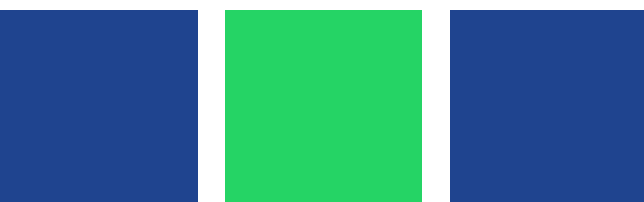

IMPLEMENTING EUROPEAN PRIORITIES IN VET

Making national VET agile,
flexible, innovative, attractive,
inclusive and quality assured

SLOVAKIA



Implementing European priorities in VET

Making national VET agile, flexible, innovative, attractive,
inclusive and quality-assured
Slovakia

[Thematic perspectives](#) provide national overviews of specific themes in a common format and offer comparative dimension across the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway.

This thematic perspectives series complements the general information on vocational education and training (VET) policies and systems provided in [VET in Europe database](#) and the [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#). The themes presented in the series feature high on the European agenda.

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CHAPTER 1. Introduction

Slovakia submitted the first version of the [National implementation plan for Slovakia \(NIP\)](#) to the European Commission on 31 May 2022. The 2022 NIP is drawing on [the Strategy of lifelong learning and guidance for 2021-30](#) (LLL Strategy), which was adopted by the government on 24 November 2021. This strategy was complemented by the [2022-24 Action plan](#), adopted on 20 April 2022. However, only some of the [LLL Strategy proposals and measures](#) were selected for the NIP. This version of the NIP was considered preliminary identifying key agendas through eight measures. The revision aimed at providing a more detailed elaboration of these measures. At that time, the policy environment did not create favourable conditions for planning and implementing strategic visions in VET and lifelong learning. This period was heavily influenced by the post-COVID era, and gradually deteriorating prospects of the national economy caused by the war in Ukraine, and, in addition, by political instability resulting in the collapse of the government.

The 2021 [Recovery and resilience plan](#) (RRP) containing currently the most important reforms affecting all sectors, disregarded initial VET-related challenges ⁽¹⁾. The RRP, influenced by economic considerations, focused on a curricular reform in primary and lower secondary (general) education, a higher education reform, and support for inclusive education. As outlined below all initial VET-related issues will need to be addressed by future projects to be prepared in line with the [2021-27 Partnership Agreement](#), a key document for access to EUR 12.8 billion for cohesion policy investments. The only development that explicitly affected initial VET was the 2023 amendment of RRP focused on supporting education and skills development for the green transition within the [REPowerEU](#)-related chapter.

A strategic policy framework for the education and training system at all levels is the National programme for the development of education (NPDE). Initially, it was [adopted by the government in 2018](#), and [revised in 2022](#) and later complemented with the [2024-26 Implementation plan](#) following public consultations. This plan created the basis for stable policy planning and drawing from EU funds. It also integrated some [Government manifesto](#)-related priorities.

A [revised version of the NIP](#), updated to align with the NIP guidelines, was resubmitted to the European Commission on 16 March 2024. It contains eight measures identical to the 2022 NIP but elaborated in more detail:

- (a) Measure 1, Centres of vocational excellence (CoVEs);
- (b) Measure 2, Supra-company training centres;
- (c) Measure 3, Post-secondary VET transformation – the creation of higher industrial schools;
- (d) Measure 4, Quality assurance in IVET and CVET;
- (e) Measure 5, Prevention of early school leaving (early leaving from education and training);
- (f) Measure 6, Basic skills;

⁽¹⁾ There is no English version of the RRP published. The best information on the RRP in English is in European documents (European Commission, 2021a; European Commission, 2023c) and concerning respective reforms in annexes to these documents (European Commission, 2021b; European Commission, 2023a).

- (g) Measure 7, Individual learning accounts;
- (h) Measure 8, New system of lifelong learning introduced by the new law on lifelong learning.

The 2022 NIP is a selection of VET and lifelong learning priorities complementing the RRP that paid little attention to VET and lifelong learning. It was created in the period of unknown VET-related preferences of the government expected to come after the early parliamentary elections. The 2024 NIP interlinks the political priorities of the new government and proposals of experts contained in the LLL Strategy with objectives and funding from the meanwhile approved [2021-27 Programme Slovakia](#) specifying investment priorities.

Both the 2022 and the 2024 NIPs, align with the overall goals of the [Council Recommendation on vocational education and training](#) (VET Recommendation). However, in the process of NIP's creation, the specific priorities of the VET Recommendation and the objectives of the [Osnabrück Declaration](#) were not explicitly targeted. Despite this, relevant alignments for all eight NIP measures can still be observed and will be detailed in the next chapters.

CHAPTER 2. Main policy developments in 2023

2.1 Agile and resilient VET, adaptive to labour market needs

To understand the role of the NIP and its measures relevant to the making VET agile and adapting to the labour market, the background situation and fundamentals of initial VET in Slovakia must be clarified first.

Three forms of initial VET are visible in Slovakia: traditional schools-based form, a mixed scheme combining school-based VET and work-based learning (WBL) based on contracts between a school and companies, and dual VET requesting individual contracts between learners and companies ⁽²⁾.

Dual VET in Slovakia is only one form of WBL offered within the school system, as dual learners are regular learners and not employees of companies. Despite strong support from the State and massive promotion, dual VET is the weakest stream. As of 15 September 2022, there were 9 347 contracted learners in dual VET (7.39% of 126 500 VET programme full-time learners). Challenges to its expansion include insufficient learner interest in ISCED 353 studies (15.12% of all secondary and post-secondary VET learners in 2022) and the young age (14–15-year-olds) of candidates not yet eligible for employment ⁽³⁾. Any further transformation of the initial VET must recognise the need for supporting variability of the provision of WBL and overcoming the rigidity of both the traditional school-based system as well as the dual VET in the current form.

The NIP highlights two measures in support of the improvement of WBL and better response to labour market needs: Measure 1 focuses on introducing [centres of vocational excellence](#) (CoVEs) commented later; and Measure 2 aims at creating the network of supra-company training centres (SCTCs) to facilitate SMEs, which often suffer from limited

⁽²⁾ Description of the Slovak VET system is available from the Cedefop's [Vocational education and training in Europe – Slovakia](#) (Cedefop & ŠIOV/SNO, 2023).

⁽³⁾ See data on VET at [Vocational education and training in Europe – Slovakia](#) (Cedefop & ŠIOV/SNO, 2023).

opportunities to offer full-scale in-company training, to enter dual VET.

SCTCs should be able to cover components of practical training that are difficult to cover by companies and also by schools. Thus, SCTCs are seen as an instrument for improving the provision of quality VET, as well as an instrument for increased provision of WBL. Although backed by the legislation from 2021, there are currently only two SCTCs operating since 2022. Funding of equipment for SCTCs is envisaged from the ERDF. The Swiss experience with SCTCs should be reflected within the project with the title “Improving quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training (VET) towards labour market needs” starting in 2024, run by the State Vocational Education Institute and co-funded by the Swiss Financial Mechanism. It is not yet possible to assess the impact of the NIP concerning this agenda, as 2023 was devoted to preparatory work only.

Measure 6 of the NIP focusing on developing the **basic skills of adults** is also relevant concerning this VET Recommendation priority. The new act on adult education in the pipeline specifies that access to adult education is for persons aged 16 years and more. Piloting a screening instrument to identify gaps in basic skills in low-qualified adults and assessment instruments is expected to benefit also secondary initial VET.

The NIP explicitly indicates the need to strengthen VET research and labour market intelligence among the main challenges. This also corresponds to this priority of the VET Recommendation. While there is progress in improving graduate tracking ⁽⁴⁾, commented in more detail in Chapter 4, neither the NIP nor other policy papers have addressed the need to support employer surveys. A stronger involvement of employers and key stakeholders of the business world is however inevitable for a better understanding of incoming changes in the labour market.

2.2 Flexible VET, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities

Flexible VET is a priority addressed both in the LLL Strategy and the NIP, although the two documents prioritise different activities. The LLL Strategy emphasised the necessity of increasing the education and qualification system flexibility, proposing three activities: segmentation of formal qualifications, development of labour market-demanded qualifications of the 4th sub-framework of the **Slovak Qualifications Framework** (SKKR), and introducing micro-credentials. Building a systemic graduate tracking system is also underway to support flexibility and quality. Although supported by the NIP, all these activities are not prioritised by specialised measures, unlike the introduction of **individual learning accounts** (ILAs), funded from the ESF+ and ERDF. ILAs as strong financial support for upskilling and reskilling are addressed by Measure 7 of the NIP, aligned with VET Recommendation priority of making VET flexible. An electronic platform for ILAs is being prepared to facilitate connectivity among learners, education providers, and employers. ILAs are expected to be implemented in Q2/2025, though challenges persist as discussed further in Chapter 5.

⁽⁴⁾ See also the respective policy development at Cedefop's online tool Timeline of VET policies in Europe (Cedefop and Refernet, 2023f).

2.3 Innovative and excellent VET

Initially proposed in the LLL Strategy, Measure 1 of the NIP focuses on establishing **centres of vocational excellence** (CoVEs), aligning with this priority. A network of CoVEs complying with the European initiative ⁽⁵⁾ should replace an earlier network of VET centres backed by the Act on VET (61/2015). Although these centres mushroomed, the policy is in need of revision as explicitly indicated in the NIP's rationale section to this measure. Some centres failed to contribute substantially to improving the quality of VET due to underinvestment and inadequate support for their development and, therefore, the amendment of the Act on VET introduced the option to take away this title although it was not originally envisaged.

To address these challenges, the 2023-27 ESF+ project with a budget of over EUR 15.58 million, run by the State Vocational Education Institute, should implement a comprehensive setup of the CoVEs system and pilot at least eight CoVEs (see Chapter 5 for more).

2.4 Attractive VET, based on modern and digitalised provision

Insufficient provision of VET programmes following secondary initial VET has been a long-standing weakness in Slovakia's education system, with no universities of applied science backed by legislation. Bachelor studies tailored to immediate labour market needs are scarce, and ISCED 554/SKRR 5 studies offered by secondary VET schools are not recognised as higher education by legislation despite official ISCED classifications.

Measure 3 of the NIP aims to address this by transforming some secondary industrial schools into higher industrial schools, backed by legislation, and linking ISCED 554 studies with ISCED 6 bachelor studies to offer a streamlined path to a Bachelor's degree. 26 secondary VET schools were shortlisted for further transformation within the aforementioned project co-funded by the Swiss Financial Mechanism. The 2024-26 Implementation plan of the NPDE targets completing school transformations and linking ISCED 554 and bachelor studies by Q4/2026.

Similarly, progress in labour market-focused bachelor programmes in higher education institutions is limited. Recent financial incentives for developing so-called professional bachelor studies yielded problematic project proposals and low responses from higher education institutions. This indicates the need for higher education staff to establish better connections with the labour market.

Measure 8 of the NIP is, in essence, overarching and interlinked with all priorities of the VET Recommendation as it was aimed at developing a fully-fledged lifelong learning system and a new quality-assured **qualifications system**. However, the first key activity, developing a proposal for a network of regional centres for lifelong learning and guidance, is directly linked to making VET attractive. A new act on lifelong learning is inevitable for structural changes, but the recent development resulted in reduced efforts, focusing instead on the preparation of a new adult education act, which partially addresses the lifelong learning agenda (see Chapter 5 for more).

⁽⁵⁾ See the dedicated website <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1501> and also the Erasmus+ programme guide at <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-b/key-action-2/centres-vocational-excellence>.

2.5 Inclusive VET promoting equal opportunities

Measure 5 of the NIP aligns with this priority by targeting [early leaving from education and training](#), which is crucial for enhancing inclusiveness and equal opportunities. This issue stems from systemic weaknesses in the education system: high threshold for completion of ISCED 2 general education required for entering VET programmes leading to qualifications for craftsmanship and low effectiveness of the alternative paths of pre-vocational programmes. Legislative changes in force from January 2022 addressed these issues by transforming criticised ISCED 253 programmes into combined programmes, offering both lower secondary education completion and EQF level 2 VET qualifications. Additionally, alternative pathways to ISCED 2 general education were introduced. While the impact of these changes is yet to be assessed, anecdotal evidence suggests VET schools are striving to provide these revised programmes, benefiting both learners and school budgets.

However, challenges persist regarding the lack of an early warning system and systematic data collection, as indicated in the [Cedefop analysis](#). An ESF+ project run by the Research Institute of Child Psychology and Pathopsychology is aimed to address this by creating such a system and targeted support through counselling and prevention measures. According to the 2024-26 Implementation plan of the NPDE, the early warning system and screening tool should be developed by Q3/2026, with recommendations for dropout prevention and staff retraining by Q4/2025 and Q1/2027, respectively.

While the effectiveness of these measures remains to be seen, a national strategy containing prevention, intervention, and compensation measures, as outlined in the annex to the 2022 [Council Recommendation on pathways to school success](#), would be helpful.

2.6 VET underpinned by quality assurance

Measure 4 of the NIP addresses this priority by focusing on developing a [national quality assurance system](#), a crucial aspect lacking in the current VET landscape. Currently, school directors are primarily responsible for education quality, but they have limited control over practical training in companies. The State School Inspectorate (SSI) has no capacity to supervise in-company training effectively, and while companies offering dual VET and employers' bodies assigned as sectoral assignees ⁽⁶⁾ are involved in the provision of training, they are not explicitly made responsible by law to implement quality control measures. Therefore, substantial revision is needed. Functional quality assurance is vital for various policies, including validation of non-formal learning, individual learning accounts (ILAs), micro-credentials, and the full implementation of SKKR.

Measure 8 of the NIP is in essence overarching and interlinked with all priorities of VET Recommendation as it was aimed at developing a fully-fledged lifelong learning system and a new quality-assured qualifications system. Further details are discussed in Chapter 5.

To implement quality assurance in VET, a national ESF+ project was approved in December 2023, run by the State Vocational Education Institute with a budget of over EUR 6.96 million. This project should build on the earlier [ESF project piloting validation of non-](#)

⁽⁶⁾ Institutions of the world of work selected from chambers and employers' associations and defined by law to represent employers' interests as professional counterparts to education authorities.

formal learning. However, experience from piloting assessment portfolios demonstrated the need for complementing the established infrastructure and governance rules with robust processes based on internal and external quality assurance. Therefore, the project aims to develop an overarching national strategy for quality assurance.

While the preparatory phase is ongoing, implementation will start in 2024, with impact analysis expected by 2026. Further details are discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 3. Involvement of VET stakeholders in the implementation of policy developments related to NIP

The role of stakeholders in VET, particularly diverse employer bodies, is described in detail in the NIP. In contrast to the 2000s, the role of employers has significantly increased backed by the Act on VET (61/2015) as amended. A radical change in the role of the Alliance of Sectoral Councils and sectoral (skills) councils is envisaged following the 2022 amendment to the Act on employment services (5/2004) and the act on adult education in the pipeline. The Ministry of Education agreed to transfer several responsibilities from educational authorities to the alliance, including the accreditation of adult education programmes, the creation of qualification standards and the publication of the register of the National Qualifications System on the website of the alliance, and also processes of validation of learning outcomes for qualifications through prior learning. The alliance is still in process of establishment as an interest association of legal entities funded by the European Union, the State budget, membership fees and its own activities. It is composed of the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education, representative associations of employers and trade unions, open also to admission of other members.

Nevertheless, the Ministry of Education prepared the 2022 NIP and its 2024 revision without any specific involvement of stakeholders, as the NIP does not contain any new policy that needed discussion with stakeholders. All NIP-relevant 'parent' documents adopted by the government have been discussed in advance with stakeholders as prescribed by legislative rules.

It is a regular practice that ESF+/ERDF project proposals are discussed with stakeholders before submitting for discussion with the European Commission. The newest example is the discussion on the proposal of the national project aimed at developing an electronic portal for ILAs held online on 12 March 2024 with over 100 participants. Stakeholders were invited to send written comments in addition to comments aired during the meeting. It should be noted that the effectiveness of stakeholder involvement can be influenced by the expertise of the personnel. This is particularly relevant for employer representatives. The sectoral assignees (who have a strong influence on initial VET), and the Alliance of Sectoral Councils may face challenges in bringing practical experience from the world of work to the education sector. Therefore, curricular authority experts and experts from VET schools are often fulfilling tasks within employers' bodies, which should be filled by professionals with direct world of work experience.

The governance architecture on national and regional levels is sufficiently structured and backed by legislation, and relevant stakeholders are involved in planning and implementing processes accordingly. However, monitoring processes at both levels have not yet been sufficiently developed.

CHAPTER 4. Achievements of implementation

All eight NIP-related measures are in an early phase of implementation. The European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) projects are in the pipeline or envisaged as a crucial game changer in six measures. In addition, Measure 3 is interlinked with a project supported by the Swiss Financial Mechanism which is also in the final preparation phase. Measure 8 is essentially different as it is an overarching initiative, predominantly aimed at legislative backing the lifelong learning system covering all forms of learning. It is too early to speak about key success factors of envisaged NIP measures. It can be broadly indicated that international experience (and international funding) is crucial for future success and that only partial progress can be reported. In three cases addressed by NIP and corresponding to the EU priorities, progress has been visible since 2020.

The first case relates to Measure 4 focusing on quality assurance and, therefore, the priority of quality assured VET. One of the envisaged instruments that should contribute to developing a new quality assurance culture is already in place. A peer-review model, based on an international framework (Gutknecht-Gmeiner (ed.), 2007) has been successfully piloted in secondary schools. This model, along with graduate tracking data analyses, is expected to play a significant role in the development of school improvement plans.

The second case relates to Measure 4 and the priority of making VET agile and adapting to the labour market. A 'three-pillar' graduate tracking system is embedded in the LLL Strategy adopted by the government in 2021. The administrative data pillar interlinking administrative databases of relevant sectors has been created. The second pillar (national surveys pillar) capitalising on the experience with the [Eurograduate survey](#) is currently in progress. It consists of two national surveys: one targeting higher education graduates and the other one targeting VET school graduates. The third pillar (schools pillar) centred on individual school surveys aimed at the provision of a feedback loop for adjusting secondary and tertiary programmes is under preparation. This feedback will be taken into account by supervising bodies, such as the Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education and the SSI.

The third case relates to Measure 5 addressing early leaving from education and training, and, therefore, the priority of making VET inclusive. Former lower secondary VET programmes (ISCED 253), known as F-type VET programmes, were seen as a dead-end path and a systemic weakness in the VET system. This issue contributed to the European Commission's infringement procedure against Slovakia concerning discrimination in education eventually leading to the decision to [refer Slovakia to the Court of Justice of the European Union](#) for failing to effectively address the segregation of Roma children in education. Component 6 of the RRP ⁽⁷⁾ focusing on inclusion and antidiscrimination measures addressed weaknesses of F-type VET programmes. The solution is in the introduction of alternative ways of achieving

⁽⁷⁾ See Ministry of Finance, 2021, p. 242, Reform 4. Implementation of tools for prevention early leaving education and training and revision of F-type programmes.

lower secondary (general) education, such as external testing, and face-to-face exams, all backed by the 2021 amendment of the Education Act (245/2008). The new Ministry of Education decree (287/2022) has also interlinked these new combined F-type programmes with programmes offering an ISCED 353 certificate of apprenticeship.

CHAPTER 5. Challenges of implementation

The 2020 to 2023 period can be seen as an interregnum in politics within which planning and preparing dominated over implementation. The year 2024 can be seen as the starting year of implementing the agreed policies. At the same time, setting consistent implementation plans and monitoring processes is a permanent weakness of policymaking in Slovakia.

For example, the introduction of dual VET, which is undoubtedly a positive feature, suffers from insufficiently thought-out implementation. The reform failed to take into account that potential dual learners in Slovakia are very young and, therefore, their in-company training in some sectors is challenged due to environmental and safety regulations. In addition, the responsibility of companies for the quality of training is loose and legislatively not backed. These systemic weaknesses are currently addressed by Measure 2 of the NIP focused on supra-company training centres and Measure 4 on quality assurance in initial VET and CVET. Moreover, the existing governance architecture has not proved effective, although it is in detail backed by legislation on national and regional levels. Supporting VET providers including VET schools from the national and regional levels insufficiently affects the quality of the ecosystem on the local level. Local companies and entrepreneurs (often alumni) are more important for VET schools than employer bodies on national and regional levels. Despite this, only partnership in dual VET is financially supported by law. However, life on the local level is more colourful and, despite no comparable co-funding from the State, VET schools enter into many contracts with local companies based on commercial law. These partnerships often support WBL more flexibly than dual partnerships. A variety of school-company partnerships on the local level is worth co-funding by the State.

The same systemic weaknesses, such as insufficiently planned implementation and ineffective governance also apply to the upcoming NIP reforms. Without addressing these issues, similar problems may arise. Three types of challenges are discussed below.

The first example of challenge concerns the coordination of reforms and investments. This is evident, for example, in Measure 1 of the NIP and the priority of excellent and innovative VET. The related ESF+ project focused on creating a network of CoVEs speaks about a full setup of the system. 16 categories of requirements with quantitative key performance indicators are to be fulfilled by future CoVEs. To fulfil these, CoVEs need to present specific documents from a list, currently under development. Examples include a quality assurance strategy, a social and personal development plan, and a skills development plan for the 21st century.

On the one hand, there is a need for careful planning for setting up the network of CoVEs, especially considering the lessons learned from the earlier controversial network of VET centres. On the other hand, the administrative burden is too high according to the first voices from practitioners. Too strict central requirements might also harm the development of these centres as organic products of local ecosystems. Aligning diverse methodologies with practice

may prove too challenging. The full functionality of CoVEs requests investments in equipment and staff capable of meeting high expectations. This investment should come from other sources, as the aforementioned ESF+ project focuses solely on refining the details of the system setup. Although complementary projects and investments have been announced, details (including interlinking all activities) are not yet known.

The second example of a challenge concerns Measure 7 of the NIP and making VET flexible. It is aimed at implementing ILAs, including the electronic platform in support of ILAs.

The LLL Strategy envisaged elaborating a strategy paper to reflect new European policies in VET and lifelong learning. A strategy paper on new elements of qualification systems for skills development (Gálová et al., 2023) proposed:

- (a) a dual approach to micro-credentials (non-regulated micro-credentials and regulated micro-credentials seen as micro-qualifications of the 4th sub-framework of the SKKR fulfilling quality assurance requirements); and
- (b) flexible targeted [voucher schemes](#) instead of virtual learning accounts based on the annual contribution from the state budget of EUR 200 for all.

While the former could benefit from the experience of existing active labour market policy schemes, the latter, originally proposed by the [2017 Learning Slovakia strategic paper](#) and supported by the 2018 NPDE, have not been piloted yet.

Two high risks are already visible. The first concerns the sustainability of ILAs after the project lifetime, as virtual learning accounts for all should be later annually filled from the state budget. This is uncertain due to potential austerity measures the Ministry of Finance signalled. The second risk concerns the pressure from employers to use public money of ILA funds to meet their needs potentially sidelining the priorities of individual learners. In addition, the Alliance of Sectoral Councils which is expected to participate in decision-making process on the use of public ILA resources and the selection of appropriate training providers is not yet fully institutionally established and lacks professional capacities required for this responsibility.

The third example concerns Measure 8 of the NIP, which involves establishing a comprehensive lifelong learning system, supported by a new act on lifelong learning. In 2023, two pieces of legislation were submitted to internal discussion: the act on lifelong learning and the act on adult education. Subsequently, the Ministry of Education decided to work on the act on adult education only with expected submission to the government in August 2024. The reason is that the legislation regulating adult education is comparably simpler than the overarching act on lifelong learning that needs substantially more time-consuming consultations with stakeholders. As a consequence, due to a focus on one segment of lifelong learning, the needed profound systemic changes (such as the revitalisation of the SKKR or the introduction of overarching quality assurance principles) can only be partly addressed.

Weaknesses in implementing and monitoring are interlinked. Currently, documents titled implementation plans do not go beyond enlisting a plain description of time-bound tasks. This is useful for basic policy control but insufficient for translating intended policies into practice. Monitoring is predominantly performed ad hoc, with no systemic impact analyses currently in place. The regular assessment of the fulfilment of tasks (and achievement of indicators, when set) does not sufficiently reflect the substance. The assessment of achieving goals and the impact on target groups is as a rule based on formal criteria. For example, retraining a

prescribed number of staff is automatically considered an improvement in their skills. However, without detailed impact analysis and supporting evidence, the assumption that retraining is meaningful and effective is not justified.

Recently, the Ministry of Education has been addressing the failure to meet European Commission' conditions for accessing European funds. For fulfilling the respective thematic enabling condition, the European Commission required the identification of responsible bodies, an evaluation and review process of the strategic policy framework (NPDE), a methodology for keeping the NPDE up-to-date and a plan for involving all relevant stakeholders in the monitoring, evaluation and review process. These requirements identify the weaknesses regarding the current monitoring process.

It is clearly visible from the NIP and this report that implementing the measures contained in the NIP essentially depends on international sources as specified by the 2021-27 Programme Slovakia prepared by the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatisation (MIRRI) and finally approved in November 2022. Therefore, it was impossible to specify in detail measures depending on the EU funds at the time of NIP delivery. This partly explains why the 2022 NIP had no real strategy power compared to the RRP and the 2021-27 Programme Slovakia and why monitoring processes of NIP measures have not yet been prepared sufficiently.

CHAPTER 6. Conclusions

In 2022 and 2023, implementing RRP-related reforms was dominant. VET remained unaddressed until the 2023 revision of RRP, which included green skills. Therefore, the highest priority and the most visible progress relates to implementing general education and higher education-related reforms. Thus, relatively little progress in VET-related policies under the NIP is due to the construction of both the RRP and the NIP per se. Eight NIP-related measures are still in an early phase of implementation predominantly focusing on elaborating the respective ESF+ projects. Thus, the success of the NIP deeply depends on the success of these projects.

To increase the chances of successful implementation of the NIP-related measures, well-designed implementation plans and a rethinking of process monitoring are inevitable. Lessons learned from the past clearly indicate that meeting superficially set quantitative indicators and weak exploitation of project results after project completion are the main obstacles to a significant change. Many previous VET-related ESIF projects failed to contribute to systemic changes or substantial capacity building. At the same time, new experts knowledgeable in skills intelligence, curriculum development and making the qualifications system more flexible are urgently needed. Insufficient capacities at the Ministry of Education and the State Vocational Education Institute, the national curricular authority, lacking expertise among newly recruited staff by employer associations (funded by the Ministry of Education), and the absence of VET-related research make evidence-based policymaking almost impossible.

The lack of synergy in investments in ESIF projects and the poor exploitation of project results hamper systemic change. The sustainability of these results beyond the project duration is hampered by insufficient funding from the state budget. This translates into

discontinuation of relevant operations and a high share of project-bound temporary staff discontinuing their work.

Further steps for 2024-25, indicated by the NIP or by the 2024-26 Implementation plan of NPDE currently under public discussion, are commented on above. This implementation plan is the update of the earlier 2018 NPDE governmental strategy paper, aligning it with the 2023-27 Government manifesto. The Manifesto priorities for the education sector were currently translated into 40 projects managed by the Ministry of Education. The final version of the implementation plan is still under discussion and details of ESIF-funded national projects within the NIP are also not yet fully specified. A more precise assessment of the NIP implementation will not be possible before the end of 2024.

Acronyms

CoVEs	centres of vocational excellence
CVET	continuing vocational education and training
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
EU	European Union
ILA	individual learning account
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IVET	initial vocational education and training
LLL	lifelong learning
MIRRI	Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatisation
NIP	National implementation plan
NPDE	National programme for the development of education
Q	Quarter
RRP	Recovery and resilience plan
SCTC	supra-company training centre
SKKR	Slovenský kvalifikačný rámec (Slovak Qualifications Framework)
SR	Slovak Republic
SSI	State School Inspectorate
VET	vocational education and training
WBL	work-based learning

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