



HOW INCLUSIVE POLICY BROUGHT
A DYING TOWN BACK TO LIFE

FUNDÃO, PORTUGAL: A TOWN THAT WELCOMES ALL

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FUNDÃO, PORTUGAL: A TOWN THAT WELCOMES ALL

Fundão's Remarkable Transformation – A Town that Nearly Disappeared

Located in the heart of Portugal, Fundão was once facing severe decline. Decades ago, the town struggled with poor socio-economic conditions, a lack of quality jobs, and limited opportunities. As a result, more than half of its population emigrated. But then came a turning point – the election of a visionary mayor with a strong commitment to community-driven change. He continues to lead Fundão to this day.

Under his leadership, the town began to reinvent itself. Today, Fundão is a place people choose to move to – and choose to stay. The slogan evolved from Move to Fundão to Fundão, the Embracing Place – a town proud to welcome newcomers and build a future based on inclusion and opportunity.

A Strong Network of Institutions Supporting Community Well-being

During the study visit, we had the opportunity to engage directly with all key institutions forming Fundão's extensive and well-coordinated municipal network, which is dedicated to enhancing quality of life across a wide range of sectors, from housing and economic development to culture, youth engagement, senior support, and migrant integration.

We visited Twintex Manufacturing, where we were warmly welcomed and introduced to their exemplary practices in creating an inclusive and supportive working environment.





Among the standout initiatives is the municipal housing agency, which regulates the local property market to ensure accessible rental and ownership options – a rare achievement in today's housing crisis. In addition, newcomers receive subsidized rent during their first years of residence.

The Municipal Migration Center is a key gateway for integration. It offers language learning, training, and support that enable migrants to quickly find employment in the town's expanding economy. The center also serves seasonal workers and students, acting as a vibrant and welcoming community hub. This work is carried out in close synergy with CLAIM, the Fundação Local Support Center for Migrant Integration, which provides free information and assistance throughout the entire process of welcoming and integrating foreign citizens.

Entrepreneurship is flourishing through the Living Lab – a municipal business incubator offering mentoring, workspace for just 1€ per square meter, and access to ten co-working hubs. Fundação also hosts a Fab Lab that provides training and services in 3D printing and digital technologies, further strengthening the town's innovation ecosystem.

Support for local agriculture is provided through Agrotech, a municipal company focused on agricultural innovation and forest maintenance. On the industrial front, Twintex, the town's largest textile employer, has gained recognition for its inclusive employment practices and social responsibility.

Thanks to affordable housing and a pro-innovation environment, Fundação has also become a haven for digital nomads. Today, tech professionals account for more than 10% of the town's new residents, spurring the creation of over ten tech startups in recent years.

Where There's Political Will, There's a Way

Fundão is living proof of how a town once facing decline can redefine its future with political vision, inclusive policies, and community engagement at its core. This is more than a success story – it's a roadmap for towns and regions across Europe seeking sustainable and inclusive revitalization.

The experience left us inspired and hopeful – a rare and powerful sentiment in today's complex world.





02.

DESIGN THINKING AS A TOOL FOR SHAPING SERVICES FOR WORK-BASED MIGRANTS

In Interreg Europe, we often talk about improving policies. But do we really know how to design the solutions that make those improvements happen? How can we make sure policies are not just well-written documents, but living, effective frameworks shaped by the people they affect?

These were the questions at the heart of the two-part Design Thinking training held in June 2025 for the INVOLVIM team. Delivered by Finnish service design experts Palvelumuotoilo Palo Oy, with trainers Sari Komulainen and Essi Kuure, the sessions offered a fresh perspective on policy development and public service design.

Participants learned not only the basics of design thinking but also how to apply it in complex, real-world work. The training emphasised moving beyond existing service categories, such as refugees, students, or any single target group, towards comprehensive integration services that consider all newcomers. This approach means engaging a broad spectrum of stakeholders: employers, public authorities, NGOs, and community organisations, working together to provide tailored support. The ultimate aim is to expand access to essential services that enable long-term immigrant settlement, foster social inclusion, and strengthen community cohesion.

Throughout the training, the INVOLVIM team explored innovative methods for all five stages of the design process from planning to prototyping. Tools such as netnography, service safari, design drivers and many more encourage participants to look deeper into user needs, observe real-life contexts, and translate insights into creative, practical solutions.

Policy makers should not only focus on delivering solutions, but also on adopting and applying innovative approaches that foster collaboration among stakeholders and communities. In our experience, inclusive processes ensure that policies are more effective and sustainable. Through this training, INVOLVIM partners have gained the knowledge and tools needed to design improved services for work-based migrants across our regions. If you would like to learn more, we welcome you to connect with us.

Visit our [INVOLVIM webpage](#) to learn more about our work, explore resources, and stay updated on how we are shaping inclusive policies for work-based migrants.



03.

PŁOCK (POLAND) LAUNCHES SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY ON FOREIGN EMPLOYMENT AND INTEGRATION

The City of Płock, in cooperation with the Mazovian University in Płock, is carrying out a sociological study to better understand the experiences of foreign citizens living and working in the city.

The research focuses on:

- **Foreign residents** – At least 300 interviews will be conducted with non-Polish citizens aged 18 and over, who live or work in Płock. The study will explore their needs, reasons for settling in the city, and everyday challenges. To ensure diversity, no more than 50% of participants will be of Ukrainian origin.
- **Local businesses** – At least 20 interviews will be carried out with companies employing foreign workers under contract, to assess their experiences, challenges, and expectations.

The study combines quantitative and qualitative methods (CATI, face-to-face, and auditorium interviews) using a variety of question types. The goal is to provide a comprehensive analysis of both foreign workers' situations and employers' perspectives, identifying key needs and barriers.

The final report, to be published in December, will offer valuable insights for shaping local policies and supporting integration in Płock. Follow the progress of this initiative [here](#).



THE INVOLVIM PROJECT BRINGS TOGETHER A DIVERSE GROUP OF PARTNERS



INVOLVIM Partnership consist of five regions across Europe representing regions, cities and one education institution. Partners are:

- Regional Council of South Ostrobothnia (Finland, lead partner)
- Municipality of Fundão together with associated policy authority Centro Regional Coordination and Development Commission (Portugal)
- City of Plock (Poland)
- Municipality of Litija and Education centre Geoss (Slovenia)
- Louth County Council (Ireland).

We appreciate your interest in building stronger, more inclusive communities throughout Europe. Thank you for reading our newsletter. Follow us on our webpage: www.interregeurope.eu/involvim or LinkedIn: INVOLVIM | Interreg Europe Project.