

Supporting teachers in their work with disadvantaged learners

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

PRACTICAL MEASURE/INITIATIVE

 SLOVAKIA

Timeline

2017 Implementation	2018 Implementation	2019 Implementation
2020 Implementation	2021 Implementation	2022 Implementation
2023 Implementation	2024 Implementation	2025 Implementation

ID number 28585

Background

Slovakia features an extremely large gap in student performance in PISA domains, attributable to socio-economic differences. Socio-economically advantaged students outperform in PISA significantly, while students from marginalised Roma communities perform extremely low. The share of early leavers from education and training has also significantly deteriorated from 4.7% in 2009 (the lowest in EU) to 8.3% in 2019 (still below the EU average).

Objectives

Supporting teachers to better respond to the specific learning needs of disadvantaged learners is crucial. Especially regarding Roma learners, as they are facing challenges they were not prepared for within initial training. In-service training of teachers should prepare them to better adjust to disadvantaged learners' needs.

Description

For a long time ESF projects have been crucial in promoting teachers' in-service training regarding assisting disadvantaged learners, including Roma. In 2017, the implementation of the ESF 'Open school for all' project gave a new impulse to this effort. The project aims to further strengthen professional competences of teachers and teacher assistants in the provision of inclusive education to Roma within mainstream general education, an important prerequisite for provision of subsequent VET.

2017 Implementation

2018 Implementation

2019 Implementation

The national ESF project 'Assisting professions in the education of children and pupils', with a budget of EUR 55 million and scheduled duration from 1 August 2019 to 1

November 2022, builds on previous ESF projects aimed at implementing the principles of inclusive education (including VET schools) at regional level. The project managed by the Methodological-Pedagogical Centre aims to enable the involvement of pedagogical assistants and assistants for learners with disabilities. It will also enable the work of specialised inclusive teams (school psychologist, special pedagogue, and social pedagogue) formed in schools.

2020 Implementation

In June 2020, the project 'Assisting professions in the education of children and pupils II' was launched, resulting in a substantial increase of working positions (75% of requested positions filled) of specialists for inclusive teams at all levels of schooling from kindergartens to secondary schools including VET schools. The cooperation of specialists is expected to strengthen continuing the professional development of pedagogical staff and translates into improved school performance. The budget of the project was approximately EUR 82 million and it is scheduled to last from 30 June 2020 till 31 December 2022.

The Catching-up regions initiative run by the European Commission and World Bank pays special attention to marginalised Roma learners in Prešov and Banská Bystrica regions. Five VET schools were identified in Prešov and eight in Banská Bystrica as strong regional players for receiving integrated investment packages to improve their performance inter alia to better serve special education needs learners. Good examples from the aforementioned schools in serving minority learners including marginalised Roma learners are secondary VET school in Kežmarok (Prešov region) and secondary VET school in Tornaľa (Banská Bystrica region).

The ESF project 'Improvement of secondary vocational education in the Prešov self-governing region' was launched, aiming to innovate school curricula (school educational programmes), improve the delivery of education and training and provide in-service training of pedagogical staff in five schools identified within the Catching-up regions initiative. The project targets pedagogical staff and VET students including disadvantaged learners such as learners from the marginalised Roma communities. The budget is approximately EUR 5 million.

2021 Implementation

Two amendments to the Act on pedagogical staff and professional staff (138/2019) resulted in substantial revision of the original legislation. However, further legislative changes are already needed, induced by the National recovery and resilience plan (RRP) and newly adopted inclusive education strategy. On 8 December 2021, the government approved the Strategy for an inclusive approach in education and training, with six priority areas. The education and training of pedagogical and other professional staff is one of the priority areas of the strategy. A subsequent action plan should further elaborate on specified measures that must be in line with RRP component Accessibility, development and quality of inclusive education at all levels. This component also includes reform aimed at the redefinition of special educational needs of children and pupils and to develop a model for eligible support measures in education. Within this reform, 10 000 teachers and other specialists should be retrained by 2025.

2022 Implementation

On 1 June 2022, the government approved the First action plan to the Strategy for an inclusive approach in education and training for 2022-24 specifying costs of measures, sources of financing and timetable. Some of the measures are universal (desegregation plans for schools, creation of a catalogue of support measures, creation and retraining of inclusive teams, a new model of counselling) and need to be supported by a further legislative amendment under preparation, but some measures are explicitly targeted at VET. Measure 3.2.3 is aimed at supporting health-impaired and socially disadvantaged learners to continue education in secondary schools and at facilitating entry into the labour market via enrolment in dual VET, financed from ESIF.

In August 2022, the education ministry presented pro-inclusive legislative amendments, however, without an agreement with the finance ministry to cover the costs of the reform. As a consequence, the mandatory coverage of the costs for hiring supporting staff from the state budget based on the number of included learners with special needs was rejected and the respective amendment of the Education Act (245/2008) will be submitted to the legislation with induced costs limited by the regular budget of institutions concerned

Financing for assisting professions under the project 'Assisting professions in the education of children and pupils II' has been extended. In the 2022/23 school year around 3 300 employees will work as assisting teachers for health-impaired learners, pedagogical assistants, school psychologists, special pedagogues and social pedagogues supporting inclusive education. These mainly concern general education but VET schools are also entitled to apply for funding.

2023 Implementation

The amendment to the Education Act (245/2008) approved in May 2023 defines 21 support measures. They were introduced into the education system in alignment with the goals set by the National recovery and resilience plan (RRP). The system of support measures aims to ensure that learners facing obstacles receive appropriate support through tailored support measures provided at the adequate level of expertise to help them fulfil their potential. Since September 2023, schools have had access to a catalogue of support measures. Following a vertical model of support, these measures are categorised as general, targeted and specific support measures.

- a. General support measures are provided by schools to all learners without requiring a specialist's opinion, for example, crisis intervention that provides learners with professional care that goes beyond the regular coping mechanisms of individuals or the school community as a whole, focused on a specific period in their lives following a traumatic event;
- b. Targeted support measures require the statement of a specialist working in a school or a counselling facility, for example interventions to prevent the indicated risk of early school leaving;
- c. Specific support measures require the involvement of a counselling and prevention facility; for example provision of materials and aids complying with special education needs of a learner, compensating their challenges in particular.

The new national project, Support of assisting professions 3, aims to finance support professions in kindergartens, basic and secondary schools (including VET schools) in the 2023/24 school year. Funded by Programme Slovakia 2021-27 with a total allocation of EUR 259 million over three years, the project seeks to maintain existing positions and create new ones. It is expected to support approximately 5 500 FTE positions for teaching assistants, school support teams, auxiliary afternoon educators, and parent assistants across approximately 1 400 schools and support approximately 450 FTE school digital coordinators in approximately 900 schools. A gradual transition from European funding to State budget financing is anticipated to ensure sustainability of these roles.

2024 Implementation

A revised catalogue of support measures is in force from September 2024, reflecting feedback from practitioners. Funding for assisting professions, initially supported by European sources will increasingly rely on the State budget, as outlined in the 2025 State budget approved by the parliament.

2025 Implementation

The amendment to the Education act (245/2008) adopted on 21 October 2025 significantly strengthened support for learners with special needs, affecting all schools and facilities, including VET.

A definition of a socially disadvantaged environment is replaced by the definition of a socially disadvantaging environment (SDE), while in a newly introduced § 145ca, objective features of SDE that allow for the identification of the environment of the respective learner are explicitly set. No diagnostic assessment of the learner is needed, and a learner and a school automatically qualify for support.

The definition of inclusive education is being refined to ensure that support for every learner is envisaged, not only in the school environment, but in society as a whole.

The amendment redefined the scope of the catalogue of support measures, according to the degree of severity of the need for support, and, therefore, introduced a division into general, targeted, and specific measures.

General measures can be provided without a request and without a specialist's opinion. Targeted support measures are provided upon request to all pupils in a specific target group. Specific measures are only provided by specialists from centres of counselling and prevention. The law intended to reduce the administrative burden and create better possibilities for measuring the impact and effectiveness of support.

The position of community assistant is being introduced into legislation as well, for example, allowing the school to employ a person directly from the Roma community to support its contact activities with children and parents.

Supported by funding from the National recovery and resilience plan, the National Institute of Education and Youth offers targeted retraining of teachers and other staff concerning the provision of support measures.

Bodies responsible

- Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth
- National Institute of Education and Youth (NIVAM)
- Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport (until 2024)
- Methodological-Pedagogical Centre (until 2022)

Target group

Learners

Learners in upper secondary, including apprentices
Learners at risk of early leaving or/and early leavers
Learners with disabilities

Education professionals

Teachers

Thematic categories

Teachers, trainers and school leaders competences

Systematic approaches to and opportunities for initial and continuous professional development of school leaders, teachers and trainers

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Ensuring equal opportunities and inclusiveness in education and training

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Further reading

[The call Assisting professions in the education of children and pupils](#)

[The call Improvement of secondary vocational education in the Presov self-governing region](#)

[The call Assisting professions in the education of children and pupils II](#)

[Slovakia Catching-up regions overview report](#)

[Proposal for a Council implementing decision on the approval of the assessment of the National recovery and resilience plan for Slovakia](#)

[The National recovery and resilience plan summary of reforms and investments](#)

[Strategy for an inclusive approach in education and training \(in Slovak\)](#)

[Act No 138/2019 on pedagogical staff and professional staff, in force from 1 January 2022](#)

[Action plan to the Strategy for an inclusive approach in education and training for 2022-24 \(in Slovak\)](#)

[The call Support of assisting professions 3](#)

[A catalogue of support measures 2024 \(in Slovak\)](#)

[Retraining activities of the National Institute of Education and Youth concerning the provision of support measures](#)

Related policy developments

2025 Implementation

National recovery and resilience plan

The National recovery and resilience plan sets out a package of reforms and public investments to be implemented by 2026.

 SLOVAKIA

Type of development

Strategy/Action
plan

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Implementation

Amendments to the Education Act (245/2008)

In January 2021, the education ministry submitted to public discussion an extensive amendment of the Education act (245/2008), which provoked a heated debate with more

than 1 000 comments, of which more than 680 were fundamental.

 SLOVAKIA

Type of development

Regulation/Legislation

Subsystem

IVET

2025 Completed

Catching-up regions initiative

The Catching-up regions initiative, in cooperation with regional authorities, aims to identify challenges and priority areas at regional level to direct investments to. Improving VET programmes in line with labour market needs can foster economic development in regions lagging behind.

 SLOVAKIA

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET CVET

2025 Implementation

Actions preventing intolerance

In 2016/17, in response to signs of increasing intolerance in the European Union, secondary education national curricula were supplemented by a document for teachers and counselling staff on how to prevent racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and extremism.

 SLOVAKIA

Type of development

Practical
measure/Initiative

Subsystem

IVET

“ ... ” Cite as

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). Supporting teachers in their work with disadvantaged learners: Slovakia. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2025 update) [Online tool].

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/28585>