

Socio-economic activation of women and young people in the Łódzkie region

Action Plan



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Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary	4
2. Introduction	6
Key findings of the case study analysis	7
EU, national and regional policy initiatives that seek to address these challenges	10
3. Methodology	12
Development process	12
Overall structure	14
4. Recommendations and proposed actions	15
4.1 Information and involvement	16
4.2 Motivating for local economy participation	23
4.3 Development of educational and training programmes	32
4.4 Labour market participation support.....	43
4.5 Entrepreneurial support	53
4.6 Expanding sustainable mobility options	61
5. Next steps	69

1. Executive Summary

This Action Plan (AP), prepared as part of SG's REFORM Technical Support Instrument (TSI) project "Support to the Implementation of Just Transition in Poland", presents an assessment of the key challenges and opportunities, along with a list of measures aimed at promoting the socio-economic activation of women and young people (aged 15–30) in the Łódzkie region, with a special emphasis on the Bełchatów area.

The AP focuses on the socio-economic activation, which is understood as a coordinated set of policy measures and support mechanisms to facilitate the integration of individuals vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion into the labour market and community life. **Specifically, the AP targets two groups that experience multifaceted socio-economic challenges exacerbated by the ongoing transition from coal-based energy production: women and young people.** Women, particularly those from mining communities, encounter structural and cultural barriers to labour market participation and social activation, including entrenched gender norms, caregiving responsibilities, and limited access to flexible employment aligned with their skills and potential. Many have experienced long-term economic inactivity and lack tailored training or entrepreneurial support. Young people, meanwhile, are affected by the limited local employment opportunities and vocational pathways misaligned with the region's evolving economic landscape, and they often migrate outside the region in search of better prospects.

The AP includes a set of potential measures to mitigate the challenges experienced by the two above-mentioned target groups. The development process of the measures started with comprehensive data collection and stakeholder engagement, including desk research, interviews, focus groups, and a survey (targeting young people), to identify barriers and opportunities for activation. This analysis led to the identification of **six priority areas for intervention**, aimed at address the key challenges and take advantage of opportunities offered by the green transition:

- **Information and involvement:** to better assess needs, ensure transparency and monitor progress.
- **Motivation for local economy participation:** to stimulate interest and engagement in the regional economy.
- **Development of educational and training programmes:** to enhance the quality and accessibility of education and training, aligning women's and young people's skills with future-oriented labour market demands.
- **Labour market participation support:** to remove structural and institutional barriers to employment, including flexible work arrangements and the involvement of specialised territorial agents who facilitate inclusion of women and young people in the labour market.
- **Entrepreneurial support:** to provide guidance, reduce perceived risks, and foster a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation.
- **Expansion of sustainable mobility options:** to improve connectivity people to educational institutions, workplaces, and business opportunities.

Further, a long list of potential measures within the six intervention areas was formulated based on relevance, feasibility, and alignment with local needs. This process drew on good practices from

European Just Transition regions, knowledge shared during the exchange visit, and insights from the literature review. Through regular interactions with project beneficiaries and stakeholders and input from the European Commission, this list was refined to the 12 measures currently included in the Action Plan.

The first of the above-mentioned areas of intervention, “Information and involvement”, addresses the issues of limited communication with target groups and the lack of systematic data collection. It proposes the development of tailored indicators to monitor the socio-economic integration of women and young people. These indicators should be based on administrative records, surveys, and consultations, and they will capture realities that are often missed in statistics, such as informal work or caregiving. In parallel, communication protocols should be co-designed with these groups to reflect their needs and preferences. These should make use of apps, media campaigns, and visual tools, and they will be institutionalised within public services at a later stage.

The second area, “Motivation for local economy participation”, responds to the structural barriers faced by women, such as caregiving responsibilities and gender norms, as well as the lack of cultural and social infrastructure for young people. To overcome these barriers, the AP proposes to organise inspirational networking events with local entrepreneurs and professionals. Underused urban spaces could be transformed into youth hubs run by youth organisations. These hubs could offer workshops, debates and activities that build leadership, creativity and civic skills.

The third area, “Development of educational and training programmes”, addresses the discrepancy between current skills and the requirements of expanding sectors such as Industry 4.0, renewable energy, and the circular economy. The plan strengthens collaboration between education providers and industry associations to align curricula and training with labour market demands. At the same time, accessible training programmes for women could be introduced in libraries, community centres and shopping centres. These programmes should cover IT, languages, and job readiness and should be designed to include childcare support, reducing barriers to participation.

The fourth area, “Labour market participation support”, addresses institutional obstacles by introducing territorial development agents modelled on a Spanish approach to coordinate local development and guide individuals towards emerging opportunities. It also promotes inclusive co-working spaces in converted industrial sites equipped with internet access, office facilities, childcare and training services. This should enable flexible working and learning for women and young people.

The fifth area, “Entrepreneurial support”, seeks to address the barriers currently discouraging women and young people from setting up businesses. It promotes adapting incubators and accelerators to their specific needs, providing mentoring, networking opportunities, confidence training for women, and global connectivity for young people. Additionally, the AP promotes the introduction of start-up labs in high schools. Here, students could learn entrepreneurship by running real microenterprises, with small seed grants and guidance from local mentors.

Finally, **the sixth area, “Expansion of sustainable mobility”**, acknowledges that fragmented transport systems restrict access to employment opportunities, essential services and educational institutions. To improve connectivity, the plan proposes the creation of a Service (MaaS) platform that could integrate carpooling, ridesharing and on-demand transport. Transport vouchers could also be offered to young graduates seeking work and women returning to the labour market after long periods of inactivity. This should help them to overcome mobility barriers.

2. Introduction

This Action Plan (AP) presents an assessment of the key challenges and opportunities, along with a list of measures aimed at promoting the socio-economic activation of women and young people (aged 15-30) in the Łódzkie region, with a special emphasis on the Bełchatów area. It is being prepared as part of the SG's REFORM Technical Support Instrument (TSI) project "Support to the Implementation of Just Transition in Poland".

Socio-economic activation in this AP refers to integrated policy measures and support structures designed to connect individuals at risk of poverty and social exclusion with employment opportunities and meaningful participation in community life.¹ It combines social and economic activation elements, focusing on empowering disadvantaged individuals and groups by enhancing their confidence, internal motivation, skills, and access to resources- ultimately fostering long-term inclusion in the labour market and economy. While the scope of the Action Plan does not extend to economic development and diversification measures, these are assumed to be developed and implemented in parallel, often informing the sectoral orientation of socio-economic activation efforts.

The overarching goal of this Action Plan is to support the socio-economic activation of women and young people aged 15-30 in the Bełchatów region. More specifically, the Action Plan aims to:

1. Reduce structural and institutional barriers to labour market entry and re-entry.
2. Improve access to high-quality, tailored training and upskilling opportunities.
3. Promote a culture of local entrepreneurship and innovation among women and young people.
4. Foster civic engagement, peer support and inclusive communication strategies.
5. Enhance the retention of young talent in the region.
6. Improve the coordination and monitoring of support measures.
7. Promote sustainable, affordable transport options connecting rural and peri-urban areas to employment hubs.

The aims and proposed measures to achieve them have been informed by a combination of interviews carried out with stakeholders, interviews/focus groups with women and young people from the Bełchatów region, surveys of students from secondary and tertiary educational institutions, and a review of relevant literature addressing the key socio-economic challenges identified in the region. Furthermore, the list of measures included in this draft Action Plan has been shared and discussed with the beneficiary authorities and local stakeholders to seek feedback and ensure alignment with local needs.

The Action Plan begins by outlining the key features of the local context related to the socio-economic activation of women and young people in the Bełchatów area and introduces the policy initiatives already in place to address these, as outlined in the remainder of the present Introduction (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 (Methodology) then details the analytical and consultative approach used to address these challenges. Chapter 4 (Recommendations and proposed actions) – the core of the Action Plan – sets out a comprehensive list of measures, structured around key intervention areas. Each measure is

¹ European Social Network. (2006). *Social and employment activation*. ESN. Retrieved from <https://www.esn-eu.org/publications/2006-social-and-employment-activation>

accompanied by a description of implementation steps, a proposed timeline, relevant stakeholders, anticipated impacts, and recommendations for monitoring progress.

Key findings of the case study analysis

At the heart of the Territorial Just Transition Plan (TJTP) is the area most affected by the transition out of coal, which comprises 35 municipalities (gmina), occupies 20.1% of the area of Łódzkie Voivodeship and is inhabited by approximately 417,000 people (17% of the region's population).² The centre of the area is the city of Bełchatów; the area also includes the communes of Bełchatów, Kamieńsk, Kleszczów, Kluki, Rząśnia, Sulmierzyce and Szczerców. The Bełchatów power plant is the largest lignite-fired power plant in Europe; its output is expected to diminish over the next decade as the power plant seeks to reduce the use of coal and its emissions, in line with the ambitions set in Poland's National Energy and Climate Plan 2021–2030 (NECP) and Polish Energy Policy 2040 (PEP). The Bełchatów area has strong economic, social and environmental links with the activities of the Polska Grupa Energetyczna Górnictwo i Energetyka Konwencjonalna S.A (PGE GiEK), which is part of PGE Polska Grupa Energetyczna (PGE Group).

According to the TJTP, the region's transition as coal-fired power generation is phased out will result in losing 8,364 jobs and the need to retrain approximately 4,500 employees. However, the challenge is more complex and is not just about replacing jobs but about creating a development vision that will allow the region to prosper economically and provide new jobs for the miners and power plant workers and their family members – their spouses and children. The TJTP identifies the Bełchatów region as a sub-region particularly affected by low socio-economic activity among women.

The regional economy of Bełchatów remains heavily reliant on the energy sector, particularly fossil fuel industries such as mining and electricity production. While this does not significantly distort the overall labour market in favour of men, specific sectors – notably mining and quarrying – remain male-dominated. Overall, women represent 46,5% of the employed population in Bełchatów, only slightly below the regional average of 47,61%³. Women are notably over-represented in trade, education, health and social work, other services, and administrative roles. However, the limited economic diversification still results in constrained employment opportunities, particularly for young people. There is a shortage of well-paid jobs outside the energy sector, and employers' demand for highly skilled workers remains relatively low. This has led to a steady outflow of young, educated individuals seeking better opportunities elsewhere. Although many skilled women find employment in the service sector, such as beauty and hairdressing, this can lead to a mismatch between qualifications and available roles, resulting in under-utilisation of their skills.

The Bełchatów area also faces multidimensional challenges related to demography and social transformation. The ageing of the population and the out-migration of young people (individuals of working age but younger than 29 years) to larger urban centres such as Warsaw or abroad are contributing to the progressive depopulation that is affecting not only Bełchatów but also the entire Łódzkie Voivodeship. However, a peculiarity of the Bełchatów region is its historically "incoming" character – a proportion of the inhabitants, who came here to work in the energy and mining sectors,

² Urząd Marszałkowski Województwa Łódzkiego. (2023). *Territorial Just Transition Plan for the Łódzkie Voivodeship (TPST WŁ)*. <https://www.funduszeue.lodzkie.pl/sites/default/files/2023/79-przyjecie-tpstwl/1-tpstwl.pdf>

³ [Statistics Poland](#): Employment, paid employees and paid employment by NACE REV.2 for ŁÓDZKIE and Powiat Bełchatowski in 2022.

return to their hometowns after retirement age. Depopulation further exacerbates the region's shortage of young and skilled workers.

One key challenge in designing effective activation measures is the lack of robust, disaggregated data on inactive women and young people. Many women, particularly those who are long-term inactive or have never entered the formal labour market, do not register with employment services. Public statistics rarely capture the socio-economic conditions experienced by mining families, where traditional gender roles persist and women's professional aspirations are often secondary to the dominant breadwinner model.

Similarly, youth migration and informal employment patterns are poorly tracked. There are no systematic efforts to gather qualitative insights through local surveys or interviews. The main sources of information about women in the Bełchatów region are the publications produced by the Association Yes to Bełchatów (Stowarzyszenie Tak dla Bełchatowa) project: [Women on the Bełchatów labour market](#) (2023), [A model for supporting women on the labour market in the Bełchatów region in the context of transformation](#) (2023), [Women on the labour market in the Bełchatów region in the fair transition process – an individual perspective](#) (2024).

This knowledge gap greatly impedes local institutions' ability to develop policies and interventions that address these groups' real-life constraints, motivations, and aspirations.

Building on the above-mentioned available data and reports, complemented by the interviews with stakeholders relevant to the project's scope, it could be observed **that women** in the Bełchatów region face structural, cultural and logistical barriers that limit their participation in the labour market.

- **Rigid gender norms persist in mining communities**, where the traditional model is that of a male breadwinner and a stay-at-home mother. Many women, particularly those in older age groups, never entered paid employment and lack role models or networks to support a professional career.
- **Caring responsibilities** remain a significant constraint. Although kindergartens and nurseries are more widely available, mismatched opening hours, a lack of care options for the elderly, and a dearth of flexible working arrangements (e.g. remote working or part-time positions) make it difficult for women, especially mothers or carers, to balance employment and family life.
- **Skills and training gaps** are particularly acute among women aged 40+. Many training programmes do not cater for their needs or circumstances. There is a lack of psychological and motivational support to rebuild the confidence of women who have been economically inactive for extended periods.
- Despite a high declared entrepreneurial potential, **low levels of entrepreneurship** are evident. Women often lack the knowledge to start and run a business, and those who do start a business often struggle to sustain it once initial funding ends.
- **Limited access to transport** is another significant barrier. Public transport outside Bełchatów is scarce and poorly coordinated, making it difficult for women in smaller towns to commute to work, training or business centres.

- **Gender pay disparities and workplace inequality** also discourage female participation. Women often occupy lower-paid positions in sectors such as retail and care, while men dominate higher-status roles.

Young people face a distinct yet equally challenging set of barriers. The EU’s Harnessing Talent initiative has identified the Bełchatów region as one of 46 regions in a “talent trap”, characterised by brain drain, a lack of appeal for skilled labour and systemic obstacles to youth empowerment.

Key challenges include:

- **Mass migration of educated young people** to cities such as Warsaw, Łódź and Wrocław, or to other countries. Young people leave for better education, higher salaries and a more vibrant urban lifestyle, and often do not return due to a lack of comparable opportunities at home.
- **Limited local employment prospects**, especially in the aftermath of the energy transition, also discourage young people from staying. Vocational and technical education still prepares many for coal and energy jobs that are now being phased out.
- **Poor transport connectivity** exacerbates this issue, as young people cannot easily commute to educational institutions or workplaces in larger cities.
- **A lack of civic and cultural infrastructure** means there are few spaces where young people can develop leadership skills, engage socially or cultivate a sense of local identity. This deepens the sense of detachment and accelerates out-migration.
- **Low entrepreneurial culture and a lack of role models** mean that even ambitious young people often do not consider self-employment or local innovation. There is little institutional support for young start-ups, mentoring or business incubation.
- **The perception of systemic exploitation in the local labour market** further erodes trust. Young people report issues such as unpaid overtime, informal working conditions, and limited prospects for professional advancement.

A lack of institutional coordination and weak stakeholder engagement affect both women and young people. The absence of integrated, multi-actor support systems means that many initiatives operate in isolation. While capable, NGOs are often marginalised, underfunded, or treated as temporary “fill-ins” rather than key partners in service delivery. There is poor communication between institutions and target groups, with little use of modern outreach methods such as digital tools or youth-targeted media.

Understanding these multifaceted challenges is essential for developing a targeted and effective Action Plan. Assuming that job creation or retraining alone will activate women and young people is not enough. Instead, interventions must address the deeper social norms, infrastructural deficits, institutional weaknesses, and motivational shortcomings that prevent these groups from participating fully in the labour market. While these challenges are not insurmountable, they require coordinated, inclusive and sustained action to ensure that the Just Transition leaves no one in the Bełchatów region behind.

EU, national and regional policy initiatives that seek to address these challenges

The EU addresses low socio-economic activation among women and young people, particularly in Just Transition regions, through a comprehensive mix of strategic policies, legal frameworks, and funding instruments. These aim to reduce inequalities, promote inclusive growth, and ensure no one is left behind in the green transition.

The EU supports transitioning regions through the [Just Transition Mechanism](#), that includes the [Just Transition Fund \(JTF\)](#) aimed at mitigating the socio-economic impact of the green transition, with a strong focus on vulnerable groups, including women and young people. Poland, as a major beneficiary of the JTF, has committed to developing and implementing Territorial Just Transition Plans (TJTPs) that include targeted interventions such as training programmes, reskilling opportunities, employment incentives, and entrepreneurship support for these groups. These plans are essential tools for ensuring that the transition to a low-carbon economy is fair and inclusive. The **TJTP of the Łódzkie Region** includes a diagnosis of how the transition process is expected to impact the region, sets the direction of transformation activities and defines the strategy to prepare the region for the implementation of the funding support provided through the JTF, and potentially also the other pillars of the JTM. The TJTP of the region identifies several economic sectors as strategically important for promoting a fair and sustainable transition from coal-based activities, with the potential to foster the socio-economic activation of women and young people. These include: research, development and innovation in general; industry 4.0 and support services for companies; renewable energy and clean technologies; circular economy and resource efficiency; digitalisation and logistics modernisation, including clean mobility.

Complementing this, the [European Social Fund Plus \(ESF+\)](#) provides critical resources for social inclusion, labour market participation, and skills development. The ESF+ allocated to the Łódzkie region supports a wide range of measures including job placement services, training in green and digital sectors, childcare infrastructure, and tailored support for disadvantaged women and youth. Additionally, the [European Regional Development Fund \(ERDF\)](#) is one of the main financial instruments of the European Union's Cohesion Policy, aimed at reducing regional disparities and promoting balanced development across the EU. While ESF+ focuses more directly on employment and social services, the ERDF can fund the development of infrastructure and services that enable greater participation of women and young people in the labour market, including business infrastructure, digital and green innovation centres, childcare and elderly care facilities, transport and connectivity improvements, enhancing access to jobs and education. In the current financial perspective, the Łódzkie Voivodeship is guaranteed €2 billion 746 million through these key EU funding instruments for the 2021-2027 period.⁴ This amount is made up of EUR 1.7 billion from the ERDF – earmarked for so-called hard measures, i.e. investment in transport, health and cultural infrastructure, as well as support for entrepreneurs; EUR 658 million from the ESF+ for so-called soft measures, i.e. social support, training for employees and retraining, as well as scholarships for students; and EUR 369.5 million from the JTF.

In addition to the EU support mechanisms, there are also several domestic initiatives that seek to address challenges linked to economic and social transformation in the Łódzkie Voivodeship. These measures are often part of broader economic development efforts, aiming to diversify regional

⁴ European Commission: [European Funds for Łódzkie 2021-2027](#)

economies, attract investment, and create sustainable employment opportunities while ensuring that women and youth fully benefit from the transition. The [Development Strategy of the Łódzkie Region for 2030 \(Strategia Rozwoju Województwa Łódzkiego 2030\)](#), adopted by the Regional Assembly in May 2021, presents a roadmap for regional development by 2030, combining economic growth, social equity, and sustainable spatial planning. The economic strategy seeks to boost research and innovation capacity, improve human capital quality, support SMEs and strengthen competitive advantage in manufacturing and services. The social dimension aims to enhance social capital and local cooperation, improve health outcomes, and reduce poverty and social exclusion. The strategy seeks to adapt to climate change and protect the environment, preserve landscape and cultural heritage, improve transport connectivity and energy security, and promote digital inclusion and responsible waste management within the spatial sphere. In addition to these three key pillars, the strategy includes a cross-cutting governance target to build an efficient and accountable regional governance system. The strategy prioritises sectors with strong R&D and commercial potential, including advanced environmental technologies, biotechnology, nanotechnology, mechatronics, advanced materials, ICT, specialised services, and creative industries. It also supports the modernisation of traditional sectors such as manufacturing (textiles, apparel, furniture, machinery), agribusiness, food production, and healthcare, alongside infrastructure-linked sectors like logistics, energy, and digital connectivity.

Other domestic initiatives targeting the socio-economic activation of vulnerable groups in the region frequently overlap in scope, simultaneously addressing the needs of women and young people. For example, Fundacja Nitka has supported mining families for over a decade by providing vocational training, postgraduate courses, and opportunities for self-development, particularly benefiting women from these communities.⁵ Since 2023, the Youth City Council in Bełchatów has actively involved young people in educational projects, such as ["Energy - Our Future"](#) ("**Energia – nasza przyszłość**"), informing students about career opportunities emerging from the region's energy transition. Additionally, the ["Vocational Reactivation"](#) ("**Zawodowa Reaktywacja**") programme, coordinated by Bełchatów-Kleszczów Technology Park, provides financial support for training and postgraduate studies aimed at re-skilling energy sector workers. Labour offices offer various forms of support, notably the ["Development Vouchers"](#) ("**Bony Rozwojowe**") from the Voivodeship Labour Office (WUP), available to residents across 35 communes affected by the energy transition, without any employment status requirements. The support is mostly from the European Funds. Similarly, the District Labour Office (PUP) in Bełchatów declares that it actively supports job seekers, especially women, with tailored services like career counselling, internships, and training courses in popular fields such as beauty and accounting.⁶ The District Labour Office (PUP) in Piotrków Trybunalski mentioned initiatives like ["Vigorously to Work"](#) ("**Z wigorem do pracy**") and ["Nanny as a Chance to Return to Work"](#) ("**Niania szansą na powrót do pracy**")⁷ that offer comprehensive support to long-term unemployed individuals and young mothers, respectively, facilitating their reintegration into the labour market. Additionally, Koła Gospodyń Wiejskich (Rural Women's Associations) play a critical role in engaging women from rural areas, providing accessible opportunities regardless of age, education,

⁵ Based on the information from the scoping interview that took place on 23.01.2025

⁶ Based on the information from the scoping interview that took place on 26.03.2025

⁷ Co-financed by the European Union as part of the Regional Operational Programme of the Łódzkie Voivodeship 2014 - 2020 co-financed by the European Social Fund.

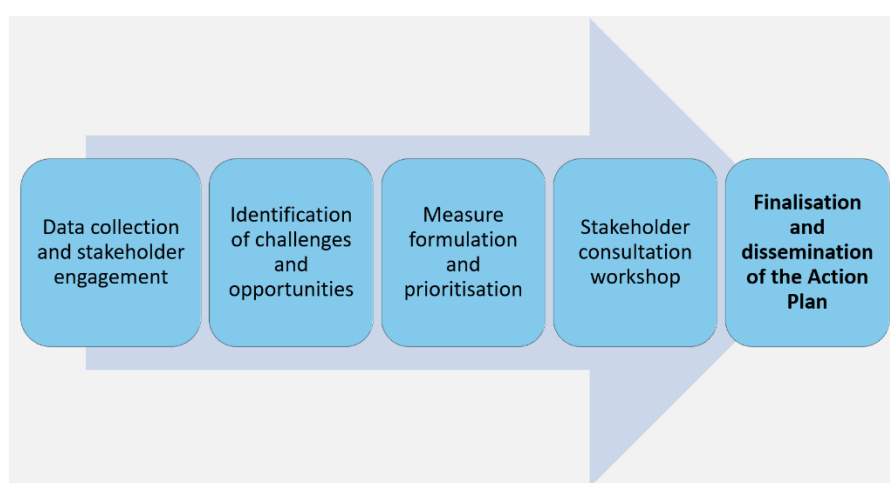
or social status. However, an equivalent urban initiative has yet to emerge in the Bełchatów region, where currently 10 different Koła Gospodyń Wiejskich (Rural Women's Associations) operate.⁸

3. Methodology

Development process

The identification of measures was conducted using a multi-phase, evidence-based methodology rooted in quantitative and qualitative analysis. The approach, illustrated by Figure 1 and discussed below, guaranteed that the interventions were tailored to the local context, addressed specific needs, and were consistent with the overarching goals of the Just Transition framework.

Figure 1: The main stages of the development of the Action Plan for the socio-economic activation of women and of young people in the Lodzkie region



Source: own elaboration.

The approach, presented visually by Figure 1, consisted of the following sequential steps:

- 1. Data collection and stakeholder engagement.** To assess socio-economic activation among women and young people in the Łódź Voivodeship, particularly in the Bełchatów region, a mixed-methods approach was used. This included desk research on local context and international practices, semi-structured interviews with 15 regional stakeholders, a focus group with women, informal consultations with young people, and surveys of secondary and tertiary school students. These methods helped identify barriers and enablers to social and professional engagement, as well as evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies and initiatives.

Qualitative tools such as interviews and focus groups provided rich insights into lived experiences, while the youth survey added a broader quantitative perspective. Statistical data from [Local Data Bank of Statistics Poland](#) and the Bełchatów employment office complemented these findings, offering gender- and age-disaggregated indicators on economic inactivity, employment by sector, and unemployment. This triangulated approach

⁸ According to <https://krkgw.arimr.gov.pl/#>

enabled a comprehensive understanding of structural labour market challenges and gender-specific barriers to economic participation.

- 2. Diagnosis: identification of challenges and opportunities.** The data analysis was then used to identify key systemic challenges, such as gendered labour segmentation, young people out migration and poor transport connectivity, while pinpointing potential leverage points. Opportunities such as flexible working arrangements, local entrepreneurship and regional development strategies were mapped alongside the associated barriers. Through this diagnosis stage, we have concluded that the socio-economic activation of these two key groups, women and young people, requires targeted, cross-cutting interventions, with a focus on six priority areas to overcome the specific barriers they face:
- Improved information flow and stronger stakeholder engagement to assess needs, facilitate cooperation, and monitor progress.
 - Motivational and awareness-raising initiatives to build interest and participation in the regional economy.
 - Education and training programmes designed to match women’s and young people’s skills with future-oriented labour market demands.
 - Removal of structural and institutional barriers to employment, including flexible work arrangements and caregiving support.
 - Support for entrepreneurship, especially in providing guidance, reducing perceived risks, and building a culture of innovation.
 - Expansion of sustainable mobility options to better connect people to educational institutions, workplaces, and business opportunities.

3. Measure formulation and prioritisation.

The diagnostic findings identified a long list of potential measures for the six priority intervention areas. This was informed by a targeted literature review and insights from the exchange visit to Aragon, Spain (13–14 May 2025). The review systematically examined good practices from national and European sources—particularly those in Just Transition regions—drawing on platforms such as the European Commission’s Just Transition Platform, the Coal Regions in Transition Platform and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Just Transition Centre. To ensure the relevance to the Łódzkie region, the scope was broadened to include both academic and grey literature, supported by the consultants’ prior experience in similar contexts.

Measures were assessed against criteria including relevance to target groups (women and young people), alignment with identified needs and local development goals, potential effectiveness, funding feasibility (e.g. JTF, ESF+), equity and accessibility, and the ability to monitor and adapt implementation. The proposed measures were discussed with the Marshal’s Office of the Łódzkie Voivodeship, the Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, and other stakeholders during a consultation workshop to ensure institutional fit and support.

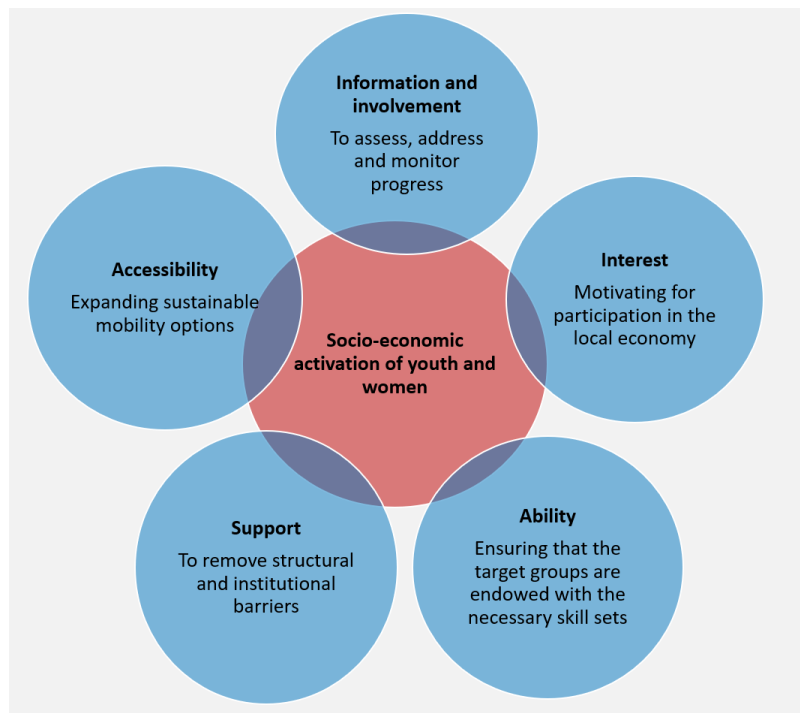
- 4. Consultation workshop and action planning.** The refined list of measures was presented for discussion at the consultation workshop in Bełchatów on 12 June 2025.
- 5. Finalisation and dissemination of the Action Plan.** The final Action Plan integrated stakeholder feedback to ensure alignment with the needs of women, young people, and local

authorities. Additionally, each measure was further developed, with key inputs from the primary and secondary data collected through the previous steps to present clear recommendations, a detailed implementation roadmap, and identify relevant stakeholders and their roles, as well as potential funding sources.

Overall structure

The final AP includes twelve measures along six main areas of intervention, summarised by **Błąd! Nie można odnaleźć źródła odwołania..** Each intervention area addresses a particular aspect of exclusion or underutilised potential, but is nonetheless an interdependent lever of socio-economic activation. Together, they form a coherent and integrated framework to improve participation and opportunity for women and young people in the Bełchatów region. The proposed measures along these intervention areas create potential for synergies between information and involvement, interest, capability, opportunity, and access. For example, raising awareness and stakeholder engagement (information) can help tailor training initiatives more precisely to local economic needs, increasing their uptake and effectiveness. Motivational strategies can enhance the willingness of women and young people to participate in training or job-seeking activities. By aligning measures across these dimensions, the approach increases the likelihood of sustained, inclusive impact, ensuring that efforts do not operate in isolation but contribute to a broader, systemic transformation of the local labour market and economic landscape. These areas are mutually reinforcing: improvements in one domain can amplify the effectiveness of others.

Figure 2 Key intervention areas and their functions to achieve socio-economic activation of women and young people in the Łódzkie region



Source: own elaboration.

4. Recommendations and proposed actions

Based on the development process described above, the Action Plan focused on developing the measures in six key thematic areas that include: 1) Information and involvement, 2) Motivating for local economy participation, 3) Development of educational and training programmes, 4) Labour market participation support, 5) Entrepreneurial support, and 6) Expanding sustainable mobility options. For each of the six thematic areas we propose the following measures:

1. Information and involvement

Proposed measure #1: Monitor the socio-economic integration of women and young people by developing a set of indicators and identifying relevant data sources at the level of regional labour offices.

Proposed measure #2: Create tailored communication protocols

2. Motivating for local economy participation

Proposed measure #3: Organisation of inspirational events such as seminars or informal gatherings with entrepreneurs, career professionals and coaches.

Proposed measure #4: Creating dedicated dynamic spaces for young people in under-utilised urban spaces, managed by local youth organisations to provide courses, workshops and debates that encourage social engagement, volunteer initiatives, leadership and social/cultural skills

3. Development of educational and training programmes

Proposed measure #5: Enhancing collaboration between education and training programmes, on one hand, and industry associations, on the other, through partnership arrangements that detail roles and responsibilities (e.g. teaching, revising curricula, modernising equipment, etc) with potential focus on renewable, industry 4.0, circular economy, tourism and care sector.

Proposed measure #6: Establishing training programmes in libraries, community centres, schools and even shopping malls tailored to the needs of women to provide basic IT, linguistic and job/vocational application skills (e.g., tailoring for women may involve providing childcare services during training).

4. Labour market participation support

Proposed measure #7: Introducing territorial development agents within the Lodzkie region

Proposed measure #8: Creating coworking spaces for remote work, ideally in converted industrial areas, adapted to the needs of women and young people, with good Internet access and appropriate office equipment (e.g., adaptation to the needs of women could involve providing on-site childcare services

5. Entrepreneurial support

Proposed measure #9: Setting up incubators and accelerators tailored to women and young people, with significant emphasis on strategic planning, network building and mentorship. Women-tailored incubators should also include confidence-building elements (leadership skills, pitching and negotiation skills). While for young people, the incubators should be impact-oriented and place significant emphasis on global connectivity.

Proposed measure #10: Setting up start-up labs in high schools run by students in schools, supervised by business mentors from the region. Students learn by doing – with small cash grants to launch real microenterprises within a semester

6. Expanding sustainable mobility options

Proposed measure #11: Promoting sustainable transportation modes, such as carpooling and ridesharing, and on-demand transport, through a Mobility as a Service platform.
Proposed measure #12: Provide transportation vouchers for young people that seek employment within the region upon graduation and to women who reintegrate into the labour market after longer periods of inactivity.

4.1 Information and involvement

Limited information and monitoring of the socio-economic integration of women and young people

To activate women and young people in the Łódzkie region effectively, accurate, disaggregated, and regularly updated information is required on the barriers they face, their existing and latent skills and interests, and the availability of suitable employment opportunities. Evidence gathered during stakeholder consultations, including interviews and focus groups, confirms that:

- Labour market statistics do not capture family-based dependencies, skills underutilisation, or the aspirations of young people and women.
- Information on the preferences of women in mining families (e.g. interest in flexible working conditions or caregiving employment) remains anecdotal or fragmented.

Current data, primarily derived from district labour offices, is often too aggregated to allow for nuanced planning. Labour market statistics usually concentrate on registered job seekers and general indicators, excluding large sections of the economically inactive population, such as unregistered women and young people still in education. As previous studies and the interviews have highlighted, these groups are often disconnected from formal employment services and subsequently remain invisible in the traditional data stream. Statistical data on the inactive population that is publicly available does not allow for assessing the extent of the challenge and progress over time by specific age and gender groups.

Proposed measure #1:

Brief description	Monitor the socio-economic integration of women and young people by developing a set of indicators and identifying relevant data sources at the level of regional labour offices.
Target	Women and young people
Justification	Developing a set of indicators and identifying relevant data sources at regional labour office level (in cooperation with other local stakeholders) will address the current lack of reliable, disaggregated information on women and young people. This measure will provide policymakers with the evidence required to design inclusive activation programmes, allocate resources effectively, and track progress over time by capturing informal work, caregiving roles, non-standard labour, and group specific needs. It will also strengthen accountability by enabling institutions to measure the real impact of socio-economic policies on underrepresented groups.

Brief description	Monitor the socio-economic integration of women and young people by developing a set of indicators and identifying relevant data sources at the level of regional labour offices.
Steps to follow for implementation	<p>Step 1: Define objectives and indicators</p> <p>The first step is to establish the purpose and scope of the monitoring framework, focusing on key policy questions such as whether women and young people are benefiting from the Just Transition measures and where gaps in the provision of support remain. Based on these objectives, a set of core and complementary indicators should be defined to measure employment outcomes, participation in training, access to quality jobs and emerging barriers. All indicators should be disaggregated by gender, age and territorial level to ensure meaningful insights across different groups and regions.</p> <p>Step 2: Review existing data practices and engage in consultations with other poviats labour offices and local stakeholders</p> <p>The next step is to assess the information already collected by regional and poviats labour offices, as well as other institutions, to identify gaps and overlaps. Relevant data and information could be harvested from the following sources: tax authorities: data on the age, total yearly income and nature of income of each member of the tax household; social benefits administration: data on income and the regularity of income within the year, as well as health/handicap status per individual and, possibly, per household; educational institutions: number of graduates and number of young people who left before completing their course and therefore have no diploma. The review should also consider relevant studies, evaluations or surveys to which questions on women's and young people's integration in the labour market could be added. To gather feedback on data requirements, practical difficulties and possible improvements to existing monitoring processes, brainstorming sessions and workshops could be organised with representatives from different labour offices from the Łódzkie region. This collaborative approach should ensure that the framework reflects local realities and institutional capacities.</p> <p>Step 3: Consult stakeholders and capture non-statistical insights</p> <p>In addition to labour offices, local NGOs, community organisations, housewives' circles and youth groups should be engaged to gain a better understanding of the barriers and opportunities that are not visible in official statistics. However, to ensure comparability of data over time, the primary monitoring should rely on systematic surveys conducted at regular intervals, with consistent questionnaires administered to a panel of respondents. Qualitative methods such as ad hoc surveys, focus groups or studies may still play a role, but their purpose should be to detect and explore issues that cannot be adequately captured within the structured survey framework (e.g., aspects of unpaid care work, informal employment, or preferences for flexible jobs). Once such issues</p>

Brief description	Monitor the socio-economic integration of women and young people by developing a set of indicators and identifying relevant data sources at the level of regional labour offices.	
	<p>are identified, they should be integrated into subsequent rounds of the systematic survey. In this way, complementary qualitative contributions can enrich the framework while ensuring that the core monitoring remains based on reliable, comparable data that captures both trends and lived experiences.</p> <p>Step 4: Pilot the monitoring framework and refine the indicators</p> <p>Before full-scale implementation, the monitoring framework should be piloted in a few selected locations within the Łódzkie Voivodeship to ascertain whether the proposed indicators can be practically measured within the existing data, small-scale surveys, and consultations. This phase will test the feasibility and clarity of the indicators, assess the availability and quality of the data, and identify any institutional or technical constraints. Based on the findings from the pilot, the indicators and methods can then be refined to improve their reliability, relevance and ease of use.</p> <p>Step 5: Refine and integrate into existing reporting</p> <p>Following a successful pilot, the monitoring framework should be incorporated into regular monitoring and reporting processes of labour offices. Adjustments should be made gradually, with lessons from pilot efforts feeding into improved practices over time. Regular reporting cycles should also be established to incorporate the findings into the wider Just Transition governance process. To enhance legitimacy and accountability, the results of the monitoring process should be made publicly available and discussed with stakeholders, particularly those representing women and young people.</p>	
Time horizon	Step 1: Define objectives and indicators	Short-term
	Step 2: Review existing data practices and engage in consultations with other poviats labour offices and local stakeholders	Short-term
	Step 3: Consult stakeholders and capture non-statistical insights	Short-term
	Step 4: Pilot the monitoring framework and refine the indicators	Short-term
	Step 5: Refine and integrate into existing reporting	Medium-term
Stakeholders	<p>Leading stakeholder:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bełchatów Poviats Labour Office <p>Supported by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other poviats labour offices from in region, • Local social institutions, • NOGs and non-formal groups, 	

Brief description	Monitor the socio-economic integration of women and young people by developing a set of indicators and identifying relevant data sources at the level of regional labour offices.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researchers from the University of Łódź, <p>To disseminate information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team for the Transformation of Mining Areas in the Łódź Voivodeship (Zespół ds. Transformacji obszarów górniczych województwa łódzkiego)
Funding sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Regional Development Fund (ERDF): Supports entrepreneurship, SME competitiveness, and the development of incubators and accelerators. • Just Transition Fund (JTF): If the measure is implemented within the framework of the Transformation Area Observatory, financing could also be secured under this initiative, as JTF supports economic diversification and inclusive entrepreneurship in transition areas.
Expected impact	<p>Indicators enable regional and local authorities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify emerging trends and structural barriers. • Track the reach and effectiveness of policy interventions. • Adjust strategies in real time based on disaggregated evidence. • Ensure that the Just Transition process is genuinely inclusive, equitable and responsive to diverse needs.
Monitoring	<p>The following methods or tools can be used for monitoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys or feedback form with powiat labour office staff and other relevant stakeholders (e.g., Marshal's Office, municipal officials) before and after the introduction of the monitoring framework to assess changes in knowledge, practices and the use of data. • Review of labour office reports and regional strategic documents to check the extent to which indicators are integrated and applied in policymaking. <p>Success can be measured according to the following indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of adjusted resource allocation or programme design targeting women and young people based on monitoring results. • Number of policy documents or programmes that reference findings from the monitoring framework.

Information and communication barriers towards women and young people

Beyond data gaps, communication between public institutions and target groups is often ineffective. Young people and women report limited awareness of existing support programmes or training opportunities. Communication strategies are typically not tailored to these groups' needs, language, or access channels.

Consultations reveal:

- Women often lack access to clear, proactive information on reskilling programmes or entrepreneurship support.
- Young people rely on peer networks and social media and frequently miss official announcements or formal channels.

Proposed measure #2:

Brief description	Create tailored communication protocols
Target	Women and young people
Justification	<p>Tailored communication protocols will enable messages, channels and formats of communication to be adapted to specific needs and habits of women and young people. This will ensure that they receive actionable information on opportunities such as reskilling, childcare support and entrepreneurship. This will raise awareness and encourage participation in labour market programmes and the broader transition, making the process more inclusive and responsive to those most at risk of being left behind.</p>
Steps to follow for implementation	<p>Step 1: Conduct a communication needs assessment</p> <p>The first step is to carry out a comprehensive needs assessment to understand the specific communication barriers experienced by women and young people in the Łódzkie Voivodeship. This process should involve focus groups, interviews and surveys targeting these groups to identify the channels they trust, the formats they prefer and the types of information they find most relevant. The assessment should also map existing outreach mechanisms and identify where gaps or mismatches occur, whether due to language, digital access, institutional mistrust or other factors. This evidence base will inform the development of communication strategies grounded in the lived experiences of the intended audiences.</p> <p>Step 2: Co-design of bespoke communication protocols</p> <p>Using the findings from the needs assessment, dedicated communication protocols for women and young people should be created in collaboration with their representatives and other relevant civil society organisations. These protocols should provide clear guidelines on language, tone, timing and communication channels. They should be co-designed using established strategic partnerships with trusted local organisations, such as housewives' associations, community centres, schools, youth organisations and online influencers.</p> <p>Step 3: Develop and deploy targeted communication tools with local ownership</p>

Brief description	Create tailored communication protocols
	<p>Once the communication protocols have been developed, the next step is to translate these strategies into concrete, user-friendly communication tools, such as mobile apps, SMS/traditional media campaigns, visual materials and social media/traditional media content, which are tailored to the preferences of women and young people. However, to ensure sustainability and long-term impact, a local coordinating institution – such as a well-established NGO, community development centre, or multi-stakeholder platform – should be designated as the owner and custodian of the communication protocols. This institution would be responsible for maintaining and updating the protocols, coordinating outreach efforts and providing guidance to partners over time. At the same time, public institutions, particularly those at the forefront of service delivery (e.g. poviats labour offices, municipal social welfare centres and training institutions), should undergo systematic training in the use of these protocols. Capacity-building workshops and practical toolkits should equip staff with the necessary skills and resources to apply the communication strategies in their own outreach activities.</p> <p>Step 4: Pilot and monitor communication activities with feedback loops</p> <p>Once the communication tools and protocols have been developed, they should be tested through pilot campaigns in areas of the Łódzkie Voivodeship that have diverse demographic and socioeconomic profiles. These pilots will help verify the clarity, accessibility and effectiveness of the communication materials and outreach methods. The coordinating institution, identified in Step 4 as the custodian of the protocols, should lead this process in close collaboration with public agencies and community partners. Monitoring should include quantitative indicators (e.g. engagement metrics, service uptake and training attendance) and qualitative feedback (e.g. user satisfaction, perceived relevance and trust in information sources). Feedback loops must be built into the process to allow the communication protocols to be adjusted and improved in real time. It is important that staff from labour offices, municipalities and social service providers are involved in the pilot phase, not only to test the tools, but also to strengthen their capacity and readiness to implement the protocols independently in future.</p> <p>Step 5: Institutionalise, scale up and sustain communication protocols</p> <p>Following refinement through piloting, the protocols and tools should be embedded in the formal communication strategies and operational procedures of key public institutions involved in the Just Transition, such as regional authorities, poviats labour offices, education providers, and social service centres. The custodian institution should play a central coordinating role, provide ongoing technical support and update communication content, while</p>

Brief description	Create tailored communication protocols	
	also serving as a knowledge hub. To support this, a structured training programme should be rolled out across the region to enable frontline public staff to apply the protocols effectively and independently.	
Time horizon	Step 1: Conduct a communication needs assessment	Short-term
	Step 2: Co-design of bespoke communication protocols	Short-term
	Step 3: Develop and deploy targeted communication tools with local ownership	Short-term
	Step 4: Pilot and monitor communication activities with feedback loops	Medium-term
	Step 5: Institutionalise, scale up and sustain communication protocols	Medium-term
Stakeholders	<p>Leading stakeholder:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local NGO (such as Bełchatów 5.0 or Yes for Bełchatów Association (Stowarzyszenie Tak dla Bełchatowa)), <p>To disseminate information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team for the Transformation of Mining Areas in the Łódź Voivodeship (Zespół ds. Transformacji obszarów górniczych województwa łódzkiego) 	
Funding sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> European Social Fund Plus (ESF+): Supports equal access to employment through outreach, activation, and tailored support for disadvantaged groups. <p>Just Transition Fund (JTF): If implemented within the framework of the Transformation Area Observatory, additional funding may be provided under JTF, as it supports social inclusion and employment opportunities in transition regions.</p>	
Expected impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased awareness and uptake of reskilling, employment, and entrepreneurship support measures among women and young people. Greater inclusion and participation of underrepresented groups in the governance and decision-making processes of the Just Transition. Improved institutional capacity to communicate effectively and inclusively with diverse target groups across the region. Reduction of information asymmetries, leading to more equitable access to opportunities and a more socially responsive transition process. 	
Monitoring	<p>Monitoring methods/tools could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of institutional communication outputs (e.g. labour office announcements) to check alignment with the new protocols. Feedback reports from NGOs, schools, and community organisations on outreach effectiveness. <p>Success indicators:</p>	

Brief description	Create tailored communication protocols
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased awareness among women and young people of Just Transition opportunities (measured through surveys). • Number of institutions adopting and applying the tailored communication protocols.

4.2 Motivating for local economy participation

Structural and cultural barriers to participation in the labour market

Women in the Bełchatów region continue to face entrenched cultural expectations that limit their economic participation. In many households, especially those historically tied to the mining and energy sectors, traditional gender roles remain dominant. Men are viewed as the primary breadwinners, while women are seen as the primary caregivers. These social norms, combined with a lack of institutional incentives for shared caregiving, such as accessible paternity leave or subsidised childcare, discourage women from seeking employment. These challenges are exacerbated by limited access to flexible working arrangements, such as remote or part-time work, that would enable women to balance professional aspirations with caregiving responsibilities. Consequently, many women become financially dependent on their male partners, which can lead to economic inactivity and reduced confidence over time. The absence of supportive professional networks, mentoring relationships and visible success stories further contributes to isolation and inaction. Interviewees emphasised the need for targeted outreach, career guidance and psychological support to help women rebuild their self-esteem and envision new career paths. Addressing these interconnected challenges is crucial for enhancing women’s socio-economic participation, strengthening family resilience, and promoting regional development.

In the case of young people, the primary structural barriers are related primarily to geographic disparities related to the availability of job opportunities. The results of the Harnessing Talent surveys reveal that about an equal share of the students of higher education institutions indicate the availability of professional opportunities as a reason to stay (26% of those planning to stay) and as a reason to leave (27% among student who want to leave), with familial and personal ties as the key determinant for both. Nonetheless, improving the availability of jobs and economic opportunities in the region was rated as one of the highest in terms of areas that need further improvement by both student groups. Similarly, among high school students surveyed, the predominant share (60%) also identified the availability of better career prospects in another region or abroad as the primary factor that could determine them to leave the Łódzkie province after graduation.

While the local authorities actively work towards a clean energy shift and economic diversification, the increasing availability of successful career trajectories and of role models should be made more evident to young people in the region.

Proposed measure #3:

Brief description	Organisation of inspirational events such as seminars or informal gatherings with entrepreneurs, career professionals and coaches.
Target	Women and young people
Justification	<p>A series of networking events with local companies, professionals and support organisations will allow participants to discover their interests and potential role in the local labour market. The aim is to create space for interactions between inactive and active women involved in different roles and among young people to provide positive examples and facilitate guidance, support, and career advice. In total, 5–6 events should be organised for women and young people over 1–2 years in parallel.</p> <p>Both target groups will be included in this action by organising a series of separate events for women and young people. While women are more isolated from these relevant networks, young people have also expressed through the survey that in the absence of more and better economic opportunities, they are not likely to remain in the region. Such networks could provide positive examples and potentially create new employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.</p>
Steps to follow for implementation	<p>Step 1: Set up the working arrangements with local women’s and young people interest groups</p> <p>To maximise the reach of the events, it will be important to connect to existing groups that represent the interests of women and young people. They often have an existing network that can be invited to the events. So, at the start of this action, it would be good to reach out to local stakeholder groups and set up certain working arrangements.</p> <p>Based on preliminary feedback from stakeholders, this measure could be included in the “Transformation Area Observatory” initiative. The initiative has already been planned for next year. It foresees the organisation of events “Green Coffee & Transformation” which aim to create space for discussion and exchange with citizens of the transition area.</p> <p>Step 2: Find venues, dates and times to hold the events</p> <p>To facilitate participation by the target groups, the location needs to be easily accessible. Some examples are town halls, schools, libraries or larger event venues. To ensure higher participation, it could also be a good idea to have a rotation in venues, so that not all interested participants would have to travel far every time. Certain periods in the year should also be avoided such as holiday periods, exam periods, the start and end of the academic year. Additionally, certain times during the day should also be avoided, such as drop-off and pick-up times from school and too late in the evening for young people.</p>

Brief description	Organisation of inspirational events such as seminars or informal gatherings with entrepreneurs, career professionals and coaches.
	<p>Consultations with local women and young groups are needed to find the best dates and times.</p> <p>Step 3: Identify and invite speakers for inspirational talks such as local entrepreneurs, career professionals and coaches</p> <p>Finding the right speakers will be crucial to motivating people to attend the networking events. Given that it will be a series of events, many speakers can be invited, with different focuses of the events. Some examples are: career coaches who can give insights into how to find the right career path, ordinary women and young professionals who have successfully found jobs and who can inspire women and young people to (re-)enter the labour market, coaches who can give a workshop on soft skills improvement of the participants, etc. Most events will be for women only. However, to some events, the families of women and young people could be invited, to demonstrate the benefits of local employment and/or entrepreneurship opportunities for their children and partners, from the perspectives of family welfare but also local development.</p> <p>Specifically for women, the focus could be on showcasing success stories from previously inactive women who have re-entered the labour market. Some examples that can be looked at in Poland are the “The future starts now”⁹ series of events, the “Women in Technology”¹⁰ networking events or the networking meeting organised by the Village Housewives’ Association with the group “Witches from Kolsko”¹¹. These encounters could, for example, facilitate the emergence of mentoring between professional and inactive women, to provide further support for identification of training and integration into the labour market. Another event could focus on highlighting the benefits of flexible and remote working arrangements. This could stimulate employers to allow women to combine childcare and a career.</p> <p>For young people, the networking events could be organised at educational institutions such as VET schools, universities and high schools. The best approach would be to invite successful entrepreneurs from the Lodzkie region to come talk to them, after which they would get the opportunity to exchange ideas with their classmates or other students with similar interests. This could also give them direct access to internships, traineeships and jobs. Some examples in Poland are the “Venture Café”¹² in Warsaw, which organises Thursday networking meetings between entrepreneurs, creators, investors, and students.</p>

⁹ <https://sharedgreendeal.eu/hubs/future-starts-now-design-tomorrow-belchatow>

¹⁰ <https://www.womenintechnology.pl/>

¹¹ <https://femfund.pl/en/kogo-wspieramy/village-housewives-association-dobrzyczanki-cuda-wianki/>

¹² <https://venturecafewarsaw.org/programs/programs-thursday-gathering/>

Brief description	Organisation of inspirational events such as seminars or informal gatherings with entrepreneurs, career professionals and coaches.	
	<p>Step 4: Invite all the potential participants</p> <p>An invitation should be drafted with the planning of the events, including their location. For some events, there might be some high-level speakers who could be put in the spotlight for the invitations. The invitation will be developed in line with the communication protocols set up in measure 4. This invitation should then be widely shared to reach the target groups. To facilitate the monitoring and impact assessment of this action, it would be useful to include a survey in the invite that asks potential participants about their current attitudes towards the (local) labour market.</p> <p>Step 5: Hold the series of events for women and young people</p> <p>The events could be organised as follows. First all participants will receive a name tag and be welcomed. Then a plenary session could take place either as an inspiring speech or a skills-development workshop. The second part of the event would involve some refreshments and the organisation of debates between the speakers and participants in smaller groups which would allow them to get to know each other, discuss their takeaways of the event and exchange on their own ideas, struggles and solutions.</p> <p>Step 6: Follow-up of the events</p> <p>There should also be a built-in system for follow up for each of the events. This is on the one hand to facilitate monitoring through quantitative indicators (e.g. engagement metrics, service uptake and training attendance) and qualitative feedback (e.g. user satisfaction, perceived relevance and trust in information sources). On the other hand, participants should receive a summary with key highlights of the event, presentations used and information on the next events. The minutes need to reflect the engagement of participants and the main messages from speakers.</p> <p>Additionally, feedback should be collected on the overall impacts of all the events together. A follow-up survey can be sent to all participants to evaluate the impact of the networking events. This could assess whether their attitudes towards the local labour market have improved and if long-lasting social connections have been made between the active and non-active population.</p>	
Time horizon	Step 1: Set up the working arrangements with local women’s and young people's interest groups	Short term
	Step 2: Find venues, dates and times to hold the events	Short term

Brief description	Organisation of inspirational events such as seminars or informal gatherings with entrepreneurs, career professionals and coaches.	
	Step 3: Identify and invite people to hold inspirational talks, such as local entrepreneurs, career professionals and coaches	Short term
	Step 4: Invite all the potential participants	Short term
	Step 5: Hold the series of events for women and young people	Short term
	Step 6: Follow-up of the events	Medium term
Stakeholders	<p>Leading stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poviát Labour Office <p>Supported by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network organisations (such as Village Housewives' Association), • Municipal Social Welfare Center, • Student organisations at universities, • Technical schools 	
Funding sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public budgets: Regional or municipal resources could co-finance outreach and organisational costs of networking activities. • European Social Fund Plus (ESF+): Supports equal access to employment and entrepreneurship through mentoring, coaching, and networking opportunities for target groups. <p>Just Transition Fund (JTF): If linked to the Transformation Area Observatory, complementary funding may be available to reinforce inclusion and labour market activation in transition areas.</p>	
Expected impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential increased interest in local employment and/or entrepreneurial opportunities • More social connections between active and non-active population • Contributing to less economic inactivity rates amongst participants 	
Monitoring	<p>The following methods or tools can be used for monitoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The survey which the participants will fill in before and after the series of networking events will allow to measure their specific impact • Labour market employment ratio tracking: inactivity rates, employment rate, etc. <p>If proven successful, this series of networking events can be replicated for other topics and target groups. Success can be measured according to the following indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of participants to the networking events • Number of speakers interested in presenting at the events • Employment rate for women and young people in the region 	

Disengagement, outmigration, and weak regional identity among young people

Beyond economic factors, young people from the Bełchatów region cite a lack of cultural and social infrastructure that supports self-expression, creativity, and peer interaction. Many feel that the region lacks 'vibrant spaces' where they can socialise, build community, and develop leadership and civic skills. This weakens their emotional connection to the region and fuels long-term migration trends. This is reinforced by the findings of the Harnessing Talent survey that reveals that the desire to explore new areas constitutes the most important factor for higher education students to plan leaving the region (39%) along with community ties to other regions (31%), even before the limited opportunities for professional development that is cited only as a third factor, by 27% of the respondents.

Furthermore, young people feel excluded from strategic planning and development conversations. The perception that decisions are imposed from outside the region, without consultation with young people, leads to frustration and disengagement. Without opportunities to co-create local initiatives or contribute to governance, young people find it difficult to envisage a future for themselves in the region.

Proposed measure #4:

Brief description	Creating dedicated dynamic spaces for young people in under-utilised urban spaces, managed by local youth organisations to provide courses, workshops and debates that encourage social engagement, volunteer initiatives, leadership and social/cultural skills
Target	Young people
Justification	Dedicated dynamic spaces provide safe, inclusive environments where young people can connect, express themselves, and take initiative, which is particularly important in communities where opportunities for meaningful participation are limited. By repurposing underutilised urban areas, municipalities can revitalise areas while empowering young people to take ownership of their development. Management by youth organisations ensures that activities are relevant, peer-led, and responsive to local needs, promoting a sense of agency and responsibility. These hubs can serve as incubators for skills-building, civic engagement, and creative expression, helping young people grow into local citizens and leaders while contributing to stronger, more resilient communities.
Steps to follow for implementation	Step 1. Mapping of underutilised urban spaces The first step involves mapping and selecting urban spaces in Bełchatów that are currently underused but structurally viable for transformation. These could include former cultural centres, industrial and industry buildings, or municipal properties. The mapping of those areas as a co-creation activity between citizens and administration, which not only will identify the places where their physical gatherings take place, but also will reinforce the sense of community. This mapping exercise should be conducted in collaboration with professionals, local planning offices, and regional development agencies, using GIS tools and participatory methods to ensure that the selected sites reflect both infrastructural potential and community needs. The selection process should

Brief description	Creating dedicated dynamic spaces for young people in under-utilised urban spaces, managed by local youth organisations to provide courses, workshops and debates that encourage social engagement, volunteer initiatives, leadership and social/cultural skills
	<p>prioritise accessibility, visibility, and proximity to public transport and educational institutions.</p> <p>Step 2. Governance model</p> <p>Once these spaces have been identified, youth from the region should be invited to co-create the vision and operational model of these spaces. The invitation and initial call to co-creation could be initiated by public authorities. This proactive engagement with youth is relevant as they might not seek help or know where to turn. However, the role of public authorities as leads needs to be reduced to a minimum standard, as there is the possibility that these informal structures and co-creation will not organise as there is distrust towards public authorities and sense of hierarchy that disrupts creativity and ownership. Alternatively, this initial process can also be started and led by already existing organisations. After having conducted desk research, some relevant stakeholders have been identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Council of Bełchatów¹³. This organisation recently organised a Youth Congress. They can build on that momentum and be proposed as the organiser group for this measure. • The Miejskie Centrum Kultury¹⁴ (Municipal Culture Centre) operates a range of creative workshops and youth-oriented events, such concerts, ceramic and music workshops, film and jam-session opportunities. • The Bełchatowskie Społeczne Towarzystwo Oświatowe (Social Educational Society of Bełchatów) is active in organising educational, cultural, and sports events for children and youth, including running its own facilities and supporting youth initiatives. <p>These groups can steer (and be part of) the formation of local design and governance committees composed of students, young professionals, and representatives from youth organisations. The new committee's role would be to define the mission of the space, set priorities for programming, and oversee operations. Support from other established regional organisations such as the European Foundation for Human Development¹⁵ (Lodzkie), FERSO¹⁶ (Lodzkie),</p>

¹³ <https://belchatow.pl/mlodziejowa-rada-organizuje-kongres-mlodziezy/>

¹⁴ <https://www.mckbelchatow.pl/o-mck/o-mck>

¹⁵ European Foundation for Human Development provides European and global opportunities for youth workers, young people and citizens based on holistic approaches and innovative non-formal education. The Foundation aims at boosting the competences of young individuals at local, regional and European level by a tailor-made plan for personal and professional development and growth in different sectors. <https://www.salto-youth.net/tools/otlas-partner-finding/organisation/europejska-fundacja-rozwoju-czowieka.14141>

¹⁶ FERSO. It is a Public Benefit Organization, a member of the National Federation of NGOs and the NGO Federation of Lodz. The main aim of FERSO is to support sustainable development of civil society through education, art and multimedia

Brief description	Creating dedicated dynamic spaces for young people in under-utilised urban spaces, managed by local youth organisations to provide courses, workshops and debates that encourage social engagement, volunteer initiatives, leadership and social/cultural skills
	<p>or Equality Factory¹⁷ (Lodzkie) would not only help these local organisations organise better, but it will also promote the project.</p> <p>Step 3. Programming and reaching out</p> <p>Once the physical space is identified and governance foundations have been laid down, designing the content and activities to animate this space will be the next step. Some initial techniques to get a sense of appetite as to how the activities should look like are proposed under the EU Youth for a Just Transition Toolkit.¹⁸ These techniques not only will serve to get inputs from the youth, but they can also serve as activities in of themselves.</p> <p>Collaboration with other organisations will be essential to learn best practices and know-how-to.</p> <p>Step 4. Institutionalisation</p> <p>In addition to the set of steps described above, yet worth including in this measure, is the institutionalisation of representation of youth in decision-making, moving beyond their presence in vibrant spaces. As aforementioned, the active role of the government should be minimised. Yet, it is essential that local municipalities accept and embed this new structure within broader regional development strategies, giving young people a formal role in shaping the future of their communities. Young people should not be limited to youth-only events, they need meaningful opportunities to be part of broader Just Transition activities alongside other stakeholder groups, integrating their participation not as a separate stream but rather as a cross-cutting principle. This means actively integrating youth into all stages of the Fund's implementation, so that their participation becomes consistent, inclusive, and routine. To ensure young people are treated equally in these mainstream processes, the public administration could offer them appropriate support, such as training and mentorship or guarantee a minimum of two seats for youth representatives in any working group that includes non-governmental participants. Thus, while this institutionalisation is not contingent on the success or existence of the vibrant spaces and it is a standalone governance reform that ensures youth are treated as equal partners in shaping the future of their communities, it is still tight and thus can be streamlined to the measure</p>

technologies. The Foundation achieves its objectives by organising and financing lectures, workshops and trainings. It organizes out-door activities, green schools, summer and winter camps, concerts, publications, exhibitions and sport events. The main aim of the organization has expanded and now it is focused on increasing civic participation, the promotion of democratic values and sustainable lifestyle. https://youth.europa.eu/volunteering/organisation/50767_en

¹⁷ Equality Factory is a dynamic group of activists, friends, students, workers, youth and adults who work together for equality in Łódź and the region. Our organization is a place where diverse perspectives and ideas meet, creating a space for creative and effective work.

<https://rownasie.org/en/join>

¹⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/guides/youth_just_transition_en.pdf

Brief description	Creating dedicated dynamic spaces for young people in under-utilised urban spaces, managed by local youth organisations to provide courses, workshops and debates that encourage social engagement, volunteer initiatives, leadership and social/cultural skills	
	for several reasons: (i) both reforms already demand a level of government involvement (ii) in order to include youth in decision-making, having an organised youth is highly beneficial -which in turn, will likely increase the youth appetite to be part of a bigger and institutionalised picture for change.	
Time horizon	Step 1. Mapping underutilised spaces	Short term
	Step 2. Governance model	Short term
	Step 3. Programming and reaching out	Short term
	Step 4. Institutionalisation	Medium term
Stakeholders	<p>Lead stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Łódzkie Voivodeship Marshal’s Office, • Local NGOs, <p>With support from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Council, • Local NGOs, • Municipality of Bełchatów, • Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, • Ministry of Education and Science of Poland, • Cultural and creative collectives: contribute to placemaking and community programming, • Urban planners, architects, GIS experts, • Bełchatów Competence Development Centre, • High schools and Higher Education Institutions (e.g. Lodz University of Technology, University of Łódź), • Local artists, • Local media, • Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions (e.g. Centres for Vocational Training) 	
Funding sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just Transition Fund (JTF): Can support measures in Bełchatów and surrounding transition areas, aligning with priorities on diversification and inclusive community development. • European Social Fund Plus (ESF+): May finance the soft components such as workshops, training, and youth engagement activities delivered in these spaces. <p>European Regional Development Fund (ERDF): Supports the revitalisation and adaptation of urban spaces for social, educational, cultural, and youth purposes.</p>	

Brief description	Creating dedicated dynamic spaces for young people in under-utilised urban spaces, managed by local youth organisations to provide courses, workshops and debates that encourage social engagement, volunteer initiatives, leadership and social/cultural skills
	Municipal budgets: Local governments can co-finance running costs or minor adaptations of facilities.
Expected impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reuse of underutilised building and spaces • Strengthened civic connection to the region, as young people gain access to physical and social spaces that reflect their identities and aspirations, giving them a sense of belonging, fostering and harnessing their talents. • Increased youth participation in local government, creating more inclusive spaces and ensuring that their voices are not siloed but actively shape regional developments • Empowerment of youth-led organisations which will gain operational experience, visibility and legitimacy through the management of these spaces • Development of social and creative skills that foster agency, confidence, and public engagement. • Expected reduction in youth disengagement and long-term migration trends, by offering meaningful local alternatives for personal development, expression, and contribution.
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of youth participants engaged in formal governance structures • Frequency of youth-related activities hosted • Attendance and participation rates • Social media interaction • Retention and migration trends • Number or reutilised urban spaces • Skill acquisition

4.3 Development of educational and training programmes

Modernising education and expanding work-based learning in strategic economic sectors

According to the Development Strategy of the Łódzkie region, while a significant part of the population – 63.5% of the total – have at least secondary and higher education, their skillsets do not always meet the employers’ demands.¹⁹ Stakeholders also raised concerns about the overall quality and relevance of training and education, citing limited instructional capacity, a narrow focus on PGE employees, and shortages of qualified teaching staff. Developing relevant skills is especially critical in sectors such as Industry 4.0, renewable energy, and the circular economy that are strategically important for the region’s just transition and long-term economic development.²⁰ These sectors typically offer higher-quality employment, with better career prospects and wages than the overall labour market.²¹ However, they are also rapidly evolving, technology-intensive, and require specialised competencies

¹⁹ [Development Strategy of the Łódzkie region](#).

²⁰ Highlighted by the [Territorial Just Transition Plan of Łódzkie region](#) and [Development Strategy of the Łódzkie region](#).

²¹ Urban Institute (2024) [Who has access to good clean-energy jobs?](#); Eurofound (2024) [Job quality side of climate change](#).

at both higher education and secondary/vocational education levels that traditional education and training systems often struggle to deliver.²² At the same time, interest in vocational education has declined, leading to shortages in medium-level qualifications essential for both strategic industries and services like tourism, healthcare, and social care, that are also at the core of regional development strategies.²³

Modernising education and training in these sectors and promoting work-based learning is once again particularly important for the socioeconomic activation of women and young people. In the case of **young people**, for example, the results of the Harnessing Talent project show that students who work during their studies are more likely to stay within the region after graduation. Internships and apprenticeships can help bridge the gap between education and employment, while also offering accessible entry points for **women** to gain practical experience and confidence. Training for sectors and activities that facilitate the green transition has attracted young people to relevant vocational education and training programmes in other countries.²⁴ Training programmes in the care sector could be particularly attractive to women as they align with current market needs and the socio-economic realities that many women face while offering stable and meaningful employment.

Proposed measure #5:

Brief description	Enhancing collaboration between education and training programmes, on one hand, and industry associations, on the other, through partnership arrangements that detail roles and responsibilities (e.g. teaching, revising curricula, modernising equipment, etc) with potential focus on renewable, industry 4.0, circular economy, tourism and care sector.
Target	Women and young people
Justification	<p>This action supports the socio-economic activation of women and young people by aligning skills development with labour market needs and expanding work-based learning in areas that are particularly well aligned with the interest and needs of the target groups. Involving industry actors in curriculum design, teaching, and infrastructure upgrades ensures training reflects real-world demands - especially in fast-evolving sectors like renewable energy, circular economy, tourism and care services.</p> <p>Although Poland has introduced several national initiatives to promote closer collaboration between education and industry,²⁵ implementation challenges continue to undermine their impact on the quality of specialised education and training, a concern repeatedly raised by stakeholders in the Bełchatów region.</p>

²² Hanna, R., Heptonstall, P., & Gross, R. (2024). Job creation in a low carbon transition to renewables and energy efficiency: a review of international evidence. *Sustainability Science*, 19(1), 125-150.

²³ [Development Strategy of the Łódzkie region. European Funds in the Łódzkie region 2021-2027; Regional Action Plan for the Lodzkie Region](#) resulting from the FINCH project entitled “Financing impact on regional development of cultural heritage”.

²⁴ Carstensen, M. B., Ibsen, C. L., & Jensen, I. M. N. (2024). Integrating ecosocial policies through polycentric governance: A study of the green transformation of Danish vocational education and training. *Regulation & Governance*.

²⁵ A 2019 law stipulates that directors of vocational schools must establish a partnership with an employer before launching new occupational training programmes. Poland has established Sectoral Skills Councils—multi-stakeholder bodies that bring together government representatives, employers, education providers, trade unions, and other relevant actors.

Brief description	Enhancing collaboration between education and training programmes, on one hand, and industry associations, on the other, through partnership arrangements that detail roles and responsibilities (e.g. teaching, revising curricula, modernising equipment, etc) with potential focus on renewable, industry 4.0, circular economy, tourism and care sector.
	<p>In practice, many schools and employers do not initiate contact, leaving cooperation opportunities unrealised.²⁶ Inadequate staffing and outdated equipment further limit the ability of VET providers to deliver high-quality training and attract students.²⁷ Similarly, while apprenticeship schemes and internship vouchers are available,²⁸ their effectiveness is hampered by organisational difficulties and high costs for participating employers.²⁹</p>
Steps to follow for implementation	<p>Step 1. Identifying relevant economic areas and skill sets through a consultative process</p> <p>The first step involves further prioritising the economic sectors and skill sets that offer the most promising opportunities for the socio-economic integration of women and young people. This prioritisation should consider (i) the region’s economic and energy transition goals, (ii) the interests, capabilities, and aspirations of the target population, (iii) and synergies with existing or planned initiatives in the region.</p> <p>Sectors such as industry 4.0, renewable energy, the circular economy, tourism, and the care sector are particularly relevant, given their growth potential and alignment with the interests and socio-economic realities of women and youth. Existing training infrastructure—such as the Rogowiec Centre, Technical School of Kleszczów, the Technical College of Automation and Robotics in the Łódź SEZ, and the Textile Skills Centre under the RRF—already covers some of these domains and should inform the selection process.</p> <p>To ensure relevance and feasibility, a consultative process with stakeholders is recommended to assess sectoral potential and guide an iterative, targeted implementation focused on women and young people. This process could build on existing platforms such as the Łódź Voivodeship Management Board for Transformation and Team for the Transformation of Mining Areas in the Łódź Voivodeship, in coordination with trade unions and social actors from Bełchatów area. Early and meaningful engagement is essential to ensure that proposed interventions are grounded in the needs and realities of the target groups. This can be achieved through participatory approaches such as focus groups, workshops, and roundtable discussions that prioritise the voices of young people and women, helping to shape inclusive and demand-driven solutions.</p> <p>Step 2. Engagement with relevant industry, education and training institutions</p>

²⁶ OECD (2019) [OECD Skills Strategy Poland](#)

²⁷ [Development Strategy of the Łódźkie region.](#)

²⁸ Michoń, P. (2023). School-to-work transition in Poland: a false reality of numbers. In *School-to-Work Transition in Comparative Perspective* (pp. 258-286). Edward Elgar Publishing.

²⁹ [Diagnosis of educational offers at secondary level, taking into account the green and digital transformation](#), Lozd 2023.

Brief description	Enhancing collaboration between education and training programmes, on one hand, and industry associations, on the other, through partnership arrangements that detail roles and responsibilities (e.g. teaching, revising curricula, modernising equipment, etc) with potential focus on renewable, industry 4.0, circular economy, tourism and care sector.
	<p>The second step entails the identification of and engagement with relevant stakeholders who could play a critical role in shaping and delivering effective training and employment pathways for women and young people. This begins with identifying relevant actors, including vocational schools, universities, training centres, industry associations and potentially trade unions operating within the selected focus sectors in the Bełchatów area. These entities could then be contacted to assess interest in participation, highlighting benefits in terms of access to an adequately trained workforce.</p> <p>Finally, formal partnerships should be established with selected institutions and organisations to foster long-term collaboration and clarity of purpose. This may include signing Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) that define roles and commitments in curriculum tailoring, training equipment access, internship placements, and mentoring programmes.</p> <p>Step 3. Providing Financial Incentives and Organisational Support to Companies</p> <p>To foster stronger collaboration between companies and education or training providers—particularly in priority sectors—this step focuses on reducing the financial and administrative barriers that often prevent firms, especially SMEs, from engaging in structured talent development initiatives.</p> <p>Additional financial incentive to companies of strategic importance could be provided in various forms such as subsidies for participation, such as lump-sum grants or tax incentives for hosting trainees, mentoring and providing training equipment, conditional on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strict performance indicators, such as the number of participants trained and or employed upon graduation. • Meeting inclusion targets such as recruiting women who have been inactive for a long time or rural youth, • Flexible delivery: modular schedules, blended learning and digital access to facilitate participation of women who balance care responsibilities; • Participant support: such as childcare support and travel vouchers; • Provision of mentorship: involvement of female alumni and industry specialists. <p>In addition to financial support, companies would benefit from more explicit organisational support, including toolkits and facilitation services from public authorities or intermediary organisations selected through competitive process. Such facilitation will be particularly important for the four realms of activities where the contribution of the companies is expected, namely:</p>

Brief description	Enhancing collaboration between education and training programmes, on one hand, and industry associations, on the other, through partnership arrangements that detail roles and responsibilities (e.g. teaching, revising curricula, modernising equipment, etc) with potential focus on renewable, industry 4.0, circular economy, tourism and care sector.	
	<p>curricula co-development, infrastructure and equipment modernisation, work-based learning and mentorship, capacity building for educators and trainers. To build momentum and peer recognition, a regional label or award (e.g. “Education-Engaged Employer”) could also be introduced to reward companies that actively contribute to inclusive workforce development.</p> <p>Step 4. Facilitation of operation and scaling up Facilitate regular regional meetups or virtual exchanges where participating institutions and companies can share lessons learned, tools, and innovations. Start with a limited set of economic areas or skill sets, for which such collaborative initiatives already exist (e.g. renewable energy system technician training at the Rogowiec Center) or were prioritised through the initial consultations (Step 1), that could for example be in the realm of ecodesign skills, HVAC technicians or system designers, and sustainability in tourism. Begin with a smaller number of participants, before scaling to a larger number of students, companies and other partners, eventually expanding into new economic areas and skill sets, using insights from the initial implementation phase.</p>	
Time horizon	Step 1: Identifying relevant economic areas and skill sets	Short term
	Step 2: Stakeholder mapping and engagement	Short term
	Step 3: Providing Financial Incentives and Organisational Support to Companies	Short term
	Step 4: Facilitation of operation and scaling up	Medium term
Stakeholders	<p>Lead stakeholders: Łódzkie Voivodeship Marshal’s Office</p> <p>With support from (depending on sectoral and/or skill focus):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public authorities such as Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, Ministry of Education and Science of Poland, Ministry of Industry, Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, • Industry associations and companies such as the Łódź Chamber of Industry and Commerce; Companies and/or industry associations from the region (e.g. Whirlpool, Miele, Piotrków Logistics Parks, Infosys BPM, Łódź Tourism Organization, social economy entities) • Educational and training institutions such as the Bełchatów, Competence Development Centre; Higher Education Institutions (e.g. Lodz University of Technology, University of Łódź); Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions (e.g. Centres for Vocational 	

Brief description	Enhancing collaboration between education and training programmes, on one hand, and industry associations, on the other, through partnership arrangements that detail roles and responsibilities (e.g. teaching, revising curricula, modernising equipment, etc) with potential focus on renewable, industry 4.0, circular economy, tourism and care sector.
	<p>Training); Adult education and lifelong learning institutions (e.g. Adult Education Centres),</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant trade unions from the economic sectors • Local civil society organisations, especially women and young people’s organisations, and those involved in the social economy
Funding resources	<p>The implementation of this measure could be delegated to external organisations selected through a transparent public procurement process, with funding sourced from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just Transition Fund (JTF): Relevant for Bełchatów and surrounding transition areas, particularly to support partnerships that advance green and digital transitions. • European Social Fund Plus (ESF+): Can co-finance training placements, upskilling programmes, and employer engagement activities, especially on skills alignment with labour market needs. • European Regional Development Fund (ERDF): Finances equipment and infrastructure needed to modernise training centres and strengthen collaboration between education and industry.
Expected impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support in modernisation of local education and training, addressing just transition changes • Local education and training opportunities for women and youth relevant to just transition • Increased employment and activation among women and young people in the local economy
Monitoring	<p>Participation and engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of formal partnership agreements signed between training institutions and companies. • Number of companies actively involved in curriculum co-design, equipment sharing, or hosting trainees. • Number of education and training institutions participating in the initiative. • Number of sector-specific programmes launched (e.g. in renewables, circular economy, care). <p>Learner outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrolment numbers of women and youth in newly developed or revised training programmes. • Completion rates of participants in collaborative training programmes. • Job placement rate of graduates within 6–12 months of program completion. • Percentage of participants entering employment in targeted sectors.

Brief description	Enhancing collaboration between education and training programmes, on one hand, and industry associations, on the other, through partnership arrangements that detail roles and responsibilities (e.g. teaching, revising curricula, modernising equipment, etc) with potential focus on renewable, industry 4.0, circular economy, tourism and care sector.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of educators/trainers receiving upskilling or industry immersion. • Number of training facilities upgraded with modern equipment. <p>Employer Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satisfaction rate of employers with the skills of program graduates. • Retention rate of trainees or apprentices hired after placement. • Number of internships/apprenticeships offered and completed. <p>Incentives & Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amount of financial incentives disbursed to companies (e.g. subsidies, tax relief). • Number of companies accessing support services (e.g. help desks, toolkits). • Time to set up a partnership (from initiation to implementation). <p>Strategic and long-term impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in female and youth employment in green and digital sectors. • Reduction in skills mismatch as reported by employers. • Replication rate of the model in other counties or sectors.

Skills obsolescence among women following long-term inactivity

Context:

Women who have spent extended periods outside the labour market often report feeling out of touch with current professional standards and lacking relevant skills. Providing women with career guidance and skills training, such as computer or language courses, has proven insufficient in enabling access to up-to-date professional qualifications. Improving digital skills is essential as education and training systems increasingly adopt online and hybrid formats, making digital literacy a prerequisite for access and participation. In the labour market, the growing demand for technology-enabled roles across all sectors means that individuals without digital competencies risk exclusion from emerging job opportunities and career advancement. This problem, related to the absence of adequate digital and linguistic skills, is particularly acute for women over 50, who often remain economically inactive for long periods, due to long breaks in employment and low self-esteem. This could also be attributed to the relatively low levels of participation in continuous education in the region. In 2019, only 3.0% of people aged 25-64 participated in education or training(s) in the łódzkie region, well below the national average of 4.8%.³⁰

Proposed measure #6:

³⁰ [Development Strategy of the łódzkie region](#)

Brief description	Establishing training programmes in libraries, community centres, schools and even shopping malls tailored to the needs of women to provide basic IT, linguistic and job/vocational application skills (e.g., tailoring for women may involve providing childcare services during training).
Target	Women
Justification	<p>Establishing basic IT, linguistic and job/vocational application training programmes in libraries, community centres, schools and even shopping malls tailored to the needs of women is essential to promoting inclusive access to education and labour market participation. These venues are familiar, accessible, and non-intimidating environments where women, particularly those with caregiving responsibilities, limited mobility or gaps in formal education, can engage in learning with greater comfort and flexibility. Tailored programmes in these settings can focus on practical skills, digital literacy, confidence-building, and career orientation, helping women re-enter the workforce or pursue further education. By embedding learning opportunities within everyday public spaces, these programmes also normalise lifelong learning, foster peer support, and build bridges between communities and formal training systems—ultimately contributing to greater social inclusion, gender equity, and local economic resilience.</p> <p>An example of a series of trainings is the Woman Entrepreneurship Bootcamp³¹ by the EIT Health. They have the aim of developing the business and product related skills of women who want to start or enhance start-ups in the health care sector. The trainers are experts in the field and they also create space for networking and more informal exchanges. In Slovakia, series of day-long events WomanUp Bootcamps³² are organised to teach women how to improve their skills, improve different areas of their lives, develop their minds and explore themselves, learn from the life lessons of successful women, and find their own definition of quality life. The events take place once a month.</p>
Steps to follow for implementation	<p>Step 1: Determine the most critical needs of women regarding training of specific skills</p> <p>There are already several initiatives on trainings, although not tailored to women. So, it is important to see what the gaps are first. Then also make sure these trainings target women by for instance offering child care.</p> <p>Based on the consultations undertaken as a part of this TSI project, training should be closely aligned with the needs of the labour market, to ensure that those who follow the training can actually be employed later on. Industrial and technical skills seem to be lacking in the region, so this would be an important area to focus on. Stakeholders also pointed out the need for training in basic competencies such as communication, resume writing, IT skills, etc. These skills</p>

³¹ <https://eithealth.eu/programmes/women-entrepreneurship-bootcamp/>

³² <https://womanup.sk/>

Brief description	Establishing training programmes in libraries, community centres, schools and even shopping malls tailored to the needs of women to provide basic IT, linguistic and job/vocational application skills (e.g., tailoring for women may involve providing childcare services during training).
	<p>seem to be lacking especially for those who have faced a long break in their participation in the labour market.</p> <p>An inquiry in the form of a survey should be undertaken to identify the current skills of women who were durably professionally inactive. Additionally, based on the sectors of importance identified in measure 8, the needs of employers can be derived. The trainings should then be targeted to filling these gaps.</p> <p>Step 2: Identify the most suitable locations to hold the trainings</p> <p>To facilitate participation by the women, the location needs to be easily accessible by them. Some examples are town halls, schools, libraries, community centres and shopping malls. These would allow for women to combine household and caregiving activities with the trainings. For instance, if the training would take place in a school, they could attend the training and afterwards pick up their kids and go home together.</p> <p>Potentially, the trainings can be integrated into a new Industry Skills Centre³³ in Bełchatów. However, this would probably increase the formality of the trainings and might make them less accessible to a wide range of women.</p> <p>Step 3: Prepare and organise the logistics of the trainings</p> <p>Once the ideal locations are identified, the specific venues need to be booked, i.e. the specific libraries, the specific schools. Additionally, the schedule of the trainings need to be defined. Certain periods in the year should be avoided such as holiday periods and exam periods, when care duties would require more time from women. Furthermore, certain times during the day should also be avoided, such as drop-off and pick-up times from school.</p> <p>An important part of the logistics of the trainings may consist in providing on-site child care services for the duration of the training, so that the women can attend without having to worry about their children.</p> <p>Based on the skills needs of women in Bełchatów, as identified in step 1, trainers need to be found who can give 2-3 hour sessions. Collaboration could be sought with existing training centres such as the technical school in Kleszczów, which is highly regarded in terms of quality, but lacks capacity to take on many students. Therefore, the trainers from schools or training centres could teach shorter sessions at external locations to attract more women to attend.</p> <p>Step 4: Dissemination of the invitations and collect registrations</p>

³³ <https://www.kpo.gov.pl/strony/branzowe-centra-umiejetnosci/>

Brief description	Establishing training programmes in libraries, community centres, schools and even shopping malls tailored to the needs of women to provide basic IT, linguistic and job/vocational application skills (e.g., tailoring for women may involve providing childcare services during training).	
	<p>The schedule of trainings, including their location and the trainers, should then be drafted into an agenda/invitation which can be widely distributed. The communication protocols and channels established in measure 4 could be used for the dissemination. Other possibilities are to hang posters or to distribute paper flyers in places frequented by the target group such as local markets, supermarkets, shopping malls, beauty parlours, hairdressers, churches, sport facilities, etc. Otherwise, online channels can also be used via social media, newsletters, regional websites, etc.</p> <p>The trainings would ideally be in groups of max 15-20 participants per trainer, to allow for a hands-on approach. Therefore, it is important to ask participants to register beforehand and to close registrations for specific sessions once they are full. The registrations should be possible through different channels, to be inclusive for a broad group of women, via online registration forms (either links in online invitations or QR codes on paper), by telephone or using pre-paid postal envelopes.</p> <p>Step 5: Hold the trainings in a pilot phase</p> <p>In a first phase, trainings for some key skills should be held. These should be observed very closely to allow to draw lessons from them on what can be improved. If certain trainings were very popular and more women wanted to register than possible, this can be a first indication of trainings that should be repeated.</p> <p>Step 6: Setup a cycle of trainings</p> <p>A cycle of trainings should be set up where the most popular, successful and impactful sessions are repeated. This will allow for more women to attend trainings and for a significant increase in their skills level.</p>	
Time horizon	Step 1: Determine the most critical needs of women regarding training of specific skills	Short term
	Step 2: Identify the most suitable locations to hold the trainings	Short term
	Step 3: Prepare and organise the logistics of the trainings	Short term
	Step 4: Dissemination of the invitations and collect registrations	Short term
	Step 5: Hold the trainings in a pilot phase	Short term

Brief description	Establishing training programmes in libraries, community centres, schools and even shopping malls tailored to the needs of women to provide basic IT, linguistic and job/vocational application skills (e.g., tailoring for women may involve providing childcare services during training).	
	Step 6: Setup a cycle of trainings	Short term
Stakeholders	<p>Leading stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Poviast Labour Office <p>Others:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local women’s grassroots organisations (involved for the identification of their skills gaps and the dissemination of the invitations for the trainings), • Training centres and schools, • Employers in the region 	
Funding sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just Transition Fund (JTF): Could support pilot programmes and operational infrastructure in transition areas, ensuring inclusiveness for women and disadvantaged groups. • European Social Fund Plus (ESF+): Supports upskilling, reskilling, lifelong learning, and inclusive training opportunities tailored to women and vulnerable groups. • National, regional and municipal budgets: To cover costs not financed by EU funds and ensure sustainability of training offers. • National Recovery and Resilience Plan (RPP/KPO): If trainings are integrated into a new Industry Skills Centre³⁴, KPO funds can be used, although financing is only available until 2026. This instrument specifically aims to strengthen cooperation between schools, universities, and employers while supporting local communities in their economic development. 	
Expected impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the skill level of participants. • Due to the mapping of the interests and needs of women for the creation of the training, there will be an increased awareness of the skills gaps among women in the region. These can then be monitored more closely in the future. • Increased interactions between women in similar situations can help them find support where needed and also inspire them to (re-)enter the job market. • This measure could also strengthen intergenerational relations and involve entire communities in the process of informal education by enhancing lifelong learning practices and normalising up- and reskilling in the communities. 	
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of women to participate in the training sessions • Perceived increase in skill level after participation in the trainings (self-assessment by participants) • Number of trainings held • Number of trainings with more registrations than spots 	

³⁴ <https://www.kpo.gov.pl/strony/branzowe-centra-umiejtnosci/>

Brief description	Establishing training programmes in libraries, community centres, schools and even shopping malls tailored to the needs of women to provide basic IT, linguistic and job/vocational application skills (e.g., tailoring for women may involve providing childcare services during training).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of qualified trainers involved in the initiative

4.4 Labour market participation support

Overcoming institutional barriers to workforce integration for women and young people

Women and young people, even when interested in local labour market participation and endowed with relevant skills, they often need additional support to overcome the persistent structural, institutional and socio-economic barriers that hinder their integration into the workforce.

Women, particularly those from mining families or over 50 years of age, are regularly responsible for unpaid caregiving and household duties. Even when highly educated, they frequently find themselves in service-oriented roles (e.g. beauty or retail) due to limited local opportunities in other sectors. This contributes to widespread under-employment and skills mismatches. Many have been economically inactive for prolonged periods and struggle to re-enter the labour market without tailored support. One institutional barrier is that access to job placement, training and counselling through public employment services is dependent on formal registration, yet many inactive women remain unregistered. As highlighted in stakeholder interviews and reinforced by literature, this creates a “first-step” gap: women must independently initiate contact with employment services, a challenge exacerbated by a lack of confidence and awareness.

Young people, particularly students and recent graduates, face different but related barriers. Although they are increasingly educated and digitally literate, young people report a disconnect between their creative, entrepreneurial and globally engaged aspirations and the region's perceived lack of innovative and rewarding jobs. Many feel that the local job market lacks dynamism and that traditional employers offer limited opportunities for growth or purpose-driven work. At the same time, rigid labour practices and low uptake of remote or hybrid working models mean that young people seeking flexibility or modern working experiences often look elsewhere.

Proposed measure #7:

Brief description	Introducing territorial development agents within the Lodzkie region
Target	Women and young people
Justification	<p>Introducing territorial development agents will help women and young people identify matching opportunities in emerging sectors such as renewable energy, circular economy, and digital innovation.</p> <p>This position is embedded in Spanish municipalities (Agente de Desarrollo Local), and their role is to activate local economies, coordinate between actors, design territorial strategies, and connect policy to practice, focusing on</p>

Brief description	Introducing territorial development agents within the Lodzkie region
	<p>employment, inclusion and sustainability. Hence, their mandate is coordinative - without special rights of budgetary authority, access or coercive powers to compel participation or enforce decisions, which depend on separate municipal acts. Introducing an equivalent role in Bełchatów region will significantly enhance the governance and delivery of just transition strategies, especially for vulnerable groups such as young people and women. Institutionalising such a position within local authorities would bring territorial coordination capacity, bridging the gap between national transition policies and local needs. The ADL model has proven effective in Spain by anchoring economic transformation processes in the realities of communities, fostering local entrepreneurship, guiding public-private collaboration, and unlocking funding at the territorial level. Its transfer to Poland would reinforce decentralisation and empower municipalities to proactively reshape labour markets in the context of the green transition.</p> <p>Both target groups will be included in the creation of this role. For young people, the territorial development agent could explore the synergies with the existing Voluntary Labour Corps (ochorniczne Hufce Pracy), which mainly focus on excluded youth, and expand their scope to encompass a bigger target group, to act as a strategic intermediary: not merely connecting individuals to jobs, but aligning vocational education, local economic development strategies, and innovation initiatives to green and future-proof sectors. This means the agent would work with local schools, training centres, businesses, and civil society to co-design local career pathways, entrepreneurship support, and awareness campaigns that reframe green jobs as attractive, viable futures. The agent's territorial knowledge and coordination role ensures that these offers respond to real economic shifts.</p> <p>For women, these agents could promote inclusive entrepreneurship opportunities tailored to women, offer individualized employment guidance, and provide technical support for women-led businesses, including help with business plans, financial viability, and access to funding. By demystifying subsidies and managing targeted training programmes, they could address skill gaps and financial barriers while advocating for flexible work arrangements that accommodate caregiving responsibilities (linking it to measure #8). Given the importance of employer readiness to offer such flexibility, territorial development agents should also be tasked with actively engaging and convincing employers to adopt flexible working time arrangements as a core duty in their work on women's inclusion. Moreover, the territorial development agents would activate local networks (which would also assist the development of aforementioned measures), connecting women to NGOs, employers, and support services, and ensure their voices are reflected in local economic</p>

Brief description	Introducing territorial development agents within the Lodzkie region
	planning, embedding gender equality into the region's broader just transition strategies.
Steps to follow for implementation	<p>Step 1: Political and institutional endorsement Present the concept to the Łódzkie Voivodeship and Bełchatów local authorities as part of the Just Transition agenda, linking it to national strategies and EU funding obligations. Engaging with the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy to clarify compatibility with existing labour market instruments (e.g. <i>powiatowy urząd pracy</i>, county labour offices) will also be necessary. Finally, a link of the agent's role to structures managing Territorial Just Transition Plan and Just Transition Fund will be needed.</p> <p>Step 2: Define the role and the institutional model Once political support is secured, the next step is clearly defining the agent's mission, drawing on the Spanish Agente de Desarrollo Territorial model but adapting it to Poland's decentralised governance. The position could be hosted within the municipal administration, an existing local development office, or as a dedicated unit linked to regional labour institutions. Clear lines of coordination and accountability should be established, ensuring the agent is embedded in local governance while maintaining strong ties to regional economic and social development strategies.</p> <p>Step 3. Design a pilot program A pilot program in Bełchatów should be developed to test the model in practice, with a strong focus on supporting women's reintegration into the labour market and helping young people transition to green, future-oriented careers. The recruitment process should target professionals with experience in local development, entrepreneurship support, and social inclusion, and offer training on just transition, inclusive economic planning, and gender-sensitive practices. The agent should be advertised to the target audiences using the channels foreseen in measure #4 <i>creating dedicated dynamic spaces for young people in under-utilised urban spaces, managed by local youth organisations to provide courses, workshops and debates that encourage social engagement, volunteer initiatives, leadership and social/cultural skills</i> (while also disclosing the services to be expected from them), and be embedded in a local network of schools, NGOs, employers, and employment offices to ensure coherent and coordinated support tailored to community needs. If successful, the model can be progressively scaled to other municipalities within the region or replicated in other Polish regions with similar socio-economic and transition challenges.</p>

Brief description	Introducing territorial development agents within the Lodzkie region	
	<p>Step 4. Secure funding and resources</p> <p>To ensure sustainability, the agent’s role should be financed primarily through the Just Transition Fund, positioning it as an enabling measure within the implementation of the Territorial Plan for Łódzkie. Additional resources can be mobilised from the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and national budgets, particularly for training, business development, and capacity building. Operational resources, including office space, transportation, digital tools, and access to partner services, must also be secured to enable the agent to work effectively within the territory (like in Spain, no specific previous bachelor’s degree is required to become a territorial agent, but internal capacity building will be needed so the agent acquires the technical capacity and experience in social participation, socio-cultural values, identifying under-utilised projects).</p>	
Time horizon	Step 1: Political and institutional endorsement	Medium term
	Step 2: Define the role and the institutional model	Short term
	Step 3. Design a pilot program	Short term
	Step 4. Secure funding and resources	Medium term
Stakeholders	<p>Lead stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Łódzkie Voivodeship Marshal’s Office, <p>Supporting stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipality of Bełchatów, • Ministry of Climate and Environment, • Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, • Territorial Just Transition Coordination Body, • Local economic development units, • Regional Labour Office, • EU Delegation in Poland / European Commission (advisory role), • Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, • Territorial Just Transition Coordination Body, • Regional Labour Office, • EU Delegation in Poland / European Commission (advisory role) 	
Funding sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just Transition Fund (JTF): Could finance pilot programmes and operational infrastructure for territorial development agents in transition areas. • European Social Fund Plus (ESF+): Supports equal access to employment and activation measures through local advisors, counsellors, and community-based agents. 	

Brief description	Introducing territorial development agents within the Lodzkie region
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National, regional and municipal budgets: To cover costs not financed by EU funds and ensure continuity of services beyond EU project cycles.
Expected impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater access to tailored support services, including business development, vocational guidance, and financial advice for underrepresented groups. • Better coordination of local actors, with stronger linkages between municipalities, employment services, educational institutions, NGOs, and employers. • Strengthened local employment and entrepreneurship amongst young people and women. • Expected increased uptake of EU and national funding, thanks to local agents facilitating access to grants, subsidies, and training programmes. • Enhanced local governance capacity, with municipalities more actively shaping inclusive, place-based strategies for the green transition. • More inclusive and effective implementation of the Just Transition Plan, anchored in real community needs and capacities.
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of territorial agents recruited. • The number of supported beneficiaries. • Perceived quality of local support services, measured through beneficiary feedback. • The number of women and young people re-entering the labour market • The number of businesses (or business plans) created, disaggregated by gender and age of founders. • Share of trained individuals who secure employment or launch a business within 6 months to 1 year of program completion. • Number of partnerships established between local authorities, schools, NGOs, employers, and labour offices. • Amount of EU and national funds accessed for employment, inclusion, or entrepreneurship projects.

Facilitating access to coworking spaces for women and young people

Context:

Despite the challenges women and young people face in finding fulfilling employment opportunities in the local market, there are also opportunities to unlock untapped potential. Rising digital connectivity and the expansion of remote work offer new avenues for employment that can be adapted to local needs. Flexible working arrangements can help balance work and other responsibilities, such as family or studies, and help women and young people stay in their jobs longer and advance in their careers. With the right incentives and infrastructure, local governments and

private sector actors can help foster inclusive economic participation. In this context, creating coworking spaces for remote work -in converted industrial areas- can provide a supportive environment tailored to the needs of women and young people. These spaces should offer good Internet access and appropriate office equipment, and, where relevant, include services such as on-site childcare to ensure accessibility for women with caregiving responsibilities.

Proposed measure #8:

Brief description	Creating coworking spaces for remote work, ideally in converted industrial areas, adapted to the needs of women and young people, with good Internet access and appropriate office equipment (e.g., adaptation to the needs of women could involve providing on-site childcare services
Target	Women and young people
Justification	Coworking hubs offer a flexible and inclusive work environment that can accelerate urban revitalisation and attract business investments in response to skill formation and concentration. ³⁵ For women, especially those with caregiving responsibilities, on-site childcare services and accessible scheduling can make the difference between economic inactivity and sustained participation in training or employment. For young people, coworking spaces offer a desk and a creative and collaborative atmosphere aligned with their aspirations for autonomy, innovation, and purpose-driven work. These spaces can also have integrated services to develop digital skills, provide career counselling and professional networking, and help women and young people explore novel remote work opportunities. Finally, these spaces can also reduce spatial and infrastructural inequalities, particularly in post-industrial or rural areas with limited access to the modern work environment, high-speed internet, and professional networks. Revising underused industrial sites also contributes to local regeneration and green reuse of space.
Steps to follow for implementation	Step 1. Locate physical infrastructure This step can be streamlined and integrated within measure #4 <i>creating dedicated dynamic spaces for young people in under-utilised urban spaces, managed by local youth organisations to provide courses, workshops and debates that encourage social engagement, volunteer initiatives, leadership and social/cultural skills</i> . Hence, this audit of potential physical spaces and viable locations for co-working hubs can be done simultaneously when planning measure #4. The indicators for this mapping should include big, underutilised infrastructure spaces, yet it should not be limited to physical assets. It must also include demographic and socioeconomic indicators. The goal is to identify sites where coworking interventions would have the highest social return on investment. The inclusion of spatial justice criteria, such as

³⁵ Vogl, T., & Akhavan, M. (2022). A systematic literature review of the effects of coworking spaces on the socio-cultural and economic conditions in peripheral and rural areas. *Journal of Property Investment & Finance*, 40(5), 465-478.

<p>Brief description</p>	<p>Creating coworking spaces for remote work, ideally in converted industrial areas, adapted to the needs of women and young people, with good Internet access and appropriate office equipment (e.g., adaptation to the needs of women could involve providing on-site childcare services</p>
	<p>proximity to public transport, childcare facilities, and educational institutions, will be essential to ensure accessibility for women and youth.</p> <p>Step 2. Engage with local stakeholders and grassroots groups. Since step 1 can be incorporated within measure #4, finding who will make a use of these spaces is the next action point. As already identified, the region has active grassroots organisations and a variety of associations such as the women organisations mentioned in measure 3 (such as the Village Housewives’ Association or the group Witches from Kolsko), or the youth organisations mentioned in measure 4 (Youth Council of Bełchatów, the Miejskie Centrum Kultur, the Bełchatowskie Społeczne Towarzystwo Oświatow, the European Foundation for Human Development, FERSO, or Equality Factory) that can be actively reached out. These groups can serve as both beneficiaries of these spaces and co-creators. Moreover, the organisation of participatory workshops (measure #3) can also serve to identify this “audience.”</p> <p>Step 3. Participatory design of inclusive coworking models</p> <p>The model should include differentiated zones that cater to diverse working styles and needs for both youth and women. Inputs gathered from a participatory design process engaging youth councils (also measure #6), women’s associations, vocational educators, and municipal representatives should be taken into consideration when building the architectural layout and service offerings. The co-creation process also serves to build local ownership and legitimacy, which are critical for long-term sustainability.</p> <p>Step 4. Construction of coworking spaces</p> <p>Building on the participatory insights, the third step entails the development of a modular coworking model that can be adapted to different spatial and demographic contexts within Łódzkie. Focus work, collaborative engagement and social support should be the three organising pillars to the construction and functionality of these spaces. Quiet pods can support focused work, while collaborative lounges and a digital skills studio can foster peer learning and innovation among youth. Childcare services should be integrated into the spatial layout, not as add-ons but as core components, allowing women to participate in training and employment without sacrificing caregiving duties. These services should be co-designed with local caregivers and educators.</p> <p>Moreover, access must reflect the realities of the target groups. Opening hours should accommodate early mornings and late evenings, and drop-in access should be available for those who cannot commit to full-time use.</p>

Brief description	Creating coworking spaces for remote work, ideally in converted industrial areas, adapted to the needs of women and young people, with good Internet access and appropriate office equipment (e.g., adaptation to the needs of women could involve providing on-site childcare services	
	<p>In addition, the physical infrastructure should also be as sustainable as possible. Post-industrial buildings should be retrofitted using green technologies such as solar panels, heat pumps, thermal and sound insulation, solar shielding against summer heat, surrounding trees and restored natural spaces and green roofs. This not only models environmental responsibility but also contributes to the symbolic and material revitalization of communities affected by coal phase-out.</p> <p>Step 5. Governance</p> <p>The management of this physical space could be first done by public workers to accommodate the scene, but this responsibility could be later transferred to the community inhabiting these spaces. This cooperative model empowers women and young people to take ownership of the initiative, fostering leadership, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement. Members of the cooperative would be trained in governance, budgeting, and space management, and would be responsible for running the co-working spaces efficiently and potentially organising events, curating services, and maintaining the physical infrastructure, linking this measure to measure #9.</p> <p>Additionally, integrating coworking into vocational training pathways could also be imagined, combining formal instruction with experiential learning, and thus linking it with measure #5. Vocational schools can partner with coworking hubs to offer dual programmes where students spend half the day in training and half the day in coworking environments (measure #6 and measure #10). This model exposes youth to real-world work cultures and fosters interdisciplinary collaboration. Training should focus on green jobs and remote-friendly roles, and stipends should be provided to incentivise participation. Childcare vouchers can support women attending these programmes.</p>	
Time horizon	Step 1. Locate physical infrastructure	Short term
	Step 2. Engage with local stakeholders and grassroots groups	Short term
	Step 3. Participatory design of inclusive coworking models	Medium term
	Step 4. Construction of coworking spaces	Medium term
	Step 5. Governance	Medium term

Brief description	Creating coworking spaces for remote work, ideally in converted industrial areas, adapted to the needs of women and young people, with good Internet access and appropriate office equipment (e.g., adaptation to the needs of women could involve providing on-site childcare services)
Stakeholders	<p>Lead stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Łódzkie Voivodeship Marshal's Office, <p>Supporting stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipality of Bełchatów (initial managers of the coworking hubs, ensuring compliance and setup), • Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, • Women's and youth associations, and community organisers, • Architects and urban designers, • Statistical offices and research institutes: to provide demographic and socioeconomic data, • Vocational educators, • Digital service providers, • Policy makers and economic strategists: to embed the initiative within regional development frameworks, • Care professionals, • Construction firms and retrofit specialists, • Evaluation and monitoring teams, • Cultural and creative collectives: contribute to placemaking and community programming
Funding sources	<p>While these spaces should collect fees to run themselves efficiently, they could also offer discounted memberships to e.g., women re-entering the workforce, thus promoting inclusive growth and offering incentives for new members to join and co-habit these spaces. Seed funding and technical assistance should be provided by regional development agencies and EU transition funds such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Regional Development Fund (ERDF): Supports urban regeneration and the adaptation of degraded or industrial areas for social, cultural, educational, and economic purposes, including coworking and digital spaces. • European Social Fund Plus (ESF+): Could finance inclusiveness measures, such as discounted memberships and childcare services for women re-entering the labour market. • Regional development agencies and municipal budgets: Can provide seed funding, technical assistance, and ensure that the cooperative running the space is embedded within local economic development strategies.
Expected impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced labour market participation among youth and women, particularly those with caregiving responsibilities, through the provision of on-site childcare, flexible scheduling, and accessible training environments.

Brief description	<p>Creating coworking spaces for remote work, ideally in converted industrial areas, adapted to the needs of women and young people, with good Internet access and appropriate office equipment (e.g., adaptation to the needs of women could involve providing on-site childcare services)</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased youth engagement and retention in the region by offering purpose-driven, collaborative workspaces that align with aspirations for autonomy, innovation, and digital careers. • Reduction of spatial and infrastructural inequalities by repurposing underused industrial sites and extending digital infrastructure into peripheral and post-coal areas. • Acceleration of urban and community revitalisation, as coworking hubs become catalysts for local regeneration, green retrofitting, and new economic activity. • Strengthening of vocational education pathways, with coworking spaces serving as hybrid environments for experiential learning, career counselling, and job matching. • Empowerment of local governance and civic participation, especially among youth, through cooperative management models that foster leadership and community ownership. • Improved digital literacy and remote work readiness, particularly for groups traditionally excluded from tech-driven employment, via integrated digital skills studios and training programmes. • Creation of inclusive economic ecosystems, where women and youth can co-habit professional spaces, access tailored services, and build networks that support long-term employment and entrepreneurship. • Demonstration of sustainable development practices, through the use of green technologies in retrofitting and the promotion of circular economy principles in space design and operation.
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilization rates of coworking spaces, including frequency of use, duration of stay, and type of activities (e.g., training, remote work, networking). • Enrolment and completion rates in vocational training programmes linked to coworking hubs, with tracking of transitions into employment or entrepreneurship. • Number of users accessing childcare services within coworking spaces, and satisfaction levels with the quality and accessibility of care. • Digital skills acquisition metrics, such as certifications earned, course completion rates, and self-reported improvements in digital confidence. • Retention and engagement of youth in cooperative governance, including participation in decision-making, event organization, and space management. • Geographic distribution of users, to assess whether the initiative is reaching peripheral and underserved areas.

Brief description	Creating coworking spaces for remote work, ideally in converted industrial areas, adapted to the needs of women and young people, with good Internet access and appropriate office equipment (e.g., adaptation to the needs of women could involve providing on-site childcare services)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental performance indicators of retrofitted spaces, such as energy efficiency gains, use of renewable energy, and reduction in carbon footprint. • User satisfaction and feedback, collected through surveys, interviews, and participatory evaluation methods. • Social inclusion metrics, such as diversity of users by socioeconomic background, disability status, and migration history.

4.5 Entrepreneurial support

Limited entrepreneurial interest and competence

Entrepreneurship is a vital yet underutilised pathway for socio-economic development in the Bełchatów region. It has the potential to generate self-employment, encourage innovation and strengthen community resilience, particularly in the context of transitioning away from fossil fuel dependency. However, structural and cultural barriers persist, limiting entrepreneurial activity among women and young people. These two groups face overlapping but distinct constraints.

Women's entrepreneurship in the region is limited in scale and sustainability. While some women are self-employed (often providing services such as beauty treatments, childcare, or running small retail outlets), these businesses frequently rely on short-term grants or one-off support. Once external funding ends, many of these businesses fold due to poor strategic and financial planning, a lack of tailored post-grant mentorship and low visibility in broader supply chains or consumer networks.

Stakeholder interviews confirm that many women lack exposure to entrepreneurial role models or peer support systems. A lack of confidence and business acumen are often cited as challenges, particularly among older women returning to the workforce. Furthermore, existing support structures, such as business incubators or accelerators, are frequently inaccessible or unappealing to women with caregiving responsibilities, reinforcing exclusion. There is also a cultural dimension: in traditionally male-dominated communities, women's business ventures are not always given social support or recognised as serious economic contributions, which can discourage entrepreneurial risk-taking further.

The region's youth often express interest in entrepreneurship to remain locally engaged while pursuing innovative careers. However, several barriers deter this pathway:

- Absence of trusted support ecosystems – there is limited access to incubators, youth-oriented business accelerators, or platforms where ideas can be tested;
- Lack of role models and mentorship – entrepreneurial success stories among peers are rarely visible, and intergenerational business mentoring is underdeveloped;

- Perceived bureaucracy and risk – young respondents report limited understanding of business regulations, tax systems, and financing mechanisms.

These gaps are exacerbated by the widespread belief that the local business environment does not reward innovation and that meaningful growth opportunities are only available in larger urban centres or overseas.

Despite these challenges, however, the Bełchatów region offers significant opportunities for inclusive entrepreneurship. Emerging sectors such as digital services, the circular economy, care-based enterprises, the creative industries, sustainable tourism and transportation are particularly well-suited to ventures led by women and young people. The green transition is creating new markets in areas such as recycling, land reclamation, energy efficiency consulting, and sustainability-related educational services³⁶. Furthermore, community-based services such as co-working hubs and mobile support units can improve access to entrepreneurial resources in smaller towns and rural areas. Finally, digital connectivity and gig platforms are reducing the barriers to entry for small-scale entrepreneurship, particularly for digitally fluent young people.

Proposed measure #9:

Brief description	Setting up incubators and accelerators tailored to women and young people, with significant emphasis on strategic planning, network building and mentorship. Women-tailored incubators should also include confidence-building elements (leadership skills, pitching and negotiation skills). While for young people, the incubators should be impact-oriented and place significant emphasis on global connectivity.
Target	Women and young people
Justification	<p>Setting up incubators and accelerators tailored to women and young people is a strategic and inclusive response to long-standing barriers these groups face in accessing entrepreneurial and economic opportunities. They not only unlock the potential of women and young people as job creators but also contribute to regional diversification and resilience by embedding entrepreneurship in communities often excluded from mainstream economic growth.</p> <p>Tailored incubators with confidence-building elements—such as leadership development, pitching, and negotiation training—can empower women to overcome self-doubt and societal expectations. Strategic planning and network-building help bring about formal, scalable businesses in high-value sectors. These incubators can encourage participation in non-traditional sectors, including green tech, digital services, or circular economy initiatives, but also innovative initiatives in more traditional sectors such as tourism and health/social care.</p> <p>Young people from the region possess high levels of education and digital literacy but struggle to translate these into stable employment due to a lack of experience, networks, and capital. Impact-oriented incubators strongly</p>

³⁶ Information based on scoping interviews that took place January – May 2025

Brief description	Setting up incubators and accelerators tailored to women and young people, with significant emphasis on strategic planning, network building and mentorship. Women-tailored incubators should also include confidence-building elements (leadership skills, pitching and negotiation skills). While for young people, the incubators should be impact-oriented and place significant emphasis on global connectivity.
	emphasise global connectivity and align with youth values such as sustainability, social innovation, and digital entrepreneurship. By offering mentorship, exposure to international markets, and startup support, these programmes create a realistic and motivating pathway for young people to launch ventures or join innovation-driven industries.
Steps to follow for implementation	<p>Step 1: Mapping and assessment of existing incubators</p> <p>The Bełchatów region already hosts functioning business incubators, including those located in Bełchatów, which operate under entities such as the Bełchatów-Kleszczów Industrial and Technological Park, Kleszczów and Zelów. As a starting point, the Marshal’s Office and the Voivodeship Labour Office should undertake a systematic review of the existing incubation landscape to assess current service offerings and infrastructural capacities, focused on integrating already-identified features. Rather than establishing entirely new structures, the intention is to strengthen and reorient existing institutions and programmes that are already in place (e.g. JTP Groundwork 2023 <i>“Ramowe zasady realizacji projektu (opracowane na podstawie „Programu wsparcia dla MŚP na Obszarze Transformacji (OT) w Województwie Łódzkim” w ramach Pomocy Technicznej JTP Groundwork)</i>).</p> <p>Step 2: Designing inclusive and targeted support</p> <p>Following the review, tailored support tracks should be co-designed to address specific barriers faced by women and young people. Focus group discussion and qualitative interviews in the Bełchatów region highlighted issues such as low self-confidence, lack of mentoring, childcare and insufficient peer networks. In response, incubator programmes should align with integrated actions already proposed in the Action Plan, establishing training programmes (measure 9), organising networking events with entrepreneurs and coaches (measure 5) and working in close cooperation with territorial development agents (measure 10) to improve outreach and engagement. In line with JTP Groundwork, programmes should consider using selection mechanisms that award additional points to applicants from underrepresented groups, as a way of actively encouraging their participation. Furthermore, regarding women, childcare responsibilities are a major constraint for many women; thus, the scope of eligible costs should explicitly include childcare expenses, as recognised in the Groundwork report’s guidance on the Incubation Path³⁷. For young people, incubators should place greater emphasis on expanding professional mentoring (including peer-to-peer models with young founders</p>

³⁷ In the context of the Groundwork report, the "Incubation Path" is described as a multi-stage program designed to support individuals with business ideas and young Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MŚP). It consists of two stages: Incubation and Acceleration.

Brief description	<p>Setting up incubators and accelerators tailored to women and young people, with significant emphasis on strategic planning, network building and mentorship. Women-tailored incubators should also include confidence-building elements (leadership skills, pitching and negotiation skills). While for young people, the incubators should be impact-oriented and place significant emphasis on global connectivity.</p>	
	<p>and strengthening networking opportunities (measure 5) and enhancing business advisory services in collaboration with territorial development agents (measure 10).</p> <p>Step 3: Piloting the tailored incubation offer The adapted incubation offer should be tested through a pilot phase implemented in at least one pre-selected incubator. This pilot would serve to operationalise the inclusive model in a real-world setting. Particular emphasis should be placed on ensuring the quality and accessibility of mentoring, the delivery of psychosocial support, and the practical management of supplementary services such as childcare compensation. Local entrepreneurs, professional networks and civil society actors should be actively involved in the pilot to support outreach, mentoring and networking opportunities. The pilot should be evaluated on both quantitative (e.g., participation rates, business outcomes) and qualitative indicators (e.g., participant confidence, satisfaction, engagement), to guide potential regional scaling.</p> <p>Step 4: Communication and outreach A persistent barrier identified in the Groundwork report and during the scoping phase of this project is the limited visibility of support programmes among underrepresented groups, despite the existence of relevant offers. To address this, a coordinated communication campaign should be launched by the Marshal's Office in partnership with the Regional Labour Office. The campaign should <i>build on the dedicated communication protocols and channels developed under Measure 2</i> and employ tailored outreach strategies to effectively reach women and young people, for example, by disseminating information through local schools, universities, municipal childcare centres, community organisations and targeted social media channels. A regional media presence (e.g. public transport advertisements, local press coverage) can further enhance reach, especially among those not actively engaged with formal employment services.</p>	
Time horizon	Step 1: Mapping and assessment of existing incubators	Short term
	Step 2: Designing inclusive and targeted support	Short term
	Step 3: Piloting the tailored incubation offer	Medium term
	Step 4: Communication and outreach	Medium term
Stakeholders	Lead stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marshal's Office of the Łódzkie Voivodeship, 	

Brief description	Setting up incubators and accelerators tailored to women and young people, with significant emphasis on strategic planning, network building and mentorship. Women-tailored incubators should also include confidence-building elements (leadership skills, pitching and negotiation skills). While for young people, the incubators should be impact-oriented and place significant emphasis on global connectivity.
	<p>With support from (depending on group focus):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing incubators, • Local Labour Offices (Powiatowy Urząd Pracy - Bełchatów, Piotrków Trybunalski, Radomsko), • Women’s Organisations (e.g. Rural Housewives' Circles, Yes to Bełchatów Association), • Private Sector and Employer Associations (e.g. Regional Chamber of Commerce in Bełchatów), • Youth Organisations and Schools (e.g. Youth City Council of Bełchatów, student unions)
Funding sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just Transition Fund (JTF) - Supports economic diversification and the inclusion of vulnerable groups in transition regions. [2] • European Regional Development Fund (ERDF): Supports SME growth, entrepreneurship, and start-up ecosystems through incubators, accelerators, mentoring, and networking services. • European Social Fund Plus (ESF+): Can support employment activation, entrepreneurship skills, and confidence-building activities for women and young people. • Municipal/regional budgets - Some costs, like local outreach or co-financing for EU-funded projects, may need to be shared by municipalities (e.g. Bełchatów city) • Private sector - Local employers and business associations (e.g. Regional Chamber of Commerce) can contribute to inclusive entrepreneurship efforts
Expected impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower economic inactivity rates among women and young people • Increased entrepreneurial participation among underrepresented groups • More inclusive and accessible incubation infrastructure • Higher retention of young people in the region
Monitoring	<p>The overall monitoring of incubators tailored to women and young people, including the piloted incubation pathway, should include key indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the number of applicants who are women or young people, • the number of participants supported at each stage of the programme, disaggregated by gender and age, • the number of new businesses created by these groups. <p>These figures should be compared against historical baseline data already held by the incubators to assess progress. In addition, we propose monitoring indicators that reflect the specific needs and barriers faced by our target groups. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the percentage of participants receiving childcare or other support services,

Brief description	Setting up incubators and accelerators tailored to women and young people, with significant emphasis on strategic planning, network building and mentorship. Women-tailored incubators should also include confidence-building elements (leadership skills, pitching and negotiation skills). While for young people, the incubators should be impact-oriented and place significant emphasis on global connectivity.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the number of coaching or mentoring sessions delivered, • and the number of targeted outreach activities conducted (e.g. school visits, local media campaigns). <p>Outcome-level monitoring should also capture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the percentage of participants reporting increased self-confidence or readiness to start a business, • the percentage of young participants who remain in the region 12 months after completing the programme, and stakeholder satisfaction with programme design and delivery.

Conext:

In Polish upper-secondary schools, there is a subject called *Podstawy przedsiębiorczości* (Fundamentals of Entrepreneurship), which has been part of the national curriculum since the 2002/2003 school year. Over that time, the curriculum has undergone two major reforms. According to a 2022 report by the Sejm’s Bureau of Research (*Biuro Analiz Sejmowych*), students generally express a positive attitude towards the subject, describing it as interesting and relevant.³⁸ However, many still struggle to fully understand the content. For example, 68% of surveyed students reported not knowing how to complete a basic PIT tax return, and as many as 71% stated they would not feel able to start their own business. A consultation report commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Science further highlighted limited openness among schools to collaborate with entrepreneurship practitioners. Only 33% of entrepreneurship teachers reported engaging in cooperation with business professionals or educational institutions. There is no formalised system that would allow for structured and standardised collaboration between schools and external mentors or entrepreneurs.³⁹

A new subject, *Biznes i Zarządzanie* (Business and Management), will replace *Podstawy przedsiębiorczości* in upper-secondary schools starting 1 September 2023. From 2027, students can also choose this subject as part of their final Matura examination.⁴⁰ The new curriculum represents a shift towards a more practical, skills-based, student-centred approach. It emphasises real-world application, active learning, and developing key competencies such as critical thinking, teamwork, and an entrepreneurial mindset.⁴¹

³⁸ Bień, I. (2022). Nauczanie przedsiębiorczości w polskich szkołach średnich – koncepcja, realizacja, rekomendacje. *Studia BAS*, 2(70), 147–163. <https://doi.org/10.31268/StudiaBAS.2022.16>

³⁹ Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki, Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych, & GovTech Polska. (n.d.). *Biznes i zarządzanie: Reforma podstaw przedsiębiorczości. Raport z konsultacji*. <https://www.gov.pl/web/biz/raport-z-konsultacji2>

⁴⁰ Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki. (2022). *Biznes i zarządzanie – nowy przedmiot w szkołach ponadpodstawowych od 1 września 2023 r.* Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki. <https://www.gov.pl/web/edukacja-i-nauka/biznes-i-zarzadzanie-nowy-przedmiot-w-szkolach>

⁴¹ Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki, Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych, & GovTech Polska. (n.d.). *Biznes i zarządzanie: Reforma podstaw przedsiębiorczości. Raport z konsultacji*. <https://www.gov.pl/web/biz/raport-z-konsultacji2>

Proposed measure #10:

<p>Brief description</p>	<p>Setting up start-up labs in high schools run by students in schools, supervised by business mentors from the region. Students learn by doing – with small cash grants to launch real microenterprises⁴² within a semester</p>
<p>Target</p>	<p>Young people</p>
<p>Justification</p>	<p>This measure has the potential to cultivate a new generation of empowered, locally anchored, and forward-looking young people, positioning them as active contributors to the region’s economic renewal and resilience. It promotes an entrepreneurial mindset early. By enabling students to “learn by doing,” this measure instils critical entrepreneurial skills, such as problem-solving, teamwork, budgeting, and risk-taking, at a formative age. Exposure to real-world business challenges through launching microenterprises helps demystify entrepreneurship and builds confidence and self-efficacy. While entrepreneurship-related subjects such as <i>Podstawy przedsiębiorczości</i> or the new <i>Biznes i Zarządzanie</i> curriculum offer a foundation for developing such skills, the regional context calls for more extensive and better coordinated efforts to truly activate local youth. Involving local business mentors ensures students are not working in isolation but are embedded in the regional economic fabric. This strengthens school-community ties and makes the idea of staying and building a future in the region more tangible, countering brain drain and rural outmigration. Even if students do not become entrepreneurs, the skills gained—initiative, communication, adaptability, and digital literacy – are highly valued in modern labour markets, especially in sectors such as the circular economy, digital services, and tourism.</p>
<p>Steps to follow for implementation</p>	<p>Step 1: Introducing incubators into the classroom The first step involves inviting representatives from local incubators to participate in <i>Biznes i Zarządzanie</i> lessons at selected schools across the Bełchatów region. These one-off visits aim to familiarise students with real entrepreneurial environments and introduce the idea of turning their classroom learning into real-world projects. Incubator staff would present the support they offer, introducing the concept of start-ups, and encourage participation in extracurricular activities linked to the Start-up Lab. In some cases, the subject teacher themselves may take on this introductory role in collaboration with the incubator representatives.</p> <p>Step 2: Launching extracurricular start-up labs</p>

⁴² The “microenterprises” envisioned here should be understood as short-term, small-scale learning projects rather than fully competitive businesses. Their purpose is to give students hands-on experience with entrepreneurship (idea development, teamwork, budgeting, marketing) in a safe environment.

Brief description	Setting up start-up labs in high schools run by students in schools, supervised by business mentors from the region. Students learn by doing – with small cash grants to launch real microenterprises⁴² within a semester	
	<p>Building on initial engagement, schools would launch extracurricular Start-up Labs for interested students. These labs would allow young people to work in teams to develop their own business ideas in a structured and supportive environment. Activities could include problem-solving challenges, basic budgeting, product design, and digital marketing simulations, which are all closely aligned with the competencies promoted in the <i>Biznes i Zarządzanie</i> curriculum.⁴³ Sessions may be led by the school’s teacher or co-facilitated by incubator representatives, with flexibility to adapt to school capacity. The aim is to enable students to “learn by doing” while providing ongoing access to expert guidance.</p> <p>Step 3: Building a local network of business mentors In parallel, the Marshal’s Office, incubators, and schools will jointly contact the local private sector to establish a pool of business mentors willing to engage with students. These mentors (entrepreneurs, SME owners, or innovation professionals) will visit schools periodically to provide one-on-one or group mentoring, helping students develop their ideas, refine their business plans, and build confidence in public presentations.</p> <p>Step 4: Public pitch and award of financial grants The final phase will culminate in a public event at which student teams present their business plans to a review panel composed of local business leaders, incubator representatives, the <i>Biznes i Zarządzanie</i> teacher, and a representative from the Marshal’s Office. Projects will be assessed based on innovation, feasibility, and presentation quality. Selected teams will receive small financial awards to test or launch their idea in practice.</p>	
Time horizon	Step 1: Introducing incubators into the classroom	Short term
	Step 2: Launching extracurricular start-up labs	Short term
	Step 3: Building a local network of business mentors	Medium term
	Step 4: Public pitch and award of financial grants	Medium term
Stakeholders	<p>Lead Stakeholder:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marshal’s Office of the Łódzkie Voivodeship, <p>With support from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local business incubators (potential leader of the call for project submission under JTF funding), 	

⁴³ Ministerstwo Edukacji i Nauki, Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych, & GovTech Polska. (n.d.). *Biznes i zarządzanie: Reforma podstaw przedsiębiorczości. Raport z konsultacji*. <https://www.gov.pl/web/biz/raport-z-konsultacji2>

Brief description	Setting up start-up labs in high schools run by students in schools, supervised by business mentors from the region. Students learn by doing – with small cash grants to launch real microenterprises⁴² within a semester
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upper-secondary schools (potential leader of the call for project submission under JTF funding), • Regional labour office, • Business mentors
Funding sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just Transition Fund (JTF) - Supports economic diversification and the inclusion of vulnerable groups in transition regions. • European Social Fund Plus (ESF+): Supports the alignment of education and training with labour market needs, development of entrepreneurial skills, and cooperation between schools and businesses • Municipal/regional budgets
Expected impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved school-to-business ecosystem linkages • Strengthened entrepreneurial skills and mindset among upper-secondary school students • Increased confidence and motivation among young people • Higher retention of young people in the region
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of schools participating in the Start-up Lab initiative • Number of students participating in extracurricular Start-up Labs • Number of sessions delivered by incubators or mentors • Number of private-sector mentors engaged • Number of student business plans submitted • Number of pitch events held

The feasibility of this measure will need to be further analysed by beneficiaries and adapted to local conditions. In particular, the number of potential business mentors in the region may be lower than the number of high schools, which could limit large-scale implementation. Therefore, the model should be tailored according to (i) the number of schools willing to participate, (ii) the number of students interested, and (iii) the availability of mentors. Depending on these factors, start-up labs could be integrated either into the *Biznes i Zarządzanie* subject or offered as extracurricular activities, as initially proposed.

4.6 Expanding sustainable mobility options

Sustainable and inclusive mobility is essential for equitable regional development. In the Łódź Voivodeship (the Łódź region), however, inadequate public transport systems and a lack of spatial integration between residential areas and job centres pose significant barriers to labour market participation, particularly for young people, women and older adults in smaller towns and rural areas.

Across the region, mobility infrastructure is fragmented and often car-dependent. Many smaller towns and outlying areas lack reliable public transport connections to industrial zones, training centres and regional urban hubs such as Łódź and Bełchatów. Rail access is limited or poorly integrated into local

neighbourhoods. Even where stations exist, they are often distant from residential areas and poorly connected to local transport networks. While bus networks are more widely distributed, their coverage, scheduling and infrastructure quality vary significantly across municipalities.

As part of this project, consultations with young individuals consistently identified poor transport as a major obstacle to accessing jobs and internships. As many young people do not own a car, they must rely on unreliable or infrequent public transport to access education and employment opportunities. The Harnessing Talent study also highlighted transport limitations as a factor contributing to young people migration, as many students view the region as poorly connected and difficult to navigate without a car. In the Harnessing Talent survey, young people attending higher education institutions identified the availability of transportation options as a top priority for improvement in the region (29% of the respondents), ranking it even above access to professional opportunities (selected by 11% of the respondents). This highlights the critical role that reliable transport plays in enabling their economic activation and fostering a sense of social inclusion and belonging that could contribute to their locational decisions in the future.

Women, particularly those in caregiving roles or living in peri-urban or rural communities, face additional transport challenges. A lack of flexible, accessible transport options limits their ability to attend training, participate in the labour market or access healthcare and social services. These barriers are particularly acute for women who cannot drive or lack access to a household vehicle.

The ageing population, which is growing in many parts of the region, also experiences mobility exclusion. This group is often overlooked in transport planning, and poor walkability or a lack of age-appropriate services can lead to social isolation and reduced autonomy. The public authorities from the region have already taken some measures to improve the available public transportation system, but further measures could complement such efforts, with the potential to create additional entrepreneurial and employment opportunities, especially for young people.

Proposed measure #11:

Brief description	Promoting sustainable transportation modes, such as carpooling and ridesharing, and on-demand transport, through a Mobility as a Service platform.
Target	Women and young people
Justification	Carpooling, ridesharing, and on-demand services can bridge existing gaps in public transportation by offering flexible, cost-effective transport options. These modes enhance accessibility to major transit hubs by solving the last-mile problem, enabling more people to connect with larger transportation networks. Carpooling and ridesharing split transportation costs among users, making travel more affordable, especially for those without access to a personal vehicle. On-demand transport options can have higher costs but can also play an essential role in enabling women and young people to access employment opportunities that are otherwise unreachable via public transit, and to participate in social, educational, and cultural life. Similarly, community-based transport initiatives (e.g., volunteer driver programmes, community

Brief description	Promoting sustainable transportation modes, such as carpooling and ridesharing, and on-demand transport, through a Mobility as a Service platform.
	<p>shuttles) can also foster trust, interdependence, and social interaction among residents.</p> <p>Encouraging such options is possible through the concept of Mobility as a Service (MaaS)⁴⁴, which promotes the combination of different transport services into one single mobile platform that facilitates seamless multimodal travel. Apps and algorithms can optimise routes, match riders efficiently, and provide real-time updates, making shared modes convenient and reliable. The required digital technology can also encourage local entrepreneurship, generate employment and promote innovation within the region.</p>
Steps to follow for implementation	<p>Step 1: Set up the working arrangements with local mobility service providers</p> <p>An effective governance framework needs to be set up to allow for a successful integration of the different mobility services. Arrangements need to be made to set in motion the cooperation with public-private transport operators, commercial transport service providers (e.g. companies operating taxis, car-sharing platforms, bike and scooter sharing platforms, parking managers) and the operator of the eventual app or platform which will combine all these services. The service could include volunteers providing hitch-hiking⁴⁵.</p> <p>The required data from all different service providers needs to be made available and following a clear and harmonised set of rules and regulations. It is important to create agreement on the passenger rights, accessibility of information, etc. The European system of Mobility Data Spaces⁴⁶ can facilitate the voluntary, sovereign, and secure sharing of data to enable new public and commercial business models and services while respecting usage control and privacy for data owners.</p> <p>Step 2: Create a MaaS app and online platform for the city of Bełchatów as a pilot</p> <p>The online platform and app should gather all the mobility information in Bełchatów, including a route planner, online payments and real-time data for public transport. Additionally, all underlying systems and services should be integrated, including branding, communication, passenger information, interoperability of the ticketing system, mobility offers and customer relations. Inspiration can be drawn from the following platforms: Floya in Brussels⁴⁷</p>

⁴⁴ https://transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/2476beda-4ffd-4608-89f3-973013c47f60_en?filename=EGUM_Recommendations_public_transport-shared%20mobility.pdf

⁴⁵ As proposed in France by the Rezo Pouce service (<https://www.mobicoop.fr/Rezo-Pouce>) of the ride-sharing cooperative Mobicoop (<https://www.mobicoop.fr/>).

⁴⁶ <https://www.eiturbanmobility.eu/knowledge-hub/unlocking-the-future-of-mobility-with-european-data-spaces-2/>

⁴⁷ <https://floya.brussels/>

Brief description	Promoting sustainable transportation modes, such as carpooling and ridesharing, and on-demand transport, through a Mobility as a Service platform.	
	<p>combining public transport, bikes, e-bikes, taxis, car sharing and steps; and DiviaMobilité⁴⁸ in Dijon combining public transport, bikes, parking and car sharing.</p> <p>A private contractor should be hired to develop the app and online platform, unless the relevant (semi-)public organisations have the relevant skills in-house. This IT-specialist should develop the app according to the specifications given by the public transport authorities. Once the app has been developed and approved, it should be rolled out in a smaller area as a pilot. For a successful roll-out, the app developer will still be needed but in the longer term, the public transport authority or one of the key public transport operators can take on the operations of the app.</p> <p>Careful monitoring of the workings of the app will be crucial in this first phase. Any issues encountered from the perspective of the consumers, IT developers, transport service providers, etc. need to be rigorously logged and mitigation measures need to be taken.</p> <p>Step 3: Expand the app and online platform to the whole Łódź region</p> <p>The pilot serves as a trial period to test the app/online platform and fix any issues. Once the operations and interface have been optimised, the scope of the app needs to be expanded to the whole Bełchatów region.</p> <p>For areas which are less densely populated, there is usually more limited access to traditional public transport. Here, a special focus should be given to promoting on-demand transport services such as on-demand buses and carsharing (e.g. BlaBlaCar). As an example, the TPG Flex⁴⁹ initiative in Switzerland introduces on-demand bus services via an app where residents can book rides.</p>	
Time horizon	Step 1: Set up the working arrangements with local mobility service providers	Short term
	Step 2: Create a MaaS app and online platform for the city of Bełchatów as a pilot	Short term
	Step 3: Expand the app and online platform to the other communes in the Bełchatów area	Medium term
Stakeholders	<p>Leading stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Public Transport Authorities, <p>With the support of:</p>	

⁴⁸ <https://www.divia.fr/bus-tram>

⁴⁹ <https://www.tpg.ch/en/travel/more-lines/tpgflex>

Brief description	Promoting sustainable transportation modes, such as carpooling and ridesharing, and on-demand transport, through a Mobility as a Service platform.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Transport Operators, • Shared Mobility Providers, • Shared Mobility Supply Industry, • IT developer
Funding sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Regional Development Fund (ERDF): Supports the transition to sustainable, smart mobility by developing innovative, low-emission transport services, including carpooling, ridesharing, and on-demand transport. • Just Transition Fund (JTF): Can provide pilot financing and operational infrastructure in transition areas, especially where sustainable mobility is tied to economic diversification. • Social Climate Fund (SCF): As outlined in Poland’s draft Social Climate Plan, SCF will support regional investments in “on-demand transport” in areas at risk of transport poverty under ETS2. Eligible costs include organising on-demand transport, purchasing zero- and low-emission vehicles, developing IT systems, and building charging/refuelling infrastructure. • National, regional and municipal budgets: To cover costs not financed by EU funds and ensure long-term service sustainability.
Expected impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The effective, public-value driven governance of digital integration services, can make the public transport and sustainable mobility sector more attractive and competitive. • This can encourage private players to step into the market of transport services, since they will have a guarantee that their services can easily be found and used by customers. This could contribute to enhanced entrepreneurship in the region. • The development of the app will require an IT developer and dedicated personnel to maintain and operate it. This can contribute to the attractiveness of the IT-sector in the region. • Increasing the visibility and accessibility of a diverse set of transport options. This could also reduce the reliance on private cars and contribute to a more sustainable urban environment.
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of users of the app/online platform • Number of payments done through the app • Problem register and mitigation measures • Cooperation agreements with transport service providers – number of service providers who are part of the platform

Proposed measure #12:

Brief description	Provide transportation vouchers for young people that seek employment within the region upon graduation and to women who reintegrate into the labour market after longer periods of inactivity.
Target	Women and young people
Justification	<p>Since alternative transportation modes can carry costs, providing vouchers to cover transportation costs would also be critical to enable young people and inactive women to overcome mobility barriers. Vouchers can be explicitly targeted for eco-friendly options, carpool credits, shared e-bikes, or community shuttles, rather than fuel or car-related expenses. They would significantly improve the mobility autonomy of women and young people, enabling them to use modern and sustainable transportation options and take up employment, training, or internships.</p> <p>In the French region Ile-de-France⁵⁰, a variety of tickets and fares exist to suit different needs of target groups. For instance, young people can get specific tickets: Imagine R junior (under 11), pupil and student ticket and Navigo weekend youth fare. There are also specific social fares which include free travel vouchers for young people who are in occupational integration programmes.</p> <p>Compared to large-scale infrastructure investments, vouchers can be a cost-effective and adaptive option, with spillover effects on entrepreneurship, innovation and employment in the region. However, a condition for the proper functioning of the voucher system is to have a large enough offer of public transport and other sustainable transport options. During the consultations with institutional stakeholders, they have expressed their plans to improve this through other initiatives.</p>
Steps to follow for implementation	<p>Step 1: Identify the groups who would be eligible for receiving transport vouchers</p> <p>The aim of this measure is to facilitate the access to and usage of more sustainable transport options for job seekers. Therefore, first the groups who are eligible for receiving transport vouchers need to be determined. The targets in light of the scope of this action plan are the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people who have graduated recently from school and are looking for a job • Women who have been inactive and want to return to work, thus actively searching for jobs <p>To be eligible, the job seekers should be officially registered as unemployed or as involuntarily working part-time at the governmental labour agency and</p>

⁵⁰ https://transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/3b3e1a94-3789-4a12-95ef-4e2c431c496b_en?filename=EGUM_PT_and_SM-Topic1.pdf

Brief description	Provide transportation vouchers for young people that seek employment within the region upon graduation and to women who reintegrate into the labour market after longer periods of inactivity.
	<p>need to be actively looking for a job. The second condition can be proven by being registered as a job seeker at the local employment agency.</p> <p>Step 2: Develop the transport voucher programme</p> <p>The second step consist of determining when the vouchers can be used and for which transport services. Transportation could be restricted to sustainable mobility types such as trains, buses, shared bicycles, on-demand transport, etc. Job seekers should be encouraged to use the vouchers to travel to and from their job interview or a relevant training or examination provided by a recognised entity. This can also include job interviews at temporary employment agencies or recruitment and selection agencies when they are invited for a specific vacancy or employer. Furthermore, job seekers need to have evidence of their presence at the relevant appointment.</p> <p>The easiest way of setting up the transport voucher system is by developing certificates which can be given by employers or employment agencies to the job seekers. For youth, it can be examined whether handing out the vouchers could be done through schools or youth-related activities and spaces. In Belgium⁵¹, job seekers can use the certificates on the train as a valid replacement for a ticket, as long as they are signed by the agencies who support job seekers and who have a cooperation with the train operator. The certificate can only be used on a specific date and for a specific route to get to the job interview. This could be replicated in Łódźkie.</p> <p>Potentially, the voucher system for the Łódź Voivodeship can also be integrated into the MaaS app created as a part of measure 16. Job counsellors could approve the transportation vouchers for job seekers in the app/platform which would alleviate the administrative burden significantly.</p> <p>Step 3: Implement the transport voucher programme for job seekers</p> <p>In South Africa, the Jobseeker Travel Voucher Programme (JTVP)⁵² is implemented by the Mobility Department as part of the Western Cape Government’s Growth 4 Jobs Strategy. The JTVP aims to remove transport costs as a barrier to seeking employment by providing free travel vouchers to job seekers. They closely monitor the impact of the programme, which should also be done in Łódźkie. In 2025, the JTVP had 160 partner employers and over 6 000 registered job seekers, providing over 8 300 free trips. They surveyed job seekers and about 40% who used their voucher are now employed, and more than 90% reported they found the voucher beneficial. In the Western Cape province, the voucher is also reaching groups most affected by unemployment,</p>

⁵¹ <https://www.belgiantrain.be/en/tickets-and-railcards/overview-discount/jobseekers>

⁵² <https://www.wcpp.gov.za/?q=node/19391>

Brief description	Provide transportation vouchers for young people that seek employment within the region upon graduation and to women who reintegrate into the labour market after longer periods of inactivity.	
	<p>with youth and women comprising the majority of beneficiaries at 86% and 81%, respectively.</p> <p>To ensure this successful uptake of the programme in Łódzkie, a dissemination campaign targeted to employment agencies and the job seekers themselves is necessary. This can be done through communication campaigns, as established in measure #2. Specific channels for this measure could be posters in job agency offices, social media, word-to-mouth, informative webinars, etc.</p> <p>The transport service providers should receive yearly funding from the government to compensate for the loss in income due to allowing certain passengers free transport. This should be done through direct agreements between the transport companies and the government.</p>	
Time horizon	Step 1: Identify the groups who would be eligible for receiving transport vouchers	Short term
	Step 2: Develop the transport voucher programme	Short term
	Step 3: Implement the transport voucher programme for job seekers	Short term
Stakeholders	<p>Leading stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Infrastructure of the the Marshal’s Office, • Poviatic Labour Office, <p>Others:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment agencies and private companies (distribute and approve the vouchers), • Local transport service providers • Important stakeholders (set up agreements with) 	
Funding sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • European Social Fund Plus (ESF+): Supports equal access to employment and activation measures, including the removal of mobility barriers for disadvantaged groups through instruments such as transport vouchers. • Just Transition Fund (JTF): Can support pilot programmes and operational infrastructure in transition areas where labour mobility is a barrier to economic diversification. • Social Climate Fund (SCF): As proposed in Poland’s draft Social Climate Plan, SCF may co-finance mobility measures in regions at risk of transport poverty linked to ETS2, complementing voucher schemes with broader on-demand transport investments. • National, regional and municipal budgets: To cover costs not eligible under EU funds and to ensure continuity of support once EU financing ends. 	

Brief description	Provide transportation vouchers for young people that seek employment within the region upon graduation and to women who reintegrate into the labour market after longer periods of inactivity.
Expected impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased usage of public transportation and sustainable transport modes by young people and women. • Perceived improvement in accessibility of job opportunities by users of the voucher system, since they can use certain transport modes for free. • Decrease in administrative burden, by integration of the voucher system into the MaaS app (measure 16).
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of users of the transport voucher system • Percentage of job seekers who indicate that the transport vouchers helped to get them a job (self-assessment) • Number of transport service providers who take part in the programme • Number of employers and employment agencies who give out the vouchers to job seekers

5. Next steps

Suggested Prioritisation and Implementation Sequence

The Action Plan should be implemented in a sequential manner, taking into account the priority, effectiveness, and potential synergies among the proposed measures. The sequential approach can be structured into three main phases, each building on the foundations established by the previous one. By progressing through these phases in order, the roadmap ensures that early actions create the necessary environment and engagement, while subsequent measures leverage these foundations to deliver targeted skills, support, and access for the population groups involved.

Phase 1: Establishing an Enabling and Engaging Environment

Actions #1–#4 and #10 are high priority, as they lay the groundwork for all subsequent measures by creating essential data, communication, and engagement structures. These actions also foster interest and trust—critical for activating target groups, though this process may require time. Implementation is recommended within the next year.

#1: Develop indicators to monitor integration

Why? Enables evidence-based planning and tracking of progress.

Synergy: Informs all other actions by identifying gaps and measuring impact.

#2: Create tailored communication protocols

Why? Ensures target groups are aware of opportunities and support.

Synergy: Boosts uptake of training, events, and support measures.

#3: Organise inspirational events

Why? Sparks motivation and connects inactive individuals with role models.

Synergy: Feeds into training, entrepreneurship, and employment support.

#4: Create youth-led dynamic spaces

Why? Provides physical and social infrastructure for youth engagement.

Synergy: Supports events, training, and entrepreneurial activities.

#10: Set up student-run startup labs

Why? Instils entrepreneurial mindset and practical skills in youth.

Synergy: Links schools, mentors, and local business networks.

Phase 2: Skills & Capacity Building

Preparatory work can begin early, but actions #5–#6 should be developed once the targeted groups are more motivated and interested in local economic opportunities—ideally in parallel with regional economic diversification. These actions are of medium priority and recommended for implementation over 2026–2027.

#5: Enhance collaboration between education/training and industry

Why? Aligns skills with market needs, especially in growth sectors.

Synergy: Increases effectiveness of job placement and entrepreneurial support.

#6: Offer basic IT and vocational training

Why? Tackles digital and vocational skill gaps, especially for women.

Synergy: Prepares participants for employment, entrepreneurship, and remote work.

Phase 3: Labour Market Integration and Entrepreneurial Support

Actions in this phase should commence once the targeted population groups are both motivated and equipped with relevant skills—likely starting in 2027. Implementation may also require additional financial resources, allowing time to secure necessary support before launch.

#7: Introduce territorial development agents

Why? Coordinates local strategies and connects individuals to opportunities.

Synergy: Facilitates implementation of training, entrepreneurship, and mobility measures.

#8: Establish coworking spaces

Why? Offers flexible work environments, especially for women and youth.

Synergy: Supports remote work, training, and entrepreneurial activities.

#9: Launch incubators and accelerators

Why? Provides tailored support for business creation and growth.

Synergy: Connects with training, coworking spaces, and networking events.

Parallel implementation: Mobility & Access Actions

Access is a cross-cutting barrier and enabler for all actions. Actions #11 and #12 should be implemented in parallel with the other measures as they will ensure access to opportunities, training and employment.

#11: Promote sustainable transportation modes

Why? Introduces new transport options, reducing access barriers.

Synergy: Supports participation in training, employment, and events.

#12: Provide transport vouchers

Why? Directly addresses mobility barriers for job seekers and women returning to work.

Synergy: Increases uptake of all other measures.

Figure 3 Sequential Implementation Approach

	Year 1						Year 2						Year 3						Year 4						
	Month 1-2	Month 3-4	Month 4-6	Month 7-8	Month 9-10	Month 11-12	Month 13-14	Month 15-16	Month 17-18	Month 19-20	Month 21-22	Month 23-24	Month 25-26	Month 27-28	Month 29-30	Month 31-32	Month 33-34	Month 35-36	Month 37-38	Month 39-40	Month 41-42	Month 43-44	Month 45-46	Month 47-48	
#1 Develop indicators to monitor the socio-economic integration of women and young people	█																								
#2 Create tailored communication protocols	█																								
#3 Organise inspirational events with professionals and entrepreneurs	█																								
#4 Create youth-led dynamic spaces in underutilised urban areas.	█																								
#10 Set up student-run startup labs in high schools.	█																								
#5 Enhancing collaboration between education and training programmes, and industry associations							█																		
#6 Offer basic IT and vocational training in accessible community spaces.							█																		
#7 Introduce territorial development agents to coordinate local employment strategies and support.													█												
#8 Establish coworking spaces with childcare and digital access.													█												
#9 Launch incubators and accelerators tailored to women and youth													█												
#11 Promoting sustainable transportation modes through a Mobility as a Service platform	█																								
#12 Provide transport vouchers for young job seekers and women re-entering the workforce	█																								
Phase 1: Enabling Environment	█																								
Phase 2: Skills & Capacity Building		█																							
Phase 3: Labour Market Integration & Entrepreneurial Spirit			█																						
Parallel Implementation																									

Overall, the proposed list of measures to support the socio-economic activation of women and young people is designed to be mutually reinforcing and synergistic across multiple dimensions. By addressing key areas such as information collection, governance, education and training, entrepreneurship, motivation and support for integration, as well as sustainable transport, the measures collectively tackle structural, institutional and practical barriers to inclusion. For example, improved data collection and inclusive governance enhance the design of effective training and other support measures tailored to the employment and entrepreneurship of women; while transport and flexible service delivery reduce access constraints, they also provide new areas for entrepreneurship and employment, especially for young people. The table below provides a map of where consultants identified synergies across the measures, with the potential to enhance each other's effectiveness or efficiency. Together, these interconnected interventions create an enabling environment that promotes active participation in the local economy, fosters empowerment, and builds resilient pathways for long-term inclusion.

Table 1: Map of potential synergies and overlaps across the proposed measures

	#1 Develop indicators to monitor the socio-economic integration of women and young people	#2 Create tailored communication protocols	#3 Organise inspirational events with professionals and entrepreneurs	#4 Create youth-led dynamic spaces in underutilised urban areas.	#5 Enhancing collaboration between education and training programmes, and industry associations	#6 Offer basic IT and vocational training in accessible community spaces.	#7 Introduce territorial development agents to coordinate local employment strategies and support.	#8 Establish coworking spaces with childcare and digital access.	#9 Launch incubators and accelerators tailored to women and youth	#10 Set up student-run startup labs in high schools.	#11 Promoting sustainable transportation modes through a Mobility as a Service platform	#12 . Provide transport vouchers for young job seekers and women re-entering the workforce
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