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Output 3

23SK04 - INCREASE ESIF ABSORPTION, ELIMINATE GOLD-PLATING AND PROVIDE RESULT-ORIENTED INVESTMENTS IN THE 2021-2027 PERIOD

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This report is Output 3 produced by the OECD for project 23SK04. It contains an action plan for the adoption of the key recommendations developed by three thematic working groups in Slovakia. The action plan is divided into three components reflecting the focus of the thematic working groups. The report contains examples of international good practice. Each component of the action plan concludes with a roadmap for implementation identifying the relevant milestones, timeframe, action owner, other relevant actors, resources, and deliverables.

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Output 3 - Comprehensive report summarising the recommendations from the conducted reviews and a proposed action plan for adoption of recommended measures

To address the key challenges identified in output 2, the OECD will develop a comprehensive report with recommendations for legislative reforms and simplification of procedures. The report will contain a proposed action plan for the adoption of the recommended measures. The recommendations will focus on both the ability to efficiently absorb the financial resources, as well as the ability to achieve the targets and objectives defined in the key programming documents for the 2021-2027 period (Partnership Agreement, Programme Slovakia). The recommendations will be supported by international good practices from other countries in (but not limited to) the eastern European region such as the Czech Republic and Poland. The proposed action plan will include specific actions to be deployed, the bodies that should lead these actions and the bodies that should contribute, the expected results and a timeline.

Source: Detailed Project Description for 23SK04

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Key recommendations

These recommendations address the main challenges identified in Output 2. They were developed by the three thematic working groups established in Slovakia in close cooperation with the OECD, supported by the Technical Instrument of the European Commission (SG REFORM). This report contains an action plan for the adoption of these recommendations. The action plan is divided into three components reflecting the focus of the thematic working groups. The scope of the recommendations is described in further detail in the report. Each component of the action plan concludes with a roadmap for implementation identifying the relevant milestones, timeframe, action owner, other relevant actors, resources, and deliverables.

Component 1: Human Resource Management

1. **Design a methodology for allocating personnel ('administrative capacities') in Intermediate Bodies (IBs).** Do this through mapping the current distribution of Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) and designing a methodology for a more effective distribution of staff working on EU funds management in Slovakia.
2. **Create a strategy for the coordination of workforce management between the Managing Authority and Intermediate Bodies**. Do this through defining coordination tasks; conducting a prioritisation workshop; improving staff mobility across the Management and Control System; creating career paths; and synthesising these and existing actions in a consolidated Roadmap.
3. **Build an effective learning and development ecosystem**. Do this through improving communication and coordination (e.g. working groups/communities of practice) and reviewing the allocation of training responsibilities between the MA, IBs and Regional Centres; Map the current learning and development offer; prioritise and target better training content; move toward flexible, on-demand training;

Component 2: Public Procurement

4. **Design a robust training and capacity-building program tailored to the needs of IBs and beneficiaries.** Do this through assessing training needs of IBs and beneficiaries; conducting capacity-building workshops; establishing a centralized Q&A repository; and monitoring the effectiveness of training sessions through feedback.
5. **Validating and refining the risk-based methodology to address procurement challenges.** Do this through a review of the methodology and the risk indicators based on validation findings; leveraging and enhancing ITMS functionalities to support methodological refinements; and holding quarterly coordination meetings to ensure continuous improvement.

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Component 3: Strategic Programming, project preparation and beneficiary relations

1. **Develop a multi-criteria prioritisation framework to help assess investment priorities.** The framework could ensure that investment priorities identified by Intermediate Bodies (IBs) 1) align with EU priorities, national cross-cutting and sectoral strategies; 2) have potential regional development impact (e.g., addressing territorial disparities); 3) are administratively and technically feasible in the given time frame (e.g., project readiness and institutional capacity). This framework can help enhance evidence-based cross-sectoral investments prioritisation and coordination of Programme Slovakia.
2. **Develop a roadmap for enhancing project preparation and beneficiary support.** This roadmap should be developed based on an evidence-based analysis of the specific project preparation obstacles faced by Programme beneficiaries. The roadmap offers concrete actions and steps agreed by relevant stakeholders (e.g., IBs, beneficiaries, and other authorities involved in investment preparation) to address the various obstacles in project preparation.
3. **Launch a pilot call for Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI).** This includes preparing criteria for a pilot ITI project, which have cross-sectoral relevance to inspire collaboration among diverse stakeholders. The MA, relevant IBs and the relevant territorial partners must be involved in the preparation of the criteria.
4. **Develop a practical guideline for the MA and IBs to improve their stakeholder engagement practices**. In cooperation with the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Development of the Civil Society, the Working Group will support the development of a practical guideline to promote the engagement and participation of stakeholders from the side of the MA and IBs.

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1 Action Plan component 1: Working Group on Human Resource Management

This component of the action plan presents three key activities to improve the management of human resource working with EU funds in Slovakia. It is based on the ideas initially developed during a Padlet brainstorming session and builds on discussions from the first and second HR Working Group meetings held in June and December 2024. The roadmap has been updated in February 2025 to reflect the revised set of actions and timeline agreed following the Working Group meeting held in January 2025, in Bratislava.

This action plan outlines three key activities to enhance the management of employees working on European Union (EU) funds in Slovakia. Each activity is comprised of a set of concrete actions with associated timelines and milestones. The proposed activities and actions are interconnected and intended to function as a cohesive strategy, where each action reinforces the others. Approaching them holistically is essential for sustainable improvements. Each step is designed to support Slovakia's efforts to improve the use of EU funds by strengthening HR practices, aligning processes with EU standards, and ensuring accountability.

The Working Group on Human Resources is encouraged to adopt a collaborative approach by engaging a wide array of stakeholders from across the EU funds ecosystem. This inclusive approach, combined with an emphasis on data-driven insights, will help identify HR gaps and tailor solutions to meet local needs effectively. Starting with small-scale, manageable initiatives will allow Slovakia to refine its

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approach based on feedback and outcomes, building a foundation for scalable, long-term progress in EU fund management under Programme Slovakia.

By strengthening HR management within the EU funds framework, Slovakia can create a work environment that fosters professional growth, offering clearer career development pathways. This focus on career advancement is crucial for attracting skilled professionals to the public sector and retaining them, ultimately reducing turnover and enhancing institutional knowledge within the EU fund management system. Additionally, by improving HR practices related to effective work planning and resource allocation, Slovakia can ensure effective talent management and balanced workload. This enables teams to operate more efficiently and meet EU fund management demands with greater agility and accountability. Together, these efforts contribute to a more resilient and efficient fund management system, maximizing the positive impact of EU investments and supporting Slovakia's long-term development goals.

Activity 1: Designing a methodology for effective workforce planning – allocating personnel (administrative capacities) in Intermediate Bodies (IBs)

Introduction

The management control system currently has a total of 2,323 “administrative capacities”, understood as full-time-equivalent (FTE) personnel, assigned to support EU funds management.[1] While the data on how these employees are allocated exists and is updated on a quarterly basis, Slovakia lacks a cohesive strategy to support workforce planning and resource allocation to effectively manage across the entire EU funds landscape. This negatively impacts the Managing Authority and Intermediate Bodies’ abilities to effectively implement EU funds management, as bottlenecks and delays are often a result of a lack of workforce capacity at key steps throughout the process and project lifecycle. Additionally, as Slovakia continues to navigate changes to the EU funds system and processes alongside demographic changes, a methodology to enable an adaptable workforce will be key to effectively support staff to manage and implement EU-funded projects.

To improve management of employees across the Management and Control System (MCS), Slovakia will take a data-driven approach to understanding the current state and identifying the ideal future of workforce planning. Using data as a starting place can help mitigate subjectivity in assessing trends and outliers in the current system. Given the large discrepancies in needs of administrative bodies, this effort will not consider the administrative capacities assigned to regions and will focus exclusively on the 10 Intermediate Bodies.

What does the data tell us?

Around 40% of OECD countries delegate workforce planning responsibilities to ministries or dedicated teams, ensuring flexibility while maintaining oversight. The highest degree of delegation in workforce planning allows for tailored approaches to sector-specific needs. However, effective workforce management goes beyond delegation - it also requires system-wide strategies for development and retention. Maintaining an inclusive and highly skilled workforce demands continuous investment in training, career progression, and institutional knowledge-sharing. By adopting a more structured and coordinated approach, Slovakia can enhance its workforce planning, aligning practices with OECD standards and improving the efficiency of public administration.

[1] To avoid confusion, this paper uses the term “Full-Time Equivalents” or “employees”, depending on the context, instead of “administrative capacities” to refer to the personnel working in the Management and Control System in Slovakia

Slovakia's public sector faces challenges in workforce planning, as job classifications are not standardised across ministries and agencies, leading to inconsistencies and inefficiencies. International best practices highlight the benefits of structured coordination. For instance, six OECD countries have established interministerial working groups on workforce planning, fostering collaboration and strategic alignment.

What are other countries doing?

1. The **Australia Public Service Commission** (APS) has developed a Centre of Excellence for Workforce Planning to better meet future capability needs across the APS. The Centre has published a Workforce Planning Guide that could be adapted by the Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization (MIRDI). In particular, the guiding questions could be used to structure action 1.1. (mapping the current state) and inform the methodology (action 1.2.)
2. In **Greece**, workforce planning in Managing Authorities is governed by Law 4314/2014 (Articles 34–37) and implemented through a common HRM management policy. The Human Resources Management and Development Sector of MOU SA oversees HR policy for MAs, reporting to the General Director of MOU SA, which itself is governed by a nine-member board under the Minister of Economy & Development. While MAs handle internal HR functions such as personnel appointments, training plans, and performance assessments, they also communicate staffing needs and monitor absenteeism. The HRM unit is responsible for broader workforce planning, including identifying staffing needs, evaluating personnel proposals, conducting assessments for secondments, and overseeing training programs. Additionally, it manages remuneration and general personnel administration to ensure efficient HR operations within the MAs. Law 4314/2014 established a unified HR framework for MAs and related services, with further details set by secondary legislation. All personnel in the "Partnership Agreement 2014-2020" pool, regardless of origin, are managed under the same centralized HR framework (promotions, evaluation, mobility, etc.), which supports effective workforce planning and management.

Final actions decided in January 2025

Please see Annex A for a Roadmap and timeline for implementation

1.1. Map the current state: Using the available data, map the current distribution of FTEs across the Intermediate Bodies. The key output of this exercise could be a dashboard summary in Excel or another application that shows the breakdown of the FTEs in the current state across administrative bodies, including the types of roles and projects assigned to each FTE or employee, where possible.

1.2. Design methodology: Following the expectation-setting exercise, develop a first iteration of a methodology or guidance document that can be applied transversally across IBs to determine how best to assign people and functions depending on criteria like programme type, size and sector. Test the methodology with a small number of IBs. Based on feedback, convene stakeholders (e.g. through the HR WG) to refine the methodology and determine how best to take into account the specific needs of IBs in terms of workforce planning.

Activity 2: Creating a strategy for coordination of workforce management between the Managing Authority and Intermediate Bodies

Introduction

Autonomy in HR management at the Intermediate Body level is necessary to ensure each administrative body can successfully manage its own unique needs. Still, establishing effective and transparent coordination of workforce management between the Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies is key to establishing a more agile and responsive workforce across the entire EU funds landscape.

Alignment and coordination in workforce management across entities can help streamline workforce planning, improve communication, and reduce redundancy. There are also clear benefits to staff, as a more coordinated workforce planning strategy can support mobility, career paths, and training opportunities. These outcomes can create follow-on benefits, for both staff and leadership, including improved understanding of workload and performance expectations, increased attractiveness of working on EU funds management, and talent retention.

To develop this strategy for coordinated workforce management Slovakia will use the insights from the data mapping exercise from Activity 1, above, while keeping in mind the interests and goals of the Managing Authority, Intermediate Bodies, and EU funds staff. This inclusive approach to strategy development is key to supporting the unique needs of staff and administrative bodies, while enabling the coordination to increase efficiency across the management and control system.

What does the data tell us?

Coordination of roles

The most common challenges reported by central HRM institutions in OECD countries relates to collaboration and resourcing (See Fig.1). Competing interests and lack of coordination or communication across ministries pose risks to whole of public service initiatives such as mobility. Low resourcing can further exacerbate coordination of the system by limiting capacity for engagement with ministries. Despite these obstacles, there are clear opportunities to strengthen approaches to staff development in Slovakia. By fostering greater collaboration between the MA and IBs, Slovakia can improve mobility and reskilling opportunities, create structured career planning mechanisms, and enhance overall performance. Establishing well-functioning coordination frameworks is essential to optimizing the allocation of human resources and ensuring that public administration remains agile and responsive to evolving challenges.

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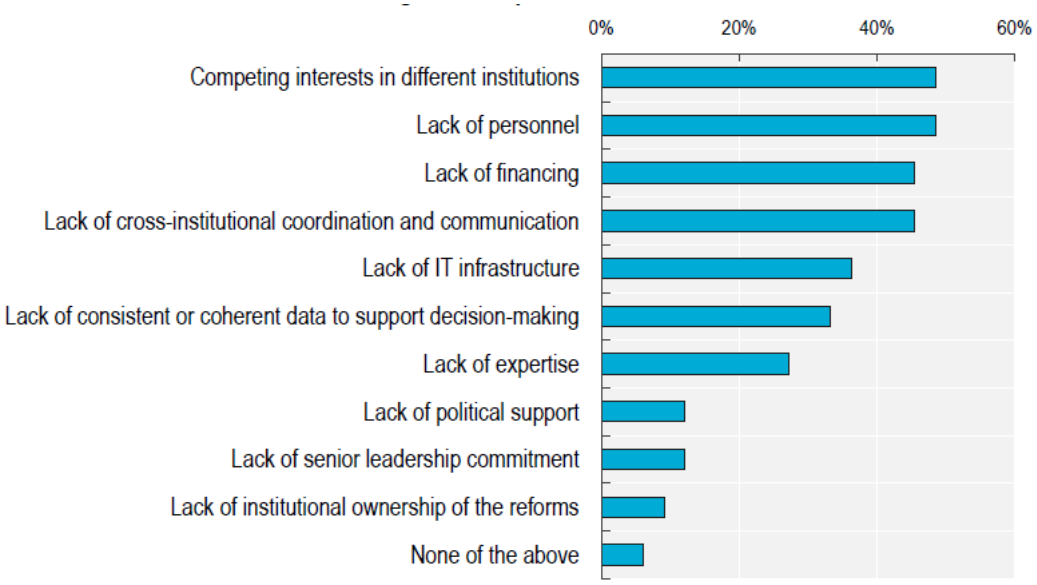
Figure 1.1. Challenges to HR policies and reforms



Note: N=33. Data for the United States, Colombia, Costa Rica, Iceland, and Japan not available. Original question "Which challenges, if any, are present when it comes to capacity and capability in the central/federal government on HRM policies and reforms?

The development of a comprehensive strategy for coordinating workforce management between the Managing Authority (MA) and Intermediate Bodies (IBs) is an important step towards enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of EU funds administration in Slovakia. By fostering a more structured and collaborative approach, the strategy can help optimise staff capacity, enhance skills development, and promote knowledge sharing between the MA and IBs – particularly through the development of a mobility programme and an enhanced career development framework.

Mobility

Mobility within the public administration is not an end in itself but a means to achieve strategic improvements in governance and efficiency. However, in the context of EU cohesion policy fund management in Slovakia, rigid civil service laws often restrict the flexibility needed to optimise workforce allocation across different employers at MA and IB level. While well-managed mobility can bring fresh perspectives and skills, it also entails short-term costs, as employees move from roles they are familiar with to new responsibilities requiring adaptation. If not carefully designed, excessive mobility can lead to high staff turnover, disrupting project implementation and eroding institutional knowledge (Fig 2) Frequent leadership changes can result in inconsistent policy execution, lack of accountability, and an inability to see long-term reforms through to completion. Moreover, rapid staff rotation—particularly between the public and private sectors or between administrative and political roles—can increase the risk of conflicts of interest and undue influence, potentially undermining the integrity of fund management. To ensure effective absorption and impact of EU cohesion funds, Slovakia must strike a balance between necessary mobility and the stability required for institutional continuity and accountability.

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Figure 1.2. Strategic Mobility Framework

	Not enough mobility	Strategic mobility	Too much mobility
Length of time in role	People staying in their positions long after they have mastered their tasks, to the point where they see few opportunities to change the way they do things and fail to bring new approaches, ideas or perspectives to tackle challenges.	People stay in one role long enough to learn about its depth and complexity, to see projects through to completion and to pass on their insights to others before moving on.	People move before they can really learn the role and see the results of their work.
Individual perspective	Employees remain in their jobs because they do not think mobility will be rewarded, are afraid of negative consequences, or do not want to leave their comfort zone. Employees tend to see few opportunities for career development, leading to complacency and/or boredom and low engagement and retention rates of best employees. Lack of transversal skill development.	Employees move to logical next steps in their career (lateral and vertical) – to work on interesting projects and develop their skills and capabilities. Higher levels of engagement due to opportunities to learn new things while also seeing results of efforts. Employees balance the development of transversal skills with deeper knowledge required of specific positions.	People move because they are unhappy, or to get salary increases, or as a result of political instability. Not linked to personal development since they do not stay long enough to learn a new role deeply. Employees tend to feel overwhelmed and stressed, as they rely on generalist skill sets without developing the depth of expertise needed in complex policy areas. Low engagement since employees do not see results of their efforts.
Team perspective	Managers hold onto their best staff for fear of not being able to achieve goals without them. High levels of stability may lead to stagnation and group think – no new energy or ideas.	Mobility is used to generate new energy in teams, moving one member at a time.	Whole teams are moved and reconstituted so there is little continuity or institutional memory (unless team is meant to be temporary) which can reduce rates of project completion.
Organisation perspective	Organisations do not promote or value mobility. Some may even punish mobility – often unintentionally. Reinforces organisational silos, and group think, which results in lower levels of innovation.	Organisations enable mobility to achieve specific and well thought out objectives – addressing complex problems and emergencies, developing staff. This helps increase innovation, productivity, employee engagement, and develop learning cultures	Often the result of instability at the political levels, or bad working cultures and not linked to organisational development objectives.
Employee Supports	No supports since there is no mobility.	Highly supported – employees are well prepared for their new role with appropriate training and regular check-ins	Often not well supported – sink or swim mentality.
Managerial supports	No supports since there is no mobility.	Highly supported – managers are guided through the process and provided the needed tools to onboard new employees and manage any institutional memory problems.	Not well supported – managers avoid using mobility strategically as they see it as disruptive to achieving their objectives.
Use of data	Not tracked.	Tracked using both administrative data and survey data to ensure a balance	Often not tracked.

Source: OECD (2023), *Public Employment and Management 2023: Towards a More Flexible Public Service*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/5b378e11-en

What are other countries doing?

- **Belgium's** Talent Exchange is a mobility programme for Belgian public servants from all levels of government, mostly used by federal entities. Talent Exchange allows participating organisations to exchange talent for specific initiatives or projects with a duration of between

6 and 12 months, thereby giving public servants new challenges aligned with their skills and competencies. In 2021, 199 exchanges were published.

- **Bulgaria** recently completed a national-level roadmap consolidating more than 80 actions for administrative capacity-building, including through a strengthened focus on learning and career development. The Bulgarian administration has deep expertise and many of the right skills needed for effective management of EUSMF. A key focus area of the roadmap is on on developing ways to better identify these skills and promote mobility opportunities as ways for public servants to develop their career and ensure an effective distribution of skills throughout the administration
- **Canada:** Canada's Free Agents programme enhances workforce mobility by allowing employees to take on temporary assignments across different departments while being hired by a host ministry. Assignments last six months to a year, enabling staff to gain diverse experience and contribute to high-priority projects. This model breaks bureaucratic silos, speeds up redeployment of specialised skills, and fosters professional development. It has been particularly successful in digital transformation, policy innovation, and project management, offering employees varied career experiences while giving departments quick access to needed expertise.

Final actions decided in January 2025

Please see Annex A for a Roadmap and timeline for implementation

2.1. Define coordination tasks: Establishing roles for workforce planning and management coordination across the Managing Authority and Intermediate Bodies is key to ensure the strategy is effective and sustainable. This could be in the form of Human Resource working group or communities of practice that meet on an ad-hoc or regular basis to discuss workforce management challenges and solutions.

2.2. Prioritise key findings: Those involved in workforce planning and management coordination should agree on a set of key goals or outcomes. These should be documented in a strategy or paper, and communicated across the Managing Authority and Intermediate Bodies.

2.3. Enhancing employee mobility: Slovakia could consider an update to the civil service law to facilitate the sharing of staff across Intermediate Bodies. This type of resource sharing could enable an increase in administrative capacities available during peak times of work and help reduce silos across the programmes.

However, the update or establishment of these processes for staff mobility must be well coordinated across the management and control system to ensure effectiveness in implementation. If well executed, staff mobility can help increase the opportunities available for staff and support knowledge share across organisations.

2.4. Create career paths: Building on the process and skills mapping exercise in Activity 1 and the actions above, develop career paths for EU funds staff. Offering visible career progression opportunities vertically and horizontally can support staff engagement and, when tied into the learning and development ecosystem, can support upskilling and talent retention, driving both individual fulfilment and organisational success. This action could be initiated by exploring where horizontal mobility opportunities could be made more visible and communicated more widely to staff in the MCS. This could help diffuse skills throughout the MCS. In a second stage, the

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existing framework for career progression in the public service could be reviewed to identify ways to bring a greater focus on talent management to IBs.

2.5. **Develop a draft summary document for administrative capacities – a Roadmap on administrative capacity building:** This action would consolidate initiatives to build the capacity of EU funds staff and offer a common vision and timeline for improvement.

Activity 3: Building an effective learning and development ecosystem

Introduction

A robust learning and development system is an important part of EU fund management in Slovakia. Slovakia's training system has faced challenges due to its limited accessibility and rigid structure. With face-to-face training as the primary method, capacity was constrained to small groups, limiting scalability and efficiency. Cumbersome registration processes for training, managed by Intermediary Bodies across regions, made it challenging to meet the diverse needs of each region. Moreover, the one-size-fits-all approach in training content was not seen to meet regional requirements adequately.

To address these issues, a more targeted, centralised training system is being developed to enable self-registration and modular learning tailored to specific roles and competencies, maximising administrative capacities across Slovakia. The goal of this training is to help employees in the MCS understand how specific learning activities align with the strategic and system-wide goals of the EU funding system. Building on the actions described above around career paths and mobility, the new training system can help underpin this more dynamic approach to developing staff skills for a more effective MCS.

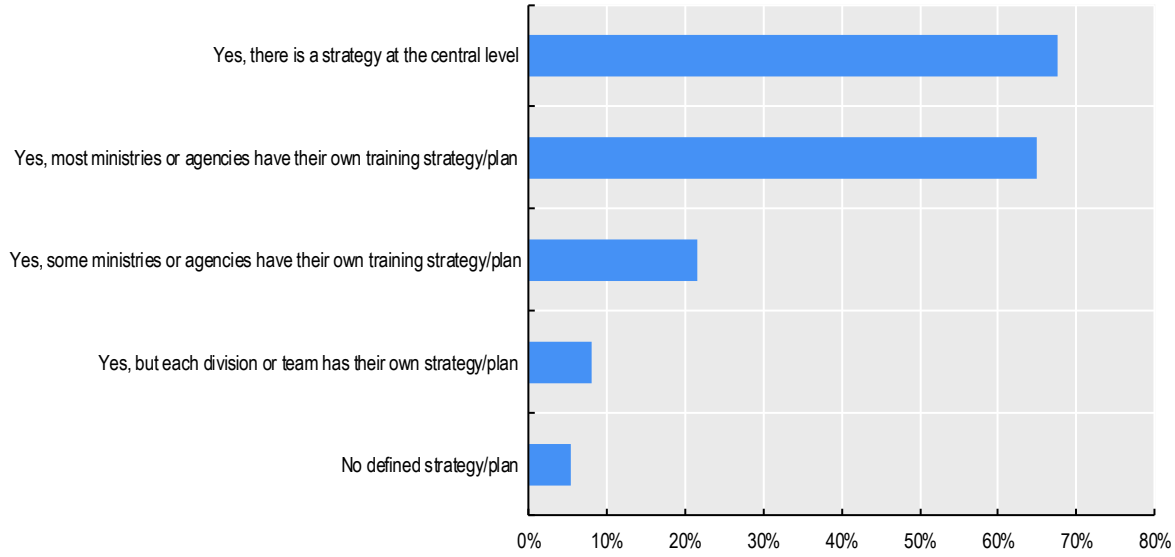
Slovakia aims to offer training in varied formats, e.g. through online courses, e-learning modules, and face-to-face workshops to ensure accessibility and relevance of training content. A modular approach, aligned with a clear, flexible methodology, is critical to fostering a responsive, well-trained workforce capable of optimising EU funds effectively and adaptively. To address this goal of an improved training system, the HR Working Group could discuss the relevance and feasibility of the following actions:

What does the data tell us?

Building a learning culture is a priority for OECD and EU public administrations. In most cases, the foundation of a learning culture is a concrete plan or strategy to guide learning objectives. Only 5% of survey respondent countries report that there is no L&D strategy in their administration, while 68% say there is a strategy at the central level and 65% say that most ministries or agencies have their own strategy.

Figure 1.3. Learning and development strategies in central governments, 2022

Percentage of countries that responded to the survey question



Note: N=37. Data for the United States not available. More than one answer was possible. Original Question: "Is there a learning and development strategy/plan for central/federal public servants?"
Source: OECD (2022), Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability, Module 5 on Learning and Development

Many countries that do well at workforce learning and development often have comprehensive, well-designed systems that encompass the entire administrative workforce, promoting communication and best practices across departments and agencies. Collaborative networks, working groups, and communities of practice can help shape a shared culture, allowing ideas and approaches to extend beyond departmental boundaries.

In Slovakia's EU funds management system, fostering a learning culture requires a broader mix of training formats and content to support staff in adapting to changing requirements and processes. Different tools and practices are already in place, but their expansion varies, reflecting shifting priorities and resource constraints. A wider variety of learning opportunities, including digital training, peer-to-peer exchanges, and structured communities of practice, could help staff stay up to date with regulatory changes and emerging challenges. Cross-departmental collaboration and shared learning networks can also play a role in spreading best practices and improving overall system efficiency.

Figure 1.4. The use of various tools for L&D, 2022

Percentage of countries that responded to the survey question

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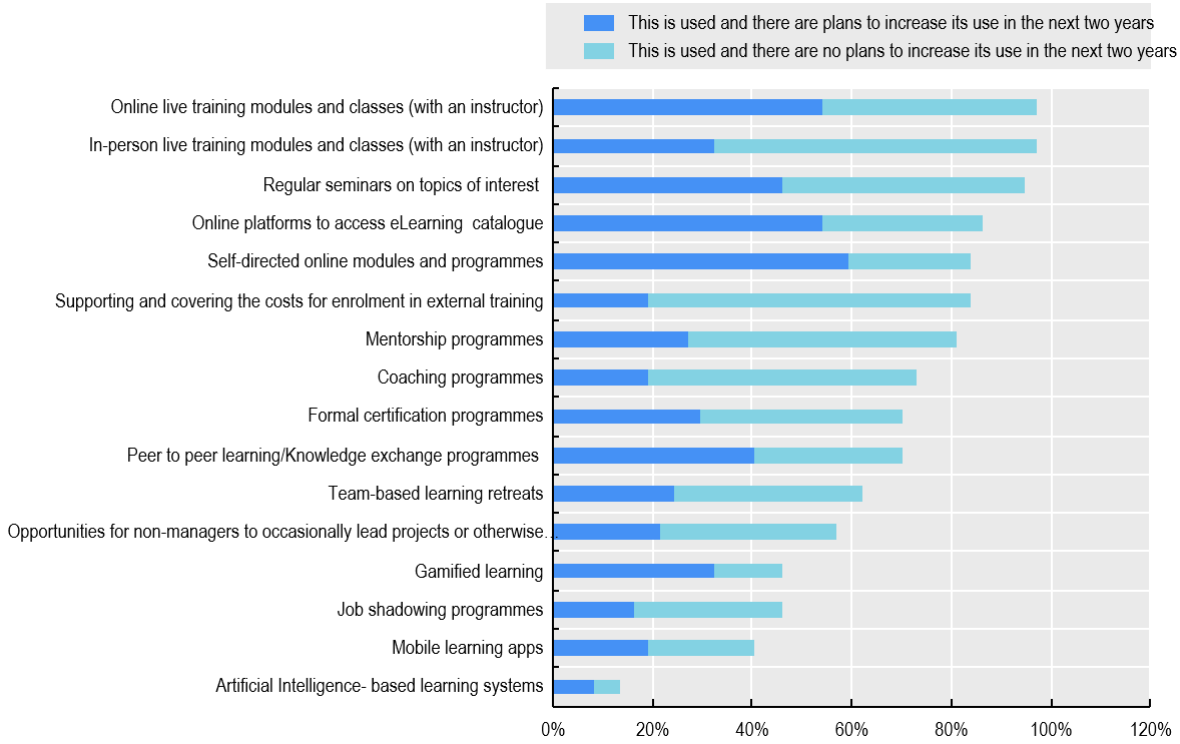

Note: N=37. Data for the United States not available. Original question: "Which of the following learning tools are used, or planned to be used in your public service?"
Source: OECD (2022), Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability, Module 5 on Learning and Development.

What are other countries doing?

- **Ireland:** The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) has centralised the administration of learning and development (L&D) courses common to 44 Civil Service Bodies (CSBs), providing standardised high quality training to approximately 42 500 Civil Servants nationwide. Key goals of this centralisation process was to make the administration of L&D more effective across Government and make training more accessible to all. Prior to the establishment of OneLearning, 44 Civil Service Bodies (CBSs) delivered their L&D programmes independently. There were no synergies and consistency, with CBSs doing their own procurement. This resulted in major inefficiencies and duplication across the Civil Service. This did not deliver value for money for the citizen and the Civil Service. In addition, there was no consistency of access to training for civil servants across Government.
- **Czechia** has recently worked with the OECD to review its workforce reform agenda. Similarly to Slovakia, the OECD recommends carrying out more in-depth and qualitative needs analysis across a variety of ministries and using the results to identify core skills and capability gaps; developing a competency framework for the Czech administration and using it to help develop a learning strategy; using the strategy to broaden the scope of learning opportunities, e.g. through piloting mobility programmes and developing governance arrangements for these; reducing duplication of training modules and sharpening quality control of the content.
- **Greece** (The Managing Authority for Transport 2021-2027) developed a targeted learning and development strategy for MA staff based on the results of a competency gap analysis carried out in conjunction with the OECD. The strategy was targeted at managers in the MA as well as operational staff. It comprised self-paced learning modules combined with workshops and peer learning opportunities.

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Final actions decided in January 2025

Please see Annex A for a Roadmap and timeline for implementation

3.1. Improve communication and coordination: Enhance communication and engagement between the Managing Authority and Intermediate Bodies, especially for introducing new regulations or updates. Determine key roles in coordinating learning and development, including agreement on what trainings should be centralised and how to divide efforts between the Managing Authority and the HR departments of the Intermediate Bodies. This should be done alongside of activity 2.1. "Establish coordination roles", above. Improved communication and coordination for learning and development could include holding interactive sessions and Q&A opportunities where updates are explained in-depth.

3.2. Map the current learning and development environment: Compile a list of the current learning and development providers and modules across the MCS. Assess the current environment for any duplication of efforts and identify best practices and/or key providers.

3.3. Prioritise and better target training content: Conduct a prioritisation workshop with the coordinating body from 2.1., above, to align on the key goals for learning and development. Create a strategy for implementing learning and development initiatives aligned to these key goals. This should include developing specialised training modules based on practical scenarios, rather than only offering general content. This approach can make the training more relevant and applicable to day-to-day challenges, particularly in managing EU fund regulations and processes.

3.4. Move toward flexible, on-demand training: More flexible, on-demand training options, including both in-person and online formats, to allow staff to revisit training materials and attend sessions at convenient times. To help new hires, a basic introductory module covering the entire system of fund management, followed by more specific training based on their roles.

Roadmap for Activities and Actions

This table is the finalised Roadmap for implementing the activities and actions developed by the Working Group on Human Resource Management. These actions were presented at the Advisory Group meeting on February 14. Subsequent engagement between the OECD, Slovakia and the European Commission will focus on monitoring progress on action implementation.

Activity 1 – Designing a methodology for effective workforce planning in IBs						
	Milestones	**Timeframe**	**Action owner**	**Other actors**	**Resources**	**Deliverables**
1.1. Map current state		3/2025	MIRDI, Administrative capacities department	IBs	Organisational structures, maps of processes	Managerial assessment

1.2. Design methodology		6/2025	MIRDI, Administrative capacities department	IBs	Managerial assessment, Historical data (ITMS), data provided by IBs, comparison of sources across IBs	Methodology
Activity 2 – Creating a strategy for coordination of workforce management between the MA and IBs						
2.1. Define coordination tasks	Contact the audit authority regarding the coordination approach Meeting on the Civil Service Act and the Public Service Act - mobility and inter-ministerial mobility options Meeting on the Civil Service Act and the Public Service Act - mobility and inter-ministerial mobility options Establish working group for administrative capacity MA, IB Establish working group for administrative capacity - regional subject (technical secretariats, sustainable	3/2025	MIRDI, Administrative capacities department	IBs (members of coordination committee for administrative capacities and technical assistance)	Public service law, Roadmap to administrative capacities	Outcome of the coordination committee meeting Recommendations on these topics Remuneration Mobility

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	urban developments)					
2.2. Prioritise key findings	Conduct prioritisation workshop	4/2025	MIRDI, Administrative capacities department	IBs (members of coordination committee for administrative capacities and technical assistance)	Public service law, Civil service job description	Impact analysis on legal framework (mobility) If agreed in Define Coordination Tasks section
2.3. Enhancing employee mobility	Establish or update staff mobility processes (if relevant) Develop guidance for staff sharing processes (if applicable) Amend Civil Service Law (if applicable)	9/2025	MIRDI, Administrative capacities department	IBs (members of coordination committee for administrative capacities and technical assistance)	Public service law, Civil service job description	Impact analysis on legal framework (mobility) If agreed in Define Coordination Tasks section
2.4 Create career paths	Conduct a workshop on the remuneration model Cooperation with universities - administrative capacities of the university (if applicable) Establish learning system - vertical mobility (if applicable) Establish learning	12/2025	MIRDI, Administrative capacities department	IBs (members of coordination committee for administrative capacities and technical assistance)	Central training plan, attributes of seniority	Draft of role-specific education plan Draft of seniorities levels for various positions

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	system - horizontal mobility (if applicable)					
2.5. Develop a draft summary document for the administrative capacities – Roadmap on administrative capacities building	Gather all existing documents related to the administrative capacities (if applicable) Draft update of the Roadmap on administrative capacities building (if applicable)	8/2026	MIRDI, Administrative capacities department	IBs (members of coordination committee for administrative capacities and technical assistance)	Administrative capacities documents/guidance	Draft update of the Roadmap on administrative capacities building
Activity 3 – Building an effective learning and development ecosystem						
3.1. Improve communication and coordination	Establish working group and/or communities of practice Determine key roles in coordinating learning and development, including agreement on what trainings should be centralised and how to divide efforts between the MA, IBs and Regional centres.	4/2025 9/2025	MIRDI, Administrative capacities department	IB contact points Regional Centres Representatives of Civil Society	Central training plan	Newsletter
3.2. Map current L&D environment	Compile a list of the current learning and development providers / systems	3/2025	MIRDI, Administrative capacities department	IB contact points Regional Centres	Workshops with contact points for all IBs and regional centres and representatives of civil society	Proposal of updates of central training plan (target groups, activities, forms)

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	Consider & Propose updates of Central training plan (target groups, activities, forms)			Representatives of Civil Society		
3.3. Prioritise and better target training content	Conduct a prioritisation workshops with Ibs, Regional centres and Representatives of Civil society to align on the key goals for learning and development. Propose specialised training modules for target group of newcomers. Propose updates in training modules for advanced	6/2025	MIRDI, Administrative capacities department	IB contact points Regional Centres Representatives of Civil Society	Central training plan Output of seminar with contact points and representatives of civil society and talks with lecturers	Proposal of new training content
3.4. Move toward flexible, on-demand training	Develop specialised training modules for target group of newcomers. Update training modules for advanced.	12/2025	MIRDI, Administrative capacities department	IB contact points Regional Centres Representatives of Civil Society	Draft on training system optimisation	New training content added to central training plan

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2 Action Plan component 2: Working Group on Public Procurement

This roadmap presents two key activities for better, more efficient public procurement in Slovakia in the context of Programme Slovakia. It expands on the ideas initially developed during a Padlet brainstorming session and builds on discussions from the first public procurement working group meeting held in Bratislava in June 2024, as well as the one organized online on December 3rd. It reflects on the insights and proposals generated in these sessions aiming to refine and further develop a collective approach. The roadmap has been updated in February 2025 to reflect the revised set of actions and timeline agreed following the Working Group meeting held in January 2025, in Bratislava.

This action plan outlines two key activities to enhance public procurement practices within the framework of European Union (EU) funds in Slovakia. Each activity is comprised of a set of concrete actions with associated timelines and milestones. These activities and actions are interconnected and designed to function as a cohesive strategy, where each component supports the others. Adopting a holistic approach is essential for sustainable improvements. Each step is intended to strengthen Slovakia's ability to manage EU funds by improving procurement processes, aligning them with EU standards, and ensuring transparency and accountability.

The Working Group on Public Procurement is encouraged to adopt a collaborative approach by engaging a wide array of stakeholders from across the EU funds ecosystem. This inclusive strategy, combined with a focus on data-driven insights, will help identify critical gaps in procurement practices and tailor solutions to meet Slovakia’s specific needs. Beginning with small-scale, manageable initiatives

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will enable Slovakia to refine its approach based on feedback and outcomes, providing a foundation for scalable, long-term progress in EU fund management under Programme Slovakia.

By strengthening public procurement within the EU funds framework, Slovakia can build a more transparent, efficient, and resilient system that ensures compliance with EU regulations. This focus on improving procurement methodologies, risk management, and capacity-building efforts is crucial for enhancing efficiency and reducing irregularities. Additionally, by prioritizing process improvements and aligning them with international standards, Slovakia can attract more competitive bids, foster innovation, and achieve better value for money in public procurement.

Improved procurement practices also ensure better resource allocation and risk management, allowing public institutions to operate more effectively. This enables Slovakia to meet EU fund management demands with greater agility, accountability, and impact. Together, these efforts contribute to a more robust and efficient public procurement system, maximizing the positive effects of EU investments and supporting Slovakia's long-term development goals.

Activity 1: Training and Capacity Building

Introduction

The public procurement workforce is a central element to a well-functioning public procurement system. As public procurement becomes increasingly complex, officials are expected to have not only knowledge and skills related to the legal framework and carrying out procedures, but also on topics such as risk management. Public procurement professionals must manage a range of overlapping risks, requiring rigorous and thoughtful application of mitigation measures and controls and a proactive approach to protecting the interests of the organisation and the public good. This requires knowledge of the different types of risk in public procurement and appropriate mitigation measures.

Public procurement processes in Slovakia are marked by high error rates and inefficiencies, with over 50–60% of procurement submissions to the Public Procurement Office (PPO) containing errors or missing critical information. These issues stem from insufficient knowledge among Intermediate Bodies (IBs) and beneficiaries about documentation requirements, risk analysis procedures, and ITMS functionalities. Additionally, the relatively new risk-based methodology requires stakeholders to adopt unfamiliar tools and practices, further complicating compliance.

The existing training efforts, while valuable, have been limited in scope and format. Workshops and video tutorials have provided some foundational understanding, but stakeholders report gaps in addressing practical challenges, such as filling out IRMAVO forms and interpreting risk indicators. Feedback mechanisms for refining training materials and approaches are also underutilized.

What does the data tell us?

Developing a procurement workforce that has the capacity to continuously deliver value for money is a priority for most OECD countries, who are largely investing in professionalisation initiatives, as demonstrated by the increasing share countries who introduce capacity-building measures. Respondents to the 2024 OECD Survey on Public Procurement have indicated that they employ a combination of capacity-building tools to support officials who carry out public procurement procedures. These initiatives can help ensure procurement officials meet high professional standards for knowledge, practical implementation skills, and integrity. Most Respondents provide methodological assistance through guidelines and manuals (39 out of 40, or 98%), help desks (33 out of 40, or 83%), standard templates (32 out of 40, or 80%), and a list of frequently asked questions (28 out of 40, or 70%). Training courses are offered by 98% of Respondents (39 out of 40), and cover legislation, e-procurement, procurement planning, contract award criteria, innovation procurement, green procurement, socially

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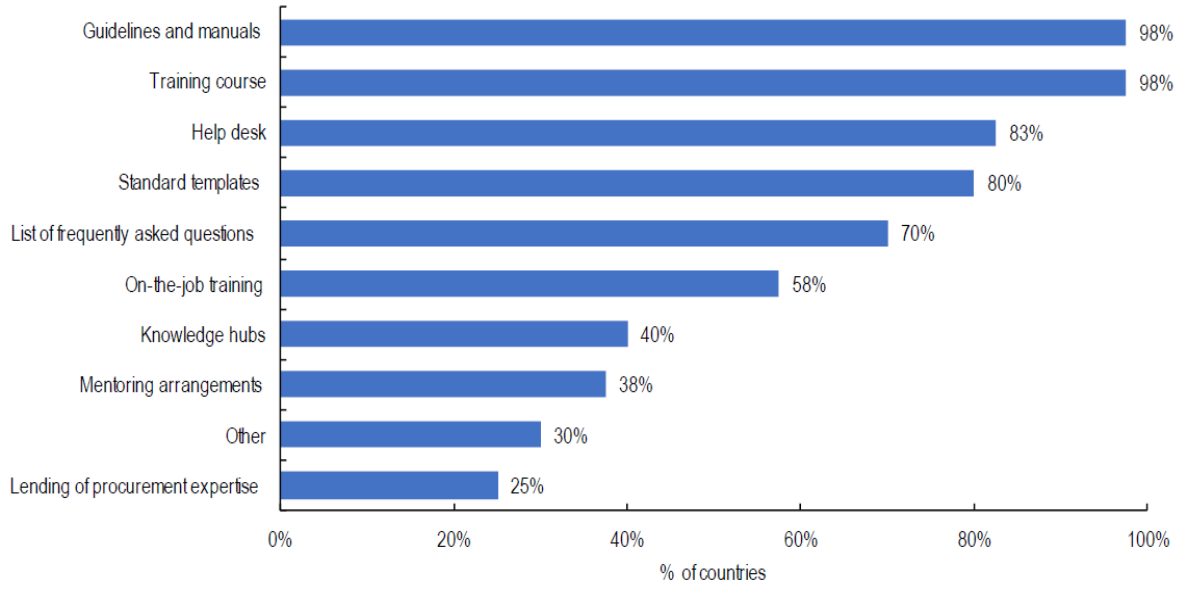
responsible procurement in more than 80% of cases. Practical training initiatives are less common. Just over half of Respondents (23 out of 40, or 58%) offer on-the-job training, and fewer than half use knowledge hubs (40% or 16 Respondents) and mentoring arrangements (38% or 15 Respondents) and lend procurement expertise to assist contracting authorities in carrying out specific procurement procedures (25% or 10 Respondents).

Figure 2.1. Capacity-building initiatives to support public procurement officials, 2024



Note: Data is shown for 40 Respondents.
Source: OECD (2024), Survey on Public Procurement.

Under the context of ESIF-funded projects, capacity of key actors (including intermediate bodies and beneficiaries) regarding public procurement is considered critical not only for speeding up the absorption of ESIF funds through the smooth implementation of public procurement processes but also for avoiding any mistakes and mitigating risks that might lead to irregularities and potential cancellation procurement processes. Indeed, investing in procurement capacity-building will help improve the overall ESIF management system, which eventually contributes to optimising the absorption rate, minimising irregularities, and maximising impact and sustainability.

In Slovakia, capacity-building efforts could help tackle the high error rates in procurement submissions (50-60% incomplete). The trainings should particularly focus on IBs and beneficiaries, are they are the key links in the risk management framework. As such, to create a risk management culture and to reinforce the capacity of the public procurement workforce, several and different types of tools should be used, as public procurement risk management activities follow a specific methodology that requires technical knowledge in both risk management and public procurement. Such capacity-building tools can include:

- Schedule of face-to-face training courses and awareness sessions on public procurement risk management, documentation requirements, and ITMS functionalities;
- E-learning modules (videos and training materials);
- Guidelines and manuals, Q&As and best practice sheets;
- Standardised templates;
- Help desk;

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- Registration for periodic newsletter to keep practitioners informed on the recent update such as the legal change, newly-developed guidelines, events etc.

What are other countries doing?

- **Lithuania:** The OECD collaborated with Lithuania's government to develop a certification framework and professionalisation strategy for public procurement. After consulting with key stakeholders, including the Ministry of the Economy and Innovation (MoEI) and the Public Procurement Office (PPO), the OECD proposed a certification course covering 19 procurement topics, totalling 60 hours with 3.5 hours of courses on integrity and risk management. The tools proposed by the OECD included e-learning, degree programmes, self-support tools (manuals, guidelines and standardised templates), a one-stop shop procurement portal for the community of practice, and practical training (on-the-job training, job-swapping, mentorship and internship programmes).
- **Croatia:** The Central Finance and Contracting Agency (CFCA), a level 2 intermediate body, was established in 2007 as one of the bodies in the system that controls the implementation of EU projects in Croatia. Beyond its control duties, one of CFCA's key objectives is to disseminate knowledge in the process of managing projects financed by the European Union, through training of employees of key partners and beneficiaries. By the end of 2023, CFCA had held over 160 training courses for beneficiaries on a wide-array of topics such as the implementation of grant agreements, visibility, project information and communication, preparation of tender documentation, implementation of public procurement procedures for contracting authorities that are or are not subject to the Public Procurement Act, financial project management, management of irregularities, etc.
- **Bulgaria:** The Managing Authority for the Programme "Development of the Regions" conducted several actions for stakeholder engagement, including a beneficiary survey, focus group consultations, and a multi-stakeholder workshop. Notably, the multi-stakeholder workshop gathered over 160 participants from different MAs, IBs, and beneficiaries to discuss strategic planning of Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) strategies, development and selection of ITI, as well as monitoring and evaluation. It also generated knowledge and insights regarding needs in capacity building and beneficiary support for implementing the PDR 2021-2027.

Final actions decided in January 2025

Please see Annex A for a Roadmap and timeline for implementation

To address identified challenges, the working group will design a robust training and capacity-building program tailored to the needs of IBs and beneficiaries. Training will focus on building proficiency in risk assessment, ITMS usage, and accurate documentation submission. Efforts will also include the development of audiovisual resources, such as video tutorials, and a centralized Q&A repository to address recurring questions and improve accessibility.

Workshops and interactive sessions will provide hands-on experience, and feedback from participants will be used to refine training materials over time. By the end of July 2025, the aim is to reduce error rates in procurement submissions and ensure that stakeholders are equipped to implement the risk-based methodology effectively.

3. The first activity focuses **on equipping stakeholders—notably IBs and beneficiaries—with the skills and tools required to implement the risk-based methodology effectively**. **Training needs assessments** will be conducted to identify specific gaps in knowledge and areas for improvement. These assessments will inform the development of tailored training programs for different stakeholder groups.

- For IBs, training will focus on applying the risk-based methodology, understanding risk indicators, filling the risk analysis form, and using ITMS for accurate control submission.
- Beneficiaries will receive training to improve their understanding of submission requirements, documentation accuracy, and compliance with public procurement processes.

4. A **centralized Q&A repository** will also be established to address recurring issues, providing stakeholders with an accessible resource to clarify doubts and prevent common errors. This repository will be updated regularly based on stakeholder queries.
5. **Monitoring and feedback mechanisms** will be implemented to measure the effectiveness of training sessions, with participant surveys and data on error reduction used to refine training materials and methods over time.

Activity 2: Refining the Risk-Based Methodology

Introduction

More complex procurement strategies, leveraged to support multiple policy objectives and respond to the challenges of the current poly-crisis environment, bring additional risks which can have significant consequences on the quality, quantity, and timeliness of public services. These can range from risks to the procurement process itself to broader risks to project or service delivery.

Slovakia's risk-based methodology for public procurement has shown promise in streamlining controls and prioritizing high-risk procedures. However, several challenges hinder its effectiveness. Key issues include misaligned risk indicators—such as low-value contracts incorrectly flagged as low-risk—and inconsistencies in the weighting of risk factors. The methodology also lacks a formal validation process, which is essential to confirm its accuracy and identify areas for refinement.

Furthermore, the ITMS system, which is integral to managing procurement data, faces technical limitations that contribute to inefficiencies. Beneficiaries often submit incomplete or inconsistent documentation, leading to significant back-and-forth communication between stakeholders. Without standardized forms or automated checks, the system struggles to ensure uniformity in submissions, hampering its ability to support effective controls.

What does the data tell us?

In recent years, OECD countries have widened their focus from integrity-related threats to other risks to public procurement outcomes, including information technology, financial, reputational, social, and environmental risks. For example, supply chain risks are an increasingly prominent concern for public buyers. While supply chain globalisation and specialisation has generated productivity gains and lowered production prices, it has also increased public buyers' exposure to supply chain risks such as extreme weather events, cyberattacks, and supplier disruptions.

The development of dedicated procurement risk management strategies remains an emerging practice among respondents to the 2024 OECD Survey on Public Procurement. Only 30% of the Respondents (12 out of 40) have developed a strategy specifically for managing public procurement risks. A few other Respondents have instead integrated public procurement into a broader risk management strategy (28% or 11 out of 40).

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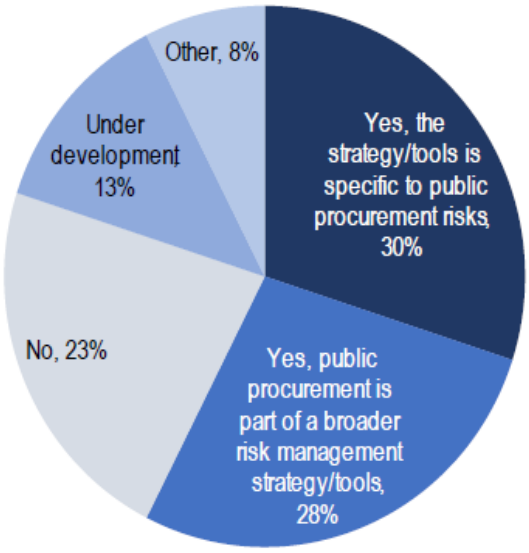
Figure 2.2. Strategy for the management of public procurement risks, 2024



Note: Data is shown for 40 Respondents.
Source: OECD (2024), Survey on Public Procurement

Having a dedicated risk management strategy can help ensure the implementation of a coherent and streamlined risk management approach and strengthen the resilience and efficiency of the procurement system. It can also help to instill a risk management culture in public procurement and to inform the design and implementation of other critical policies, such as integrity and anti-corruption processes. Moreover, the major risks factors addressed in these strategies include compliance risks, economic and contextual risks as well as operational risks.

Slovakia identified several risk factors in its Individual Procurement Risk Analysis Model for Public Procurement ('IMARVO'). These risk factors are mostly based on historical data analysis, considering irregularities, unauthorized expenses, procurement cancellations, fines by the Public Procurement Office, media reports, and suspicions of fraud or corruption. However, the current risks factors are sometimes misaligned. The review of the methodology and its risk factors, as well as improvements to the ITMS system, have the potential to greatly improve the prioritization of high-risk processes based on better data accuracy and submission processes.

What are other countries doing?

- **Portugal:** The OECD supported the Portuguese Court of Auditors (Tribunal de Contas or TdC) in developing a risk assessment methodology for its audit selection for public procurement that relies on data, advanced analytics, and artificial intelligence. At the core of this initiative was the need to map risks and data sources, examine the digital maturity of the TdC to conduct such work, and assess the quality of potential databases that could be used for building a new risk methodology. This work was a precursor to the next phase of the project, which involved developing a proof-of-concept for a data-driven model for the TdC to assess risks in public procurement.
- **Sweden:** Adda, the central purchasing body for Swedish municipalities, developed a sustainable public procurement risk assessment template to identify related risks, evaluate suppliers, and prioritise based on risk and performance. The tool is designed for use by both contracting authorities and suppliers to assess risks within their supply chains. The template

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consists of an Excel spread sheet that includes a country risk assessment. While it does not require an in-depth risk assessment, it allows users to understand overall the risks and generate a total risk score. The score, ranging from 1 to 10, considers factors such as country-specific risks, as well as child labour reports, high level of informal employment, and other high-risk indicators. A score of 4 or higher makes it necessary for the contracting authority to require the supplier to fulfil the contract in accordance with ILO core conventions, if Swedish labour law is not applicable. Access to information is crucial to conduct the assessment, and many free resources are available. The guidance includes a list of sources that can be used, including general, human rights, workers' rights, environmental, and vulnerable group-specific resources, together with links to global unions.

- **Greece** has recently worked with the OECD to develop a public procurement risk registry. The risk registry is intended to be used as a reference by public procurement policy makers and practitioners to guide the development of risk management strategies and the implementation of mitigation measures. The registry is organised by stages of the public procurement lifecycle, first by main phase (pre-tender, tendering, post-tender) and then by detailed stage. It focuses on risks related to corruption and fraud, but covers all public procurement risks. The registry also includes information regarding risks identified by Greek entities and the OECD, and classifies the risk, mentions its potential root cause, and suggests potential mitigation measures (focusing on corruption and fraud). The public procurement risk registry is expected to be regularly updated in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders
- **Romania:** The Romanian government issued Government Decision no.599/2018 requiring central public authorities and institutions to develop a corruption risks registry and an integrity incident registry. The Decision provides a methodology for evaluating and managing corruption risks and a standard procedure for evaluating integrity incidents. It also includes annexes with corruption risk and incidents registry templates and guides on how to complete them. In addition, ANAP. the National Public Procurement Agency, has developed a series of tools and supports related to public procurement risk management. The most prominent and comprehensive is the Online Public Procurement Guide, which was developed to provide operational support to practitioners involved in the national public procurement system and covers all stages of the public procurement process. The Online Public Procurement Guide includes specific guidance on risk management, outlining the need to ensure the review of risks at all stages of the procurement process, from planning to contract implementation, a risk registry with examples of risks throughout the procurement process.

Final actions decided in January 2025

Please see Annex A for a Roadmap and timeline for implementation

The working group will focus on validating and refining the risk-based methodology to address these challenges. Validation efforts, planned for Q1/Q2 2025, will involve analysing a representative sample of public procurement cases to assess the methodology's effectiveness. Based on the findings, risk indicators will be reviewed and updated to align with actual risk profiles.

To support these improvements, ITMS will be upgraded to include standardized submission forms, automated validation features, and enhanced data tracking capabilities. Quarterly coordination meetings between MIRRI, PPO, and IBs will ensure that feedback from real-world applications informs the refinement process. By the end of July 2025, these efforts shall result in a streamlined and validated methodology that enhances Slovakia's public procurement system.

1. **The methodology will be evaluated** using a representative sample of 100 procurement cases, both flagged and unflagged for PPO control, to assess its effectiveness in identifying high-risk

procedures. This validation process, planned for Q1/Q2 2025, will provide critical insights into potential gaps or misalignments in the current approach.

2. **Risk indicators will also be reviewed** and updated based on validation findings. Adjustments to the weighting of indicators will ensure a more balanced assessment of procurement risks. Specific proposals for updating or modifying the risk-oriented approach methodology will be formulated.
3. **ITMS functionalities will be enhanced and leveraged** to support these methodological refinements. Updates will include the introduction of standardized forms to reduce inconsistencies in data submission, automated validation checks to flag incomplete or incorrect data, and a centralized database for tracking procurement controls and risk analyses. These new functionalities will be explained and promoted to the stakeholders.
4. To ensure continuous improvement, **quarterly coordination meetings** will be held with representatives from MIRRI, PPO, and IBs. These meetings will provide a platform for sharing insights, discussing validation findings, and adjusting processes based on feedback. Collaborative efforts will ensure that the methodology remains effective and aligned with the evolving needs of public procurement in Slovakia.

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Annex A. Roadmap for activities and actions

Activity	Associated Milestones	Timeframe	Action Owner	Relevant Actors	Resources required	Deliverables
Activity 1: Training and Capacity Building	Assessment of training needs and designed of targeted training programs	February–March 2025 Planned educational activities in the regions. 20.2.2025 – Trnava 21.2.2025 - Nitra 11.3.2025 -Trenčín 13.3.2025 - Košice 14.3.2025 – Prešov 20.3.2025 - Žilina 21.3.2025 – Banská Bystrica	MIRRI, PPO	MIRRI, PPO, IBs, beneficiaries	Surveys, past training records, existing methodologies and guidelines on public procurement	Short summary of the training assessment
	Roll-out tailored capacity building activities for IBs and beneficiaries	March 2025 and ongoing	MIRRI	MIRRI, IBs, Beneficiaries, central training coordination body	Ministry website, web platform	Training materials and recording
	Establish a centralized Q&A portal	February – April 2025	MIRRI, PPO	MIRRI, ITMS Development Team	ITMS system, ministry website	Q&A webpage
	Conduct evaluations of training impact	June 2025 and ongoing	MIRRI	MIRRI, PPO, IBs, beneficiaries	Training feedback reports, data from webpage of the Ministry	Short document, such as excel table with the number of viewers, number of attendees to the trainings
Activity 2: Refinement of the Risk-Based Methodology	Discuss the sample for the review of the methodology	March–June 2025	MIRRI	MIRRI, PPO	Case review tools, historical procurement data	List of samples
	Revise risk indicators and discuss potential updates/modification of the methodology	June -July 2025	MIRRI,	MIRRI, PPO	Feedback from validation, risk analysis reports	Report with recommendations

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	Promote ITMS new functionalities among stakeholders	February–June 2025	MIRRI, PPO	MIRRI, ITMS Development Team	ITMS, technical expertise	Communication about new ITMS system, and short guide on how to use it properly
	Collaboration and meetings among stakeholders to share insights	February–July 2025	MIRRI	MIRRI, PPO, IBs, Beneficiaries	Writing support, stakeholder consultations, meetings	Summary of the meetings

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3 Action Plan component 3: Working Group on Strategic Programming, Project Preparation and Beneficiary Relations

This component of the action plan presents four key activities to reinforce an integrated, place-based, and beneficiary-oriented approach to the design and implementation of Programme Slovakia. These ideas are initially developed based on an OECD diagnosis, a Padlet brainstorming session, and builds on discussions with the Working Group on Strategic Programming, Project Preparation and Beneficiary Relations in June and December 2024. The roadmap was updated in February 2025 to reflect the revised set of actions and timeline agreed following the Working Group meeting held in January 2025, in Bratislava.

This action plan outlines four key activities to enhance the programming and implementation of Programme Slovakia. Each of these is comprised of a set of concrete actions with associated timelines and milestones. Some actions are designed for medium- or long-term implementation, and thus are beyond the scope of the current Technical Support Instrument project. The proposed activities and actions are interconnected and intended to function as a cohesive whole, with each action reinforcing the others. Each step is designed to support Slovakia's efforts to improve the use of EU Cohesion Policy funds by reinforcing an integrated, place-based, and beneficiary-oriented approach to Programme design and implementation.

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Previous diagnoses and discussions within this project highlighted the strongly sector-driven approach to investment design and implementation in Slovakia, which results in a proliferation of investment priorities and calls and poses a large coordination challenge. Resources are stretched thin, and thus face difficulty in effectively contributing to long-term policy goals (OECD, 2024 Unpublished[1]). Specifically, stakeholders have highlighted the lack of an effective and evidence-based prioritisation methodology, the low quality of cross-sector and multi-level coordination in investment prioritisation and design, and a lack of systematic and effective beneficiary communication and engagement practices throughout the Programme cycle (Padlet, 2024[2]; Working Group meetings, 2024[3]).

The Government of Slovakia is strongly focused on establishing a long-term vision to guide and enable integrated and place-based investment for national and regional development. Doing so can help line ministries and regions optimise their investment efforts by supporting more coordinated action when designing and implementing initiatives to drive long-term development. Slovakia is developing its long-term national investment plan and has established various coordination mechanisms for EU Cohesion Policy fund implementation (OECD, 2024 Unpublished[1]). It also aims to develop a short pipeline of strategic projects for the next programming period (2028-2034) to improve investment readiness and absorption.

At the same time, Slovakia should continue to take action on planning and implementation issues immediately at hand. This action plan focuses on short- and medium-term actions that the Working Group on Strategic Programming, Project Preparation and Beneficiary Relations can implement within the scope of the current Cohesion Policy programming period and to help Slovakia better prepare for the next. At the same time, the actions presented here can also help advance longer-term efforts and the overall objective of adopting a place-based and integrated approach for investing EU Cohesion Policy funds in Slovakia.

The Working Group is encouraged to adopt an inclusive and collaborative approach by engaging a wide array of stakeholders from across the EU fund ecosystem. This includes actors within the Management and Control System (e.g., the MA, IBs, audit authority, certifying and payment functions, etc.), and beyond – such as beneficiaries and policy makers that influence EU fund investment. The Working Group is also encouraged to start with small-scale, manageable initiatives that will allow Slovakia to refine its approach based on feedback and outcomes, building a foundation for scalable, long-term progress in EU fund management under Programme Slovakia.

Activity 1: Enhance evidence-based cross-sectoral investments prioritisation and coordination

Introduction

Slovakia needs to strengthen its integrated investment approach across sectors and among all levels of government. The programming approach of Programme Slovakia 2021-27 remains sector driven, despite the creation of a single programme managed by a single MA. When identifying priorities and measures for Programme Slovakia, sectoral requirements and priorities were often given precedence over long-term national and regional development needs (Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, 2023[4]). Line ministries have their own methodologies for prioritising investments to be funded by Programme Slovakia. Under the assumption that line ministries possess the greatest expertise in their respective sectors, it is often considered nearly impossible for MIRRI or the Government Office to alter and thus standardise these established methodologies for setting investment priorities (Working Group meetings, 2024[3]).

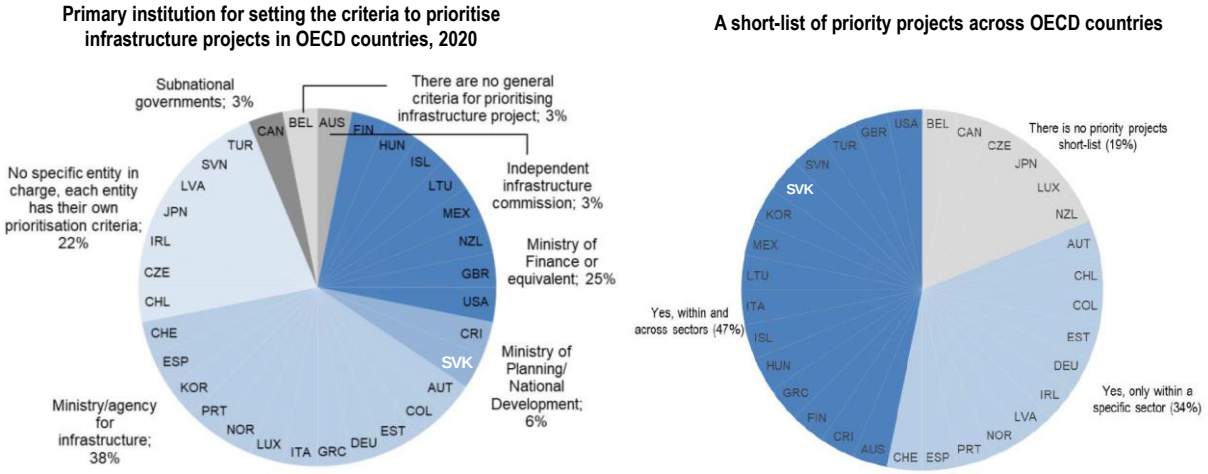
At the same time, stakeholders emphasised that line ministries and regions face challenges in effectively using data to help define investment priorities. This is primarily due to the lack of a clear methodology or structured process for them to analyse data and apply the results to support decision-making. For

example, while some regions delve deeply into the data to generate meaningful insights, others may simply cite figures without thorough analysis. Furthermore, some stakeholders noted difficulties in accessing relevant data – either the data do not exist, or they cannot be easily accessed. For example, stakeholders observed that, when designing investment plans, regions do not consistently use the same datasets or may employ the data in different ways (Working Group meetings, 2024[3]).

What does the data tell us?

Slovakia has made significant progress in improving planning and prioritisation for public investment in general (OECD, 2024[5]). Since 2021, all ministries with annual public investment levels above EUR 20 million must publish five-year (or more) investment plans to identify prioritised investments based on a standardised methodology (OECD, 2024[5]). Most OECD countries – including Slovakia – have used various mechanisms to prioritise public infrastructure investment and have developed a short list of priority projects (Figure 3.1). The Slovakia government is developing the national investment plan, which outlines the country's vision for public investment and will identify a list of strategic projects. It has the potential to be used for guiding programming post-2027.

Figure 3.1. Most OECD countries have mechanisms to prioritise investment and have a list of pipeline projects



Note: Data for Denmark, France, Israel, Netherlands, Poland and Sweden are not available. The 2020 data for Belgium are based on the responses from Flanders only.
Source: (OECD, 2022[6]), adapted from (OECD, 2024[7]).

However, these mechanisms have not yet yielded results in improving integrated investment under Programme Slovakia. First, the quality of the general sectoral investment prioritisation plans varies, and they currently have different formats; some do not manage to identify the most important projects, others insufficiently cover all relevant types of investments (OECD, 2024[5]; Ministry of Finance, 2023[8]). Second, it remains unclear how IBs and the MA discuss and agree upon on the priorities and measures to be supported under Programme Slovakia, and how they coordinate their sectoral plans and priorities to ensure synergies within the Programme. Third, while line ministries are required to prioritise investment based on the standard methodology, this does not apply to the subnational level, even though subnational governments account for 29% of total public investment in Slovakia (OECD, 2023[9]). Slovakia could benefit from a specific framework and tool for the use of EU Cohesion Policy funds to strengthen its integrated approach for EU-funded investment programming, so that it can cascade down to implementation and lead to integrated call design and project selection.

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What are other countries doing?

- **Australia:** Infrastructure Australia undertakes independent assessments of infrastructure projects and initiatives on behalf of the Federal Government. It has an Assessment Framework that guides on how to identify nationally significant problems and opportunities, and how to consider strategic merit, value for taxpayers and deliverability. The framework has three broad criteria – strategic fit, societal impact, and deliverability; each criterion has a set of themes and consideration. The assessment results are released in the form of Infrastructure Priority Lists (Infrastructure Australia, 2021[10]).
- **Chile:** The Chilean National Investment System brings together the methodologies, standards, and procedures that guide the formulation, execution, and evaluation of investment initiatives that apply for public funds. The National Investment System is jointly managed by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Social Development and Family. It composed of four subsystems (Ministry of Social Development and Family, 2024[11]; OECD, Forthcoming[12]):
    - **Ex Ante Evaluation Subsystem**: Set of norms, instructions, and procedures that allow public institutions to have a portfolio of socially profitable investment initiatives that can be executed (with a result of the technical-economic analysis with a Satisfactory Recommendation granted by the Ministry of Social Development and Family). The Social Investment Evaluation Division (DESI) lead this process at the national level and the Regional Ministerial Secretariats of Social Development and Family at the regional level.
    - **Ex Post Evaluation Subsystem:** Analysis of the results achieved once the project begins operation or is completed or, to measure the degree of compliance with the effectiveness and efficiency in the use of public investment resources. The processes are coordinated by the Social Investment Evaluation Division, with the support of regional investment teams in the Regional Ministerial Secretariats of Social Development and Family
    - **Budget Formulation Subsystem:** Allocation of financial resources to sectoral, regional, and State Enterprise projects, led by the Ministry of Finance. Its function is to standardise, regulate, and coordinate information related to the fund allocation processes.
    - **Budget Execution Subsystem:** Regulation and supervision of public expenditure execution and its respective financing. It is carried out through the Public Sector Budget Law and the complementary instructions from the Ministry of Finance.
- **Czechia:** In late 2020, Czechia adopted the Territorial Agenda 2030 and joined the European Commission's pilot action "Understanding How Sector Policies Shape Spatial (Im)balance", focusing on Territorial Impact Assessment for its EU Cohesion Policy programmes. (Ministry of Regional Development of Czhecia, n.d.[13]). On the project level, a new methodology was developed by the Czech Ministry of Regional Development together with experts in regional development. In 2021, several workshops were organised for local, regional and national actors to explain the benefits of this methodology and ex ante project assessment in general. A specific website (http://www.tiammr.cz) has also been established as a virtual space gathering all key information about Territorial Impact Assessment in Czechia (Květoň and Nosek, 2024[14]).

Final action decided

Please see Annex 3.A for a roadmap and timeline for implementation.

Develop a multi-criteria prioritisation framework to help assess investment priorities. The framework would aim to ensure that investment priorities identified by IBs 1) align with EU priorities,

national cross-cutting and sectoral strategies; 2) could have potential regional development impact (e.g., addressing territorial disparities); and 3) are administratively and technically feasible in the given time frame (e.g., project readiness and institutional capacity).

Activity 2: Develop a Roadmap for enhancing project preparation and beneficiary support

Introduction

Slovakia has placed a strong emphasis on building beneficiary capacity in project planning and preparation, which is a key bottleneck to efficient public investment in the country (OECD, 2020[15]). The 2024 OECD Economic Survey for Slovakia identified that the low level of investment and slow absorption of EU funds largely reflects deficiencies in project planning and preparation. Due to a lack of well-prepared projects, about EUR 1 billion in EU structural funds from the 2014-2020 programming period were re-allocated to finance measures to mitigate the energy crisis in 2023 (OECD, 2024[5]).

A lack of support to beneficiaries for project preparation is a longstanding issue. Slovakia does not have a large number of well-prepared projects in its pipeline that could address investment priorities stemming from the national, regional, and local strategic documents, and which would be sufficiently advanced for funding at the time a call launches. Potential beneficiaries have a short time to prepare their project proposals to respond to calls, which leads to a low quality of applications, or reduces interest of potential beneficiaries. In particular, regional and local authorities often lack the necessary administrative and financial capacity for high quality project preparation, which could hinder the implementation of the Programme Slovakia. The OECD Economic Survey recommends that Slovakia strengthen project preparation and implementation capacity at the line ministry and subnational government levels via targeted training (OECD, 2024[5]). This aligns with the opinions of stakeholders interviewed and the white paper issued by the Slovakia Government – *A Guide to Successful Slovakia: 15 years of (un)used European funds?* (Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, 2023[4]).

What does the data tell us?

Building the capacity of subnational governments in preparing investment projects is critical, as they are key investment actors, accounting for about 55% of total public investment on average in OECD countries (OECD, 2024[16]). Meanwhile, many face significant challenges in preparing investment projects. An OECD-Committee of the Regions survey found that around two-thirds of subnational governments reported failures in taking the full life cycle of infrastructure investment into account when designing projects (OECD-CoR, 2015[17]).

However, capacity building is often weaker when it comes to developing expertise specifically for subnational public investments. In a 2024 OECD survey on the implementation of the OECD Recommendation on Effective Public Investment across Levels of Government, 17 out of 29 responding Adherent countries reported that training courses related to public investment management are available for subnational public officials (Figure 3.2). However, only 11 declared having technical assistance programmes for project appraisal, and only 7 have guidance documents on project appraisal standards and methodologies. In the same spirit, very few Adherents (8) dedicate special financial resources for the planning and preparation of subnational investments (OECD, Forthcoming[18]).

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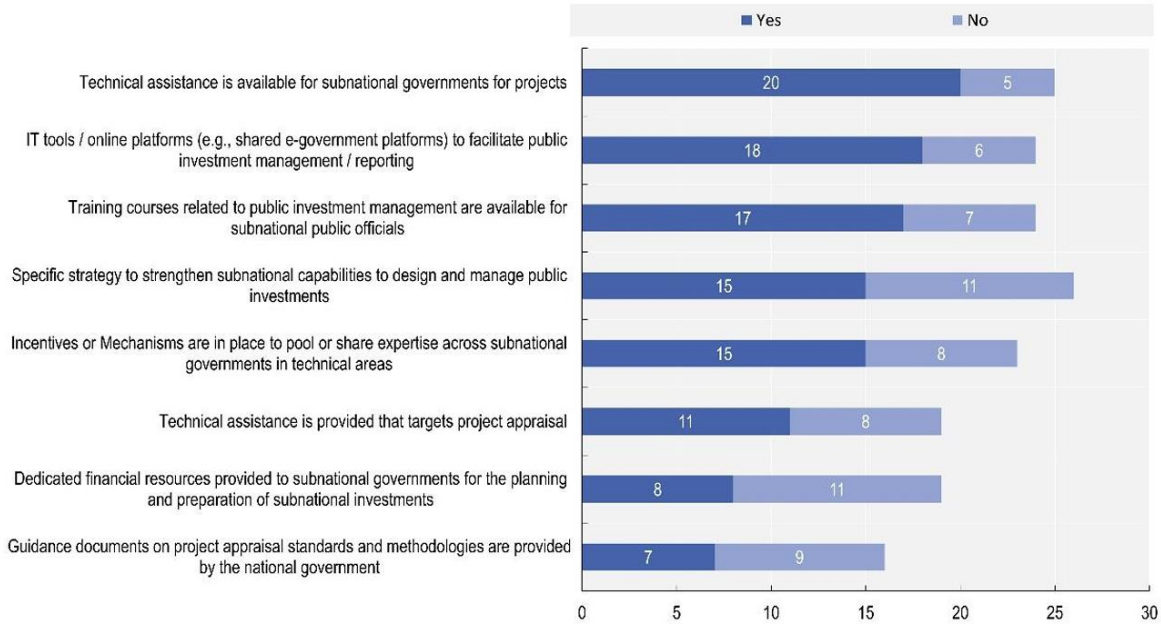
Figure 3.2. Mechanisms used to reinforce subnational public institution capacities for public investment

Which tools / mechanism(s) are implemented by your national government to reinforce the skills and capacities of subnational public officials and institutions to better support public investment for regional development? (The implementation of Principle 7 of OECD Recommendation on Public Investment across Levels of Government)



Note: Total respondents: 29.
Source: (OECD, Forthcoming[18]) OECD 2024 Survey on the Implementation of the Recommendation of Effective Public Investment Across Levels of Government

What are other countries doing?

Examples of developing capacity building roadmap

- **OECD-EC pilot project on beneficiary capacity building**. The OECD supported six regional, national, and Interreg MAs across EU (Portugal, Poland, Romania, Italy, France, Danube Region) to launch beneficiary surveys to identify specific challenges faced by beneficiaries in preparing and implementing projects. The six surveys collected over 1000 responses. The surveys are complemented with a series of focus group consultation with beneficiaries. The information gathered through these exercises provided critical insights for the development of the action plans for these MAs.
- **Portugal** developed its national Capacity Building Roadmap for EU fund implementation in three stages: 1) needs assessment (e.g., nine focus group meetings and two webinars and a workshop); 2) capacity building strategy (identifying a set of needs and specific objectives); and 3) action plan development (defining 6 projects and multiple actions) (AD&C, n.d.[19]). Portugal's national Administrative Capacity Building Roadmap is led by the National Coordination Body. once launched, also serves as a basis for other actions, such as a European funds week, capacity-building workshops for media and political actors on the funds (AD&C, n.d.[19]; Gal, Van der Valk and Bachtler, 2023[20])

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- **Australia:** Infrastructure Australia develops the National Guidelines for Infrastructure Project Delivery to promote cross-government consistency and the use of best practice approaches covering traditional contracting, alliance contracting and PPPs, among others (OECD, Forthcoming[18]; Infrastructure Australia, n.d.[21]).
- **France:** the *Agence nationale de la cohésion des territoires* (ANCT) is placed under the authority of the ministers responsible for regional planning, local authorities and urban policy, with administrative supervision provided by the Ministry of Interior. Its mission is to advise and support local authorities and their associations in the design, definition and implementation of their public investment projects. The ANCT facilitates local authority access to the resources they need to bring their projects to fruition: technical and financial engineering, partnerships, subsidies. In particular, it has developed "tailor-made engineering", a free service for municipalities with fewer than 3 500 inhabitants and EPCIs with fewer than 15 000 inhabitants, designed to help local authorities bring their projects to fruition by providing technical and financial support tailored to their specific needs (ANCT, 2021[22]; OECD, Forthcoming[18])
- **Greece**: to assist weaker beneficiaries, the Greek Management and Organisation Unit had dedicated expert teams in the 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy programming period, also known as "flying consultants". The task for these consultants was to provide support on a permanent basis to beneficiaries in remote and island areas, since these types of beneficiaries often lack in-house technical services (Gal, Van der Valk and Bachtler, 2023[20]).
- **Latvia**: the Central Finance and Contracting Agency has developed an online tool to support public authorities, notably subnational authorities, to distribute project risks between public and private partners involved in infrastructure projects. The tool categorised 16 potential risks in five types of infrastructure investment (social housing, schools and kindergartens, hospital, sports and rehabilitation complex, and street lighting). Through the online tool, local authorities can obtain an automatic assessment of their projects, and the tool will generate a structure of the risk section of the project contract, depending on the risks that are relevant for a particular project. This tool also contains an indicative, but not exhaustive, list of key risks that PPP projects usually take into account and their typical contractual arrangement, which can be used as a starting point to understand the risk-sharing issues that typically arise in PPP projects (CFLA, 2021[23])
- **Poland:** The Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy launched created the Centre for Advisory Support (*Centrum Wsparcia Doradczego*, CWD). The CWD focuses on strengthening the institutional capacity of local authorities to participate in strategic development activities, including designing, planning and managing infrastructure projects in areas of strategic intervention. It also helps build capacity and strengthen the territorial approach to investment by helping build cross-jurisdiction partnerships with other ASI communes and with non-public socio-economic partners, such as civil society organizations in order to tackle local development challenges and advance the competitive advantage of working in partnerships) (OECD, 2023[24]).
- **New Zealand**: The Infrastructure Commission provides procurement and delivery support, from preparing a business case to market engagement, procurement, negotiation and/or project delivery, including, where appropriate, providing embedded commercial and procurement expertise; and good practice guidance. It tailors its support according to the project size, complexity, risk level and procurement capability (OECD, n.d.[25]).

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Final action decided

1. **Develop evidence-based analysis of the specific project preparation obstacles to feed into an update of the roadmap at a later stage.** The analysis can include the challenges faced by different groups of beneficiaries (e.g., line ministries and state agencies, regions, municipalities) and across different sectors. This analysis could provide information on, for example, which steps in project preparation cause the most and how these issues manifest across different types of projects and beneficiaries.
2. **Develop a roadmap for enhancing project preparation and beneficiary support based on broad stakeholder inputs.** The development could include reviewing existing information, direct dialogue (e.g., focus group meetings, multi-stakeholder workshop) with relevant stakeholders to gather their ideas for action, and/or for them to validate the actions in the roadmap to build ownership.
3. **Launch and publish the Roadmap and monitor its implementation.** The Working Group can launch and publish the Roadmap for a wider public. This would help increase its visibility and accountability – the Working Group and other actors can keep track of the implementation of the various actions in the Roadmap.

Activity 3: Launch a pilot call for Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI)

Introduction

While Programme Slovakia has adopted the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) approach, its implementation faces several obstacles, the largest of which is the coordination between IBs and regions when launching ITI calls. Working Group members suggested piloting an integrated call for different parties learn how to work together in a "learning-by-doing" manner (Working Group meetings, 2024[3]).

The Working Group could spearhead a pilot call to demonstrate the process of bottom-up and participatory call design[2], identify pathways and tools to develop an integrated call and better match funding to territorial priorities. It can test collaborative methods for aligning priorities across sectors, levels of government, and stakeholder groups, in the Slovakian context. These steps aim to create a replicable model for integrated call design – one that strengthens cooperation and ensures investments are aligned with regional and national priorities. This activity is also in line with the DG REGIO letter that included observations and recommendations dated 14/1/2025, and which suggests that MIRRI prepare criteria for the selection of the integrated territorial investment that will be piloted.

What are other countries doing?

- **Bulgaria:** Bulgaria adopted ITI investment with the support from the World Bank. The report *Guidelines for Preparing, Evaluating, and Implementing Integrated Territorial Investments and Urban Investment* (2020[26]) is based on the project Enhancing the Regional Development Process in Bulgaria and supporting Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works in the programming process for the period 2021-2027. The report consists of detailed procedures and proposed criteria for selecting ITI investment.

[2] For example, this could mean a broader scope of consultation for the pilot's call design. This means that once the draft call has been developed, it can be disseminated to relevant stakeholders (e.g., municipalities within the pilot region, NGOs, line ministries) beyond the pilot's core team to collect ideas and feedback. This could be accomplished through workshops, public consultations, and technical discussions.

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Final action decided

Preparation of criteria for a pilot project of integrated territorial investment. The selected ITI project must have cross-sectoral relevance, in order to inspire meaningful collaboration among diverse stakeholders. The MA, relevant IBs and the relevant territorial partners must be involved in the preparation of the criteria. Selection criteria should include the potential for high impact, feasibility of implementation, transferable results, and relevance to regions with diverse needs. To ensure balanced representation, the pilot ITI project could be selected based on criteria such as socio-economic challenges, compliance with the priorities of the European Commission, and must be implemented through at least 2 policy objectives, alignment with national priorities, and minimum investment amount, high stage of readiness and commitment to implement. This step ensures that the pilot focuses on an investment area with clear, demonstrable benefits that can generate interest and buy-in from stakeholders.

The call criteria should be guided by clear call objectives (e.g., strengthening low-carbon mobility, enhancing urban regeneration, etc.). Selection criteria could include strategic relevance and the degree of integration. For example, project alignment with the ITI strategy and Programme Slovakia will be the requirement. Additional selection criteria can include the degree of cross-sectoral integration. Also to consider can be territorial impact and cohesion – for example, the project's contribution to reducing territorial disparities and impact on monitoring indicators against the objectives identified (e.g., the number of inhabitants benefiting, CO2 emission reduction estimates, area of regenerated space, etc.). It could also take into account stakeholder engagement in the projects, such as the level of inter-municipal cooperation and engagement with other non-public stakeholders (e.g., the level of participatory planning of the project). Finally to consider might be project feasibility and maturity, including the quality of feasibility studies, availability of necessary permits, etc. Other criteria can include innovation and sustainability (e.g., to what extent there are innovative solutions in the project that can be replicated by other territories).

Activity 4: Develop a practical guideline for the MA and IBs to improve their stakeholder engagement practices

Introduction

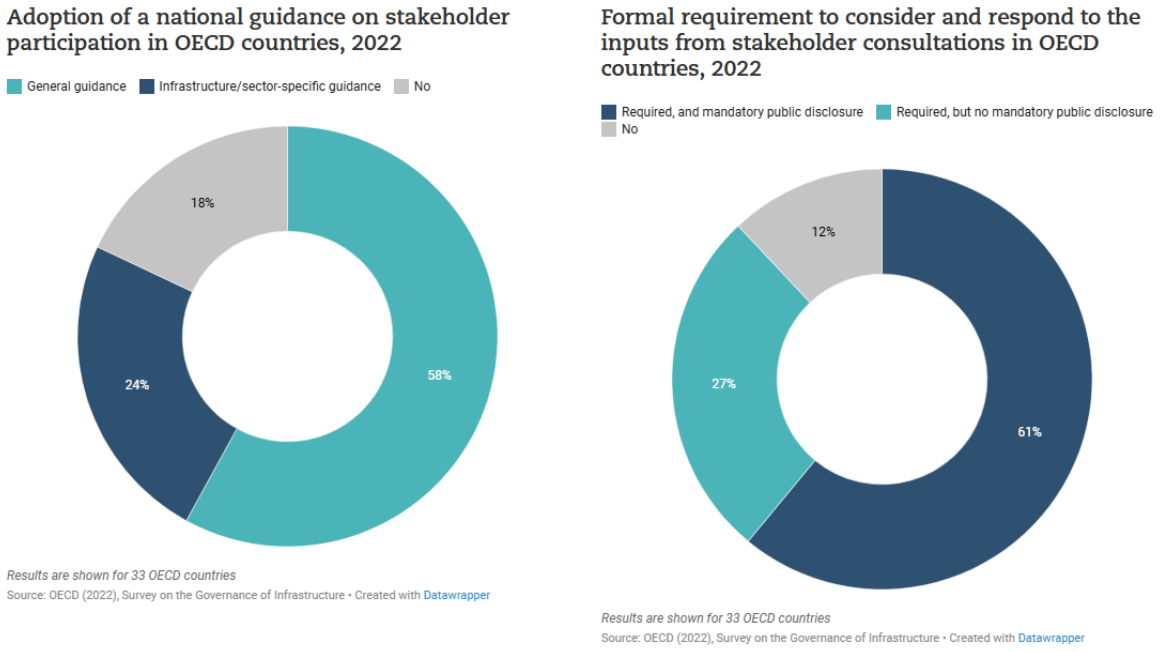
Recommendations and evaluation reports on the application of the principle of partnership in the implementation of ESIF, conducted by the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Development of the Civil Society[3], point to areas for improvement to better engage stakeholders in programming and call design. Building on this advice and in cooperation with the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Development of the Civil Society, the Working Group could support the development of a practical guideline to promote the engagement and participation of stakeholders from the side of the MA and IBs.

What does the data tell us?

Stakeholder involvement can establish a shared vision for development, improve the assessment of investment needs and of the environmental and social sustainability of projects (OECD, 2017[27]). OECD research shows that 82% of OECD Member countries have national guidance on stakeholder participation and that in 88% of cases, there are formal requirements to consider and respond to the inputs from stakeholder consultations (Figure 3.3) (Ruiz Rivadeneira, Dekyi and Cruz, 2023[28]; OECD, n.d.[25]).

[3] Výstupy projektu, Ministerstvo vnútra SR - Splnomocnenec vlády SR pre rozvoj občianskej spoločnosti

Figure 3.3. Stakeholder engagement practice in investment across OECD countries

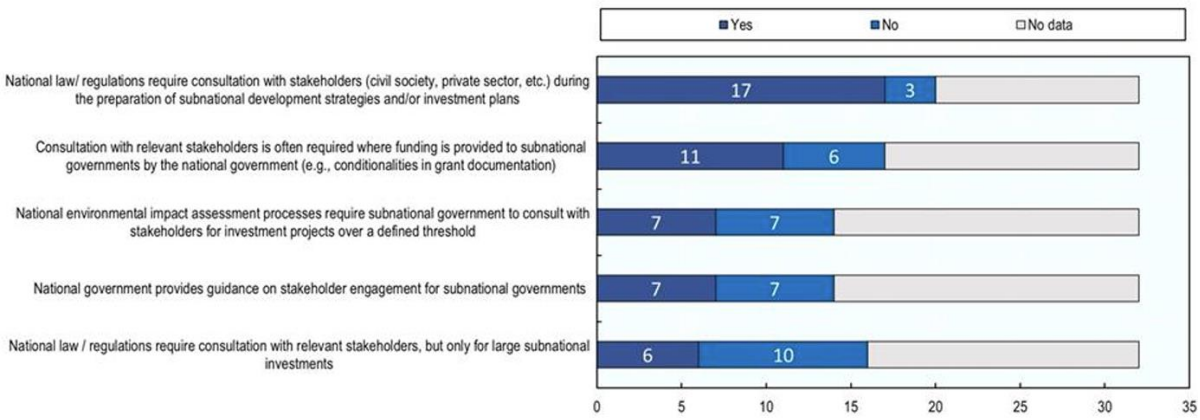


Source: (OECD, 2022[6])

In the past years, more countries have adopted formal requirements to involve stakeholders when preparing subnational investment strategies or plans. In the OECD 2024 Survey, 17 out of 20 responding Adherent countries, appear to have a national law or regulation that requires consultation with stakeholders (civil society, private sector, etc.) during the preparation of subnational development strategies and/or investment plans (Figure 3.4). This represents an important step forward for several Adherents, as in 2019 Report, only 7 out of 27 responding Adherents declared having specific requirements to involve the private sector in the design or/and financing of public investment. In addition, several responding Adherents report that consultation with relevant stakeholders is often required when funding is provided to subnational governments by the national government (e.g., conditionalities in grant documentation) (OECD, Forthcoming[18]).

Figure 3.4. Stakeholder engagement on investment undertaken by subnational governments

Has your country implemented a national law or regulation to promote stakeholder engagement on investment projects undertaken by subnational governments?



Total respondents: 20.
Source: OECD 2024 Survey (OECD, Forthcoming[18])

What are other countries doing?

- **Australia:** Stakeholder engagement is a significant focus of the 2021 Australian Infrastructure Plan. Infrastructure Australia engaged with more than 5 500 individuals, including domestic and global policy leaders, to test the conclusions and identify reform opportunities. The plan has also been informed by an extensive sector-specific engagement program that targeted industry experts, government, and academia. In addition, Infrastructure Australia engaged extensively with stakeholders for the 2019 Audit and ran a formal stakeholder submissions process for which they received 151 formal submissions from government, industry and academia, as well as a small number of individuals. All this feedback was considered when developing the 2021 Plan (OECD, n.d.[25]).
- **Columbia:** The Territorial Planning Councils are territorial planning bodies established by constitutional mandate to ensure citizen and civil society participation in the creation and monitoring of public policies at the territorial level, in line with the principle of participatory planning. Regulation specifies that the processes of drafting, executing, monitoring, and evaluating development plans, both at the national level and within territorial entities, should be participatory whenever possible. It is also specified that the consultative role of the Planning Councils does not end with the discussion phase of the Plan but extends to subsequent phases related to its modification (OECD, Forthcoming[18]; Departamento Nacional de Planeación, n.d.[29]).

Final action decided

Support the development of a practical guideline to promote the engagement and participation of stakeholders from the side of the MA and IBs. The intention behind this practical guideline is for it to become the “go-to” resource for the MA and IBs when undertaking stakeholder engagement activities, providing clear, actionable advice that is tailored to specific needs. It should be designed for immediate use but also remain adaptable, allowing updates in future programming periods to reflect new information and contexts. It can be of inspiration for MCS actors and be used as a starting point for engaging actors in programming in the next programming period. This is a longer-term action that the Working Group can undertake beyond the timeline of the TSI project.

Annex 3.A. Roadmap for activities and actions

This table is the finalised Roadmap for implementing the activities and actions developed by the Working Group on Strategic Programming, Project Preparation, and Beneficiary Relations. These actions were presented at the Advisory Group meeting on February 14. Subsequent engagement between the OECD, Slovakia and the European Commission will focus on monitoring progress on action implementation.

Action	Milestone	Timeframe	Action owner	Other actors	Resources	Deliverables
Activity 1: Enhance evidence-based cross-sectoral investments prioritisation and coordination						
Develop a multi-criteria prioritisation framework to help assess investment priorities	Definition of framework objectives and KPIs	February – March 2025	UPPVL	Territorial and socio-economic partners: Representatives of state administration, local governments, academic sector, business, and non-governmental sector, etc.	Internal and external expert teams Data from ministries and local governments Examples of best practices Methodological support	Framework for investment project evaluation and prioritization v.1.0 Methodology and guidance for implementing the framework in practice v.1.0. Investment database v.1.0
	Draft Methodology for data collection/creation and evaluation for the investment database	February – March 2025				
	Collection/creation of data for the investment database	April – June 2025				
	Draft Methodology for multi-criteria prioritisation	April – June 2025				

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Activity 2: Develop a roadmap for enhancing project preparation and beneficiary support						
Develop evidence-based analysis of the specific project preparation obstacles	Initial analysis for the roadmap	March – May 2025	UPPVL	Local Experts, MF/ ÚHP? MIRRI	Review, Interviews/ Focus Groups, Workshops	Description of key obstacles
Develop a roadmap for enhancing project preparation and beneficiary support based on broad stakeholder inputs.	Pre-final version of a Roadmap	March – May 2025	UPPVL	Local Experts, MF/ ÚHP? MIRRI	Review, Interviews/ Focus Groups, Workshops	Draft roadmap
Launch and publish the roadmap and monitor its implementation	Roadmap Published and Launched	June/ July 2025	UPPVL	MIRRI	Seminar/ Meeting	Roadmap
Activity 3: Launch a pilot call for Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI)						
Preparation of criteria for a pilot project of integrated territorial investment.	Draft criteria	June 2025	MIRRI	Regional partners and IBs ivolved in ITI	Programme Slovakia, Integrated territorial strategies	Criteria for a pilot project of ITI
Activity 4: Develop a practical guideline for the MA and IBs to improve their stakeholder engagement practices						
Support the development of practical guideline to promote the engagement and participation of stakeholders from the side of the MA and IBs.	Draft guideline	4/2025	USV ROS	MA and IBs	Human resources Examples of good practices Data on engagement and participation	Draft guideline developed and disseminated
	Consult with all relevant stakeholders	7/2025				

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Implementation advice: thematic considerations to take into account for future Working Group meetings

The following advice is intended to guide Slovakia in implementing the actions in this action plan beyond the life-span of the current project. Many of the actions in this action plan are long-term, and there are multiple synergies across the actions that can be taken forward through continued meetings of the three working groups. For example, building workforce capability through increased data-collection and analysis, robust coordination mechanisms on workforce management, and an increased focus on building capability through career development (mobility) and learning opportunities can underpin a revised approach to strategic programming and effective public procurement.

Human resource management

One of the factors underpinning the three activities developed by the working group on human resource management is the need to develop workforce management processes that are strategic and flexible enough to be able to manage the people – 'administrative capacities' – that work on EU funds management in Slovakia. The activities developed by the working group are long-term in nature, and it is encouraging to see that work has already begun in early 2025 on implementation. The following aspects have already begun to be explored in the context of the activities of this action plan, and should underpin planning for the 2028 – 2035 Programming Period.

Anticipate and plan for the high turnover of senior leadership

The frequent turnover of senior leadership within Slovakia's EU funds management system poses a challenge to stability, long-term strategic planning, and effective fund absorption. Changes in leadership can result in inconsistent policy execution, disruptions in decision-making, and weakened institutional memory. To address this, Slovakia could implement structured succession planning within Managing Authorities (MAs) and Intermediate Bodies (IBs), ensuring that leadership transitions are smooth and knowledge transfer is prioritised. Strengthening leadership development programmes and fostering a culture of institutional continuity can help mitigate the negative impact of high turnover. For example, this could include a formal network of senior leaders Additionally, aligning recruitment and retention strategies with the long-term needs of EU fund management will support greater stability.

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Use coordination mechanisms established in action 2 to determine the right balance between centralised control and delegation of workforce management

In Slovakia's EU funds management system, better coordination between the MA and IBs on workforce management challenges is at the core of activity 2. In the longer term, finding the right balance between centralised oversight and delegated responsibilities for workforce management can help structure a strategic and effective system for workforce management.

Many OECD countries are also exploring the trade-offs that come with this type of planning. A balanced approach can allow for flexibility in addressing ministries' unique contexts while still ensuring common standards and conditions across government and enabling a whole of system approach to workforce transformation. When implemented well, central HRM bodies can provide a unified strategic vision for public service workforces including identifying and prioritising common skill needs, challenges and workforce initiatives. Across the OECD, recruitment, onboarding and decisions around resourcing are frequently delegated, which can enable ministries to be responsive to changes in operating environment. In contrast, pay and benefits are often centrally determined, which can help reduce inter-ministerial competition, particularly in tight labour markets.

While the Managing Authority must maintain a strong role in ensuring compliance with civil service regulations, excessive centralisation can slow down decision-making and limit the flexibility of Intermediate Bodies. Establishing clear guidelines on delegation, backed by robust coordination mechanisms and performance monitoring, will help Intermediate Bodies operate more effectively while maintaining accountability. A well-defined framework that aligns roles, responsibilities, and decision-making powers can optimise fund absorption and reduce administrative bottlenecks.

Reflect on the need for a new type of EU fund expert

Slovakia's EU funds management system requires professionals who can go beyond administrative compliance to actively shape strategic investments. Currently, many roles are focused on ensuring procedural correctness rather than maximising the impact of EU funds. To attract and retain a new generation of EU fund professionals, Slovakia should establish clear career pathways, promote cross-sector experience sharing, and offer specialised training in areas such as project evaluation, financial engineering, and digital transformation. Many of these actions are foreseen in activity 2, such as building partnerships with universities. To sustain momentum, Slovakia could consider developing a comprehensive attraction and development strategy with the objective of building a pipeline of talent combining technical skills (e.g. in areas such as financial control, risk assessment, public procurement, and strategic planning) with transversal capabilities. Given the importance and impact of EU funds management in Slovakia, a long-term strategy can help attract and build a cohort of high-performance EU funds professionals.

Explore common salary systems and job classification frameworks

Slovakia's civil service framework governing EU funds management must be adaptable to changing regulations, financial cycles, and evolving policy priorities. A frequent theme in this project was the rigidities in the civil service act that were seen to hinder the ability of Managing Authorities and Intermediate Bodies to enhance flexibility, e.g. through greater staff mobility. Inconsistent salary structures and job classifications within Slovakia's EU funds management system contribute to recruitment and retention difficulties, particularly for skilled professionals who may find more competitive opportunities elsewhere. Aligning salaries and job classifications across Managing Authorities, Intermediate Bodies, and regional offices could enhance transparency and ensure fair compensation.

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Public Procurement

The activities developed by the working group on public procurement highlight the need to create a procurement system that is both efficient and adaptable, while ensuring the integrity and effectiveness of EU funds management in Slovakia. However, strengthening procurement practices goes beyond streamlining the risk-based methodology or providing capacity-building initiatives, as it requires continuous improvement, oversight, and refinement. By tracking training impact, evaluating methodology effectiveness, and ensuring continuous monitoring of the action plan, stakeholders can ensure that the outcomes of the action plan are sustainable, and that procurement practices remain adaptive, efficient, and aligned with evolving challenges and objectives.

Tracking the impact of capacity-building initiatives

The training and capacity-building initiatives implemented under the action plan are designed to improve the skills of intermediate bodies and beneficiaries regarding risks in public procurement. To measure the effectiveness of these trainings and capacity-building tools such as Q&A webpage, attendance and participant feedback should closely monitored. Indicators such as the number of attendees as well as retention rates across multiple sessions will help assess engagement levels, while post-training surveys and evaluations will provide insights into satisfaction, content clarity, and relevance.

Beyond participation metrics, a key indicator of training impact is the expected reduction in the rate of common errors in procurement processes. By comparing baseline error rates before training with those recorded after stakeholders complete the programs, improvements in submission accuracy, such as correctly completing IRMAVO forms, can be assessed. Fewer mistakes in procurement processes can therefore demonstrate increased capacity among stakeholders. Additionally, knowledge retention and application in practice should be evaluated through periodic follow-ups, by gathering case studies and practical of improved procurement outcomes as a result of training.

Beyond the activities foreseen in the action plan, the insights gathered can guide the creation of complementary training initiatives and tools such as manuals, templates, and guidelines, further supporting stakeholders in applying best practices in procurement.

Assessing the effectiveness of the risk-based methodology

The risk-based methodology is a cornerstone of the action plan, requiring ongoing evaluation to ensure it accurately identifies and prioritizes high-risk procurements. Validation exercises through systematic analysis of flagged procurement cases can help determine the accuracy of risk indicators. Regular validation exercises can also help refine existing indicators and adjust their weightings based on real-world procurement data, ensuring the methodology remains relevant and effective. Learning from the experiences and risk-management frameworks of countries can also help refine the indicators and methodology.

In addition to validation efforts, improvements in compliance and control mechanisms also serve as key performance indicators. Monitoring changes in compliance rates post-validation will help determine whether irregularities are decreasing over time. Furthermore, comparing timelines and error correction rates for both pre- and post-validation reviews will provide insight into the effectiveness of control measures, supporting continuous refinement of the methodology.

Ensuring overall continuous improvement through regular monitoring of the action plan

Sustaining long-term success requires a structured approach to continuous improvement, including regular progress reviews and refinement of strategies. Regular progress meetings should be held to assess progress on action items, addressing successes, bottlenecks, and identify other areas of improvement.

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Continuous engagement of key stakeholders such as IBs, PPO, and MIRRI will foster collaboration and ensure emerging challenges and opportunities are proactively addressed.

To maintain accountability, concise progress reports summarizing key findings, implemented changes, and planned next steps should be developed. These reports should be shared during meetings of the working group on public procurement to enhance transparency and track responsibilities. Additionally, feedback from stakeholders should be leveraged to help refine training content, improve methodology indicators, and enhance system functionalities such as ITMS updates. Lessons learned should be used to inform future strategies and align them more effectively with broader program objectives.

Strategic programming, project selection and beneficiary relations

The action plan for the Working Group on Strategic Programming, Project Selection, and Beneficiary Relations marks an important step in improving the management of European Structural Funds in Slovakia. Many of its initiatives are designed to address long-standing structural challenges in public investment practices. While it is essential to adopt a broad, strategic perspective, the Working Group must ensure that its initiatives yield tangible results within the EU fund management framework. For instance, while developing a comprehensive framework for public investment prioritisation is crucial, it is equally important that this framework be effectively implemented by the IB units in the line ministries when designing investment measures and calls. The following high-level reflections aim to support the Working Group to implement its action plan with an eye on yielding concrete results for EU fund management in the short-term, while advancing longer-term structural objectives and change.

Building the capacity of MA, IBs and regions to use integrated data to support investment prioritisation

In addition to changing or standardising the approaches used by line ministries, IBs and regions to set priorities, the Working Group could focus on enhancing their capacity to use data and evidence more effectively in priority-setting processes. The Working Group could help by guiding them to consider the right data (e.g., regional development indicators), as well as by providing resources, examples, and tools to help IBs and regions better leverage data and evidence for prioritisation, while incorporating a regional perspective—for instance, by integrating regional development data into their analyses.

Initiatives in this direction includes conducting a stocktaking exercise on the use of data in priority-setting, as well as developing a handbook and training sessions to help MA, IBs, and regions strengthen their capacity for data-driven decision-making – if are not yet in place. These capacity building measures should combine theoretical knowledge with practical exercises, such as applying the handbook to real-world scenarios. For example, participants could work with datasets on regional unemployment or CO_2 emissions to prioritise projects aimed at labour market inclusion or green infrastructure. In-person trainings can be complemented with online sessions and discussion fora where participants can exchange experiences. These efforts are expected to support the design of any upcoming calls within the current programming period and inform both programming and call design in the next period. Additionally, the handbook and training materials could serve as a valuable resource for setting public investment priorities more broadly, beyond the scope of EU funds.

To ensure sustainability, the Working Group could establish a professional network or community of practice where trained staff can continue to exchange ideas, seek advice, and collaborate on shared challenges. This approach would help create a pool of skilled professionals capable of leveraging data to make informed and strategic investment decisions.

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Enhance communication and coordination platforms for all MCS actors, including regions and municipalities

The need for multi-stakeholder coordination is a recurring issue when developing an integrated, place-based approach to Programme Slovakia (OECD, 2024 Unpublished[1]). While there are many procedures and mechanisms in place intended to support coordination, MA, IBs and beneficiaries indicated that these are not effective for helping reach consensus on investment priorities and subsequent call design (OECD, 2024 Unpublished[1]). Regional stakeholders, in particular, expressed frustration: for example, after preparing integrated strategies and preparing investment projects, the national government has not opened integrated calls as expected. Regions and municipalities thus apply to the normal sectoral calls to support their investments and thus the integrated investment is not actually implemented.

Enhancing communication and coordination platforms for all actors in the EU fund management and control system is critical to foster strategic coherence in programming and facilitate subsequent project implementation (Working Group meetings, 2024[3]). It can also contribute to the success of the action plan, for example with the adoption of a multi-criteria framework by all IBs for investment prioritisation, and/or by enhancing project planning and preparation, developing successful ITI investment, and improving stakeholder engagement in investment design and implementation.

Enhancing coordination within Slovakia's public administration may require cultural shifts, including transforming attitudes, behaviours, and practices to prioritise collaboration, shared ownership, and trust over sector-focused and siloed approaches. This goes beyond formal consultation and requires building a truly participatory exchange. It entails fostering openness, mutual understanding, and proactive engagement across sectors and among levels of government. The proposed actions in this activity – assessing existing coordination initiatives, organising an expectation-setting workshop, and developing a communication and coordination guideline – lay the foundation for this transformation. Building on these efforts, the Working Group can then help promote high quality dialogue for stronger coordination by setting clear objectives for meetings, managing stakeholder expectations through transparency and regular updates, sharing good practices for consensus-building, and publishing discussion outcomes to ensure accountability and measurable progress.

Addressing beneficiary capacity gaps requires a comprehensive and differentiated approach

When developing the roadmap for enhancing project preparation and planning, it is essential to address the specific challenges faced by different types of beneficiaries and not to treat them as one group. Programme Slovakia 2021-27, covering all types of investment, serves an extremely wide range of beneficiaries, which also suggests a high diversity of beneficiary capacity needs and calls for a targeted approach to beneficiary support. The projects undertaken by national public beneficiaries are particularly varied, from large infrastructure projects to upgrading school curricula to subsidies for public service centres (MIRRI, Unpublished[30]). It is thus important to develop differentiated analysis and actions to address the bottlenecks faced by different beneficiaries.

In addition, other beneficiary capacity building efforts (i.e. beyond providing technical support on project preparation) are necessary to enhance beneficiary capacity overall and ultimately improve programme implementation performance. Beneficiaries carry out more tasks than just preparing and planning projects. They provide insights on their investment needs to help shape the programme and calls; they coordinate project implementation with various public and private actors (e.g., permitting authorities, constructors, etc.); they monitor and report project results that provide evidence on investment performance. Building beneficiary capacity throughout the investment cycle is a complex and cross-cutting task and requires various measures and tools to tackle different capacity gaps.

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