ROADMAP FOR POLICY IMPROVEMENTS

Partner Name:	**Slovak Innovation and Energy Agency (SIEA)**
Date:	**19.2.2026**
Country/Region:	**Slovakia**

1. Policy Improvement objective

Describe your current Policy Instrument and one specific improvement you would like to achieve.

The concept for the support of start-ups and the development of the start-up ecosystem is embedded in the broader concept of gradual pro-growth measures to support the Slovak economy and the innovation policy of the Slovak Republic. The main indirect support measure is the Startup Support Scheme (de minimis aid scheme).

De minimis aid scheme 16/2021 of the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic aimed at supporting the creation of new businesses and increasing the attractiveness of entrepreneurship as a career choice (Remark: Initially DM 16/2021 was valid until 31 December 2023. The current DM 49/2024 scheme is valid until December 31, 2026, and represents an update to the previous one - The next steps will involve close cooperation and communication with stakeholders to improve the scheme).

The scheme regulates the procedure for providing de minimis aid to SMEs. Under this scheme, de minimis aid is provided indirectly in the form of business information and advice, business training, organizing and supporting participation in internships, competitions, exhibitions, or other events aimed at promoting entrepreneurship, targeted strengthening of the potential of SMEs to increase their performance, and long-term professional advice and training aimed at improving entrepreneurial skills and professional growth.

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

Eligible projects for the provision of de minimis aid under this scheme are projects focused on the following activities:

Component 1 – participation in events, provision of information and organization of educational activities.

Component 2 – provision of expert advice.

Component 3 – foreign internships.

BUDGET

The estimated budget for this scheme is EUR 4,000,000.

The estimated annual budget is:
2024: EUR 1,000,000
2025: EUR 1,500,000
2026: EUR 1,500,000

Improvement objective:

The policy instrument addressed is the Startup Support Scheme (de minimis aid scheme DM 49/2024) of the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, which is operationally implemented through calls for proposals launched by the Slovak Business Agency (SBA). SBA has acted as the implementing body in previous programming periods and is expected to continue launching calls under this scheme in the future.

In parallel, the project aims to incorporate stakeholders' inputs and project results into the next update of the de minimis aid scheme itself, ensuring that both the strategic framework and its practical implementation better reflect the needs of high-potential start-ups and contribute more effectively to the development of the Slovak start-up ecosystem.

2. Key insights from UnicornQuest

Identify key lessons and good practices from the project that have inspired you. Go through all the good practices and visits you have experienced in Interregional Learning Events.

1. ***Irish Best Practices***

The Irish best practice was explored throughout 2024 via materials shared within the project's internal repository and through in-depth exchanges with the Irish partner, West BIC, aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the programme's structure and added value. Further insights were obtained during the Interreg Europe webinar "Startups in the Spotlight", held in April 2025.

PREP4SEED – Investor Readiness Acceleration Programme

PREP4SEED is a 12-week acceleration programme designed to rapidly prepare high-potential start-ups for engagement with investors and access to investment funding. The programme combines five thematic masterclasses (delivered both in person and online) organised by the Irish BICs with six tailored one-to-one mentoring sessions led by experienced BIC consultants, addressing the specific needs of each participating company. The training modules focus on key areas such as business planning, financial modelling, sales and marketing strategies, corporate governance, and investor pitch development. The programme also includes intensive pitch coaching and mock pitching sessions. It concludes with an Investor Pitch Day, during which participating start-ups present their projects to private investors and venture capital representatives.

- ***Relevance:*** *This model has the potential to be incorporated into the design of future support activities focused on investor readiness, addressing identified skills gaps within the entrepreneurial ecosystem.*

2. ***Hungarian Best Practices***

The Hungarian best practice was reviewed in 2024 through documentation shared in the project's internal repository, followed by targeted exchanges with the Hungarian partner PMB to gain a detailed understanding of the supported initiatives and their implementation context.

StartITup Győr – Startup Ecosystem and Ideation Support Programme

StartITup Győr creates an open and inclusive support environment for start-ups by combining networking activities, mentoring, thematic workshops, and incubation services. A core element of the programme is the Ideathon, a flagship initiative that has developed into one of Hungary's most prominent idea competitions since its launch in 2018. Ideathon is structured as an intensive three-day ideation programme targeting early-stage concepts, where participants collaborate in newly formed teams to address predefined challenges.

- ***Relevance:*** *Guided by mentors and facilitators, teams apply modern innovation and problem-solving methodologies to refine their ideas. The programme concludes with a pitching event, during which teams present their solutions to a panel of experts.*

Through this initiative, StartITup Győr strengthens entrepreneurial skills while facilitating connections with potential investors and strategic business partners.

3. ***Latvian and Portuguese Best Practices***

***Innovation Voucher Systems** Insights from Latvia's **Innovation Voucher Support Program** and Portugal's **StartUP Vouchers** highlight the effectiveness of using a "voucher" as a letter of guarantee to connect SMEs with knowledge providers. In Latvia, the voucher acts as a simplified guarantee for the service provider, which significantly reduces the administrative burden on the startup. Portugal's model successfully uses vouchers to target specific outcomes, such as the development of **Green and Digital products**.*

- ***Relevance:** These practices represent a potential pathway for transforming current indirect support methods into a more agile and flexible delivery mechanism based on a voucher system.*

4. ***French Case Study***

***Local Ecosystem Validation** The case study of **Bioteos (France)** demonstrates that successful scaling often begins with strong local validation. Bioteos utilized a **Proof of Concept (POC)** in the Lille metro to gain credibility, media exposure, and validation from public stakeholders before scaling further. Their success was deeply rooted in their early integration within the local innovation parks and specialized technical tracks.*

- ***Relevance:** This insight suggests the potential value of incorporating support for domestic validation and training stays, allowing entrepreneurs to strengthen their solutions within the local "forest" before pursuing global expansion.*

5. ***Administrative Simplification (Latvia/Portugal)***

*A recurring theme identified during workshops and study visits was the necessity for **non-bureaucratic language** and simplified application processes, ideally limited to a maximum of 2 pages. The complexity of state support procedures and lengthy documentation requirements often discourage innovative entrepreneurs from seeking public assistance.*

- ***Relevance:** These findings have the potential to be incorporated into the procedural optimization of future calls for proposals, aiming to shorten the path between the entrepreneur and the required expertise.*

3. Actions for implementation

List the steps that will be taken to implement the improvement.

- *Internal coordination within SIEA, in cooperation with the ministry of economics as the implementing body, to assess gaps and improvement opportunities in the current Startup Support Scheme (de minimis aid scheme) and its practical implementation through calls for proposals.*
- *Review of good practices, policy tools and implementation models shared within the UnicornQuest project, with a focus on start-up acceleration, investor readiness programmes, mentoring schemes, and stakeholder engagement mechanisms.*
- *Identification and selection of relevant and transferable good practices aligned with the Slovak start-up ecosystem and the objectives of the de minimis aid scheme.*

- *In-depth analysis of selected good practices (e.g. ac celeration formats, mentoring structures, investor pitch preparation, stakeholder involvement) to identify elements applicable to future SBA calls under the scheme.*
- *Structured consultation with key stakeholders to collect feedback on current support measures and validate the relevance of proposed improvements.*
- *Integration of stakeholder inputs and UnicornQuest results into concrete recommendations for the next update of the Startup Support Scheme at the policy level.*

4. Expected impact

Describe the expected benefits and impact of this improvement on policies, practices, or stakeholders.

- *Improved alignment of the Startup Support Scheme (de minimis aid) with the real needs of high-potential start-ups, especially in early growth and investment readiness phases.*
- *Feedback and lessons learned from interregional good practices.*
- *Introduction of more structured acceleration and mentoring elements inspired by proven models (e.g. investor readiness programmes, pitch preparation, tailored mentoring).*
- *Increased effectiveness of public support by focusing resources on start-ups with higher growth and innovation potential.*
- *Strengthened cooperation between policy makers, implementing bodies, start-up support organisations and the start-up community.*
- *Better transparency, clarity and usability of support instruments for applicants, leading to higher participation and satisfaction of beneficiaries.*
- *Enhanced contribution of the de minimis aid scheme to the overall development of the Slovak start-up ecosystem and its international competitiveness.*
- *Evidence-based input for future updates of the Startup Support Scheme, improving both strategic design and operational implementation of start-up support policies in Slovakia.*

5. Timeline & Milestones

Define key milestones and deadlines for implementing the roadmap.

Milestone	***Deadline***
Preparation and supplement of the Case study InoBat	*December 2024/May 2025*
Development of stakeholder questions oriented to the InoBat study case and DM Support Scheme	*August 2025*
Stakeholder consultation	*September 2025*
Final policy refinement & implementation	*August 2026*

6. Stakeholders Involved

Identify key actors or organizations that will be involved in implementing the improvement.

The Ministries
Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic

Agencies:
Slovak Business Agency

7. Challenges & Support Needed

Highlight any potential obstacles and specify any support required from the project or other partners.

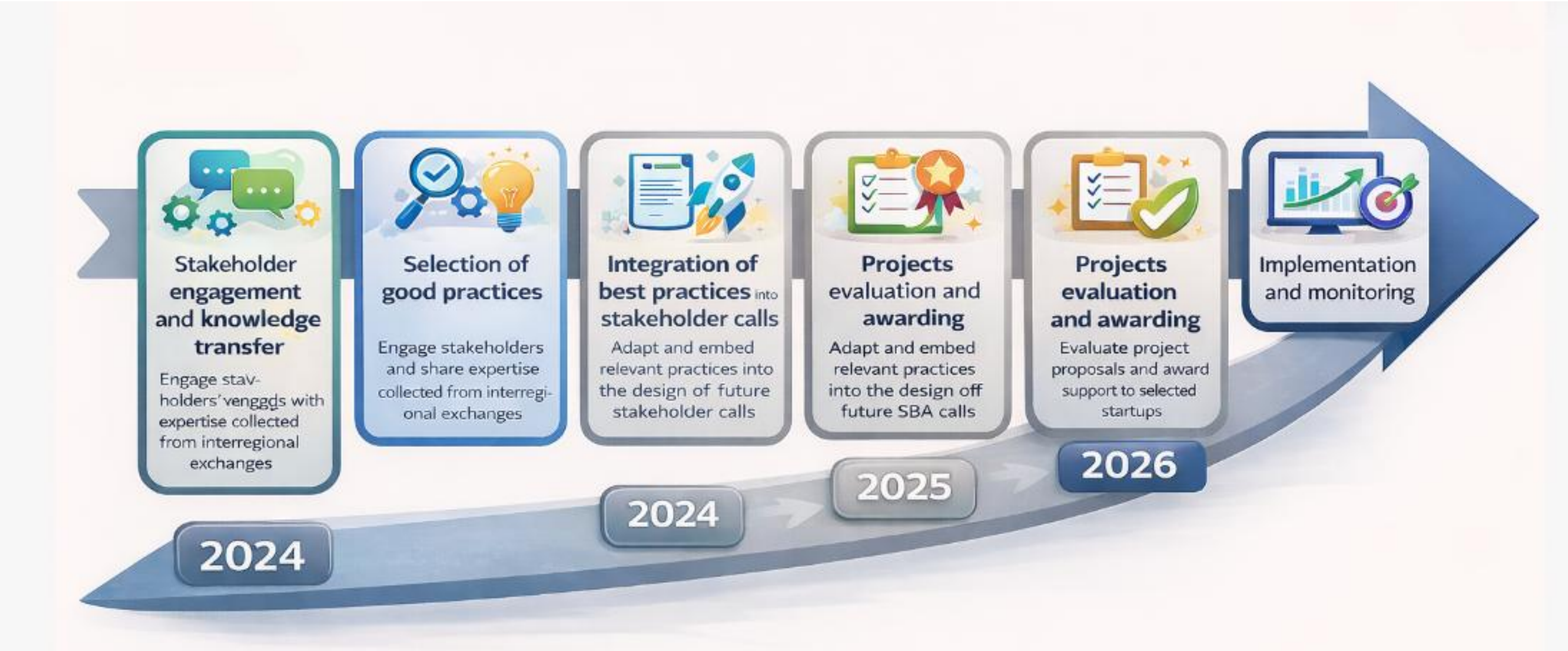
Challenges:

- *Low level of awareness among early-stage entrepreneurs regarding available support instruments, including limited familiarity with or understanding of the startup support scheme.*
- *Limited capacity of start-ups to prepare high-quality applications and project proposals, particularly in the early stages of business development.*
- *Insufficient connectivity between start-ups and investors and other ecosystem partners, limiting the potential multiplier effects of the support provided.*
- *Risk of uneven participation of start-ups from regions outside major innovation and entrepreneurial centres, potentially weakening the overall impact of the scheme.*
- *Limited human and financial resources available for adapting and improving the scheme, which may slow down the implementation of necessary changes.*
- *Complex administrative procedures and legislative constraints that hinder the rapid adaptation of the scheme's conditions.*
- *Coordination challenges among multiple partners and institutions, which may result in delays in implementation.*
- *Risk of inconsistent approaches, as different partners may hold divergent views on what constitutes an effective "improvement".*

Support Needed:

- *Communication support from project partners to increase awareness of the scheme through dissemination activities within their respective networks.*
- *Cooperation in the development of training and methodological materials to support start-ups in preparing applications and project plans.*
- *Sharing of experience and good practice examples from partners who have already implemented similar support instruments.*
- *Technical assistance in setting up monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to effectively measure the impact of the scheme.*
- *Support in facilitating connections with investors and private-sector actors through partner and ecosystem networks.*

8. Visual roadmap



9. Roadmap Monitoring and impact measurement

As part of the UnicornQuest roadmap, each partner is required to define clear indicators and methods to monitor the implementation and impact of the proposed policy improvement. This monitoring will ensure that changes are effective, measurable, and aligned with regional and project goals. Below are the key aspects to be included in the monitoring plan:

1. Impact indicators

Each roadmap should specify quantitative and qualitative indicators such as:

- *Number of SMEs benefiting from the new or improved policy measure (e.g. training received, access to services, funding awarded).*
- *Total amount of funding mobilised or distributed through the improved measure (EUR).*
- *Satisfaction level of the SMEs and stakeholders involved, based on surveys or feedback forms.*

2. Monitoring methods

To ensure proper tracking and reporting, each partner should define a method for collecting and analysing data, including:

- *Regular progress reports .*
- *Stakeholder interviews and surveys at key stages of implementation.*
- *Case studies on selected SMEs or actions, to illustrate impact in-depth.*

3. Suggested additional indicators (optional)

Partners may include extra indicators relevant to their regional context or type of improvement, such as: - .