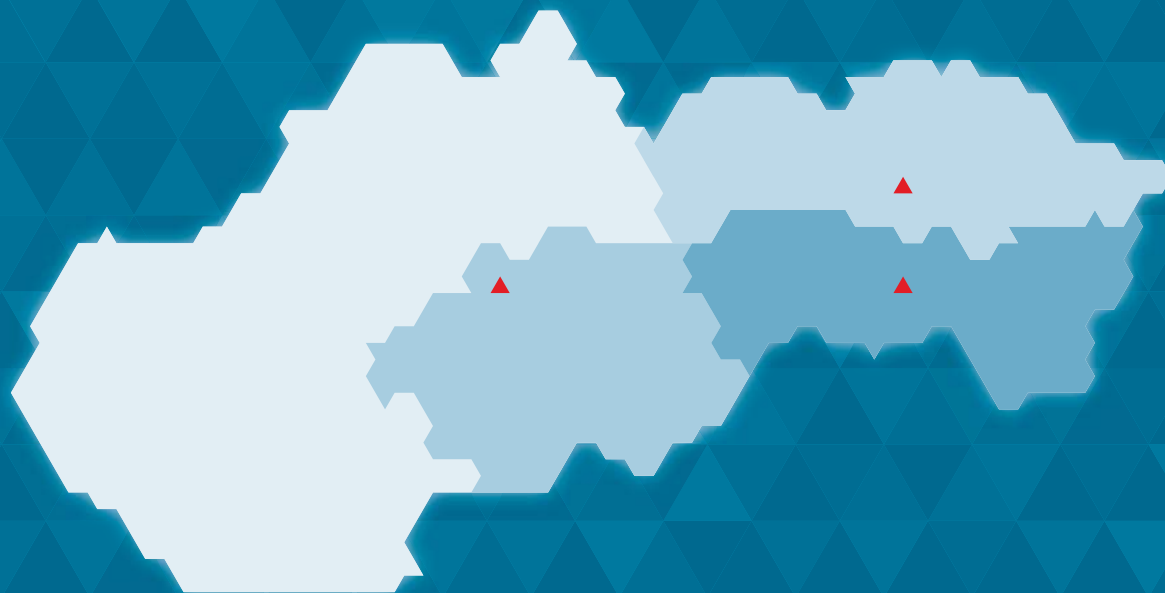


SLOVAKIA CATCHING-UP REGIONS 5

OVERVIEW (FINAL) REPORT SUMMARY REPORT

JANUARY 2024 – APRIL 2025



SLOVAKIA CATCHING-UP REGIONS 5

OVERVIEW (FINAL) REPORT SUMMARY REPORT

MAY 2025



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BBSK	Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region (<i>Banskobystrický samosprávny kraj</i>)
CuRI	Catching-up Regions Initiative
DG REGIO	Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy
EC	European Commission
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIS	Geographic Information System
HSS	Health & Social Services
IROP	Integrated Regional Operational Programme
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment
ITS	Integrated Territorial Strategy
KSK	Košice Self-Governing Region (<i>Košický samosprávny kraj</i>)
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
MIRDI	Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic
MOPS	Local Civic Patrols (<i>Miestne občianske a poriadkové služby</i>)
MRC	Marginalized Roma Communities
OP	Operational Programme
PHSR	Program rozvoja obce, Plán hospodárskeho a sociálneho rozvoja obce (Local Development Plan)
PSK	Prešov Self-Governing Region (<i>Prešovský samosprávny kraj</i>)
R&D	Research and Development
RIC	Regional Innovation Center
SIEA	Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency
SIOV	State Institute of Vocational Education (<i>Štátny inštitút odborného vzdelávania</i>)
SK/SR	Slovak Republic
SLA	Service Legal Agreement
SLF	Slovak Land Fund (<i>Slovenský pozemkový fond</i>)
SMEs	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
SVS	Secondary Vocational Schools
TAIEX	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument of the European Commission
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WB	World Bank
WWTP	Wastewater Treatment Plant

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was prepared by the core team comprised of Ellen Hamilton (Program Manager and Task Team Leader), Grzegorz Wolszczak, Vladimír Benč, Veronika Dreboldt Zimanová, and Andrea Millington.

The team would like to thank all World Bank teams for their input into the report, and engagement during the CuRI 5 implementation, namely:

- Ellen Hamilton, Task Team Leader;
- VET team: Husein Abdul-Hamid, Štefan Chudoba, Daniela Dusza Repková, Andrea Hagovská, Helena Virčíková, Anna Polačková, Juraj Ľapák, Jaroslav Grygar, and Martin Džbor;
- MRC team: Yondela Silimela, Juni Singh, Thandile Tanzile Gule, Simona Meszárošová, Samuel Arbe, Václav Hochmuth, Valerie Morrica, Svetluša Surová, Rastislav Zubaj, Lubomír Billý, Patrik Pavlovský, and Artsiom Klunin;
- Poloniny Trail team: Tengiz Gogotishvili, Eva Kocanová, and Václav Hochmuth;
- Social Economy team: Alina Nona Petric, Nataša Milistenferová, and Imren Arslanoglu;
- RD&I team: Grzegorz Wolszczak, Krzysztof Malicki, Jordanka Tomková, Jan Wyrwiński, and Damian Kuźniewski;
- Health team: Ana Mercado, Adina Maria-Voda, Anna Gizela Krol-Jankowska, Tatjana Prenda Trupac, Anna Koziel, Ján Králik, Andrea Slobodníková, and Lubomír Billý.

The team would like to thank Anna Akhalkatsi, Marina Wes, Lasse Melgaard, Sameh Wahba, Charles Joseph Cormier, and Christoph Pusch, for the advice, support and guidance provided throughout the implementation of the initiative and the elaboration of this report, and Marco A. Gallardo, Larysa Hrebianchuk, Nikolinka B. Ivanova, Irina Manzhura, Vessela Radeva Stamboliyska, Sylvia Stoyanova, and Adela Ivanova Delcheva Nachkova for their excellent operational and administrative support.

The team would also like to thank Commissioners – Raffaele Fitto and Elisa Ferreira for their continuous support to the Catching-up Regions Initiative, Ministers for Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic, Samuel Migaľ and Richard Raši, the President of the Prešov Self-Governing Region, Milan Majerský, the President of the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region, Ondrej Lunter, and the President of the Košice Self-Governing Region, Rastislav Trnka, for their invaluable support, as well as the European Commission's team for their outstanding engagement and support, especially Pascal Boijmans, Eva Wenigová, Katarína Prokopič, Andrej Mikyška, and Lucian Jega.

The team is also indebted to all our counterparts for the support offered and the excellent collaboration, as well as their passion for developing the three participating Slovak regions: Banská Bystrica, Košice and Prešov regions and their institutions, especially:

- The Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic: Ladislav Šimko, Ján Stano, Juraj Hošťák, Lukáš Turiak, Miroslava Jurenková, Boris Sloboda, Veronika Vozárová, Libuša Ďaďová, Michaela Dvorská, Peter Mravec, and many others.
- Office of the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region: Ondrej Lunter, Ján Beljak, Mikuláš Pál, Matúš Holly, Zuzana Lafféřsová, Anna Hriňová, Denisa Nincová, Janka Páľková, Mariana Badínská, Martin Caudt, Ján Michalský, Silvia Mašlářová, Martina Lipoldová, Kornélia Kubizniaková, Zuzana Sojková, Miroslava Kotřířková Rašmanová, Dávid Mesík, Monika Viljoen, Vasil Černák, and many others.
- Office of the Prešov Self-Governing Region: Fabián Novotný, Marek Cimbala, Martina Slivková, Lenka Smetanková, Pavol Zajac, Miroslav Vaško, Ján Furman, Ivana Kirkov, Juraj Kredátus, Tadeáš Gavala, Jana Szidorová, Soňa Kožárová, Matúš Goč, Eva Kaduková, Ladislav Lorinc, Slávka Srokovská, Bibiána Miščířková, Daša Jeleňová, Ján Kocák, Lýdia Budziňářková, Lubomířa Levočká, Peter Makara, Emířia Antolířřková, Michal Fischer, Patrícířa Janošřřková Hnatová, Daniela Eliašřřová, Jana Pecuchová, and many others.

- Office of the Košice Self-Governing Region: Boris Bilčák, Ladislav Lörint, Ľubomír Gerda, Barbora Kováčová, Jarmila Hviščová, Peter Serfözö, Martin Pukančík, Vladimír Pauco, Peter Breyl, Jarmila Zvarová, Andrea Gajdošová, Ivana Puchallová, Iveta Lazarová, Anna Heribanová, Angelika Theinerová, Lenka Diškantová, Henrieta Karašová, Natália Vince, Štefan Krištín, Jaroslava Mamčáková, and many others.

The team is also grateful to the following institutions for their active involvement in the Catching-up Regions Initiative: Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic; Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic; Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic; Ministry of the Economy of the Slovak Republic; Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic; Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic; Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic, State Institute of Vocational Education (ŠIOV); and many others. Special thanks also goes to the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, represented by former plenipotentiary Ján Hero, and the new plenipotentiary, Alexander Daško, and their colleagues.

The report was completed in May 2025.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes the findings of the fifth and final year of the Catching-up Regions Initiative (CuRI 5) in the Slovak Republic, implemented from January 2024 to April 2025. The initiative, a joint effort financed by the European Commission (EC) and implemented in collaboration with the World Bank (WB), three Slovak regions (Banská Bystrica, Košice, and Prešov), and the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization (MIRDI), aimed at enhancing the capacity of national and regional authorities to design and implement EU-funded regional development interventions. CuRI 5 served as a phasing-out edition, focusing on completing ongoing activities, disseminating results, and transferring knowledge to Slovak authorities and other regions. This overview report provides general information on CuRI 5 individual components, while separate technical reports delve into details of each thematic stream of work.

The initiative's multidisciplinary approach addresses various development areas, including regional and urban development, job creation, education, transport, health, social integration, and innovation. Effective coordination between the EC, WB, national government, and regional authorities was crucial for CuRI's success. This last edition built upon the achievements of the previous four years, which included activities in secondary vocational education and training (VET), Roma community integration, industry-research collaboration, public transport, GIS utilization, integrated senior care, tourism development, water infrastructure, and energy efficiency.

CuRI 5 comprised four components:

1. Inclusion of Disadvantaged and Marginalized Groups: This component continued support for Roma integration across the three regions, focusing on living conditions, jobs, and education. Key activities included technical assistance to regional and municipal authorities, disaster risk management planning (particularly in Telgárt, BBSK, following a fire), participatory planning using behavioral interventions (in Ostrovany, Krivany, and Jasov), and development of a monitoring and evaluation framework aligned with EU standards. The Bank team provided support to PSK in addressing identified gaps in the social economy ecosystem. Two primary areas of focus were: 1) Scaling up networking and coordination, which led to establishment and launch of the Prešov Self-Governing Region Social Economy Community of Practice (PSK-SECoP); and 2) Strengthening capacity, skills, and business development for public administration. While significant progress was made in project preparation and submission, challenges remain regarding funding for critical initiatives, sustainable waste management, and addressing systemic issues like land tenure.

The “Support for Inclusion in Secondary Education” activity aimed to address challenges faced by low-income regions in Slovakia, particularly in ensuring sustainable growth and preventing low-growth development patterns. This component focused on improving the quality, flexibility, and inclusivity of Slovakia's Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, which is crucial due to negative demographic trends, a mismatch between VET offerings and labor market demands, and social exclusion impacting marginalized Roma communities. Implemented across the Prešov, Banská Bystrica, and Košice regions, the Initiative sought to create conditions for comprehensive and functional VET systems by investing in high-quality learning environments and supporting system flexibility, with a specific focus on Roma inclusion. Activities included thematic surveys, webinars sharing best practices, and regular monitoring and evaluation of integrated investment packages for pilot secondary vocational schools, along with region-specific initiatives such as study visits and consultations on campus and training center concepts.

2. Human Capital in Health: This component focused on improving healthcare provision in the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region, addressing critical shortages of qualified specialists. A key activity was the development and piloting of a telemedicine model, informed by a literature review, expert consultations, and a study visit to Croatia and Slovenia. The proposed telemedicine system includes teleconsultations, remote patient monitoring, and telehealth-supported home care. Challenges include securing funding, navigating legal and infrastructural constraints, and ensuring equitable access.

3. Local Economic Development: This component continued support for sustainable tourism development. In Košice, it focused on the Gemer Trail, providing technical support for project documentation and stakeholder engagement. In Prešov, it supported the Poloniny Trail, including completion of ongoing construction and development of a long-term investment plan for tourism development in the Snina district. In Košice, it supported the Regional Innovation Center (RIC), focusing on talent development, startup support, and reinforcing the regional innovation ecosystem. The RIC not only structured a comprehensive approach to stimulating regional innovation with a focus on startup development, but also it successfully secured € 9.7 million of EU funding from the policy objective 1, the measure 1.1.1. of the Programme Slovakia 2021-27 tapped other funding sources.

4. Program Management and Administration: This component oversaw the overall management of CuRI 5, including meetings, work planning, budgeting, communication, reporting, monitoring, and evaluation. The final conference, held in Bratislava in April 2025, celebrated five phases and seven calendar years of CuRI implementation in the Slovak Republic and marked the handover to the Baltic states.

The report concludes with specific recommendations for each component, emphasizing the need for continued collaboration between stakeholders, strategic investments, and a focus on sustainable solutions to address the persistent socio-economic challenges in the three Slovak regions. The success of CuRI hinges on the continued commitment and investment from all partners to build upon the progress achieved and address the remaining challenges. The lessons learned from the Slovak CuRI experience can inform similar initiatives in other EU member states and World Bank client countries. Over the five phases of CuRI implementation, CuRI regions, pilot municipalities, and other actors such as VET schools and SMEs benefited from numerous targeted calls organized by MIRDI and other relevant ministries. Through these initiatives, projects totaling nearly EUR 240 million were successfully implemented (refer to Table 1 below).

TABLE 1. Investments generated by CuRI (in EUR) – confirmed, spent & under implementation

Confirmed & under implementation	Total budget (in EUR)	Of which EU Funds & National co-financing in EUR	Co-financing of CuRI regions & municipalities in EUR
BBSK	82 649 764,30	77 347 367,61	5 302 396,69
PSK	81 361 126,21	67 473 073,47	13 888 052,74
KSK	51 973 769,93	48 610 345,56	3 363 424,37
Total	215 984 660,44	193 430 786,65	22 553 873,79
Other CuRI calls	Funds for SMEs – tourism & VET schools and companies' cooperation		
MInEconomy SR / PSK	13 727 071,63	12 051 921,66	1 675 149,97
MinEconomy SR / BBSK	9 472 319,88	8 126 424,10	1 345 895,78
Total	23 199 391,51	20 178 345,76	3 021 045,75
TOTAL	239 184 051,95	213 609 132,40	25 574 919,55

Note: Additional projects / investments (not included in the table) are still under preparation (as of May 2025), valued >>> EUR 70–80 mil. (in all 3 regions).

Source: World Bank, 2025.

BACKGROUND

The European Commission (EC) and the World Bank (WB) share a common objective of building competitive and sustainable economies and reducing poverty and social exclusion – goals of the Europe 2030 Strategy, which is built on several pillars focused on climate action, biodiversity, digital transformation, social rights, and defense. The Europe 2030 Strategy is broadly in line with the objectives and strategies adopted in the Europe and Central Asia region (ECA) of the World Bank Group¹. The European Commission and the World Bank concur that direct interaction is beneficial to both institutions and through them to the beneficiary countries. This applies particularly to the provision of analytical, advisory and knowledge services and technical assistance.

Following Poland, Romania and Croatia, Slovakia officially launched the ECs' Lagging Regions Initiative in January 2018 with the Prešov region as the Catching-up Regions Initiative (CuRI) pilot region. The Initiative provided tailored support to lagging regions with a focus on boosting the impact of EU investments in the region. The World Bank (WB) was asked to provide technical support and help coordinate the activities, and an Administration Agreement was signed in May 2018 between DG REGIO and the World Bank. CuRI activities supported over the years capacity building in three lagging regions (Banská Bystrica, Košice, and Prešov) in Slovakia.

The objective of the CuRI was to assist the EC in enhancing the capacity of selected national and regional authorities in the abovementioned three Slovak lagging regions in selected thematic areas by providing hands-on technical assistance pertaining to their analyses, design and implementation of EU co-financed interventions aimed at regional development.

After four previous CuRI phases the CuRI partners decided to extend the implementation of the Initiative by another, phasing out edition. The implementation of this fifth stage of the Initiative started in January 2024 and continued until December 2024 - the final conference was organized in Bratislava in April 2025.

While there is no Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for Slovakia, the CuRI directly contributes to all four strategic aims of the World Banks' Europe and Central Asia (ECA) Regional Strategy: 1) Boosting human capital by helping the Slovak CuRI regions to build adaptive and inclusive human capital through access to quality health (integrated health and social care services), education (the vocational education and training component focused on inclusion, quality assurance, digitalization of education, school network optimization, etc.), social protection services and jobs (the inclusion of marginalized Roma communities and social economy component); 2) Enabling markets (the R&D and technology transfer component); 3) Facilitating green transitions mainly by inclusive infrastructure construction (sustainable-green tourism investment preparation, energy efficiency in public schools); 4) Building and strengthening institutional capacity, mainly at the regional and local levels, improving governance and state effectiveness, policy and institutional modernization to support infrastructure services. The CuRI is also fully in line with the EC's goals for the current and upcoming programming periods (Cohesion policy), and with the EU CMU strategy objective of enabling inclusion of excluded households and regions.

Partners implementing the CuRI include the European Commission / Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic and sectoral ministries (depending on the component) the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region Office, the Košice Self-Governing Region Office, the Prešov Self-Governing Region Office, and the World Bank.

BOX 1. Roles of CuRI partners

The European Commission, through its Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, primarily undertakes the role of coordination and monitoring within the CuRI framework. This involves overseeing the alignment of projects and investments with EU policies. The Commission's role is crucial in maintaining coherence across various projects and facilitating communication among CuRI partners and other stakeholders to ensure that the projects are on track and adhere to established guidelines.

The Ministry of Investments, Regional Development, and Informatization of the Slovak Republic (MIRDI), along with other sectoral ministries, plays a pivotal role in financing identified projects and investments. Their involvement is primarily through the facilitation of EU Funds calls, which are tailored to meet the specific needs of CuRI. These ministries are responsible for ensuring that the financial resources required for project implementation are available and appropriately allocated. By leveraging EU funding mechanisms, MIRDI and sectoral ministries help bridge the gap between project conception and execution, providing the necessary financial support to bring projects to fruition.

The Offices of the self-governing regions in Banská Bystrica, Košice, and Prešov, along with pilot municipalities, are at the forefront of project documentation, design, and implementation. These entities are responsible for preparing detailed project documentation, conducting feasibility studies, and managing procurement processes. Their role is hands-on, involving the practical aspects of project preparation and ensuring that all necessary groundwork is laid for successful project implementation.

The World Bank's role in the CuRI partnership is primarily advisory, focusing on sharing global knowledge and providing analytical insights. The Bank offers guidance in project preparation and design through recommendations, capacity building, and best practices. However, it does not engage in designing projects on behalf of municipalities or CuRI regions. Instead, the World Bank reviews project documents prepared by CuRI regions and pilot municipalities, offering suggestions and recommendations for improvement.

Source: World Bank, 2025.

A characteristic feature of the CuRI was that its activities and teams were multidisciplinary. They included, for instance, the topics of urbanism, economy, education, transport, health, social protection and jobs, innovation and others. Thanks to that the CuRI covered a wide gamut of development areas. Such a broad range of topics requires engaging an equally broad range of stakeholders on the Client and Beneficiary side. Thus, effective and efficient coordination was essential and was ensured by Team Task Leaders (TTLs) and a strong local coordination team. For that reason, the local team was maintained through the whole CuRI duration to ensure the delivery of technical outputs, the management of communication with the stakeholders, and administrative support for the program.

Very close coordination with the European Commission's team was maintained over the program duration. This was essential for solving arising obstacles and providing a direction for the teams' work. Moreover, convening with the different key stakeholders (regions, national government, EC, World Bank) at regular intervals provided a powerful forum for identifying and resolving problems.

To allow simultaneous work on all activities, autonomous teams were established for each component and related activities, with the technical work coordinated by the component leader (TTL) and a team of experts. Each component team was present in the field on a regular basis and carried out frequent (often weekly or biweekly) communication with the stakeholders. This ensured the active engagement of all the parties and the tailoring of the outputs to their needs and requests. Thanks to this hands-on approach, steady progress in the defined activities was achieved.

The components and activities selected for the CuRI were identified in collaboration with all partners of the Initiative mentioned above to ensure their high interest and buy-in. Consequently, knowledge and approaches developed at the regional level were shared by the national government with other Slovak regions.

The first three phases of the CuRI (implemented from May 2018 until December 2022) included the following activities:

1. Enhancing Secondary Vocational Education and Training (VET): initiated in the Prešov Region (PSK) during the first year of the CuRI; during CuRI 2, the activity was continued in the PSK and initiated in the Banská Bystrica Region (BBSK); then during CuRI 3, the activity was continued in the PSK and the BBSK and extended to the Košice Region (KSK);
2. Supporting integration of marginalized Roma communities (MRC): launched during CuRI 2 in the PSK, then during CuRI 3 continued in the PSK and expanded to the two other regions (BBSK and KSK);
3. Reinforcing collaboration between Industry and Research (R&D): started in the BBSK during CuRI 2; during CuRI 3 continued in the BBSK and expanded to the KSK;
4. Enhancing Local Public Transport: initiated in the BBSK during CuRI 2 and continued during CuRI 3;
5. Supporting utilization of Geographic Information System for Regional Development (GIS): implemented in the PSK during CuRI 1, CuRI 2 and CuRI 3 and expanded to the KSK during CuRI 3;
6. Planning Integrated Care for Seniors: started in the BBSK during CuRI 2 and continued under CuRI 3;
7. Tourism Development in the Poloniny National Park: implemented in the PSK during CuRI1, CuRI2 and CuRI 3;
8. Supporting Development of Basic Water Infrastructure in Remote Areas: implemented in the PSK under CuRI 1, CuRI 2 and CuRI 3;
9. Enhancing Energy Efficiency in Public Buildings: implemented in the PSK during CuRI1.

The Slovakia Catching-up Regions 4th phase, implemented from May 2022 until December 2023, supported the continuation of earlier approved and implemented activities within the CuRI. Furthermore, two new activities were added as well: Social Economy in the BBSK and PSK, and Sustainable Tourism in the KSK. The fourth phase was the largest in terms of the range of topics and the number of activities. Overall, 15 activities were implemented (see Table below) within 8 components.

TABLE 2. Summary of the CuRI 4 activities per region

Region	Activity
PSK	Activity 1: Improving integration of marginalized Roma communities
	Activity 2: Basic environmental infrastructure in the Snina district
	Activity 3: Poloniny Trail
	Activity 4: Improving the quality and efficiency of secondary education
BBSK	Activity 5: Improvement of availability and effectivity of healthcare provision
	Activity 6: Social Economy
	Activity 7: Building an innovative ecosystem in BBSK, linking industry with R&D organizations
	Activity 8: Improving the quality of secondary vocational education and increasing the quality of the learning environment
	Activity 9: Continued support to the three pilot municipalities – Improving the integration of groups at risk of poverty or social exclusion

	Activity 10: Improved integration of marginalized Roma communities
	Activity 11: Creating an environment for technology transfer and greater R&D collaboration between research and industry
	Activity 12: Sustainable tourism
KSK	Activity 13: Integration of social and health care, increasing regional accessibility and creating an environment for the development of new types of social services and the support of scarce health services
	Activity 14: Geo-infrastructure of spatial data – extension and improvement of quality
	Activity 15: Improving the quality of secondary vocational schools in the Košice self-governing region that meets the requirements of the labor market

Source: World Bank, 2025.

The Slovakia Catching-up Regions 5. CuRI partners agreed that the fifth phase of the Initiative would be the last one in the current format – a phasing-out. The main aim of the CuRI 5 was to complete activities started within the CuRI 4 or earlier, and disseminate results, outcomes and approaches of the Initiative within Slovakia. The emphasis of this final phase was on sharing the lessons learned and handing over to the Slovak national authorities, but also other Slovak regions and municipalities.

The CuRI 5 activities consisted of the following components, which contributed to the integrated territorial development in the three Slovak CuRI regions:

Component 1. Inclusion of Disadvantaged and Marginalized Groups

This component continued the work initiated under the CuRI 1–4 phases and supported the inclusion of disadvantaged and marginalized groups, especially the Roma in all three CuRI regions by focusing on living conditions, jobs and education. This is a priority area for the three regions as all of them have substantial Roma populations living in substandard conditions and characterized by long-term unemployment. The Roma are also the poorest and most excluded group in Slovakia. Activities under this component included technical and strategic support to the three regional authorities (BBSK, KSK and PSK) and selected pilot municipalities. An additional focus of the 5th phase was on Roma students' integration into secondary education and subsequently into the labor market.

Component 2. Human Capital in Health

This component continued the work initiated under the CuRI 4 phase in the BBSK, supported regional authorities in the preparation and implementation of regionally-based pilot solutions suitable for improving the availability and effectiveness of healthcare provision in a context of critical shortfalls in qualified specialists, in close coordination with the national government. Telemedicine was also an area for piloting within the 5th phase of the CuRI.

Component 3. Local Economic Development

This component continued the work initiated under the CuRI 1-4 phases, focusing within the *Development of sustainable tourism* on:

3.1 in the KSK, providing technical and analytical inputs to support sustainable tourism development in the Gemer part of the KSK region with a focus on eco-tourism, green environment, and the Gemer Trail development; and

3.2. in the PSK, providing technical support to the project team at the PSK with the further development of the Poloniny Trail and associated long-term investments in the Snina district contributing to enhancing the visitors' experience.

Further on (3.3.) *Creating an environment for innovation-based regional development by supporting operations of the Regional Innovation Center (RIC)*. The World Bank supported the KSK in the implementation and fine-tuning of the RIC's activities aimed at developing regional talent, supporting entrepreneurship, start-ups and developing a sustainable and growing innovation ecosystem.

Component 4: Program management and administration.

Program management and administration activities, including but not limited to, supporting any program governance arrangements and CuRI 5-related meetings; planning and executing work plans and budgets; managing communications and conducting outreach; disseminating lessons learned; reporting on progress; and monitoring and evaluating the program.

TABLE 3. Summary of the CuRI 5 activities per region

Region	Activity
PSK	Activity 1.5. Improving the integration of marginalized Roma in the PSK
	Activity 3.2. Planning of integrated investments related to Poloniny trail
BBSK	Activity 1.1. A complex design of the MRC integration project in the municipality of Telgárt, BBSK region
	Activity 1.2. Inclusion in education in pilot BBSK secondary vocational schools
	Activity 2.1. Improvement of availability and efficiency of health care provision in BBSK
KSK	Activity 1.3. Supporting inclusion in education in pilot KSK secondary schools
	Activity 1.4. Continuous support to selected pilot municipalities in the KSK in their Roma integration activities
	Activity 3.1. GEMER Trail – Taking it forward
	Activity 3.3. Creating an environment for innovation based regional development by supporting operations of the Regional Innovation Center

Source: World Bank, 2025.

The background of the entire page is a repeating pattern of small, light blue triangles pointing downwards, set against a slightly darker blue background. The triangles are arranged in a grid-like fashion, creating a textured, geometric effect.

YEAR 5: RESULTS AND LESSONS

COMPONENT 1. IMPROVING THE INTEGRATION OF GROUPS AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION – ROMA INTEGRATION

Activities implemented:

- 1.1 A complex design of the MRC integration project in the municipality of Telgárt, BBSK
- 1.4. Continuous support to selected pilot municipalities in the KSK in their Roma integration activities
- 1.5. Improving the integration of marginalized Roma in the PSK

Why?

Consistently with the CuRI philosophy, support under this component took a pragmatic approach in supporting regional authorities and municipalities to plan, prepare and implement projects aimed at reducing the development gap between Roma and non-Roma and improving integration and inclusion of Marginalized Roma Communities (MRC). The World Bank team worked closely with regional counterparts, provided hands-on support to municipalities and maintained open communication channels with national authorities to highlight lessons from practical implementation, address systemic challenges and share global best-practices grounded in Slovak experience.

The objectives of the MRC integration component were to support the integration of Marginalized Roma Communities in Slovakia, specifically in the PSK and its six pilot municipalities,² the municipality of Telgárt in the BBSK, and the municipality of Jasov in the KSK. Activities focused on i) continued strengthening of regional and municipal authorities' capacity in project preparation and implementation, ii) increasing awareness of Disaster Risk Management (DRM) through the preparation of a municipal disaster risk vulnerability assessment & reduction action plan and hosting a multi-stakeholder conference under the theme "Strengthening Disaster Risk Resilience of Communities and Regions in Slovakia", iii) supporting Roma consultation and engagement in the updating of local development plans and preparation of stakeholder consultation tools such as the Collaborative Innovation Handbook and Toolkits, iv) piloting behavioral interventions in education and waste management, v) supporting the preparation of monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Efforts were also directed towards addressing access to land and adequate shelter for Roma communities, engaging with national actors and the Office of the Roma Plenipotentiary.

In addition to above mentioned objectives & activities, special WB technical assistance was shaped to mainly support the development of the PSK social economy ecosystem regarding two dimensions: 1) networking and coordination; and 2) capacity, skills and business development. Social economy emerged following the CuRI 4 phase as a viable mechanism in addressing the needs of marginalized groups in the PSK and creating economic opportunities.

The pilot municipalities in the PSK face a range of socio-economic challenges, particularly in areas with significant Roma populations. Ostrovany, with 84 % Roma residents, struggles with high unemployment, limited access to essential services like water and sanitation, and overcrowding. The municipality prioritizes projects such as expanding sanitation, improving access to drinking water, and constructing new sidewalks and public lighting. However, it still lacks funding for critical initiatives like extending the primary school and building social rental housing. Čičava, where 80 % of the population is Roma, faces high unemployment and inadequate infrastructure, including missing roads and sidewalks and insufficient school capacity. The municipality's prioritized projects include extending the sanitation system and eliminating illegal landfills, but it also has unfunded needs like constructing new social rental homes and a multifunctional sports hall. Varadka, with a Roma population of 79.9 %, deals with job creation issues, lack of municipal social enterprises, and low levels of intermunicipal cooperation. The municipality has prioritized projects such as building a community center and reconstructing roads and sidewalks has an established municipal social enterprise and completed social rental housing. Varhaňovce, where 79.5 % of the population is Roma, faces high unemployment, missing roads and sidewalks, and insufficient school capacity. The municipality aims to extend its sanitation system and improve access to drinking water but lacks funding for a new primary school and community center. Dlhé Stráže, with a 30.4 % Roma population, struggles with high unemployment, road reconstruction needs, and improving school attendance amongst Roma pupils. The municipality prioritized completing its sanitation system and constructing a wastewater treatment plant, but still needs funding for a community center and housing upgrades. Krivany, where 22 % of the population is Roma, faces high unemployment, poor accessibility, and insufficient rental housing. The municipality's prioritized projects include extending the sanitation system and building a community center, but it also has unfunded needs for home reconstruction and establishing a social enterprise.

In the Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region, Telgárt activities in the CuRI 5 phase focused on disaster risk vulnerability assessment and action planning as well as supporting the update of the Local Development Plan (PHSR). The municipality faces high levels of poverty, limited access to services, and needs improved infrastructure and housing. The municipality faced significant challenges due to management issues, including a conflict between the mayor and the local assembly, which paralyzed activities related to the CuRI. The elected mayor stepped down in May 2024, and a new mayor has since been elected and is in office. Despite these challenges, several projects are in preparation, including partial clearing of the rubble following the fire in the settlement, resolving land tenure for housing and infrastructure, wastewater treatment plant, extension of the drinking water pipeline, landfill elimination, roads and sidewalks, cycle paths, construction of social housing, reconstruction of the multifunctional playground, and construction of a children's playground. Additionally, there are funding constraints for clearing the fire rubble and land tenure constraints impeding land settlement for two illegal roads built on private land.

In the Košice Self-Governing Region, Jasov is actively addressing waste management issues but has limited access to services and needs improved infrastructure, including roads, sidewalks, and a waste collection yard. Projects in preparation include road reconstruction and sidewalk to the settlement, waste collection yard, waste stands for containers, containers for separated waste and composters, repair of benches and tables for cave visitors, activities to spread awareness about waste separation, anti-flood measures, provision of health care (pediatrician and doctor for adults), reconstruction of the kindergarten, construction of a playground, and social rental housing. However, the municipality faces challenges in securing funding for projects like the waste collection yard and requires assistance in reviewing technical documents for projects and identifying relevant funding opportunities.

What & How?

Work under this component focused on:

1. Strengthening integrated support to inclusion of Marginalized Roma Communities through continued support to regional authorities and eight pilot municipalities to strengthen their capacity, especially with (a) project preparation and implementation; (b) updating local development plans; (c) establishing a monitoring and evaluation framework; and (d) reviewing technical project documentation and identifying relevant calls for municipalities to submit applications.
2. Supporting the conceptualization and design of soft investments intended to support hard investments. Driven largely by PSK, this subcomponent focused on broader social infrastructure necessary for sustainable community development. It included activities in education, employment, housing, health, personality development, and participation. Notable projects included the “Regional analysis of NEET and partnerships for young people in PSK” and the establishment of the Regional Partnership Youth Guarantee, aiming to create a supportive environment for young people and other vulnerable groups.
3. Supporting regional authorities and municipalities in activities that support adequate shelter. This sub-component addressed the need for safe and secure housing by: (a) offering technical and strategic guidance to municipalities in preparing technical documentation for housing projects; (b) identifying suitable plots for construction and advising municipalities on appropriate calls to submit applications, while helping them overcome technical and administrative challenges.
4. Using Innovative Participatory Approaches and Instruments by employing behavioral interventions to address specific community behaviors impacting overall well-being. The sub-component was aimed to increase stakeholder engagement through participatory planning and community-based initiatives such as pro-attendance nudges to improve school attendance in Ostrovany and interventions to promote plastic waste separation in Krivany.
5. Ensuring community resilience to natural and man-made disasters by (a) preparing a disaster risk assessment and developing an action plan (b) with the BBSK, facilitating a conference titled “Strengthening Disaster Risk Resilience of Communities and Regions in Slovakia”.
6. Consistently with the philosophy of the CuRI, the Bank team sought to offer pragmatic and hands-on support to assist in the resolution of challenges encountered by municipalities and regional authorities.
7. Activities focused on the support of the development of the PSK social economy ecosystem included: a) scaling up networking and coordination among local social economy stakeholders; b) strengthening capacity, skills and business development mainly of public administration with spillover effects to implementers of social economy and social enterprises.

During the CuRI 5th phase, the six pilot municipalities of Dlhé Stráže, Varhaňovce, Čičava, Krivany, Ostrovany and Varadka in the Prešov region prepared and submitted 39 projects valued at € 16 million. The projects covered many sectors including roads and sidewalks (26 %), social housing (15 %), water and sanitation (13 %), kindergartens (13 %), community centers (13 %), solid waste management infrastructure (waste stands, waste collection yards) (5 %), land ownership settlements (5 %) and the Installation of cameras (2 %). Municipalities were provided with comprehensive support throughout the project proposal process. This included practical guidance in designing projects, ensuring alignment with strategic frameworks, and adhering to funding regulations to secure the necessary resources for implementation. The six pilot municipalities have updated their project lists for the new programming period, with projects in various stages of preparation, including documentation, building permits, and funding applications.

The Bank team also supported the municipality of Varhaňovce with preparation of a brief note with flood prevention measures. The note identified measures such as reforestation, vegetative cover and permeable surfaces; contour trenches along the slopes with water retention reservoirs and rainwater harvesting, and green roofs. The note, which was translated into Slovak was shared with the municipality for incorporation of some measures into the Local Development Plan (PHSR) and where necessary, the Land Use Plan.

In the Banská Bystrica region, the municipality of Telgárt received support from the BBSK and submitted two applications for a grant: (1) an electrical substation and connections to individual housing containers where Roma families were temporarily placed, and (2) sanitation for the fire affected settlement. Several projects were in preparation (as of March 2025). Telgárt has a pipeline of 14 projects including the reconstruction of the multifunctional playground, construction of a children's playground co-located with the school ground, purchase of large-volume containers to accommodate fire victims, site preparation for location of containers and purchase of a small tractor. The municipality is preparing project documents for various other projects such as housing development in the lower settlement, resolving land tenure in the settlement, amendment of the land use plan, sports grounds in the Roma settlements. Other projects such as public Wi-Fi have been completed. The site rehabilitation after the fire in the Roma settlement faced a setback as the project was rejected, and alternative funding options are being sourced.

FIGURE 1. Telgárt Roma Settlement affected by fire in July 2023



Source: Vlatko Jovanovski, World Bank, 2024.

The municipality has prepared a new PHSR and the World Bank supported this process through convening focus groups to input into the PHSR. Focus group meetings were held regularly from August to December 2024 and were attended by a diverse range of representatives from various sectors of the community. A comprehensive action plan for the municipality of Telgárt, spanning from the present to 2030, covering waste management, community development, infrastructure improvements, social initiatives, and environmental projects was developed.

A Municipal Disaster Risk Vulnerability Assessment & Reduction Action Plan for Telgárt has been finalized. The development of the Telgárt Municipal Disaster Risk Vulnerability Assessment & Reduction Plan involved a comprehensive methodology carried out in three phases. The first phase focused on preparatory activities, including defining the methodology design and the scope of the report. The second phase involved data collection and analysis, while the third phase was dedicated to developing the final assessment and action plan, incorporating findings from field visits and observations. The plan addresses several critical challenges related to multi-hazard risk scenario concerns, where interconnected natural hazards such as heatwaves, windstorms, and wildfires pose significant threats to Telgárt. Suggested measures to address Telgárt's disaster risks include:

- Improved Infrastructure: Focuses on upgrading housing infrastructure in Roma settlements, completing sewage systems, and enhancing fire hydrant networks.
- Community Based Early Warning System: Aims to improve the municipality's capacity to receive and disseminate early warning messages for hydro-meteorological events.
- Revision of the Civil Protection Plan: Emphasizes community inclusion and consultation in updating the Civil Protection Plan.
- Community Based Disaster Management: Promotes community participation in disaster preparedness and response, particularly focusing on Roma community involvement.
- Vegetation Management: Addresses wildfire risk through vegetation management programs and resident education initiatives.

The World Bank, in collaboration with the BBSK, organized a conference on December 4, 2024 that focused on disaster risk management, civil protection, and climate change adaptation, with a particular emphasis on marginalized Roma communities. The conference sought to address the challenges of high vulnerability of marginalized communities as a result of poor infrastructure quality (leading to frequent fires and flooding), lack of access to resources and support, and living in risk-prone areas due to lack of alternatives or unresolved land ownership issues which are exacerbated by intergenerational poverty and lack of capacity in smaller municipalities. Only 4 % of Slovakia's population is aware of local response plans (compared to 9 % EU average), and 67 % feel they need more information. Understanding of risks, contingency planning, and preventative actions is low, particularly within marginalized communities.

Key activities discussed included the importance of improving living conditions for marginalized communities, integrating environmental education and preparedness training into school curricula, and targeting vulnerable populations through various channels. The conference emphasized the need for better communication and understanding of data, strengthening urban planning and construction permitting authorities, and strategically placing resources. It also highlighted the importance of establishing a multi-sectoral stakeholder platform for regular collaboration, enhancing response and recovery capacities, and investing in technological advancements. The discussions underscored the necessity of combining climate change adaptation with disaster risk prevention and fostering community engagement and social capital.

In the Košice region, the CuRI initially supported three municipalities of Trebišov, Dobšiná and Jasov. However, cooperation with Dobšiná was terminated at their request due to lack of communication from the municipality and change in priorities within the municipality. Trebišov's participation in the CURl was terminated in September 2024 due to unmet commitments and limited engagement by the municipality. Ultimately, cooperation continued only with Jasov. The municipality implemented a number of activities and investments, notably targeted at addressing waste management after 16 000-ton illegal landfill under the settlement was cleaned. As of March 2025, Jasov had an investment pipeline of 14 projects valued more than € 21 million. Project applications have been submitted for road reconstruction, sidewalk, waste collection yard, and waste stands. The project for containers for separated waste and composters will be financed from the municipality's own resources in phases, with the municipality distributing waste bags for households and planning to purchase separation bins. Several other projects, including the repair of benches and tables for cave visitors, activities to spread awareness about waste separation, anti-flood measures, provision of health care, social rental housing, completion and reconstruction of local roads and sidewalks, expansion of the camera system, reconstruction of the house of mourning, and recultivation of the waste dump, are in various stages of preparation.

The World Bank prepared a note on Flood Risk Management Measures to Reduce Flood Risk in Jasov. The note identified practicable measures to reduce flood risk in Jasov, especially to the Roma settlement located along the Bodva river. Some of the measures identified include: i) reducing exposure through planning and carefully considering the sitting of houses in the settlement. The report highlighted flooding risks for the site identified for new Roma housing; ii) water reservoir(s)/ mini-retention basins and retention ponds along the Bodva valley, soft measures and maintenance such as installing simple check dams on the Bodva river; iii) awareness and clearing of litter along the river; iv) greening of the riverbank of Bodva; v) creation of wetlands; vi) re-meandering the river, etc.

FIGURE 2. Drone photographs of flooded area of Roma settlement in Jasov, 2020



Source: Tibor Kaputa, Jasov, 2020.

The World Bank team piloted the use of behavioral interventions and innovative participatory approaches in three municipalities: Ostrovany, Krivany, and Jasov. In Ostrovany, the project addressed the issue of high truancy rates among marginalized Roma communities. A qualitative approach was used to explore the barriers and drivers of school absenteeism among MRC pupils in Ostrovany attending the primary school in Šarišské Michaľany. The impact of a role-model-based intervention designed to improve school attendance among MRC pupils was then evaluated. The intervention used a quasi-experimental design to compare the attendance rates of pupils exposed to the intervention with those of control groups. The intervention involved three stages; (a) posters featuring role models, placed in the school and local community; (b) screening video interviews with role models during civic education classes; and (c) an in-person workshop with role models to discuss the campaign's messages and answer questions.

The study provided a structured framework for understanding the complex factors influencing absenteeism, exploring a variety of factors influencing school attendance, such as family dynamics, commuting challenges, and school policies. Observations focused on pupils' school commutes, classroom behaviors, and the social environment in the community. Capability-related barriers included difficulties in adhering to morning routines, a lack of self-discipline, and present bias, where pupils prioritized short-term gains over the long-term benefits of education. Many students struggled to articulate the relevance of schooling, with some viewing it as a waste of time. Language barriers were minimal, as most pupils saw learning Slovak as an opportunity for skill development.

In the municipality of Krivany, there was room to improve knowledge and awareness about the benefits of waste separation. Pollution of public premises in and around the settlements of Krivany is a visible issue, with litter often attributed to children or animals. Thirteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with municipal officials (4), Roma settlement inhabitants (8), and a waste services employee (1). Interviews occurred between December 4th and 15th, 2023 framed by the COM-B model (Capability, Opportunity, Motivation, Behavior). Eight semi-structured direct observations supplemented the interviews, focusing on waste collection points, the Roma settlement, households, pathways, and waste pickup. One of the key activities included incentivizing correct and proper plastic waste separation which includes offering debt reduction on local fees for households that participate in waste separation. Additionally, the community is being made visible online through visibility efforts, and artwork made from recycled materials collected by the community is being promoted. These activities aim to create a sense of pride and ownership among residents.

As an intervention, on April 23, 2024, two large plastic waste containers and waste bags were provided to 17 households. Bi-weekly collection and monitoring of bags was conducted. A workshop on waste separation, including practical demonstrations and educational games was conducted with representatives from all 17 households. This involves redesigning segregated waste bins to function as voting containers, creating formations from bags with separated waste on adjacent meadows, and documenting domestic separation by children for the title of “sorting superhero”. These gamified elements make the process of waste separation more engaging and fun for the community. Regular public appreciation of households that separate waste is also being implemented and involves publicly recognizing and appreciating the efforts of households that consistently separate their waste, thereby creating positive patterns and encouraging others to follow suit.

Results of the interventions are presented in the study elaborated by the World Bank team. The findings of this study offer significant insights into the complex interplay of behavioral, logistical, and social factors influencing waste separation in the marginalized Roma settlement of Krivany. By applying the COM-B model as the main framework, the qualitative study systematically explored the capability, opportunity, and motivation dimensions underpinning waste separation behavior. The study highlighted that knowledge about waste separation, while present, is not deeply internalized or prioritized within the community. Although residents are aware of the basic principles of waste separation, this knowledge has not translated into habitual behavior. The limited effectiveness of educational initiatives points to the need for further analyses and working on other approaches. The qualitative study revealed that the absence of dedicated containers for recyclable waste in the settlement and the distance to the nearest recycling bins posed logistical challenges. Furthermore, household space constraints and inconsistent waste management services exacerbated the issue, as did socio-economic factors such as the inability to afford additional waste bins or bags. A general lack of intrinsic motivation, with many residents perceiving waste separation as a low-priority activity, was observed. This apathy was further compounded by negative social norms and the absence of community role models. Conversely, financial incentives, such as the potential for reduced waste fees and monetary rewards for returned beverage containers, were identified as effective motivators, particularly among children.

The findings might have broader implications for waste management policies and practices in marginalized communities. First, the importance of contextually tailored, participatory educational campaigns cannot be overstated. Such initiatives should prioritize practical demonstrations and leverage trusted community members as role models to foster intrinsic motivation. Second, infrastructural investments must address the specific needs and constraints of marginalized communities. This includes ensuring the availability of separate waste containers within settlements, as well as regular and consistent waste collection services. Policies should also incentivize municipalities to adopt equitable waste management practices that address the disparities between Roma and non-Roma populations. Third, financial incentives and rewards should be integrated into waste management programs to align economic motivations with pro-environmental behavior. These incentives should be designed to benefit both individuals and communities, creating a sense of collective responsibility. Finally, the studies underscore the need for sustained and long-term interventions that address the systemic barriers underlying waste separation behavior. Short-term initiatives, while valuable, must be part of a broader strategy that includes capacity-building, community engagement, and structural reforms.

FIGURE 3. Waste separation training for adults and children in Krivany



Source: World Bank, 2024.

The Collaborative Innovation Process is meant to address the challenge of improving social inclusion and quality of life for Roma people in Slovakia through the engagement of stakeholders.

As part of this, the World Bank has been working with the municipality of Jasov to pilot an approach to stronger stakeholder engagement in municipal-wide and project / issue specific planning, with a particular focus on Roma participation and engagement. The results of this were codified into a Handbook and a Toolkit that can be used by other municipalities and agencies at the national level to enable stronger stakeholder engagement. The pilot Collaborative Innovation process was co-convened by the municipality of Jasov, the World Bank, the Košice Self-Governing Region, and Reos Partners. These convenors contributed to deciding the scope and topic of the process, which was “Keeping Jasov Clean,” and identified which actors to invite into the process. The pilot project successfully convened a diverse group of 25 stakeholders. The handbook outlines a detailed process for implementing Collaborative Innovation, including six key steps: convening a team, observing the system, identifying leverage points, devising prototype solutions, testing and refining, and expanding what works. The handbook also highlights the pilot process conducted in Jasov municipality, which demonstrates the practical application of Collaborative Innovation and provides valuable insights into its implementation. The Toolkit is aimed at understanding and tackling complex issues within a system and is organized into seven sections, each focusing on different aspects of the Collaborative Innovation process.

The Bank team also elaborated a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework. Despite national strategies aligned with EU guidelines, there is a lack of coherent investment and action plans to address the chronic underdevelopment and exclusion of Roma communities. Therefore, within the CuRI phases 4 and 5, a monitoring and evaluation framework was prepared to support municipalities, regional and national authorities in developing more specific M&E frameworks. The M&E Framework prepared is linked with the European-level framework, particularly through indicators provided by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). It includes data from regular surveys by the FRA, reports from National Roma Contact Points (NRCPs), civil monitoring, and reports by the European Commission. The methodological approach involved assessing current planning and methodological documents, along with available datasets, to pinpoint any gaps or areas requiring additional focus. The aim was to offer guidance for better alignment at the sub-national and municipal levels. Monitoring under the National Strategy was designed as a continuous process that regularly evaluates and publishes data, primarily quantitative, to measure progress toward achieving set objectives. This process is linked with the European-level framework, particularly through the common framework of indicators provided by the FRA. The Bank team identified key gaps in data availability, particularly at the municipal level, and highlighted the need for improved data collection methodologies and synchronization among institutions. It proposed a sub-national monitoring framework for aligning strategic and monitoring frameworks at various levels of governance, emphasizing the importance of municipalities in realizing tangible impacts of Roma inclusion strategies. Additionally, a Theory of Change and an Indicators Database which

provide a clear roadmap for interventions and monitoring, highlighting the interconnectedness of different areas of Roma inclusion were developed. These achievements lay the groundwork for more effective and targeted efforts to improve the integration of Roma communities in Slovakia.

Challenges & Next Steps

The Roma population in Slovakia faces significant socio-economic disparities, including systemic discrimination, poor living conditions, limited access to services, and high unemployment rates. The Bank team piloted several interventions in 14 municipalities. Integrated approach to investment preparation and implementation helped them to develop public infrastructure for all citizens in these municipalities. However, municipalities still have investment needs that were not fully met. Some municipalities have prepared projects and are ready to submit once funds are available and calls are open. Municipalities are concerned about the cost of solid waste management and low-cost recovery, especially from Roma settlements. This raises concerns about municipalities' ability to sustain investments made in the last programming period.

The Bank support of the CuRI regions and pilot municipalities in project preparation and implementation helped to close development gaps and improve integration of marginalized communities. Some pilot municipalities are engaged to resolve land tenure (such as in Ostrovany), while many are waiting for calls to be opened such as for housing (like Čičava) while others continue to submit to open calls for basic infrastructure. The Bank prepared and shared a guidance note on measures to reduce flooding in Varhaňovce, Jasov and Telgárt, but more needs to be done. The municipalities could benefit from support to implement some of the proposed measures, if the resources from national or EU level are available.

As many municipalities struggle with high unemployment levels, especially among the Roma, there is increased interest to establish social enterprises (SE). Municipalities such as Ostrovany have explored the establishment of Social Enterprises and could benefit from engagement with the Bank supported Social Economy Community of Practice (SECoP) established by the PSK. Municipalities are following up on and will respond to calls to be issued by the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family (MoLSAF), and the Office of the Roma Plenipotentiary. These calls aim to support MRC integration initiatives in areas such as youth partnerships, innovation ecosystems, sustainable social economies, and the development of supportive public policies at the local level. The Regional analysis and partnerships for young people project, approved in May 2024 and running until June 2025, will contribute to reducing NEET rates among young individuals aged 15 to 30. Additional projects will focus on developing tools to support social innovation, promoting sustainable social economies, and strengthening the Social Economy ecosystem within the Danube region.

Municipalities indicated limited financial resources to prepare project documentations. Many cited co-financing and public procurement corrections in the last programming period. While municipalities acknowledge and appreciate that there is no co-financing in the current programming period, they nonetheless have limited financing to contract service providers to prepare project documents, even though they are aware that these funds will be refunded. Many expressed appreciation for the support received from Development Agencies established by the self-governing regions. This support could be further extended to those municipalities that are not part of the Development Teams³.

Investments in the last programming period are subject to a 5-year sustainability period. Municipalities that invested in solid waste management infrastructure and removal of illegal landfills (Varadka, Varhaňovce, Krivany, Jasov) need to ensure there are no new illegal landfills and good solid waste management is maintained. Others who invested in water and sanitation infrastructure need to ensure the prescribed number of Roma continue to benefit from these services. Many municipalities also benefited from IROP resources to prepare project documents, and these projects have to be implemented within five years of the funds being used. Failure to meet these sustainability conditions could result in the municipalities having to refund investments and this would put them under severe financial pressure.

Data collection on Roma communities is limited, particularly at the municipal level. The census relies on self-reported nationality, which may not accurately reflect the Roma population. The Atlas of Roma Communities (ARC) provides estimates based on ascribed ethnicity, but it does not collect data on individual residents. Despite the 2030 Strategy, there is a lack of a coherent investment pipeline of projects and measures at the municipal level to address chronic underdevelopment and exclusion of Roma. Municipalities often lack technical capacity and resources to effectively implement integration strategies. Anti-Roma racism and prejudice persist, hindering social inclusion and access to services. It is therefore recommended for municipalities to improve data collection methodologies, synchronize information among institutions, and enhance municipal capacity through targeted support and training to form a robust monitoring and evaluation system.

COMPONENT 1. IMPROVING THE INTEGRATION OF GROUPS AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION – SOCIAL ECONOMY

Activities implemented:

1.5. Improving the integration of marginalized Roma in the PSK – social economy

Why?

The Social Economy component of the CuRI 5 aimed to address the persistent socio-economic challenges in the PSK, the least developed region in Slovakia. The PSK suffers from high unemployment, particularly among the Roma population, significant emigration (“brain drain”), and an aging demographic. Economic opportunities are limited for young people (NEETs), women, and vulnerable groups, fueling outward migration and depopulation.

The social economy was identified as a viable mechanism to address these issues by:

- **Creating employment opportunities:** Specifically targeting long-term unemployed individuals, particularly within the Roma community, young retirees, and fostering innovation.
- **Addressing the needs of marginalized groups:** Providing support and opportunities for those facing significant barriers to employment and social inclusion.
- **Strengthening the social economy ecosystem:** Building on the foundation laid by CuRI 4, this phase focused on improving networking and collaboration among stakeholders, especially the private sector. This involved adapting the World Bank’s social entrepreneurship ecosystem framework to the EU’s social economy approach, focusing on networking and coordination (demand-side) and capacity, skills, and business development (supply-side).

What & How?

CuRI 5 activities built upon the collaborative approach of CuRI 4, addressing identified gaps in the social economy ecosystem. Two primary areas of focus were:

(1) Scaling up networking and coordination:

- **Establishment of the Prešov Self-Governing Region Social Economy Community of Practice (PSK-SECoP):** Preparatory activities, training for the PSK team, and development of a tailored SECoP Toolkit.
- **Launch of PSK-SECoP:** The launch event brought together over 70 stakeholders to raise awareness, share best practices, and co-design future actions.

- **Second PSK-SECoP meeting:** Focused on forming a core group of organizations to support the CoP's development and addressed challenges related to Roma community employment.
- **Ongoing activities:** Further meetings and outreach efforts continued to raise awareness and engage stakeholders.

(2) **Strengthening capacity, skills, and business development:**

- **Capacity building for public administration:** Strengthening understanding of the local social economy ecosystem and implementing the SECoP.
- **Support for social enterprise establishment at the municipal level:** Exploratory meetings and field visits to explore opportunities for establishing new social enterprises.
- **Study visits (planned for 2025):** Visits to France and Belgium to learn from successful social economy initiatives. Making use of the TAIEX-REGIO Peer2Peer instrument.
- **Application for EC funding:** Submitted for follow-up technical assistance focusing on deeper diagnosis of the regional social economy ecosystem.

The activities yielded several key results and outputs:

- **Successful launch and ongoing engagement of PSK-SECoP:** Fostered collaboration and raised awareness of the social economy's potential.
- **Increased capacity of the PSK team:** Improved understanding of the social economy ecosystem and ability to implement and manage the SECoP.
- **Identification of key challenges and opportunities:** Highlighted the need for collaboration between public, private, and non-governmental actors, particularly in addressing long-term unemployment of marginalized Roma communities.
- **Increased awareness and interest in social economy:** Generated significant interest among local stakeholders in social economy initiatives.
- **Development of actionable plans:** Led to the formation of a core group for PSK-SECoP and exploration of solutions to identified challenges.

FIGURE 4. Launch of the PSK SECoP on May 21, 2024



Source: World Bank, 2024.

Next Steps

To maximize the impact of the social economy in the PSK, several key next steps are recommended:

- **Secure funding to sustain the PSK-SECoP:** Continued funding is crucial for the long-term success of the CoP.
- **Develop a regional strategy or action plan for social economy:** A comprehensive strategy with allocated budget is needed to ensure a unified vision and approach.
- **Strengthen administrative capacity at regional and municipal levels:** Continued capacity building is essential to support the implementation of social economy initiatives.
- **Address identified challenges:** Focus on developing and implementing solutions to challenges related to transportation, vocational training, and mentoring for marginalized groups.

- **Continue monitoring and evaluation:** Regular monitoring and evaluation are needed to track progress and ensure sustainability.
- **Explore further collaboration with the private sector:** Strengthening partnerships with the private sector is crucial for creating sustainable employment opportunities.

The success of the social economy in the PSK depends on sustained commitment and investment from all stakeholders. By addressing the recommendations outlined above, the PSK can leverage the social economy as a powerful instrument to drive inclusive economic growth and address the region's persistent socio-economic challenges.

FIGURE 5. Outcomes from co-designing the PSK-SECoP



Source: World Bank, 2024.

COMPONENT 1. IMPROVING THE INTEGRATION OF GROUPS AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION – INCLUSION IN EDUCATION

Activities implemented:

- 1.2 Inclusion in education in pilot BBSK secondary vocational schools
- 1.3. Supporting inclusion in education in pilot KSK secondary schools
- 1.5. Improving the integration of marginalized Roma in the PSK – inclusion in education

Why?

The “Support for Inclusion in Secondary Education” component (MRC EDU) of the Catching-up Regions Initiative (CuRI) 5 aims to address the challenges of low-income regions, particularly in ensuring long-term sustainable growth and preventing low-growth development patterns. These regions, primarily located in eastern Slovakia, face a dual challenge: sustaining growth and mitigating the risks associated with low growth rates. The MRC EDU component, implemented across the Prešov, Banská Bystrica, and Košice Self-Governing Regions, focuses on improving the quality, flexibility, and inclusivity of Slovakia’s Vocational Education and Training (VET) system. This is crucial given the negative demographic trends (declining youth population), a mismatch between VET offerings and labor market demands (34 % of secondary school programs experiencing low demand), and the need to address social exclusion, particularly impacting Marginalized Roma Communities. The initiative seeks to create conditions for comprehensive and functional VET systems, investing in high-quality learning environments and supporting system flexibility, with a specific focus on MRC inclusion.

What & How?

The MRC EDU component implemented several activities across the three regions, including joint and region-specific initiatives during the 5th phase of the CuRI. Joint activities included a thematic survey on inclusion in VET, webinars sharing best practices, and regular monitoring and evaluation of Integrated Investment Packages (IIP) implementation for pilot Secondary Vocational Schools (SVS). Region-specific activities varied, including TAIEX study visits and consultations on campus and training center concepts.

TABLE 4. Overview of joint and region-specific component activities by region

Activity/region	Prešov region	Banská Bystrica region	Košice region
Joint activity 1	Thematic survey focused on inclusion in VET and proposal of recommendations	Thematic survey focused on inclusion in VET and proposal of recommendations	Thematic survey focused on inclusion in VET and proposal of recommendations
Joint activity 2	Webinars focused on sharing experiences and best practices	Webinars focused on sharing experiences and best practices, proposals for legislative changes	Webinars focused on sharing experiences and best practices, preparation of new investment proposals
Joint activity 3	Regular monitoring and evaluation of IIP/IP implementation and provision of consultations to 14 pilot schools	Regular monitoring and evaluation of IIP/IP implementation and provision of consultations to 13 pilot schools	Regular monitoring of IIP/IP implementation preparation for 8 pilot schools and shared infrastructure of SVS
Region-specific activity 1		TAIEX study visit	Consultations on the Košice-Šaca Campus concept
Region-specific activity 2			Consultations on the establishment of a pilot training center

Source: World Bank, 2024.

The thematic survey involved:

- Semi-structured interviews with SVS representatives.
- An anonymized online questionnaire for students in F (lower secondary vocational education) and H (upper secondary vocational education) study programs.
- Focus groups with parents, employers, and VET stakeholders.

The selection of pilot SVS was based on criteria including existing infrastructure investments, untapped potential, strategic optimization goals, program offerings (F and H programs), practical training opportunities, and synergy with existing national and regional projects. The report also details the ongoing national education reforms, including curriculum reform and optimization of the secondary school network, which significantly impacted the context of the CuRI activities.

The thematic survey yielded several key findings:

- A significant mismatch persists between SVS offerings and labor market demands, particularly for graduates of F study programs.
- Early school leaving rates remain high, especially among MRC students.
- Many SVS lack comprehensive inclusion strategies and sufficient cooperation with stakeholders.
- Students from MRC face various barriers to successful completion of studies, including financial constraints, lack of support, and perceived lack of future opportunities.
- Employer-based training is crucial for improving inclusivity and employability but faces challenges related to administrative burdens and legislative constraints.

The analysis of best practices highlighted the importance of multi-level cooperation, strong stakeholder networks (especially local governments), precise identification of target group needs, and the development of sustainable interventions with measurable outcomes. The Bank team completed a report, which includes a Best Practice Database to support knowledge sharing and future initiatives especially in relation to inclusion of disadvantaged groups in meaningful jobs. Data from the student questionnaire revealed insights into factors influencing school choice, motivational factors, perceptions of inclusion, and suggestions for improvement.

Next Steps & Recommendations

To ensure alignment between skills and labor market demands, self-governing regions must continue to support initiatives focused on skills development and pursue strategic investments recommended by the World Bank – adult education and lifelong learning, the development of future-proof skills, skills retention, the attraction and reintegration of skilled talent, and the recognition of various forms of vocational training.

Upskilling and reskilling the existing workforce in the regions are essential to enable transitions between jobs and occupations. A regional skills space should include a strategic education plan in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), an action plan for basic skills focused on school-based education, and the European strategy for vocational education and training, as well as strengthen university alliances.

The relevance of skills and occupations for the labor market also requires intensive dialogue with social partners, the facilitation of skills recognition and validation, and the collection of evidence on current and future labor market skills and trends. Future interventions should include support for initiatives that ensure the transferability of skills, aiming to facilitate the recognition of acquired competencies in cases of mobility.

In addition, Slovakia is facing a decline in the working-age population, making it necessary to increase the participation of women, young people, and older citizens who wish to remain economically active in the labor market. Access to the labor market is also difficult for low-skilled workers, persons with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups.

And finally, the world of work is changing, and while new, rapidly growing economic sectors are emerging, workers need ways to adapt in order to retain or find employment. At the same time, they need a safety net and support during transitional periods – particularly young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, including students from marginalized Roma communities.

The World Bank team drafted numerous recommendations at national and regional level, which included:

1. National Level:
 - Develop a national-level platform for inclusion in VET to improve strategic planning, data collection, and stakeholder coordination.
 - Improve data collection and publication to support evidence-based policymaking.
 - Revise legislation to simplify the dual education system, increase flexibility in employing younger students, and improve support for students from MRC.
 - Increase funding for VET, exploring multi-source financing models.
 - Develop a national strategy for inclusion in VET, including clear criteria for funding support teams and a unified system of inclusion indicators.
 - Promote and support international cooperation initiatives.

2. Regional Level:
 - Establish local platforms for inclusion in VET to foster collaboration among stakeholders.
 - Support SVS in developing comprehensive inclusion strategies and strengthening their local ecosystems.
 - Invest in modernizing school equipment and facilities, particularly in SVS with a high proportion of MRC students.
 - Implement targeted interventions to improve student motivation, including scholarships, mentoring, and tutoring.
 - Develop culturally relevant curricula and training modules for teachers on cultural competencies and inclusive teaching practices.
 - Strengthen cooperation between primary schools and SVS to improve school choice and career guidance.
 - Support employer engagement in practical training and dual education, including financial incentives and simplified administrative processes.

These recommendations aim to create a more inclusive, high-quality, and responsive VET system in Slovakia, better preparing students from MRC and other disadvantaged backgrounds for successful transitions into the labor market.

TABLE 5. Example of possible interventions to support inclusive VET in selected areas

Interventions in the area of teaching organization	Interventions in the area of teaching methods and forms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjustment of the teaching schedule (time, location, blocks) • Establishment of an additional workstation for the student • Alternative teaching arrangements • Modification of the seating arrangement in the classroom • Reduction in the number of students per class • Formation of classroom teams • Education in non-school environments • Extracurricular stays and training programs • Organization of leisure time within the school • Provision of social services on school premises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual work with the student • Structuring of instruction • Cooperative learning • Active learning methods • Instruction tailored to learning styles • Supporting student motivation • Fatigue prevention and focus enhancement • Regular checking of understanding • Teaching methods appropriate to the pedagogical context

Source: World Bank, 2024.

COMPONENT 2. HUMAN CAPITAL

Activities implemented:

- Activity 2.1 Improvement of availability and efficiency of health care provision in the BBSK:
- 2.1.1 Preparation of the knowledge-sharing & continuing education model for healthcare professionals in the BBSK:
 - 2.1.2. Creation and piloting of a healthcare model using digital tools / tele-medicine (remote data collection, data analysis, and evaluation of the patient's health status):

Why?

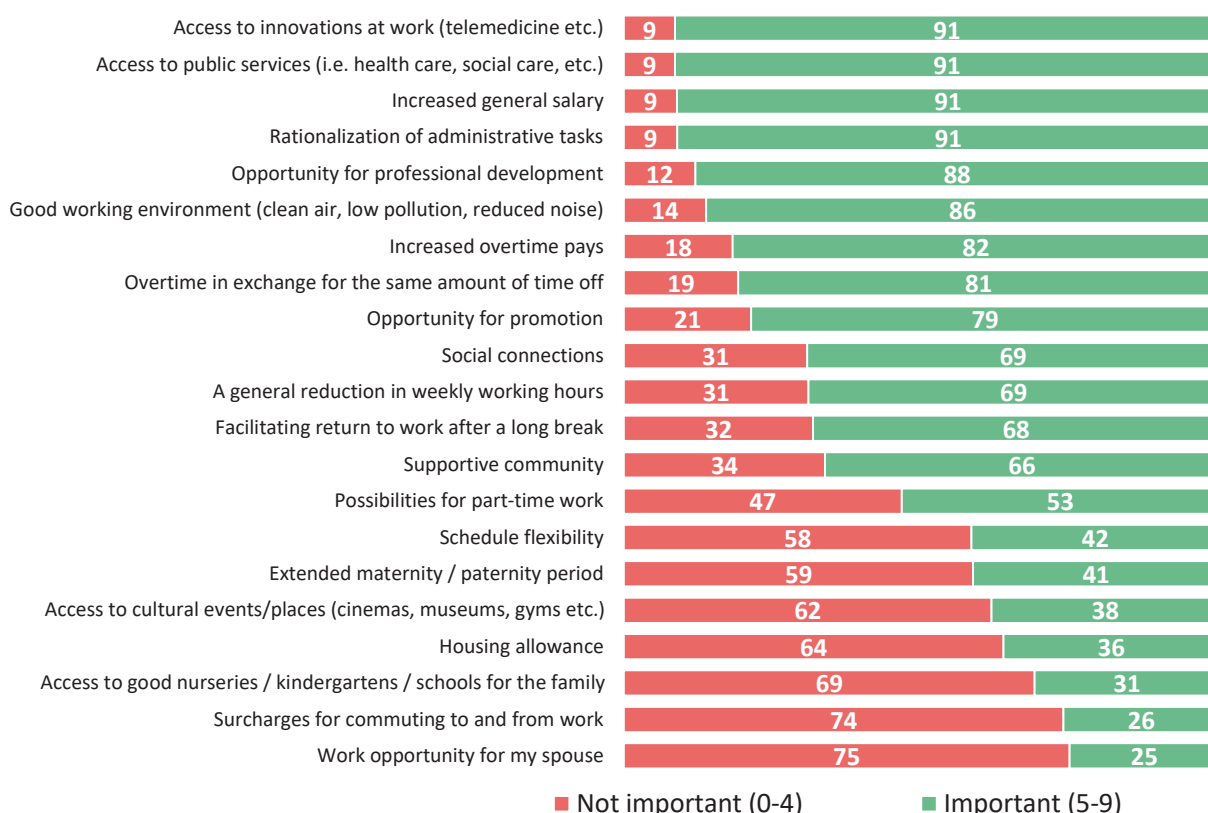
Health workers play a crucial role in the health system to ensure everyone has access to comprehensive health services that are appropriate, timely, and of high quality. Despite the growing need for health care due to aging societies, health systems face human resources shortages owing to migration, aging health workforce, and expected retirement.

The World Bank team analyses conducted within the previous CuRI phases, showed critical shortages of both doctors and nurses in the BBSK, high pre-retirement age of most healthcare employees, as well as high dissatisfaction with the work performed. Based on this, the most important recommendations were identified, including one of particular importance: creation and piloting of healthcare model using digital tools (telemedicine).

Regional interventions, including telemedicine, are important to increase the attractiveness of the medical profession and be able to efficiently respond to local health needs. Telemedicine saves both the patient's and the health care provider's time as well as the cost of the treatment. Furthermore, due to its fast and advantageous characteristics, it can streamline the workflow of inpatient and outpatient clinics and make it easier to monitor chronically ill patients in the home environment.

The need for technological development in outpatient care, including access to telemedicine, was indicated as the main motivational factor ensuring the attractiveness of work by healthcare system employees, both in Slovakia and in the BBSK. Among the stated motivational measures, the respondents of the national survey were most interested in access to innovations at work, better access to public services, increased general salary and rationalization of administrative tasks. These mentioned motivations were identified as important (5-9) by more than 90 % of respondents.

FIGURE 6. Which of the mentioned incentives would be of interest to you in relation to a better work-life balance and your health and well-being at work, if any?



Source: World Bank 2023. Own compilation, based on the results of the national survey.

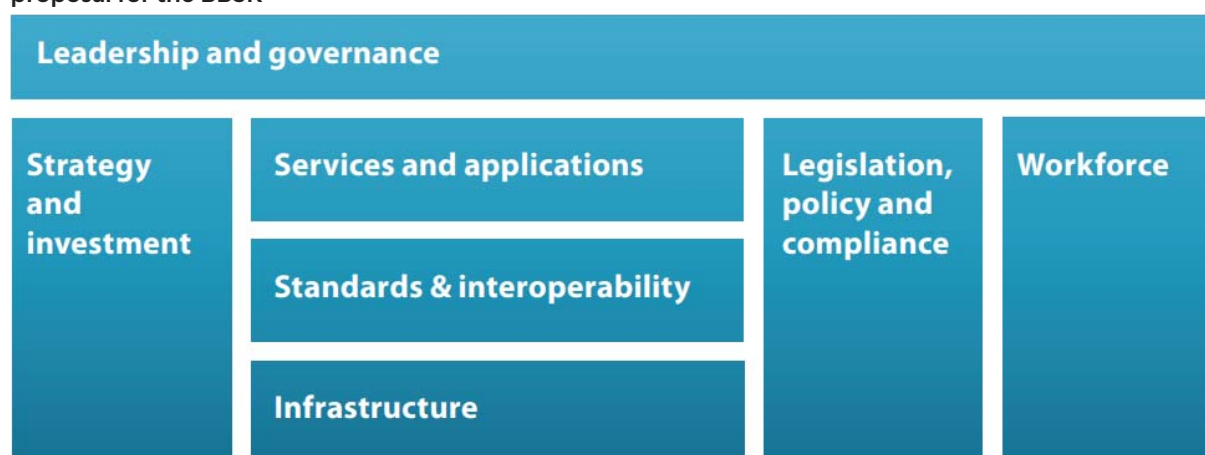
How & What?

To develop a BBSK regional pilot model proposal for telemedicine, a thorough literature review was conducted to identify the best possible interventions. Then, expert consultations were held between the World Bank and representatives of the BBSK to define a common goal and scope of developed pilot model proposal. The methodology for the development of the proposal for telemedicine implementation in the BBSK was primarily based on the World Health Organization National eHealth Strategy Toolkit and encompassed its main aspects. Although the scope proposed by the World Bank only covered one segment of the recommended by WHO strategy (i.e. telemedicine), the most important aspects that were thoroughly analyzed were interdependence and interconnection with other health system parts and components, such as primary health care (PHC), hospital care, leadership and governance, and national and regional health information systems available both in Slovakia and the BBSK. The use of a well - well-known and field-tested methodology brought a strong foundation for a successful development of the project proposal, ensuring that all strengths and weaknesses of the stakeholders are considered and reliably assessed. In addition, the methodology was extended to cover important aspects of telemedicine based on the EU best practice.

The assessment of the current (“as-is”) state was carried out using the methods of desk review and conducting workshops/meetings/interviews with the BBSK representatives and relevant stakeholders. The documentation for desk review was obtained by the WB from previous deliverables, open-source databases as well from the internal team’s knowledge base. The desk review was done to document the current state of governance/leadership, organization structure, processes and related data flows, roles and responsibilities, data, legal and financial framework, and strategic goals.

Through several workshops and interviews with the BBSK representatives, a list of requirements and the future (“to-be”) state was defined. These events aimed to fulfil any gaps in information that were observed during the desk review and to gather the opinion and requirements of stakeholders firsthand. These requirements were then supplemented by the opportunities recognized during the study visit in Croatia and Slovenia held between 15 and 19 of October 2024 and other recognized European best practices. The Croatian Institute of Emergency Medicine (CIEM) agreed to be main host institution for the BBSK TAIEX-REGIO Peer2Peer visit to Croatia and Slovenia. The BBSK delegation visited several healthcare centers and offices of Zagreb and Varaždin counties. The delegates were familiarized with the basic principles of planning, organizing, implementing and monitoring telemedicine solutions at different outpatient facilities.

FIGURE 7. The aspects considered when developing the telemedicine pilot project proposal for the BBSK



Source: World Bank 2024. Own compilation, based on the National eHealth strategy toolkit.

Developed by the WB team, the telemedicine project proposal aims to build a teleconsultation platform on regional level to allow health professionals to establish teleconsultation with their patients, equip health professionals with needed software, hardware, and digital medical equipment, as well as patients with remote monitoring devices. Secondly, the project is focused on providing financial incentives to health professionals (doctors and nurses) who will perform the teleconsultation/telemedicine services during the pilot period of two years after the implementation of telemedicine solutions.

Development of a telemedicine system

The first main intervention “Development of a telemedicine system” consists of three activities which need to be implemented in the BBSK:

1. The first activity, teleconsultations with GPs and selected specialists, is the introduction of a teleconsultation system at the level of the region, which would allow the patients to have virtual visits (eConsultations) with their general practitioners (GPs) and other specialists after being referred by the GP (e.g., cardiologists, pulmonologists, etc.).

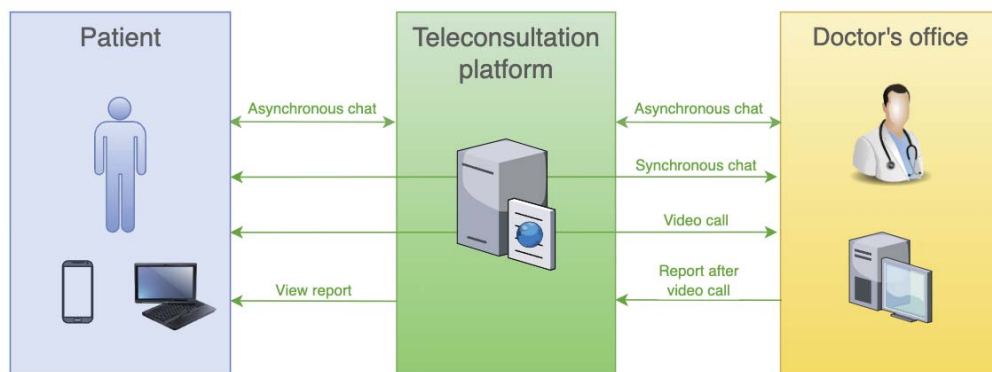
Within the project, a teleconsultation platform will be procured and implemented (cloud solution with hosting in Slovakia, enabling transfer of the data, virtual video conference, database for storing all the data and video files in a structured, searchable form, possibly integrated in electronic medical record; administration of users, technical support with call center, backup location). Safe identification/authentication and safe data transfer will be enabled (login/password or smart card).

Patients will be able to start an eConsultation with mobile phones, PCs, or tablets. Doctors will answer prearranged video calls through an application in their computer or from the smartphone/tablet if it is out of the working hours (depending on the agreement with health professionals). During the video call, the doctor will be able to record a summary of the call through several key data (history, status, therapy, recommendation) that are automatically sent to the teleconsultation platform and are available to the patient by logging into the system again. Everything will be stored as legislation requires.

Within the project, the procurement, and implementation of the required equipment for medical personnel is envisioned (tablets, laptops, end user software, integration with electronic health record), alongside education and promotion of the system.

2. The second activity, selected telemonitoring project, is the procurement of the remote monitoring equipment for patients (e.g., small portable ECG) which will be distributed to patients with chronic diseases (e.g., patients with COPD, post-COVID, heart failure, post AMI, post stroke, DM type1, 2 etc.) to monitor their health status for the purpose of better management of their diseases (not for emergency purposes). Patients will be educated for the use of the monitoring devices. Exchange of the data with the specialist will be established with user-friendly interface containing advanced analytical and reporting features (possibility to include machine learning and AI analysis).
3. The third activity, telehealth supported homecare branch, is to equip health professionals (e.g. nurses, GPs) in rural settings with telemedicine devices (digital HD cameras for inspection of ears, throat, and eyes, vital signs monitors, ECGs, respiratory monitors, dermatology cameras, digital stethoscopes, point-of-care mobile laboratory etc.) to transfer the data from the patient to the doctors (different specialists) either from the practice or during home visits for treatment and diagnostic purposes. Education of health professionals to use the equipment will be performed.

FIGURE 8. Implementation parts within the first main activity “Development of telemedicine system”



Source: World Bank, 2024.

Capacity building

The second main project intervention is “capacity building”. It is concentrated on the planning of and providing financial incentives to health professionals (doctors and nurses) who will perform the teleconsultation/telemedicine services during the pilot period of two years after the implementation of telemedicine solutions.

Challenges & Next Steps

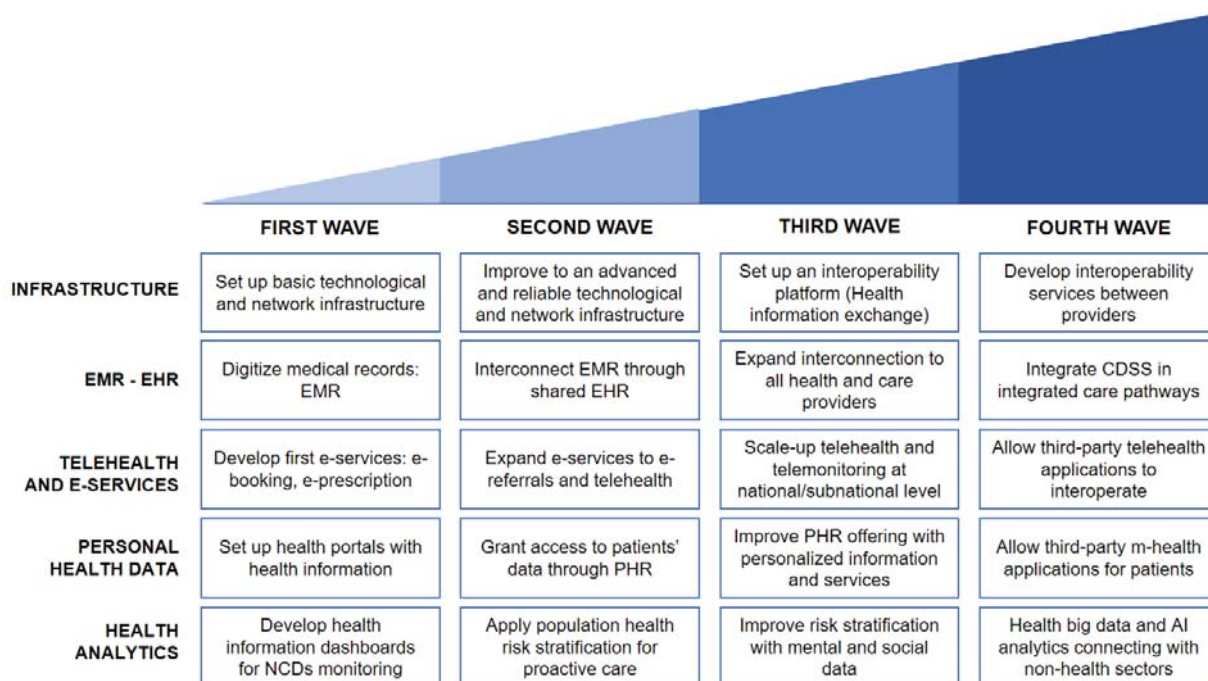
Barriers to implementing telemedicine are numerous and varied, including funding mechanisms, competing priorities, legal and infrastructure constraints. Additionally, social equity of access to telehealth services and related clinical issues like lower quality of patient-physician relationships, physical examination, and care with remote visits can become drawbacks for adoption.

Adoption ultimately depends on the evolving business and policy context that shapes these trends, especially the integration of data into electronic medical record systems and the penetration of value-based reimbursement formulas that influence decisions about technology investment. Other determinant factors in telemedicine adoption include the penetration of clinician training combined with progress in enhancing the usability of technology in daily workflows, success in navigating evolving relationships between patients and their physicians, and the availability of evidence-based clinical guidance.

In recent years, several telemedicine maturity models and benchmarking analyses have been done allowing to rank countries in different levels of adoption. Based on a hypothetical synthesis of the different digital maturity models and benchmarks and according to the diffusion of innovations theory, countries can be classified in five groups: (1) innovators; (2) early adopters; (3) early majority; (4) late majority; and (5) laggards. Slovakia belongs to category 5, hence the development of telemedicine at the regional level as a pilot model is advisable. A telemedicine pilot at the regional level will therefore have the potential to be scaled up to the national level if appropriate steps are taken.

To leapfrog forward the above-mentioned levels, Figure 9 depicts a telemedicine roadmap informing a gradual implementation sequencing classified by the type of information solutions related to better management of care.

FIGURE 9. Information solutions and telemedicine implementation sequencing



Source: World Bank, 2024, own compilation based on WHO, 2019.

COMPONENT 3. LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Activities implemented:

- 3.1 GEMER Trail – Taking it forward
- 3.2. Planning of integrated investments related to the Poloniny Trail
- 3.3. Creating an environment for innovation based regional development by supporting the operations of the Regional Innovation Center

ACTIVITY 3.1 GEMER TRAIL – TAKING IT FORWARD

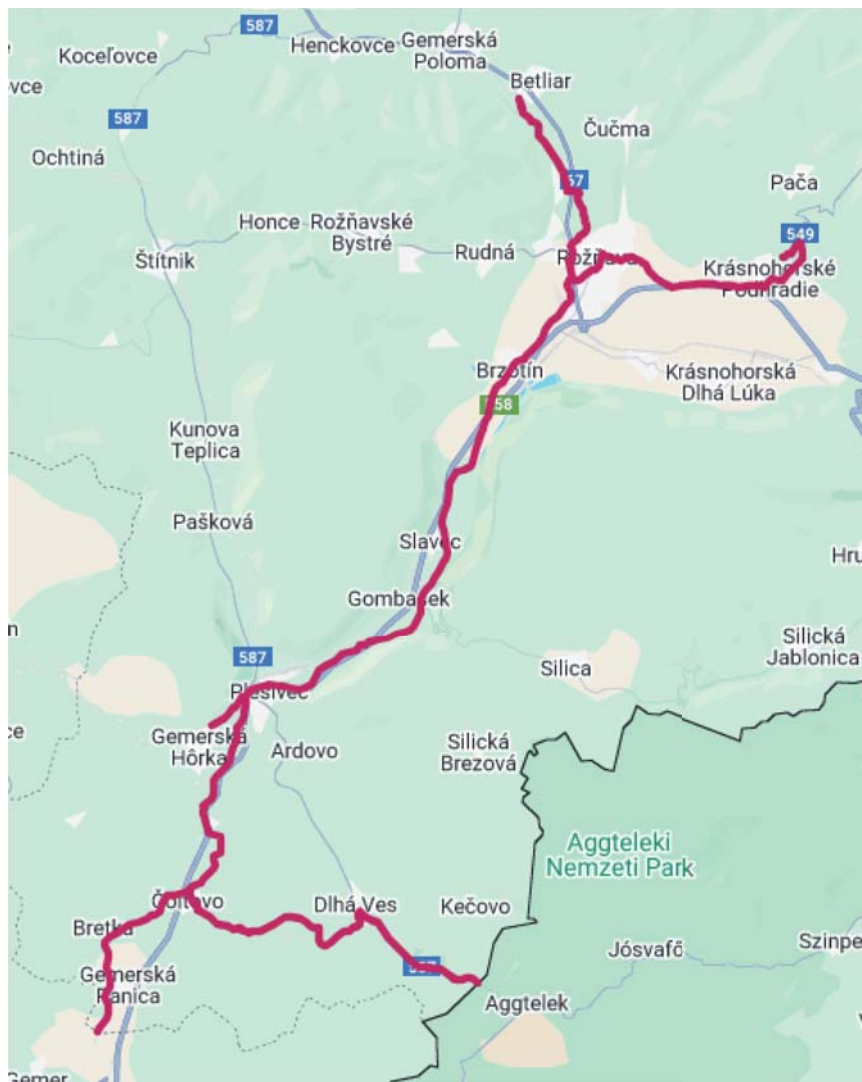
Why?

The Upper Gemer region area lies in the Košice region with a high potential for tourism development, thanks to the Slovak Karst National Park, the most significant karst area of the plain type in Central Europe, and the Slovak Paradise National Park, which preserves karst plateaus, deep-cut river canyons, and gorges with glamorous waterfalls. The area is also rich with cultural heritage, which can serve as a substantial lure to attract a higher number of visitors.

The Upper Gemer: The report on Rapid-Assessment of the Tourism Sector in the Rožňava District identified challenges that hindered the tourism development in the area. These included: 1) limited mobility, isolated sites, and no public transit options; 2) fragmented cycling trail networks further limiting accessibility to the key tourism destinations and attractions; 3) lack of tourism services available to the visitors largely triggered by the lack of qualified workforce as a result of scarce training opportunities at the local level; and 4) a lack of effective marketing and promotion activities to help visitors with planning their trips to the Upper Gemer area and the town of Rožňava.

As part of the CuRI 4 phase, the tourism component of this Initiative helped the KSK prepare a Gemer Trail Preparation Investment Programme for the implementation of the pilot section of the trail, which is nearly 60 kilometers long and aims at connecting the town of Rožňava and key tourist attractions around the town with the Hungarian border and increase the number of visitors. The programme also provided the opportunity to bring together and connect key actors in the tourism industry and enable them to work together on product and service development. During the 5th phase of the CuRI, the Bank team continued providing support to the KSK team for tourism development in the Upper Gemer area.

FIGURE 10. Map of the future Gemer Trail



Source: KSK, 2024.

What & How?

The Bank team provided technical support, reviewed & provided inputs into project documentation prepared by the KSK team in order to prepare investment projects in line with the integrated territorial strategy plan of the KSK for the Upper Gemer area. The region has identified tourism as a sector with high potential for local economic development and in need to be supported by funding. This has been clearly declared in the development strategy of the Košice Region until 2027. The technical support under this component consisted of working closely together with the KSK team for the trail alignment identification, prioritization, and preparation of project documentation related to drawing of EU funds in the cycling sector in line with the report the “Gemer Trail: Taking It Forward”.

As of January 2025, the status quo of the Gemer trail construction preparation by each section was as follows:

- Southern branch (Rožňava – Gemerská Panica, and to Domicia cave)

1st stage: Rožňava – Slavc (Gombasek) – construction of a cycle route along the protection dam of the Slaná River with a total length of 11.5 km. The KSK submitted a project application within the Interreg VI-A HU-SK Programme in January 2025. The project should cover the elaboration of the project documentation.

FIGURE 11. Protection dam of the river Slaná – future construction site of the 1st section of the Gemer Trail



Source: KSK, 2024.

2nd stage: Slavec (Gombasek) - Gemerská Panica – construction of a cycle route along the protection dam of the Slaná River in a total length of 20 km. The KSK was processing a rental contract with the Slovak Water Management Company (SVP, state enterprise). The KSK allocated funds for the construction of this section in their regional Integrated Territorial Strategy 2021-2027 (ITS/ITI).

- Right branch (Rožňava - Krásnohorské Podhradie)

In January 2025, zoning proceedings were underway. KSK allocated funds for the construction of this section in their regional Integrated Territorial Strategy 2021-2027 (ITS/ITI). The KSK needs to resolve some land ownership related issues along the planned cycling route.

- Left branch (Nadabula - Betliar)

Documentation for zoning decision has been elaborated. The vendor is working on the detailed design. The construction permit could be awarded in the beginning of 2026. KSK allocated funds for the construction of this section in their regional Integrated Territorial Strategy 2021-2027 (ITS/ITI).

At the same time, the World Bank team supported the KSK in strengthening institutional capacity and acquiring professional know-how. In 2023, the World Bank played a pivotal role in connecting diverse stakeholders in the Upper Gemer area, acting as a bridge and introducing innovation through external expertise and exchange opportunities. Building on this foundation, the World Bank continued to support the KSK in 2024 in enhancing the capacities of stakeholders involved in tourism and national park management, with a focus on improved conservation and sustainable development. As part of these efforts, the World Bank and the KSK jointly organized a workshop for local stakeholders in Rožňava on October 2, 2024.

FIGURE 12. Workshop for local tourism stakeholders in the Upper Gemer area



Source: KSK, 2024.

Next Steps

The KSK team needs to continue with the preparation of project documentation for the Gemer trail (at various stages) and proceed with the provision of construction permits. There is a high likelihood that the KSK will secure financing for the construction of the trail within the programming period 2021-2027. However, delays in the processes with issuing building permits for different sections of the Gemer Trail may jeopardize or prolong the construction of the planned cycling trail. Accordingly, the KSK, in accordance with the World Bank's recommendations, should simultaneously develop the construction of additional cycling infrastructure (such as the rest areas) along the planned trail, and continue to maintain a dialogue with tourism development actors in the Upper Gemer area.

ACTIVITY 3.2 PLANNING OF INTEGRATED INVESTMENTS RELATED TO THE POLONINY TRAIL

Why?

The Poloniny Trail Project is a key initiative aimed at fostering tourism development in the Snina District of the Prešov Self-Governing Region. The project focuses on enhancing high-quality cycling infrastructure and services within and around the Poloniny National Park. The designated cycling trail, spanning approximately 90 km, integrates newly built, existing, and reconstructed segments. It connects the city of Snina in the west, extends to the Polish border in the north, and aspires to establish a link to the Ukrainian border through the municipality of Ublá in the east. Given the complexity of implementation, the trail was divided into phases to align with EU's financing periods. The construction of the initial 27 km – comprising the Stakčín-Starina-Ruské and Ulič-Uličské Krivé sections – commenced in 2023 and was completed in 2024. The remaining sections are at various stages of preparation.

Recognizing that tourism development extends beyond cycling infrastructure, the PSK has identified the need for additional investments to strengthen the broader tourism ecosystem in the Snina District. In line with this vision, the project team collaborated with and provided advisory services to PSK and local municipalities in order to assess infrastructure needs, prioritize investment opportunities, and develop an Investment Plan for Tourism Development in the Snina District.

What & How?

The objective of the component for CuRI 5 in 2024 was to (1) provide implementation support to ensure the completion of the ongoing construction works financed in 2023, (2) identify additional investments to be financed through local, regional, central, and European funds, and (3) continue building the capacity of project stakeholders in the areas linked to tourism development.

The World Bank team monitored the construction process and provided implementation support for the ongoing construction works in Stakčín and Ulič, and Starina water reservoir. In working with the PSK and their roads department, the World Bank provided expert advice in the design of other sections of the Poloniny Trail which are currently under preparation. As of January 2025, the PSK was designing two more sections and was preparing the procurement process to secure a designer for the remaining sections. As part of this activity, the PSK benefited from additional consultations with the World Bank experts to ensure high quality design documentation deliverables. At the same time, the PSK was opening newly constructed sections of the trail during the year 2024⁴.

FIGURE 13. Newly constructed sections of the Poloniny Trail in 2024



Source: PSK, 2024.

The World Bank supported the PSK in investment planning to identify integrated interventions for the development of the tourism sector in the Snina District during the 2021-2027 programming period. Under this framework, the PSK has the authority to directly allocate financial resources to projects aligned with the Integrated Territorial Strategy. The Poloniny component was identified as one of two flagship projects within the Upper Zemplín development package.

Building on the successful launch of the Poloniny Trail Project, the PSK requested the World Bank's support to develop a comprehensive investment plan focused on leveraging ongoing initiatives in and around the Poloniny National Park, while introducing new targeted measures to enhance the region's tourism potential.

The plan was developed through a robust and inclusive process. It began with a review of relevant materials, including the PSK's RISK database, the Slovak Recovery and Resilience Plan, the Programme Slovakia 2021–2027, and commitments made during the UA-SK High-Level Governmental Meeting held in Uzhhorod, Ukraine, in October 2024. Two field visits were conducted to validate the proposals and engage directly with local communities. Extensive consultations with municipal leaders, the management of the Poloniny National Park, and other stakeholders ensured alignment with local needs and strategic priorities.

In total, 144 investment proposals were identified and evaluated using a comprehensive methodology. This included criteria such as alignment of the proposed activity with the Snina County Destination Strategy 2022, importance, implementation readiness, expected beneficiaries, land ownership status, and environmental impact. Based on this assessment, 61 high-priority activities were selected for the final plan.

The selection methodology was designed to ensure that all activities are feasible, strategically aligned, and capable of delivering tangible benefits to local communities and the broader tourism sector. The plan includes three annexes: a list of prioritized activities by financing and packaging solutions; activities grouped by implementing agencies and municipalities; and an overview of potential funding sources to support project implementation.

The plan reflects a collaborative effort involving community leaders, mayors, NGOs, and other local actors, whose active participation and input were instrumental in shaping its outcomes.

FIGURE 14. Sketches of cycling and non-cycling infrastructure projects along the Poloniny Trail



Source: World Bank – Vaclav Hochmuth, 2024.

The World Bank team also continued building professional know-how of the PSK project management team and other relevant stakeholders, in the areas of project management, tourism and service development, and other relevant themes. An example of such activities was a workshop with Snina district local stakeholders organized in late October 2024 (more details are available here: <https://www.poloninytrail.sk/en-gb>).

Next Steps

The PSK team is now well positioned to advance tourism development in the Snina District, with a particular focus on environmental and cyclo-tourism initiatives. Going forward, the team should continue preparing project documentation and advancing the construction permitting process for the remaining sections of the Poloniny Trail. In parallel, the PSK should actively pursue financing options for the trail's completion and for the broader set of prioritized projects outlined in the Investment Plan for Tourism Development in the Snina District. Maintaining ongoing dialogue with key tourism stakeholders in the district will also be essential to ensure coordinated efforts and sustained impact.

ACTIVITY 3.3 CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT FOR INNOVATION BASED REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT BY SUPPORTING THE OPERATIONS OF THE REGIONAL INNOVATION CENTER

Why?

The origin of the component focusing on stimulating the regional innovation ecosystem stems from the conviction that innovation in companies enhances their productivity and thus their competitiveness, consequently they offer better jobs and drive socio-economic growth of a region. In fact, stopping the brain drain and stimulating local economy were key priorities of regional authorities at the outset of this component, since both the BBSK and the KSK experienced an outflow of talented people and their economies lagged behind the national average that was mainly driven by the capital city, Bratislava. At the same time both regions have foundations for developing innovations. For instance, both have the legacy of high-quality manufacturing. The KSK is the second strongest academic center in the country and a company cluster focusing on IT. The BBSK has a cluster of aluminum companies and the aluminum-focused research institute of the Slovak Academy of Science, Inoval, operates there. Moreover, in both regions, several large and innovative businesses operate that have their own R&D centers. Similarly, many medium – and small-size companies thrive in the BBSK and the KSK that run own inhouse development departments.

The evolution of the innovation component from CuRI 2 to CuRI 5 reflects the shifting focus of the regional authorities, their perception of the innovation ecosystem, and the availability of funds. The work started with a strong focus on knowledge transfer, collaboration with the research organizations (universities, research institutes, the Slovak Academy of Science) and mapping of the national system for supporting innovation. It also included the identification of local needs via interviews with local stakeholders. The mapping of local needs and a better understanding of the national innovation support programs, which, at that time, did not include any dedicated resources for developing regional innovation systems, led to supporting the design of individual interventions. In parallel, the CuRI team worked on elaborating the framework for the commercial utilization of R&D infrastructure. Gained experience led to the realization that regional authorities have limited influence over the research sector, which is fully funded by the national level and has limited experience in working with the private sector.

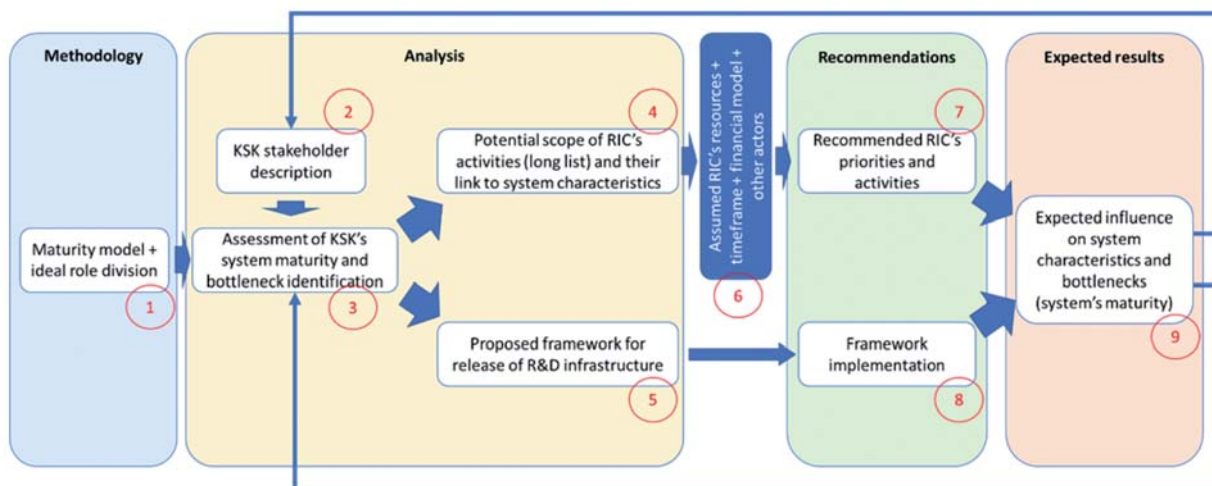
Consequently, the work program shifted towards establishing regional innovation centers (RICs) as coordinators and facilitators of budding regional innovation ecosystems. This was supported by a dialogue with the national level which resulted in the idea of earmarking a financial envelope for supporting regional innovation ecosystems. This topic became the core theme of the CuRI innovation work. It started with the conceptualization of ideas of RICs' objectives and responsibilities in both the BBSK and the KSK. Then it turned into fairly detailed planning of RIC's organizational structure, four pillars of its activities, and specific activities around startup support in the KSK. The focus of the CuRI work also moved from R&D collaboration and knowledge transfer to nurturing the talent pool, supporting startups and strengthening the governance of the regional innovation ecosystem, since these are elements that can be influenced by the regional activities in the Slovak Republic.

What & How?

The initial work on innovation based regional development during CuRI 2 was dedicated to research and development collaboration and knowledge transfer between academia and industry in the BBSK. Besides mapping the regional resources and stakeholders, it also provided an overview of the national programs supporting the R&D area. Key recommendations pertained to i) setting up a RIC, ii) testing a regional innovation voucher scheme, and iii) establishing a prototyping space for to-be-innovators, the nnolabb. Additionally, it laid foundations for developing the framework for releasing RD&I infrastructure, which Slovak research organizations purchased with public resources (including EU funds) and did not utilize for commercial purposes. As a result, an inter-ministerial working group was set up by the MIRDI to tackle this topic. Based on this work, the BBSK regional innovation voucher was designed and tested together with the Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency (value of provided vouchers: EUR 1million). After initial testing in the BBSK, this instrument was scaled up to the whole country and several subsequent rounds were implemented. The BBSK also established the innolabb, which has been expanded since then to several similar entities across the region.

The CuRI 3 work in the innovation component focused on two pillars and also encompassed the Košice region (Figure 15). First, it proposed a model for assessing the maturity of the *knowledge transfer* systems in both the BBSK and the KSK and helped identify key bottlenecks in their ecosystem development. These led to proposing the initial pillars for potential RICs' activities as well as roles and responsibilities within knowledge transfer systems in each region. Moreover, an analysis of potential RIC organizational and legal models was conducted. Second, it finalized the framework for releasing R&D infrastructure. The framework was successfully tested at the University of Pavol Jozef Šafárik in Košice and it was also shared with the national level and other research organizations in the Slovak Republic. In parallel to these activities, the WB team provided just-in-time support to further developing and operationalizing RICs in both regions.⁵

FIGURE 15. Logic of the CuRI 3 Innovation Component Report



Source: World Bank, *CuRI 3 innovation component report*, 2023.

Reflecting on the CuRI work, the government of the Slovak Republic dedicated EUR 80 million of EU funds in the Programme Slovakia under the Policy objective 1 (measure 1.1.1.) for developing regional innovation systems⁶. These funds came from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for the programming period 2021-2027. The regional envelope was divided between the regions and major cities – the allocation for the BBSK and the KSK was roughly EUR 10 million each. This decision was preceded by an extensive conceptualization process at the national level that started during CuRI 3 and lasted well into the CuRI 4. During that stage various organizational models and financing mechanisms were considered.

Hence the CuRI 4 emphasis was on finetuning an optimal model for the functioning of RICs in the Slovak Republic according to subsequent modifications of the planned measure 1.1.1. Eventually, four pillars were recommended for RICs' activities, i.e. i) talent pool development, ii) support for enterprises (in Košice the focus was on startups), iii) reinforcement of the innovation system governance, and iv) facilitating collaboration between academia and business. Additionally, this work included recommendations on sequencing the RIC's development, gradual build-up of its capacity, monitoring and evaluation elements, and budgetary considerations.⁷

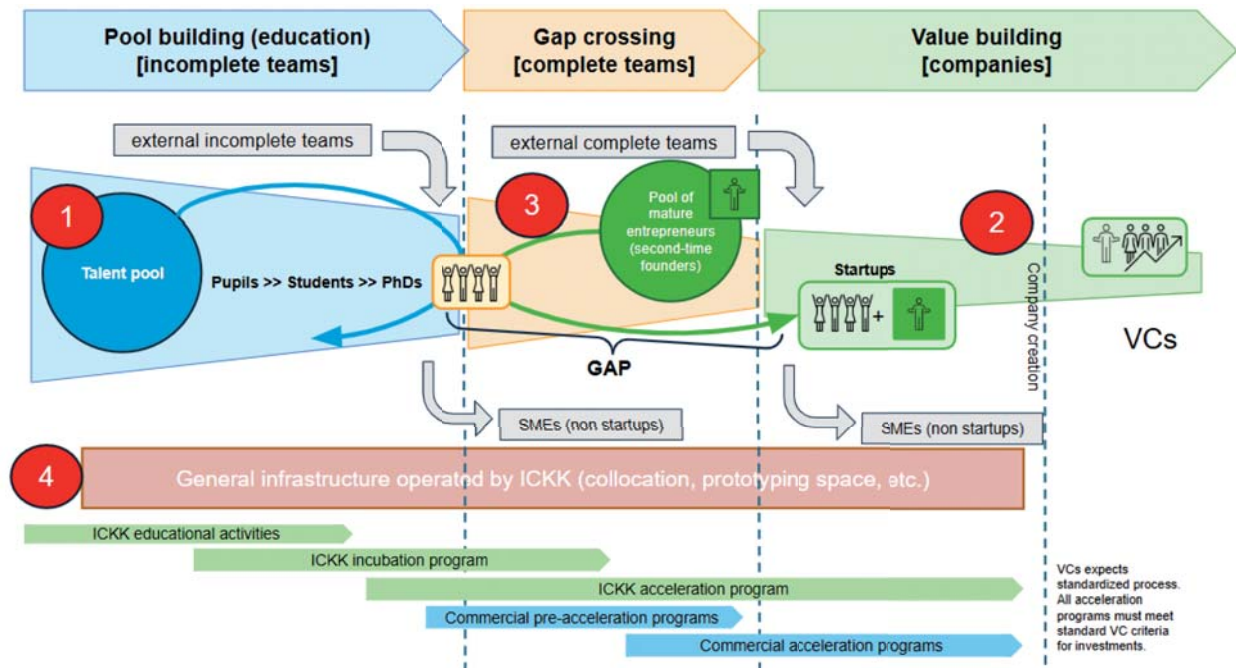
CuRI 4 also devoted significant time to supporting the KSK RIC⁸ in carrying out experiments and testing various types of support measures and initiatives, directed to different target groups that were financed with the regional budget. The key result was the RIC's decision to prioritize i) the development of the local talent pool and ii) support for startups. The World Bank team provided hands-on support and examples of specific programs that could be implemented by the KSK RIC.

The final year (CuRI 5) zoomed in on supporting the KSK RIC in launching planned activities after the call for the measure 1.1.1. was launched with a special focus on developing the regional startup ecosystem. It included the fine-tuning of the previously planned activities to the last-minute changes in the conditions of the call, and supporting the KSK RIC in building its strategy of and activities for developing the regional startup environment. The WB team provided hands-on capacity building and organized study visits to the Gdańsk Technical University (Poland) and Vilnius (Lithuania). The WB team also supported the KSK RIC in thinking about organizing a regional innovation council (Kraj30) and updating the Regional Innovation Strategy.

The special focus on the startup ecosystem in the KSK resulted in developing two models that are to guide the KSK RIC's future activities. These are the 'startup development path' and the 'startup development ecosystem' (Figure 16). Both are described in the technical report of the CuRI 5 innovation component. In a nutshell, the startup development path describes how an idea is being created, finetuned and potentially ends with establishing a company. This model starts with nurturing individual talent and innovative ideas (trainings and competitions for students),

progressing through skill and idea enhancement (pre-acceleration), prototype development and business skills development (acceleration), and culminating in company establishment and investor funding. The model of a startup development ecosystem segments the startup development path into three distinctive 'stages' (pool building, gap crossing, value building). These are used to indicate support measures that a well-developed startup ecosystem must provide to facilitate startup creation. Such a model can help RIC inform its strategy and develop its activities to fill in existing gaps and avoid duplication of service provision.

FIGURE 16. Startup development ecosystem



Source: World Bank, CuRI 5 innovation component report, 2025.

The technical report of the CuRI 5 innovation component provides two sets of recommendations for the early-stage development of regional innovation ecosystems with an emphasis on nurturing a startup ecosystem in the Slovak Republic, and potentially beyond. The first, more general set of recommendations, is targeted at regional policy makers. The second, much more detailed, aims at coordinators of regional innovation ecosystems, i.e. RICs and their managers. The intention of the CuRI 5 innovation report is to distill lessons learned from the four years of work and provide more universal recommendations for other Slovak regions that would like to reinforce their regional innovation ecosystems at their early stage of development, i.e. first four-five years. These recommendations are divided in (fairly) sequential phases that start with a political vision and then evolve into operationalization. The latter is split into five stages: i) ground zero, ii) preparation, iii) planning, iv) early implementation, and v) taking stock and fine tuning. The content of the report can be treated as a check list of topics that a RIC manager must deal with at individual stages and includes such aspects as: baseline assessment, vision and goal setting, developing a strategic plan and strategic development directions, selecting suitable activities, defining a theory of change and a monitoring framework, potential thematic specialization, planning budget and staff, identifying financing sources, collaborating with stakeholders, experimenting.

The CuRI 5 report synthesizes and references tools and approaches elaborated and applied during the program lifetime. The World Bank team hopes that such an approach will help utilize knowledge accumulated through the CuRI work, ideally influencing practices at the national level.

Next Steps

The KSK RIC is an exemplary case of how a region can start and evolve its adventure with developing regional innovation ecosystem. Thanks to the strong commitment of the region's political leadership and financial support, the KSK RIC could develop its strategy and activities as well as test its ideas by implementing relatively small-scale activities with a very small team. This experimentation was taking place while preparing for obtaining EU funds from the policy objective 1 (A Smarter Europe), measure 1.1.1 of the Programme Slovakia 2021-2027. In the meantime, it also obtained other sources of funding support ambitious projects, such as the Regional Innovation Valley.

The current key objective of the KSK RIC is to keep experimenting with different activities, yet at the same time it must professionalize and expand ones that are functioning well. Such a professionalization is crucial for building the RIC's brand among the regional and national stakeholders. One of such ongoing activities is launching a pre-acceleration program in collaboration with a professional venture capital fund. The other one, delivered just after the CuRI 5 assistance ended, was the organization of national conference on innovation and startups in Kosice. To keep evolving the KSK needs to expand its staff and keep investing into inhouse skills as well as to develop a network of external partners. Moreover, close monitoring of its activities is crucial to ascertain that the RIC is moving in the right direction and focuses on activities that will allow it to achieve envisaged results.

Finally, entities such as the KSK RIC deliver public goods by nurturing the talent pool, facilitating startup creation, and enhancing the ecosystem governance, however, they are not profit making and need long-term political and financial support. While the KSK RIC has just received a EU financed grant (EUR 9.7 million), it will only last until the end of 2027. For the RIC's further operation and growth, it will be necessary to find funding model that can sustain the RIC's activities beyond that date. The earlier the decision is made, the easier for the RIC it will be to deliver on its targets and plan its further development.

COMPONENT 4. PROJECT MANAGEMENT & ADMINISTRATION

The Joint Action Plan of the CuRI 5th phase was elaborated and approved by all CuRI partners in January 2024. An Amendment of the Administrative Agreement between the EC and the WB was signed on April 3, 2024. The agreement was also adjusted to include a new component of work, a pilot phase of the CuRI application in the Baltic States (hence the title of the agreement adjusted to reflect both Slovakia and Baltic States). The work in the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) is implemented as a separate engagement with the respective DG REGIO and DG EMPL desks, and through different WB technical teams, informed by lessons learned from Slovakia. The final conference, held in Bratislava on April 15, 2025, celebrated seven calendar years and completion of CuRI implementation in the Slovak Republic. The opportunity was further used to mark the symbolic handover to the Baltic states as the CuRI approach is now being implemented in these 3 countries. More than 170 participants participated in person, and many others online. More information on the conference is available at: <https://www.bbsk.sk/zaverecna-konferencia-2025>

FIGURE 17. Photos from the CuRI 5 Final conference



Source: World Bank, 2025.

Steering Committee Meetings

The Steering Committee was the main monitoring, coordinating and decision-making platform of the CuRI. The Committee monitored the implementation of the CuRI, in particular the delivery of the measures agreed within the Action plans of the participating regions. The Committee decided on measures to improve and accelerate the implementation process of the Action plans. Regular Steering Committee Meetings were organized with all the stakeholders present to: 1) assess the progress of the work to date (the World Bank or the regions shared short presentations and progress reports with the Steering Committee Meeting participants prior to each meeting); 2) discussed problems and issues encountered, and made decisions on how to solve them; 3) proposed next steps to be taken with clear deadlines and responsibility for their delivery; and 4) agreed on a change of approach, or additional/different work to be completed. The frequency of the Steering Committee Meetings ensured that all the problems and issues identified were addressed in a timely manner, which helped to save time and resources needed later in the process to achieve the agreed-upon results.

Five Steering Committee Meetings were organized during the CuRI 5th phase. The first Steering Committee Meeting (SCM) of the CuRI 5 was held on March 11, 2024, virtually (videoconference). The 2nd SCM was held on June 25, 2024 in Košice. The 3rd SCM was held on September 24-25, 2024 in Prešov and Snina. The 4th SCM was held on December 3 in Banská Bystrica. Upon agreement of the CuRI partners, a short virtual SCM was organized on April 3, 2025, two weeks before the final conference.

TABLE 6. CuRI 5 Steering Committee Meetings

No.	Date	Place
1 st	March 11, 2024	Virtual (videoconference)
2 nd	June 25, 2024	Košice
3 rd	September 24-25, 2024	Prešov (and Snina)
4 th	December 3, 2024	Banská Bystrica
5 th	April 3, 2025	Virtual (videoconference)

Source: World Bank, 2025.

CONCLUSIONS

The Catching-up Regions Initiative in the Slovak Republic has been a transformative effort over seven years, significantly enhancing the capacity of national and regional authorities to design and implement EU-funded regional development interventions. This multidisciplinary initiative, involving collaboration between the European Commission, the World Bank, and various regional authorities, has yielded substantial outcomes and impacts across several development areas.

Overall Outcomes and Impact:

- **Integration of Disadvantaged Groups:** CuRI has made significant progress in Roma integration, focusing on living conditions, jobs, and education. It facilitated the preparation and submission of projects addressing critical infrastructure needs and fostered economic opportunities for marginalized groups.
- **Human Capital in Health:** The development of a telemedicine model in Banská Bystrica addresses healthcare accessibility and efficiency, particularly in rural areas.
- **Local Economic Development:** CuRI supported sustainable tourism development and established the Regional Innovation Center, securing substantial EU funding.
- **Vocational Education and Training (VET):** The initiative improved the quality and inclusivity of Slovakia's VET system, emphasizing Roma inclusion and aligning offerings with labor market demands.
- **Capacity Building:** CuRI provided hands-on technical assistance, empowering local stakeholders to design and implement EU co-financed interventions.
- **Investment Generation:** CuRI contributed to generating substantial investments, demonstrating its effectiveness in leveraging external funding for regional development.

Positive Impact on Jobs and Inclusion. CuRI has positively impacted job creation and the inclusion of vulnerable groups, particularly the Roma community. By addressing systemic barriers and enhancing access to education and employment opportunities, the initiative has contributed to reducing unemployment rates and fostering economic participation among marginalized groups. The focus on vocational education and training has equipped individuals with the skills needed to thrive in the labor market, thereby improving their livelihoods and economic prospects.

Cooperation Across Levels. The initiative has strengthened cooperation between national, regional, and local levels, fostering a collaborative environment for regional development. This cooperation has been crucial in aligning strategies, sharing resources, and implementing projects effectively. The involvement of local stakeholders in decision-making processes has ensured that interventions are tailored to the specific needs of each region, enhancing their impact and sustainability.

Capacity Building for Investments and EU Funds. CuRI has significantly enhanced the capacity of self-governing regions to prepare and implement projects funded by EU resources. By providing technical assistance and training, the initiative has equipped regional authorities with the skills and knowledge needed to access and manage EU funds effectively. This capacity building has been instrumental in driving investments and ensuring the successful implementation of development projects.

Recommendations for Sustainability of the CuRI results:

- **Continued Funding:** Ongoing financial commitment is essential for critical initiatives like social housing and waste management infrastructure.
- **Strengthening Local Capacity:** Further investment in technical capacity building at the municipal level is needed.
- **Addressing Systemic Issues:** Persistent challenges such as land tenure issues require ongoing attention and policy solutions.
- **Data-Driven Policymaking:** Improving data collection methodologies is crucial for effective monitoring and evaluation.
- **Sustaining Collaborative Platforms:** Continued support for platforms like PSK-SECoP will foster ongoing collaboration and knowledge exchange.
- **Strategic VET System Development:** Aligning VET offerings with labor market demands and supporting marginalized students are necessary.
- **Scaling Telemedicine:** Securing long-term funding and addressing constraints are crucial for scaling telemedicine nationally.

Applicability Elsewhere. The Slovak CuRI experience offers valuable lessons and a replicable model for other EU and World Bank client countries facing similar regional disparities. Key takeaways include:

- **Multidisciplinary Approach:** Addressing regional development through a holistic approach integrating various sectors.
- **Strong Partnerships:** Collaboration between the European Commission, the World Bank, and regional authorities was fundamental to CuRI's achievements.
- **Hands-on Technical Assistance:** Direct, practical support proved highly effective in building local capacity.
- **Focus on Pilot Projects:** Piloting interventions allows for testing and refinement before broader implementation.
- **Addressing Vulnerabilities:** Targeted support for marginalized communities is crucial for inclusive growth.
- **Leveraging EU Funds:** CuRI's ability to guide regions in accessing EU funds provides a blueprint for other countries.

The Slovak CuRI has laid a strong foundation for sustainable regional development and inclusive growth. By building upon its successes and applying the valuable lessons learned, Slovakia can continue its trajectory towards greater prosperity and social cohesion, offering a compelling case study for similar endeavors globally.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: Overview of the CuRI components/activities during 7 years of the project implementation

During the seven years of the CuRI implementation, the World Bank supported three Slovak regions within the following components:

- Improvement of employment for secondary vocational school graduates in all 3 regions, with a focus on the alignment of the demand of the labor market with the supply of VET schools, enhancement of quality and efficiency of vocational secondary education, digitalization of education, and inclusion (of marginalized groups) in education in all 3 CuRI regions.
- Improving the integration of groups at risk of poverty or social exclusion, mainly the Marginalized Roma Communities in all 3 regions.
- Support to development of the Social Economy (BBSK & PSK).
- Support for the Geo-infrastructure of spatial data and open data in the PSK as well as in the KSK, with a focus on improving analytical and decision-making processes.
- Enhancing R&D&I collaboration between industry and research in the BBSK and the KSK.
- Support for the development of basic environmental infrastructure in the Snina district (PSK).
- Enhancing energy efficiency of public buildings in the PSK.
- Support to development of environmentally friendly tourism. It included technical support to the Poloniny Cycling Trail construction in the PSK, and Gemer Cycling Trail construction in the KSK region.
- Support to establish an integrated, intelligent, and sustainable public transport system (BBSK).
- Improvement and Integration of Health and Social Services (for seniors) in the BBSK. Improvement of availability and efficiency of health care provision in the BBSK, focusing on human resources and telemedicine.

CuRI 1: May 2018 – June 2019

Prešov region

Activity 1: Improving Secondary Vocational Education

Activity 2: Enhancing Energy Efficiency of Public Buildings in the PSK

Activity 3: Enhancing Regional and Urban Management Capacity in the Prešov Region:

- Establishing a Regional Spatial and Open Data Infrastructure in the Prešov Self-Governing Region
- Supporting the development of the endogenous potential of the PSK for tourism and regional development

CuRI 2: July 2019 – December 2020

Banská Bystrica & Prešov regions

After the first year, the piloted approach was prolonged in the Prešov Region and rolled out in the Banská Bystrica Region, focusing on these activities:

Activity 4: Support for the improvement of quality and efficiency of secondary vocational education training in the PSK

- Activity 5: Support to increase the dynamism of regional development (PSK)
- Activity 6: Provision of technical input for in the development of a geospatial platform to manage spatial data (PSK)
- Activity 7: Support to improve project management (PSK)
- Activity 8: Support to improve the integrated, smart, and sustainable transport system in scarcely populated areas (BBSK)
- Activity 9: Support in the analysis and bridging of the skill gap through improving secondary VET (BBSK)
- Activity 10: Support in enhancing research and development collaboration between industry and research organizations (BBSK)
- Activity 11: Support for integrated health and social services for seniors (BBSK)

CuRI 3: January 2021 – June 2022
Banská Bystrica & Košice & Prešov regions

After the second CuRI year, the Initiative was prolonged in the Banská Bystrica and Prešov regions and rolled out to the third Slovak region – the Košice region, focusing on these activities:

- Activity 12: Support for the Geo-infrastructure of spatial data (PSK).
- Activity 13: Improving integration of marginalized Roma (PSK).
- Activity 14: Support to develop basic environmental infrastructure in the Snina district (PSK).
- Activity 15: Technical support to the Poloniny Trail construction (PSK).
- Activity 16: Improving the quality and efficiency of vocational secondary education in the PSK.
- Activity 17: Support to establish an integrated, intelligent and sustainable public transport system (BBSK).
- Activity 18: Improvement of employment for secondary vocational school graduates in the BBSK.
- Activity 19: Enhancing R&D&I collaboration between industry and research in the BBSK.
- Activity 20: Improvement of Health and Social Services for seniors in the BBSK.
- Activity 21: Improving the integration of groups at risk of poverty or social exclusion (BBSK).
- Activity 22: Creating an environment for technology transfer and greater R&D collaboration between research and industry (KSK).
- Activity 23: Increasing the scope of education to promote successful employment (KSK).
- Activity 24: Improving the integration of groups at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the Košice region (KSK).
- Activity 25: Support for the design of a geo-spatial open data infrastructure in the region and improving the analytical and decision-making processes of the KSK.

CuRI 4: July 2022 – December 2023
Banská Bystrica & Košice & Prešov regions

- Activity 26: Improving integration of marginalized Roma (MRC) in the PSK
- Activity 27: Basic environmental infrastructure in the Snina district (PSK)
- Activity 28: Poloniny Trail (PSK)
- Activity 29: Improving the quality and efficiency of secondary education in the PSK
- Activity 30: Improvement of availability and effectivity of healthcare provision in the BBSK
- Activity 31: Social Economy (BBSK)
- Activity 32: Building an innovative ecosystem in the BBSK, linking industry with R&D organizations (BBSK)
- Activity 33: Improving the quality of secondary vocational education and increasing the quality of the learning environment (BBSK)
- Activity 34: Continued support to the three pilot municipalities – Improving the integration of groups at risk of poverty or social exclusion (BBSK)
- Activity 35: Improved integration of marginalized Roma communities in the KSK
- Activity 36: Creating an environment for technology transfer and greater R&D collaboration between research and industry in the KSK

- Activity 37: Sustainable tourism in the KSK
- Activity 38: Integration of social and health care, increasing regional accessibility and creating an environment for the development of new types of social services and the support of scarce health services in the KSK
- Activity 39: Geo-infrastructure of spatial data – extension and improvement of quality (KSK)
- Activity 40: Improving the quality of secondary vocational schools in the Košice Self-Governing Region that meets the requirements of the labor market

CuRI 5: January 2024 – April 2025
Banská Bystrica & Košice & Prešov regions

- Activity 41: Improving the integration of marginalized Roma in the PSK
- Activity 42: Planning of integrated investments related to Poloniny Trail (PSK)
- Activity 43: A complex design of the MRC integration project in the municipality of Telgárt, BBSK region
- Activity 44: Inclusion in education in pilot BBSK secondary vocational schools
- Activity 45: Improvement of availability and efficiency of health care provision in the BBSK
- Activity 46: Supporting inclusion in education in pilot KSK secondary schools
- Activity 47: Continuous support to selected pilot municipalities in the KSK in their Roma integration activities
- Activity 48: GEMER Trail – Taking it Forward (KSK)
- Activity 49: Creating an environment for innovation-based regional development by supporting operations of the Regional Innovation Center (KSK)

ANNEX 2: List of SCMs and Final conferences organized within the CuRI in Slovakia

Number	Date	Place
CuRI 1		
1	May 17-18, 2018	Prešov
2	June 28-29, 2018	Prešov
3	September 13-14, 2018	Prešov
4	November 15-16, 2018	Bratislava
5	January 24-25, 2019	Prešov
6	March 25-26, 2019	Prešov
7	May 16-17, 2019	Vysoké Tatry
CuRI 2		
8	September 18-19, 2019	Banská Bystrica
9	November 21-22, 2019	Prešov
10	January 30-31, 2020	Banská Bystrica
11	March 10, 2020	videoconference with both regions (due COVID-19)
12	April 21-22, 2020	videoconference with both regions
13	June 16-17, 2020	videoconference with both regions
14	September 29-30, 2020	videoconference with both regions
15	November 24-25, 2020	videoconference with both regions
CuRI 3		
16	February 9-10, 2021	virtual (videoconference with all 3 regions)
17	April 13-14, 2021	virtual (videoconference)
18	June 9-10, 2021	hybrid (in Banská Bystrica & virtual)
19	October 4-5, 2021	hybrid (in Prešov & Košice & virtual)
20	December 6-7, 2021	virtual (videoconference)
21	March 17, 2022	virtual (videoconference)
CuRI 4		
22	May 17-18, 2022	hybrid (in Banská Bystrica & virtual)
23	September 20-21, 2022	hybrid (in Prešov & virtual)
24	December 6-7, 2022	hybrid (in Banská Bystrica & virtual)
25	March 21-22, 2023	hybrid (in Trebišov/KSK & virtual)
26	June 13-14, 2023	hybrid (in Prešov & virtual)
27	September 26-27, 2023	hybrid (in Banská Bystrica & virtual)
CuRI 5		
28	March 11, 2024	virtual (videoconference)
29	June 25, 2024	Košice
30	September 24-25, 2024	Prešov (and Snina)
31	December 3, 2024	Banská Bystrica
32	April 3, 2025	virtual (videoconference)

List of CuRI annual conferences organised

Number	Date	Place
1 - CuRI 1	June 18, 2019	Prešov
2 - CuRI 2	June 29, 2021	Tále (Banská Bystrica region)
3 - CuRI 3	June 14-15, 2022	Košice
4 - CuRI 4	November 27-29, 2023	High Tatras (Prešov region)
5 - CuRI 5	April 15, 2025	Bratislava

NOTES

- 1 See for more details here: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/eca>
- 2 Čičava, Dlhé Stráže, Krivany, Ostrovany, Varadka, and Varhaňovce
- 3 The Office of the Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities selected 60 pilot municipalities and supports them within the National Project “Development teams”. The implementation of the project includes soft activities (especially in the areas of education, housing, employment, and combating Roma racism) and equally hard activities associated with necessary infrastructure investments (e.g. construction and reconstruction of drinking water infrastructure, roads and sidewalks, construction of sewerage and WWTPs, construction of waste management infrastructure, etc.). More information available here: <https://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/narodne-projekty/nprti/>.
- 4 Note (PSK): The sections were put into early use but have not received the statutory approval from the Building Authority (as of March 2025).
- 5 Parts of this chapter originated from the CuRI3 RD&I Report.
- 6 European Commission. (2022) Partnership Agreement with Slovakia 2021-2027/ Policy Objective 1. https://commission.europa.eu/publications/partnership-agreement-slovakia-2021-2027_en
- 7 These elements are reflected in the CuRI 4 Report.
- 8 Official name: Innovation Center of the Košice Region, or ICKK.

