

# Action Plan

## to Promote Economic Growth

### in Prešov Self-Governing Region

### Catching-up Regions Initiative IV (CuRI IV)

Final version - January 2022

#### Summary

The proposed Action Plan is based on the needs and competences of the Prešov Self-Governing Region (PSK) and builds on previous successful activities carried out within CuRI I to III. The aim of the Proposal is to support inclusive economic growth generating quality jobs in the region, by promoting productivity growth in the following factors:

- **People.** High quality education is a prerequisite for creating good jobs. It is necessary to improve quality of secondary education and lifelong learning, which will unlock the workforce potential, including the potential of the marginalized Roma community (MRC) for a benefit of local labour market.
- **Infrastructure.** Data management, addressing tourism infrastructure. Developing local decentralized solutions to the water supply and wastewater infrastructure and service needs within the region. These solutions should be more sustainable for the beneficiaries and have a much smaller carbon footprint.

#### Introduction

**Fundamental priority of the PSK is to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth.** The Prešov region, has the highest number of least developed districts (NRO<sup>1</sup>) with high unemployment rates, strong labour force emigration, brain drain and aging population within all Slovak regions. Many investments are of lower added value, they do not guarantee good wages and their sustainability is often questionable in the context of technological changes.

**We emphasize necessity of an inclusive growth.** Our goal is to improve **living conditions** of families, young families, seniors, and Roma community.

A community of more than 130,000 Roma lives in the Prešov region, a large part of which is marginalized without access to adequate education, basic infrastructure, and the labor market. This community represents a pool of labor force, which is one of the region's development potentials, and it is critical to increase its active participation on the labor market.

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<sup>1</sup> As defined by Act no. 336 /2015 Coll. on the Support of the Least Developed Districts.

As stated in the Economic and Social Development Programme of the Prešov Self-governing region<sup>2</sup> (ESDP PSK), our regional development vision is:

“Competitive region attractive for preserved and responsibly managed natural and cultural richness with **high quality infrastructure** for work, entrepreneurship, and housing of citizens who do not leave the region; but actively look for ways of social, cultural and economic recovery of its territory potential, and thus participate in **improving the living conditions** of all residents without distinction of nationality, age or educational level, health status or gender”.

Consistent with the programming documents of wider scope applicable to the Slovak Republic (SR) and EU, **8 thematic areas of development potential** were defined for the territory of the Prešov region. These will have been implemented as a priority in the period 2015-2022 and will be fulfilling the vision of PSK development:

- Entrepreneurship & innovation;
- Tourism;
- Technical infrastructure;
- Education;
- Social services & health care;
- Efficient service to public for inclusive life of higher quality and higher participation;
- Development of cultural & creative potential of the region;
- Environmental care.

Cross-cutting priorities are promotion of economic growth, promotion of employment and inclusive society which, will be applied in the evaluation criteria for the selection of eligible activities, respectively projects for fulfilment of individual measures and specific objectives of the ESDP PSK.

Among the main barriers related to implementation of activities for fulfilment of individual measures we consider the following:

- Discrepancy between national economic policy and the potential of the Prešov region, insufficient targeting of national and regional policies to develop economic potential.
- Lack of managing and sharing spatial information for public.
- Insufficient integration of MRC members in the labor market and insufficient living standard of MRC.
- Unaffordable centralized solutions for supplies of drinking water and wastewater infrastructure in smaller municipalities, local decentralized solutions to be more seriously considered in the feasibility studies phase of project development.
- Untapped tourism investment potential in smaller regions and perspective tourism destinations near protected areas.
- Discrepancy between primary and secondary school curricula and labor market needs, lack of cooperation between education, research and commercial sectors.

**Selected priority areas were elaborated into detailed recommended activities based**

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.po-kraj.sk/files/dokumenty/Rozvojove-dokumenty-PSK/PHSR\\_PSK\\_2014-2020/phsr\\_psk\\_2014-2020\\_en\\_strucna-verzia.pdf](https://www.po-kraj.sk/files/dokumenty/Rozvojove-dokumenty-PSK/PHSR_PSK_2014-2020/phsr_psk_2014-2020_en_strucna-verzia.pdf)

### on CuRI I , CuRI II and CuRI III results:

- Support to the development, expanding and improving quality of managing and sharing spatial data.
- Integration and improving living standards of MRC by continued support of municipalities.
- Development and delivery of more affordable and sustainable decentralized drinking water supply and wastewater management in remote areas of Snina District, which will serve as a model for other similar areas throughout the region and the country.
- Development of endogenous potential in the tourism in pilot region of Snina through building a trail in Poloniny.
- Improve quality of the secondary vocational education in Prešov region.

The Proposed Action Plan for Phase IV consists of activities in four areas. The following table summarizes a development potential, main barriers and the goal for each component:

	Potential	Barrier/challenge	Component
I	Willingness to systematically approach the Roma issue in the PSK environment, potential cooperation with other self-governing regions dealing with the same issue; support to municipalities	Poor living standard of MRC community, weak integration between Roma and non-Roma community members	<b>Improving integration of marginalized Roma</b> Continued support to municipalities with Roma population in the region
II	Increased living conditions and potential in developing travel industry in Snina district	Legislative barriers, limited access to funding, lack of basic infrastructure for developing business activities and increasing the qualitative living conditions of local inhabitants	<b>Piloting the design and construction of basic environmental infrastructure in Snina district.</b>
III	Attractive conditions for development of <b>tourism and local SMEs</b>	Weak access to finance, low investment in tourism infrastructure	Development of tourism and strengthening the attractiveness of <b>Poloniny Trail</b>
IV	<b>Quality labor force</b> for higher value-added jobs paying good wages	Mismatch between market demand for and school supply of learning programs	<b>Better quality of VET education</b> Increasing the quality of the educational environment

### CuRI IV components

## **Component I. Improving integration of marginalized Roma (MRC)**

About 30% of the Slovak Roma population (which is about 130,000 people) live in the PSK. During CuRI II. and CuRI III. pilot activities were implemented in six municipalities, including Roma communities (Dlhé Stráže, Ostrovany, Varhaňovce, Čičava, Varadka and Krivany). The development plans of 6 municipalities were updated, the team for the MRC component at the PSK assisted municipalities to prepare a list of projects and after their evaluation and setting priorities, investment packages for each of the 6 municipalities were prepared. A special integrated call was launched by the Ministry of Interior (MoI) in October 2020.

Within CuRI III., support for 6 pilot communities continued and will be extended during CuRI IV until all eligible applications have been submitted. PSK's internal team will play a communication, coordination and promotional role and will also identify sources of funding (ESIF, PSK's own resources) for investment projects that were not included in the initial integrated call for pilot municipalities. The World Bank will provide technical input to the project documentation for applications for ESI Funds funding and liaising with ministries (such as MoI) and other national agencies (such as the office of the Plenipotentiary) to find solutions to challenges experienced by municipalities and the Regional Authority.

Challenges faced by the MRC are well documented, ranging from poor living conditions, low employment levels, low educational outcomes, etc. In tackling these challenges, different levels of government and other development partners, require a coordinated approach, as these challenges are often inter-related. This document recommends four intervention areas to advance MRC integration measures gleaned over the duration of this component as part of SK CuRI. The document proposes a dual focus that seeks to address some of the systemic challenges while maintaining a focus on practical application and implementation. There is no suggestion that the proposed intervention areas are the panacea of MRC challenges, but rather a progressive approach to tackling some of these intractable challenges. The proposed intervention areas are i) integrated investment call to support provision of basic services in pilot municipalities; ii) enhancement of social enterprises to improve employment opportunities for marginalized and vulnerable groups; iii) improving access to sustainable shelter and iv) expanding “soft” investment to include home based care for infants.

Each of these are detailed below.

### **Activities and outputs:**

## 1. Integrated investment packages to support provision of basic services in pilot municipalities:

### *Problem statement:*

**Investments targeted at the provision of basic services are currently administered by different ministries<sup>3</sup> and Managing Authorities (MA),** the eligibility criteria and conditions attached to each of these often differ. Their issuance is also sequenced differently – according to the timetable of the MA, rather than taking cognizance of implementation considerations. These current realities make the application process difficult for municipalities and significantly increases transaction costs, as they often need to outsource this function. In addition, municipalities are not always able to sequence construction programs in the most effective manner as for example; resources for a road and sidewalks may be available before resources for sanitation.

### *Recommended approach:*

**To support PSK and pilot municipalities to prepare investment packages that adopt a complex and integrated approach to addressing integration issues of people from Marginalized Roma Communities (MRC).** This is premised on parallel engagements with the Government Office (envisaged Intermediate Body) and the Office of the Plenipotentiary and the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family in the design of Programme Slovakia and its future calls with a view to consolidating investments targeted at the provision of basic services (roads, sidewalks, sanitation, schools, community centers, etc.) as well as supporting soft investments, to ensure a consolidated investment package is availed to municipalities, especially small municipalities appearing on the Roma Atlas.

**The support will include:** i) support to pilot municipalities in preparation of integrated investment packages; ii) technical review and comments on technical documents produced by municipalities; iii) simultaneous extraction of lessons based on an assessment of previous attempts to achieve integrated/ complex calls in Slovakia in the preceding programming periods; and drawing from international best practice and peer learning opportunities from other countries that have succeeded in transitioning to more integrated basic infrastructure funding structures.

### *Activities and Outputs:*

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<sup>3</sup> For example: Water, Sanitation, Roads and Sidewalks, etc. for municipalities appearing on the Roma Atlas - Ministry of Interior. Roads, sidewalks for municipalities above 2000 people – IROP/MIRRI; Solid Waste Management – Ministry of Environment, EnviroFund.

#### PSK activities:

- continuing to apply for a financial contribution for six pilot municipalities

Timeplan: March 2022 – April 2023

- effort to finance other projects (Primary schools, School facilities for sports/gyms, Playgrounds, Reconstruction of municipal buildings) from PSK grants or from the PSK Integrated Territorial Strategy under the new programming period (after approval of mandatory co-financing by the municipal councils)

Timeplan: March 2022 – April 2023

- assistance to six pilot municipalities in communication with public entities (District Office of the Environment, Slovak Land Fund, etc.)

Timeplan: March 2022 – April 2023

- implementation of approved projects in pilot municipalities by the Regional Development Agency (RDA) established by PSK

Timeplan: March 2022 – April 2023

- support the project implementation process in pilot municipalities that do not use RDA services

The World Bank outputs will include: i) technical inputs and comments on investment packages as well as technical documents; ii) slide decks with lessons learnt from previous attempts at consolidated approaches to financing basic infrastructure and other MRC integration projects, especially in municipalities on the Roma Atlas; iii) 2 peer-to-peer knowledge exchange sessions.

## 2. Social enterprises

### *Problem statement:*

**Unemployment levels of people from MRC are comparatively higher than those outside of these communities.** Reasons for this vary from poor education attainment levels, poor location relative to employment opportunities, discrimination at the labor market<sup>4</sup>, and unestablished work culture amongst MRC. Further, the labor market is also not always geared to absorb employees from MRC, as such MRCs have limited entry opportunities into formal work. One of the responses to these challenges is the establishment of Social Enterprises (SEs)

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<sup>4</sup> See e.g. here:

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/648778/IPOL\\_STU\(2020\)648778\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/648778/IPOL_STU(2020)648778_EN.pdf)

established to provide services/ products and subsidized with a view to easing employment of marginalized, vulnerable and excluded communities. Therefore, SEs have the dual objective of contributing to the economy as viable enterprises and addressing chronic and long-term unemployment of marginalized groups. However, the legislative regime for SE is complex with some notable gaps. Further, the subsidy system does not cover all costs necessary for the effective operation of SEs.

Social entrepreneurship is a new area of PSK activities aimed at solving local or regional problems in the labor market. The specific implementation is influenced by local socio-economic conditions and the state of the labor market. In the case of social entrepreneurship, it is a business with priority social goals, where economic surpluses are directed back to entrepreneurial activity, serve to develop the local community and create at least temporary jobs for the long-term unemployed, socially disadvantaged, disabled, people from MRC and other jobseekers from disadvantaged backgrounds (long-term unemployed, unemployed over the age of 50, etc.).

The PSK Social Economy Cluster is a systemic tool for supporting the social economy at the regional and sub-regional level designed by the PSK team. By cluster, we mean a set of activities by which the PSK specifically supports and stimulates the development of the social economy in its territory. The cluster also creates a business and socially favorable environment supporting all forms of cooperation and innovation within the region with the aim of sustainability and competitiveness of organizations and companies in the conditions of the social economy in Slovakia.

Lessons learnt from CuRI III on measures intended to improve the integration of MRC indicate the need for integrated solutions.

*Recommended approach:*

Preliminary assessments suggest that interventions to improve SE environment include simultaneous easing of establishment processes and rigor in testing the feasibility of planned SEs; clarifying and strengthening the regulatory environment with regards to for instance, the 6% procurement targeted for SEs, clarifying VAT and state aid implications for SEs, expanding the definition of qualifying SEs; reconsidering the subsidy regime to provide sufficient resources for core services necessary to sustain an SE. Through the support to the Regional Authority, knowledge, results and recommendations will be shared with the Office of the Plenipotentiary, and the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family (MoL) to inform future refinements of the current SE regime. The Bank will further support supporting PSK and municipalities in establishment of SEs, this will include technical and strategic expertise on key

factors to consider in determining viability, preparation of investment projects. Simultaneously, the World Bank will draw on international examples of improving employment pathways for marginalized groups and ongoing support to sustain and scale up SEs and liaise with national ministries and agencies to advance emerging proposals to simplify SE establishment and operating environment.

#### *Activities and Outputs:*

##### PSK activities:

- organizing meetings of social enterprise managers with the aim of networking and exchanging experiences

Timeplan: March 2022 – April 2023

- organizing trainings and providing advice in areas defined by social enterprises

Timeplan: March 2022 – April 2023

- stimulating public procurement with a view to the social aspect in order to enable social economy actors to participate in the public procurement process

Timeplan: March 2022 – April 2023

- negotiations with other socio-economic partners and public administration partners

Timeplan: March 2022 – April 2023

- promotion of projects, activities and initiatives in social economy area by PSK channels (social sites, local TV, newsletter, PSK newspaper etc.)

Timeplan: March 2022 – April 2023

The outputs will include: i) support to PSK and pilot municipalities in the preparation of SE applications; ii) review and comment on technical documents; iii) slide decks with lessons learnt from global experiences in alternative employment pathways for marginalized communities and sustaining/scaling up SEs, iv) recommendations on measures to improve current SE environment.

### **3. Support for adequate shelter**

#### *Problem statement:*

**Shelter needs for people from MRC who reside in segregated settlements remain largely unmet. Many have lived and continue to live in shacks (such as in Ostrovany). From the 2019 Roma Atlas, it is estimated that 57,139 people from MRC live in the concentrations**



**outside of the municipality and 150,107 people from MRCs live in settlements on the edges of the municipality, many of whom live in inhumane conditions.** The lackluster response to this challenge can be attributed to multiple reasons, most notable being unresolved land ownership in the settlements (referred to as unsettled plots), interpretation of 3D<sup>5</sup> rules in a manner that prohibits investment in shelter in these segregated settlements and reluctance of local landowners to sell well located land to people from MRCs, thus impeding them to move out from these settlements. Several nationally led initiatives to address these bottlenecks have been undertaken, such as the National Project on Land Settlement under the stewardship of the Plenipotentiary, issuance of investment calls for Leap Housing, some initiatives at self-build, etc. However, these measures have not resulted in perceptible large-scale resolution of the problem.

*Recommended approach:*

In PSK, two municipalities (Varadka and Čičava) decided to prepare projects for securing adequate shelter for parts of their population within CURI III. For various reasons including lack of available land, the remaining four municipalities could not advance with the shelter issue. Experiences from CURI II and CURI III in PSK still show that there is a need for: i) improving the performance of the land settlement initiatives and enhancing the pace at which land plots within MRC settlements can be settled together with identification of suitable new land plots for potentially new construction; ii) a review of the housing subsidy/ support regime to introduce more demand side support packages (such as rental subsidies targeted at the housing consumer), support for self-build schemes; iii) continued support to PSK and 6 pilot municipalities in resolving land and housing challenges within their areas of jurisdiction.

*Activities and Outputs:*

PSK activities:

- submission of applications and implementation of projects addressing the unfavorable housing situation in the MRC in pilot municipalities

Timeplan: March 2022 – April 2023

- assistance six pilot municipalities in land settlement (consultations with the PSK Property Department, communication with the Slovak Land Fund and the Building Authority)

Timeplan: March 2022 – April 2023

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<sup>5</sup> The 3Ds are Desegregation, Deghettoization and De-stigmatization. These are detailed in the Methodological interpretation for efficient application of the principles of desegregation, deghettoization and de-stigmatization available on [https://www.minv.sk/swift\\_data/source/romovia/publikacie/metodicky-vyklad.pdf](https://www.minv.sk/swift_data/source/romovia/publikacie/metodicky-vyklad.pdf)

- support for self-help housing in Roma communities through construction coordinators in selected municipalities

Timeplan: March 2022 – April 2023

The World Bank activities and outputs will include strategic and technical support to PSK and any pilot municipality that is implementing housing interventions evidenced by ongoing monitoring reports and with the support of the GIS department of the PSK.

#### 4. Soft investments

##### *Problem statement*

**Environmental factors especially in the first 1000 days of life impact on cognitive, social, emotional etc. development and functioning of the brain.** Infants from MRC have limited environmental stimulation at the critical age (between birth and kindergarten) and this leads to poor academic and social performance. Mothers/Parents from MRC, many of whom have their first child in their teens, lack sufficient child-minding skills and needed support and for many, participation in the labor force is hampered by child minding responsibilities. To address this, it is required, among others, long-term community-based capacity, which is not always readily available in small municipalities. This is typically a role that is best played by entities of public society organizations.

At the same time, day-to-day work with the MRC of all ages in various areas (education, housing, social area, spiritual service) leads to a positive social change and consequently to an active inclusion of members from these communities to the majority population. It is therefore important to expand the implementation of soft projects and projects of helping professions (MOPS, teaching assistants, tutors, mentors, community and pastoral assistants, etc.), which have a positive impact not only on children but also on families from MRC as such.

**While the investment packages targeted at MRC include both hard and soft investments, the sequencing of these packages is not always in tandem.** Consequently, hard infrastructure is not always complemented by necessary soft investments. Examples include housing developments that do not have field social workers working with residents or community centers that do not have sufficient human capacity to run activities targeted at improving social integration between people from MRC and those from majority population.

##### *Recommended approach*

The creation of strong partnerships and support to organizations (Civil Society Organizations) is key to extending community social change and community-based childhood enrichment programs. There are some organizations and institutions currently operating in this sector,

however, they are very few and their reach is limited. The intention of the support is to work with these institutions to map out the support required to scale up the extent and geographic coverage of support that they can provide. The World Bank has extensive experience in this area and can share global best practices on approaches to supporting early childhood development and partnership building with community-based organizations and active municipalities.

#### *Activities and Outputs:*

##### PSK activities:

- analysis and networking of Civil Society Organizations and other social partners  
Timeplan: March 2022 – April 2023
- support for the activities of Civil Society Organizations in Roma communities (Roma volunteering, pastoral assistants, MOPS, teaching assistants, tutors, mentors, community & social workers etc.)  
Timeplan: March 2022 – April 2023
- promoting examples of good practice in Roma communities by PSK channels (social sites, local TV, newsletter, PSK newspaper etc.)  
Timeplan: March 2022 – April 2023

The World Bank will: i) support PSK and pilot municipalities willing to participate in activities described above; ii) Identification of organizations (Civil Society Organizations and other social partners that can collaborate in the extension of the services; iii) recommend a support package necessary to strengthen Civil Society Organizations and municipalities; and iv) sharing of global best practice and facilitating peer to peer knowledge exchange sessions.

World Bank will provide expert advisory and technical input, including environmental and social (E&S) recommendations based on the environmental and social standards (ESS) to the PSK to guide their preparation of the proposed investment packages in the six pilot municipalities. Specifically, the Bank will review and provide comments together with proposed criteria, proposed standards and best practices, as applicable, for selected documents prepared by the six selected municipalities, specifically: (i) relevant technical and engineering studies; and (ii) relevant project financing documents (including funding applications) for selected investments.

This work will culminate in a consolidated report at the end of the program.

Timeplan: March 2022 – April 2023

## Component II. Basic environmental infrastructure in Snina district

This component builds on the activities of CuRI I., CuRI II. and CuRI III. - building the basic environmental infrastructure based on the results of a revised feasibility study from 2020.

The purpose is to provide 28 municipalities in the Snina district, which lack the basic environmental infrastructure, with optimal alternative technical solutions for drinking water supply source development, treatment, and distribution; and wastewater collection, treatment, and disposal.

The affected area includes four valleys of the Snina district: Pčoliné and surroundings, Ublianska valley, Uličská valley and Zbojská valley. Drinking water supply infrastructure and service will be delivered for 24 municipalities with a population of 4902 inhabitants and wastewater infrastructure and services for 28 municipalities with a population of 6690 inhabitants<sup>6</sup>.

The output will be an elaboration of a technical proposal set of engineering designs (project documentation) of decentralized solutions of these activities with regard to public water infrastructure legislation, the existing state of the region (size and demography of municipalities, National Park Poloniny, Protective Landscape Area Vihorlat, Natural Reserve Veľký Bukovec, protected areas NATURA 2000) and the state of existing water and wastewater infrastructure.

The World Bank is providing advice on project design documentation. Funding for the engineering designs, will be provided by the PSK with the possibility to leverage ESIF after meeting requirements set by the managing authority. Elaborated designs will be handed over to the municipalities so that they can apply for ESI Funds for the construction of water supply and sewerage systems. PSK will further communicate the need for VAT eligibility to the relevant authorities and lack of resources for co-financing of municipalities.

*Activities and outputs:*

### **Activity II.1 Supply of municipalities with drinking water, including drainage and disposal of wastewater in the Snina district**

Activities:

- PSK to procure a well-qualified and experienced engineering firm to undertake the design of the 24 water supplies and 28 wastewater facilities for Snina District. PSK will hire an internationally procured (not to exclude local firms in the procurement process)

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<sup>6</sup> Year 2020 data.

Source: [http://datacube.statistics.sk/#!/view/sk/VBD\\_DEM/om7103rr/v\\_om7103rr\\_00\\_00\\_00\\_sk](http://datacube.statistics.sk/#!/view/sk/VBD_DEM/om7103rr/v_om7103rr_00_00_00_sk)

engineering consultant firms for the design of these water supply and wastewater infrastructure and services for the 28 targeted municipalities of Snina District.

Timeplan: January – December 2022

- Identification of a suitable legal form and definition of contractual relations for the process of obtaining financial sources from the ESIF and/or national funds.

Timeplan: April - June 2022

- Consulting activities of World Bank experts in the design of the method of operation and maintenance of water and wastewater infrastructure.
- Engineering firms engaged by the PSK to design and prepare project documentation for the water supply and wastewater infrastructure in Snina District, incl. provision of engineering services to PSK and 28 LGs in acquiring the zoning permissions, and EIA elaboration, if needed.
- Consulting activities of World Bank experts within the elaboration of Project Documentation, participation at the meetings with the designer.

Timeplan: April - December 2023

- PSK & 28 LGs to successfully finish zoning permission processes, incl. EIA approval by Regional/District Environmental Agencies.

Timeplan: December 2022 – December 2023

### **Component III. Poloniny Trail**

The Poloniny Trail is a practical tool for the social and economic development of the Poloniny National Park and surrounding areas, which was defined by the recommendations of the World Bank experts during the implementation of the first phase of the CuRI initiative. During the second year of the CuRI, the initiative helped identify a tentative alignment of the Poloniny Trail, a 90 km main loop from a wide network of existing smaller trails in the area and also some completely new ones, as suggested by Output 3. Due to the complex nature of trail development, the loop was divided into three stages, where the preparation of the first two stages have advanced significantly and will be built by 2023, while the preparations for Stage 3 will continue in 2022 and will be proposed for funding in the 2021-2027 programming period.

*Activities and outputs:*

#### **Activity III.1. - Completion of the third Stage of the Poloniny Trail**

The goal of the component in 2022 will be, based on the developed project documentation, to complete land acquisition processes, obtaining permits for the construction of the third stage of the trail to proceed with the construction works for this stage in the following years.

#### Activities and Outcomes:

- Identifying and resolving property issues through the dialogue with the private and public landowners, as required by the Slovak legislation  
Timeplan: March – September 2022
- Obtaining of zoning decision  
Timeplan: September 2022
- Obtaining of building permit  
Timeplan: February 2023
- Communicating intensively with the relevant managing authority regarding the financing of the 3rd stage, securing sources of financing from the Structural Funds  
Timeplan: March 2022 – June 2023
- Engaging with relevant agencies and institutions to further promote Poloniny Trail (interconnection of tourism services - beneficiaries of the Ministry of Economy call, marketing and publicity, etc.)  
Timeplan: March 2022 – June 2023
- WB report  
Timeplan: June 2023

#### **Component IV. Improving the quality and efficiency of secondary education in PSK**

The PSK Education Department expresses its interest in continuing the VET component within the Catching-up Regions Initiative (CuRI) in cooperation with the World Bank, MIRRI, and the European Commission, as well as in its next phase (IV.), which is expected in 2022-23. Within this component and this initiative, we will continue our focus on increasing the quality, relevance and modernization of secondary schools in the founding scope of PSK in order to prepare graduates for regional, national or international labor market, which will meet current and future employers' requirements based on Industry 4.0 requirements in field of informatization, automation and skills development for the 21st century.

Given the development and current state of the areas and topics that were the subject of the VET component within the PSK Initiative in recent years (2018-2021), we propose that the main focus (topic / key area) of the VET component for 2022 should be the digitization.

Digitization at the level of educational content, internal school infrastructure or regional information network of secondary schools is a complementary addition to investments made and launched in schools under the founding scope of PSK, whether in connection with the CuRI or the process of optimizing the secondary school network.

In this way, PSK will prepare for the effective drawing of financial resources within the ESIF, Recovery and Resilience Plan, or other programs, within which the area of digitization is one of the main topics / areas of support within secondary education in Slovakia.

All the steps – analysis, findings, recommendations or proposals will be shared and discussed with the Ministry of Education, MIRRI or which PSK will be in close cooperation with in order to avoid any duplication or conflict in planned activities on both sides.

### Activities and outputs:

#### **Activity IV.1 support for the digitization of secondary schools in PSK / alt. Building a digital infrastructure at secondary schools in PSK**

Support for the construction of digital infrastructure and digitization of education at secondary schools in PSK with regard to the requirements and standards of the school of the 21st century. Building the internal digital infrastructure of secondary schools and the regional network of schools for sharing and exchanging content, data and information.

#### *Activities and Outcomes:*

- Analysis of the state of digitization at secondary schools in the founding competence of PSK

Timeplan: March 2022 – July 2022

- Output: Analytical report by WB experts

- Selection of "pilot schools" for the design and construction of digital infrastructure

Timeplan: July 2022 – October 2022

- Output: Selection of pilot schools by WB and PSK

- Setting 3 levels of digitization support at selected PSK secondary schools:

- Technical equipment of schools (needed hardware equipment – Laptops, servers, LAN /WAN components, audio-visual technology ... etc.)
- Digitization of educational content (transformation of current study materials / training contents and creation of the new in digital form, which can be used in digital environment for distance learning, or easily shared between the schools, students, employers participated in educational process; as well as the trainings or courses for creation of digital study materials);
- Design / architecture of the regional digital network of secondary schools (for example, a Datawarehouse and shared on-line space for sharing the data, study materials / on-line trainings or other activities of our school, also as a space for on-line presentation of the schools and their study programs to the public – primary schools/parents/ employers... etc – e.g. “Secondary Schools Portal”).

Timeplan: November 2022 – March 2023

- Output: Recommendation for Project proposals

The World Bank support in the VET component to focus on: analysis study of the state of digitization at VET secondary schools and recommendations, advise on rapid results interventions in relation to digital resources and curriculum, and support in the design of the pilots with an evaluation plan.

Timeplan: March 2022 – March 2023

- Output: report