

PILLAR 1 OF THE TALENT BOOSTER MECHANISM

Technical Assistance

Helping regions facing a 'talent development trap' to harness talent

ŁÓDZKIE, POLAND

LOOKING AHEAD: STRATEGIC ROADMAP



**HARNESSING
TALENT
PLATFORM**

A new boost for EU Regions

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Executive Summary



In **Łódzkie, Poland**, the Implementation Phase of the Technical Assistance (Pillar 1 of the Talent Booster Mechanism) focused on two key areas:

1. **Intelligence support: collecting evidence on the motivations of young people**, aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the decision-making processes of young university graduates.
2. **Support the establishment of strategic cooperation with selected research institutions to monitor graduate migration**, enhancing data quality and improving the understanding of migration flows through partnerships with institutions that process relevant data.

The TA supported in **addressing gaps in understanding the extent, specificity and causes of the brain drain phenomenon**. Existing research and public statistics provided a very limited picture in this regard, making policy design challenging. Given resource constraints, identifying key influencing factors is crucial. A comprehensive **study of university students** was designed, conducted and analysed, involving close to **2,000 students across five universities**. As a result, key factors for enhancing **regional attractiveness** to mitigate **brain drain** were identified in the areas of the **labour market, transport and spatial planning, and regional image and branding**. Additionally, a **partnership** with two **research institutes** was established to **enhance the monitoring of talent migration**, providing **quantitative evidence** currently unavailable to regional policymakers.

In what follows in this **Strategic Roadmap**, we look beyond Pillar 1 of the TBM. **Section I focuses on the sustainability** of the expert support provided by Pillar 1 Technical Assistance in the past six months. In the case of Łódzkie, the effectiveness of the survey—both in terms of its method of delivery and the insights generated—has led the region to confirm that it will be repeated approximately every two years. Moreover, the results of the survey will now be used by regional authorities to develop policy interventions in a more targeted manner. Furthermore, collaboration with existing research institutions has resulted in an **agreement to monitor talent migration more systematically**.

Section II of the report outlines a **Strategic Roadmap** that sets out a series of priority areas to help regions harness talent more effectively and guide future efforts — including those supported by Cohesion Policy — in the years ahead. In Łódzkie, the priority areas include the **labour market, public transport and spatial planning**, as well as the **regional image and perception**. For each of these priority areas, we outline the rationale for their selection, assess how they currently align with Cohesion Policy programmes from a talent perspective, and propose strategic actions for their funding allocation and implementation. The section concludes by offering selected transversal considerations for a more effective implementation of Cohesion Policy to harness talent.

I. Sustainability of implemented support

This section outlines how the actions undertaken during the Implementation Phase of the TA will be sustained over time. It describes how the outputs delivered will be embedded into existing regional processes and considers how these outputs can be presented and discussed within relevant forums and with key regional stakeholders.

1. Action I – Collecting evidence on the motivations of talents

The student survey carried out as part of the TA has proved its usefulness and the regional authorities plan to repeat it in the future. It will help to monitor the effectiveness of the measures taken to attract and retain talent in the Łódzkie region. In discussions with the Marshall Office representatives, it was agreed that it would be reasonable to conduct this type of research approximately every two years.

The solutions developed within the framework of the TA (questionnaire, sampling, implementation process, scheme of the data analysis etc.) could form a strong basis for conducting related research in the future. **The TA team provided the regional representatives with all the necessary elements of the process** (including the survey script from the programme for conducting the survey). At the same time, there is room for modification of the research tools in order to adapt them to the specific information needs that may be identified in the future.

In this respect, it is necessary to maintain cooperation with the universities that have direct contact with students. In order to strengthen the cooperation, universities should be involved in the whole process, as was the case during the TA (i.e. from the consultation of the survey questionnaire to the discussion of the research results). It would also be beneficial if the universities involved in the survey also received the detailed results of the study for their own in-depth analysis. At the same time, it would be worthwhile to expand the sample of students surveyed to include other universities from the Łódzkie region, such as the Academy of Humanities and Economics or the SAN University, both in Łódź¹. The pilot survey as part of the TA covered a total of five universities².

¹ There are 23 universities in the region.

² These were: the University of Łódź, the Łódź University of Technology, the Medical University of Łódź, the Piotrków Trybunalski Academy and the Stefan Batory Academy of Applied Sciences in Skierniewice.

Surveys planned for the future would complement the information provided by the IBE PIB³ and OPI PIB⁴, which is a part of Action 2, described below. While the results of analysis provided by external research organisations will show specific trends in talent migration, student surveys will help to better understand and interpret them. In particular, the latter will provide insight into the specific motivations of young talents migration decisions.

2. Action II – Cooperation with research institutions to monitor migration of talents

Cooperation with research institutes, initiated as part of the TA, is intended to ensure a sustainable mechanism for monitoring talent migration, based on the use of reliable registry data. In accordance with the arrangements made during the TA, two research institutions will prepare annual estimates for indicators relating to the place of residence of secondary school graduates (analyses conducted by the Educational Research Institute National Research Institute - IBE PIB) and higher education graduates (analyses conducted by the Information Processing Centre National Research Institute - OPI PIB). **The year 2025 will be the first time that estimates for the selected set of indicators will be made⁵.**

In order to strengthen and consolidate the results, further working contacts with both research institutions are necessary. Some of these took place in early 2025. They were accompanied by a consultation process on a document containing a list of indicators with their detailed technical specifications. As a result of the consultations, a set of 12 indicators was agreed upon, of which 7 refer to secondary school graduates (IBE PIB) and the remaining 5 to higher education graduates (OPI PIB)⁶. Subsequent meetings will be aimed at discussing the estimated indicators and possible further developments. Ultimately, after 2025, the analyses will be carried out periodically (once a year), independently by both research institutions.

Additional involvement of the Marshal's Office is necessary to increase the scope of data analysed by one of the research institutions. According to the findings of the indicator consultation stage, not all indicators can be calculated under the current legal framework. In the case of five indicators planned to be estimated by the IBE PIB, appropriate legislative changes are necessary to increase the scope of data processed by this institution. This includes, among other things, information on the exact place where secondary school graduates undertake higher education, within the relevant time frame. As a public body and one of the recipients of the analyses in question, the Marshal's Office can influence the details of the legislation. In this regard, the region has already

³ The Educational Research Institute.

⁴ The National Information Processing Institute.

⁵ OPI PIB has already conducted the first round of analyses, and the results are now available at <https://ela.nauka.gov.pl/>. These include [nationwide](#), [regional](#) and [university-level](#) reports. In-depth [source data](#) is also available (Geographic Mobility section).

⁶ Nine indicators were planned at the [implementation report](#) stage. Following consultations with research institutes in 2025, this number increased to 12.

submitted relevant comments on the draft law covering the issues in question⁷. Similar involvement may be necessary in the future to ensure that all needed indicators can be estimated.

In order to consolidate the results of the project, it is also important that the estimated indicators are used in the cycle of implementation of public policies, related to the development, attraction and retention of talent. In this respect, they can be useful both for planning and for evaluating the effectiveness of public interventions.

An important area for ensuring the sustainability of the solutions developed under the TA is also the dissemination of results in this field in other regions and at the national level. This will be possible by ensuring that indicators are estimated not only at the level of the Łódzkie region, but also for the remaining 15 regions of Poland. Both OPI PIB and IBE PIB have declared the implementation of universal solutions that will show the estimates of indicators for all regions. It would be worthwhile to disseminate information on the estimated indicators at a forum of institutions dealing with challenges related to the development, attraction and retention of talent. In this regard, the first networks have been established during the TA process⁸. They should be continued, expanded and strengthened.

Survey results and the conclusions drawn from them, as well as the outcomes in the area of the talent migration monitoring system are to be the subject of further discussion with representatives of the Regional Board. The conclusions drawn from the research conducted served as a starting point for designing measures of greatest importance for the implementation of policies aimed at developing, attracting and retaining talent. These measures are presented in the Strategic Roadmap (Chapter II) and should be further discussed and subsequently implemented.

The results of the project are also being disseminated. A meeting is planned with representatives of the Polish Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, responsible for implementing a project dedicated to developing solutions to counteract the migration of young people from areas affected by depopulation. The exchange of experiences in this area should be helpful in the process of further designing and implementing public policies related to the development, retention and attraction of talent.

⁷ Link to the regulation under consideration: [Project](#)

⁸ During the project, cooperation was established with the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, which is implementing a national project addressing youth migration from depopulated areas. A meeting is planned to exchange experiences in this area.

II. Strategic Roadmap

1. Priority Areas

This section outlines a strategic roadmap that identifies key areas where further action is needed to harness talent more effectively. The roadmap is intended to guide future efforts within the region, particularly in relation to Cohesion Policy, by highlighting priority areas, potential interventions, and considerations for targeted resource allocation.

Table 1 – Strategic Roadmap to harness talent in Łódzkie

Priority Area	Rationale	Cohesion Policy Alignment (Talent Perspective)	The Path Ahead: Strategic Actions & Resource Considerations
PA1: Labour Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employment opportunities are a key factor influencing students' decisions to stay in or leave the region. - Students with a job or internship are approximately 33% more likely to remain in the region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Limited funding is currently available for activities supporting student employment. Existing measures primarily target disadvantaged groups and jobseekers. - Relevant actions include: FELD.01.02, FELD.01.05, FELD.01.06, FENG.01.01 (job creation). - FELD.01.03 may support stronger university-business cooperation. - FENG.02.28, FENG.02.29 support for start-ups. 	<p><i>Time horizon: short to medium-term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support initiatives encouraging employers to hire final-year university students in order to “anchor” young graduates in the region by providing promising employment opportunities. - Support student entrepreneurship, particularly in fields with high talent outflow and aligned with smart specialisations (such as services of the future, medicine, engineering, modern technology and construction). - Give preference to companies (e.g. in project selection criteria) that are willing to create jobs in sectors vulnerable to brain drain and that represent regional specialisations, such as services of the future, medicine, engineering, modern technology and construction.
PA2: Public Transport and Spatial Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public transport and road infrastructure improvements were the most frequently mentioned needs in open-ended responses within the survey of students. - Other key areas included urban revitalisation, more effective infrastructure management, and access to affordable housing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Since the investment area extends beyond Łódź to the wider metropolitan region, funding could be sourced from Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) for the Łódź Territorial Area 2021–2027. - However, current ITI allocations are insufficient to fully address these needs. - FENX.03.01 Urban transport. 	<p><i>Time horizon: medium to long-term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhance public transport by expanding dedicated bus lanes, prioritising buses at intersections, optimising timetables, journey planning and ticketing with smart tools, and improving coordination of roadworks. - Advance spatial planning through local mobility plans based on the 15-minute city concept and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)

Priority Area	Rationale	Cohesion Policy Alignment (Talent Perspective)	The Path Ahead: Strategic Actions & Resource Considerations
			<p>strategies focused on well-connected neighbourhoods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting green and active mobility, by expanding safe and continuous cycling infrastructure (bike lanes, bike-sharing systems, bike parking), improving pedestrian accessibility and walkability (wider pavements, safer crossings, car-free zones), and integrating these modes with public transport.
PA3: Regional Image & Perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outdated image of Łódzkie discourages young people from staying, despite revitalisation efforts and educational potential. - Negative perceptions influence early decisions to study elsewhere and fuel ongoing brain drain. 	<p>As Priority Action 3 focuses on improving the region's image to attract talent, it currently lacks a clear funding stream within the FEŁ2027. Indirect support may be drawn from Priority 5, particularly through tourism, cultural, and revitalisation measures, if reframed with talent-oriented goals. However, stronger alignment would require either changes to the current programme or consideration of this issue in the next programming period..</p>	<p><i>Time horizon: short to medium-term</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a data-informed strategy to redefine the region's image, starting with perception studies, surveys, focus groups, and media monitoring. - Create an authentic brand identity highlighting regional strengths (e.g. creative industries, academic heritage, affordability) and aligning with generational values like sustainability and inclusivity. - Establish a regional promotion council to coordinate branding efforts across public authorities, universities, businesses, and civil society, ensuring consistent and locally rooted messaging. In parallel, create an independent network of young regional ambassadors that collaborate closely with the council to inject fresh perspectives and foster grassroots engagement.

I. PA 1: Labour market – creating new jobs that better match talent expectations

i. Rationale

The economy of the Łódzkie region has a limited capacity to generate attractive, secure and well-paid jobs. This weakness is closely linked to the region's modest level of innovation, its sectoral profile and the overall state of entrepreneurship. In the Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2023, Łódzkie is classified as an 'Emerging Innovator +', placing it below the EU average and broadly in line with the Polish average. The region lags behind both Poland and the EU on several key inputs and outputs

of innovation, including private-sector R&D expenditures, the share of business-process innovators, innovation expenditure per employee, collaboration among innovative SMEs, the number of ICT specialists in employment and the volume of patent applications⁹. The development of entrepreneurship is also subdued: Łódzkie ranks 11th among Poland's sixteen regions on composite measures of entrepreneurial activity (number of active SMEs, employment, density, growth etc.)¹⁰. The supply of jobs offered by large companies is also limited. Only 189 large enterprises operated in the region in 2023 - fewer than 5% of the national total - and they employed roughly 156 000 people, equivalent to 65.9 jobs per 1 000 inhabitants (Poland: 89.4)¹¹. The entrepreneurial ecosystem is further weakened by low business survival. Only 48.4% of non-financial enterprises created in 2022 were still active after one year, compared with a national survival rate of 67% (the lowest score in Poland)¹².

As a result, the region remains relatively unattractive in terms of potential salaries. In 2023 the average gross monthly wage in Łódzkie was PLN 6 694. By contrast, average pay in Mazowieckie reached PLN 8 467 (+26%), in Dolnośląskie PLN 7 415 (+11%) and in Małopolskie PLN 7 263 (+9%)¹³. The combination of lower wages and the region's central location - within commuting distance of better-paying labour markets - amplifies the risk of talent outflow.

In the survey conducted during the Technical Assistance, students were asked whether they plan to stay in the region, leave it, or if they remain undecided. The last group - representing 42% of all respondents - is particularly important from a public policy perspective. These undecided students identified several employment-related factors that could influence their decision to stay in the region, including high salaries (47%), opportunities for professional development (40%), and access to interesting job offers (40%).

The survey also included open-ended questions about what could make the Łódzkie region a more attractive place to live. The second most frequently mentioned need was the creation of new employment opportunities. To gain deeper insights into the factors influencing students' decisions to remain in Łódzkie after graduation, a statistical model based on logistic regression analysis was developed. This method allowed to estimate how specific characteristics or opinions affect the likelihood of a student deciding to stay in the region. Notably, students who already have a job or internship are approximately 33% more likely to remain in Łódzkie. At the same time, a negative perception of job opportunities in the region reduces the likelihood of staying by 45%.

⁹ Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2023 – Regional profiles Poland.

¹⁰ Report on the state of the small and medium-sized enterprise sector in Poland. Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (2024).

¹¹ Activity of non-financial enterprises in 2023. Statistics Poland. Warsaw 2024.

¹² Report on the state of the small and medium-sized enterprise sector in Poland. Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (2024).

¹³ Average monthly gross wages and salaries in national economy in voivodships in 2023. Statistics Poland. Warsaw 2024.

ii. Current alignment with Cohesion Policy Programmes from a talent perspective

Incentives for hiring final-year students and for startup creation. A preliminary analysis of EU Funds for Łódzkie 2021-2027 suggests that funding opportunities for such activities are relatively limited. The support available under the current regional programme tends to focus on disadvantaged groups, jobseekers, and equalising opportunities. However, when it comes to talents, the target group is different: these are highly educated individuals who require stronger, more tailored incentives and actions. It may be worth considering the launch of pilot actions specifically for this group, allowing solutions to be tested and scaled up in the next programme. Such an initiative could be implemented under the "[Young in Łódź](#)" programme. Funding for pilot actions (in addition to city resources) could be drawn from the regional programme, possibly by introducing a new pilot action targeting talent, in line with the [European Commission proposal for a Modernised Cohesion Policy](#). In order to make this happen, either the current programme would have to be changed, or it would have to be included in the next programming period. The Commission's proposal also highlights the potential to support large enterprises, as many of the potentially attractive job opportunities for talents may be created within this group of companies, which are typically more innovative. Another option would be to fund a large project within the national programmes: European Funds for Social Development (FERS) or European Funds for Smart Economy (FENG). Within the latter, the "Competence" module of the Smart Path (measure 1.1) offers targeted support for developing human capital in areas aligned with innovation and smart specialisations. This can include co-financing training, upskilling, and reskilling activities. By supporting the development of in-demand skills and increasing the attractiveness of local job markets, the Competence module can help retain and attract talents, especially when implemented in cooperation with local businesses and research institutions. In addition, the FENG programme provides dedicated support for startups through the "Startup Booster Poland" initiative (measure 2.28). This scheme offers acceleration services, internationalisation opportunities, and expert mentoring, aiming to strengthen the global competitiveness of early-stage innovative companies. Furthermore, under measure 2.29 "Startups Are Us", selected startups – particularly from the GreenTech and EdTech sectors – can participate in international training and business missions to key global markets. Promoting both initiatives among young people in regions such as Łódzkie could help unlock their entrepreneurial potential, encourage the development of locally rooted ventures, and reduce the outflow of talent by offering attractive prospects for business growth and global exposure close to home.

Providing incentives for companies to create jobs. As part of activities aimed at businesses and funded by EU Funds for Łódzkie 2021-2027, consideration should be given to introducing criteria that reward job creation (an alternative could be a conditional grant mechanism for this purpose). The actions that could include job creation mechanisms are FELD.01.02 Investments in enterprise research and innovation, FELD.01.05 Competitiveness of SMEs, FELD.01.06 Investments in SMEs – IF. FELD.01.03 PPO may also be a potential source of funding for enhancing cooperation between universities and enterprises.

At a national level, the FENG programme primarily supports job creation for talented individuals through innovation-driven instruments. The most relevant actions include SMART Path (FENG.01.01) modules such as 'Implementation of Innovation', 'Competences', and 'R&D Infrastructure'. These actions facilitate business growth, enhance employee qualifications and generate high-value jobs in emerging sectors and regions in need of talent retention. Notably, the SMART Path component, which is implemented by the National Centre for Research and Development (NCBR), provides support to large enterprises, which often have the capacity to create a significant number of high-skilled jobs. By leveraging their R&D capacity and scale, large companies can act as important anchors for regional talent and innovation ecosystems.

In addition, FENG will soon incorporate the 'Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)' initiative, which is aimed at boosting Europe's competitiveness in key areas such as clean technologies, biotechnology and deep tech. This new area of support will contribute to the creation of high-quality jobs by accelerating the development of critical technologies and strengthening European supply chains.

iii. [The path ahead: strategic actions to further harness talent and considerations for resource allocation and implementation](#)

Incentives for hiring final-year students. It is recommended to initiate or strengthen activities aimed at creating incentives for hiring final-year students. These actions could include subsidized internships and apprenticeships with companies in the region. A key consideration is accurately identifying the target group, which should consist of students from fields that are particularly relevant to the regional and national economy (aligned with regional and national smart specialisation sectors¹⁴). These concern talents from the following areas: services of the future¹⁵, medicine, engineering, modern technology, construction and others. Another important factor to consider is the professions or fields of study from which relatively more students (according to the survey conducted) plan to leave the region. These actions could be further developed and promoted under the city of Łódź's "Young in Łódź" initiative.

Creating stronger incentives for students to establish new businesses, particularly those studying in fields at risk of talent outflow and aligned with national and regional smart specialisations (RIS), can be achieved through:

¹⁴ Seven regional smart specialisations have been selected in the Łódzkie region, including two horizontal ones (1. Modern environmental technologies and 2. Services of the future) and five sectoral specialisations (3. Innovative textiles and fashion industry, 4. Smart construction, 5. Medicine, pharmacy, cosmetics, 6. Innovative agriculture and agri-food processing, 7. Mobility and logistics of the future).

¹⁵ In line with the regional innovation strategy, services of the future includes a wide range of digital transformation solutions, such as automation, data analytics, artificial intelligence, robotics, blockchain technology, the Internet of Things, and virtual and augmented reality.

- Establishing entrepreneurship incubators at universities, offering professional mentoring programs, legal and financial advice, and access to shared infrastructure (e.g., co-working spaces, labs, prototyping tools).
- Providing higher subsidies for starting businesses than those typically offered by local and regional labour offices, as well as diversifying the types of businesses that can be established (currently, most are self-employed businesses, which are not ideal for innovative startups).
- Encouraging collaboration between universities and regionally based businesses to facilitate knowledge transfer and joint research and development initiatives, as well as real-world problem-solving projects that engage students. This can lead to the commercialisation of academic research, internships and graduate employment opportunities, and the creation of spin-offs or start-ups based on innovative solutions developed jointly by academia and industry.
- Promoting participation in European mobility and mentoring programmes, such as Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, which enable aspiring entrepreneurs to learn from experienced founders in other EU countries¹⁶.
- Creating a regional contact and support hub for young entrepreneurs, inspired by models like hub.brussels¹⁷, where individuals can access step-by-step guidance, expert consultations, and referrals to support institutions.
- Organising regular matchmaking events between young entrepreneurs and local investors, such as pitch sessions, startup demo days, and business angel meetups, to improve access to seed funding and mentorship.
- Hosting innovation-focused events such as hackathons, idea labs, and startup weekends, where interdisciplinary teams of students can prototype solutions to local challenges, guided by mentors from business and academia.
- Offering entrepreneurship-oriented elective courses and micro-credentials, developed in collaboration with industry, to equip students with practical skills in business modeling, fundraising, and scaling ventures.
- Establishing pre-seed and early-stage funding programs, with simplified application procedures for student-founded enterprises and additional points for RIS alignment.

¹⁶ More information: <https://www.erasmus-entrepreneurs.eu/>

¹⁷ More information: <https://info.hub.brussels/en/guide/starting-business/support-and-information-new-entrepreneurs-who-should-you-contact>

- Building alumni networks and peer communities of young entrepreneurs, allowing exchange of experiences, advice, and potential collaboration between generations of startup founders.

Providing incentives for companies to create jobs in professions at risk of talent loss. This could involve modifying the project selection criteria for actions aimed at supporting businesses. These actions must be very precisely targeted. In Poland, the labour market situation makes it difficult for companies to find suitable employees. Using overly broad criteria for rewarding job creation could hinder efforts focused on building competitiveness and innovation within businesses. Therefore, it is even more crucial to clearly define the target group. This should include students from fields that are particularly important for the regional economy (e.g., aligned with regional smart specializations). Another factor to consider is the types of jobs requiring specialized education, for which relatively more people plan to leave the region (according to the conducted study).

II. PA 2: Improving public transport and new approaches to spatial planning

i. Rationale

According to the study, factors that discourage students from staying in the region include the poor condition of public spaces, neglected urban areas, and inadequate transport infrastructure. The survey also included open-ended questions about potential factors that could make Łódzkie a more attractive place to live. The most frequently mentioned need was improvements to public transportation and road infrastructure. Other notable requests included the revitalisation of urban areas, more effective management of infrastructure investments, and the provision of affordable housing¹⁸. Specific concerns regarding transport were also raised, such as lengthy renovations, inadequate and inconsistent public transportation, and a lack of timely information on schedule changes. These issues were identified as significant barriers to daily life by students.

ii. Current alignment with Cohesion Policy Programmes from a *talent perspective*

Measures related to the implementation of public transport system management solutions.

Since the investment concerns not only the city itself but the entire metropolitan area, a potential source of funding for the activities is ITI-based funding. As part of the [ITI Strategy for the Łódź Territorial Area 2021-2027](#), Strategic Objective 2 – A mobile and better-connected Łódź Metropolitan Area – has been defined. In the case of insufficient allocation under the current EU Funds for Łódzkie 2021-2027, we propose either a reallocation of resources as part of future changes to the regional programme, or the allocation of appropriate funds in the successor to the FEŁ2027.. In the Commission proposal for a Modernised Cohesion Policy, the “right to stay” is emphasised as well as affordable housing. The proposed spatial planning solutions also align with other objectives of the Łódź Territorial Area ITI Strategy 2021-2027 and could be financed accordingly. The EC proposal

¹⁸ On the housing front, Łódź offers one of the lowest average prices for new apartments among major Polish cities. In March 2024, the average price of an apartment in Łódź was PLN 10,843 per square metre. This was significantly lower than in Warsaw (17,500), Krakow (15,056), Gdańsk (13,359), Wrocław (13,100) and Poznań (13,100). (Source: [link to rynekpierwotny.pl](#)) On the other hand, new flats are being built in less (transport) accessible areas.

also indicated that in order to help public administrations improve their capacities and effectiveness, costs related to preparatory actions for reforms will be eligible¹⁹. This could be used to improve spatial planning reforms.

iii. [The path ahead: strategic actions to further harness talent and considerations for resource allocation and implementation](#)

Public transport and sustainable urban mobility²⁰

Speeding up public transport – bus lanes and traffic light priority. The main issues with public transport in Łódź include delays, long travel times, and low service frequency. To address these issues, traffic lights should prioritize public transport, and more dedicated lanes for buses and trams should be introduced. These measures would reduce energy consumption, lower emissions, and cut operating costs. Similar actions have been successfully implemented in cities like Warsaw (tram priority) and Gdynia (bus lane strategy). Łódź already has an ITS infrastructure in place, which would allow for the quick implementation of such solutions.

Realistic timetables – computer-based travel time adjustments. Punctuality issues in Łódź arise from poorly set travel times in timetables, which are manually adjusted, leading to inaccuracies. To address this, it is recommended to use statistical analysis of actual travel times, as implemented in other cities, such as the system developed by the Kraków University of Technology team. Using computer systems to optimize timetables could significantly improve accuracy. Additionally, bus lanes and priority traffic lights would further enhance punctuality. To minimize dissatisfaction due to transport disruptions, it is recommended to create an app that provides real-time information about changes in routes and departure times. The app could use AI to personalize notifications based on the user's preferences. The most advanced system in Poland is in Poznań, but it relies on SMS, which is less functional compared to apps like Moovit or Jakdojade, which could be adapted for Łódź.

Better coordination of roadworks and investments. Frequent roadworks disrupt public transport. One solution is to establish a team dedicated to coordinating roadworks and infrastructure investments, similar to the one in Warsaw, which efficiently manages construction and roadworks. This team would create investment schedules designed to minimize disruption to transport. It would also use tools such as the elnwestycje database to coordinate activities and ensure that works are carried out in a streamlined and effective manner.

Multimodal mobility and seamless integration It is recommended to develop multimodal transport hubs that effectively connect buses, trams, regional rail services, shared bicycles, and e-scooters. Introducing unified ticketing systems and smart mobility cards would help facilitate smooth and convenient transitions between transport modes. These actions would be fully in line with the [New](#)

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 17.

²⁰ The proposed actions are intended to complement those set out in strategic documents, particularly the [Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan for the Łódzkie Metropolitan Area 2030 \(with a view to 2040\)](#).

[Urban Mobility Framework's](#) emphasis on promoting modal shift towards more sustainable forms of transport.

Active mobility: cycling and walking infrastructure. It would be beneficial to expand and better connect the city's network of protected cycle lanes and pedestrian pathways, ensuring safety, comfort, and continuity for all users. Installing secure bicycle parking facilities—particularly at public transport hubs and university campuses—should also be considered. In addition, introducing a city-wide bike-sharing system, including electric-assisted bikes, could make longer or more demanding commutes more accessible and attractive.

Spatial planning

Improving quality of life and services in residential areas – mobility microplans / 15-minute city. The lack of basic services in residential areas leads to a reliance on cars. One solution is to implement mobility microplans that identify missing services within neighborhoods and work to provide them. These measures aim to increase pedestrian access to everyday amenities, improve the quality of public spaces, and promote sustainable mobility. Plans may include creating new facilities such as schools, green spaces, and gyms, as well as reorganizing traffic flow and reducing parking spaces. Similar initiatives have already been introduced in Łódź.

Improving access to services and jobs– local microcenters / Transit-Oriented (Re)Development.

Promoting greater use of public transport requires a more integrated and strategic approach to spatial planning, rather than simply increasing the supply of housing or jobs in certain areas. In particular, efforts should focus on the creation of compact, mixed-use urban developments near public transport nodes, where residential, commercial, and service functions coexist in close proximity. This approach – often referred to as Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) or [Transit-Oriented Re-Development](#) in the case of revitalising existing built-up areas – has been shown to reduce car dependency, promote modal shift, and support local economies when implemented within a clear and enforceable planning framework. To ensure effectiveness, it is essential to establish a strong regulatory and policy framework that defines land use, density thresholds, building typologies, and service provisions in these areas. Without such controls, there is a risk of urban sprawl or socio-spatial inequality. Spatial interventions should therefore be closely coordinated with public transport investment plans and designed in consultation with local communities and developers. Lessons from EU-funded initiatives, such as the [Transit Oriented Development for Inclusive and Sustainable Rural-Urban Regions \(TOD-IS-RUR\)](#), show that successful TOD strategies require not only infrastructure and real estate development, but also robust governance, clear zoning regulations, and incentives for inclusive and sustainable growth.

The above proposals in the area of spatial planning can respond to two major challenges. They can improve the transport situation in the Łódź agglomeration (less traffic caused by private cars, better use of existing public transport). At the same time, they will make transport services more efficient

(lower transport costs in terms of money and time, as well as lower CO2 emissions). Beyond the above proposals, there are several remaining challenges in terms of (public) transport in the Łódzkie metropolitan area. Discussions with relevant stakeholder also indicate the need to:

- **Invest in construction of bike lanes, pedestrian paths, and combined pedestrian and bike paths (necessary for improving the functionality of public transport).** To promote active mobility, it is recommended that a connected and safe network of protected cycle lanes, pedestrian walkways and shared-use paths is developed. These routes should be designed with universal accessibility in mind and incorporated into a wider Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP). The aim is to promote walking and cycling as viable daily transport options and to ensure seamless connectivity with public transport services for the first and last miles of journeys.
- **Purchase of public transport vehicles.** it would be beneficial to prioritise the procurement of low- and zero-emission public transport vehicles – such as electric or hydrogen-powered buses and energy-efficient trams. This should be accompanied by the development of supporting infrastructure, including charging or fuelling stations, and embedded within a long-term fleet decarbonisation strategy. Particular emphasis should be placed on accessibility features to ensure inclusive transport for all users.
- **Conduct analyses for the implementation of on-demand transport options.** Comprehensive feasibility studies on the introduction of demand-responsive transport (DRT) services are advisable, particularly in underserved or low-density areas. Such analyses should consider digital booking platforms, real-time fleet management systems and multimodal integration. When implemented effectively, DRT can complement fixed-route services, helping to create more flexible, inclusive and efficient public transport networks.
- **Investments in local road infrastructure (county or municipal) and regional roads that are/will be used for public transport purposes.** Investment in road infrastructure should prioritise the efficiency, safety and sustainability of public transport. This should include the construction and maintenance of dedicated bus lanes, priority signalling for public transport vehicles and improvements to the road surface to enhance ride comfort and reduce vehicle wear. Traffic-calming measures should also be introduced where appropriate to protect vulnerable road users.
- **Investments in transport hubs that integrate various forms of public transport and non-motorised individual transport.** Investing in multimodal transport hubs that facilitate easy, safe and efficient transfers between buses, trams, regional rail, bicycles and scooters is strongly recommended. These hubs should feature real-time information systems, integrated ticketing, secure bicycle storage and a user-friendly design. Incorporating green infrastructure and public space improvements around the hubs can further increase their attractiveness and

social value. The planning of these hubs should reflect the principles of Transit-Oriented Development and the 15-minute city concept.

The Łódzkie region can access a combination of EU funding sources, both regional and national, to support the proposed actions in public transport, sustainable urban mobility and spatial planning. Key instruments include the European Funds for Łódzkie 2021–2027 (FELD), which offer dedicated support for urban mobility (including low-emission vehicles, cycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and multimodal hubs), road infrastructure, spatial revitalisation, and improvements to public spaces. The national FEnIKS programme (European Funds for Infrastructure, Climate and Environment) also provides substantial co-financing for strategic investments in modernising the public transport fleet, digitising transport systems (ITS), developing cycling infrastructure and implementing Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP). Together, these funding streams support the goals of the New Urban Mobility Framework and the European Green Deal, providing Łódzkie with an opportunity to enhance connectivity, minimise emissions, and foster more liveable and accessible urban environments.

III. PA 3: Regional image and perception

i. Rationale

Improving the image of the Łódzkie region can help address the persistent outflow of young, educated residents and reversing negative demographic trends. This is in line with the Commission's Proposal for a Modernised Cohesion Policy, which highlights the importance of ensuring that all citizens have an effective right to stay in the place they call home, supported by access to opportunities and services²¹. Despite tangible revitalisation efforts and the region's rich educational potential - including unique institutions like the Film School in Łódź - Łódzkie continues to be perceived through the lens of outdated stereotypes associated with post-industrial decline and a collapsing labour market²². This negative perception, especially common among young people and those from outside the region, is a key factor contributing to brain drain, as confirmed during stakeholder consultations and student survey results. The unattractive image discourages not only settlement but also determines early decisions by secondary school students to pursue higher education elsewhere. While objective indicators show recent improvements, these have not yet translated into a renewed reputation that reflects the region's strengths - such as a central location, affordability, safety and cultural assets. Therefore, a comprehensive image diagnosis followed by a strategic communication programme is needed. This includes evaluating public perception,

²¹ A Modernised Cohesion Policy: The Mid-Term Review", European Commission, Strasbourg, 1 April 2025", p. 15

²² These outdated stereotypes include: perceiving the region as "Poland's Detroit" - a ghost city dominated by textile industry ruins, high structural unemployment resulting from the collapse of textile factories, mass economic emigration of residents (particularly young and educated populations), urban and social degradation of post-industrial districts, and the image of the region as a "loser of systemic transformation" - a place that failed to successfully rebrand itself after 1989. While these narratives partially reflected real challenges during the transformation period, they fail to account for significant infrastructure investments, the development of modern service sectors, the establishment of numerous cultural and academic institutions, and the dynamic economic growth of the past two decades.

leveraging modern branding approaches and aligning messages with generational values like authenticity and sustainability. Coordinated branding efforts should position Łódzkie as a dynamic, opportunity-rich region, supported by a governance model that involves universities, businesses, NGOs, and local authorities. Without a deliberate and cohesive effort to reshape its image, the region risks continued marginalisation in national and European talent competition.

ii. Current alignment with Cohesion Policy Programmes from a talent perspective

From a talent perspective, Priority Action 3 - focused on improving the image of the Łódzkie region - currently has limited direct alignment with the existing regional Cohesion Policy programme (European Funds for Łódzkie 2021–2027). The regional programme does not explicitly include dedicated funding lines for territorial branding or strategic image-building initiatives targeting talent attraction and retention. However, indirect opportunities exist under *Priority 5 – European Funds for Local Development*, particularly through measures supporting tourism and cultural infrastructure, promotion of regional heritage, and revitalisation projects. These can serve as platforms to enhance the region's attractiveness and visibility, provided they are reframed to incorporate talent-oriented objectives. Additionally, the potential exists to leverage Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI), especially in the context of revitalisation and the development of high-quality public spaces in urban areas. While the current programme provides a partial foundation, a more strategic and talent-driven integration of image-enhancing activities - such as those proposed under PA3 - would require either modifications of the current programme or stronger embedding in future programming cycles. In this context, the potential changes to the FEŁ2027 programme provide an opportunity to realign it with evolving regional priorities, including those related to competitiveness, resilience and quality of life – a direction also highlighted in the Commission's Proposal for a Modernised Cohesion Policy²³. This underscores the need to explicitly link regional branding, talent development, and quality of life improvements within the broader logic of Cohesion Policy investment in Łódzkie.

iii. The path ahead: strategic actions to further harness talent and considerations for resource allocation and implementation

Looking ahead, improving the image of the Łódzkie region will be a strategic lever for attracting and retaining young talent. This aligns with the recent Commission Proposal for a Modernised Cohesion Policy, which highlights that Europe's competitive strength lies in its people, and that human capital is central to prosperity, resilience and cohesion²⁴. As perceptions of place increasingly influence life decisions, particularly among younger generations, it is essential that regional identity and branding become more central to talent policy. This requires moving beyond promotional campaigns toward a coherent, data-informed approach that aligns image-building with the values, aspirations and expectations of students, graduates and young professionals. The first step is to develop a robust diagnosis of the region's internal and external image, grounded in both national perception studies and local sentiment analysis. This includes targeted surveys, focus groups

²³ Ibidem, p. 2

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 6

and media monitoring to better understand what narratives are currently associated with Łódzkie - and what gaps or opportunities exist to redefine them.

In practical terms, a **refreshed and authentic brand identity should be developed, anchored in the region's actual assets – such as creative industries, academic heritage, central location and affordability – while embracing generational values like environmental sustainability, social inclusivity and authenticity**. This new narrative should serve as the backbone for communication strategies that differentiate between audiences (e.g. students, professionals, investors), using appropriate content and channels to connect with them meaningfully. To ensure coherence and effectiveness, a formal coordination structure is needed - such as a regional promotion council - bringing together public authorities, universities, businesses and civil society. Examples from other European regions, including coordinated city-region branding in Oslo and Eindhoven, show that such models can help maintain narrative consistency while encouraging local ownership. Working in close partnership with an independent network of young regional ambassadors, the council can ensure that strategic messages are amplified by grassroots voices and informed by youth perspectives.

From a resource perspective, while the current regional programme (2021–2027) does not directly fund branding activities under a talent lens, alignment can be achieved by **integrating image-oriented goals into projects related to culture, tourism and revitalisation**. These can serve as functional anchors for enhancing visibility and attractiveness, especially when paired with storytelling and digital outreach. In the short term, pilot communication initiatives could be supported through flexible instruments like regional technical assistance budgets or city-led initiatives (e.g. “Young in Łódź”), with the view to scale them in the next programming period. Over time, repositioning Łódzkie as a vibrant, open and opportunity-rich region will not only enhance its standing in the national and European talent landscape - it will also offer its youth a compelling reason to stay, return or choose it as home.

In addition to attracting and retaining individual talent, efforts to improve the region's image should also target business attraction by showcasing **Łódzkie's academic strengths and R&D potential**. Coordinated promotion of the region's higher education institutions, particularly their high-quality faculties, research infrastructure, and doctoral programmes, can establish Łódzkie as an environment conducive to innovation, in line with Europe's green and digital transitions. Strategic communication should highlight existing excellence in fields such as film and media, textile innovation, ICT, biotechnology and energy systems, while also promoting the region's openness to establishing new disciplines and cross-sectoral research clusters. Encouraging universities to expand their academic offerings in areas critical to green and digital priorities, in partnership with businesses and public sector organisations, can help to reposition Łódzkie as a forward-looking region where research, education, and entrepreneurship intersect. This dual narrative, rooted in talent and innovation, can raise the region's profile among investors and knowledge-intensive firms seeking skilled personnel and collaborative ecosystems.

2. Considerations regarding the implementation of Cohesion Policy to harness talent at regional level

In order to effectively implement the actions proposed in Section II, several key challenges can be identified to better address talent attraction, retention and development in future Cohesion Policy programmes:

- First and foremost, talent-related objectives need to be more explicitly embedded in the strategic documents and the regional programme. In particular, this means taking into account the results of surveys that point to key barriers for young people, such as a lack of attractive jobs, inadequate infrastructure or poor quality of life. Incorporating these factors into programmes funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund+ (ESF+) can increase the conceptual and operational coherence of the measures. This requires reaffirming the territorial approach of Cohesion Policy: one region cannot adopt meaningful talent strategies without first undertaking a place-based diagnosis of its demographic trends, skill gaps and potential assets. It would be desirable to take these considerations into account during further updates of FEŁ2027 programme and, if this is not possible, in the discussion of its successor.
- At the institutional level, it is crucial to further promote multi-level cooperation between local governments, universities, the private sector and community organisations. Such an approach will ensure better coordination of activities and greater effectiveness of interventions. The Technical Assistance process has shown that many key actors are already mobilised, but additional mechanisms for structured collaboration and governance are necessary to ensure continuity and policy coherence. In addition, the identification of areas most vulnerable to the negative effects of demographic change should become a priority for actions funded by cohesion policy, allowing support to be targeted precisely where it is most needed.
- An important complement to these actions is the creation of a monitoring and talent management framework to systematically track trends related to migration, employment and education in the region (as described in Section II). Such a framework should also integrate tools to evaluate the impact of cohesion-funded interventions on talent mobility, job creation, or the quality of life in supported areas. Better data will support more adaptive policymaking and allow regions to adjust interventions based on real-time feedback.
- An important element of future interventions should be the strengthening of integrated actions, e.g. within the framework of Integrated Territorial Investments (ITIs) and perhaps within the LEADER approach. Territorially sensitive tools such as ITIs or Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) offer an opportunity to integrate talent-related goals with local

infrastructure, service provision, and cultural activities - ensuring that different types of territories (urban, rural, suburban) are addressed appropriately.

- It is also particularly important to foster inter-municipal and inter-regional cooperation in terms of talent development, which will allow more efficient use of resources and infrastructure, as well as the scaling up of public services. This could be further supported by identifying reforms that can be accelerated through cohesion funding, such as improving alignment between infrastructure and human capital investment.
- To ensure the sustainability of these actions, it is also necessary to consider reforms at the national level. These reforms should range from adapting the education system to the needs of the labour market to promoting flexible forms of employment and job mobility. In this way, regions such as the Łódzkie region will be able to face the challenges of talent retention and adaptation to demographic change more effectively, becoming more resilient and competitive on the national and European arena. Where clearly identified through Technical Assistance, cohesion policy should support the implementation of such reforms through targeted investments and governance innovations.
- Finally, the role of large enterprises in talent development could be more systematically recognised. As highlighted in the Commission Proposal for a Modernised Cohesion Policy, large companies can drive innovation and transfer knowledge across value chains. In regions undergoing industrial transition, support to talent policies should include collaboration with such enterprises to co-develop reskilling programmes, mentoring schemes or graduate employment pathways.

