



NIHAK
2025

NIHAK is a development organization that provides business and regional development services in the southern part of Northern Ostrobothnia.

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Toni Krankkala
CEO

Turning opportunities into action!

The year 2025 has shown that now is the time when the potential of our region begins to materialize. Planned projects and studies are turning into actions: investments are being prepared, construction is being started and new operating models are being created. The transition towards a cleaner economy is not an abstract goal. Rather, it is practical actions, construction sites, contracts, new partnerships and tangible growth. Now is the time for both companies and municipalities to take action and ensure that this period of construction is fully utilized.

The clean transition will create new ecosystems in the region. Clean energy solutions, the circular economy, the data industry and the hydrogen economy open up opportunities, creating a foundation on which the region's companies can build new business with their special expertise. When one project succeeds, a second and a third spring up alongside it – and soon, it creates a whole ecosystem that sustains itself.

Large investments are reflected in construction sites, but they also strengthen and increase the expertise of the region's companies, as well as their ability to participate in future projects. NIHAK plays a key role in this work. We do not intend to simply drift along with the flow and see what happens. We want to actively influence what happens. We merge projects, find synergies and make sure that when one investment is realized, several new ones emerge around it.

NIHAK's mission is, on the one hand, to pave the way for new investments and, on the other hand, to bring together the specific expertise of companies in the region, identify the opportunities it offers and ensure that the work leads to tangible results. The competence of our personnel is a key resource here: they know the companies, the expertise and the needs of the region, and they know how to bring the right operators together.

Construction and new investments bring more than just production to the region: increasing housing and service needs create opportunities for entrepreneurs and strengthen the service offerings for all residents of the municipality. Anyone who works in the region, even for a moment, uses local services, spends money in the region and, in the best case, stays in the region and creates new vitality.

The municipalities in our region know how to look towards the future and have the courage to take action. We have the courage to take big steps and build new opportunities that will carry us far into the future. This year, we will also launch a joint regional strategic effort aimed at strengthening workforce availability, retention, and the conditions for business growth, as well as ensuring that the opportunities provided by the clean transition are fully utilized. The future isn't just about plans, it's something that is being built around us right now. Expertise produces solutions, and by working together, we can build sustainable growth far into the future.

Municipality-specific business services support the entrepreneur every step of the way



Regional business services

Regional business services help companies with matters such as

- internationalization,
- recruitment,
- e-commerce and
- commercializing new innovations.

We develop the capabilities of companies to operate in a changing operating environment and organize training, workshops and coaching on various subjects to support the competence development of companies.

The regional business services supplement the service offering of municipality-specific business advisory services.

Applying for funding

NIHAK's experts help you apply for funding and business grants

Businesses will often consider applying for business grants or funding when they intend to make investments, develop their operations or create growth. Grants or funding may also be necessary when establishing a new company or transferring the ownership of an existing one. NIHAK provides companies with free assistance in applying for business grants and funding. It is especially advisable for first-time entrepreneurs to make use of expert support.

Cooperation begins with charting the company's situation and needs. The experts and businesses work together to identify suitable support and funding options, as well as work on the content of the application. Comments on the draft application can also be requested from financiers. If necessary, NIHAK's expert will also participate in negotiations with the financier and assist in the preparation of payment applications and reports.

NIHAK will accompany the entrepreneur throughout the application process, and all the steps are taken together with them. However, applying for business grants and funding also requires the entrepreneur's own work contribution, as the key content of the application is always based on the entrepreneur's own expertise and plans," says Business Service Manager **Harri Jokela**.

According to Jokela, no two application processes are identical. However, the chances of success are always improved by careful preparation and the use of expert assistance.

"Therefore, we hope that entrepreneurs would contact us as soon as they have their first thoughts about investments or development," says Jokela.

Good to remember:

- The grant application must be submitted before the related work is started.
- The success of grant applications is influenced by the competitive situation in the industry, the impact of the planned actions on the company's growth and development, and the company's financial situation.
- A well-drafted business plan and profitability calculations are important when applying for both business grants and funding.
- When applying for funding, the assessed information also includes the collateral, the company's financial situation and the expertise of the team implementing the actions.
- NIHAK's Business Service Managers provide assistance with every step of the application process.

Introduction of the NIHAK business advisory

NIHAK is a partner for businesses in the region at all stages of the business operations.

Entrepreneurs don't have to manage everything by themselves. NIHAK's business services provide free and tangible assistance to all businesses, regardless of size and industry. We have extensive expertise and strong networks. We bring together the right people for the entrepreneur and move toward the next steps with them. NIHAK's business services are available to all entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs in Haapajärvi, Kärsämäki, Nivala, Reisjärvi, Sievi and Oulainen.

Appointments can also be booked electronically through our website.

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"By asking, you find solutions;
by doing, you get results."

LAURA KORHONEN

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"Courage and persistence turn
enthusiasm into reality."

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"Remember the practical side!"

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"Let's turn challenges into
opportunities."

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"Advice for entrepreneurs from NIHAK!"

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"Everyone has ideas, but it's
the actions that matter."

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"Small insights grow into
big opportunities."



Photo: Media Mimmit Oy

The courage to try will take you far

Media Mimmit Oy started from the shared hobby of two friends from Haapajärvi. Now the friends are planning for full-time entrepreneurship after they graduate.

Pinja Huhtala ja Jenni Järvenpää have been working as a team since they were in school. Their shared career began in Haapajärvi with Finnish baseball, when the two took over management of their team's social media channels.

The spark for owning a company first occurred when they participated in an entrepreneurship camp during upper secondary school. There, Huhtala and Järvenpää were encouraged to turn their idea into a business. However, they decided to wait until they were adults so they could independently establish a limited liability company.

In autumn 2026, it will be three years since the establishment of Media Mimmit Oy. Life has taken Järvenpää to Korpilampi and Huhtala to Tampere. Both are studying business, and Huhtala still plays Finnish baseball. Entrepreneurship goes hand in hand with the rest of life.

"All the while, we have a strong desire to learn new things and develop our own work. It would be great if we could be full-time entrepreneurs after we graduate," says Järvenpää.

The purpose of Media Mimmit Oy is to offer social media marketing services at an affordable price and with a low threshold, even in smaller municipalities. Gradually, their operations have expanded, and the services now also include graphic design and photography.

Huhtala and Järvenpää's networks, particularly those accumulated through their sports activities, have helped them find customers. They say they are a good example to prove that you can start entrepreneurship on a small scale, without extensive prior expertise or expensive equipment.

"My father has said that the most important thing in the beginning is unwavering self-confidence.

We have learned many things through practical experience and developed our operations so that we can eventually do this at a larger scale," Huhtala says.

Entrepreneurship today is not just a single path; it can be shaped according to the entrepreneur's life situation. Business services must also stay with the entrepreneur at different stages. Huhtala and Järvenpää have taken advantage of NIHAK's business services and training, and they have received Leader funding for purchasing equipment.

Support from their friends and family has also been important. Attitudes towards the young entrepreneurs have mostly been curious and encouraging.

"In high school, we would sometimes receive negative comments, but you shouldn't worry about that. Even in a small town, you should do your own thing and have the courage to try," say Huhtala and Järvenpää.

Building the future together with young people

Young people have a lot to offer to the business world, and they are also increasingly interested in entrepreneurship. NIHAK's goal is to help turn that interest into action.

More and more young people see entrepreneurship as a real option for building their own future. To get started, you need enthusiasm and courage, but also information, support and encouragement.

As a new initiative in November 2025, NIHAK organized entrepreneurship events for young people in all municipalities in the region. These Born to Bisnes events included talks from young entrepreneurs and meetings with NIHAK's business advisors. They also included workshops and a pitching competition.

Aada Junno and **Enni Krankkala**, who were responsible for organizing the events, note that young people now consider entrepreneurship to be an increasingly attractive option.

"As an entrepreneur, you're your own boss and you get to do exactly what interests you. There may be a lot of work, but it's worth it if you care about it," say Junno and Krankkala.

NIHAK's diverse business services are also available to young people, whether they are just curious or already have a concrete business idea.

According to Business Service Manager **Pirja Piipponniemi**, the most important thing is to lower the threshold for starting a business and make entrepreneurship a realistic option.

"Young people must have the opportunity to try entrepreneurship safely, even without a full-time commitment. You need to remember that there is much more to young people's lives, such as



school, friends and their own growth and development."

Piipponniemi wishes to remind people that they don't need to be experts or know everything when they get started.

"There are as many types and forms of entrepreneurship as there are entrepreneurs. You can start a business even on a small scale, and adapt it to fit your own life situation."

Young people themselves have a lot to offer to the business world. When the

world changes, it is natural for young people to get involved.

They boldly adopt new ways of working and help create them, as well.

Encouraging young people is also important for the continuity of business activities in the region.

"We have a lot of companies that need successors. NIHAK is involved in supporting the transfer of ownership, and we also want to encourage young people to see this as an option," says Piipponniemi.



Bringing out the local potential

Company visits help introduce the region's companies to higher education students. Sites such as Scanfil Oyj's Sievi plant have had positive experiences.

Higher education studies tend to draw people towards cities, but varied career paths can also be found in smaller towns. It is therefore important to raise students' awareness of opportunities outside the growth centers.

NIHAK has responded to this need by organizing student visits to companies in the region. This allows companies and higher education students to connect and foster increased cooperation between companies and educational institutions.

"This serves the interests of all parties involved. Companies are consulted, and we also consider the wishes of students regarding in which sectors we should organize visits," says the Rekry+ Project

Manager **Kristiina Nyman**.

The most important message for students is clear: there are interesting companies in the region that offer traineeships, topics for thesis work and opportunities to build careers after graduation, even towards international fields.

One of these companies is Scanfil, a provider of electronics manufacturing services, to which NIHAK recently organized a student visit together with Centria and the Oulu University of Applied Sciences.

The company, which operates in ten countries, has around 250 employees in Sievi, and also employs trainees and summer workers.

Pauli Huhtamäki, HR Manager of the Sievi factory says that from the company's point of view, student visits are an excellent opportunity to familiarize students with their operations.

"We see this as a good way to raise the company's awareness. Students may not already know how internationally we operate and how many development opportunities we offer," says Huhtamäki.

Huhtamäki believes that the visits can genuinely increase students' interest in applying for jobs in the region. They also provide an opportunity to dispel myths about factory work.

"An on-site visit helps us show what our operations are like and what processes are involved in them. At the same time, students see how work is carried out here in modern facilities."

NIHAK has been providing business services to Sievi since 2024. Cooperation with Scanfil has also been started, and according to Huhtamäki, it is currently planned to be continued and, if necessary, expanded.

"Regional cooperation is good for municipalities, and NIHAK's activities benefit the entire region and its businesses," he says.

The shared goal of a successful region

NIHAK and Centria work together to build bridges between students and companies in the region. The aim is to ensure that the offered competence meets the needs of working life.

NIHAK and the Centria University of Applied Sciences have the shared goal of helping companies succeed and securing the vitality of the region now and in the future.

According to Centria's rector **Tapio Huttula**, the collaboration is a natural part of the basic mission of the University of Applied Sciences.

"We want to work to strengthen the vitality of the region together with the business community and the partners that develop it, such as NIHAK.

The working life orientation of the University of Applied Sciences is materialized through exactly this kind of cooperation," says Huttula.

From the students' perspective, it is important to gain contact with working life and experience in their field already during their studies. NIHAK has been involved in organizing company visits and building contacts through which students can get to know the companies in the region.

Centria and NIHAK also have the shared goal of promoting the employment of international students. At the moment, about a third of them stay in the region after graduation.

"In order to succeed in finding employment, connections to workplaces must already be built during studies. We help students build pathways to working life through traineeships, projects, theses and other means," says Huttula.

Through its campuses in Ylivieska, Pietarsaari and Kokkola, Centria has a strong presence in its area of operation.

Regional impact comes not only from the educational offerings but also from active collaboration with companies and developer organizations.

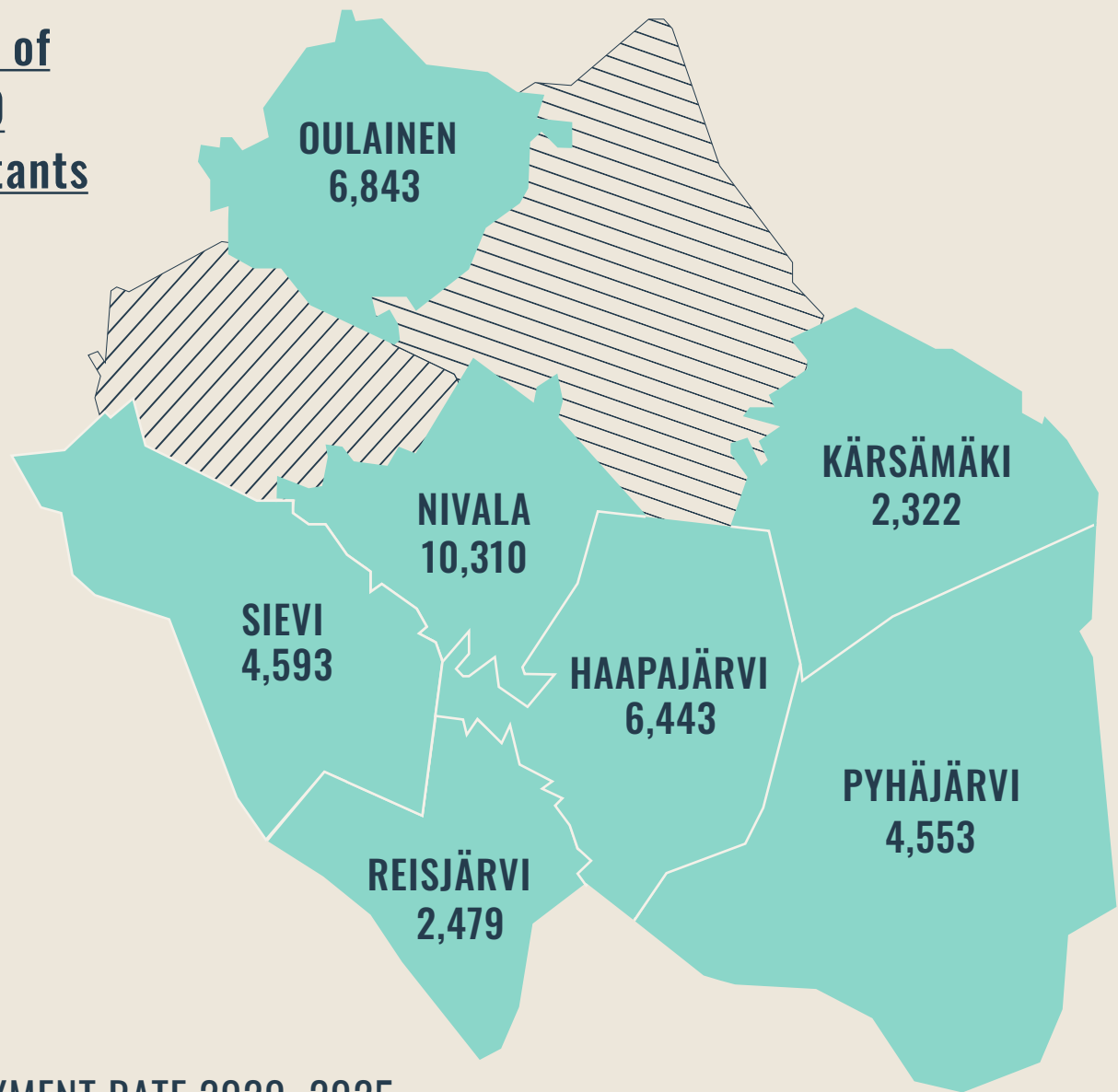
Centria's experts and testing environments offer companies a variety of support for needs such as product development and the pilot testing of new solutions. NIHAK is involved in several RDI projects as a financier or co-developer.

Cooperation is also reflected in the events and networks. For example, the Tervatynnyri pitch competition brings together entrepreneurs, students and developers and helps to bring forward new ideas.

"NIHAK gives us a point of contact for companies in the region. They have an understanding of the business field and its needs, as well as extensive networks," says Huttula.

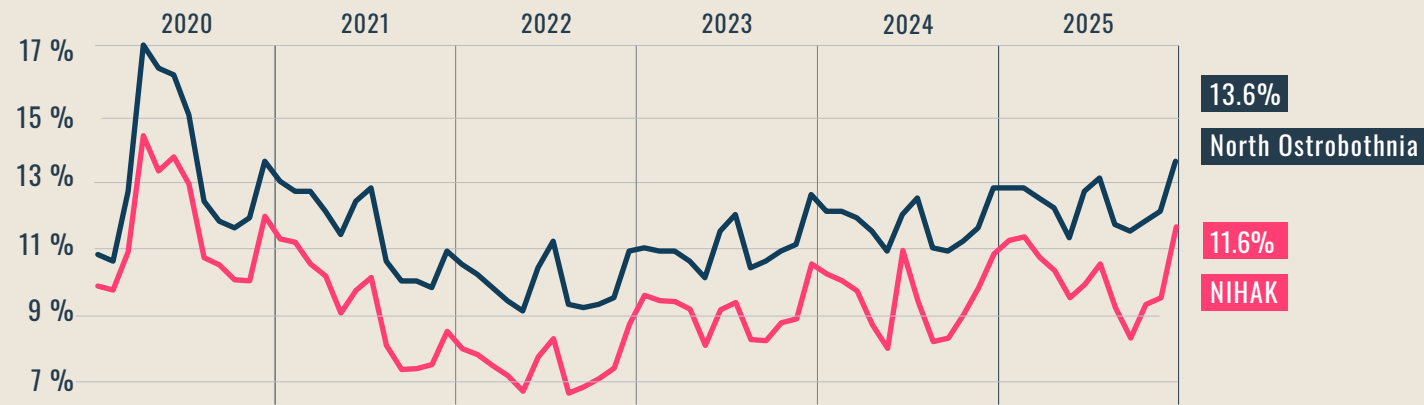
NIHAK’S OPERATING REGION 2025

A total of
32,990
inhabitants



UNEMPLOYMENT RATE 2020–2025

Source: Statistics Finland



3,856

COMPANIES
IN THE REGION

218

NEW COMPANIES

215

COMPANIES THAT
RECEIVED AID

€3,609,847

AMOUNT OF AID GRANTED

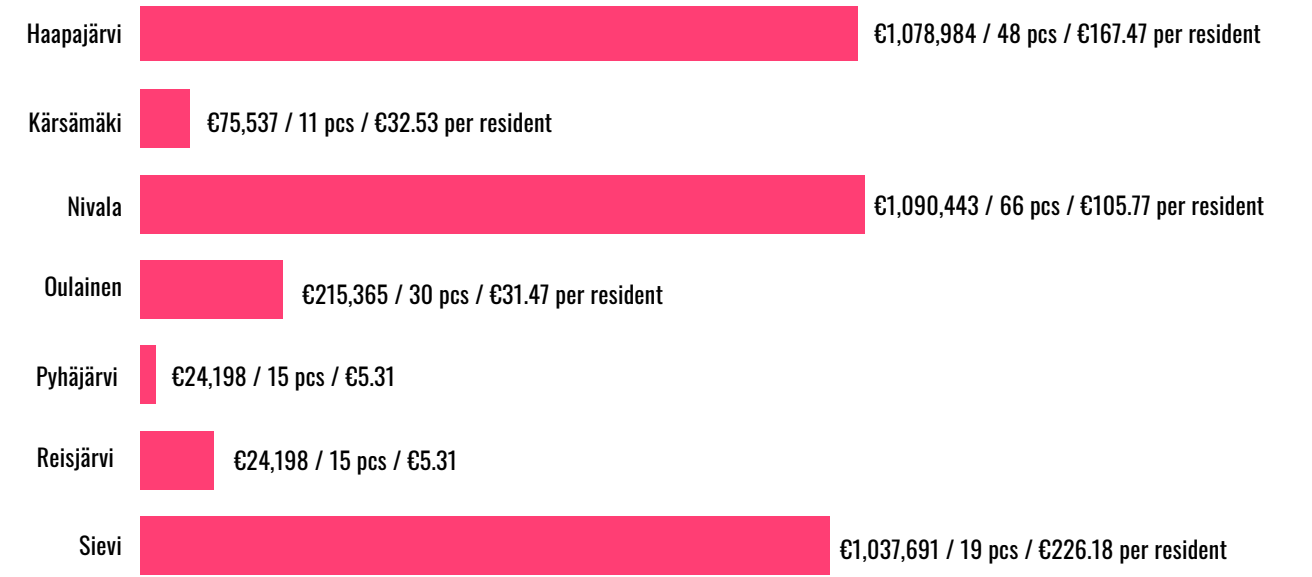
NUMBER OF COMPANIES 2025

*Finnish Patent and Registration Office's Virre information service, as of 28 January 2026), Company forms: general partnership, limited partnership, cooperative, limited company, public limited company, sole proprietorship)

	HAAPAJÄRVI	KÄRSÄMÄKI	NIVALA	OULAINEN	PYHÄJÄRVI	REISJÄRVI	SIEVI	TOTAL
Companies active in the register*	696	335	950	592	514	280	489	3,856
New registered companies*	35	12	68	28	20	16	39	218
Companies that have ceased trading*	17	6	19	21	12	8	15	98
Net change*	+18	+6	+49	+7	+18	+8	+24	+130

BUSINESS GRANTS PROVIDED IN 2025

Sources: *Statistics Finland: Preliminary demographic data
Does not include operating environment grants awarded to municipalities or municipal/supra-municipal development companies.



A reliable partner on the path to internationalization

There is no single correct road to the great wide world; each company has its own path. NIHAK's internationalization services can help you on your way to a new market.

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project manager
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The operating environment of companies has been in constant turmoil in recent years, both worldwide and in Finland. During such changes, the importance of competent and reliable partners is emphasized.

NIHAK's internationalization services have long supported companies in the region in charting new markets, building networks and developing business.

"When the world around us changes, it also means opportunities for companies. An entrepreneur does not have to do everything themselves, as we at NIHAK can help them approach new markets," says Internationalization Services Manager **Ari Alakangas**.

Careful background research is required before taking practical steps. For example, it is necessary to specify objectives, define the target market and assess whether the product or service meets a local demand or whether it needs to be tailored for the market.

There is no single correct path to internationalization, and the results may only show with time. The final target market may be found elsewhere than originally planned, and sometimes the end result may also be returning to square one.

"Trust is essential. Entrepreneurs can trust that they will get the right help and expertise either through us or our networks," says Alakangas.

Project Manager **Reea Vainikainen** wants to remind people that helping companies to access international markets also involves a lot of proactive and pioneering work.

"NIHAK actively gathers information of new markets and refines it for companies to utilize. Such work has been done with prospects such as the reconstruction of Ukraine.

The digital economy represents one growing sector. It is represented by areas such as the e-services business, trading on digital platforms and software development.

Traditionally, finding new markets takes a lot of time and resources. Through electronic platforms, smaller companies in particular have the opportunity to internationalize quickly and to experiment regardless of their location.

"NIHAK has expertise to meet a wide range of needs. We are there to support entrepreneurs, whether they are following a more traditional path or using new digital channels," says Vainikainen.

Partnership as a guarantee of success

Biogas strengthening energy independence and the circular economy

The Nivala biogas plant is a significant investment that promotes local production of renewable energy and the efficient use of biomass, especially from agricultural by-products. In close cooperation with local farmers and companies, we are not only building Finland's largest biogas plant, but we are also reducing our dependence on imported natural gas, supporting sustainable agriculture and creating new jobs in the region.

NIHAK's role has been decisive in the initial phase of the project; their long-term development work, creation of local networks and practical support have helped us find a suitable location and proceed smoothly through the permitting and preparation phases.

Andreas F. Brandt, Partner, Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners



Local expertise and motivation accelerating the development of hydrogen production

We are an international renewable energy project developer with over 30 years of experience in developing wind, solar, energy storage and hydrogen projects in 14 countries. In Finland, we have been operating for more than ten years and have carried out several wind power projects. The hydrogen production project being developed in Nivala is the first of its kind for us in Finland, and its planned capacity for the first phase is 200 MW.

The project has progressed smoothly thanks to strong local expertise and cooperation. From the very beginning, the cooperation with NIHAK and the City of Nivala has been open, solution-oriented and practical. A suitable location for the project as well as key infrastructure connections such as water, electricity and the future hydrogen network connection were quickly found, which helped confirm our decision to locate the project in Nivala.

Oliver Biegel, Team Leader, ABO Energy, Hydrogen Europe



Electrical grid enabling growth

The Finnish electricity system is undergoing a major transformation as new industrial projects and clean energy solutions increase the demand for electricity in different parts of the country. From the grid's point of view, predictability is essential for ensuring that the grid can be supplemented when needed and the materialization of investments can be ensured.

The long-term development work carried out by NIHAK lays a clear foundation for investment planning and implementation in the region. When the overall development is actively carried out, it creates better conditions for the development of the electricity network. A shared understanding of the current situation helps to direct investments to the right places and ensure that the capacity meets future needs.

When planning is proactive and the various operators have a shared course, the electricity network is able to support growth and does not become an obstacle to it.

Asta Sihvonen-Punkka, Managing Director, Fingrid



The NIHAK region stands out in the field of clean transitions

Billion-euro investments are the result of systematic regional development work

Finland's largest biogas plant and carbon capture plant, dozens of new investors in biogas, hydrogen, biochar, solar energy, battery storage and data centers, preliminary design of Finland's first regional hydrogen transmission network.

Here are a few examples of how the NIHAK region currently stands out in the field of clean transitions. During 2026–2027, the total value of projects in the investment decision stage will increase to more than one billion euros.

The development is the result of long-term and systematic work, in which a coherent and efficient way to promote investments has been built throughout the southern part of the Northern Ostrobothnia region.

NIHAK CEO **Toni Krankkala** stresses the importance of systematic regional development work:

"As a regional developer, we are exceptionally active and we also do things in a new way. We invest in expertise, allocate the right people for the work at hand, and lead our efforts with a results-oriented approach. In this work, we cannot wait; we have to go out into the world and market our region."

According to Krankkala, it is also important to create a shared understanding of the current situation with the municipalities.

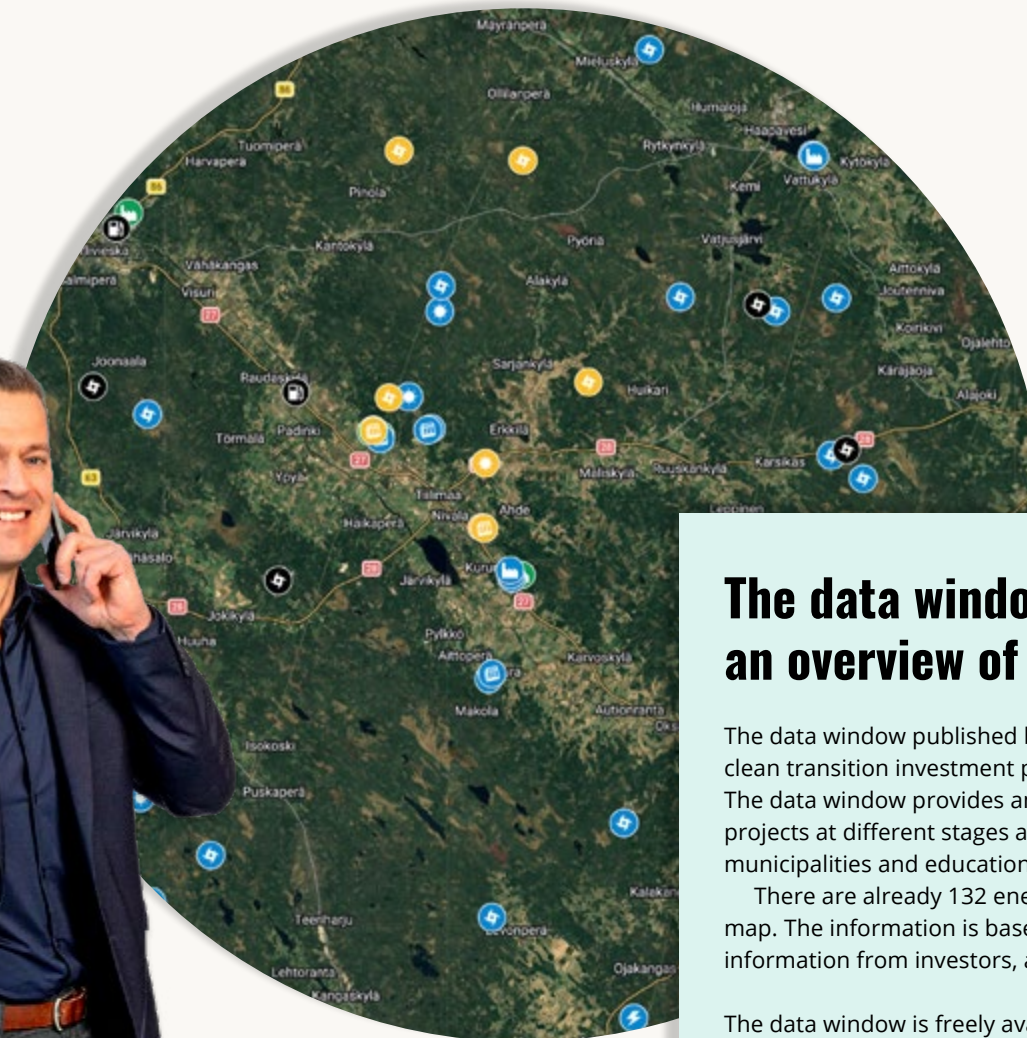
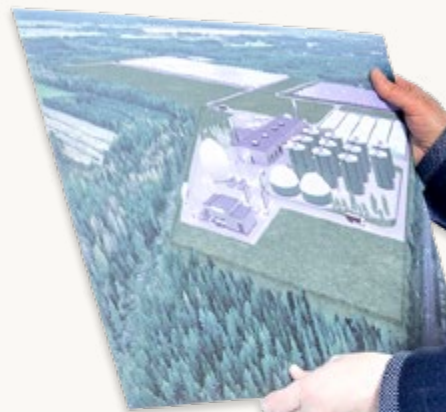
"We actively share information with municipal decision-makers so that everyone has a realistic understanding of the region's true potential."

NIHAK's regional development services promote the allocation of investments in the region and help municipalities create the preconditions for new projects. The aim is also for local companies to be involved in the implementation of investments.

Regional Development Director **Kimmo Niskanen** describes the work in a practical manner:

"When we promote the area to investors, we have every intention of making new projects happen. To succeed at that, our product has to be in good condition. We need to identify our own competitive advantages and present them clearly and convincingly."

The development of the area has progressed in stages. First, a strong foundation was built for investments in energy production and the construction of the electricity network. Now, the region is attracting more and more productive investments that take advantage of the existing infrastructure. They are also bringing new jobs and strengthening the vitality of the region.



The data window provides an overview of investments

The data window published by NIHAK presents all the clean transition investment projects in the region. The data window provides an up-to-date view of projects at different stages and serves companies, municipalities and educational institutions alike.

There are already 132 energy projects on the map. The information is based on public sources, information from investors, and general estimates.

The data window is freely available to everyone on the NIHAK website: www.nihak.fi/fi/dataikkuna

Fast Track model accelerating investments

The Fast Track operating model significantly reduces the time it takes to bring projects to an investment decision. This makes projects more attractive to investors and creates a clear competitive advantage compared to other similar projects.

The Fast Track operating model developed by NIHAK is based on anticipation, clear definition of roles, and close cooperation. The area's potential is identified in good time by charting its strengths and acquiring land proactively. Zoning for industrial plots is conducted in advance so that investments can be started without delays.

Actively marketing the region is also important. A clear presentation of the region's strengths is drafted for discussions with investors. The visibility is further improved by industry events such as Think BIG – More from Energy, as well as the international Oulu South Hydrogen Valley brand.

The operating model relies on a clear division of labor. The municipalities are responsible for land use and decision-making, while NIHAK collects information, produces materials and cooperates actively with investors. Open communication and a solution-oriented approach help build trust and speed up decision-making.

The shared operating model brings continuity to the investment promotion work. The close partnership between municipalities and NIHAK allows projects to proceed smoothly without unnecessary administrative delays.

The Nivala biogas plant will strengthen the region's position as a bio-economy hub

The largest biogas plant in Finland is planned to be built in Nivala, and it is a significant project that will contribute to the development of the entire region. It strengthens the region's energy independence, accelerates other related industrial investments, and serves as a driver for the hydrogen economy being developed in the area. The plant is also part of something bigger; the clean energy production, circular economy and agriculture together form a sustainable ecosystem.

The creation of a bio-economy hub

With this project, the region will become a bio-economy hub. Local farms and companies will supply the plant with raw materials such as slurry, solid manure, grass and straw, which are converted into biomethane. The plant will significantly reduce the need for imported energy, and the biogenic carbon dioxide to be captured can be utilized in the production of synthetic fuels and chemicals. This allows the region's natural resources to be transformed into local economic added value.

Circular economy network supporting agriculture and businesses

Cooperation with farms in the region creates a functioning circular economy network. The plant's nutrients are returned to the field as bio-fertilizer, which supports sustainable agriculture and improves the competitiveness of farms. At the same time, smaller companies can participate in logistics, processing, and the utilization of side streams. This creates new financial opportunities and strengthens the region's business network.

Employment and expertise

The investment will generate a significant employment effect. The construction phase will have an employment effect of hundreds of person-years, and the startup of the plant will create new permanent jobs. The project will increase the region's technological expertise and competence base, attract new clean transition investments and strengthen the region's position as a forerunner in the bio-economy.

Local impact through international expertise

The project utilizes international expertise, but its effects are primarily felt on the local level. It will strengthen the business network and the research and development cooperation between agriculture and energy production. The bio-economy as a whole supports the long-term development of the region, diversifies job and training opportunities and lays the foundation for future sustainable energy projects.

Example of regional development

The Nivala biogas plant is a tangible example of how renewable energy, bio-economy and technological expertise can strengthen local vitality. The construction of a clean energy hub shows that these investments will benefit local businesses, strengthen the region's competitiveness and boost future energy-related investments.

*The Nivala Biogas Plant project is owned and developed by **Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners (CIP)** through the **CI Advanced Bioenergy Fund I (CI ABF I)**.*



Major project bringing new expertise

For Rakennusliike Sorvoja Oy, the biogas plant is the biggest contract in the company's history. At the same time, it is an important step for the company in international cooperation.

The construction project of the largest biogas plant in Finland will be carried out by locals, as the main contractor is Rakennusliike Sorvoja Oy from Oulainen. The company is a family business that is turning 60 this year, and the biogas plant represents the biggest contract in its history.

Project Manager **Juha Sorvoja** says that the initial phase of the project has progressed as planned. Most of the earthworks were completed during midwinter, and next is the foundation work for the plant's buildings and tanks.

"The pace of work is gradually picking up towards the summer. During the summer and autumn, many people will be working on the site at the same time. After our construction phase, the technical erection of the plant will begin, and the plant will be completed during 2027."

About 20 of the construction company Sorvoja's own staff are working on the project, and subcontractors are also involved in tasks such as the erection of the steel frame and roof work. In total, the employment impact during the construction phase is estimated to increase to hundreds of person-years.

From the constructor's point of view, the construction site is exceptional in many ways. It is already notable just because of its scale: the area covers about 20 hectares.

The project is also characterized by a large number of involved parties and internationality. It involves cooperation between Danish, German and Finnish operators, and English is used as the working language.

The design-build contract requires close and smooth cooperation with the customer, Nivalan Biokaasu Oy, as well as several other operators. One key partner is the German plant supplier Bioconstruct.

In a large project, coordinating the schedules and goals of the various parties requires paying close attention, according to Sorvoja.

"There is plenty to coordinate. In weekly meetings, we discuss issues together with the various parties, and we also maintain regular contact outside the meetings. The operators on the worksite also hold their own meetings."

For the contractor, the construction of the biogas plant offers a valuable opportunity to develop their expertise in the cooperation processes of a large and multi-stage project.

"This is a significant opportunity to take part in an international project in our region. If we think about the future, this project will also serve as a good reference as a larger project," says Sorvoja.

Think Big highlighted the region’s strengths

Clean transition projects make the NIHAK region an international investment destination. The Think Big event showed that collaboration represents a strong competitive advantage.



The largest energy sector event in the history of NIHAK and in the entire surrounding region, Think Big – More from Energy, gathered 600 participants to the Champion Door arena in Nivala in August 2025. The event provided a comprehensive overview of ongoing projects in the southern part of Northern Ostrobothnia. Billions of euros in investments in clean transition production and electricity networks are planned and ongoing in the region. Today's expert presentations had a common message: clean energy production and the related refinement processes offer significant growth opportunities for Finland, and Northern Ostrobothnia in particular. The area is also of interest to international operators. In the exhibition area, a total of 50 companies and organizations showcased their solutions across various sectors of the energy industry. A wide range of service sector companies were also involved. This year, the Think Big award was given to KNK Networks from Reisjärvi and Ketola Invest Oy from Haapajärvi. Both have made use of the transition in the energy sector as an opportunity to renew themselves and build sustainable growth.



FINANCING OUTSIDE OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES €1.3M	PROJECTS IN PROGRESS 15	TOTAL VOLUME OF ACTIVITY FUNDING €2.6M	EMPLOYEES 25
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FINANCIAL INFORMATION

NIHAK is a non-profit charitable association. The funding of NIHAK's operations consists of membership fees paid by member municipalities for regional development, regional business services and separately invoiced fees for the provision of municipality-specific business services. The aim is to cover the costs of development projects produced by regional development services primarily through public project funding provided by the EU, which is supplemented by the regional association's own contributions. One important part of regional development activities is development projects that can make significant use of the 'leverage' effect of self-funding for the benefit of the region. In 2025, 15 projects were in progress. The total funding for this project portfolio amounted to €11.7 million, of which NIHAK's own project activities accounted for a total of €3.5 million.

The total volume of financing of the association's activities in 2025 was €2.6M, of which membership fee income accounted for €0.6M. The result for the financial year 1 Jan – 31 Dec 2025 was a surplus of €33,677.71. The balance sheet total of the association was €1,441,056.34 and its equity was €495,816.80.

Funding paid to project activities (excluding self-financing contributions) during 2025 amounted to €1.3M, of which funding from financiers (EU and state funding) accounted for €1.26M. Municipal match funding for regional development collected with membership fees is channeled through the regional board, to which funding proposals can be submitted in a continuous application process. In 2025, the membership fee was €16.76 per resident in the municipalities in the region. The regional board met eight times in 2025. At the end of 2025, NIHAK had 25 employees.

MEMBERS OF THE REGIONAL BOARD

FULL MEMBERS	ALTERNATES
Juho Jukkola, Kärsämäki	Pekka Anttila, Kärsämäki
Jonna Tamminen (vice chair), Haapajärvi	Mauri Tenkula, Haapajärvi
Päivi Karikumpu, Nivala	Hannu Tölli, Nivala
Matias Ojalehto, Reisjärvi	Sanna-Mari Vesanen, Reisjärvi
Esko Peltoniemi, Haapajärvi	Teija Myllylä, Haapajärvi
Jarmo Vuolteenaho, Nivala	Jarmo Pihlajaniemi, Nivala
Esko Ristinen, Kärsämäki	Mika Autio, Kärsämäki
Sari Huuskonen, Reisjärvi	Arto Vähäsöyrinki, Reisjärvi
Antti-Jussi Vahteala, chair, Sievi	Merja Haavisto, Sievi
Rami Rauhala, Sievi	Terhi Kangas, Sievi

NIHAK OFFERS COMPREHENSIVE SERVICE



Municipality-specific business advice

- Starting a business
- Advice on business grants and financing
- Business development
- Mergers and acquisitions
- Negotiations in crisis and transition situations
- Networking



Regional business services

- VAU!HAUS service
- Incubation activities
- Training for entrepreneurs
- Internationalization services
- Development projects
- Business service for investment projects



Development of the business environment

- Invest in service
- Advocacy
- Communication and information services
- Partnerships and networking

A TOTAL OF 690 ACTIONS WERE IMPLEMENTED THROUGH PROJECTS IN 2025.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:



Recruitment and competence needs:

Companies' recruitment skills were developed and supported in recruitment by charting labor needs, preparing and publishing job advertisements, searching for employee candidates, and organizing cooperation with educational institutions and employment services.



Marketing and digitalization:

Companies' marketing and digital readiness were developed by offering digital communication advice as well as training on search engine optimization, the use of artificial intelligence and digital tools.



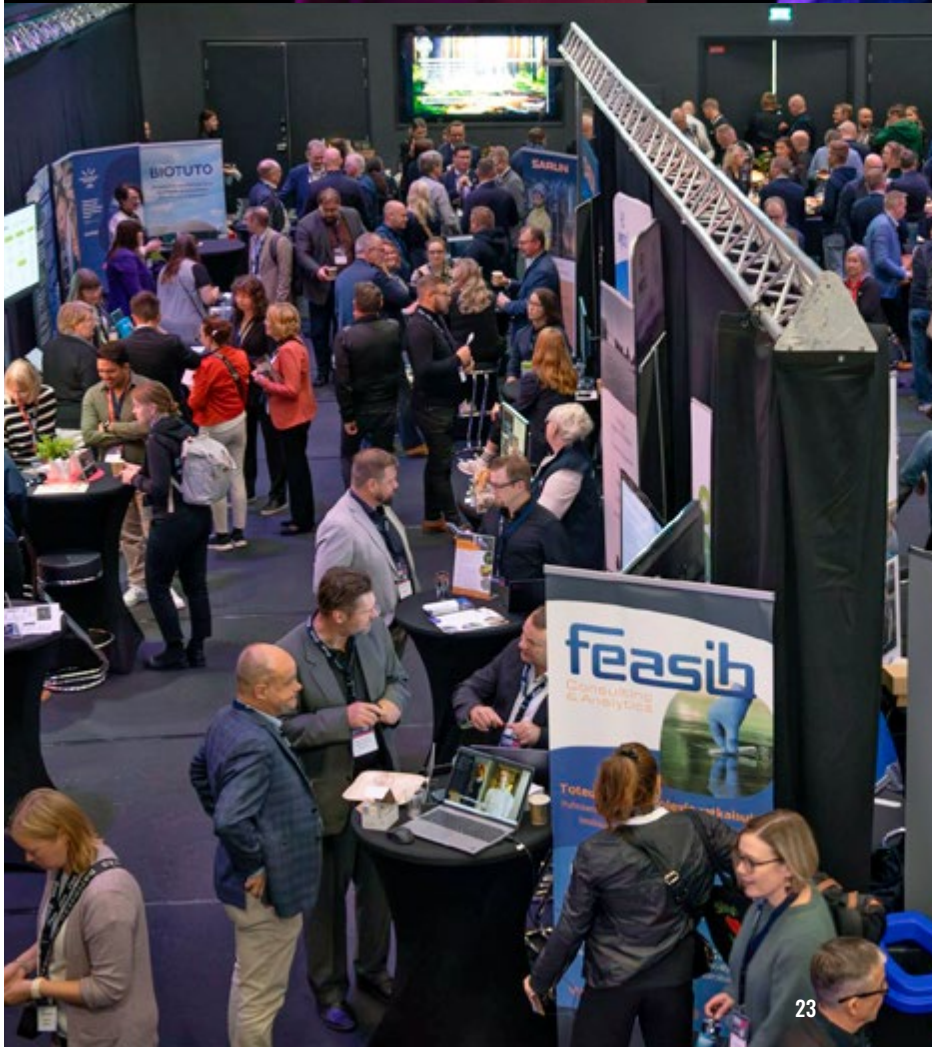
Sustainability:

Assessments of companies' current level of corporate responsibility were conducted, and measures were initiated for the calculation of carbon footprints, sustainability reporting, and developing sustainable business.



Innovations:

Companies were supported in the development of new products and services, commercialization of innovations and renewal of their business through coaching and expert services.



EVENTS

119 self-organized events

- 101 were hosted live
- 18 online

The largest of our events were

- the Match&Rekry event,
- ThinkBIG – More from Energy.

Topics emphasized in the training events included:

- sustainability,
- sales,
- marketing,
- artificial intelligence.

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NIHAK AS THE LEAD OR CO-DEVELOPER

1 OSATA
Competence needs in the quickly changing working life are met quickly through quality and digitalization using training, guidance, counselling, and expert services.

2 NIHAK GREEN DEAL
Seeking maximum benefits for the growth and development of the region's business activities from the region's large investment demand generated by the green transition.

3 Fast Track
NIHAK acts as a municipal partner in the Invest In activities by actively seeking investments for the region and by helping municipalities create the pre-conditions for new investments. In the Fast Track project, an Invest In strategy that crosses regional borders is created and implemented. Business excellence ecosystems are identified and supported, data is produced for investors, and a Fast Track process for investments is developed.

4 NIHAK REKRY+
Companies' recruitment skills are developed, micro- and medium-sized companies are supported in their recruitment work. Hidden job opportunities are made visible and comprehensive solutions are identified to address the local companies' challenges of skilled labor availability.

5 Dr Livingstone – New business in turbulent world
Strengthening the export opportunities of companies in new target markets and their ability to identify business opportunities in them. Competence development related to new target markets, and creation of business alliances and networks to enable companies to better respond to the opportunities in new growth areas.

6 Scaling business on a digital platform
Development of the group project involves scaling the business of four companies to international markets using digital platforms.

7 VAU!START+
Incubator services for the area will be produced. The goal is to find innovative companies in the region as well as new ideas and provide them with a variety of support to achieve success. Developing a regional funding model (fund) that supports early-stage financing for businesses.

8 VATUPASSI
Enhancing companies' ability to identify and understand sustainability as a broad theme that is key to achieving positive societal impact, competitive advantage, and financial performance. Companies' sustainability expertise is developed to better adapt to changes in the operating environment.

9 SmartPilot
Identifying applications for unmanned systems to meet the needs of agriculture, forestry, and industry in the North Ostrobothnia region.

10 Luova Triangeli
Supporting the region's cultural and tourism service providers' livelihood opportunities. Development of the collaboration among the arts and culture sector, program and event services, and tourism services. Exploration of ways to extend the peak seasons and increase cooperation across municipal boundaries.

11 BIOTUTO – Working together to boost recycled nutrients and local bioenergy production
The goal is to promote biogas investments in the region, as well as the use of biogas in the region, in transport and in industry through various measures. Farm-specific projects, projects between farms, and industrial-scale projects.

12 New trends in housing
Rural living across municipalities is developed in cooperation between the three regions. Municipalities are helped to develop housing solutions in their area and solutions are sought to the financing challenges that have arisen in rural areas.

13 KASVA
A collaborative project involving business service providers, entrepreneurs, researchers, and innovation stakeholders, aimed at promoting the sustainable growth, renewal, development, and adaptability of companies in the region, as well as improving the vitality and retention capacity of the regions.

14 UUPO – Renewable energy education infrastructure
JEDU learning environment investments: Solar power systems, grid construction, and emergency response training.

15 Digitalized test environments for robotic work machines, vehicles, and drones (Networked Robotics Test Beds)
Pyhäjärven Callio's investments: High-capacity transformer and generator, electrical (main) distribution board, UPS system with batteries, charging equipment, trunk cabling, and charging cables.

Project name	2023	2024	2025	2026	Role	Strategic focus	Budget	NIHAK budget
1 OSATA – Competence needs in changing working life					Lead developer	First-class business conditions	€518,392	€262,302
2 NIHAK GREEN DEAL					Lead developer	Impactful Invest in services for municipalities	€448,203	€448,203
3 Fast Track – Developing future excellence ecosystems with Invest In activities					Lead developer	Impactful Invest in services for municipalities	€428,931	€428,931
4 NIHAK REKRY+ Regional partnership for business recruitment challenges and employment management					Lead developer	Outstanding business services	€387,134	€387,134
5 Dr Livingstone – New business in turbulent world					Lead developer	Outstanding business services	€279,181	€279,181
6 Scaling business on a digital platform					Lead developer	Outstanding business services	€50,000	€50,000
7 VAU!START+					Lead developer	Outstanding business services	€1,234,305	€492,800
8 VATUPASSI – Sustainable future					Co-developer	First-class business conditions	€840,800	€189,000
9 ÄlyPilot – Pilot testing of smart unmanned systems in Northern Ostrobothnia					Co-developer	First-class business conditions	€687,459	€249,593
10 Luova Triangeli					Co-developer	First-class business conditions	€599,368	€81,343
11 BIOTUTO – Working together to boost recycled nutrients and local bioenergy production					Co-developer	Impactful Invest in services for municipalities	€995,160	€195,426
12 New trends in housing					Co-developer	Impactful Invest in services for municipalities	€736,493	€240,761
13 KASVA – Sustainable growth for micro- and small-sized businesses through regional cooperation between RDI operators and business services					Co-developer	Outstanding business services	€1,974,712	€182,678
14 UUPO – Renewable energy education infrastructure					Funded by	Impactful Invest in services for municipalities	€2,272,172	€-
15 Digitalized test environments for robotic work machines, vehicles, and drones (Networked Robotics Test Beds)					Funded by	Impactful Invest in services for municipalities	€200,000	€-
Total project budget							€11,652,311	€3,487,352

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www.nihak.fi

