to state-of-the-art infrastructure, digitalisation strategies in line with national context and environmental and social sustainability in VET programmes and organisational management, thus</p>	<p>1. Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET</p> <p>3. Sustainability – a green link in VET</p>	<p>1.4. Support Vocational Excellence (CoVEs) and improve permeability between vocational and academic pathways, including work-based learning and enhanced cooperation between VET, HE and research centres, thus establishing quality and effective VET and apprenticeship programmes at EQF level 5 and above</p> <p>3.1. Create incentives for greening VET programmes, including education and training in green technologies and innovation, in energy efficiency, circular economy, environmental awareness, sustainable use of learning and training material, digitalisation to reduce climate effects</p> <p>3.2. Define labour-market-relevant skills for the green transition that are to be incorporated in curricula and VET provision, including basic skills across all sectors and occupations and sector-specific skills in cooperation with the social partners</p> <p>3.3. Define and support opportunities to enable teaching and training staff, managing teams in VET providers and trainers and mentors in companies to act as multipliers and mediators,</p>

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	contributing to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.		in view of increasing digitalisation and sustainability within the provision and management of training programmes
D. Vocational education and training is an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training/skills	<p>D.1. permeability between both initial and continuing vocational education and training, general education and higher education;</p> <p>D.2 development of VET at EQF levels 5 to 8;</p> <p>D.3 delivery based on a mix of open, digital and participative learning environments, including learning conducive workplaces supported by state-of-the-art and accessible infrastructure, equipment and technology, and accompanied by versatile pedagogies and tools (e.g. ICT based simulators, virtual and augmented reality);</p> <p>D.4 initial and continuing professional development of VET teachers and trainers to foster technical and digital skills and effective innovative training methods, including teaching in virtual environment, in line with state of the art vocational and digital pedagogy, work with digital learning tools, and in diverse and multicultural environments;</p> <p>D.5 internationalisation strategies supporting a strategic approach to international cooperation in VET;</p> <p>D.6 Opportunities for learning mobility of vocational learners and staff, including virtual mobility, long-duration mobility and mobility to Partner Countries are in place, facilitated by the use and recognition of units of learning outcomes and of relevant European</p>	<p>1. Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET</p> <p>2. Establishing a new lifelong learning culture – relevance of C-VET and digitalisation</p> <p>4. European Education and Training Area and international VET</p>	<p>1.2. Support the development of digital infrastructure for learning and teaching purposes in VET including artificial intelligence and AR/VR technologies and develop suitable institutional teaching and training arrangements underpinned by adequate infrastructure, especially in remote and rural areas thus ensuring social inclusion</p> <p>2.2. Develop targeted information measures on the benefits of CVET and ensure user-friendly access to information on IVET and CVET offers at national and regional levels addressing gender and other stereotypes for an equal, fair and diverse society</p> <p>2.5. Support VET teachers, trainers, guidance counsellors, adult educators and mentors by equipping them with the adequate skills and tools for and through digital technologies; in particular through systematic approaches to, and opportunities for, initial and continuous professional development in both school and work-based settings, as well as distance education and training, enabling them to progress in their careers</p> <p>4.1. Support and facilitate the mobility of VET and adult learners, including apprentices, for example by developing support structures and providing information on opportunities in host countries</p> <p>4.2. Increase the rate of mobility of VET learners as well as teachers and trainers, while strengthening measures to ensure the quality and recognition of learning outcomes, as well as adequate support structures. Foster longer periods of mobility for VET learners abroad and ensure that apprentice work</p>

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	<p>tools (Memorandum of Understanding and the Learning Agreement); and</p> <p>D.7 high quality lifelong learning and career guidance services, making full use of Europass and other digital services.</p>		<p>placements are in line with the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships , taking into account national regulations and collective agreements, including health and safety provisions</p> <p>4.3. Develop VET internationalisation strategies, mobilising partnerships and including commitments for concrete and targeted actions, with all relevant stakeholders in accordance with national or regional regulations</p> <p>4.5 Cooperate with other EU countries in preparing national teams for international competitions such as WorldSkills and EuroSkills</p>
<p>E. Vocational education and training promotes equality of opportunities</p>	<p>E.1 inclusive and accessible programmes for vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, low-qualified/skilled persons, minorities, people with migrant background and people with fewer opportunities because of their geographical location and/or their social-economically disadvantaged situation; targeted measures and flexible training formats prevent early leaving from education and training and support the school-to-work transition;</p> <p>E.2. programmes accessible through digital learning platforms, supported by tools, devices and internet connection, in particular for vulnerable groups and people in rural or remote areas; and</p> <p>E.3 targeted measures promoting gender balance in traditionally “male” or “female” professions and address gender related and other types of stereotypes together.</p>	<p>1. Resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET</p> <p>2. Establishing a new lifelong learning culture – relevance of C-VET and digitalisation</p>	<p>1.2. Support the development of digital infrastructure for learning and teaching purposes in VET including artificial intelligence and AR/VR technologies and develop suitable institutional teaching and training arrangements underpinned by adequate infrastructure, especially in remote and rural areas thus ensuring social inclusion</p> <p>2.2. Develop targeted information measures on the benefits of CVET and ensure user-friendly access to information on IVET and CVET offers at national and regional levels addressing gender and other stereotypes for an equal, fair and diverse society</p>
<p>F. Vocational education and</p>	<p>F.1 further development of national quality assurance systems, for both initial and continuing VET, in all</p>		

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<p>training is underpinned by a culture of quality assurance</p>	<p>learning environments (such as school-based provision and work-based learning, including apprenticeship schemes) and all learning types (digital, face-to-face or blended), delivered by both public and private providers, underpinned by a set of indicative descriptors and common reference indicators for quality assurance in vocational education and training applied both at system and provider level as defined in Annex II of the Council Recommendation on VET.</p> <p>F.2 Quality Assurance National Reference Point for VET to: take concrete initiatives to implement and further develop the EQAVET Framework, inform and mobilise a wide range of stakeholders, including Centres of Vocational Excellence, to contribute to implementing the EQAVET framework, support self-evaluation as a complementary and effective means of quality assurance to allow the measurement of success and the identification of areas for improvement, including with respect to digital readiness of VET systems and institutions, participate actively in the European network for quality assurance in vocational education and training, provide an updated description of the national quality assurance arrangements based on the EQAVET Framework, engage in EU level peer reviews of quality assurance to enhance the transparency and consistency of quality assurance arrangements, and to reinforce trust between the Member States;</p>		
<p>Making best use of the European transparency tools</p>		<p>2. Establishing a new lifelong learning culture</p>	<p>2.3. Work with respective stakeholders to develop digital learning solutions supporting access to CVET opportunities and the awarding of CVET credentials and certificates, thereby</p>

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		– relevance of C-VET and digitalisation	<p>opening the possibility to obtain full qualifications without neglecting on-the-job CVET and the positive effects of learning conducive work environments</p> <p>2.4. Support linking national VET platforms or databases to the Europass in accordance with the Europass decision and the EQF Recommendation where appropriate</p>
Sustainable partnerships at national, regional and sectoral level, involving all relevant stakeholders			
Best use of European Union funds and instruments such as the Next Generation EU (Recovery and Resilience Facility, REACT-EU), European Social Fund+, SURE, the European Regional Development Fund, InvestEU, Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, Interreg, Digital Europe, the Just Transition Mechanism and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, and the Modernisation Fund			