

WRITTEN BY



MAREK KUNDRÁT
Head of Legal Services Department
CORWIN SK a.s.



KEEPING TALENT IN THE EAST

THE NEW PARADIGM OF PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

For decades, regional employment strategies focused on “job security” - the promise of a steady paycheck and a stable position until retirement. However, the modern professional landscape has shifted. Today’s talent is not seeking a final destination; they are seeking a career trajectory. In Eastern Slovakia, the challenge lies in moving beyond the perception of the region as a mere back-office or manufacturing outpost. To retain the brightest minds from local universities, companies must offer clear pathways for advancement that rival those in Western Slovakia or broader Europe. This requires investing in leadership programs, continuous upskilling, and roles that carry high-level responsibility. When a young engineer or developer sees a ten-year growth map within their home region, the lure of Bratislava or Prague begins to fade.

THE REGIONAL ADVANTAGE: COST VS. QUALITY

One of Eastern Slovakia’s most potent, yet underutilized, tools is the “regional advantage.” The rise of remote and hybrid work has fundamentally changed the value proposition of living outside a capital city. Eastern Slovakia can offer “Bratislava-level” roles—positions characterized by high intellectual complexity and competitive salaries—paired with “regional-level” flexibility.

The cost-of-living index in Eastern Slovakia remains significantly more attractive than in major European hubs. When professionals can afford a higher standard of housing, shorter commutes, and a superior work-life balance while still working on cutting-edge projects, the “brain drain” reverses. The goal is to market the region as a place where one never has to sacrifice professional ambition for personal well-being.



Today’s talent is not seeking a final destination; they are seeking a career trajectory.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS: THE POWER OF ECOSYSTEMS

Talent is inherently more resilient when it exists within a local cluster. A solitary high-tech company in a remote town is a risky bet for a professional; if that company fails or the culture sours, the individual is forced to relocate. However, when talent is part of a dense ecosystem, such as the Košice IT Valley, the Prešov industrial network, or the burgeoning Volvo automotive cluster, that risk is mitigated. These

clusters offer multiple employment options within the same geographic area. They foster a “community of practice” where professionals can network, share knowledge, and transition between firms without uprooting their families. Strengthening these clusters ensures that Eastern Slovakia becomes a “talent pond” rather than a “talent pipeline” leading elsewhere.

SMART SPECIALIZATION AND GLOBAL IDENTITY

To compete globally, regions cannot simply be “good at everything”; they must be “exceptional at something.” This is the essence of smart specialization. By focusing on a specific niche, a region creates a globally competitive identity. The most daunting challenge, however, lies in accurately identifying the right niche for this specialization. When a region specializes, it ceases to be a periphery and begins to feel like a center. This psychological shift is crucial. Specialization attracts specialized investment, which in turn attracts specialized talent, creating a virtuous cycle of growth that bolsters Slovakia’s overall competitiveness.

BEYOND THE OFFICE: ESSENTIAL SERVICE ACCESS

While career prospects and salary are the initial hooks, they are rarely the reasons people stay long-term. The “brain drain” in Eastern Europe is frequently driven by a lack of essential service

access. High-earning professionals will still leave a region if the local hospital is outdated or if schools cannot provide their children with a modern, bilingual education. Retention in Eastern Slovakia is therefore directly tied to public infrastructure. Regional competitiveness requires a holistic approach where private sector growth is matched by public sector excellence. Investing in healthcare facilities and educational innovation is not just a social service, it is a critical economic development strategy. To keep a 35-year-old manager in the region, they must be convinced that their children have a future in Košice or Prešov that is at least comparable, if not superior, to what they would find in Bratislava or Prague.

PLACEMAKING: SOLVING THE “BOREDOM FACTOR”

Finally, we must address the social dimension of talent retention. Young professionals are drawn to cities that offer cultural and social vibrancy. The “boredom factor” is a legitimate economic threat; if a city goes quiet at 6:00 PM, talent will eventually follow the noise to more vibrant urban centers. Investing in “placemaking” is essential. This means supporting cultural hubs, a lively “café culture,” and, crucially, modern sports infrastructure. Eastern Slovak cities must offer a wide range of athletic opportunities, from accessible cycling paths and running tracks to community multi-purpose

courts and modern swimming facilities. Vibrant public spaces, combined with a rich cultural and athletic calendar, create an emotional bond with the region, making the decision to leave much harder.



The goal is to market the region as a place where one never has to sacrifice professional ambition for personal well-being.

CONCLUSION

There is significant untapped potential within Eastern Slovakia. By treating talent retention as a multi-dimensional challenge—combining professional growth, ecosystem density, high-quality public services, and urban vibrancy—the region can secure its future. The goal is clear: to create an environment where the next generation of Slovak talent chooses to stay, not because they have to, but because it makes sense to do so and actively contribute to the reshaping of the region.