

Slovakia: Commission initiative helps a low-income region catch up

Prešov's GDP is rapidly growing but remains well under the EU and Slovak average. In the framework of the [Catching up initiative](#), Commission and World Bank experts on the ground will provide tailored support to the region, in partnership with the Slovak national authorities.

Thanks to this support, by early 2019 the region should have designed and implemented a solid action plan for economic transformation, including a series of measures for structural reforms in order to improve the local investment environment.

Commissioner for Regional policy Corina Crețu said: *"Cohesion Policy makes sure no region, no one is left behind. We work closely on the ground with governments and citizens to help them carry out reforms that lead to bright economic prospects and improved citizens' quality of life. Today's initiative puts this principle in practice: the Prešov region will benefit from tailor-made support to strengthen its economy for future generations."*

Together, the region and the Commission and World Bank experts will address the challenges that currently hamper Prešov's economic development: brain drain, high unemployment rate, especially for young people, social exclusion, mismatch between the education offer and the needs of the local labour market and a lack of cooperation in the field of innovation between the business sphere, research centres and the regional public university.

At the same time, the action plan will build on the region's competitive assets, in line with the national [smart specialisation strategy](#); a unique position on the border with Poland and Ukraine, important natural and cultural resources and heritage and potential for tourism as well as the presence of a faculty of Manufacturing Technologies.

In addition, regional and EU experts will seek to draw funding from the 10 different Cohesion Policy programmes that the region can access, in order to support this action plan.

Next steps:

The action plan should be ready in March 2018. Its implementation should take place between the spring of 2018 and March 2019.

Background:

In June 2015, the Commission launched a broad [initiative](#) to examine the factors that hold back growth and investment in low-income and low-growth regions in the EU.

Low-growth regions have a GDP per capita of up to 90% of the EU average but a persistent lack of growth, while low-income regions' GDP per head is growing,

but is still below 50% of the EU average. These regions are home to 83 million inhabitants, i.e. 1 out of 6 EU residents.

A Commission [report](#) published in April 2017 detailed the investment needs, growth determinants, macro-economic framework and need for structural reforms in these regions (see [MEMO 17/895](#)).

A first local pilot initiative was launched in two Polish regions in March 2016, and another one in two Romanian regions shortly afterwards. A [first assessment](#) of the Polish experience showed that the initiative was successful, while in Romania, the tailored support led to faster and more efficient use of the available EU funds in the concerned regions.

The initiative is part of the Commission's wider commitment to provide tailored assistance to regions in order to help them improve the way they manage and invest Cohesion Policy funds (see [MEMO 15/4654](#)) and foster more ownership, coordination and prioritisation in regional investment and development strategies.