



OVERVIEW OF EIT WESTERN BALKANS SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

Date: 22 January 2025

This note provides an overview of EIT Western Balkans Support Activities, until the end of 2024, with a specific focus on the support activities being implemented by the EIT Cross-KIC Strategic Regional Innovations Cluster. It is pertinent to note that the 2024 preliminary results are indicative and subject to EIT verification and further analysis.

ABOUT THE EIT

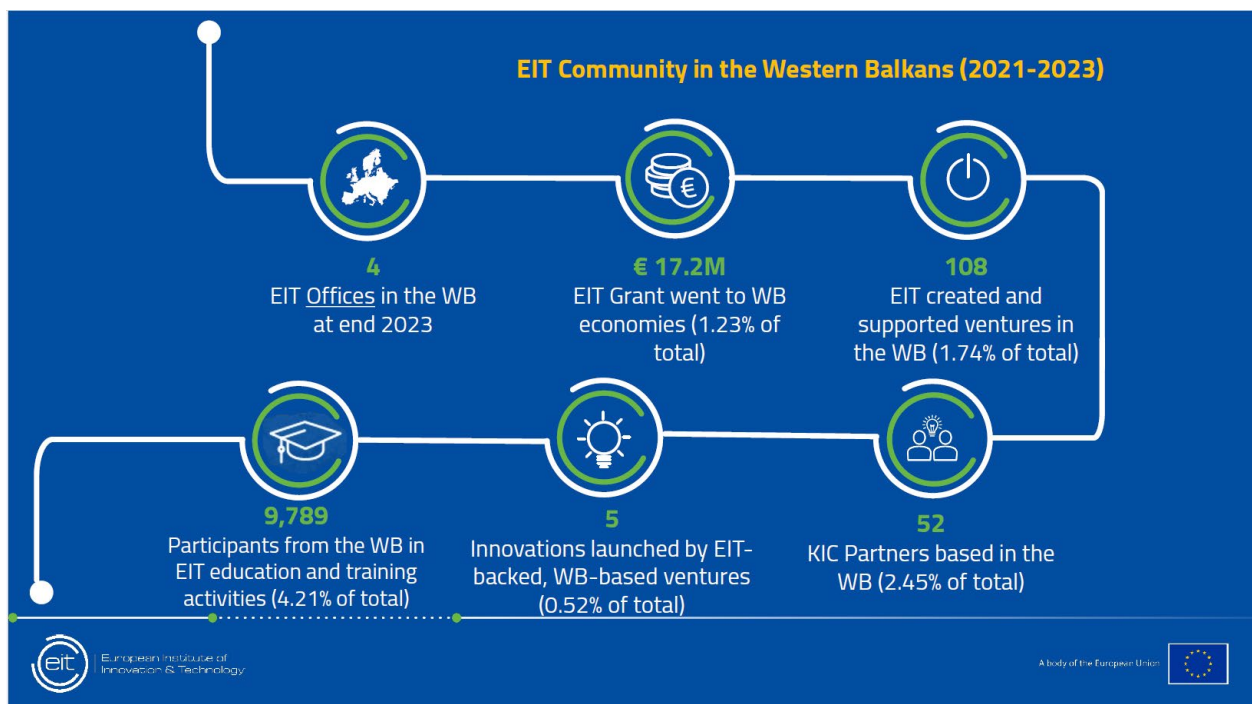
- The European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) is Europe's largest innovation ecosystem. Our network is made up of **2400+ partners** working across more than **70+ innovation hubs in Europe and beyond**.
- Our mission is to drive innovation forward, as innovation is key to solving pressing global challenges, ensuring a **green and sustainable** future for Europe.
- As Europe's largest innovation network, the EIT has directly supported over **9 900 ventures**, launched **over 2 450 new products** to market and **trained over 880 000 learners** in new skills. Thanks to early business creation support, EIT- supported companies and start-ups are currently valued at over **EUR 72 billion**.
- The EIT's success is based on its unique approach – building sustainable innovation ecosystems. We unite business, research and education in **Knowledge and Innovation Communities**, that power innovations to solve global challenges
- One of EIT's distinct features is that it's the only innovation body with on the ground presence in **every EU Member State and beyond**.
- The EIT, as part of **Horizon Europe**, is the only EU innovation instrument dedicated to integrating **education and skills with research and business**.
- The EIT's activities cover the entire innovation journey from idea to successful products and services on the market. **Our nine Innovation Communities** (1) educate entrepreneurs through our education programmes, (2) empower researchers to find smart solutions to pressing challenges via innovative research projects, and (3) nourish ventures through business creation and acceleration services.
- The **mandate of the EIT is also growing** from the European Commission to implement political priorities, such as skilling 1 million workers in deep tech, and being among the first to take up roles in key policy programmes including the New European Bauhaus, and the Net Zero Industries Act.



EIT VERIFIED RESULTS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS (2021-2023)

During the current programming period, the EIT made it a priority to **increase engagement with the Western Balkan economies**. In this context, all EIT KICs, working individual and in a joint manner, have rolled out a number of activities in support of the Western Balkans.

The results delivered by the EIT Community in the **Western Balkans in 2021-2023** are outlined in the visual below:



These results, including the Western Balkan economies' participation rate in **EIT Community activities of 2.24%** shows a strong performance compared to the **Horizon Europe average data**, highlighting both that the EIT's offering is of interest to Western Balkan innovators and is producing significant and tangible impact on the ground.



WESTERN BALKANS SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

The EIT Cross-KIC Strategic Regional Innovations Cluster, an EIT Community project bringing together all the EIT KICs working towards a common objective, has been spearheading support of the Western Balkans, primarily through the following key initiatives:

1. EIT JUMPSTARTER:

The [EIT Jumpstarter](#) is a proven **pre-accelerator programme** by the EIT Community that provides **early-stage idea holders with mentoring, training, and smart pre-seed funding** to help them establish start-ups and embark on entrepreneurial journeys. On average, **10-11% of applications annually come from the Western Balkans**, and in **2023, 65 out of 621 total applications** originated from the region, with two teams winning three prizes at the [Grand Final](#).

In **2024, 9 teams from the Western Balkans region were supported via the EIT Jumpstarter**, proposing innovative ideas across Health, InnoEnergy, Manufacturing, Food, and Raw Materials. Two teams reached the Grand Final held in Budapest on 28 November 2024: **Rehem from Serbia**, which won 3rd prize in the EIT InnoEnergy category, and **WellscanPro from Kosovo**, which received 2nd prize in the EIT Health category and a special award as the most promising Western Balkans team across all categories.

From 2026, a dedicated Western Balkans Cohort within the EIT Jumpstarter, fully funded from IPA III funding (€600,000) is expected to be launched. This will allow for the annual number of Western Balkan teams supported via the EIT Jumpstarter to be significantly increased.

Several success stories have emerged from the Western Balkans via the EIT Jumpstarter. One example is [NeoPill](#):

NeoPill is a female-led Serbian start-up founded in the **EIT Jumpstarter** programme in 2023. Winner of the **Healthcare category** and the **Western Balkans Special Prize**, it later became a **finalist in the EIT Post-Jumpstarter** and won the **InnoStars Awards Investment Track (2024)**. Currently, it is part of the **EIT Health Spice** programme, supporting high-potential start-ups toward commercialization.

NeoPill developed the **first dental device using electrolysis to eliminate bacteria** in hard-to-reach areas around teeth and braces, addressing a major oral hygiene challenge for **orthodontic patients (75% of whom are young individuals)**. Unlike traditional cleaning methods, **NeoPill requires no water or bathroom, ensuring effortless, eco-friendly oral care anytime, anywhere.**

A **2024 in-vitro study** with the **Faculty of Dentistry, Pančevo**, showed that a **30-second application reduces bacteria by 24%**. The first **1,000 devices** were distributed in **Serbia (Laviefarm)** and **Bulgaria (doctor's offices)**. With support from **NALED** and a **Startech grant**, NeoPill **finalized production and began local market distribution**. Fully **Serbia-based**, the company is now ready to **scale production** to tens of thousands of units.



2. EIT INFRABOOSTER:

The [EIT InfraBooster](#) is a **modular training programme designed for representatives of scientific organisations** in the Western Balkans and neighbouring countries that **own research infrastructures**. It provides capacity building and support to **develop infrastructure-based services for companies**, helping participants leverage commercially relevant research infrastructures and the expertise of their research teams. The programme aims to foster closer collaboration with industry, enhance institutions' international exposure and innovation, and create new revenue streams.

In 2023, the EIT InfraBooster supported **60 participants** (68% female) from 17 institutions, including Aleksandër Moisiu University (Albania), the University of Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Ss. Cyril and Methodius University (North Macedonia), and the University of Belgrade and Belgrade Metropolitan University (Serbia), resulting in the development of [eight new services](#). **Notably, four of these have achieved commercial success within just 12-months, collectively generating over €10,000 in revenue in 2024.**

By June 2024, the 2024 edition of the programme had received 99 eligible applications for its Foundation Module, marking a significant year-on-year increase from the previous year. **In 2024, 13 mentoring sessions were held, and eight teams from the Western Balkans** – one from North Macedonia, two from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and five from Serbia – **progressed successfully**, presenting their projects during a dedicated session at the EIT Jumpstarter Grand Final in Budapest on 28 November 2024.

3. EIT RAWMATERIALS REGIONAL INNOVATION CENTRE IN ALBANIA:

EIT RawMaterials established a **Regional Innovation Centre in Elbasan, Albania**, at the end of 2023 with the Hub officially launched in April 2024. The Hub is fully funded by the Albanian authorities and based within the premises of Aleksandër Xhuvani University of Elbasan.

[Ledi Moisiu](#) was appointed as the Centre Director in early 2024. The rest of the team is now also in place and the Centre is fully operational. Whilst the Centre is primarily focused on Albania, supporting local innovators, industry players, universities, research centers, and investors of the raw materials value chain, it also engages with the wider Region.

The key goals and objectives of the Centre are aimed at:

- promoting scientific research in the **mining sector**, exchanging experiences and supporting overall **Albanian integration with the European Union** in terms of exploration and processing of minerals, especially those of strategic importance, based on the latest technological developments;
- serving as a Center for **revitalising innovation**, education and promoting businesses in the field of **raw materials for Albania**;



- playing a key role in the **modernisation of the raw materials extraction** and processing industry, through the promotion of green technology with the aim of increasing the supply of raw materials from Albania to the European market; and;
- fostering **entrepreneurial and innovative skills** among specialists and students, as well as promote **STEAM education to develop skills for the future** and meet the needs of the raw materials industry in Albania and beyond.

The activities of the Centre are fully aligned with and aim to significantly contribute to:

- Albania's Research and Innovation Smart Specialization Strategy (where the raw materials sector is identified a priority);
- the European Commission's "Growth Plan" for the Western Balkans; and;
- the goals of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and the Innovation Agenda for the Western Balkans.

More information in the Centre is available on its website: <https://www.rawmaterialsalbania.al/>.

4. EIT COMMUNITY HUBS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

EIT Community Hubs serve as one-stop-shops for local innovators, partners, and stakeholders to access the full range of services and opportunities provided by the EIT Community. These Hubs aim to bridge the EIT with regional ecosystems, raise awareness, foster collaboration, and support policy engagement. Each Hub is managed by an EIT Community Officer and plays a pivotal role in promoting innovation, facilitating stakeholder engagement, and attracting local participation in EIT initiatives.

Activities of the HUBs

- Act as centralized sources of information on, as well as a single gateway towards all EIT Community opportunities and services.
- Foster collaboration between local innovators, businesses, and academia.
- Provide policy support and engage with local authorities to advance innovation goals.
- Facilitate EIT Community initiatives, such as workshops, mentoring, and capacity-building programmes.
- Support local innovators, in the local language, in accessing funding, building partnerships, and participating in EIT activities.

Three EIT Community Hubs are in place in Western Balkans – in North Macedonia (established in 2023), in Montenegro (established in 2024) and Albania (established in 2025 – fully financed by IPA III via the [EU4INNOVATION](#) Project). Hubs in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina will be established before the end of 2025. More details of the EIT Community Hubs are contained in annex.



5. OTHER EIT SUPPORT INITIATIVES

EIT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEI) INITIATIVE:

The [EIT Higher Education Institutions \(HEI\) Initiative](#) is a joint activity of the EIT community, which recognises higher education institutions (HEIs) as the pivotal actors in regional and European innovation ecosystems.

The EIT HEI Initiative is uniquely designed to enhance the innovation capacity and entrepreneurial mindset of HEIs and foster collaboration between academia, industry, research institutions, public authorities and governmental organisations. Through competitive calls for proposals, the initiative offers non-reimbursable grants to consortia formed by HEIs and their partners to work on innovation and entrepreneurship, but also on other dimensions of strategic interest for Europe, such as deep tech.

The participation of Western Balkan HEIs in the EIT HEI Initiative as of 2023, is summarised below (this data includes both full partners and associated partners from Calls in 2021-2023):

- *Albania*: 5 partners.
- *Bosnia and Herzegovina*: 10 partners;
- *Montenegro*: 2 partners;
- *North Macedonia*: 14 partners;
- *Kosovo*: 1 partner;
- *Serbia*: 16 partners.

When compared to the participation from RIS countries, the engagement levels from the Western Balkans demonstrates a robust involvement in the EIT HEI Initiative. The Western Balkans collectively have 48 partners, indicating a strong regional commitment to enhancing their innovation and research capabilities through this initiative. This data reflects the growing collaboration and dedication of HEIs in the Western Balkans to the EIT HEI Initiative, aimed at enhancing their capacity to innovate and integrate with the broader European innovation ecosystem.

The 2024 EIT HEI Initiative Call for Proposals was launched on the 26 September and the deadline for submitting applications was 12 December, with 109 applications from the Western Balkan countries.

DEEP TECH TALENT INITIATIVE (DTTI):

The [EIT DTTI](#) is a pioneering programme led by the EIT that will skill one million people within deep tech fields by the end of 2025. Deep tech innovations – cutting-edge technological solutions combining fields of science and engineering in the physical, biological and digital spheres – are indispensable in addressing the most pressing global challenges.

By the end of 2024, 28 organisations from the Western Balkans joined the Pledge and proposed training courses.



EIT NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS BOOSTER:

The new [EIT Community Booster Programme](#) is part of the [New European Bauhaus Initiative](#), intending to find and **support ventures that can change and improve the quality of life of citizens**. The EIT Community is looking for the most innovative ventures driving **sustainable change for cities, industries, climate, food and wellbeing** in order to support their business growth and help them become the international game changers.

One citizen engagement project took place during 2024 based in the Balkans: [PLACETHEATRE \(Connect NEB\)](#) in Serbia. The PLACETHEATRE project in **Novi Sad pioneered an innovative approach to urban transformation through participatory street theatre and citizen engagement**. Addressing challenges in three neglected neighborhoods, the project empowered young people—especially those from at-risk groups—to co-design future visions for their communities using the **"Dialogues of the Future" methodology**. Their insights were transformed into three dynamic street theatre performances, sparking public dialogue on inclusivity, sustainability, and aesthetics.

Beyond performances, the project established a strong foundation for long-term urban revitalization by hosting two **NEB Lab workshops**, where residents and stakeholders co-designed strategies for improving public spaces. These activities directly influenced policy discussions, strengthened community ownership, and demonstrated the power of cultural interventions in shaping sustainable urban futures. A key outcome was the proposal for a permanent NEB Lab in Novi Sad, ensuring continued citizen-driven innovation and impact. *More information:* <http://placetheatre.in.rs/>

EIT SUPERNOVAS:

The [EIT SUPERNOVAS](#) Is an [EIT Community](#) initiative that aims to **increase female presence in the entrepreneurship and investment ecosystem, as well as support women already active in it**. We support female founders, women-led start-ups, and scale-ups, facilitate women's engagement in the early-stage investment industry, and ignite growth for women business angels and VC investors. The objective is to establish and cultivate role models throughout the sector, with the ultimate goal of arriving at a more sustainable future and a more equitable society.

In 2024, several women from Western Balkans participated:

- *Women2Invest*: 2 participants (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro).
- *VC Academy*: 1 participant (Montenegro).
- *BA Academy*: 8 participants, including representatives from Albania, Bosnia, and Serbia.



BOOSTING ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WESTERN BALKANS:

EIT REGIONAL INNOVATION SCHEME (RIS):

The EIT launched the [EIT Regional Innovation Scheme \(EIT RIS\)](#) in 2014 as its main tool **for reducing Europe's regional innovation disparities**. It aims to enhance the innovation capacity in **moderate and modest / emerging innovator Member States**, eligible Horizon Europe Associated Countries and EU Outermost Regions. The EIT RIS **has established a dense and resilient network of people and organisations, supported by the EIT's nine Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs)**: EIT Climate-KIC, EIT Digital, EIT InnoEnergy, EIT Health, EIT RawMaterials, EIT Food, EIT Manufacturing, EIT Urban Mobility, and EIT Culture & Creativity.

The EIT RIS **works to boost the innovation capabilities** of the targeted regions by building the capacity of local actors, such as **businesses, start-ups, incubators, research institutions, and educational bodies**.

Key objectives for the 2021-2027 period include:

- **Strengthening local innovation ecosystems** through capacity-building and fostering stronger connections between local and European actors.
- **Attracting new partners to the KICs**, integrating them into pan-European networks through initiatives such as Co-Location Centres (CLCs) and EIT RIS Hubs.
- **Securing additional private and public funding**, with a focus on European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF).

From 1 January 2025, EIT has welcomed Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina to the list of EIT RIS eligible countries. As a result, all Western Balkan economies apart from Kosovo are now eligible for the EIT RIS. EIT is planning to build on the successful EIT RIS activities that has been implemented in the region and work to strengthen the scope and the level of support activities.

PILOTING A REGIONAL INNOVATION BOOSTER (2025-2028)

CONCEPT

Starting in 2025 the EIT plans to launch a Regional Innovation Booster (RIB) pilot to be fully scaled up under the next iteration of the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. This flagship initiative will aim to meet the developing needs of the Union and its Member States, as well as reinforce the impact being delivered by the EIT, namely by providing a more integrated and in-depth support to countries beyond capacity building. The EIT is open to pilot the RIS in a Western Balkan economy from 2026 and national authorities are being approached by the EIT Community Hubs.



STEP-UP FROM CURRENT ACTIVITIES

The EIT RIB will not be just another accelerator and will be a significant step-up from current activities implemented by the EIT, as well as other EU-level support initiatives.

The most central feature of the EIT RIB is that it will ensure that seamless support is offered through the most impactful existing initiatives, whether at regional, national or EU level, within the EIT Community or outside, and that any gaps are filled – therefore boosting European innovation through better integration!

In this context, the following will be in-built from the pilot stage:

1) *Country-by-country implementation:* This ensures that the highest potential ventures in every single [EIT RIS-eligible country](#) will be supported, boosting geographical spread and balance whilst ensuring that any local structural weaknesses are not a barrier to EIT support.

2) *Place-based support:* The EIT RIB will be implemented in close collaboration with national authorities, inter alia, ensuring that targeted support is offered in the most pressing thematic areas. The network of EIT Community Hubs currently being established across the EIT RIS geographical area, should play a strong role in providing the place-based support offered to the targeted ventures under the EIT RIB

3) *Tailored support:* The support offered by the EIT RIB will not be standardised and instead will be fully adapted to the needs of each venture and co-designed with the local authorities taking into consideration complimentary, existing schemes and other running initiatives. Ventures which have received support from other relevant national or EU initiatives, including the Regional Innovation Valleys (RIVs) and the COST Innovators Grant, should be given advantage.

4) *Long-term support:* Unlike most Venture capital funds which invest in early-stage companies, offering limited, short-term support with a view to exit at a profit after 12 months, the EIT RIB will act as a partner to its supported ventures and offer them unique and long-term support (at least 3 years). The EIT KICs will be expected to take equity in the supported ventures.

5) *Plug-in synergies:* The EIT RIB will ensure that backed ventures showing the highest levels of potential are smoothly plugged-into other initiatives offered by the EIT Cross-KIC Strategic Regional Innovations Cluster, including the EIT Jumpstarter, the EIT Post-Jumpstarter and subsequently the KICs' mainstream Business Creation and Support activities. Ventures will also be offered assistance to successfully access additional support beyond the EIT Community, such as investment from the European Innovation Council. Additionally, irrespective of focus area of the supported ventures, the EIT RIB will provide them with full access to Europe's largest innovation ecosystem.



ANNEX – EIT COMMUNITY HUBS DETAILS

EIT COMMUNITY HUB IN NORTH MACEDONIA

Established [April 2023](#).

Location: Skopje

EIT Community Officer: Mr. Aleksandar Stamboliev

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/eit-community-north-macedonia/>

Website: <https://eit-ris.eu/north-macedonia/>

EIT COMMUNITY RIS HUB IN MONTENEGRO

Established: [May 2024](#).

Location: Podgorica

EIT Community Officer: Mrs. Branka Zizic

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/eit-ris-hub-montenegro/>

Website: <https://eit-ris.eu/montenegro/>

EIT COMMUNITY RIS HUB IN ALBANIA

Established: December 2024.

Location: Tirana

EIT Community Officer: Ms. Françeska Korançe

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/eit-community-ris-hub-albania/>

Website: <https://eit-ris.eu/albania/>

EIT COMMUNITY RIS HUB IN SERBIA

Will be established by the end of Q1 2025

EIT COMMUNITY RIS HUB IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Will be established by the end of 2025.

