

NEWSLETTER

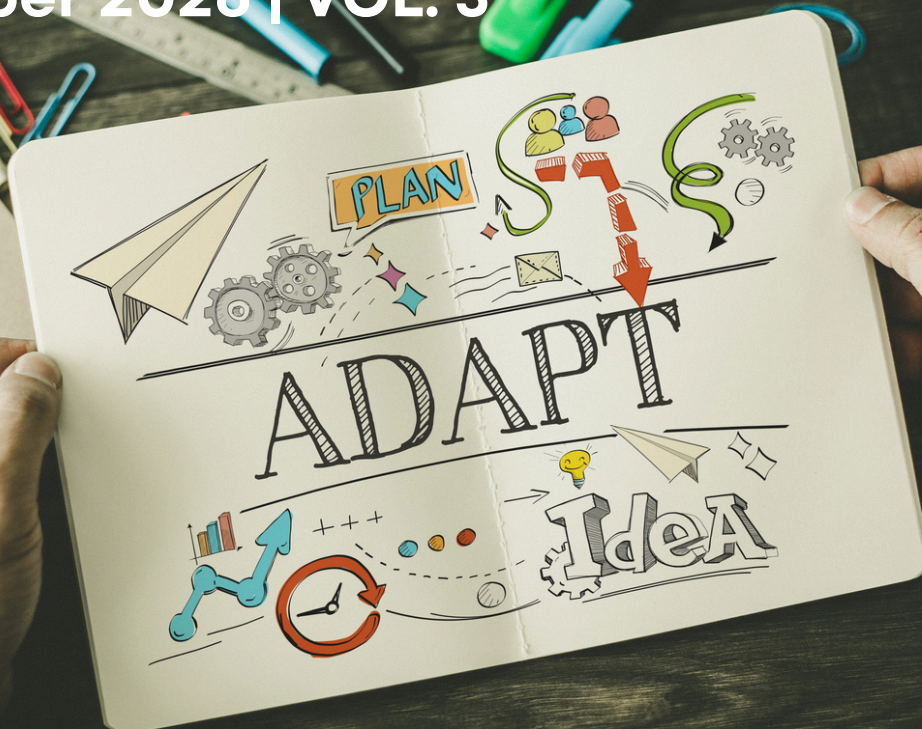
Interreg
Europe



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REWARD

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GET TO KNOW THE PROJECT, UPDATES, UPCOMING EVENTS

In response to global trends, technological development and the emergence of new forms of work and lifestyles, policymakers need to develop a better understanding of the brain-drain brain-gain phenomenon and take action for the benefit of communities by adapting their policies for developing skills for smart specialisation, industrial transition and entrepreneurship.

Against this background, REWARD brings together 9 partners from 2 transition regions (FI, IE) and 6 less developed regions (HR, PT, IT, SK, PL, CZ) to find solutions to these challenges.

ABOUT PROJECT

REWARD aims to improve regional policies and programmes for retaining and attracting knowledge workers for regional development. It will identify, analyse, disseminate and transfer good practices among regional policy actors in 4 complementary areas. The specific objectives are thus to:

- Improve the effectiveness of **university-industry collaboration** as a means of retaining graduates in existing jobs
- Support entrepreneurship and increase **business support** to create new jobs in the economy
- Improve interventions that enhance the **quality of life** and foster regional attractiveness
- Adapt to **new forms of work** (digital nomads, remote work, second homeowners).

A FEW NUMBERS



Common theme

In regions with innovation potential, the problem of qualified workers is frequent. This is particularly important for regions undergoing industrial transformation, those on the edge of the EU, or close to large cities.

The REWARD project is an active contribution to EU cohesion policy that supports economic growth, jobs and sustainable development, while at the same time reducing disparities in regional development.

Shaping the Future of Regional Skills and Remote Work: Irish REWARD Stakeholders Outline Next Steps

On March 27, 2026, the Irish REWARD project stakeholder group met online to review regional progress and prepare for key upcoming events. Hosted by the Western Development Commission (WDC), the session focused on adapting European policy successes and tackling regional skills and housing challenges.

Learning from European Partners

The group reviewed insights from the Third Interregional Learning Event (ILE) in Pardubice, Czechia (October 2025). While Ireland shared its Sustainable Mobility Index, stakeholders showed great interest in Pardubice's Start-up Housing Programme for Young Residents as a potential model to help address the West of Ireland's housing crisis



Key Strategic Discussions

- **Diaspora Engagement:** Exploring ways to bring skilled diaspora back, such as Leitrim's upcoming place-based skills strategy event and Sardinia's talent network model.
- **Skills Matching:** Discussing Grow Remote's new platform to connect local remote workers with global jobs, emphasizing the need for active marketing to sustain recruitment platforms.
- **Enterprise Ecosystem:** Addressing the complexity of upskilling grants and agreeing to feed these challenges directly into regional policy reviews.
- **Remote Work Integration:** Supporting Grow Remote's advocacy for national remote work targets and their community-integration volunteering initiatives.

Stakeholders will participate in targeted in-person workshops over the summer to draft recommendations for the Regional Spatial And Economic Strategy (RSES). Crucially, the region is also gearing up to host the next Interregional Learning Event in Sligo and Leitrim this June 2026, showcasing the West of Ireland's remote work ecosystem to EU partners.

Regional Stakeholder Group Meeting in Mazovia: AI, Entrepreneurship, and Talent Retention

On June 23, 2026, the REWARD project's Regional Stakeholder Group met in Warsaw to review project progress and exchange interregional good practices.

The meeting brought together key representatives from local universities, the Voivodeship Labor Office, and the Mazovia Development Agency to address talent retention and skills development in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship.

The Structural Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Skills

A major topic of discussion was the rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its profound implications for regional qualifications. Stakeholders emphasized that AI is not merely a technological milestone but a structural force reshaping the labor market. To ensure a successful transition, both the regional workforce and the formal education system must proactively adapt to these emerging skill demands.

The event also featured an interactive workshop, "Enterprising Mazovia – From the Young to the Experienced". This session explored how to create supportive regional conditions that foster business initiatives and unlock entrepreneurial potential across all age groups, leveraging the strengths of both youth and experienced professionals.

A Holistic Ecosystem for Talent Retention

Ultimately, participants concluded that successfully retaining skilled talent requires a comprehensive regional ecosystem. Beyond simply providing jobs, regions must offer a holistic environment that combines:

- Continuous opportunities for modern skill development,
- Broad access to cutting-edge technologies,
- Robust and structured support for entrepreneurship,
- High quality of life and attractive conditions for personal and professional growth.

The insights and good practices gained during this fifth semester of the REWARD project will serve as a valuable foundation for future regional policy instruments aimed at enhancing Mazovia's attractiveness as a premier place to live, work, and grow professionally.



Driving Regional Appeal: CIM Médio Tejo Champions Quality of Life and Modern Work Models in Portugal

The Médio Tejo region in Portugal (represented by CIM Médio Tejo) marked two major milestones in May 2026, advancing its strategic commitment to regional attractiveness and sustainable investment under the REWARD project.

Coworking and Talent Attraction: The 5th Local Partner Meeting

On May 25, 2026, local stakeholders gathered in Tomar to review project progress and prepare for upcoming European exchanges:

- **European Exchanges:** Partners discussed mobility and quality of life initiatives observed during their visit to Pardubice, Czechia.
- **Support for New Forms of Work:** Looking ahead to the June meeting in Sligo, Ireland, the group explored Ireland's national remote work strategy. CIM Médio Tejo highlighted its own practical progress, sharing its experience in establishing two dedicated coworking spaces for public servants.



Synergizing Intermunicipal Investment

On May 29, 2026, the REWARD project took center stage at the intermunicipal investment support meeting in Abrantes:

- **Policy Alignment:** The meeting brought together municipal investment support offices to align investment attraction policies across the region.
- **Thematic Leadership:** Key focus was placed on the action plan for Thematic Working Group 3 (TWG 3), coordinated by CIM Médio Tejo, which is entirely dedicated to "Quality of Life and Regional Attractiveness".

CIM Médio Tejo will lead a specialized working group alongside partners from Italy, Ireland, and Czechia. This collaborative effort will focus on regional attractiveness, culminating in a major interregional meeting hosted in Portugal in February 2027.



Fostering Talent and Policy Innovation: Sardinia Explores Quality of Life and Digital Opportunities

On March 27, 2026, the Autonomous Region of Sardinia's Department of Industry hosted its fourth regional stakeholder meeting in Cagliari under the Interreg Europe REWARD project. This session marked an exciting transition as the project shifts from learning toward active policy improvements for talent attraction and retention.



Connecting Local Talents and European Insights

Stakeholders reviewed the outcomes of the previous interregional event in Pardubice (Czech Republic), focusing on how quality of life and regional attractiveness serve as competitive factors. A major point of discussion was Sardinia's own good practice, the "Decalogue of Sardinian Talents Abroad", which is designed to understand the motivations and expectations of Sardinian professionals living overseas and keep them connected to their home region.

Shifting Focus to the Digital Future

To prepare for the upcoming project meeting in Ireland, which will center on adapting to new forms of work, participants discussed several key local and digital opportunities:

- **Remote Work & Creative Sectors:** Discussion highlighted emerging opportunities in remote work, particularly within digital and creative industries like audiovisual and storytelling.
- **Digital Skills & AI Hubs:** Stakeholders examined regional efforts by ASPAL (Sardinian Agency for Active Labour Policies) to establish AI hubs and promote short training programs in digital and linguistic skills.
- **Collaborative Policy Co-Creation:** Representatives from the departments of industry and labour, ASPAL, business associations (Confapi and Legacoop Sardegna), and the Sardegna Film Commission committed to continuous dialogue to successfully integrate these practices into regional policies.

From Shared Desks to Vibrant Communities: South Savo Shapes Its Remote Work Future

On August 13, 2026, the autumn season of the REWARD project kicked off in Pieksämäki, where stakeholders from the South Savo region gathered to discuss regional development and share insights from their recent study visit to Ireland.

Key Lessons from the Irish Remote Work Ecosystem

The Finnish delegation highlighted how Ireland has successfully leveraged remote work as a driver of regional development through a comprehensive ecosystem of national strategy, infrastructure, and community building. The most important takeaway for South Savo is that physical workspaces are not enough on their own. True regional vitality relies on:

- **Vibrant Communities:** Providing remote workers with spaces and opportunities to meet, network, and integrate into local areas.
- **Leveraging Regional Strengths:** Combining South Savo's natural environment, safety, and high quality of life with long-term collaboration to attract skilled professionals.

Innovative Steps Forward for Finland

To turn these insights into action, stakeholders explored two key initiatives:

- **A Unified National Platform:** Participants identified the potential of a shared, easily accessible platform to connect coworking and remote work facilities across Finland, improving their visibility and helping professionals settle outside major urban centres.
- **The Launch of a Regional Developer Network:** Taking inspiration from Sardinia's NODI network, South Savo officially launched a new, informal developer network to serve as an open forum for exchanging ideas and driving innovative regional cooperation.



Adapting to New Ways of Working: Experts Discussed Key Challenges at a Stakeholder Meeting

On 30 September 2026, the Regional Development Agency of the Pardubice Region hosted an online stakeholder meeting focused on new ways of working, skills development and the responsible use of AI.

International Inspiration from Ireland

The meeting presented key outcomes from the REWARD project study visit to Sligo, Ireland, highlighting practical approaches to rural revitalisation and talent retention. These included more than 400 Connected Hubs, flexible working policies, and community initiatives such as Grow Remote and Moving West.

Participants also explored good practices from other European countries, including remote-working skills development in Poland, coworking hubs in Portugal, district hubs in Slovakia and initiatives engaging seasonal residents in Finland.

TWINUP4CE: Future Skills for the Pardubice Region

The meeting introduced TWINUP4CE, an Interreg Central Europe project with a budget of almost EUR 800,000. In the Pardubice Region, the project focuses on areas around Česká Třebová, Moravská Třebová, Svitavy and Králíky and aims to address skills gaps linked to the digital and green transitions.

A key element will be the creation of Regional Upskilling Management Alliances (RUMAs), connecting regional authorities, employers, schools and the Labour Office to support upskilling, reskilling, lifelong learning and micro-credentials.

Shadow AI: When Employees Move Faster Than the Rules

The final session, led by experts from the University of Pardubice, focused on Shadow AI – the unofficial use of AI tools by employees before organisations have established clear rules.

The discussion highlighted risks such as sensitive data leaks and unchecked AI-generated outputs. Instead of blanket bans, organisations should establish clear guidelines, including protecting sensitive information, verifying AI outputs and being transparent about AI use.

The meeting provided a valuable opportunity to share international experience, regional initiatives and practical approaches to managing technological change in the workplace.

The meeting highlighted that the future of work requires both flexibility and preparedness. International examples, regional skills initiatives and responsible approaches to AI can help organisations and communities respond to technological change while creating better opportunities for people and businesses. Continued cooperation and knowledge sharing among regional and international stakeholders will be essential for turning these insights into practical solutions.

PAST EVENTS

REWARD in Ireland: Driving Regional Growth through New Forms of Work and Talent Attraction



Between 9–11 June 2026, project partners and regional stakeholders of the REWARD project gathered in the Sligo–Leitrim region on the west coast of Ireland for the 4th Interregional Learning Event.

Hosted by the Western Development Commission, the three-day event focused on the highly relevant theme of “Adaptation to New Forms of Work”.

With the shift toward flexible working models accelerated by technological progress, smaller cities and peripheral regions face both unique opportunities and challenges.

The Sligo event demonstrated how combining robust public strategy, specialized technology centers, and high-quality local infrastructure can help European regions successfully attract and retain skilled professionals.

A key highlight of the Irish study visit was the presentation of Grow Remote and Connected Hubs, two initiatives forming a strong national approach to remote work.

- Connected Hubs links more than 400 coworking and community spaces across Ireland, helping people work closer to home while reducing commuting and supporting local economies.
- Grow Remote complements this network by building remote worker communities and supporting companies in adopting flexible working models.

The Irish model shows how remote work can become a strategic regional policy tool, strengthening smaller communities and making better use of local talent.

Technology and Innovation outside Urban Centers

The program also showcased how smaller regions can successfully build specialized centers of technological excellence to enhance business competitiveness and attract top-tier experts. Partners conducted site visits to several innovative centers:

AIM Centre (Sligo):

This state-of-the-art center supports companies in adopting advanced digital technologies and Industry 4.0 systems. It features advanced laboratories dedicated to robotics, collaborative robots, virtual and augmented reality, and artificial intelligence. In addition to training programs for students and industry professionals, it serves as an active coworking and innovation hub that bridges the gap between researchers and entrepreneurs.

Future Cast (Manorhamilton):

Operating as a specialized center of excellence, Future Cast focuses on research, training, and the practical application of Industry 4.0 technologies within the construction, mining, and manufacturing sectors. It allows regional businesses to test and deploy advanced methods, including 3D printing in construction, robotics, and artificial intelligence, showing that cutting-edge innovation does not have to be concentrated solely in large metropolitan areas.

SocoLab (Strandhill):

This modern innovation and coworking hub provides flexible office environments specifically tailored for start-ups, creative professionals, technology firms, and freelancers.. Beyond physical space, SocoLab offers active mentoring, business development support, and cross-sectoral networking opportunities, helping cultivate local talent and drive entrepreneurial activity.



Quality of Life as a Strategic Asset

An increasingly vital factor in attracting knowledge workers is the overall quality of life and leisure opportunities a region can offer. This concept was vividly demonstrated during a visit to the National Surf Centre in Strandhill.

Opened in 2023, the facility is Ireland's national center of excellence for surfing, offering world-class training facilities and community spaces. More importantly, it serves as a prime example of strategic regional investment where sport, tourism, and community life intersect. For modern professionals, factors like natural environments, leisure activities, and a strong sense of community are highly influential when choosing where to live and work. Investing in lifestyle-oriented infrastructure can therefore serve as a powerful tool for regional development.



Key Takeaways for European Regions

The learning event in Ireland confirmed that successful regional adaptation to modern labor dynamics requires a balanced, multi-faceted approach. It is not enough to focus solely on technology or policy; regions must combine **high-quality digital infrastructure, accessible coworking networks, specialized educational and innovation centers, and an appealing living environment.**

We extend our sincere gratitude to our hosting partner, the **Western Development Commission**, for their outstanding organization and for sharing these highly inspiring regional development strategies.



UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

Focus on the Upcoming Thematic Working Groups

As we enter the autumn season, the REWARD project is transitioning into an intensive phase of cooperation and knowledge exchange. The partnership is now fully focused on the upcoming series of Thematic Working Groups (TWGs). These groups serve as the primary mechanism for transferring good practices and co-designing regional policy improvements across our partner territories.

Over the next six months, four dedicated working groups will convene across Europe to address key project themes:

TWG 1:

University-Industry Collaboration (Pardubice, Czech Republic)

Date: 11–15 January 2027

Host: Regional Development Agency of the Pardubice Region

Bridging the gap between academia and key regional industries. The group will explore successful collaboration models in the fields of transport, chemistry, information technology, electrical engineering, and textiles. Activities will include interactive workshops, peer reviews, and a sustainable value analysis.

TWG 2:

Entrepreneurship and Business Support (Trnava Region, Slovakia)

Date: 17–18 November 2026

Host: Trnava Self-Governing Region

This group will examine how regional authorities can create a supportive environment for citizens wishing to start their own businesses. Partners will share good practices in entrepreneurship support, engage with Slovak regional stakeholders, and review the Strategy for the Support and Development of SMEs in the Trnava Region.



UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

Focus on the Upcoming Thematic Working Groups

WG 3:

Quality of Life and Regional Attractiveness (Médio Tejo, Portugal)

Date: 25–26 February 2027

Host: CIM Médio Tejo

Enhancing the attractiveness of low-density territories. Key topics under discussion include Smart City solutions, the revitalization of decommissioned industrial or military sites, sustainable mobility and cycling infrastructure, affordable housing strategies, and leveraging cultural heritage.



TWG 4:

Adaptation to New Forms of Work (Savonlinna, Finland)

Date: 25–26 November 2026

Host: Savonlinna Development Services

Navigating the shift toward hybrid and remote work. The sessions will focus on regional strategies for remote hubs, coworking networks, hybrid work models within public services, and “serendipity management” in innovation ecosystems. The event will also feature a study visit to the Noheva technology park.



Each Thematic Working Group (TWG) follows a simple three-phase approach to ensure that knowledge and good practices lead to real policy improvements:

Prepare: Partners align their priorities through online meetings, questionnaires, and the exchange of Good Practices.

Exchange: During multi-day visits, partners explore Good Practices through presentations, interactive workshops, and study visits to local stakeholders.

Transfer: After each event, key lessons are summarized and shared, helping partners apply new insights to their own regional strategies and policies.

THE PARTNERSHIP



Savonlinna Development Services (FI)



South Savo Regional Council (FI)



Institute for Tourism (HR)



Inter-Municipal Community of Médio Tejo (PT)



Autonomous Region of Sardinia (IT)



Western Development Commission (IE)



Self-Governing Trnava Region (SK)



Marshal's Office of the Mazovian Voivodeship (PL)



The Regional Development Agency of the Pardubice Region (CZ)



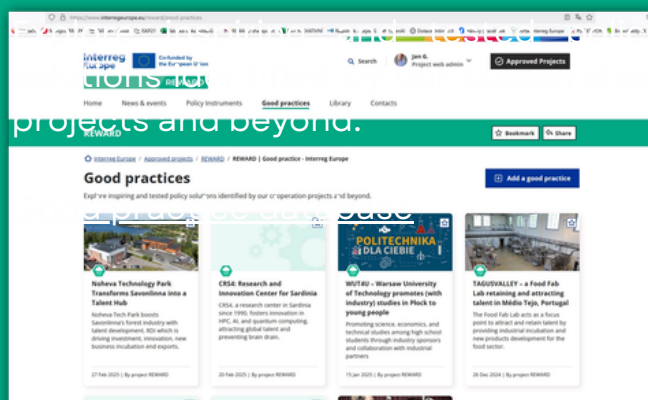
EVENTS

- **Continuous support pathways for women-led businesses**

On 15 October, the Policy Learning Platform is hosting a webinar focused on policy and business support pathways to help women-led businesses consolidate, grow, and scale across Europe. The online event will feature expert insights from the Enterprise Europe Network and showcase successful regional initiatives from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Romania.

[Register here](#)

- **Good practices**



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