**REWIND: Advancing Worker Buyouts as a Pillar of Business Continuity in Europe**



REWIND

Relaunching Enterprises through Workers’ Innovation and New dynamics

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**Addressing Business Succession Through Worker Ownership**

Across Europe, thousands of small businesses are at risk — not because they’re failing, but because their owners are retiring. What happens when no one is there to take over?

The REWIND project, co-funded by the Erasmus+, offered a powerful answer: let the workers take the lead.

Over the past two years, REWIND has helped bring attention to worker buyouts (WBOs), a model where employees step in to take over and run their workplace as a cooperative. The idea is simple but transformative: instead of shutting down a healthy business, hand it over to the people who already know it best.

**Multiplier Events and Local Impact**

REWIND reached over 150 stakeholders through targeted multiplier events held in Italy, Greece, France, Spain, Belgium, and Sweden. These events brought together a diverse range of participants, including SME owners, workers, trainers, VET educators, social economy leaders, and local authorities.

During these events:

* Participants engaged with cooperative business models in the context of regional development.
* WBO concept was introduced and REWIND’s digital learning tools were demonstrated and a dialogue among social enterprises and vocational educators was initiated.

Feedback collected across all events confirmed a high level of satisfaction with the REWIND tools and approach. Participants valued the practical focus, user-friendliness, and applicability of the materials to real-world business scenarios.

**Making Waves at the European Level**

REWIND culminated in a high-level European seminar held on 8 April 2025, organised at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in Brussels. This event served as both a dissemination milestone and a platform for structured policy dialogue. It convened over 50 stakeholders, including representatives from EU institutions, national cooperative federations, social economy actors, and the REWIND project consortium.

The seminar’s objective was to position worker buyouts (WBOs) within current European policy frameworks and explore how the REWIND tools and findings could support future efforts to promote cooperative entrepreneurship, inclusive governance, and SME resilience.

**Key contributions and strategic insights**

* **Giuseppe Guerini**, member of the EESC and President of CECOP-CICOPA Europe, opened the discussion by underlining the practical success of worker buyouts in Italy, referencing the 316 WBOs implemented under the Marcora Law, which have preserved more than 11,000 jobs. He highlighted their 79% survival rate after 10 years, exceeding average SME survival rates. Guerini advocated for worker buyouts to be recognised not only as emergency responses to crisis but as proactive instruments of economic democracy and long-term industrial strategy.
* **Margit Perko**, policy officer at the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL), contextualised WBOs within the EU Social Economy Action Plan (SEAP). She acknowledged that although the plan identifies WBOs as promising instruments for inclusive growth and social innovation, implementation remains uneven across Member States. She emphasised the need for:
  + Legal reform to facilitate cooperative transitions,
  + Access to targeted financial instruments and guarantees,
  + Capacity-building initiatives for both workers and support organisations.
* Perko also expressed interest in featuring REWIND’s tools and case studies on the EU Social Economy Gateway, thus increasing their visibility and uptake at European level.
* Speakers from Spain, Ireland, France, and Belgium enriched the dialogue with national case studies:
  + In **Spain**, the existence of legal distinctions between cooperatives and social enterprises was highlighted, along with the regional leadership of Catalonia and the Basque Country in fostering WBO ecosystems.
  + In **Ireland**, discussions focused on leveraging credit unions and shared services to support WBOs, despite structural and regulatory barriers.
  + In **France** and **Belgium**, the emphasis was on the importance of governance training and changing mindsets from traditional employer-employee models to democratic ownership and co-responsibility.

These contributions reinforced REWIND’s core findings: WBOs require not only motivation and opportunity, but also enabling ecosystems—including legal frameworks, financial infrastructure, advisory services, and a shift in education and awareness.

**REWIND’s policy relevance**

The seminar clearly demonstrated that REWIND is more than a vocational training project: it is a policy-relevant initiative aligned with EU priorities on social economy development, SME continuity, and inclusive entrepreneurship.

The tools and methodologies developed through REWIND:

* Complement existing EU efforts to strengthen the resilience of SMEs, particularly in the context of demographic transitions;
* Address concrete needs for training, succession planning, and cooperative governance;
* Offer evidence-based insights from pilot activities and stakeholder engagement, which can inform national and EU-level policy implementation.

By bridging the gap between grassroots practice and institutional strategy, REWIND has positioned itself as a reference point for future Erasmus+ projects and social economy policy actions.

**Deliverables and Long-Term Use**

REWIND delivered a suite of open-access resources designed for broad adoption by vocational education providers, cooperative support organisations, and social economy actors. Key outputs include:

* A multilingual eLearning platform offering structured training on WBOs, succession planning, and cooperative governance.
* An interactive coworking toolkit featuring real case studies, downloadable guides, and facilitation templates.
* Policy recommendations based on comparative research and feedback from pilot implementation across six EU countries.

**Sustainable Impact and Policy Alignment**

REWIND contributes directly to several Erasmus+ programme priorities, including:

* Labour market relevance through support for employee-led business transitions
* Social inclusion by promoting participatory ownership models
* Digital transformation via user-friendly online learning tools
* Capacity building in vocational education, cooperative training, and stakeholder engagement

By fostering dialogue across sectors and Member States, REWIND has strengthened the European knowledge base on worker buyouts and laid the foundation for sustained policy and practice innovation in cooperative business continuity.

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