

URBACT



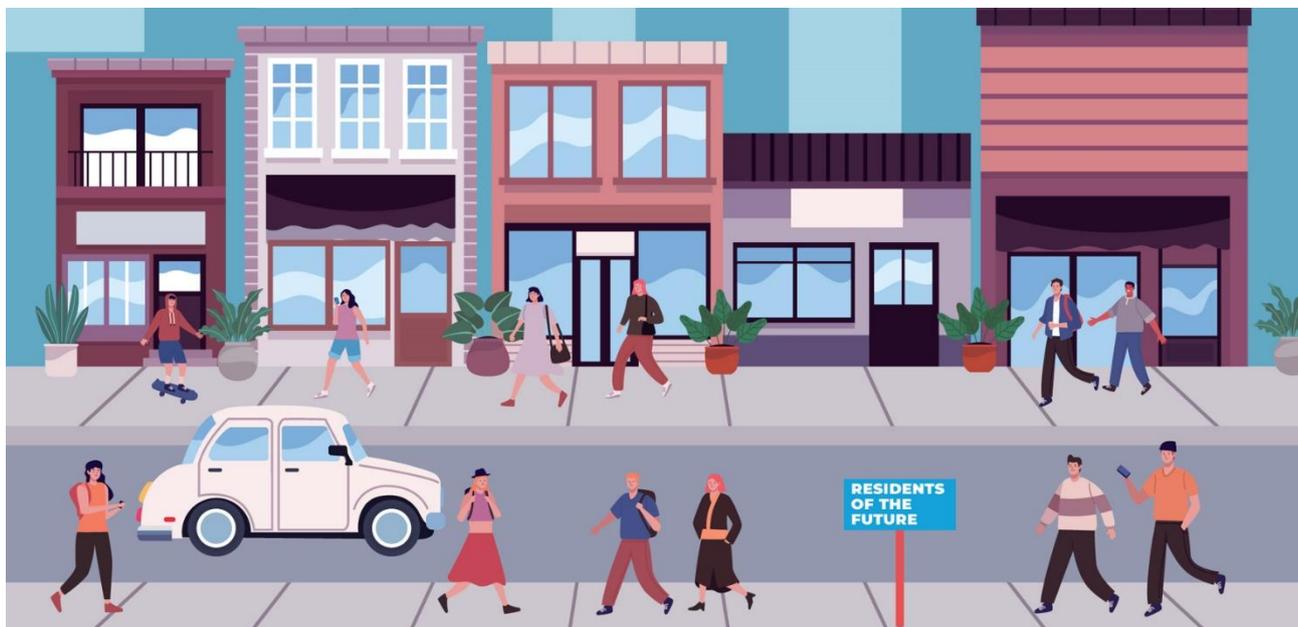
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Integrated action plan

URBACT IV – RESIDENTS OF THE FUTURE

CITY OF IISALMI, 2025



City of Iisalmi, 2025
INTEGRATED ACTION PLAN

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IAP section 1: Context, needs and vision

1.1 Overall theme and network's topic

In June 2023, nine small and medium-sized European cities and municipalities joined the URBACT IV project called “Residents of the Future”, which aims to support the process of finding new answers to the urban shrinking of small and medium-sized cities. City of Iisalmi, with 20.801 inhabitants, is one of those cities who wanted to tackle this problem.

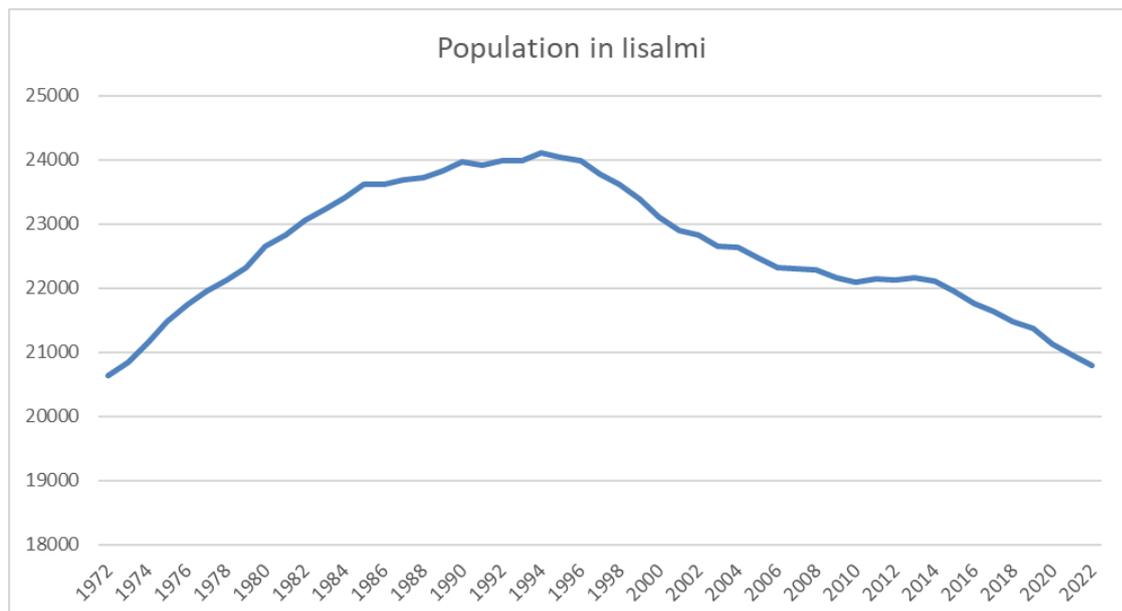
Small and medium-sized cities are struggling to redefine digital goals to become more citizen-centric with holistic, sustainable solutions that enable green growth and livability for residents. The question: “How can shrinking cities attract future residents” will be answered by researching the following key elements:

- Rethinking digital transformation, through sustainable solutions.
- Economic diversification, focusing on supporting the development of new economic sectors, such as technology and creative industries.
- City branding, improving the city’s image as a city that supports a healthy lifestyle and innovation, attracting talent, new residents, and business investments.

1.2 Current situation and relevant data of Iisalmi

Evolution of residents:

- **1973** - 20.839
- **1990** - 24.117
- **2013** - 22.171
- **2023** - 20.801



City of Iisalmi, 2025
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Iisalmi and Upper Savo region are the birthplace of several global competitive companies. Ponsse, Olvi, Genelec and Normet are examples of the ability of local people to found and scale innovative companies that create good job opportunities. Companies' turnover in the area is over 3 000 M€. Exports are approximately 700 M€. Industrial companies provide over 4 000 jobs in Iisalmi and the surrounding Upper Savo region focusing on metal and machinery industries. Other major sources of income include service industries, agriculture, especially milk and dairy products as well as wood processing industries.

The means for the availability of a skilled workforce are refined in more detail in IAP's chapter 2, section 2.1. Local challenges and activities that need to be developed have been identified in URBACT local group, especially with representatives of the local companies. The future growth of local companies relies heavily on the availability of skilled workforce.

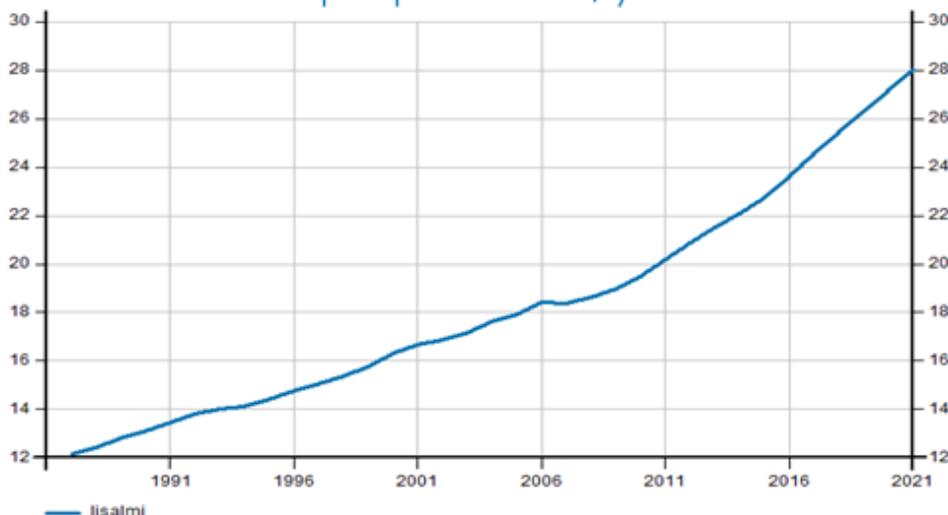
Iisalmi has a moderately high unemployment rate due to lack of skills or health issues: almost 40% of the unemployment have been unemployed over 12 months or more. The national health index is very low. The unemployment rate is 11.3% currently (autumn 2024). Finding skilled employees from the current unemployed part of the workforce is rather difficult due to lack of competence or health problems.

Social challenges, inequality, and access to services:

In Iisalmi women's wages are about 15 % lower than men's wages. One reason is that industrial jobs are often for men and better paid, while women work more in the lower-paid healthcare and services sectors. This characteristic proves the challenge of the local economy to promote similar welfare opportunities for both genders.

Another challenge is that population in Iisalmi is mainly native Finnish people. The percentage of foreign citizens is around 2,6%, which is a small number, so it is difficult to integrate to the city when you come from another country.

Share of people over 64 years old

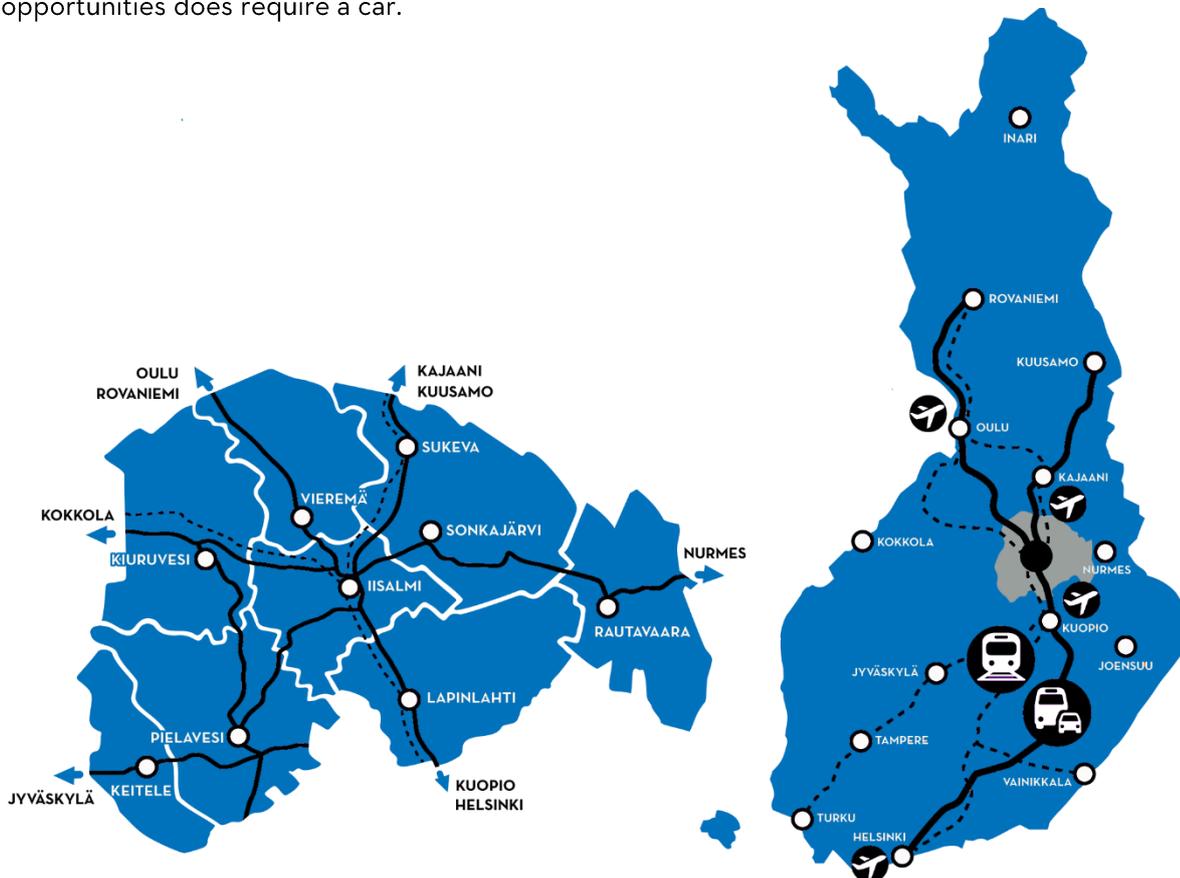


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Iisalmi has been receiving refugees for several years regularly, and especially in the agricultural sector there is a big group of foreign employees. There have been challenges with settling in and integration due to language barriers and lack of social networks, and it is precisely these challenges that this Integrated action plan and the ULG's brainstorming work aim to address. The general atmosphere in Iisalmi and the attitude towards people from other countries should also be gradually changed to more positive. Work around this theme has been done actively during previous years as well but we have learned that this process is slow, and change takes time.

One problem in getting skilled workforce to growing companies is also the fact that Iisalmi is not a university city, there is a small campus of Savonia University of Applied Sciences with approximately 800 – 1000 students. Most young people migrate to bigger cities for their university degrees, and many of them don't return after that period, staying living in the bigger cities that they consider more attractive and vital. Bigger cities also provide good nightlife and entertainment options, which are important, especially for the attractiveness of the city to young people. Unfortunately, Iisalmi does have only limited options with those, and that is another reason why young people leave the city. You can see this in the statistics as the number of elderly people is growing rapidly.

Iisalmi has several high-quality public facilities both for sport and cultural activities, such as indoor swimming pool, many places for children to play, sports activities, hiking routes, urban beach on the lake, art exhibitions on the street, cultural center etc. The access to these facilities is easy, because mostly all of them are near the central area so owning a car is not necessary. On the other hand, public transport to surrounding municipalities or industrial areas is limited, so access to some of the employment opportunities does require a car.



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Location, territorial context:

Iisalmi is located in Eastern Finland, basically in the middle of the country. The distance to the capital city Helsinki is about 475 km and distance to the nearest airport (Kuopio) is 75 km. Iisalmi is the functional center of the Upper Savo region, as well as the heart of the Upper Savo economic zone. Upper Savo is also characterized by strong agricultural heritage and dairy farming: ~1 800 farms, of which ~630 are dairy farms.

1.3 Relevant existing strategies and policies

Relevant local strategies and plans:

The city’s strategy has several goals and targets that, together, help to improve local services and make the living environment even more attractive to future residents. The vision for the city’s own strategy is to be the most attractive regional city of Finland by 2030.

The Iisalmi city strategy has been updated during spring 2025 in small group discussions, in which residents from different population groups, organizations and the third sector representatives were invited. There was also a separate group discussion for local entrepreneurs, educational institutions and business organizations. The actions and initial ideas of this IAP were also considered in these group discussions, and the plan is to update them in the city strategy as much as possible.

The already existing, statutory regional plan defines long-term objectives, development strategies and population targets. In the plan there are sections about the attractiveness of regions, the availability and sufficiency of the workforce in the province. It also aims to improve the availability of labor through education, immigration, internal commuting within working regions, remote work, multi-locationality and adequate services.

The Most Wonderful Town in Finland

MISSION STATEMENT
We take care of the well-being of our residents and enhance the competitiveness and vitality of the entire region

STRATEGIC THEMES

- Inspiring Iisalmi**
- Thriving Iisalmi**
- Lovely Iisalmi**
- Miraculous Iisalmi**

Stable economy
Well-being of personell
Digitalisation, information and knowledge management

VISION 2030
Most attractive regional town in Finland

We operate bravely locally and globally
We want to create a sustainable living environment
In Iisalmi everybody can succeed

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Iisalmi wants to better use digital transformation in city development and create new partnerships between companies and universities to build more international collaboration and become better known for talented international people. The new city plan for the industrial area shows the wish to attract new investments from outside the region.

“By Iisalmi” brand development group has 30+ members. The members are from local companies and educational institutions. The brand work is active, and meetings happen regularly.

During the years By Iisalmi brand group has tested variously different actions and campaigns to promote the city for the target group of potential new residents (including students and young adults) and finding qualified workforce for local companies, but also to make Iisalmi better known inside Finland generally. For example, there has been promotional co-operation between City of Iisalmi and national radio channels, a tour in which Iisalmi representatives visited the biggest university cities and promoted open jobs in the area, social media co-operation with college and university students around Finland (recruiting the students as “micro-agents of Iisalmi”, co-operation with local sports teams and athletes, promotional co-operation with nationally known social media influencers, etc.

In the past few years, Iisalmi launched “Kiireneutraali Iisalmi” concept which could be translated as “rush-free Iisalmi”, promoting the city as a friendly place for people looking for work life balance. Since then, there have been yearly different actions and campaigns inside of this theme. Iisalmi wants to stand out with this unique and important insight – nowadays people feel increasingly stressed and rushed, so it is important to find a place where you can have your career but also have a chance to feel good and take care of your well-being.

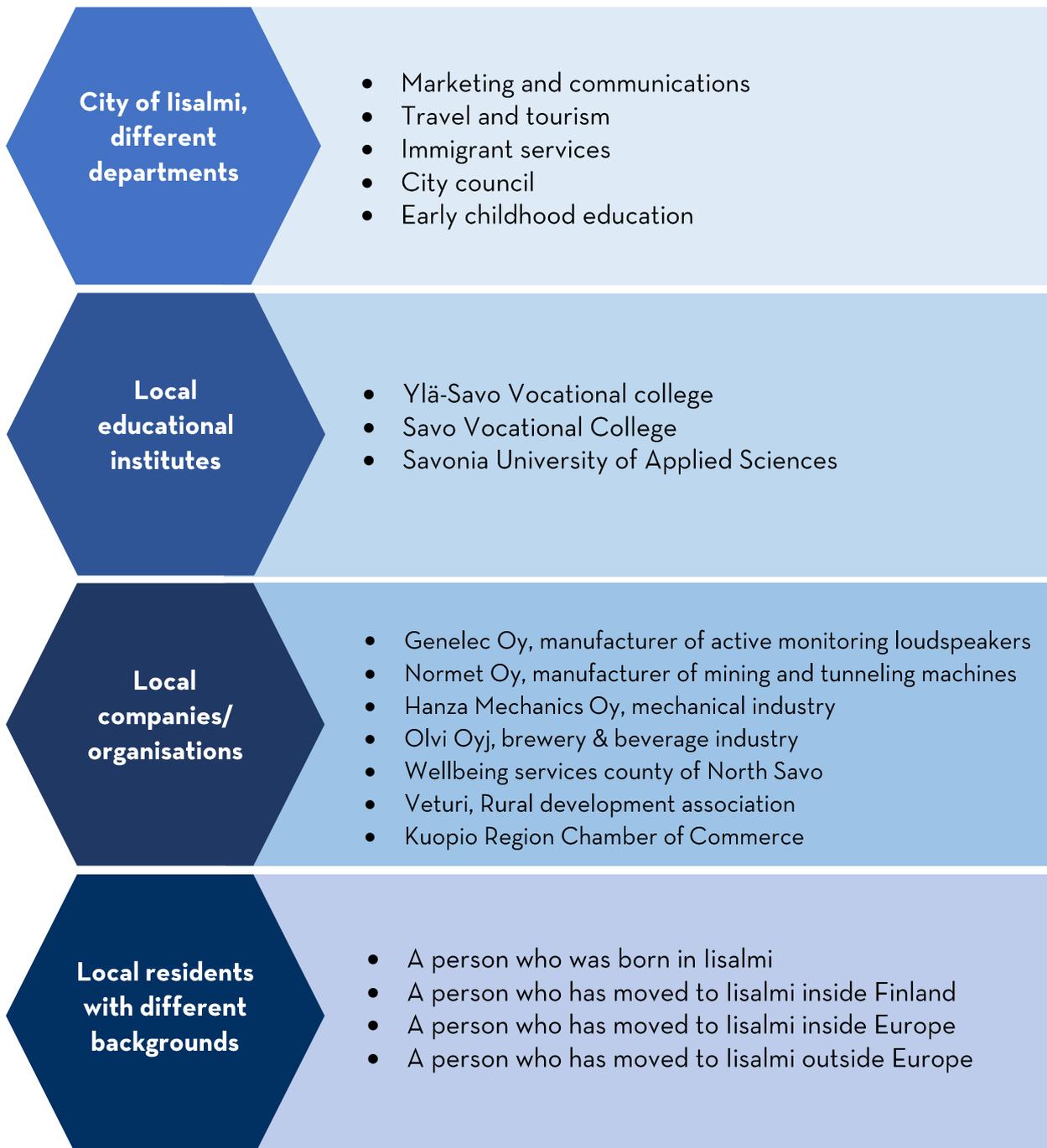


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1.4 Problem identification by local stakeholders

Composition of Iisalmi's URBACT local group:

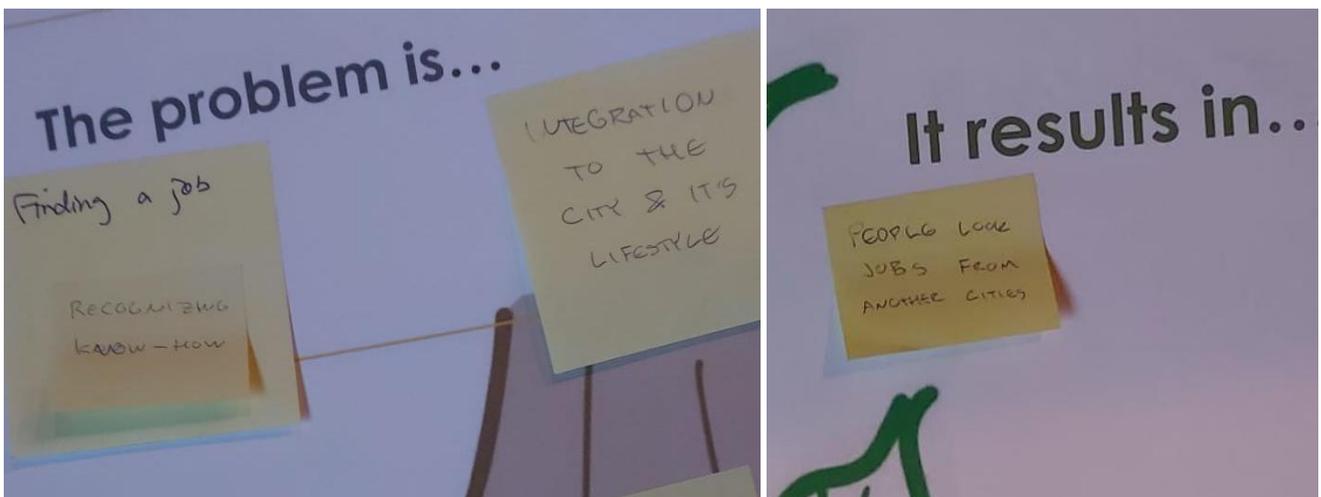
Iisalmi's ULG consists of about 20 people, and the "core" group includes 10 active members. When establishing ULG was in the beginning, we tried to invite potential members from different sectors. In the first ULG meeting we also had suggestions about people we should invite to join our ULG. There was also an open call on social media in which we were searching residents to be citizen representatives in ULG.



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Since the very first ULG meeting, there has been a shared opinion among the ULG members that Iisalmi has difficulties to attract new residents, especially immigrants. The share of immigrants is quite low in the city, although it has been growing in the recent years. For local employers it is often hard to recognize international job applicant's talent and to get rid of language barriers inside the city. Job offering for qualified immigrants (matching their education and skills) is also a challenge.

Because English is not very common language in everyday life of Iisalmi, it might take more courage to communicate with a person who speaks English. Generally, local people aren't very confident about their English skills because they don't need to use it daily. That might cause insecurities among some employers as well, which is why they might rather hire native people who speak Finnish, avoiding the language barrier. This has been discussed a lot in ULG meetings and that is why language barriers and changing the employers' mindset towards immigrants have been identified one of the priority concerns by ULG.



The city has also problems to keep current inhabitants and immigrants in Iisalmi – integration to the "Iisalmi-lifestyle" could be better. Especially, as an immigrant it's difficult to find jobs and improve your skills to qualify for the job. Integration into the local community, networks, events etc. is also challenging because of the language barrier. That leads to migration of immigrants to bigger cities because they feel isolated and they don't have any reason to stay in Iisalmi, even if the city would offer great surroundings and facilities to build life in there. This is another priority concern identified by ULG. Especially the members who have personal experiences about moving to Iisalmi from other countries have told that integration to local community is not easy.

As an international newcomer you need to be active to find your networks and ways to learn more about the city and its facilities, services and leisure possibilities. Most of the information is available only in Finnish, and it is not guaranteed that you would get service in English everywhere in the city. All this leads to an impression that you are not welcomed or wanted in Iisalmi.

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Local strengths and opportunities:

Iisalmi and Upper Savo region are the birthplace of several globally competitive companies. These companies are examples of the ability of local people to found and scale innovative companies that create good job opportunities. Iisalmi and Upper Savo area are also known for their communality; companies and people collaborate and work together for the greater good. Projects like “YHESSÄ – Know-how Network” and the “By Iisalmi” brand development group are examples of the ability to cooperate between stakeholders from different sectors.

Iisalmi has several very qualified public facilities, and the city is surrounded by stunning natural beauty, including lakes and forests. This provides residents with ample opportunities for outdoor activities. Iisalmi is also a safe place to live, and housing is affordable over there. The contact with nature, work life balance and the quiet lifestyle are new magnets that attract people after covid-19. Iisalmi is a place with outstanding conditions to offer this value proposition to residents.

Another opportunity can be also the fact how Finland is understood internationally as a successful country. The country and Iisalmi average salary, and the fame about being the “happiest country” in the world.



1.5 Vision and overall objective

Iisalmi has as its main goals in this project to impact the city’s marketing towards immigrants, attract new residents, and increase its reputation outside Finnish borders. Within this URBACT IV project, Iisalmi wants also to learn about new international strategies and methodologies for attracting people and attract international population as well. One goal as well is to make the city qualified in terms of co-working and remote work.

The main vision for Iisalmi is to become a more international city that can attract and retain immigrants better than before. As a long run vision Iisalmi wants to be one of the best regions to immigrate in Finland. The goal is to increase the current 3% immigrant population to 10% in the future. Based on demographic analysis, Iisalmi needs approximately 250 immigrants per year to maintain the current population.

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From those, Iisalmi is most familiar with city branding. “By Iisalmi” brand development group’s persistent work is one good example. Iisalmi has been open-minded by collaborating with new associates and by trying different kind of campaigns.

For digital transformation Iisalmi is very interested in getting more remote workers and digital nomads to the area, currently the limitation is facilities that could accommodate remote workers easily. There are projects on-going where new facilities will be built and learnings from other areas through this project are very useful to the future development of Iisalmi for remote work and digital nomads.

Economic diversification, focusing on supporting the development of new economic sectors, such as technology and creative industries is also of high importance for Iisalmi due to the several internationally successful companies. Many of the current success in Iisalmi area comes from revolutionary technological solutions that the companies have developed. New ideas and projects to foster this technological knowledge to new innovations are being studied and implemented in the near future.

1.7 First ideas for testing actions at local level

Initial ideas include improving communication through marketing campaigns, organizing events for social inclusion, and creating support systems for digital nomads and remote workers. There have been plenty of ideas, and pretty much all of them are the results of group works that have been proceeded in ULG meetings. URBACT tools, such as OPERA and Action Table, have been used with these group works. Here’s some examples about first ideas for testing actions:

- **Warm welcome to everybody, everywhere in the city** (workplaces, stores, restaurants, cafés, offices etc.) No language barrier anywhere, so immigrants could feel more welcome as well while running errands in the city.
- **Job opportunities more visible and available.** Especially that kind of job opportunities, which are suitable for immigrants and language skill requirements are not an obstacle.
- **Some kind of new activities or events for the locals**, that are not available in any other city. Standing out more attractive city. For example, this could be an innovative event at park, maybe an outdoor restaurant day or an outdoor movie day. Something different that would attract people to gather outdoors and make it easier to meet new people.
- **“Get together” events** happening regularly, at least once a year and so-called “Iisalmi Tinder” which would help you to find a mentor with whom you would match in the app, based on interests and professional skills. You could go to this “Get together” event with this person you have found from the app. It is easier to go to the event together with someone, if you are new in the city and don’t know anyone yet (this scenario can be general among the immigrants).
- **Remote work packages** that offer apartments or co-working spaces for those who come to the city to working remotely. The remote work packages could also include excursions to local companies that would share knowledge and mentoring. So-called “climate tourists” were also mentioned here, because in the future climate change will affect the temperatures getting hotter and hotter around the World, and people might want to escape the heat into places that have cooler climate and do remote work from there during the hottest months. Iisalmi and its remote work packages could have a good market niche with this subject!

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- **“Face of the city”** - A person, who would personify Iisalmi and be an influencer or an ambassador for the city. This person would be active and visible in social media and would promote the city of Iisalmi in different events and places.
- **Micro-agents** (e.g. Company agent, student agent, etc.): Makes it easier to get to know Iisalmi and local companies. These could be local social media influencers who already have some audience in their own reference groups and thus visibility.
- **Local guide for integration:** Makes integration into the city and its lifestyle easier. Introduces/gives advice about hobbies, services, helps to find friends, etc. Some of these can also be social agents mentioned above.
- **Real stories from Iisalmi:** A truthful and honest opinion from a person who moved to Iisalmi. Makes it easier for a person who is thinking about moving/has already moved to Iisalmi. For example, in the form of a video story, it is told how moving to Iisalmi is successful, what you should pay attention to, what you can do in the city, etc.
- **Iisalmi Tinder's open chat:** Easy and simple way to ask something or just chat with local people. Some kind of online tool or social media channel (Telegram, WhatsApp, Discord, etc.)
- **Tandem schools/studies:** Possibility to study in Finnish and another language at the same time. English teaching group, etc.
- **Internationalization of recruitment events:** E.g. The annual employment week in February would be more rewarding if it also reached non-Finnish speakers. The planned "Get together" event could also include its own recruitment fair section.
- **Comprehensive general information websites in English:** The website would include all the open jobs in the Ylä-Savo area and Iisalmi region, where Finnish language skills are not a requirement. On the same page, there could be useful information in English for those who are moving to Iisalmi, such as e.g. information about services, help with integration, etc.
- **Marketing concept/package for new residents:** Comprehensive materials in English that are attractive and provide good information for non-Finnish speakers as well.

The idea of marketing concept, that is targeted for international people who have moved or are potential to move to Iisalmi, was chosen to be the first testing action for Iisalmi. A request for tenders to create this marketing concept was sent on September 6th, 2024, to four strategic marketing partners of City of Iisalmi.

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IAP Section 2: Overall logic and integrated approach

2.1 Defining strategic objectives

Objective 1: Finding qualified jobs for immigrants

To get better knowledge of open jobs in Iisalmi area, the city needs to deepen the co-operation between local companies, educational institutes and immigrant services. The visibility of open jobs needs to be improved in general – that way the potential applicants could apply for the job.

To improve immigrants' and international job seekers' chances to find a job from Iisalmi area, different Finnish language courses provided by the city/company/school/etc. need to be more visible and available than they currently are. Also, sharing positive experiences or stories about recruiting from employer's and employee's side would encourage people to improve their language skills – both in Finnish and in English.

Objective 2: Attracting and retaining immigrants in Iisalmi

Iisalmi needs to retain the current immigrants and international people that already have moved to the city and also attract new residents from this same demographic group. Ageing population, low birth rates and migration inside Finland have caused the lack of skilled workforce in Iisalmi. The population in Iisalmi is mainly native Finnish people and the percentage of foreign citizens is only around 3% - that number needs to increase in the future, so Iisalmi would be vibrant and attractive city for future generations. The main vision for Iisalmi is to become a more international city that can attract and retain people from everywhere.

Results in this area can be measured through the growth rate of immigrant population in Iisalmi, their unemployment rate as well as their participation in the specified activities in the action plan. For future success Iisalmi needs more immigrants and they should be active members of the society.

Objective 3: Feeling welcome in Iisalmi

As an international newcomer it is important to get easily information about Iisalmi in English, so you could get a bigger picture of the new city in which you have settled and learn important things about it. The basic city services must be available in English, including KELA, tax office, police, bus timetables, restaurant menus etc.

The city, third sector, local companies, communities, educational institutes and local people are all responsible to make newcomers to feel welcome in Iisalmi, and positive thinking and compassionate attitude is a key to that. Racism is still a problem in our area sadly, and it is crucial to tackle it.

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2.2 Defining areas of intervention


Marketing and city branding:

Marketing and making Iisalmi better known among foreign people are important so the city could grow and attract new residents from abroad. The marketing concept/”Bridge to Iisalmi” program that is targeted for international people became a testing action for Iisalmi.

With improved city branding, co-operation between the city and local companies/educational institutes aims to show that in Iisalmi we work together for better good, and we want to welcome new international residents. Communality has always been a strength in our area, so improving that helps us to reach even better results at many levels.

Marketing campaigns and other city branding efforts aim to promote the numerous job opportunities in Iisalmi area. The “By Iisalmi” logo appears in the marketing materials, representing our brand development group’s joint signature and the unique co-operation we have between the city and local stakeholders. Another important factor of attraction is the work life balance and quality of life that Iisalmi offers to its residents.


Quality of life:

In general, Finland is considered as a high-quality welfare country, and Iisalmi offers good quality of life for its residents: Clean air and nature, possibility to enjoy nature by yourself, safety, opportunity to choose between “city-life” or more peaceful living, lots of space, chance to get good education and find jobs from different industries, equality between genders, affordable housing and four seasons and weather that is not too hot.

Everything is accessible because services and facilities are mainly located in the central area of Iisalmi, so owning a car is not mandatory. Quality of life and different services are very high in Iisalmi, and we want to promote this widely and visibly. It is known that immigrants and refugees especially value the safety and quality of life, although the peace and quiet in Iisalmi might feel first strange and even scary for those who move from big city.


Public services:

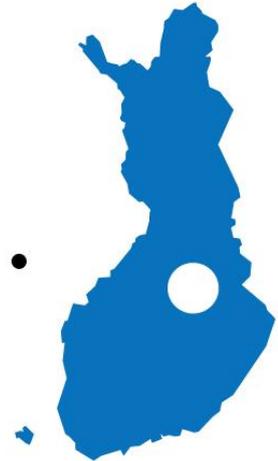
Health and social care, employment services, immigrant services, daycare for children, free education system/schools (in Iisalmi students are getting more education than the national average is), good range of cultural services or hobby opportunities and great spaces/facilities to do the hobbies and sports.

These all are important and valuable factors of attraction, and it is often told that Iisalmi has surprisingly good and wide selection of public services, considering the size of the city. The city also wants to invest in the services; modern school buildings and new swimming hall were built during the past years, and currently the cultural center is under renovation. It is important to bring out these diverse and qualified services and possibilities more in marketing and communications and make them visible, especially for

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international residents and immigrants. The knowledge of the public services among this demographic group would help them to feel more like home in Iisalmi. We also recognize the need to develop existing services to better serve the target group of international residents and immigrants.

Bridge to **iisalmi**.



2.3 From vision to action – defining and presenting actions

The planned actions of Bridge to Iisalmi-program (these actions are presented in more detail in IAP's section 3 where each action is elaborated in action table separately)

- **Action 1: Marketing and communication plan for immigrants (the key action)**
Area of intervention: Marketing and city branding.
We need to develop a holistic approach to marketing and branding Iisalmi to international residents and potential immigrants. This is a key part of the whole Bridge to Iisalmi-program and forms a basis for formulating our message on how to attract new residents from abroad. It will help us in communication of all the other planned actions in this action plan.
- **Action 2: “Get together” events for newcomers and residents**
Area of intervention: Marketing and city branding.
Regular events to reach newcomers in the city and make them feel more comfortable in Iisalmi. These will help in local networking between new and existing residents and also finding new opportunities in work life or free time.
- **Action 3: Matchmaking for dedicated participation**
Areas of intervention: Marketing and city branding & Quality of life.
When organizing new events, it should be easy to find new acquaintances through digital services. This will make it easier to get people to attend the events when they already have some information on other participants.
- **Action 4: Job fair for finding the right match**
Area of intervention: Public services.

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One form of new events should be job fair for international residents. It is not always easy to find jobs where Finnish language is not needed so these opportunities need more visibility.

- **Action 5: Remote work packages and digital nomadism**

Areas of intervention: Quality of life & Marketing and city branding

With the growing trend of remote work and digital nomads, Iisalmi needs to find ways to attract more residents through offering premises and services to this target group.

2.4 Integrated approach

All the listed actions above are originally planned in ULG by stakeholders from different sectors. There is a clear coherence between these actions and already existing strategies – in the city strategy Iisalmi aims to be international and attractive regional city that offers good facilities and excellent conditions to live or own a business. In the strategy Iisalmi also wants to take care of its residents' wellbeing and improve the area's competitiveness and attractiveness.

Action 5 with remote work packages and digital nomadism is part of sustainable urban development, and that supports integrated approach as well as city strategy's cross-cutting theme about digitalization. All in all, these actions are strongly related with the theme of internationality – the local action group's work in Iisalmi has highlighted the importance of it since the very beginning of the Residents of the Future project.

We are aware that these actions are strongly related with marketing and city branding and there could be other perspectives as well. But, Iisalmi has put effort on city branding and marketing for a long time, and in the ULG it was considered that it is important to reach international people better than before.

Iisalmi has active co-operation with neighboring municipalities and public actors, for example educational institutes. In the beginning of 2025, the employment services were united between five municipalities of Upper Savo region (including Iisalmi), which enables deepening the co-operation.



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Residents of the Future project has enabled us to focus on the creation of marketing and communications that is targeted for international residents and potential immigrants. The project and its resources have given us a chance to develop a whole marketing concept for this target group and think more thoroughly about how we can appeal to this target group. Working with the subject at such a precise level and with larger budget would not have been possible under the By Iisalmi -brand work. In the future, the Bridge to Iisalmi -program will be a key element under By Iisalmi -brand building work and Iisalmi city's brand marketing efforts will reach international residents and potential immigrants better than before.

From ULG we have received important perspectives and development ideas inside the theme of internationality, and the members of the group come from different sectors and life situations, which has given a diverse foundation for the work. From previous implementations and branding efforts we have learned how important it is to engage different local actors and stakeholders, implement concrete measures and ensure the continuation of good practices that have already been implemented.



IAP Section 3: Action planning details

The following five actions that are presented in tables are the ones which have felt the most needed and most realistic to include in future actions. The development of the Bridge to Iisalmi -program is still in the beginning and during the upcoming years we will refine and clarify the actions more detailed as time passes.

Many of these actions include elements from already existing plans or actions that Iisalmi has developed previously or are combined with them. The new marketing concept and ULG's brainstorming work gives a more international approach for these already existing good practices or actions.

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3.1 Action 1: Marketing and communication plan for immigrants

Action 1: Marketing and communication plan for immigrants

Action owner: City of Iisalmi / Different departments

Description: City of Iisalmi didn't have a marketing or communication plan for international people, who have moved to Iisalmi or are potential new residents. This was a needed action and it's the key part of larger "Bridge to Iisalmi" - program

Stakeholders: City of Iisalmi, members of URBACT local group; local companies, educational institutes and organizations, advertising agency Avidly as a partner in production of the concept

Links to strategy: To make Iisalmi more international, get more international residents and find matching talents better for open jobs

Finance & resources: The marketing concept/plan costed 10 000 € and it was taken from project Residents of the Future's budget

Action readiness: Done, the next phase is to test the plan and include it to city's daily basis

Risks: City's different departments or stakeholders don't find the plan useful and won't use it → Communication for the target group isn't converging

ACTIVITIES Summary

ACTIVITY	Dates	OUTPUTS	Related ACTIVITIES	Problems / Concerns
Creating materials for the upcoming campaign	2-4/2025	Different materials: Photos, texts, banners etc.	Other campaigns in the future	The materials aren't convincing for the target group
Test the marketing concept and its messages in a social media campaign targeted for international people	4-6/2025	Reports of the campaign: How the concept's messages were taken?	Developing and rethinking the campaign messages if needed	We don't reach the target group
Photoshoot with international residents of Iisalmi	4-8/2025	Good photos which can be used in other city's marketing purposes as well	Another photoshoot in different season, for example winter	Difficulty to find models for photoshoots among international residents
Introduce the marketing plan for city's different departments and stakeholders	Autumn 2025	Feedback about the plan	Collecting ideas to develop and refine the concept	Lack of time, not active participation
Keeping Bridge to Iisalmi -program active and developing it further together	Present-Future	More international city marketing/communications	New campaigns, events, etc. for this target group	Who will be in charge about the continuation?

This was the first testing action for city of Iisalmi within project Residents of the Future. We decided to implement this action first, because it was truly needed, and the marketing concept and the whole "Bridge to Iisalmi" -program are a basis for future actions with the theme of internationality.

The marketing concept will be useful for a long time, and it includes plenty of ideas that we will use in future actions and marketing efforts. It also helps us to develop our previous messages and marketing materials or campaigns to international target group. The plan is to direct 20 % from the marketing budget to international marketing and actions, which is approx. 50,000 €.

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3.2 Action 2: "Get together" events for newcomers and residents

Action 2: "Get together" events for newcomers and residents		Action owner: City of Iisalmi / Different departments	
Description: Regular events to help and improve local networking between new and existing residents and also finding new opportunities in work life or free time	Stakeholders: City of Iisalmi; Departments of international services, employment services, marketing and communications, library and cultural services, local companies, educational institutes and organizations	Links to strategy: To make Iisalmi more international, reach newcomers in the city and make them feel more comfortable in Iisalmi	Risks: Lack of time, the difficulty to find the person (or department) who would be in charge about these events
		Finance & resources: City's budget - divided between city departments that are arranging the events. Sponsor money from companies?	
		Action readiness: In progress	

ACTIVITIES Summary

ACTIVITY	Dates	OUTPUTS	Related ACTIVITIES	Problems / Concerns
Create a concept for the events, set goals	Spring 2025	Concept and action plan	Cooperation with different stakeholders	Lack of time
Gathering a group of volunteers and other stakeholders to help with planning and sponsoring	Spring 2025	Clarification of roles and responsibilities	Deepening cooperation, having better contacts	Lack of time, hard to reach volunteers
Already existing Iisalmi hobby event and guided bus tours more international - using English in both	Spring 2025	More international residents attending to the hobby event and bus tour	Developing events' marketing for international people	Presenters' fear to use English
Promoting and marketing the events (social media, local newspapers etc.)	Summer 2025	Different marketing materials (digital & print)	Cooperation with other events	Marketing doesn't reach the target group
Organising the events and collecting feedback	8-9/2025	Events and collected feedback	Creating a poll for feedback and ideas for future events	Newcomers don't find events appealing, they don't give feedback

We learned from ULG that it is not easy to integrate to Iisalmi when you move to the city from abroad - in our ULG there are few members who have personal experiences about the issue. That is why we want to tackle the problem and develop a concept for welcoming events, that gather newcomers and local people and help them with networking and hopefully that way make newcomers feel more welcome in Iisalmi. The marketing concept's main messages for the target group include statements like "You are needed here. You are welcome here", and with these events we want to make sure that this impression reaches everybody who decides to move or has already moved to Iisalmi.

We have some already existing good practices (e.g. Iisalmi hobby event and guided bus tours for new residents) that will help current residents as well as newcomers to learn about diverse leisure possibilities and to get more familiar with the city in general. With Bridge to Iisalmi -program we just give an international touch for these actions, so these possibilities would be available for residents who don't understand Finnish. We believe it would help with integration and networking.

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3.3. Action 3: Matchmaking for dedicated participation

Action 3: Matchmaking for dedicated participation		Action owner: City of Iisalmi, interested stakeholders		
Description: When organizing new events, it should be easy to find new acquaintances through digital services. This will make it easier to get people to attend the events when they already have some information on other participants.	Stakeholders: City of Iisalmi, local companies, educational institutes and organizations, third sector, service provider of the digital tool/application	Links to strategy: Helping newcomers and current residents create networks in the city and make them feel more comfortable in Iisalmi		Risks: Lack of time, lack of money, the difficulty to find the operator/person who would be in charge about app project's implementation
		Finance & resources: Possibly money from some project, sponsor money from companies?		
		Action readiness: Low		

ACTIVITIES Summary

ACTIVITY	Dates	OUTPUTS	Related ACTIVITIES	Problems / Concerns
Asking local stakeholders' willingness to participation of the app project	End of 2025	List of interested stakeholders and knowledge of their needs	More detailed information for the request of tenders	Lack of time and lack of stakeholders' participation
Define the required properties for the application	Beginning of 2026	Request of tenders	Benchmarking	Lack of time, resources and money
Creating contents/developing the app together with the chosen service provider	3-6/2026	The application	Gathering a test group which will test the app	The difficulty to find a dedicated team for app project
Launching the finished application	8/2026	Launching campaign	The app helps people to attend events in 2026	The app won't gain active users
Collecting feedback from app users	End of 2026	Feedback and ideas for development	Discussion about the results with stakeholders	Not receiving feedback

This action is refined from the original idea of so-called "Iisalmi Tinder", which has been in discussions in the ULG meetings. The main idea of this application is to help local people to find new acquaintances when they are interested in attending local events. The app would help you to find a so-called local "mentor" or possibly a new friend with whom you would match in the app, based on interests and professional skills. The app would also give a possibility to chat with your new "match", so you could learn more about him/her in advance. We believe it would easier go to the event together with someone, if you are new in the city and don't know anyone yet (this scenario can be common among the immigrants).

City of Iisalmi has tested previously one type of city application platform, but that test wasn't very successful. That platform didn't provide any kind of interaction possibilities between the app users, they were able to interact only with the contents that were published in the app (for example voting, answering questions, sending photos for contests etc.) That is why the app that we have been planning now should give better possibilities to interact with other app users and give them a chance for networking and finding new acquaintances. That way the app would help with integration and making newcomers feel more welcome in Iisalmi.

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3.4 Action 4: Job fair for finding the right match

Action 4: Job fair for finding the right match

Action owner: City of Iisalmi: Employment/international services

Description: In Iisalmi there are several events/fairs which give good chance for recruiting. But none of them are specially targeted for international residents who don't speak Finnish. That is why this new type of job fair is needed.

Stakeholders: City of Iisalmi, different departments: Employment services, international services, business counselling, marketing and communications. Local companies and employers.

Links to strategy: Helping international residents and local companies/employers to find the match and give chance for networking

Finance & resources: City's money, possibly money from some project, sponsor money from companies that participate?

Action readiness: In planning

Risks: Lack of time, the difficulty to find the operator who would be in charge and be the main organizer

ACTIVITIES Summary

ACTIVITY	Dates	OUTPUTS	Related ACTIVITIES	Problems / Concerns
Asking local stakeholders' willingness for participation of this job fair	9-10/2025	List of interested stakeholders	Collecting ideas from stakeholders	Some employers might find using English challenging/frightening
Forming a project team and nominating the main organizer of job fair, start of planning	End of 2025	Project team and clear roles for successful implementation	Creating marketing materials, starting marketing	Lack of time/resources
Planning job fair's detailed contents, finding host, continuing the marketing	1/2026	The finished event concept for international job fair	Asking different stakeholders to share job fair ads in their networks	Marketing doesn't reach the target group
Iisalmi's international job fair at week 8, which is employment week in Finland	2/2026	A new kind of recruiting event in Iisalmi	Cooperation with educational institutes	Only few participants attending
Collecting feedback from those who were arranging and participating the event	2-3/2026	Feedback and ideas for development	Discussion about the results with project team	Not receiving feedback

As Iisalmi aims to be more international in the future, the job opportunities or open jobs need to be more visible and available for immigrants or other international residents who don't speak Finnish. Having a recruitment event or job fair that is available only in English could give courage for local employers and companies to expand their recruiting processes to be more international.

Positive encounters and meeting talented and qualified international job seekers at this kind of event could change the employers' mindset to be more positive about international employees. Communicating in English in an international event would help everybody realize that understandable communication is possible even if your English skills are not perfect, and that positive experience would lower the language barriers and prejudices in the future. The costs of organizing this kind of event could be covered for example with European social funds (project money, if possible).

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3.5 Action 5: Remote work packages and digital nomadism

Action 5: Remote work packages and digital nomadism

Action owner: City of Iisalmi, Iisalmi industrial park

Description: The growing trend of remote work/digital nomads isn't a thing currently in Iisalmi and there are no decent co-working spaces in the city. Although, there has been initial plans about building a new modern multi-purpose building, including co-working spaces too

Stakeholders: City of Iisalmi, Iisalmi industrial park, local companies, educational institutes and organizations

Links to strategy: Presenting Iisalmi to the target group of digital nomads, and at the same time attracting potential new residents

Finance & resources: City's and Industrial park's budgets, sponsor money from companies, project money / structural funds

Action readiness: In planning, but depends on finance and resources

Risks: Lack of time, lack of money, the difficulty to prove for decision-makers the importance of attracting digital nomads or to build new co-working spaces in the city

ACTIVITIES Summary

ACTIVITY	Dates	OUTPUTS	Related ACTIVITIES	Problems / Concerns
Defining the target group and creating a concept for digital nomads	2026	Identified and detailed concept	Cooperation with companies, benchmarking	Lack of time, difficult to start cooperation with companies
Testing the concept with limited target group, deepening cooperation with companies	2026	The results of testing, new ideas from the companies	Utilizing the companies' networks	The difficulty to make this subject and its importance understandable
Building new co-working spaces or renovating already existing old spaces/premises for this purpose	2026-2027	Attractive co-working spaces	Marketing co-working spaces for the locals	Lack of money, lack of resources, nobody gets interested
Testing the new co-working spaces by inviting local people or/and people from other cities to work remotely there	2026-2027	Feedback and comments from test group	Development according to the feedback	Not getting enough people for testing
Creating a strategy/marketing plan to attract digital nomads to Iisalmi worldwide	2026-2027	The finished strategy/marketing plan	Consultation from professionals to reach this target group	Digital nomads don't find Iisalmi attractive

Iisalmi Industrial Park has plans to build a modern multi-purpose building that would offer spaces for housing, business and co-working. To make this project happen, Iisalmi Industrial Park needs partners for funding. At the moment, there have been discussions with few interested partners, but the project's fruition is still unclear.

The plan is largely based on interaction with local actors. During both the concept and reference design stages, the needs of various stakeholders have been extensively investigated by interviewing companies, educational institutions and the city's own operational units.

A communal working café has been included in the plan, and that would be ideal space to test this action about remote work packages and attracting digital nomads. The picture below shows a concept picture of the interior of communal working café.

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IAP Section 4: Implementation framework

4.1. Governance

To make sure that this IAP and the planned activities will be included in the future's work, we have already made a preliminary division of responsibilities for the activities. The next step is to look at the table of responsibilities together with those who are mentioned in the table and consider whether the implementation we are proposing is realistic or not.

In Iisalmi, the department of international services offers guidance and counselling services to all immigrants living in Upper Savo. The department's work is also supported by the advisory board for immigration work in Upper Savo, which acts as a cooperation network for immigration counselling, among other things. A working group has also been set up in Upper Savo in cooperation with international services of Iisalmi and immigration counselling. The working group includes people from other countries with different backgrounds.

Our intention is to integrate this IAP into international services' activities, because it is related to their daily work so closely. But, even if the international services of the city play an important role with the continuation of this IAP, committed actions are needed across all city departments and local stakeholders. The city's and international services' resources are only limited. All in all, the department of economic development and business services has the main responsibility of this IAP's continuation.

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4.2 Stakeholder engagement

As told previously, City of Iisalmi has active co-operation with the local companies, educational institutes and other stakeholders within the “By Iisalmi” brand work. That is why it’s safe to say that the stakeholder engagement and participatory approach will be secured in the future as well.

Some of the active members of URBACT local group are also active with By Iisalmi brand group’s work which is a good thing, because that ensures they are already familiar of the work and the actions that were implemented during Residents of the Future project (for example Bridge to Iisalmi -program).

During Residents of the Future project, we have faced challenges to have active participation in the ULG meetings, and usually the same “core” group has gathered in the meetings every time. That is why the continuation of actual ULG won’t probably be topical after Residents of the Future ends.

In the future the cooperation with organizations and the third sector will be developed further, since they have an important role with immigrants’ integration into the local community.

4.3 Timeline

We have defined initial dates for each planned action in the tables that are presented in IAP’s chapter 3. The implementation started during spring 2025 and will continue as planned in the upcoming years. The schedule for each action will be specified along the way, because at this point it is not possible to know all the details and actors. Here is a table with a summary of all the actions with their planned schedules:

Action	Timescale	Note
1. Marketing and communication plan for immigrants	2025 ->	This action will be a permanent part of city marketing and branding.
2. “Get together” events for newcomers and residents	2025->	This action is intended to remain a permanent event concept.
3. Matchmaking for dedicated participation	2025-2026	The residents’ app will be piloted during the mentioned period, and depending on its success, it will be seen whether its continuation is necessary.
4. Job fair for finding the right match	2025-2026	Integrated into the already existing national Employment week, as well as a partial piloting in November 2025 in connection with the By Iisalmi seminar.
5. Remote work packages and digital nomadism	2026-2027	This entity requires the participation of municipal decision-makers and interested companies and financiers in order to happen actually.

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4.4 Costing and funding strategies

Not all the actions presented in this plan require large amounts of money, but their implementation depends more on whether human resources are available for their implementation. Possible sponsorships or other financial investments from various stakeholders also play an important role in the implementation of the actions, as the city's resources are limited. That is why our plan is to seek different funding opportunities, e.g. local/regional funding, EU funding, direct EU calls, Ministry of the interior, etc. Money can be applied for during the ongoing programming period, and City of Iisalmi has some new projects at the application stage currently.

Benchmarking is also a good way to have a rough estimate of the costs for some of our planned actions. Asking experiences of certain subjects from partners, stakeholders or other municipalities/cities gives valuable information and insights that can help us with our own actions' implementation.

4.5. Risk assessment

The tables in chapter 3 of IAP present the risk factors for each action. When risks are identified, it is easier to tackle them and find ways to solve them. By identifying risks, it is also easier to justify to decision-makers and partners the reasons why different resources would be needed for the actions. On a general level, the common risk factors for all actions have been e.g.

- Lack of time
- Financial resources
- Human resources
- Finding the person who is responsible for the action and its implementation
- Stakeholder involvement
- Marketing doesn't reach the target groups

All of the risks mentioned above are possible, some more and some less. Although, lack of financial resources probably is the core risk that affects the availability of human resources: If there are no resources to get more workforce, the responsibility to implement these actions will be divided for city workers who already have plenty to do in their job descriptions. That leads to lack of time, which is considered a major risk as well. And most likely it is not easy to find a person in charge for each action, because of the workload that current city employees are already having. The lack of financial resources also makes it difficult to implement some of these actions, for example action 5 with remote work packages and digital nomadism - Iisalmi Industrial Park and the city need partners for funding to be able to build the new planned multi-purpose building.

Stakeholder involvement is also considerable risk factor. As mentioned before, Iisalmi already has lots of co-operation with local stakeholders and partners. ULG work during this project has also proved that people have limited time and resources, so they consider carefully their involvement in different projects and implementations. That is why it would be useful to have a dedicated person in charge who would take

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most of the responsibility and actually have time for the implementation of these actions, so interested stakeholders or partners would have lower barrier to be involved.

There is always a slight risk with marketing efforts while reaching different target groups or audiences – you can't be completely sure if the marketing is going to work or not. That is why it is important to take possible failures as a learning experience, make changes if needed and also do real-time monitoring for your marketing campaigns' success etc. If you get small successes, it makes it possible to realize even larger entities.



4.6 Monitoring and reporting

The results of these actions are difficult to measure, as some of the actions described in this IAP are extensive and long-term implementations, and their effectiveness cannot be measured immediately after implementation. Although, success can be measured by collecting data about number of immigrants and their employment rate. The use of marketing budget can be also monitored more carefully.

The implementation of the actions can be monitored, for example, by measuring the number of visitors to events, setting a target for the number of users of the citizens' app, and finding out how new residents (especially the ones with international background) have participated in the organized events.

Monitoring of this IAP can be done as part of annual reporting and the implementation of the city strategy. The aim is to get the planned actions of this IAP into the annual planning, and possibly to refine them in a possible next project. Different city departments from the areas of marketing, international services and employment services are responsible to develop and/or maintain these actions and the IAP.