

PODGORICA, 13–15 MAY 2025

Meeting of the Western Balkans Steering Platform on Research and Innovation

Western Balkans Agenda: R&I developments in the Western Balkans

Reporting by the Western Balkans

- ➔ R&I developments in the Western Balkans
- ➔ New Growth Plan efforts
- ➔ Reform Agendas

Albania

- ➔ R&I developments in the Western Balkans
- ➔ Reform Agendas

→ R&I developments

Key Government Programs & Initiatives in Innovation

- Innovation Fund - Financing for Startups & SMEs;
- National Incubation & Acceleration Programs;
- Development Projects (DURANA Tech Park and TEDA);
- EDIH – Digital Innovation in Albania;
- EIT Community Hub;
- Adoption and implementation of Smart Specialization Strategy (2025–2030);

→ R&I developments

- ✓ €14.5 million budget to boost the ecosystem through programs providing support, mentoring, and financing for Start-ups and Entrepreneurship.
- ✓ €7.6 million direct support in the form of grants for SMEs and innovative Start-ups in the past two years.
- ✓ €1.18 billion commitment for implementing the Smart Specialization Strategy 2025-2030.
- ✓ €183 million in digital technology products and service exports.
- ✓ 4,175 digital technology enterprises.
- ✓ 14,974 registered employees in 2023.
- ✓ Today, there are 340 smart laboratories in schools, with plans to reach 985 by 2026.
- ✓ From 2015-2024, enterprises with more than 10 employees showed significant growth in the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology), reflecting the trend of digitalization and technological transformation in business.

→ R&I developments

- On **research and innovation policy**,
 - the Ministry of Education and Sports has established a working group for monitoring the National Strategy for Scientific Research, Technology and Innovation 2023-2030. The monitoring and evaluation report for the first year of the Strategy implementation is drafted and consulted with stakeholders.
 - the new Law for Science in the Republic of Albania" was adopted at the end of 2024. ERA priorities are addressed through the new Law
 - In January 2025 are established working groups which are working for drafting by-laws, going to be approved by the government within this year.
 - In the framework of Higher Education reforms, a policy document is drafted with the aim of increasing quality, access and equal opportunities in higher education. Currently a working group is establish and is working to draft the action plan.

→ R&I developments

- **Funding the science and research**
 - To reach the target of 1% of GDP, Albania continue to increase the annual research fund. In the midterm budget program 2025-2027 a systematic increase of 25% per year is anticipated.
 - In parallel with the increase of funds, joint work is being done by the ME, the MF, and INSTAT to produce a complete data set on scientific research and innovation regarding expenditures for research.
- **Cooperation of academia with private sector.** With regard the incentives to mobilise private sector investment, Albania is committed to extend the number of programs that support R&D&I in the private sector.
 - cooperation between academia and business in research;
 - cooperation of local researchers with academic diaspora for R&D activities”. This program is coo-financed with AADF;
 - in 2025 it is introduced a new program, “Scholarship program for young researchers - doctoral studies”;
- **Participation in HE**
 - A good progress is done with participation in HE. Supported by our national and international partners more than 50 events are organised to promote participation of the Albanian institutions in HE.

→ Reform Agendas

- As part of the Reform Agenda for Albania 2025–2027, adopted through DCM No. 621 dated 10.10.2024, Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation is leading the initiative to improve its position on the European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS), with the aim of being classified as a "moderate innovator."
- Key priorities following the initiative include:
 1. Enhancing reporting mechanisms to better leverage the EIS as a policy tool.
 2. Developing an action plan with specific, measurable steps to improve performance across all 32 EIS indicators by December 2025.

→ Reform Agendas

- NASRI in cooperation with NAIS have drafted ToRs for establishment the platform (ACRIS) for the promotion of Open Science, giving Albanian researchers access to research publications (June 2027).
- Adoption of the law on science and research and preparation of regulatory framework, in line with the ERA policy, which aims to ensure:
 - access and reuse of publicly funded R&I results, including open access;
 - access and reuse of publications and data for research purposes;
 - gender balance and gender equality in research
 - ethics and Integrity in research
 - promoting talents and supporting young researchers
 - ensure open research infrastructure
 - ensure the reciprocity(December 2025)

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- ➔ R&I developments in the Western Balkans
- ➔ New Growth Plan efforts

→ R&I developments

Last statistical release published in December 2024:

- In 2023 there were 3 631 persons employed in research and development in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in full-time and part-time employment, of which 1 875 were women (51.6%). Expressed by full-time equivalent, there were 2 744.25 persons employed in research and development.
- Gross domestic expenditures for research and development in 2023 amounted to 94 115 000 BAM, of which current expenses were 77 163 0000 BAM (82.0%), and investment expenditures were 16 952 000 BAM (18.1%). From the funds for research and development, 27.0% are own funds, while 41.3% are funds received from the state and other levels of government
- The total number of research work is 1 533, of which the largest number of research work is from Engineering and Technology sciences with a share of 27.3%.
- Out of the total number of observed units that performed research and development activities in 2023, 61.6% are from the higher education sector, 28.3% are from the business sector, 7.1% are from the government sector

→ R&I developments

- Bosnia and Herzegovina participates in the European Innovation Scoreboard, showcasing sufficient improvements in STI-related data collection
- Bosnia and Herzegovina is an Emerging Innovator with performance at 33.1% of the EU average in 2024.
- The country registered an increase of 25.5%-on the Digitalisation dimension, with growth of 44.6%-points on broadband penetration. In line with the digitalisation agenda, Bosnia and Herzegovina's efforts on closing the digital skills gap contributed to a 6.8%-point increase in the above basic digital skills of its population, compared to 2023.
- Progress was achieved on the use of IT by firms, with a registered 7.8%-point increase compared to 2023, and an overall performance at 39.8% of the 2024 EU level on this dimension. In fact, the share of enterprises providing ICT training recorded a positive trend and is the strongest-performing indicator in this category, at above 60% of the EU average in 2024. In addition, employment of ICT specialists has seen a 9.7%-point increase since 2023, reflecting the growth of the ICT sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

→ R&I developments

- The Council of Ministers of Bosnia and herzegovina in March 2025. adopted the document Plan for Economic Reforms for 2025-2027
- According to this document, it is estimated that the investemnt in research and development will reach 112,1 million BAM, according to the overall economic projections.

→ R&I developments

Horizon Europe

- According to the latest data, in the period from January 2021 to April 2024, organizations from BiH submitted 494 applications, of which 367 applications met the legal and formal criteria. Grant agreements were signed for 48 projects worth EUR 9.48 million EU grant funds.
- Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina implemented its two grant programmes for support of participation in EU programmes for research and innovation.
- Total of 65 projects were supported through two ongoing grants. 35 projects were supported under the Horizon Europe project preparation and potential candidates program, while 30 projects were supported under the Support to technical culture and innovation grant.
- In 2024, 323 researchers from Bosnia and Herzegovina participated in the COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) Program. In 2024, the COST program allocated EUR 359,509 for researchers from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

→ R&I developments

- The establishment of STPs in Bosnia and Herzegovina have different years of establishment, founders, forms of organization, way of functioning, different intensity of cooperation with universities
- Common goals which include: establishment and development of companies based on knowledge with high growth potential, strong links with the academic community, a role to connect science, business community and government, all with the aim of commercialization and contribution to the economic development of the region in which they are located.

→ R&I developments

STPs vary in the way they are established and managed, generally. BIT Center in Tuzla, Innovation Center Banja Luka in Banja Luka and INTERA Technology Park in Mostar*

While BIT Center is a public enterprise (established by the local government), the other two STPs: ICBL (20% Republic of Srpska, 20% City of Banja Luka, 20% Development Agency of RS and 40% University of Banja Luka) and INTERA (100% private property), are established as foundations which is the most common legal form for STPs, generally.

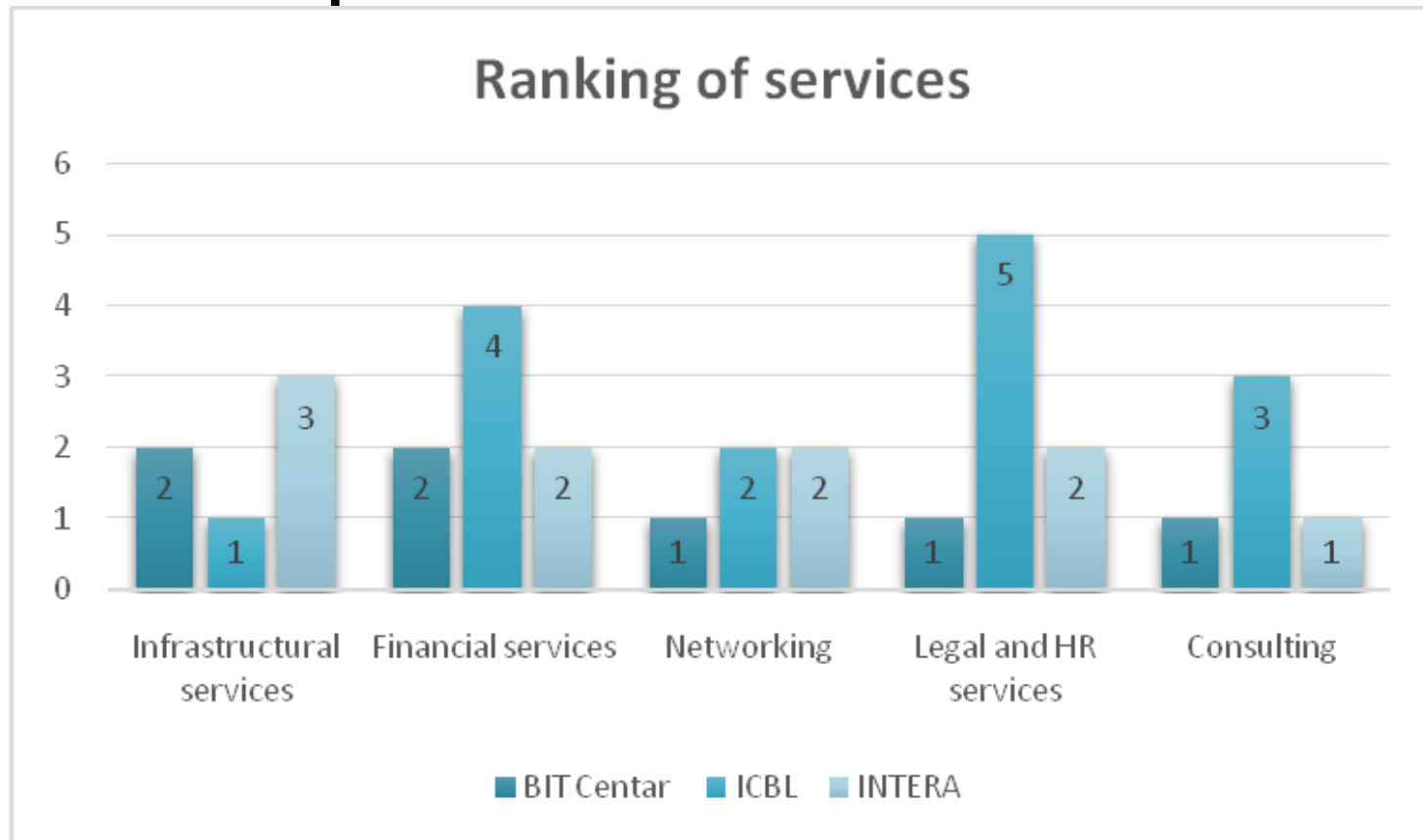
*Source:

Science and Technology Parks as Part of Innovation Ecosystem: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, research paper by University of Tuzla, Research Gate

→ R&I developments

- The sources for STP funding are mostly local governments, projects, and lease. ICBL and BIT have a higher percentage of governmental support due to their ownership structure.
- According to research results, the enterprises in the three STPs are dominantly focused on international markets and clients. All three STPs are focused on start-ups and enterprises in certain sectors (e.g., ICT).
- STPs provide various services to member enterprises. The STPs ranked their services by importance as following:

STPs provide various services



→ New Growth Plan efforts

- The Plan aims to:
- integrate the Western Balkan partners into the EU's single market,
- advance regional economic cooperation,
- deepen EU-related reforms
- increase pre-accession funding in view of accelerating socio-economic convergence of the Western Balkans to the EU.
- Bosnia and Herzegovina is part of the Growth Plan of the EU and will benefit upon approval of the Reform Agenda by the EU.

Kosovo*

- R&I developments in the Western Balkans
- New Growth Plan efforts
- Reform Agendas

Legal Framework

- Revision of the Law on Scientific Activity -
The Working group is established and
drafting of the Law is ongoing
- Revision of the Law on Innovation and
Entrepreneurship

Support Measures for Scientific Activities

- Grants for research projects;
- Grants for short-term research mobility to present research work in int. conferences;
- Reimbursement of publication fees of scientific articles in international scientific journals indexed;
- Support for the publication of academic books;
- Grants for PhD and postdoc research in top 500 globally ranked universities;
- Grants for research and post-doc in the USA (Fulbright Program).
- Grants for research-based teaching ;
- Researcher awards – Young Researcher and Researcher of the Year;

→ R&I developments



- [NanoKos](#) Project: Advancing Nanotechnology Research (funded by the European Commission-€1million), June 2023-ongoing
 - **Strengthened research capacity** in nanomedicine and environmental nanoscience;
 - **International mobility:** Internships and training at top EU universities
 - **Student and staff upskilling** through workshops, seminars, and lab practice;
 - **Engaged Kosovo diaspora** in research and mentorship;
 - **Fostered international collaboration** and research networking.

Support Measures for Innovation

Innovation Grant Scheme

- **Funding Amount:** €1.9 million, co-funded by Kosovo and Luxembourg.
- **Implementing Agency** - Kosovo Investment and Enterprise Support Agency (KIESA)
- **Target Beneficiaries:**
 - **Start-ups:** Eligible for up to 80% co-financing of project costs, with a maximum grant of €15,000.
 - **Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs):** Eligible for up to 50% co-financing, with a maximum grant of €40,000.
- **Focus Areas:** All industrial sectors, including production, manufacturing, and services, with an emphasis on fostering innovation to drive economic, social, and environmental development.

→ R&I developments

LuxAid Challenge Fund & LuxAid Demonstration Fund

- **Total Funding Available:** €2 million.
- **Target Beneficiaries:**
 - **LuxAid Challenge Fund:** Start-ups, employing at least two individuals, with market-tested innovations. Eligible for co-financing ranging from €50,000 to €120,000, covering up to 70% of project costs.
 - **LuxAid Demonstration Fund:** Established companies, employing at least five individuals, with proven market-tested innovations. Eligible for co-financing ranging from €100,000 to €350,000, covering up to 50% of project costs.
- **Focus Areas:** Innovative solutions in manufacturing, education, healthcare, and mobility, particularly those emphasizing circular economy practices, digitalisation, and specialisation.

→ R&I developments

COST participation in figures

1. COST Action participation

Participation figures	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Action participation (n of running Actions)	18 6,16%	28 9,62%	41 14,2%	78 25,8%	135 39,7%	169 52,2%
Action participation (n of Working Group members)	18	28	41	79	296	380

2. Participation in the COST Open Call

	oc- 2019-1	oc- 2020-1	oc- 2021-1	oc- 2022-1	oc-2023- 1	oc-2024- 1
Proposers (n of secondary proposers per collection date)	19	24	25	22	57	83
Proposals (n of proposals submitted as secondary proposer per collection date)	17	20	22	19	41	60

Horizon Europe Program

The **second** Joint Committee Meeting EU-Kosovo was held in October 2024 in Prishtina;

Horizon Europe data

- Eligible Applications: 169
- Eligible Proposals: 128
- Retained proposals: 15
- EU contribution: € 1.508.397.25
- Success Rate Proposals: 11,72 %

The topic areas of this performance are: Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society, Health; Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture; Widening, and MSCA.

Support to Stimulate Participation in HE

- Seed funding instrument for successfully submitted projects;
- Upcoming Activities: Horizon Europe Week: May 26-29, 2025; Main information session; Personalized consultations-tailored support to stakeholders; Training on proposal writing; Dedicated information session for the business community;
- Info Sessions on “EU Funding Opportunities for Culture” – Scheduled for June 11, 2025

→ R&I developments

Advancing Kosovo's Digital Future Through Public-Private Partnership



- Launched in June 2025;
- Located at Innovation and Training Park, Prizren
- Co-funded by the European Union and the Government of Kosovo

Strategically designed around four core pillars:

- 1. Ecosystem Building & Networking** – Promoting and connecting Kosovo's innovation stakeholders.
- 2. Skills Development & Training** – Empowering individuals with digital competencies.
- 3. Test Before Invest** – Enabling businesses to experiment and innovate with reduced risk.
- 4. Access to Finance** – Facilitating investment opportunities for startups and innovators.

DIG-4K aims to strengthen the country's digital landscape and position Kosovo as a competitive hub for innovation in the Western Balkans.

More information: [DIG-4K](#) - Email: Dig-4k@itp-prizren.com

Montenegro

- ➔ R&I developments in the Western Balkans
- ➔ New Growth Plan efforts
- ➔ Reform Agendas

Strategic and Legal Framework

- **Strategy for Scientific Research Activities 2024-2028:**
 - The Government of Montenegro has approved the **Strategy for Scientific Research Activities 2024-2028** and the **Action Plan for 2024-2025**
 - The Strategy aims to establish clear priorities for scientific research, facilitating Montenegro's integration into the European Research Area (ERA) and supporting the country's development and prosperity.
 - It outlines three strategic goals: improving framework conditions for research, strengthening human resources and institutional capacities, and enhancing international cooperation, with a total budget of €16,480,419.27 for the Action Plan
 - **Annual Report** on the Action Plan's implementation is being prepared, with adoption expected in **Q2 2025**.
- **Research Infrastructure Roadmap:**
 - On **October 3, 2024**, the government approved a **Roadmap for Research Infrastructure 2024-2028** to enhance support for research infrastructure.
- **Legal enhancements:**
 - Three key legal documents have been adopted by the Government end December 2024:
 - **Law on Scientific Research Activities:** Improves recognition and monitoring of research entities.
 - **Law on Incentive Measures for Research and Innovation:** Streamlines innovation incentives.
 - **Amendments to the Law on Innovation Activities:** Focuses on technical harmonization.
 - These laws aim to strengthen Montenegro's research and innovation ecosystem and are in the final stage of the Parliamentary adoption process.

Funding of Research and Innovation in 2025

Law on Budget 2025 and Incentive Measures for R&I

12,127,541.66€

- **6,772,252.06 €** - MESI budget: Prog. „Development of Science and Technology“ (+26%)
- **5,355,289.60 €** - MESI budget: Prog. „Innovation and Technological Development“ (+17%)
- **1,200,000 €** - MED budget: Sub-prog. „Programme framework for improvement of the industry competitiveness and overall regional development“

2,500,000.00 €

- Incentive measures for R&I according to the Law (calculated end-year 2024)

Funding of Research and Innovation – Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation

2024

- **Call for co-financing national scientific research projects** (launched in 2023, worth 2,3 mil €): 24 projects funded with 2,241,230 €
- **Call for co-financing scientific research activities in 2024** (0.42 mil. €): 331,999.04 € disbursed across 11 programme lines
- **Call for co-financing the costs of completed doctoral training aimed at strengthening human resources in scientific research, industry, and the public sector of Montenegro** (launched in 2024): 17 PhD holders supported in 2024 and 2025 with 20,500.00 €
- **Call for applications for excellence scholarships for doctoral research in Montenegro** (1.5 mil. € for 2024-2027): 30 PhD scholarships supported with 1,040,630.90 €
- **Call for Research Grants for Promoting Excellence** (2.1 mil. € for 2024-2027): 20 applications received
- Public Call for co-financing the participation in EUREKA projects in 2024 (190,000 €): 4 projects funded with 160,000.00 €
- Public Call for co-financing the participation in the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation „Horizon Europe“ – Pillar III Innovative Europe in 2023 (50,000 €): no applications
- Festival Science and Innovation Days 2024 (two calls): for the promotion of science (€50,000.00, 19 projects totalling €45,260.69) and for innovative programmes (€50,000.00, 17 projects totalling €46,985.00)
- Total of 2,55 million € re-directed (Law on Incentives for Development of Research and Innovation)

2025

- Call for co-financing scientific research activities (0.47 mil. €): 8 programme lines
- Call for Fostering Participation in the Horizon Europe Framework Programme for Research and Innovation in 2025 (160,000.00 €): 6 instruments
- EUREKA (Network Eureka, LinkUp Eureka) (200,000.00 €) – to be launched
- Science and Innovation Days – two calls (50.000,00 € each) – to be launched

→ R&I developments

Funding of Research and Innovation – Innovation Fund

Innovation Fund of
Montenegro Annual Report
2024 adopted by the
Government

- Total of 556 applications since September 2021, 155 beneficiaries received grants
- In 2024, Innovation Fund implemented 7 support programmes, contracted 71 project with a total value of over €3.2 million

Program lines	Amount of support per project	Number of received projects	Number of supported projects	Contracted support amount
Program for collaborative grants for innovation	from €50,000 to €200,000	32	6	€941,111.61
Early-stage start-up development program	up to €35,000	98	12	€388,573.14
Proof of the innovative concept	from €20,000 to €40,000	32	11	€371,429.07
Program line of vouchers for the protection and development of inventions	up to €5,000	14	7	€22,957.88
Program line for encouraging innovation culture	up to €8,000	34	11	€83,249.00
Program line for the implementation of educational programs in the areas of smart specialization	up to €10,000	27	17	€150,000.00
Program for encouraging innovation in the field of energy efficiency	from €80,000 to €200,000	15 (First call)	7	€1,289,479.62
<i>the evaluation of the second call in the amount of €2,300,000 (*) is underway</i>		32 (2nd call)	Evaluation in progress	- €
TOTAL			71	€3,246,800.32

→ R&I developments

Funding of Research and Innovation – Innovation Fund

Innovation Fund of
Montenegro Work Plan 2025
adopted by the Government
(2.4 mil. € allocation for 2025)

- Six calls launched in April 2025
- Launch of three new programmes in the pipeline (source: Programme for investment of particular significance for economic and interest of Montenegro):
 - Regional accelerator for sustainability and AI
 - GovTech programme
 - Strengthening current programmes

PROGRAMME LINE NAME	Fund budget (€)	
1. Programme for strengthening the innovation of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises	1,200,000.00	
2. Proof of the innovative concept (PoC)	400,000.00	
3. Support for the early stage of development of startups	400,000.00	
4. Innovation vouchers	150,000.00	
5. Encouraging innovation culture	100,000.00	
6. Implementation of educational programmes in areas of smart specialization	150,000.00	
Total	2,400,000.00	

Innovation infrastructures

Budgetary allocations for innovation infrastructures in 2025

- **Science and Technology Park MNE (700,000.00 € MESI budget)**
- **IEC Tehnopolis (950,000.00 € MESI budget)**

Science and Technology Park (STP MNE):

- Officially opened on June 10, 2024, enhancing innovation infrastructure. Accepted 26 accepted tenants so far (17 start-ups, 5 innovative entities, 4 complementary organizations) from 38 applications.
- Participates in 7 international projects, including MontEDIH, the first European digital innovation hub in Montenegro.
- Launched SkillsUP pre-incubation program with Montenegro Telecom and hosted an inclusivity-focused hackathon.
- Established Technology Transfer Office (TTO) on September 3, 2024, via a MoU with the Government and UoM.
- Joined the Alliance of Science and Technology Parks in Southeast Europe on October 28, 2024.

Innovation and Entrepreneurship Centre Tehnopolis:

- Strengthened capacities and supported start-ups through BioLab, TechLab, and Data Centre.
- Digital Revolution Hub: Final works underway for high-tech equipment and new workspaces.
- Business Incubator: 42 tenants, with 21 new in 2024; BoostMeUp 4 program completed, having started from 54 record-breaking applications.
- Project Implementation: Completed 12 projects in 2024, with 4 contracted for 2025 and 5 new proposals submitted.

→ R&I developments

Participation in Horizon Europe and International cooperation

- MESI collaborates with National Contact Points for Horizon Europe; updated list communicated to the European Commission in 2024.
- Funding Support: €30,000 allocation in the Call for scientific research activities in 2024; varying amounts for coordinators, partners, and evaluated teams. New Call for fostering participation in Horizon Europe in 2025!
- Delivered 3 info days, 1 four-day workshop, and 3 one-day workshops on Horizon Europe project implementation.
- Joined the *European Partnership for Sustainable Blue Economy* on November 25, 2024, to enhance global efforts in marine protection and sustainable industry.
- Widera.Net Project: Two calls for grants for networking travel to encourage participation in international events; 5 Montenegrin researchers utilized this opportunity
- EDIH – European Digital Innovation Hubs
- European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT)
- IPA II Action Program for 2020
- IPA III EU Reform Instrument
- Bilateral and multilateral cooperation: partnerships with Italy, Slovenia, Austria, and China, new agreements signed with Germany, Bahrain, and Italy in 2024; multilateral initiatives in the Danube region.

→ New Growth Plan efforts

New Growth Plan efforts

- **Funding Overview:**
 - Total funding of **€6 billion** for the period **2024-2027**, comprising:
 - **€383.5 million** allocated to Montenegro:
 - **€110 million** in grants.
 - **€273.5 million** in favorable loans.
- **Budget Support:**
 - **€178.5 million** planned as budget support.
 - Remaining **€205 million** designated for infrastructure projects, implemented through the **Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF)**.
- **Disbursement Schedule:**
 - **7%** of total funds will be allocated at the start of the Growth Plan as pre-financing.
 - Remaining funds will be disbursed in six semi-annual tranches based on the implementation of planned reforms.

→ Reform Agenda

Reform Agenda for the EU Instrument for Reform and Growth (I)

- **Adoption Date:**
 - Officially adopted by the European Commission on **23 October 2024**.
- **Funding Conditions:**
 - Funds available upon successful implementation of reform measures outlined in the agenda.
- **Key Focus Area:**
 - Chapter: **Business Environment and Private Sector Development**
 - Sub-chapter: **Private Sector Competitiveness**
 - **Reform 1.2.2:** Strengthening the research and innovation ecosystem for a knowledge-based economy.
- **Goals of Reform 1.2.2:**
 - Ensure continuous funding through a diversified program supporting innovation and research.
 - Enhance international connections within the Montenegrin ecosystem.
 - Improve capacity for EU fund absorption via targeted programs like Horizon Europe.

→ Reform Agenda

Reform Agenda for the EU Instrument for Reform and Growth (II)

- **Four implementation Steps:**
 - Step 1 - Number of funded R&I actors (physical persons – researchers and innovators, and legal entities – scientific research institutions, companies, clusters, NGOs) in the National R&I System is increased by 50% and the impact is demonstrated through improved figures in research and innovation statistical reporting;
 - Step 2 - Number of companies benefiting from the services of the Innovation Centres / Technology Centres as a result of their launched and publicly made available list of services for companies increased by 50%;
 - Step 3 - R&D expenditure of the business sector in MNE reaches 15% of the EU average; and
 - Step 4 - R&D expenditure of the public sector in MNE reaches 35% of the EU average.

North Macedonia

→ R&I developments

- Draft **National Program for Scientific-Research Activity**
(in procedure of adoption in the Parliament)
Key priorities:
 - Open science, increased funding, legal harmonization, academic excellence, and academia-business collaboration.
- New legal frameworks on track:
 - Law on higher education
 - Law on scientific research activities
 - Law on Innovation activities

→ R&I developments

- **Research Infrastructure and Roadmap (updated)**
- **Competence Center for Open Science at UKIM-Skopje**
 - part of the **Pan-European network**, contributing to the EOSC.
 - training, data management support, policy tools, and Open Science Lab access
- **INOFEIT EDIH** at the Center for Technology Transfer and Innovation at UKIM's Faculty of Electrical Engineering. The consortium involves three universities, the Military Academy, two business chambers, and four companies, offering 300+ services to support SMEs, startups, and the twin transition.
- **EIT RIS HUB**

→ R&I developments

Budget Growth: +58% over 2024

OPEN calls: Deadline: June 13th 2025

5.5 mil EUR for 2 years projects / up to 130K per project;

- Call for the Allocation of Funds for Scientific Research Projects at State Universities – Faculties, Scientific Institutes, and MASA for year 2025 (basic research in all scientific areas including S3 domains)
- Call for the Allocation of Funds for Scientific Research Projects at Public Research Institutes for year 2025
- Call for Funding of Scientific Research Projects of Special Scientific and Public Interest for 2025(Support for Collaboration Between the Academic and Business Sectors Within the Framework of Smart Specialisation)
- Participation is open to EU and international researchers as members of national teams(self-funded);

Continuously open calls

- Grants to stimulate researchers to publish in international journals with an impact factor
- Support young scientists through full scholarships for postgraduate and doctoral studies at the top 100 universities according to the Shanghai List
- Supports researchers to participate in scientific conferences, study visits and other events.

→ R&I developments

- **Horizon Europe**

In 2024, North Macedonia secured **22 grants (€3.6M EU funding)** in:

- Food, Bioeconomy, Agriculture, and Environment (8 projects)
- Culture, Creativity, and Inclusive Society (8 projects)
- Widening Participation (3 projects)
- EU Missions (2 projects in Climate & Soil)

Financial contribution for year 2025 for MK participation- paid

- **JRC–MK Research Framework Arrangement** for future collaboration signed

- JRC INFO day 12-13 June 2025 , Skopje

- **COST-** 88% MK participation in all active actions

- In 2024: 95 MK researchers in 60 approved Actions.

- ***Vice president of the Scientific Committee of COST***

-Prof. Vlatko Ilievski –Faculty of Veterinary Medicine "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" University in Skopje

- ***Vice-President of COST and Chair of the COST Executive Board.***

-Prof. Zoran Popovski -Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Food, "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" University in Skopje

→ Reform Agendas

- Reform Agenda of North Macedonia 2024-2027, two pivotal reform activities have been proposed to support the implementation of Smart Specialization Strategy.
- Integration of SME Funding Mechanisms
to connect SME funding opportunities provided by the EIT/ EIC with a co-financing scheme under the national Fund for Innovation and Technological Development.
- Development of Institutional Innovation Infrastructure
(innovation centers, centers of excellence, or EDIH in S3 priority areas)

→ Smart Specialisation

- **S3 Action Plan 2024-2025**

- 35 measures and 63 activities – 52% actions completed with € 6.1 million budget . Key initiatives:
- Five PhD scholarships for S3-aligned research (four awarded).
- "Digital Agriculture" study program at the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Food, in partnership with three other UKIM faculties.
- Digital Agriculture Laboratory established for research and business collaboration.
- Ministry of Economy and Labour launched €0.6M in funding for laboratory accreditation, circular economy projects, and academia-business collaborations.

Serbia

- ➔ R&I developments in the Western Balkans
- ➔ New Growth Plan efforts
- ➔ Reform Agendas

- Members of the Serbian parliament elected a new Government of the Republic of Serbia, to be led by Prime Minister prof. dr Djuro Macut, on 16.04.2025.
 - Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation-**NITRA**
www.nitra.gov.rs
 - Minister Academician Bela Balint
- Strategies:
 - Scientific and Technological Development 2021-2025; **New one on the way**
 - Development of Startup Ecosystem 2021-2025;
 - Smart Specialisation Strategy 2020 – 2027; **Drafting of Action plan 2026-2027.**
 - Artificial intelligence development strategy 2025–2030. **Adopted in January 2025.**
- Laws:
 - Science and Research, **in 2024 worked on Amendments**
 - Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, **new one on the way**
 - Innovation Activities, **new one on the way**
 - Artificial intelligence, **to be adopted in December 2025**

RESEARCH POLICY

- Rulebook on the acquisition of research and scientific titles – adopted in 2024; implementation from 1. June 2025.
- Rulebook on the categorization and ranking of scientific journals, adopted in October 2024; implementation from 1. June 2025.
- Unique science information system - eScience, was put into operation in July 2023, Phase 1 completed, phase 2 will start by the end of 2025.
- E-innovation register, launched on 13th December 2023, transferred to Innovation Fund
- Project "Portal of open research infrastructure" is in progress.

Programmes implemented by NITRA

- Programme of institutional financing of accredited research organizations founded by the Republic of Serbia
NITRA and SF/IF
 - Call for improvement of innovation activity - approved 6 projects with a total value of RSD 60,000,000
 - Call for promotion and popularization of innovation - approved 14 projects with a total value of RSD 70,000,000
- National Programme of development of scientific research staff
 - Staff training program for scientific research work - 1542 researchers supported;
 - Scholarship for young and talented researchers - 13, PhDs thesis 7, experts mission for students 26, Scholarship for PhDs students 413;
 - Acquisition of DOI number for scientific papers (57 sci. journals);
 - Publication of scientific papers and financing scientific meetings (224 national sci. journals, 124 monographs, 298 national sci. meetings, 99 international associations fees).

Programmes implemented by NITRA

- Programmmes of international cooperation
 - Bilateral programs: Austria, Germany, **Slovakia**, Croatia, France, Slovenia, Belarus, Portugal, Germany, Italy, **Hungary**, India, China, Turkey
 - Multilateral cooperation: Horizon Europe (RS 354 projects), EUREKA (10 projects), COST (RS in 98% running Actions)
 - NITRA achieved full membership in the ORCID organization (Open Researcher and Contributor ID) and GPAI. Applying for EMBL/EMBO in 2025. Considering membership for numerous ERICs
- Ongoing infrastructure investments programme
 - Four Science Technology parks (STP) were supported, Belgrade, Novi Sad, Čačak and Niš, fifth in Krusevac – ongoing.
 - BIO4Campus-project of national importance

→ R&I developments

EVENTS

- December 3–4, 2024 - The GPAI Summit was held at the Palace of Serbia, bringing together more than 130 delegates and 1,000 experts from around the world. Minister Dr. Begović led a series of bilateral meetings with officials from Slovakia, the USA, India, Japan, Canada, UNESCO and the United Nations, discussing international cooperation in the field of digital and innovation policy.
- October 24, 2024 - The third international conference AI_4_LIFE: Biotech Future Forum, organized by the Government of the Republic of Serbia, was held in Belgrade. More than 1,000 experts from over 15 countries participated, and speakers emphasized the importance of cooperation between science and industry. Research by Startup Genome on the domestic innovation ecosystem was also presented.
- 66th International Fair of Technology and Technical Achievements "Play for Humanity!" Science for all", held 21th-24th May 2024. at the Belgrade Fair.
- Innovations Forums Serbia – Italy, France, Switzerland

Serbia: Science Fund

Program	Description	Results in the period Apr 2024-Apr 2025
PROMIS – Program for Excellent Projects of Young Researchers	Support for young researchers from all research areas	FUNDING: 9M€, supported 59 projects (up to 200.000€ per project) BENEFICIARIES: 51 Scientific Research organizations (SROs), 319 researchers STATUS: Program successfully completed RESULTS: 802 Scientific Publications (181 in top-ranked International publication)
Program for Development of Projects in the Field of Artificial Intelligence	Investing in development of basic and applied scientific research in field of AI	FUNDING: 2,2M€, supported 12 projects (up to 200.000€ per project) BENEFICIARIES: 19 SROs, 119 researchers STATUS: Program successfully completed RESULTS: 334 Scientific Publications (44 in top-ranked International publication)
Serbian Science and Diaspora Collaboration Program: Knowledge exchange vouchers	Establishing cooperation with diaspora through knowledge exchange and joint work on scientific research	FUNDING: 0,8M€, supported 92 projects (up to 10.000€ per project) BENEFICIARIES: 43 SROs, 268 researchers STATUS: Program successfully completed RESULTS: 241 Scientific Publications (37 in top-ranked International publication)
IDEAS	Support excellence of science in all areas	FUNDING: 30M€, supported 105 projects (up to 300.000€ per project) BENEFICIARIES: 98 SROs, 1041 researchers STATUS: Program successfully completed RESULTS: 2659 Scientific Publications (419 in top-ranked International publication)
Special Research Program on COVID-19	Funding for projects that will contribute to the efficient scientific response to the COVID-19 pandemic	FUNDING: 2M€, supported 14 projects (up to 400.000€ per project) BENEFICIARIES: 19 SROs, 128 researchers STATUS: Program successfully completed RESULTS: 88 Scientific Publications (19 in top-ranked International publication)
IDENTITIES	Support for scientific research in the field of social sciences and humanities	FUNDING: 2M€, supported 16 projects (up to 150.000€ per project) BENEFICIARIES: 29 SROs, 126 researchers STATUS: Ongoing RESULTS: 161 Scientific Publications

Serbia: Science Fund

Program	Description	Results in the period Apr 2024-Apr 2025
Green Program of Cooperation between Science and Industry	Support for reducing pollution of air, water and soil, sustainable industry and waste management	FUNDING: 3,5M€, supported 20 projects (up to 200.000€ per project) BENEFICIARIES: 39 SROs, 232 researchers STATUS: Ongoing RESULTS: 141 Scientific Publications (14 in top-ranked International publication)
PRISMA	Support excellence of science in all areas	FUNDING: 25M€, supported 97 projects (up to 300.000€ per project) BENEFICIARIES: 91 SROs, 948 researchers STATUS: Ongoing 617 Scientific Publications (102 in top-ranked International publication)
PROMIS 2023	Support for young researchers and scientists in the early stages of their careers	FUNDING: 4M€, supported 30 projects (up to 150.000€ per project) BENEFICIARIES: 42 SROs, 157 researchers STATUS: Ongoing 83 Scientific Publications (11 in top-ranked International publication)
Proof of Concept	Support for projects with commercialization potencial	FUNDING: 1M€, supported 52 projects (up to 20.000€ per project) BENEFICIARIES: 27 SROs, 232 researchers STATUS: Ongoing 17 Scientific Publications
DIASPORA Joint Research Projects	Support for cooperation with scientific diaspora for joint research projects	FUNDING: 2,2 M€, supported 11 projects (up to 200.000€ per project) BENEFICIARIES: 27 SROs, 134 researchers STATUS: Ongoing
DIASPORA Support for Visits of Diaspora Scientists	Grants for visits to Serbia by researchers from the diaspora	FUNDING: 0,8 M€, supported 45 projects (up to 20.000€ per project) BENEFICIARIES: 42 SROs, 207 researchers STATUS: Ongoing
IDEAS 2024	Support excellence of science in all areas	FUNDING: 24 M€ (up to 300.000€ per project) STATUS: Administrative check of project proposals (Public Call for project proposals closed on February 28, 2025)

Program	Description	Results in the period Apr 2024-Apr 2025
Green Program of Collaboration between Science and Industry – II phase	Commercialisation of research-based products and enhanced science-industry cooperation	FUNDING: 1M€, (up to 100.000€ per project) STATUS: Awaiting Government approval
Strategic AI Research Support Programme	Support for basic and applied scientific research in field of AI	FUNDING: 8.4M€, (up to 300.000€ per project) STATUS: Awaiting Government approval
Bilateral Cooperation Programme with China – NSFC	Joint research in natural sciences, technology, biomedicine, and AI between Serbian and Chinese scientists	FUNDING: 4M€ (2M€ Serbia + 2M€ China), (up to 400.000€ per project, max 200.000€ from SF) STATUS: Program in preparation

Serbia: Innovation Fund



Program	Description	Results in the period April 2024-April 2025
Smart Start	Support program for early-stage startups to validate their business ideas and develop a prototype or minimum viable product (up to 50,000 EUR per startup)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 PUBLIC CALLS:- BENEFICIARIES: 42 startups (out of 175 applications) FUNDING: RSD 248 million (~EUR 2.1 million) STATUS: Implementation period Q3 2024-Q1 2025- BENEFICIARIES: 37 startups (out of 385 applications) FUNDING: RSD 220 million (~EUR 1.9 million) STATUS: Implementation period Q2 2025-Q1 2026• So far, 22% (out of 58) startups from the previous two support cycles have, in their second year have launched a revenue-generating product.
Mini Grants Program	Support program for startups in their research and development efforts while helping them to build strong business capacities to successfully bring their innovations to market (up to 120,000 EUR per project)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 PUBLIC CALLS:- BENEFICIARIES: 27 startups (out of 181 applications) FUNDING: EUR 2.87 million STATUS: Implementation period Q1 2024-Q1 2025- BENEFICIARIES: 40 startups (out of 214 applications) FUNDING: EUR 4.32 million STATUS: Implementation period Q3 2024-Q3 2025• So far, 86% (out of 219) startups from the past 10 cycles have launched a revenue-generating product.
Program acceleration - Katapult	Support for growth-oriented innovative startups which consists of a three-month intensive training program and financial support (up to 300,000 EUR per startup)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1st&2nd cohort: 29 startups raised private investments (out of 39) in a total of EUR 18.8 million that were matched with EUR 7.1 million as grants from the Innovation Fund• 3rd cohort: 21 start-ups were in the mentoring program from March till June 2024; 9 startups raised investments in a total of EUR 18.8 million that were matched with EUR 2.2 million as grants from the Innovation Fund and 8 are in the pipeline• 4th cohort: 19 startups are in the mentoring program from March till June 2025
Matching Grants Program	Support for SMEs looking for significant financial resources to commercialise research (up to 500,000 EUR per project)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 PUBLIC CALLS:- BENEFICIARIES: 8 SMEs (out of 62 applications) FUNDING: EUR 3.78 million STATUS: Implementation period Q1 2024-Q3 2025- BENEFICIARIES: 7 SMEs (out of 63 applications) FUNDING: EUR 3.36 million STATUS: Implementation period Q3 2024-Q1 2026• So far, 59.7% (out of 72 SMEs) from the previous 8 support cycles have successfully developed a final product.

Serbia: InnovationFund



Program	Description	Results in the period April 2024-April 2025
Collaborative Grant Scheme Program	Support for SMEs and S&R organizations to engage in joint R&D projects with the goal of creating new commercially viable products and services or technologies (up to 500,000 EUR per project)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 PUBLIC CALLS:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- BENEFICIARIES: 6 (out of 41 applications) FUNDING: EUR 2.98 million STATUS: Implementation period Q1 2024-Q3 2025- BENEFICIARIES: 8 (out of 56 applications) FUNDING: EUR 3.58 million STATUS: Implementation period Q3 2024-Q1 2026• So far, 71% (out of 68 consorsiums) from the previous 7 support cycles have successfully developed a final product.
Innovation Vouchers Scheme	Simple financial tool that helps SMEs to leverage S&R organizations' services to improve their products/services/processes (up to 20,000 per SME)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Through nine public calls since 2017, the Innovation Fund has issued a total of 1,354 innovation vouchers, of which 1,253 (93%) have been implemented, with €6.2 million disbursed.• In 2024, the Innovation Fund Issued 94 innovation vouchers.
Transfer Technology Program	Support for S&R organizations to identify commercially viable research and enable technology transfer (up to 50,000 EUR per project)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Since 2016, the Innovation Fund has supported 80 projects from S&R organizations. Upon completion, 77% of projects developed a prototype (TRL 5–6), while 21% reached a minimum viable product (MVP).• During the reporting period, funding of EUR 0.4 million was approved for 20 R&D projects.

Serbia: Innovation Fund



Program	Description	Results in the period April 2024-April 2025
GovTech program	Program with the aim of supporting the creation and use of innovative solutions in the public sector (up to 120,000 EUR per project)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Based on the public call in 2024, 19 solution proposals were selected, with a total of RSD 137.8 million (~EUR 1.1 million) in approved funding• Examples: VodostAI, a platform for flood prediction and prevention; irrigNET, a system for irrigation optimization; and LibrAlfy, a solution for the digitization of written cultural heritage.
Serbia Ventures program	Program with the aim to support the creation of private VC funds incorporated in Serbia (up to 5M EUR per VC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fifth Quarter Ventures Fund I (2022) – raised EUR 7.1 million from 35 investors; Fund invested EUR 2.5 million; FQV Fund I had invested USD 3.85 million across seven startups.• Omorika Ventures (2022) –raised EUR 0,7 million from 24 investors; Fund invested EUR 2.5 EUR 0.37 million• Fifth Quarter Ventures Biotech I (2023) – in the process of establishment and licensing• Kolo Ventures (2024) – in the process of establishment and licensing
Capacity Building Program for Regional Innovation Start-up Centres	A program aimed at strengthening the capacity and long-term sustainability of regional startup centers and their ongoing operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 23 regional startup centers; support period Q4 2023 – Q4 2025

In 2024 – First Public Call for financing within the Program for the Formation and Development of Innovation Incubators in R&D Organizations

PILLAR I – ACCESS TO THE EU SINGLE MARKET

- **ACAA Agreement**
 - Initiative submitted (May 2024)
 - EC accepted & launched negotiations (July 2024)
 - First technical meeting held (Sept 2024)
 - 15 legal acts aligned and submitted to EC
- **Green Lanes**
 - MoU signed with Hungary for data exchange (Oct 2024)
 - Real-time customs data sharing with Hungary launched
 - EC preparing legal changes for full interoperability
- **SEPA (Euro Payments)**
 - Official application for accession to the SEPA area on (Dec 2024)
 - SEPA application response still pending.
- **Single Market**
 - Active participation in EU digital programmes (e.g. Digital Europe)

PILLAR II – REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION (CRM)

- The new Action Plan for the Common Regional Market (CRM2) 2025–2028 was endorsed at the Leaders' Summit in Berlin in 2024.
- Serbia advocates for continued focus on regional trade in goods and services, mobility, and digital integration under CRM2.
- Serbia reaffirmed its dedication to regional economic integration by removing trade barriers—such as those addressed through CEFTA—and by maintaining active engagement in both ongoing and upcoming Common Regional Market (CRM) initiatives.

PILLAR III – REFORM AGENDA

- Serbia adopted the **Reform Agenda 2024–2027** aligned with the Growth Plan to secure structural reforms and priority investments.
- The Reform Agenda defines 98 payment-linked reform steps across four key areas:

Business Environment and Private Sector Development – 26

Green and Digital Transition – 39

Human Capital – 12

Fundamentals – 21

- Endorsed by the European Commission; Facility and Loan Agreement ratified by Serbian Parliament.
- First Annual Implementation Report and payment request submitted in March 2025 (for milestones due in Dec 2024).
- Next reporting deadline: July 15, 2025 (for milestones due by June 2025).

PILLAR IV - Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans

- **€6 billion** total for the Western Balkans (2024–2027), of which Serbia will receive approx. **€1.59 billion**: **€738M** for budget support (grants/loans), **€393M** in loans and **€455M** in grants for WBIF projects.
- Key project sectors: energy, transport, digitalization, and human capital.
- Initial advance payment of **€112M** approved; first disbursement pending.
- Projects to be implemented via EIB & EBRD, with a dedicated WBIF fund for Serbia.
- NITRA has submitted an application for a WBIF grant for the project "**Development of bioscience and technology campus in Belgrade (BIO4)**" under the *Human Capital Development* intervention area. EC and WBIF decision is expected.

→ Reform Agendas

- **Reform Agenda adopted by the Serbian Government on 3 Oct 2024 and approved by the European Commission.**
- **Covers 4 reform clusters:**
 - Business Environment and Private Sector Development
 - Green and Digital Transition
 - Human Capital
 - Fundamentals (rule of law, public finance, institutional capacity)
- All measures have to be implemented by end of 2026 (Government decision)
- Indicators linked to financial disbursements – EC will assess compliance.
- First Annual Report + Payment Request submitted in **March 2025** (for Dec 2024 milestones). Next due: **July 2025.**

Policy area 1. Business environment and private sector development

1.2.2 Further Development of the science and innovation ecosystem for a knowledge-based economy

- The number of funded researchers/innovative companies in the National Innovation System (Supported by Science Fund and Innovation Fund programs) is increased to 3400/600 **(June 2025)**.
- Full alignment with the European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC) Regulation is reached **(December 2025)**.
- The private sector expenditure on research and innovation is increased to 50% of total expenditure on R&I, submitted to Eurostat by the National Statistics Office **(December 2026)**.
- Serbia advances from 'Emerging innovator' to 'Moderate innovator' in the European Innovation Scoreboard **(December 2026)**.