



Integrated Action Plan

“C4TALENT-Creating a better environment for start-ups and businesses to attract and retain talent”

Summary

City of Rzeszów

URBACT

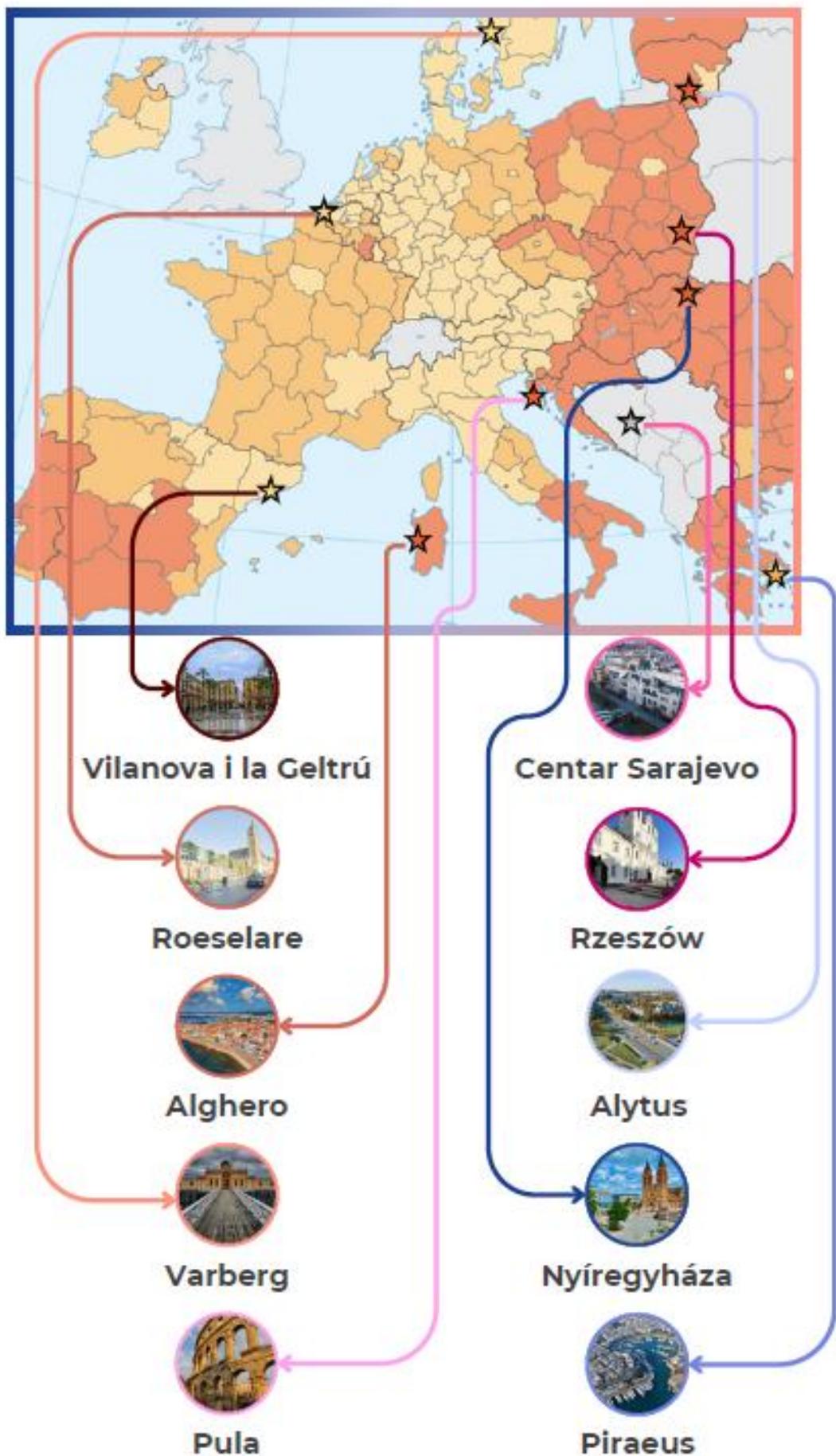


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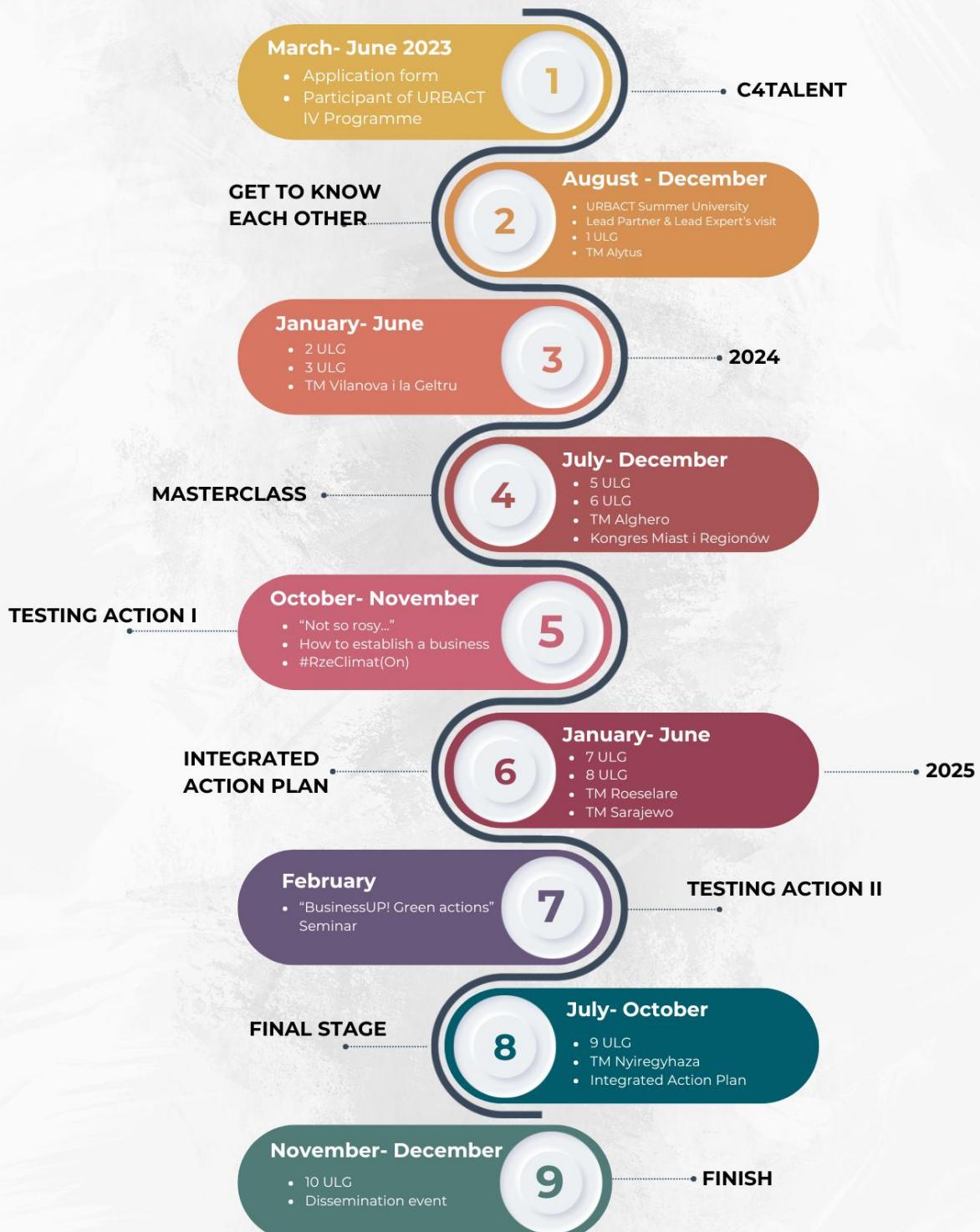


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TIMELINE



Introduction

URBACT is a **European Territorial Cooperation Program** that helps cities work together and develop integrated, sustainable solutions for urban challenges. It is based on the belief that cities are on the “front line” of Europe’s most pressing problems, from climate change and demographic shifts to digital transformation, but at the same time, due to their diversity, creativity, and innovation potential, they also hold the key to numerous opportunities.

The project "**C4TALENT - Creating a better environment for startups and businesses to attract and retain talent**", co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund and IPA under the URBACT IV 2021-2027 Program, focuses on **attracting and retaining** talent as the overarching theme, with particular emphasis on **entrepreneurship and the development of the startup ecosystem** as key factors in increasing the attractiveness of smaller cities for talent.

The network examined three closely interconnected areas:

- **entrepreneurship ecosystems** – how cities can create conducive conditions for the establishment and growth of local businesses;
- **attracting and retaining talent** – how cities can better understand and respond to the factors influencing people's decisions to stay, return, or relocate;
- **building a place brand for talent** – how cities can communicate their authentic identity and strengths to attract residents, investors, and professionals.

Instead of treating these areas separately, **C4TALENT** combines them into a single integrated approach: a dynamic startup environment supports the development of local talent; an attractive, inclusive city encourages people to stay; a strong, authentic sense of place provides a solid strategic framework for local development and communication activities.

City context

Rzeszów is a dynamically developing city located in southeastern Poland, serving as the capital of the Subcarpathian Voivodeship. Due to its geographical location, it constitutes an **important transportation hub** – significant road and rail routes intersect here, and it is also home to **Rzeszów-Jasionka Airport**, which offers a range of domestic and international connections. The city covers an area of just over **129 km²**, and **at the end of 2024 it officially had 196,636 residents¹**.

The **A4 motorway**, which connects Western Europe with Ukraine, passes through Rzeszów, as well as the **S19 expressway**, which is the national section of the international

¹ Source: www.erzeszow.pl, tab: City of Rzeszów/ Statistical data (as of 29.12.2025)

Via Carpatia route. Along the northern border of the city stretches the international **E30** railway line.

The city is also a **significant academic center**, home to several higher education institutions, including: Rzeszów University of Technology, the University of Rzeszów, and the University of Information Technology and Management. **Rzeszów** is also developing its scientific and research facilities and **fostering innovation**—particularly in the aviation, IT, and high-tech sectors.



Graphic 1: Road map, source: Destination Rzeszów - Colliers Report EN (Spring 2022)

Methodology

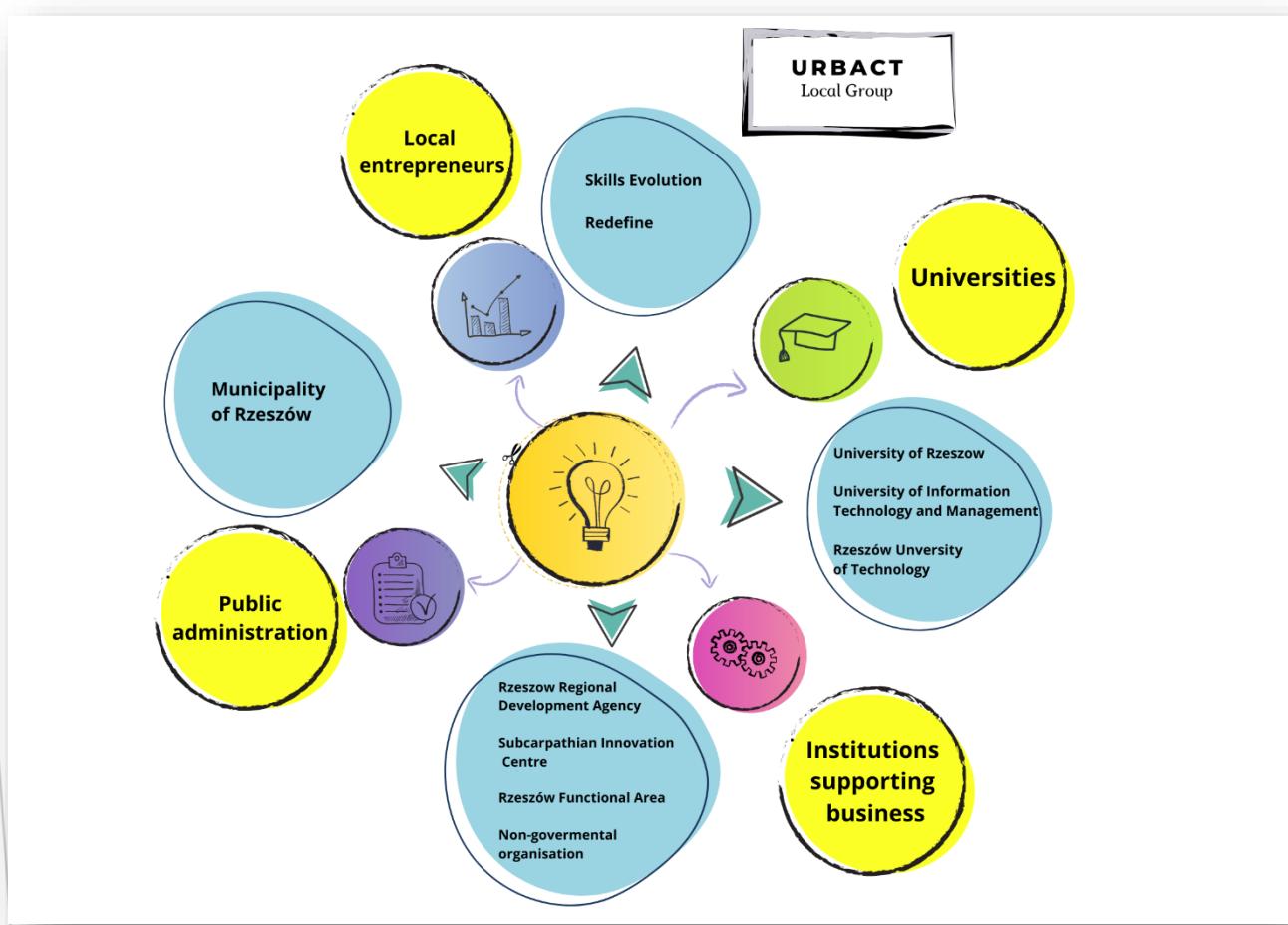
The project methodology is based on the **participatory and integrated approach** of the URBACT Program, utilizing **cross-sector collaboration**, working with local stakeholders, and **jointly developing solutions** through workshops, working meetings, and pilot actions.

Each partner city participating in the **C4TALENT** project established a **URBACT Local Group (ULG)**, which brought together representatives of various local stakeholder groups (public administration, business, startups, higher education institutions, and non-governmental organizations) for the purpose of jointly developing an **Integrated Action Plan**.

During the project implementation period, i.e., from June 2023 to December 2025, the **URBACT Local Group** met regularly to discuss both the challenges facing the city and to look for solutions, and together with the Project Team to organize events and pilot actions related to the project.

Moreover, the participation of members of the **URBACT Local Group** in international project meetings is **a valuable source of inspiration and experience sharing**. Through direct contact with partners from other European cities, the project leader, and the Lead Expert, participants had the **opportunity to learn about innovative solutions supporting the development of startups and attracting talent**.

The added value of working with the URBACT Local Group is not only the engagement of its members in activities for the City, but **also gaining a broader perspective as well as practical advice and suggestions useful for developing plans for the further growth of the local entrepreneurship ecosystem**.



Grafika 2: URBACT Local Group (2023-2025), original work

In order to ensure the sustainability and continuity of the implementation of the **Integrated Action Plan**, the Urban Innovation Center – Urban Lab will make use of ongoing expert support, carried out **in cooperation with project partners and invited specialists**, as appropriate to the needs of individual activities. Thanks to a flexible model

of **collaboration with local stakeholders**, based on existing organizational structures and the experience of the Urban Lab team, the project will maintain its course for the continuation and development of activities.

Challenges

Although the city of Rzeszów is developing dynamically and its role on the national and international stage is steadily increasing, efforts to **further support the development of local entrepreneurship** should not be stopped.

Therefore, the city of Rzeszów is eager to undertake further actions and cooperation that will help preserve local potential and support the development of entrepreneurship.

As noted in the "Diagnosis prepared for the development of the Rzeszów City Development Strategy until 2035," a **persistent phenomenon is the decline in the number of students**. In the years 2013-2022, according to data from the Central Statistical Office, the number of students in Poland steadily decreased (from 1,548,748 in 2013 to 1,221,938 in 2022). In 2013, the number of graduates with a master's degree nationwide was 198,956, and in the following years it declined, reaching 132,893. This **national trend is also reflected in all universities across the region**, including those in Rzeszów. In 2013, 47,995 students were studying in Rzeszów, and in 2022 – 36,074. This means that the number of students in the city decreased by over 26.6% over the decade. Nationwide, the number of students decreased by 21.1% during the same period. The decline in student numbers is mainly due to demographic changes and a decreasing youth population, as well as less interest among young people in pursuing education after high school.

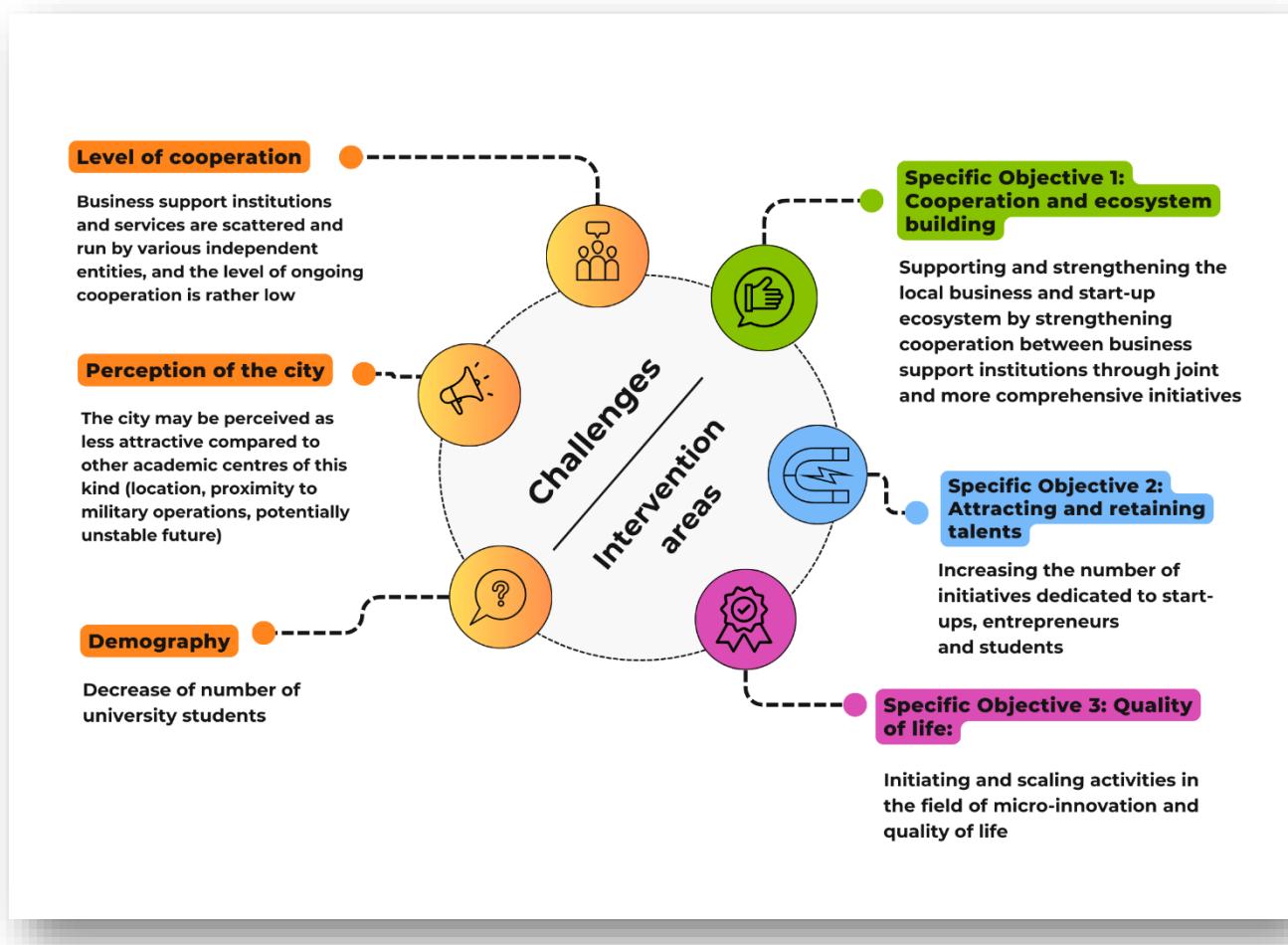
This creates a phenomenon of competition, and even rivalry for students, between individual academic centers and universities, which is evident during the recruitment period. Students studying in Rzeszów in 2022 accounted for 49.3% of students in the region and just under 2.9% of students in the country².

Rising labor costs, increasing housing prices, the armed conflict in Ukraine, and 'low competitiveness' compared to larger academic centers in the country also, albeit indirectly, affect interest in or consideration of Rzeszów as a place to develop one's own business, whether as a start-up or a standard company.

Hence the suggestions **to strengthen the level of cooperation** both among institutions supporting business within the city and to organize the dispersed support offerings, while eliminating any potential duplications that could lead to a decrease in the quality of the services provided. It is also proposed that **the City take on the role of an "intermediary/bridge"** between local enterprises and higher education institutions in order to harness the potential inherent in students and facilitate **the transfer of knowledge and modern technologies** to the business environment.

² Source: Diagnosis for the purpose of developing the Rzeszów city development strategy until 2035 (pp. 50-51)

A group that, according to ULG members, should not be overlooked when planning actions to attract and retain talent includes **experienced professionals** and so-called digital nomads, for whom the city may be attractive in terms of quality of life: work opportunities (quality of internet infrastructure, coworking spaces), career development (especially in areas related to IT, cybersecurity, smart specializations, aviation, etc.), a wide and diverse range of leisure activities, access to public services (nurseries, kindergartens, schools, healthcare centers), and green spaces. It is recommended **to emphasize the advantages of Rzeszów** as a regional capital with the character of a "compact" city, striving for climate neutrality and continuous development, in line with the promotional slogan "the capital of innovation".



Graphic 3: Intervention logic, original work



Vision

Rzeszów in 2030 is a city that **attracts new residents**, including **creative individuals**—both young and experienced—who are eager **to develop their business ideas** here, while the **business support institutions** operating within the city **collaborate** with each other, creating a vibrant local ecosystem. The city's strengths include developed infrastructure, a clean environment, a network of social services, and a modern and innovative economy connected to scientific and research facilities. **Rzeszów is a good place to live: green, well-organized, modern, and well-maintained, steadily strengthening its position as an academic city as well as a center for innovation, research, and development.** Together with its functional area, it forms a dynamically growing metropolis, leveraging its location, potential, and the responsiveness of its residents. This fosters the retention of talent and attracts new talent, who see their “opportunity” for growth in Rzeszów.

In order for the envisioned vision to become a reality, it is necessary for several factors to occur and for actions to be carried out that align with specific objectives, such as:

- **supporting and strengthening the local business and startup ecosystem** by fostering cooperation between business support institutions through joint and more comprehensive initiatives,
- **increasing the number of initiatives** dedicated to startups, entrepreneurs, and students,
- **initiating and scaling activities** in the field of micro-innovation and quality of life.

Summary of planned activities

Specific objective / intervention area 1		Supporting and strengthening the local business and start-up ecosystem by strengthening cooperation between business support institutions through joint and more comprehensive initiatives/ <i>Cooperation and ecosystem building</i>		
Action	Output	Intended result	Responsible organisation	Timescale
1.1 A joint 'map' of business support institutions	A graphic map presenting business support institutions in the city, their competences and available resources.	Clear information about the institution's competences and resources, better use of available support services.		2026
1.2 Establishing cooperation with institutions promoting entrepreneurship	Number of institutions co-organising programmes, training courses and activities supporting young entrepreneurs	Increasing the number of young people participating in programmes and training, increasing entrepreneurial skills	Municipality of Rzeszów (Centre for Urban Innovation – Urban Lab/coordinating department)	2026
1.3 Supporting cooperation between universities, businesses and cities (knowledge transfer)	The number of events, seminars and workshops that bring together the academic, business and urban communities	Development of cooperation networks between universities, businesses and cities (knowledge and technology transfer)		2026
1.4 A series of events in cooperation with business	Number of regular events presenting the current	Updating the current range of support offered by		2026

environment institutions presenting their current offerings („one day one-stop shop”)	support offered by business environment institutions to entrepreneurs	various business environment institutions to entrepreneurs, raising awareness of available services		
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Specific objective / intervention area 2	Increasing the number of initiatives dedicated to start-ups, entrepreneurs and students/ Attracting and retaining talents			
Action	Output	Intended result	Responsible organisation	Timescale
2.1 Developing a concept for municipal support for start-up entrepreneurs (e.g. co-working space with the possibility of organising events)	Number of documents developed describing support models for start-up entrepreneurs that can be implemented by the city	1 program		2027
s2.2 A series of networking events	Number of networking events organised for start-ups, entrepreneurs and students, enabling them to establish business contacts and exchange experiences	10 events	Municipality of Rzeszów (Centre for Urban Innovation – Urban Lab/coordinating department)	2027
2.3. Municipal mentoring programme supporting young	Number of participants in the mentoring	3 programme participants		2027-2028

businesses (final years of secondary school, students)	programme dedicated to young entrepreneurs			
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Specific objective / intervention area 3	Initiating and scaling activities in the field of micro-innovation and quality of life/ Quality of life			
Action	Output	Intended result	Responsible organisation	Timescale
3.1 Initiating and scaling activities in the field of micro-innovation and quality of life	The number of new municipal projects or initiatives aimed at improving quality of life, supporting creativity and developing micro-innovations. The indicator measures the real increase in activities and projects involving students.	2 projects/initiatives	Municipality of Rzeszów (Centre for Urban Innovation – Urban Lab/coordinating department)	2029-2030

Gantt chart

INTERVENTION AREAS	2026				2027				2028				2029				2030			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
I. COOPERATION AND ECOSYSTEM BUILDING	1.1 A "joint" map of local institutions supporting business in the city																			
	1.2 Establishing cooperation with institutions and organisations promoting entrepreneurship																			
	1.3 Supporting cooperation between universities, businesses and administration to enable the transfer of knowledge from academia to business																			
	1.4 A series of events in cooperation with institutions supporting entrepreneurship presenting their current offer (one day one-stop-shop)																			
II. ATTRACTING AND RETAINING TALENT					2.1 Developing a concept for municipal support for start-up entrepreneurs (e.g. co-working space with the possibility of organising events)															
					2.2 Series of networking events															
					2.3 Municipal mentoring programme supporting young businesses (final year secondary school students, university students)															
III. QUALITY OF LIFE													3.1. Initiating and scaling activities in the field of micro-innovation and quality of life							

Resources and funding

The implementation of the tasks included in the **Integrated Action Plan** assumes the acquisition of external funding, enabling the effective execution of the planned activities and initiatives. Considering the forward-looking nature of the project and its significance for the development of the local innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem, it is appropriate to utilize external funding sources available through regional, national, and European programs.

It is advisable to develop and implement a strategy for obtaining external funds, including, among others:

- 1) **European funds**, including the European Funds for Eastern Poland 2021–2027, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan,
- 2) **national and regional measures** supporting the development of entrepreneurship, innovation, and digital skills,
- 3) **Norwegian and EEA funds**,
- 4) **grant competitions, public-private partnerships** based on cooperation, as well as sponsorship initiatives and private investments.

In the process of implementing individual activities, the Urban Innovation Center – Urban Lab will play a key role, serving as the coordinator in the preparation of projects, identification of funding sources, and collaboration with institutional and expert partners.

Financial table summary

Action Title	Output targets	Responsible organisation	Cost (EUR)	Timing	
				Start	End
Cooperation and ecosystem creation/ Supporting and strengthening the local business and start-up ecosystem by strengthening cooperation between business support institutions through joint and more comprehensive initiatives.					
Action 1.1 A joint 'map' of local institutions supporting business in the city	1 map	Municipality of Rzeszów (Department of Urban Innovation Centre – Urban Lab)	14 106,70 EUR	1 st q. 2026	4 th 2026
Action 1.2 Establishing cooperation with institutions and organisations promoting entrepreneurship	15 institutions		18 103,59 EUR	1 st q. 2026	4 th 2026
Action 1.3 Supporting cooperation between universities and businesses to enable the transfer of knowledge from academia to business	4 events		14 341,81 EUR	1 st q. 2026	4 th 2026
Action 1.4 A series of events in cooperation with business environment institutions presenting their current offer ('one day one-stop shop')	4 events		12 225,80 EUR	1 st q. 2026	4 th 2026
Attracting and retaining talent/ Increasing the number of initiatives dedicated to start-ups, entrepreneurs and students					

Action 2.1 Developing a concept for municipal support for start-up entrepreneurs (e.g. co-working space with the possibility of organising events)	1 concept		8 699,13 EUR	1 st q. 2027	4 th q. 2027
Action 2.2 Series of networking events	10 events	Municipality of Rzeszów (Department of Urban Innovation Centre – Urban Lab)	13 871,58 EUR	2 nd q. 2027	4 th q. 2027
Action 2.3 Municipal mentoring programme supporting young businesses (final year secondary school students, university students)	3 startups/ projects		10 344,91 EUR	2 nd q. 2027	4 th q. 2027
Quality of life / Initiating and scaling activities in the field of micro-innovation and quality of life.					
Action 3.1 Initiating and scaling activities in the field of micro-innovation and quality of life	2 projects	Municipality of Rzeszów (Department of Urban Innovation Centre – Urban Lab)	26 567,61 EUR	1 st q. 2029	4 th q. 2030
		Total for IAP	118 261,13 EUR		

Governance of implementation

The **Integrated Action Plan** will be submitted to the **Mayor of Rzeszów** for recommendation regarding the implementation of the document by the **department coordinating the task, the Urban Innovation Center – Urban Lab**. The document presents a proposal of actions developed with the support of members of the **URBACT Local Group** and inspired by the best practices of the project Partners, aimed at creating a more business- and startup-friendly environment, with particular emphasis on activities dedicated to **students**, who have been identified as one of the project's key target groups due to their high innovation potential and access to entrepreneurship support instruments.

Most of the elements proposed in the **Integrated Action Plan** have been designated as **urban actions**, the coordination of which will be managed by the **Urban Innovation Center – Urban Lab**. **Relevant departments and substantive units of the Rzeszów City Office** will be involved in the implementation of individual tasks, invited to cooperate as **expert partners** supporting actions in areas corresponding to their competencies. This approach will ensure a **participatory nature in the implementation** of the Plan and will enable the utilization of specialists' knowledge and experience in carrying out specific actions and projects.

The implementation of the Plan, and consequently the execution of some of the planned actions, due to their scope and complexity, **will require the involvement of the city's environment**. **Maintaining existing partnership relations** with representatives of entities and institutions from the academic sector, as well as **the business and science** sectors, which constitute the foundation for further cooperation, is of key importance in this process. Equally important is the creation of a sustainable, expert ecosystem functioning as a **collaborative "platform"** that allows for systematic evaluation of the Plan's implementation and the exchange of knowledge and experiences among partners. Many representatives of institutions involved in the implementation of the **"C4TALENT"** project are already supporting the city in this process and have declared their intention **to continue cooperation after its completion, with the aim of jointly building a local ecosystem of entrepreneurship and innovation**.

Monitoring framework

The monitoring and evaluation system is designed to continuously track progress in implementing the Integrated Action Plan (IAP), assess the effectiveness and efficiency of ongoing activities, as well as identify potential deviations and recommend corrective actions. **This mechanism will ensure alignment with strategic objectives, enhance the transparency of actions, and enable decision-making based on current data and indicators.**

Within the monitoring system, **key stakeholders** and their roles and responsibilities were identified:

- 1) **Urban Innovation Center – Urban Lab:** It serves as the Coordinator of the Integrated Action Plan (IAP), responsible for coordinating the entire monitoring process, analyzing data, preparing reports, and recommending corrective actions. The Center also provides expert support in the assessment of reports, recommending remedial measures, and overseeing the alignment of implemented actions with the city's strategic objectives.
- 2) **Departments and substantive units of the Rzeszów City Hall:** substantive and expert support.
- 3) **External partners** (universities, social organizations, businesses): support in the implementation of activities, data provision, participation in evaluation, expert consultancy.

The designed system for monitoring and controlling the implementation of the Integrated Action Plan ensures transparency, effectiveness, and continuity of the implementation process. **It is primarily based on cooperation between departments and substantive units of the Rzeszów City Hall.**

Testing actions and events

Testing action I: „Not so rosy, not so easy, but still worth it...”

The first event, organized with the future of entrepreneurs in mind as part of a pilot initiative in October 2024, was a so-called "case study" entitled "Not so rosy, not so easy, but still worth it...", during which representatives of local businesses, who are also members of the **URBACT Local Group**, shared their "business stories" with young people.

The speakers told the youth not only about their successes but also about their experiences and the "lessons" associated with starting and running their own businesses, which was positively received by the students. The subsequent networking also proved fruitful, during which participants were able to ask the speakers questions in an informal conversation.

The proposed event received a **positive response** from high school students, who expressed their willingness to participate in further meetings of this kind.

In the case of organizing future events of this kind, it would be worthwhile **to consider adding a workshop component**, which would help young people engage with various aspects of running their own business, as well as to test their ideas, reflections, or doubts in a smaller group, rather than necessarily on the forum of the entire audience.

Testing action II: „BusinessUP ! Green actions” Seminar

The aim of the seminar "BusinessUP! Green actions" was, among other things, to educate students in entrepreneurship with regard **to presenting business ideas, as well as to stimulate and develop their potential business activity**, not forgetting to incorporate **pro-ecological initiatives** into the operations of future companies.

During the Seminar, five students from the University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszów presented their proposals for presentations, and their ideas were evaluated by a Jury consisting of representatives from the local entrepreneurship ecosystem, affiliated with the **URBACT Local Group**, operating within the framework of the "C4TALENT" project.

The seminar also provided an opportunity to attend **two lectures on public speaking**. The first focused primarily on practical tips for presentations, such as how to make a good first impression and how to move confidently on stage. The second addressed the content of the speech itself, specifically **how to prepare a pitch in a way that captures the interest and favor of investors**.

Networking after the official part of the seminar also demonstrated that students from Rzeszów universities are eager to participate in such events and open to gaining knowledge from experts.

#RzeClimat(On)

Each of the partners of the "C4TALENT" project was obliged to organize an event that would draw the attention of city residents to issues **related to ecology and the environment**. In the case of Rzeszów, we decided on an event called "**#RzeClimat(On)**", whose theme primarily focused on topics such as **urban mobility, climate change, biodiversity, social participation, and business**. Its goal was to increase awareness among the target group regarding ecology, climate change, and the challenges these pose for the city and the local community.

The task of the students of Urban Studies at the University of Rzeszów, to whom the workshops were directed, was to present proposed solutions for the cases prepared by the lecturers.

Based on the knowledge they acquired and their own creativity, the students proposed solutions including a **green tunnel, a company garden, an additional break for commuting to work by bicycle, and a network of ivy over the city streets**.

It is worth emphasizing that the organization of the **#RzeClimat(On)** event involved not only members of the **URBACT Local Group** but also representatives of other departments of the City Office, which in practice demonstrated **an integrated approach** and the fact that **many topics intersect and influence each other** on various levels, affecting different aspects of urban life.

