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D1.1 Catalysts' Rollout

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Purpose and vision of the Catalyst's Rollout

This document is part of Deliverable D1.1 of the EPIC-X project, funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe Programme (Grant Agreement No. 101193579). Its primary purpose is to introduce and structure Deliverable 1.1: Catalyst's Rollout, a core element of the project's collaborative strategy. The Catalyst's rollout involves creating a dynamic network of Local Key Players identified across the 16 EU countries participating in the EPIC-X project. These players are strategically positioned to support collaborative activities, foster knowledge exchange, and contribute to achieving the project's long-term objectives. This document provides a structured approach to gathering and presenting information on key national-level stakeholders, including universities, research institutions, investors, corporations, incubators, accelerators, business associations, government agencies, and individual experts. In addition to building this network, it plays a key role in mapping the national innovation ecosystems of the participating countries. This effort directly supports the data collection activities outlined in Task 1.1 of the EPIC-X project. The list of actors will be continuously updated, with a final catalogue to be prepared by the end of the project (M24, December 2026).

1. Project Overview

EPIC-X aims to accelerate and unlock excellence by connecting regional innovation ecosystems across the European Union. The project builds on strategic areas of regional strength and smart specialisation, while addressing the persistent innovation divide and the underrepresentation of talent across the EU. At its core, EPIC-X mobilises a diverse and robust interregional ecosystem network, forming a Pan-European alliance of interconnected innovation ecosystems. The initiative brings together 16 ecosystem builders from moderate and emerging innovator countries, laying the foundation for a network that will expand across all regions and actively engage quadruple helix actors—academia, industry, public authorities, and civil society—in co-creation, co-implementation, and co-assessment activities. Central to the project is the Acceleration+ Programme, a pioneering initiative that includes a Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) scheme specifically designed to support women-led deep tech start-ups. Embedded within this programme are cross-fertilisation activities and an innovative mobility scheme tailored to the selected start-ups, enhancing their growth and exposure within the European innovation landscape. Ecosystem builders and network members will benefit from dedicated collaboration and knowledge exchange opportunities, enabled by tailored actions that strengthen mutual learning and ecosystem connectivity. Backed by a consortium of 13 experienced entities, EPIC-X will lead the development and dissemination of tools and materials that support a robust communication, dissemination, and exploitation strategy, ensuring broad visibility and sustained impact. As part of this strategy, the project will produce a white paper with policy recommendations and a peer-reviewed article or expert paper highlighting key insights and outcomes. Structured around three strategic pillars—deep tech, women-led start-ups, and smart specialisation strategies—EPIC-X leverages a multi-layered and global approach to foster place-based innovation and promote sustainable and inclusive growth across Europe.

EPIC-X focuses on five specific objectives:

- **SO#1** – Activate and expand an interregional interconnected ecosystem to support local-placed innovations and accelerate women-led deep tech start-ups.
- **SO#2** – Increase the market footprint of European women-led start-ups in strategic digital technologies and deep tech innovation in ‘moderate’ and ‘emerging’ innovator countries, supporting cross-border interconnected acceleration activities for start-ups that demonstrate traction and scale-up potential as well as opportunities for investment and growth.
- **SO#3** – Improve connectivity within and between deep tech innovation ecosystems, encouraging innovators and ecosystem builders, less well-represented stakeholders, and less advanced innovation territories to take forward a uniquely inclusive European innovation.
- **SO#4** – Strengthen and expand cooperation to better support the next generation of deep tech innovators leading the shift towards a more competitive EU and a more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient world.
- **SO#5** – Ensure effective project management, evaluation, impact assessment, quality control, risk management and follow the ethics and data management standards.

EPIC-X is structured into five work packages.

EPIC-X interconnected ecosystem. This WP aims to establish and expand a diverse, strong and extensive multi-actor ecosystem network to gather less represented regions and actors and create opportunities for cooperation at and between regional and interregional landscapes. It also includes developing a detailed matrix to public-based innovation challenges and opportunities aligned with innovative specialisation strategies. Additionally, it proposes a framework to address talent gaps, support women-led startups, and mitigate technological biases. Using design thinking methodologies, the approach also involves refining a cooperation scheme and acceleration program for deep tech startups and ecosystem builders from emerging and moderate innovator countries.

Acceleration + program. This entails a plan to launch an open call targeting women-led deep tech start-ups from 16 moderate and emerging innovator countries, prioritizing those with market-product fit or prior funding, especially scale-ups from Horizon, Digital, and National Programmes. Selected start-ups will benefit from a comprehensive acceleration program, including financial support, tailored mentoring, capacity building, events, and access to networks of investors and partners. The initiative also aims to support place-based innovations aligned with smart specialisation strategies and unbiased advancements, fostering inclusive deep tech solutions.

Cooperation scheme. The Work Package outlines a strategy to create an inclusive pan-European innovation ecosystem by strengthening regional innovation systems, particularly in less advanced areas, and leveraging the diverse experiences and perspectives of various talents, organizations, and regions. It emphasizes organizing cross-fertilization initiatives to encourage collaboration, knowledge sharing, and synergies, thereby enhancing innovation, expanding networks, and fostering growth opportunities for both start-ups and regional ecosystem builders. Additionally, it proposes an innovative mobility scheme within the acceleration program to promote developing and exchanging essential deep tech talent across borders and transnational landscapes.

Outreach & Policy recommendations. This WP entails developing a comprehensive communication, dissemination, and exploitation (CDE) strategy to share project outcomes and effectively engage stakeholders. This includes creating and distributing materials to amplify the EPIC-X project's impact among target audiences and the public, thereby strengthening innovation ecosystems across the EU. Additionally, it emphasizes facilitating the dissemination of research findings, best practices, and innovative solutions to enhance the visibility of women-led deep tech start-ups and accelerate the adoption of effective strategies.

Project Management. This Work Package details the importance of efficient project coordination and management, focusing on implementing activities as per the work plan. It highlights the need for effective communication within the consortium and with external entities, including the European Commission. Additionally, it underscores the significance of evaluating progress, monitoring risks, and assessing impact to ensure project activities achieve the desired outcomes. The WP also stresses managing ethical considerations and data protection issues throughout the project.

The project targets a diverse and representative network of stakeholders essential to the success of women entrepreneurs in deep tech, including:

Women Entrepreneurs – Deep Tech Startups: Women-led start-ups operating in strategic deep tech sectors such as AI, quantum computing, biotech, cleantech, and cybersecurity. This includes ventures from Horizon, Digital Europe, and National Innovation Programmes demonstrating high growth and scale-up potential, as well as start-ups aligned with Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3).

Innovation Support Organisations and Accelerators: Incubators, accelerators, and venture builders focusing on deep tech and female entrepreneurship, including regional innovation agencies and ecosystem builders engaged in cross-border collaboration and capacity-building initiatives.

Investors and Financial Institutions: Angel investors, venture capital firms, and impact investors dedicated to promoting diversity in investment and supporting women-led businesses in deep tech through funding, mentorship, and strategic partnerships.

Policymakers & Institutional Stakeholders: The European Commission, Horizon Europe, and national governments driving policy efforts to enhance women's participation in deep tech, as well as Smart Specialisation Platform (S3P) and regional development authorities promoting inclusive innovation ecosystems. Gender-focused policy research groups advocating for equity in funding and innovation policies.

Knowledge & Research Institutions: Universities, R&D centres, and think tanks focused on deep tech advancements and gender diversity in STEM, along with organizations supporting skills development and training for women entrepreneurs in deep technology. Research groups generating insights and policy recommendations for inclusive innovation.

Industry and Corporate Partners: SMEs and industrial partners seeking to collaborate with women-led deep tech start-ups. Corporates engaged in open innovation and co-development with emerging female-led ventures, as well as cross-industry networks fostering knowledge exchange and partnerships.

2. Defining the Scope & Methodological Framework

The Catalyst Rollout focuses on the structured identification and documentation of Local Key Players across the 16 EU countries involved in the EPIC-X project. These key players are pivotal in supporting and advancing the project's innovation and collaboration objectives. The selection process followed a criteria-driven approach, ensuring strategic alignment with the project's goals, prioritizing thematic relevance, geographic and institutional diversity, and the potential to contribute meaningfully to the innovation ecosystem. Stakeholders from key sectors—including universities, research institutions, investors, corporations, incubators, accelerators, business associations, government agencies, and experts—were identified, with an emphasis on those active in deep tech and initiatives promoting gender inclusivity in the field. Special attention was given to Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) expertise at the national level across the 16 EU countries. A systematic methodology was employed to gather detailed information on each stakeholder, capturing key data points such as sector, ecosystem role, areas of expertise, and existing connections. A centralized approach was adopted to ensure reliable, comparable data, avoiding open-ended or voluntary methods like surveys or interviews. Consortium partners and ecosystem builders were guided to identify at least 12 relevant stakeholders each. A total of 270 stakeholders have been identified, and this list will

be continuously updated until the project concludes in December 2026. By July 2025, approximately 41 stakeholders will be officially engaged across the 16 EU countries.

Methodology for Mapping Local Key Players

During the first four months of the EPIC-X project (M1–M4), partners and ecosystem builders engaged in a detailed stakeholder mapping exercise. This process laid the foundation for the EPIC-X Ecosystem Network, which will continue to evolve as new stakeholders are engaged. SERN, the coordinator of Task 1.1, adopted a structured and rigorous approach to ensure the consistency and quality of the data collected. The data collection was facilitated using a standardized template that guided partners in identifying and documenting stakeholders based on key criteria: sector, ecosystem role, area of expertise, and potential contributions to the project's goals. The data was captured in a table format for easy analysis, comparison, and integration over time. This methodology also included categorization mechanisms for stakeholders based on their alignment with key project themes, such as deep tech, gender inclusivity, and innovation policy. An Excel file was created to ensure the structured and systematic capture of stakeholder data, providing an overview of stakeholder information and allowing each country to highlight its unique innovation assets and challenges. The mapping effort is designed to evolve and expand as the project progresses, ensuring the identification of high-potential local innovation stakeholders. A comprehensive Local Key Players Catalogue will be published at the end of the project, showcasing the network's strategic value within the European innovation ecosystem.

3. Engaging Stakeholders in the EPIC-X Network

Once stakeholders were identified, the next phase involved direct engagement. Consortium partners, task leaders, and ecosystem builders reached out to invite stakeholders to join the EPIC-X network. To ensure stakeholders understood the context, activities, and benefits of joining, several information sessions were organized. These online sessions allowed stakeholders to ask questions, share insights, and clarify how they could contribute and actively engage with the network. Tailored communication packages and customized presentations highlighted the benefits of joining the network, such as access to a cross-border ecosystem of innovation, visibility through EPIC-X's communication channels, and participation in thematic working groups, events, and networking sessions across the 16 countries. A letter of engagement invited stakeholders to formally join the network, emphasizing the project's commitment to fostering inclusive, sustainable, and competitive deep-tech ecosystems, particularly supporting women-led startups and bridging regional innovation gaps. The stakeholders listed here are officially involved in the EPIC-X network and have signed the letter of engagement.

4. Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders in the EPIC-X Network

Stakeholders within the EPIC-X network play a vital role in fostering a dynamic innovation ecosystem across Europe, particularly by supporting the growth of deep tech start-ups, with a focus on women-led ventures. Their involvement is essential to achieving the project's goals in an inclusive, impactful, and sustainable manner.

1. Identification and Mobilization of High-Potential Start-ups

Stakeholders are tasked with identifying and mobilizing local deep tech start-ups that align with EPIC-X's objectives, particularly those in sectors like AI, biotech, cleantech, and

cybersecurity. They engage with early-stage ventures, provide access to tailored resources, and connect them to the EPIC-X ecosystem, ensuring regional start-ups have access to cross-border growth opportunities.

2. Mentoring and Expertise During the Acceleration+ Programme

Stakeholders provide tailored mentoring to start-ups in the Acceleration+ programme, offering strategic guidance on scaling, financial planning, technology development, and market positioning. They also assist with navigating regulatory environments, securing funding, and fostering industry partnerships, ensuring start-ups receive actionable insights to overcome obstacles and seize growth opportunities.

3. Validation of Business Models and Strategic Roadmaps

Stakeholders contribute to validating business models and strategic roadmaps for deep tech start-ups. Their real-world market knowledge and technological expertise help refine business strategies, ensuring start-ups meet market demands and are positioned for long-term growth.

4. Promoting Inclusivity and Gender Equality

A key principle of EPIC-X is advancing gender equality in the deep tech sector. Stakeholders actively promote gender inclusivity by mentoring female founders, advocating for policies that support gender equity, and encouraging women's participation in deep tech innovation.

5. Networking, Matchmaking, and Public Engagement

Stakeholders actively participate in networking activities, matchmaking sessions, and public events. They facilitate cross-border collaboration and help amplify the visibility of women-led start-ups, fostering strategic partnerships and stimulating investment in innovation.

6. Dissemination of Project Outcomes and Success Stories

Stakeholders play a crucial role in disseminating EPIC-X project outcomes across academic, industrial, and governmental platforms. Their active participation in public communications ensures that the project's tools, methodologies, and successful ventures are widely recognized and adopted.

7. Facilitating Knowledge Exchange and Interregional Cooperation

Stakeholders facilitate the exchange of knowledge and promote interregional cooperation within the EPIC-X network. Through their extensive networks, they help start-ups access resources, research, and technological expertise, ensuring innovations developed in one region can be implemented across Europe.

8. Supporting Ecosystem Development and Long-Term Sustainability

Stakeholders contribute to the long-term sustainability of the EPIC-X network by supporting local innovation ecosystems. They engage in policy advocacy, promote best practices, and align deep tech innovations with regional and EU-wide priorities, ensuring the continued success of deep tech start-ups beyond the project's duration. Through these diverse and complementary roles, stakeholders within the EPIC-X network contribute to the growth of women-led deep tech start-ups, drive technological innovation, and foster inclusive, sustainable entrepreneurship across Europe. Their active participation ensures EPIC-X's lasting impact on the innovation landscape, empowering start-ups to scale and contribute to a more resilient, competitive, and equitable European economy.

5. Key stakeholders mapped across the 16 EU countries

Under the EPIC-X initiative, we have successfully mapped and engaged a diverse range of stakeholders from several European countries, including Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Slovakia. These stakeholders represent various sectors, supporting the journey of EPIC-X by contributing to the development and strengthening of regional innovation ecosystems, fostering collaboration, and addressing the innovation divide within Europe.



Key players from

Bulgaria

5.1 Bulgaria

Bulgaria's Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) landscape is shaped by a combination of national policies, institutional frameworks, and EU-supported initiatives¹. The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) oversees national education and scientific research policies, while the Ministry of Innovation and Growth focuses on innovation and technological development. The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS) is the central scientific institution, comprising various research institutes. Additionally, the Council for Smart Growth supervises the implementation of the Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation (IS3), which aligns with the EU's Smart Specialisation Strategy to promote regional innovation. According to the European Commission's 2023 European Innovation Scoreboard, Bulgaria is classified as an "Emerging Innovator," performing at 46.7% of the EU average². Challenges include low business and public R&D spending, a fragmented public research system, and limited patent activity³. Despite these challenges, Bulgaria has implemented strategic documents like the National Strategy for Development of Scientific Research (2017–2030) and the National Roadmap for Research Infrastructure (2020–2027)⁴, which guide scientific and technological advancement in the country⁵. These strategies are supported by EU funds, notably the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP), which aim to enhance Bulgaria's innovation capacity and facilitate digital and green transitions. A 2024 EU report on technology transfer and intellectual property rights (IPR) systems in Bulgaria highlighted the need for stronger academia-industry collaboration and improved research commercialization processes⁶. Recommendations include enhancing technology transfer offices (TTOs) at universities and research institutes, fostering a more integrated innovation ecosystem. Bulgaria's STI system is governed by a multi-layered framework involving various actors. The National Assembly legislates on STI matters, while government ministries are responsible for implementing STI policies. The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences conducts scientific research, and technology transfer offices facilitate the commercialization of research. Innovation agencies and clusters support industry collaboration and innovation.

Re:Gena is a Bulgarian company specializing in personalized medicine, focusing on disease prevention and health optimization through genetic analysis. Founded by Boriana Gerasimova, the company emerged after her own experience with cancer and her quest for effective long-term health strategies. Re:Gena's mission is to empower individuals to take control of their health in an informed and personalized way. The company offers genetic-based solutions for preventing diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular issues, hormonal and autoimmune disorders, and also assists with weight management and mental health. They provide consultations with specialists to interpret genetic test results and offer guidance on health, nutrition, and lifestyle. Additionally, Re:Gena offers packages like "Healthy Woman," "Fit Passport," and "ThyroGene," which provide insights into metabolism, nutrition, and hormonal health. The company also develops personalized programs to enhance athletic performance and offers solutions for clinics and healthcare professionals. Re:Gena's team consists of

¹ *European Innovation Scoreboard 2023: Bulgaria.*

² European Commission. (2023). *Country Report - Bulgaria.*

³ European Commission. (2024). *Strategic Evaluation of Technology Transfer and IPR Protection Systems in Bulgaria, Croatia, and Romania.*

⁴ National Roadmap for Research Infrastructure (2020-2027), Bulgaria. (n.d.). *Research Infrastructure Roadmap.*

⁵ Council for Smart Growth. (n.d.). *Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation (IS3).*

⁶ Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. (n.d.). *Overview of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and its Research Institutes.*

certified professionals in various fields such as nutrition, medical genetics, psychology, and sports. Re:Gena is recognized for its innovative and personalized approach to promoting health, using genetics as a primary tool to optimize well-being and prevent diseases. As collaboration and innovation continue to progress in Bulgaria, the EPIC-X network will expand to include new stakeholders. Their involvement will strengthen Bulgaria's regional innovation ecosystem and foster impactful partnerships, particularly in the deep tech sector, contributing to the country's overall innovation capacity.



Key players from

Croatia

5.2 Croatia

Croatia is home to a rapidly growing innovation ecosystem, characterized by dynamic research centers, technology parks, and a strong focus on fostering sustainable and inclusive innovation. The country has made significant strides in supporting startups, scientific research, and cross-sector collaboration, particularly within the fields of technology, biotechnology, and renewable energy⁷. Within the EPIC-X project, the engagement of key Croatian stakeholders is crucial to ensure the network's vision is grounded in real local contexts, facilitating experimentation, scalability, and the development of inclusive methodologies. This section presents a range of Croatian stakeholders—including national research centers, technology parks, innovation hubs, and industry advocacy organizations—who will play varied roles within the EPIC-X network. Some will act as strategic contributors, helping to shape the project's priorities and co-develop methodologies, while others will serve as implementers, testing new tools, running pilot actions, and collaborating with entrepreneurs and researchers. Additionally, some stakeholders will function as beneficiaries, gaining from the network's resources while providing bottom-up feedback to refine the project's objectives. By leveraging their expertise in areas such as technology transfer, community mobilization, technical innovation, and sustainability, these Croatian stakeholders will ensure that EPIC-X not only produces cutting-edge solutions but also fosters lasting, meaningful change in line with both national and European goals for smart, sustainable, and resilient regions. The following partners have expressed interest in joining the network.

NUQLEUS (ICENT Inovacijski Centar Nikola Tesla), located within the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing in Zagreb, is one of Croatia's leading innovation centers. The institution is known for its work in advanced technologies, particularly in electrical engineering, energy, and digital solutions. NUQLEUS (ICENT Inovacijski Centar Nikola Tesla), located at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing (FER) in Zagreb, is one of Croatia's leading innovation centers, renowned for its work in advanced technologies, particularly in electrical engineering, energy, and digital solutions. The center's name, inspired by Nikola Tesla, reflects its dedication to pioneering developments in these critical fields. NUQLEUS is at the forefront of applied research and technological development, offering a range of solutions in electrical engineering with a focus on power systems, electrical machinery, and smart grid technologies. Its expertise aims to improve the efficiency, sustainability, and reliability of electrical systems, ensuring the effective distribution and utilization of energy. The center also plays a pivotal role in energy, particularly in advancing renewable energy solutions such as solar, wind, and bioenergy. NUQLEUS is deeply involved in the development of energy storage systems, smart energy grids, and energy optimization technologies, helping both industries and municipalities reduce their carbon footprint and improve energy consumption. Its efforts contribute significantly to Croatia's transition towards more sustainable energy practices. In the field of digital solutions, NUQLEUS is driving digital transformation through the development of AI-driven systems, IoT technologies, and big data analytics. These innovations are applied across various industries, including smart cities, autonomous systems, and healthcare. By leveraging machine learning and data mining, NUQLEUS helps optimize industrial processes, enhance decision-making, and create more efficient, user-friendly systems. The center is also making strides in automation and robotics,

⁷ European Commission (2020). *Smart Specialisation Platform: Croatia's Innovation Ecosystem and Sustainable Growth Strategies*. Brussels: European Commission.

particularly for applications in manufacturing and logistics. By developing advanced robotics and automation technologies, NUQLEUS enhances operational efficiency and precision in these sectors. As part of its mission to foster innovation and economic growth, NUQLEUS plays a key role in technology transfer. It supports researchers and startups by helping them commercialize their innovations and connect with industrial partners. Through business development support and market analysis, the center facilitates the scaling of new technologies both locally and internationally. NUQLEUS is committed to sustainability and reducing environmental impact through the creation of eco-friendly technologies that support the circular economy. Its initiatives in waste management, green building solutions, and sustainable manufacturing demonstrate its dedication to creating long-term, positive environmental change. By combining its expertise in engineering and digital technologies with a focus on sustainability, NUQLEUS plays a vital role in Croatia's innovation ecosystem. It is instrumental in developing smart, sustainable, and resilient solutions that align with both national and European goals for technological advancement. The center's work is shaping the future of Croatia as a hub for cutting-edge innovation. As a strategic implementer within the EPIC-X project, NUQLEUS plays a key role in fostering cross-border collaboration between academia, industry, and government entities. Its experience in technology transfer and interdisciplinary research positions it as a critical partner for scaling the network's innovations. By engaging NUQLEUS, EPIC-X can access cutting-edge research infrastructure, technical expertise, and pilot testing capabilities, particularly in areas such as smart technologies, energy efficiency, and AI-driven solutions.

BIO CENTAR, led by Vedrana Perković Hadl, is a key player in Croatia's biotechnology and sustainability sectors, focusing on the intersection of innovation, sustainability, and community-driven solutions. The center is dedicated to advancing projects that foster environmental sustainability and biotechnological innovation while creating tangible social impacts. Under the leadership of Vedrana Perković Hadl, a highly experienced professional in program management and project implementation, BIO CENTAR has become a recognized authority in capacity-building and the promotion of sustainable practices. With a strong foundation in biotechnology, the center focuses on leveraging cutting-edge biotechnological innovations to address key global challenges, particularly in sectors such as environmental protection, agriculture, and renewable energy. BIO CENTAR's expertise in biotechnology spans various areas, including the development of biological solutions for waste management, bio-based products, and sustainable agricultural practices. The center has developed solutions aimed at improving soil health, enhancing crop yields, and promoting the circular economy by reducing dependency on synthetic chemicals. This work supports the transition to more sustainable agricultural systems and contributes to environmental conservation efforts. In the realm of sustainability, BIO CENTAR emphasizes the integration of green technologies and environmental innovation into everyday practices. The center is actively involved in projects that promote energy efficiency, waste reduction, and the use of renewable resources. BIO CENTAR works closely with both public and private sectors to implement eco-friendly technologies that drive sustainable development across industries. The center is also renowned for its work in community-driven solutions, focusing on empowering local communities to engage in sustainable practices and contribute to environmental stewardship. By facilitating knowledge exchange and capacity-building programs, BIO CENTAR helps communities adopt eco-friendly behaviors and access innovative solutions that enhance their quality of life. This approach also extends to social impact measurement, where BIO CENTAR evaluates the effectiveness of its initiatives and ensures that they result in tangible, measurable benefits for communities and the environment. Through its involvement in the

EPIC-X project, BIO CENTAR serves both as a deviser and implementer, contributing to the development of strategies and methodologies that align with the goals of sustainability, innovation, and social equity. The center's work ensures that EPIC-X's solutions are grounded in practical, locally relevant contexts and reflect the broader EU ambitions for smart, sustainable, and resilient regions. With a strong commitment to innovation, capacity-building, and social responsibility, BIO CENTAR is shaping Croatia's role in the global transition to sustainability while driving forward the use of biotechnological innovations for the greater good. The organization's deep expertise in biotechnologies, environmental solutions, and community-based innovation will be crucial to ensure that EPIC-X delivers socially responsible, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable practices from the outset. In the EPIC-X network, BIO CENTAR will contribute by developing frameworks for inclusive innovation and sustainability, while actively engaging with startups, researchers, and local communities to ensure that the project benefits all stakeholders. With a strong focus on building sustainable ecosystems, BIO CENTAR is well-positioned to pilot new tools and methodologies in Croatia, ensuring the project aligns with national priorities in biotechnology, environmental sustainability, and social innovation. Through the active involvement of NUQLEUS and BIO CENTAR, Croatia will significantly contribute to the success of EPIC-X, helping to shape a resilient, innovative, and inclusive future for both local and European regions. Their combined expertise in research, technology transfer, and sustainability will ensure that EPIC-X's outcomes are impactful, grounded in scientific excellence, and aligned with the goals of sustainable development.

Driven by the growing momentum for collaboration and innovation, the EPIC-X network is set to welcome new stakeholders. Their arrival marks a crucial step in enriching regional innovation ecosystems and forging new connections across Europe's deep tech landscape—connections that promise to spark innovative ideas, strengthen partnerships, and amplify the impact of collective action.



Key players from

Czech Republic

5.3 Czech Republic

Czech Republic is rapidly positioning itself as a key player within Central Europe's innovation ecosystem⁸. The country has long been known for its strong industrial base⁹, highly skilled workforce¹⁰, and growing focus on technology-driven innovation¹¹ and entrepreneurship¹². Within the framework of EPIC-X, the participation of key Czech stakeholders is critical in grounding the network's vision in local realities while ensuring that innovation is scalable, sustainable, and aligned with national and European ambitions for smart, resilient regions. This section introduces some of the most prominent Czech stakeholders involved in the EPIC-X project, whose roles will be pivotal in its success. From government agencies to innovation hubs and accelerator programs, these organizations will serve as devisers, implementers, and receivers, each contributing their unique strengths to the project. Some will help define the strategic priorities and co-develop methodologies, while others will engage directly with entrepreneurs, researchers, and local communities to apply new tools, pilot actions, and collect feedback.

CzechInvest, a government agency under the Ministry of Industry and Trade, is a vital institution dedicated to promoting investment, innovation, and entrepreneurship in the Czech Republic. With its long-standing experience and expertise in fostering a competitive business environment, CzechInvest plays a pivotal role in supporting both domestic and international businesses, particularly in high-tech industries and innovative sectors. The agency offers a range of services, including investment facilitation, advisory support, and the development of policies that align with national and EU innovation goals. At the heart of CzechInvest's efforts is its Creative Hub, which serves as a leading accelerator for startups and innovative businesses. Under the leadership of Petra Kneslová, Director of the Creative Hub, CzechInvest has focused on creating a collaborative environment that bridges the gap between entrepreneurs, investors, and research institutions. The Creative Hub provides critical support in the commercialization of innovative ideas, facilitating the development of new business models and helping startups navigate the complexities of scaling their operations. The Creative Hub is a dynamic and thriving ecosystem that nurtures collaboration between diverse stakeholders, such as entrepreneurs, investors, and academia. It offers a variety of resources and services, including mentorship programs, networking opportunities, and access to funding. These initiatives help startups and innovators refine their business strategies, test new products and services, and reach the necessary market maturity for successful commercialization. CzechInvest's focus is not limited to technology-driven innovation alone but also extends to the creative industries, where it provides tailored support to businesses operating in sectors such as digital media, design, gaming, arts, and entertainment. Through its initiatives, the agency plays a significant role in developing the Czech Republic's creative economy, enhancing the visibility of local startups in the global market, and creating a robust platform for cross-sectoral innovation. CzechInvest's collaboration with EPIC-X is crucial, as the agency not only devises strategic goals for the project but also implements critical actions,

⁸ European Commission (2020). *European Innovation Scoreboard 2020: Czechia's Innovation Performance*. Brussels: European Commission.

⁹ OECD (2021). *The Czech Republic's Digital Transformation and Innovation Policies*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/czech-republic/>

¹⁰ CzechInvest (2021). *Czech Innovation Ecosystem: Fostering Startups and Technology Entrepreneurs*. Prague: CzechInvest.

¹¹ European Investment Bank (2020). *Czechia's Green and Sustainable Innovation Landscape: Opportunities for Growth and Development*. Luxembourg: European Investment Bank. Available at: <https://www.eib.org/en/>

¹² Czech Ministry of Industry and Trade (2020). *Industry 4.0 Strategy for the Czech Republic: Transforming the Industrial Base through Digital Innovation*. Prague: Ministry of Industry and Trade.

ensuring that EPIC-X aligns with Czech Industry 4.0 and Smart Specialisation Strategy. The agency brings a deep understanding of technology transfer, innovation management, and policy development, providing essential guidance to ensure that EPIC-X's methodologies and tools are applicable and scalable within the Czech and broader European context. With its strong expertise in ecosystem development, business incubation, and policy alignment, CzechInvest is well-positioned to ensure that EPIC-X remains a responsive and agile network, able to meet the needs of both entrepreneurs and the local business environment. Its deep involvement in fostering an innovation-driven economy and its hands-on support for startups guarantees that EPIC-X will benefit from valuable insights into commercialization and growth strategies. Through CzechInvest's efforts, the Czech Republic continues to strengthen its position as a leader in the Central European innovation ecosystem.

AceON is a prominent accelerator and innovation network that supports startups and scale-ups across the Czech Republic, with a strong focus on driving technology and digital transformation. Through its robust ecosystem of entrepreneurs, investors, and technical experts, AceON is dedicated to fostering collaboration between the private and public sectors, empowering businesses to scale and innovate in alignment with national goals for digital innovation and sustainability. AceON is renowned for its deep involvement in technology commercialization and digitalization initiatives. The network assists startups in leveraging cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, internet of things (IoT), and big data to develop innovative products and services. The organization works with early-stage ventures to accelerate their growth by offering mentoring, funding opportunities, and market access, helping them bridge the gap between product development and commercialization. In addition to its support for entrepreneurship, AceON places a significant emphasis on cross-sector collaboration. It creates synergies between startups, public sector organizations, and corporates, ensuring that new technologies are tested in real-world settings and adapted to meet both market needs and regulatory standards. This unique collaboration fosters an environment where digital solutions can be rapidly deployed and scaled across various industries, including healthcare, smart cities, agriculture, and energy. As an implementer and receiver within the EPIC-X project, AceON will play a key role in the pilot testing of new tools and services, providing real-time feedback to refine the project's methodologies. Through its comprehensive network, AceON will ensure that EPIC-X's solutions are tested in practical environments, enabling further innovation and optimizing tools for scalability. AceON's involvement extends to capacity-building activities, where it offers startups the resources they need to build sustainable and scalable business models. The organization provides technical expertise, facilitating access to advanced digital tools and industry knowledge that support the long-term growth of innovative enterprises. Overall, AceON's expertise in digital transformation, entrepreneurship support, collaboration, and sustainability makes it a key partner in the EPIC-X project. Through its active role in both implementation and feedback, AceON ensures that EPIC-X remains grounded in real-world challenges while contributing to the Czech Republic's growing leadership in the European innovation ecosystem.

With their combined expertise and active involvement, these Czech stakeholders will ensure that EPIC-X is not only innovative but also deeply connected to local and national priorities, enabling the project to make a tangible and sustainable impact. Their contributions will help shape the future of innovation in the Czech Republic, ensuring that the EPIC-X network serves as a model for inclusive, sustainable, and smart growth across Europe.



Key players from

Estonia

5.4 Estonia

Estonia hosts a vibrant and rapidly evolving innovation ecosystem, marked by strong public-private collaboration, dynamic startup communities¹³, cutting-edge research institutions¹⁴, and growing awareness of the need for inclusive and sustainable innovation¹⁵. Within EPIC-X, the participation of key Estonian stakeholders is essential to ground the network's vision in real territorial contexts, ensuring relevance, experimentation, and scalability. This section introduces a selection of Estonian actors—ranging from national agencies and technology parks to startup platforms, research centres, and advocacy organisations—who will play diverse and complementary roles within the EPIC-X network. Some will act as devisers, helping to shape strategic priorities and co-develop methodologies. Others will serve as implementers, applying tools, running pilot actions, and engaging with entrepreneurs and researchers. Still others will participate as receivers, benefiting from the network's resources and contributing bottom-up insights essential to the project's evolution. By leveraging their specific strengths—policy influence, community mobilisation, technical excellence, or inclusivity advocacy—these Estonian stakeholders will ensure that EPIC-X is not only innovative in its design but also impactful, inclusive, and aligned with national and European ambitions for smart, sustainable, and resilient territories. The following partners have expressed interest in joining the network.

The Tartu Centre for Creative Industries (TCCI) is a business incubator and regional development hub in South Estonia, established in 2009 by the City of Tartu. It supports entrepreneurs in creative sectors, such as design, fashion, film, and the performing arts, through tailored incubation programs, mentoring, and events like the Estonian Fashion Festival and sTARTUp Day. The Tartu Centre for Creative Industries actively promotes women's entrepreneurship through initiatives like the WE C Business program, which empowers women aged 18–25 in Estonia, Sweden, and Latvia to explore entrepreneurship via training, mentoring, and international networking. Additionally, TCCI co-organized the Be the Future program, supporting young women in developing business ideas in creative and tech fields. While TCCI's primary focus is on creative industries, its programs foster skills relevant to deep-tech entrepreneurship, including innovation, sustainability, and digitalization. Through collaborations with organizations like EIT Culture & Creativity, TCCI connects creative entrepreneurs with broader innovation ecosystem. TCCI can collaborate in EPIC-X as a bridge between creativity and technology, supporting youth and female inclusion, providing cross-cutting innovation skills, and contributing to the European expansion of the project's ecosystem.

Garage48 is an Estonian nonprofit that organizes hackathons and innovation programs to turn ideas into prototypes in 48 hours. Active in over 50 countries, it supports entrepreneurship and tech development globally. Garage48 runs several programs to empower women, especially in Ukraine and Estonia. These include hackathons, mentorship, and grants to help women start and grow businesses, often focusing on digitalization and refugee support. Their goal is to create a more inclusive startup ecosystem. Garage48 can collaborate in EPIC-X by accelerating the ideation and prototyping of innovative solutions, promoting inclusion and female entrepreneurship, and contributing to the internationalization of the project through its global network.

¹³ European Commission. *Startup Estonia: Harnessing Talent Platform Good Practice*. Brussels: EC, 2025.

¹⁴ Kangro, K., & Lepik, K.-L. (2023). *An Ecosystem for Social Innovation in Estonia: Overview Report*. Tallinn University.

¹⁵ European Commission. *ERA Country Report 2023: Estonia*. Brussels: EC, 2023.

Startup Day is a community-driven business and startup festival held annually in Tartu, Estonia. It was conceived in December 2015 to unify various smaller events into a larger platform that could attract international attention. The inaugural festival took place in December 2016, drawing 3,000 participants and marking the beginning of a collaborative tradition. The festival is co-organized by a diverse group of institutions, including the City of Tartu, University of Tartu, Tartu Science Park, Tartu Biotechnology Park, Tartu Business Advisory Services, Tartu Centre for Creative Industries, and Swedbank. This collaboration brings together a wide range of expertise and perspectives, contributing to the festival's unique atmosphere and varied program. Startup Day serves as a central hub for Tartu's entrepreneurial ecosystem, fostering connections among startups, investors, and innovators. It emphasizes community involvement and shared values, aiming to inspire growth and cooperation within the startup community. Startup Day can collaborate in EPIC-X as a platform for visibility, connection, and international exchange, contributing to the expansion of the ecosystem, the promotion of shared innovation, and the strengthening of deep-tech start-ups.

As collaboration and innovation continue to gain momentum, the EPIC-X network will expand to include new stakeholders. Their involvement will strengthen regional innovation ecosystems and promote high-impact partnerships across Europe, particularly in the deep tech sector.



Key players from

Greece

5.5 Greece

Greece's deep tech sector is expanding rapidly. The country is seeing more startups, higher investment levels, and increasing global interest¹⁶. However, when it comes to women's participation, especially in founding roles (as startup creators or co-founders) and funding (accessing venture capital or investor support), women are still significantly underrepresented¹⁷. This means that while the sector is growing overall, the number of women starting deep tech companies or receiving funding to scale their businesses remains low compared to their male counterparts¹⁸. There are, however, signs of positive change and at the same time Greece is seeing the emergence of more female role models—successful women in science, technology, and entrepreneurship—who inspire and support the next generation of women in deep tech¹⁹. This section introduces a selection of Greek actors—ranging from national agencies and technology parks to startup platforms, research centres, and advocacy organisations—who will play diverse and complementary roles within the EPIC-X network. Some will act as devisers, helping to shape strategic priorities and co-develop methodologies. Others will serve as implementers, applying tools, running pilot actions, and engaging with entrepreneurs and researchers. Still others will participate as receivers, benefiting from the network's resources and contributing bottom-up insights essential to the project's evolution. By leveraging their specific strengths—policy influence, community mobilisation, technical excellence, or inclusivity advocacy—these Greek stakeholders will ensure that EPIC-X is not only innovative in its design but also impactful, inclusive, and aligned with national and European ambitions for smart, sustainable, and resilient territories. The following partners have expressed a willingness to join the network, further expanding its reach and collaborative potential.

The Hellenic Foundation for Research and Innovation (HFRI), based in Greece, has promoted Research and Innovation by supporting the Greek scientific community and fostering high-quality research without thematic or geographical restrictions. While HFRI provides grants across disciplines, the ecosystem of R&I it supports includes individuals – among them women, whose research work in the Hellenic Universities and Research Centres often intersects with emerging technologies and innovation. By investing in curiosity-driven research, the Foundation lays the groundwork for technologies and ideas that can evolve into startups, contributing to a more diverse innovation landscape in Europe. The Hellenic Foundation for Research and Innovation (HFRI) can collaborate in EPIC-X as a research funding and ecosystem-strengthening partner, supporting breakthrough ideas with startup potential across disciplines. By enabling female researchers and curiosity-driven innovation, HFRI contributes to a more inclusive and diverse European deep tech landscape.

Loggerhead Ventures is an early-stage climate tech equity fund launched in 2024 to advance ESG-driven entrepreneurship and sustainable innovation in Greece. With a €10 million fund, it backs startups developing advanced technologies with tangible environmental and social impact. The fund focuses on ventures emerging from regional innovation hubs and supports technology transfer from research to market. Loggerhead provides hands-on support in product development, EU funding, HR, fundraising, and international scaling. Acting as a venture studio, it guides startups from concept to pilot and market launch. The team brings

¹⁶ EIT & EIB. *Women Founders in European Deep Tech Startups*. Brussels: EIT & EIB, 2025.

¹⁷ EIT. *Only 15% of Seed Funding Goes to Women-Led Deep Tech Start-Ups*. Brussels: EIT, 2024.

¹⁸ European Commission. *Women TechEU Initiative*. Brussels: EC, 2025.

¹⁹ EIC. *Statement on Gender & Diversity in EIC*. Brussels: EIC, 2021.

decades of experience in venture capital, innovation, and environmental sciences. Loggerhead is dedicated to measurable impact and actively supports women founders and leaders in deep-tech by providing access to funding, networks, and mentorship, helping close the gender gap in science and technology entrepreneurship. As collaboration and innovation continue to gain momentum, the EPIC-X network will expand to include new stakeholders. Their involvement will strengthen regional innovation ecosystems and promote high-impact partnerships across Europe, particularly in the deep tech sector. Loggerhead Ventures can support EPIC-X as a strategic partner accelerating sustainable deep tech innovation and research commercialisation, while advancing gender inclusion through targeted support for women founders.



Key players from

Hungary

5.6 Hungary

Hungary boasts a dynamic and growing innovation ecosystem²⁰, with strong emphasis on supporting early-stage startups²¹, fostering technology transfer²², and encouraging collaboration between academic institutions, research organizations, and business²³ incubators²⁴. As part of the EPIC-X project, Hungary's involvement is pivotal to ensuring the integration of local innovation expertise into the broader European network, fostering scalable solutions that align with both national and European strategic goals. This section introduces a selection of Hungarian stakeholders—ranging from government-supported incubators and universities to business associations and tech NGOs—who will play diverse roles in the EPIC-X network. These organizations are critical in contributing as devisers, implementers, and receivers, ensuring that the project's tools and methodologies are not only effective but also deeply embedded in local contexts. The following partners have expressed a willingness to join the network, further expanding its reach and collaborative potential.

Lunar Program is one of Hungary's leading incubators, dedicated to providing comprehensive support to early-stage startups, particularly in the space and tech sectors. Focused on fostering high-growth potential startups, Lunar Program plays a vital role in the EPIC-X network as a key implementer, helping entrepreneurs navigate the challenges of scaling and commercializing their innovations. The incubator's primary areas of expertise include space technology, digital innovation, deep tech, AI, IoT (Internet of Things), and advanced manufacturing. Lunar Program supports startups that are developing cutting-edge technologies and services, with a focus on industries that are critical to both the future of innovation and the economy. Their comprehensive services include mentorship, strategic guidance, access to capital, and technical support, all aimed at accelerating the growth and internationalization of startups. In the space sector, Lunar Program supports ventures focused on satellite technology, space exploration, remote sensing, and space-based communications, helping these startups develop solutions for both governmental and commercial applications. This area is increasingly important, given the growing demand for space-based data and services across sectors such as telecommunications, agriculture, and environmental monitoring. Digital innovation is another core focus area, where Lunar Program provides support to startups working on emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, and cybersecurity. These technologies are integral to the future of various industries, from healthcare to finance, and Lunar Program's support enables these startups to refine their solutions and bring them to market faster. Additionally, Lunar Program specializes in deep tech innovations, helping startups that are developing next-generation robotics, autonomous systems, and industrial automation solutions. The incubator fosters the development of these advanced technologies, providing the necessary resources for scaling and commercialization in sectors like manufacturing, logistics, and energy. Another key area of expertise is advanced manufacturing, where Lunar Program supports startups working on cutting-edge technologies such as 3D printing, nanotechnology, and smart materials. This area has vast potential in transforming traditional industries by making manufacturing processes more efficient, sustainable, and cost-effective. Through its extensive network of entrepreneurs, investors, researchers, and industry partners, Lunar Program facilitates the

²⁰European Commission. (2023). *Hungary Country Profile*. EURAXESS.

²¹European Commission. (2023). *ERA Country Report 2023 - Hungary*. European Research Area.

²²European Commission. (2023). *Bringing High-Tech Industries to Hungary: EPIC Centre of Excellence*. Research and Innovation.

²³European Commission. (2023). *European Innovation Scoreboard 2023*.

²⁴European Commission. (2023). *ERA Country Report 2023 - Hungary*. European Research Area.

exchange of knowledge, best practices, and collaboration opportunities. This network extends beyond Hungary, providing startups with access to international markets, funding opportunities, and research collaborations. As part of EPIC-X, Lunar Program will apply the methodologies and tools developed by the network to help startups scale and internationalize their solutions. The program will also play a pivotal role in advancing the project's objectives by supporting the growth of innovative companies that are well-positioned to address global challenges across multiple sectors. In summary, Lunar Program is a leading incubator in Hungary, with deep expertise in space technology, digital innovation, deep tech, AI, IoT, and advanced manufacturing. Its focus on high-growth, technology-driven startups positions it as a key player in the EPIC-X network, where it will contribute to the development of scalable, internationally competitive solutions.

STRT Holding is a prominent incubator in Hungary, renowned for its focus on nurturing early-stage startups with high growth potential. Specializing in emerging technologies and innovative business models, STRT Holding is particularly active in the digital and tech sectors, where it helps entrepreneurs bring their innovative ideas to life and scale their businesses effectively. As a key implementer within the EPIC-X network, STRT Holding will leverage its extensive experience in startup incubation to provide valuable resources, funding, and strategic partnerships, accelerating the development of high-potential startups. One of STRT Holding's primary areas of expertise is in the digital transformation of businesses, where it assists startups in adopting and integrating technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, big data, cloud computing, and blockchain. These technologies are pivotal in reshaping industries and creating new business models. STRT Holding helps startups navigate the complexities of digital transformation, ensuring they develop scalable, tech-driven solutions that can disrupt traditional markets. In addition to digital innovation, STRT Holding is highly focused on the fintech sector, providing incubation services to startups that develop innovative financial technologies. This includes solutions related to digital payments, blockchain-based finance, insurtech, and cryptocurrency. Hungary has become a growing hub for fintech innovation, and STRT Holding's involvement in this sector helps position startups to benefit from the opportunities arising in the evolving financial landscape. STRT Holding is also deeply involved in enterprise software development, particularly for startups building tools that help businesses improve productivity, enhance customer experiences, and streamline operations. With a focus on SaaS (Software as a Service), enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, and cloud-based solutions, STRT Holding supports startups in building scalable software products that address the needs of modern businesses across sectors. Another area of expertise for STRT Holding is healthtech and medtech. The incubator supports startups that develop technologies aimed at improving healthcare delivery, including telemedicine, digital health records, medical devices, and health data analytics. With healthcare being a key area of growth globally, STRT Holding's experience in this sector ensures that startups have access to the tools, mentorship, and partnerships necessary to bring their innovations to market. Moreover, STRT Holding is a leader in supporting sustainable innovation and the green tech sector. This includes startups focused on renewable energy, energy efficiency, water management, and environmentally friendly technologies. STRT Holding's role in the green tech space ensures that high-impact startups can scale their solutions while contributing to global sustainability goals. Through its extensive network, STRT Holding connects entrepreneurs to key resources such as venture capitalists, business mentors, and strategic partners. This network facilitates collaboration and accelerates growth, giving startups the support they need to scale successfully. The organization's ability to build strong relationships with investors also plays a critical role in securing funding for startups,

enabling them to develop and commercialize their innovations. As an implementer within EPIC-X, STRT Holding will apply the network's methodologies and tools to further enhance the ecosystem for startups in Hungary. By aligning the project's goals with the needs of Hungarian startups, STRT Holding will ensure that the tools, resources, and support provided resonate with entrepreneurs and help drive innovation in the country's rapidly growing tech ecosystem. In summary, STRT Holding excels in supporting startups in sectors such as digital transformation, fintech, healthtech, enterprise software development, and green tech. Its expertise in these areas, coupled with its strong connections to Hungary's thriving innovation ecosystem, positions it as a key partner within the EPIC-X network. Through its involvement, STRT Holding will contribute to scaling and internationalizing innovative startups, ensuring the growth of Hungary's digital and technological capabilities

BME FIEK BRIDGE is a collaborative research and development initiative linked to the Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BME), one of Hungary's leading academic institutions. It plays a central role in the country's innovation ecosystem by bridging the gap between academia and industry. BME FIEK BRIDGE focuses on fostering collaborative R&D projects, facilitating technology transfer, and accelerating the commercialization of research outcomes. This initiative is crucial for translating cutting-edge academic research into real-world applications, particularly in high-impact sectors such as artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, and clean technologies. BME FIEK BRIDGE's core areas of expertise include AI, where it works on developing innovative machine learning algorithms, robotics, focusing on automation and industrial robots, and clean technologies, including renewable energy, waste management, and sustainable manufacturing. The initiative collaborates with both startups and established companies, providing access to state-of-the-art facilities and expert knowledge. It acts as a facilitator for technology transfer, supporting the commercialization of innovative research and fostering industry-academia collaboration. As an implementer in EPIC-X, BME FIEK BRIDGE will contribute scientific expertise and facilitate the testing of new methodologies in Hungary's unique context. This involvement ensures that EPIC-X benefits from the latest developments in AI, robotics, and clean technologies, while also offering opportunities for Hungarian startups to leverage high-level academic research for product development and innovation scaling. Through this collaboration, BME FIEK BRIDGE will play a pivotal role in shaping Hungary's growing technological landscape and strengthening the country's position within the European innovation ecosystem.

Skool is a tech NGO focused on empowering young people with the skills needed to succeed in the digital economy. Skool is dedicated to developing youth education programs that target the increasing demand for tech skills in Hungary and beyond. The organization provides a variety of training programs, workshops, and educational resources, with a particular focus on teaching coding, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship. These programs aim to equip young people with the necessary tools to enter the tech industry, become innovators, and lead the charge in digital transformation. Skool's main areas of expertise are in tech education, particularly in areas such as coding, app development, data science, machine learning, and entrepreneurship. By fostering these skills, Skool ensures that future generations are prepared to thrive in an increasingly digital world. Their educational model emphasizes hands-on experience, mentorship, and collaboration with industry leaders, which allows students to gain both theoretical knowledge and practical experience. As both an implementer and receiver in the EPIC-X network, Skool plays a critical role in addressing the pressing need for inclusivity and tech skill development in Hungary. Skool's involvement ensures that the EPIC-X network not only drives innovation but also prepares the next generation of tech entrepreneurs, innovators, and problem-solvers. This focus on skill development is essential for building a

sustainable and inclusive innovation ecosystem, ensuring that all young people, regardless of background, have the opportunity to participate in the digital economy. Skool's work helps shape Hungary's future workforce, making it an indispensable partner in EPIC-X's mission to foster sustainable and inclusive innovation.

In summary, both BME FIEK BRIDGE and Skool contribute significantly to the EPIC-X network. BME FIEK BRIDGE brings academic excellence and cutting-edge research to the project, particularly in AI, robotics, and clean technologies, while Skool empowers the next generation with essential tech skills, ensuring that EPIC-X supports innovation while simultaneously fostering an inclusive, diverse, and future-ready workforce.

Together, these Hungarian stakeholders—Lunar Program, STRT Holding, BME FIEK BRIDGE, and Skool—bring diverse and complementary expertise to EPIC-X, ensuring that the project's tools, methodologies, and innovations are deeply rooted in the local context. Their involvement ensures that EPIC-X is not only a platform for technological innovation but also a vehicle for fostering inclusivity, cross-sector collaboration, and sustainable growth within Hungary and across Europe.



Key players from

Italy

5.7 Italy

Italy's deep tech ecosystem is evolving, with increasing attention being paid to innovation driven by science and advanced technology²⁵. Women are gradually gaining visibility as entrepreneurs, researchers, and innovators, though they remain underrepresented overall²⁶. The ecosystem is supported by a mix of universities, research centers, incubators, venture capital, and corporate partners²⁷. In recent years, there has been growing awareness of the need to promote gender diversity, leading to more initiatives aimed at encouraging women to enter and thrive in deep tech fields²⁸. While challenges remain—such as access to funding, mentorship, and networks—progress is underway. Several programs, communities, and investment efforts are starting to support women-led projects and highlight their contributions to technological innovation. This section introduces a selection of Italian actors—ranging from national agencies and technology parks to startup platforms, research centres, and advocacy organisations—who will play diverse and complementary roles within the EPIC-X network. Some will act as devisers, helping to shape strategic priorities and co-develop methodologies. Others will serve as implementers, applying tools, running pilot actions, and engaging with entrepreneurs and researchers. Still others will participate as receivers, benefiting from the network's resources and contributing bottom-up insights essential to the project's evolution. By leveraging their specific strengths—policy influence, community mobilisation, technical excellence, or inclusivity advocacy—these Italian stakeholders will ensure that EPIC-X is not only innovative in its design but also impactful, inclusive, and aligned with national and European ambitions for smart, sustainable, and resilient territories. The following partners have expressed a willingness to join the network, further expanding its reach and collaborative potential.

I3P (Incubatore di Imprese Innovative del Politecnico di Torino) is a non-profit business incubator founded in 1999 and based in Turin, Italy. It supports the creation and growth of innovative start-ups with high technological intensity and growth potential, founded by university researchers, students, or external entrepreneurs. I3P provides strategic consulting services, coaching, mentoring, fundraising support, and workspaces. Its mission is to foster entrepreneurship to generate economic development and employment in innovative industrial sectors. I3P collaborates with private entities and institutions engaged in research, advanced training, technology transfer services, innovation financing, and internationalization. The interaction with the Polytechnic University of Turin is central to the support services offered by I3P, providing access to a pool of technical and scientific expertise for the development of incubated start-ups. I3P can serve as a strategic partner within EPIC-X by supporting the identification, incubation, and scaling of deep-tech start-ups. Leveraging its strong ties to academic research, investment networks, and international innovation ecosystems, I3P can significantly enhance the project's technological impact and global reach.

2i3T is the Business Incubator and Technology Transfer company of the University of Turin, established in 2007. It focuses on transforming academic research into economic value by supporting the creation of knowledge-intensive startups. As a certified incubator, 2i3T offers services such as business idea scouting, feasibility studies, business plan development, and

²⁵ European Commission. *Italy 2024 Digital Decade Country Report*. Brussels: EC, 2024.

²⁶ EIT & EIB. *Women Founders in European Deep Tech Startups*. Brussels: EIT & EIB, 2025.

²⁷ European Commission. *Italian Strategy for Artificial Intelligence 2024–2026*. Brussels: EC, 2024.

²⁸ European Innovation Council. *Deep Tech Europe: European Innovation Council Impact Report 2021*. Brussels: EIC, 2021.

pre-incubation support. It collaborates with institutional partners like the Metropolitan City of Turin, the LINKS Foundation, and Finpiemonte SpA to foster innovation and sustainable economic growth in the region. 2i3T has facilitated the launch of nearly 100 startups across various sectors, including biotechnology, digital innovation, and environmental sustainability. 2i3T can collaborate in EPIC-X as a hub for technology transfer and incubation, transforming research into enterprise, supporting the growth of knowledge-intensive start-ups, and activating institutional networks to amplify the project's regional impact.

GammaDonna is a non-profit organization that, for over 20 years, has been promoting entrepreneurial talent as a driver of socio-economic development. Its mission is to reduce the gender gap, foster inclusive innovation, and accelerate the creation of regenerative and circular business ecosystems. Founded in 2004, GammaDonna enhances the entrepreneurial potential of women and young people, supporting their ability to innovate, lead change, and generate positive impact. Through its initiatives, it facilitates dialogue and collaboration among startups, SMEs, corporates, investors, institutions, and innovation stakeholders. Its flagship initiative, the GammaDonna Award, is a nationwide empowerment program that highlights and supports female entrepreneurs driving innovation and sustainability within their companies. Complementing this, the GammaDonna BEEz Tour brings innovation and enterprise into the spotlight across Italy's lesser-known territories, engaging local communities, amplifying youth and women's voices, and bridging gaps between center and periphery. GammaDonna is also actively engaged in supporting women in deep tech startups. Through the Women Startup Award, a special category within the GammaDonna Prize, we specifically recognize and promote women founders who are driving innovation in high-tech and science-based ventures. GammaDonna can collaborate in EPIC-X as a catalyst for inclusion, innovation, and social impact, fostering the emergence of female leadership in deep-tech sectors, promoting high-potential start-ups, and strengthening the connection between innovation and local territories. As collaboration and innovation continue to gain momentum, the EPIC-X network will expand to include new stakeholders. Their involvement will strengthen regional innovation ecosystems and promote high-impact partnerships across Europe, particularly in the deep tech sector.

Zest Group is a leading Italian and European innovation platform, born from the merger of Digital Magics and LVenture Group. It invests in early-stage startups, accelerates their growth, and supports corporate innovation through tailored programs. With over 250 startups in its portfolio, 7 active acceleration programs, and 13 investment vehicles, Zest plays a key role in Europe's innovation ecosystem. Strategic focus areas include AI, CleanTech, FinTech, HealthTech, and Smart Cities. Zest also runs corporate venturing and open innovation services, helping companies innovate and collaborate with startups. Its innovation hubs in Rome, Milan, and Turin host 400+ events per year and promote ESG values like inclusion and sustainability. The Zest Group could serve as a key innovation partner in EPIC-X, supporting early-stage startups, leading acceleration activities, and fostering collaboration between corporations and startups. With strong regional hubs and expertise in ESG, they can also contribute to ecosystem building and impact-driven innovation across Europe.



Key players from

Latvia

5.8 Latvia

Latvia's science, technology, and innovation (STI) landscape is undergoing a significant transformation, marked by a growing deep tech sector, enhanced public-private collaboration, and strategic alignment with European Union (EU) research and innovation priorities²⁹. While challenges persist—such as low R&D intensity and underrepresentation of women in STEM fields³⁰—concerted efforts are being made to foster an inclusive and sustainable innovation ecosystem³¹. This section introduces a selection of Latvian actors—ranging from national agencies and technology parks to startup platforms, research centres, and advocacy organisations—who will play diverse and complementary roles within the EPIC-X network. Some will act as devisers, helping to shape strategic priorities and co-develop methodologies. Others will serve as implementers, applying tools, running pilot actions, and engaging with entrepreneurs and researchers. Still others will participate as receivers, benefiting from the network's resources and contributing bottom-up insights essential to the project's evolution. By leveraging their specific strengths—policy influence, community mobilisation, technical excellence, or inclusivity advocacy—these Latvian stakeholders will ensure that EPIC-X is not only innovative in its design but also impactful, inclusive, and aligned with national and European ambitions for smart, sustainable, and resilient territories. The following partners have expressed a willingness to join the network, further expanding its reach and collaborative potential.

Riga TechGirls is a non-profit organisation based in Latvia that empowers women and girls through tech education, mentorship, and startup-focused initiatives. With a strong emphasis on early-stage entrepreneurship and female founders' community building across all the tech verticals, they support female-led startups through programs like “Spring Up” and international collaborations that connect founders to mentors, funding, and prototyping resources. With a strong focus on closing the gender gap in ICT, they connect aspiring women in tech with mentors, industry experts, and global opportunities. Their impact spans internationally, supported by partners like Google.org, and includes digital skills training, hackathons, and community building to foster a diverse and inclusive tech ecosystem. Riga TechGirls can collaborate in EPIC-X as a gender inclusion and capacity-building partner, empowering women in deep tech through education, mentorship, and startup support. Their expertise in fostering female-led innovation and international collaborations will contribute to a more diverse and inclusive European tech ecosystem.

University of Latvia-innovation and Acceleration Centre (IAC) is a one-stop agency that fosters collaboration between academia and industry, supporting innovation, research commercialisation, and student entrepreneurship. IAC provides a structured platform for technology transfer, project management, and intellectual property support. With many implemented projects and extensive experience in startup incubation, the center plays a vital role in turning scientific knowledge into market-ready solutions. IAC also coordinates training, mentorship, and networking programs to support business idea development and prototype creation through initiatives like its OpenLab prototyping facility. A special focus is placed on empowering and supporting women in deep tech, helping them succeed in high-impact

²⁹ European Commission. *ERA Country Report 2023 – Latvia*. Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Brussels, 2024.

³⁰ European Commission. *Specific Support to Latvia II: Human Capital for Research and Innovation*. Policy Support Facility, Brussels, 2022.

³¹ European Commission. *European Innovation Scoreboard 2024 – Latvia*. Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Brussels, 2024.

innovation sectors. The University of Latvia – Innovation and Acceleration Centre (IAC) can collaborate in EPIC-X as a key innovation and tech transfer partner, supporting the commercialisation of research and student entrepreneurship. With a focus on prototype development and inclusion of women in deep tech, IAC will strengthen EPIC-X's mission to foster impactful, market-ready innovation across Europe.

As collaboration and innovation continue to gain momentum, the EPIC-X network will expand to include new stakeholders in Latvia. Their involvement will strengthen regional innovation ecosystems and promote high-impact partnerships across Europe, particularly in the deep tech sector.



Key players from

Lithuania

5.9 Lithuania

Lithuania has rapidly emerged as one of the most dynamic and innovative countries in Central and Eastern Europe³², becoming a key player in the global science and innovation ecosystems³³. The country has made significant strides in deep tech, with a growing focus on artificial intelligence (AI), biotechnology, robotics, clean energy, and financial technologies. Lithuania's strong academic institutions, vibrant startup community, and increasing investment in research and development (R&D) create an environment that nurtures technological innovation and entrepreneurship. The Lithuanian government has made strategic investments in building a robust innovation ecosystem, encouraging collaboration between academia, industry, and government. Key initiatives have been launched to promote technology transfer, entrepreneurship, and the commercialization of deep tech solutions³⁴. As a result, the country has seen a significant rise in the number of startup incubators and accelerators dedicated to fostering high-tech and sustainable businesses³⁵. In this context, several organizations play a pivotal role in supporting and scaling startups, particularly in deeptech sectors. Sunrise Tech Park, Baltic Sandbox, and Rokit are three of Lithuania's leading incubators and accelerators that contribute to the country's growing entrepreneurial and innovation landscape. These organizations help transform research and innovations into commercial solutions, bridging the gap between academia and the market. By supporting early-stage startups with mentorship, capital access, and strategic partnerships, these organizations are essential in scaling Lithuanian startups and connecting them to broader European and global innovation ecosystems. Together, these organizations are actively shaping the future of Lithuania's tech ecosystem, ensuring that it remains a vibrant hub for deeptech innovation, inclusive entrepreneurship, and sustainable business practices. Through their participation in the EPIC-X network, they are contributing to the development of an interconnected European innovation ecosystem, where emerging technologies can thrive and create a lasting impact. The following partners have expressed a willingness to join the network, further expanding its reach and collaborative potential.

Sunrise Tech Park is a leading startup incubator located in Lithuania, with a strong focus on university spin-offs and deeptech commercialization. It serves as a crucial bridge between academic research and industry, helping research-driven startups transition from university labs to market-ready solutions. Sunrise Tech Park collaborates closely with Lithuanian universities and research institutions to identify high-potential technologies and bring them to market, focusing on sectors such as biotechnology, AI, robotics, and advanced manufacturing. The incubator provides startups with the resources they need to succeed, including mentorship, business development support, and access to funding. The facility offers state-of-the-art office space and laboratory facilities, providing an optimal environment for deeptech startups to grow. One of the key features of Sunrise Tech Park is its commitment to promoting gender inclusivity, ensuring that women and other underrepresented groups in the tech ecosystem have equal opportunities to succeed. The incubator's gender-inclusive programs help support a diverse range of founders in their pursuit of innovation. As an implementer in the EPIC-X network, Sunrise Tech Park actively contributes to scaling deeptech startups within Lithuania, ensuring that the methodologies and tools developed by the network are applied locally to foster innovation. The organization's role in the project is pivotal, as it helps create an

³² European Commission. (2023). *ERA Country Report 2023 – Lithuania*. European Research Area.

³³ European Commission. (2024). *European Innovation Scoreboard 2024 – Lithuania*.

³⁴ European Commission. (2024). *Lithuania Digital Decade Country Report 2025*. Digital Strategy.

³⁵ Business Insider. (2024). *Lithuania's Capital Vilnius Becoming Europe's Biggest Tech Campus*.

ecosystem where technology transfer and innovation can thrive, contributing to Lithuania's growing role in the global innovation landscape.

Baltic Sandbox is a renowned startup accelerator based in Lithuania that focuses on supporting underrepresented founders in the deeptech sector. Baltic Sandbox aims to remove barriers to access, particularly for those who traditionally face challenges in securing funding and support in the startup world. The accelerator provides entrepreneurial coaching, investment readiness programs, and access to venture capital. It also offers a robust network of mentors, industry experts, and corporate partners, which helps startups navigate the complexities of scaling and internationalization. Baltic Sandbox specializes in deeptech startups, which are involved in high-tech sectors such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, robotics, and clean energy. By providing a comprehensive support system for startups, Baltic Sandbox plays a significant role in strengthening Lithuania's deeptech ecosystem, making it a key player in the EPIC-X network. Through its involvement, Baltic Sandbox helps startups grow and expand globally while ensuring that access to capital and resources is equitable, supporting the development of high-impact, scalable solutions.

Rockit is a prominent startup incubator and accelerator in Lithuania, focusing specifically on scaling responsible fintech and increasing diversity within the startup ecosystem. The organization specializes in nurturing startups in the financial technology sector, offering support to businesses that are developing innovative financial solutions in a responsible and sustainable manner. Rockit places a particular emphasis on ethical practices, ensuring that the startups it supports are aligned with global standards for financial transparency, inclusivity, and sustainability. Rockit provides a wide range of services, including business mentoring, product development assistance, market access, and funding support. One of its standout features is its focus on diversity and inclusion. Rockit aims to foster an inclusive environment by supporting founders from diverse backgrounds, helping them overcome the challenges they face in the competitive fintech landscape. The accelerator also offers specialized programs for female founders, minority entrepreneurs, and other underrepresented groups in the fintech space. As an implementer in the EPIC-X network, Rockit plays a critical role in scaling fintech startups, particularly those focused on inclusive finance, digital payments, insurtech, and sustainable financial technologies. Through its programs, Rockit contributes to the development of ethical fintech solutions, ensuring that startups have the support and resources they need to grow, scale, and have a meaningful impact on the financial sector. Rockit's role in EPIC-X extends beyond just business support, as it is actively shaping the future of inclusive innovation in the financial services industry.

Together, Sunrise Tech Park, Baltic Sandbox, and Rockit represent the growing strength and diversity of Lithuania's startup ecosystem. Each organization brings its unique expertise to the EPIC-X network, fostering innovation, inclusivity, and responsible business practices. Their collective impact helps create a thriving innovation ecosystem in Lithuania, strengthening the country's position in the European and global markets, particularly in the fields of deeptech, fintech, and social innovation. Driven by the growing momentum for collaboration and innovation, the EPIC-X network is set to welcome new stakeholders. Their arrival marks an important step in enriching regional innovation ecosystems and weaving new connections across Europe's deep tech landscape—connections that promise to spark fresh ideas, strengthen partnerships, and amplify the impact of collective action.



Key players from

Malta

5.10 Malta

Malta's deep tech ecosystem is emerging as a promising frontier within the national innovation landscape³⁶, with increasing attention being paid to science-driven and advanced technology solutions³⁷. Although women remain underrepresented in Malta's science and technology sectors, efforts to promote gender diversity are gaining momentum. Initiatives from institutions such as the Malta Council for Science and Technology (MCST), national universities, and EU-supported projects are increasingly aimed at fostering inclusive innovation environments that empower women as researchers, entrepreneurs, and decision-makers. The Maltese deep tech ecosystem is supported by a growing network of actors, including universities such as the University of Malta, research centres like the Centre for Molecular Medicine and Biobanking, innovation hubs like Malta Life Sciences Park and the MITA Innovation Hub, as well as startup platforms and early-stage investors. Collaboration between government bodies, academia, and industry stakeholders is key to unlocking the country's potential in deep tech, particularly in niche areas where Malta can act as a testbed for agile, scalable, and cross-border innovations³⁸. This section introduces a selection of Maltese actors—ranging from national agencies and technology parks to startup platforms, research centres, and advocacy organisations—who will play diverse and complementary roles within the EPIC-X network. Some will act as devisers, helping to shape strategic priorities and co-develop methodologies. Others will serve as implementers, applying tools, running pilot actions, and engaging with entrepreneurs and researchers. Still others will participate as receivers, benefiting from the network's resources and contributing bottom-up insights essential to the project's evolution. By leveraging their specific strengths—policy influence, community mobilisation, technical excellence, or inclusivity advocacy—these Maltese stakeholders will ensure that EPIC-X is not only innovative in its design but also impactful, inclusive, and aligned with national and European ambitions for smart, sustainable, and resilient territories. The following partners have expressed a willingness to join the network, further expanding its reach and collaborative potential.

Xjenza Malta is the Malta Government Agency acting as the national R&D and Space-funding agency, and the policy development and implementation body in Research, Innovation and Space. Xjenza Malta is entrusted with the updating of the national R&I and Space policy frameworks, overseeing and coordinating R&I and Space-strategy implementation through programming efforts, including the direct management of the national public budgetary allocation for Research, Innovation and Space. Xjenza Malta also hosts the National Contact Point (NCP) network for Horizon Europe, promoting and ensuring Malta's overall successful participation in the EU Framework Programme for R&I and related support schemes, while also representing the Government of Malta within the comitology structure of Horizon Europe. Xjenza Malta can collaborate in EPIC-X as a partner in strengthening international collaborations and developing deep-tech solutions with impact at the European level.

Acceler8 (A8) is a European venture builder that helps commercialize deep tech and life science innovations, particularly from EU research programs like the European Innovation Council (EIC), European Research Council (ERC), and EIT. Based in Estonia, they partner with universities, labs, and corporates to turn early-stage technologies into investable startups. Acceler8 has supported over 30 companies, helping raise €18 million in funding and increasing valuations by €2 million on average. Acceler8, it contributes to gender inclusion

³⁶ European Commission. *ERA Country Report 2023: Malta*.

³⁷ Malta Council for Science and Technology. *Malta's National Research and Innovation Strategic Plan 2023–2027*.

³⁸ European Commission. *EU Research and Innovation in Malta*.

through initiatives such as the Venture Alliances Residency Program – a collaborative EU-funded program where female researchers and founders work alongside experienced entrepreneurs. This creates meaningful opportunities for women in academia and early-stage tech to break into the startup ecosystem. Acceler8 can collaborate in EPIC-X as a partner driving the commercialisation of deep-tech and life science innovations from EU research, while fostering inclusive entrepreneurship through dedicated support for female researchers and founders.

The University of Malta (UM) is the highest teaching and research institution in Malta, offering a comprehensive range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs across disciplines. With a strong focus on innovation, UM plays a central role in shaping Malta's knowledge economy through its research centres, entrepreneurial support services, and academic-industry collaborations. The UM fosters women's participation in Deep Tech entrepreneurship through research, innovation, and education. Key initiatives include the Edward de Bono Institute, which offers programs in creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship, and the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Business Incubation (CEBI), which supports startup development. UM also engages in EU-funded projects aimed at promoting gender equity in research and innovation. Female researchers and students are encouraged to commercialize scientific ideas through innovation hubs and the tech transfer office of UM. Collaborative ties with industry and international partners provide mentorship and funding opportunities. The University of Malta (UM) can collaborate in EPIC-X as a key academic partner, fostering Deep Tech entrepreneurship and inclusive innovation through its research centres, startup support structures, and initiatives promoting women's participation in science and technology.

MALTAaccelerate is a dynamic Malta-based accelerator and venture builder established in 2023, dedicated to scaling startups at the intersection of digital innovation, climate-tech, and deep-tech sectors. With a strategic focus on transformative technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), biotechnology, sustainable energy solutions, and the blue economy, MALTAaccelerate is committed to fostering innovation and enabling the growth of disruptive startups. Through its partnership with prominent EU programs such as the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), MALTAaccelerate connects entrepreneurs to vital resources, funding, and mentorship, empowering them to accelerate their development and reach new markets. The accelerator provides a collaborative ecosystem that nurtures early-stage companies with cutting-edge technological solutions, facilitating their growth within the EU and beyond. In addition to supporting tech startups, MALTAaccelerate is also committed to gender inclusion, particularly within the deep-tech space. Through initiatives like the X2.0 Driving Deep Tech Growth program, the accelerator ensures that women-led startups are empowered with the necessary resources, guidance, and funding to thrive in traditionally male-dominated fields. By promoting diversity and inclusion, MALTAaccelerate plays a crucial role in building a more equitable entrepreneurial landscape, with a strong emphasis on supporting women entrepreneurs who are pioneering change in tech-driven sectors. Furthermore, MALTAaccelerate collaborates with industry experts, investors, and governmental entities to foster a robust innovation ecosystem, enabling startups to leverage Malta's growing status as a digital hub within the EU. By connecting innovative minds and offering a tailored support structure, MALTAaccelerate drives forward the global transition to sustainable and digital economies. The organization also works closely with stakeholders in the maritime, sustainability, and biotech sectors, providing startups with strategic insights, advanced technologies, and a broad network of partners to help them succeed in a rapidly evolving marketplace.

In response to the increasing emphasis on collaborative innovation within EU policy frameworks, the EPIC-X network will be expanded to include new stakeholders from the Maltese context. Their participation is expected to strengthen regional innovation ecosystems and foster the development of impactful, cross-border collaborations in the deep tech sector, aligning with the EU's strategic objectives for inclusive and sustainable growth. MALTAccelerate can collaborate in EPIC-X as a venture-building partner supporting the growth of digital, climate-tech, and deep tech startups, while advancing gender inclusion through targeted support for women-led innovation. Their involvement will help strengthen regional ecosystems and drive cross-border collaboration aligned with EU priorities.



Key players from

Poland

5.11 Poland

Poland brings a dynamic and multifaceted innovation landscape to the EPIC-X project, driven by a mix of public agencies, research centres, startup platforms, technology parks, and advocacy organisations³⁹. These actors contribute a unique blend of policy influence, research excellence, entrepreneurial energy, and community engagement—key ingredients for building a robust and inclusive deep tech ecosystem⁴⁰. This section introduces a selection of Polish stakeholders who will take on diverse and complementary roles within the EPIC-X network. Some will act as devisers, shaping strategic directions and co-developing methodologies. Others will operate as implementers, applying tools and running pilot actions with researchers, startups, and innovators. Still others will participate as receivers, benefiting from the network's knowledge, tools, and peer exchange to grow their capabilities and influence. The following partners have expressed a willingness to join the network, further expanding its reach and collaborative potential.

Tangent Line VC invests in early-stage technology startups (pre-seed and seed), with a strong focus on deep tech solutions that can transform industries and improve lives. They support founders not only with capital but also with strategic guidance through a robust network of experts, industry partners, and technology advisors. As a European venture capital fund led by a team with deep expertise in science, technology, and business, they believe that breakthrough innovation happens where advanced research meets bold entrepreneurship. Their mission is to back science-driven founders building the future – from materials science and biotech to AI and space technologies. They are committed to fostering diversity and inclusion in deep tech, with a focus on increasing the representation of women in science, technology, and leadership roles. They collaborate with organizations like Women in Tech, and several of their portfolio companies are founded or co-founded by women. They have contributed to the Polish innovation ecosystem for years – mentoring and working with universities, public institutions, and private stakeholders through initiatives such as Startup Poland, NCBR, Akces NCBR, Innovation Hub, DeepTech Summit, EIT Food, InCredibles, Startup Hub Poland, and Youth Business Poland. They are also engaged in “Sprawdzamy,” a grassroots initiative of Polish entrepreneurs aiming to improve regulatory frameworks and create system-level support for the deep tech sector in Poland.

³⁹ European Commission. *ERA Country Report 2023: Poland*. Brussels: 2023.



Key players from

Portugal

5.12 Portugal

Portugal hosts a vibrant and rapidly evolving innovation ecosystem, marked by strong public-private collaboration, dynamic startup communities⁴¹, cutting-edge research institutions⁴², and growing awareness of the need for inclusive and sustainable innovation⁴³. Within EPIC-X, the participation of key Portuguese stakeholders is essential to ground the network's vision in real territorial contexts, ensuring relevance, experimentation, and scalability. This section introduces a selection of Portuguese actors—ranging from national agencies and technology parks to startup platforms, research centres, and advocacy organisations—who will play diverse and complementary roles within the EPIC-X network. Some will act as devisers, helping to shape strategic priorities and co-develop methodologies. Others will serve as implementers, applying tools, running actions, and engaging with entrepreneurs and researchers. Still others will participate as receivers, benefiting from the network's resources and contributing bottom-up insights essential to the project's evolution. By leveraging their specific strengths—policy influence, community mobilisation, technical excellence, or inclusivity advocacy—these Portuguese stakeholders will ensure that EPIC-X is not only innovative in its design but also impactful, inclusive, and aligned with national and European ambitions for smart, sustainable, and resilient territories. The following Portuguese partners have expressed interest in joining the network.

351 Portuguese Startup Association (Associação 351) is the largest and most active startup community in Portugal, with over 1300 founders, developers, mentors, and investors connected through grassroots initiatives. It acts primarily as a connector and receiver within the EPIC-X framework. 351 STARTUPS fosters a dynamic and open community that can absorb and test new innovation methodologies in real-time. 351 Portuguese Startup Association (Associação 351) is a key organization dedicated to supporting and promoting the startup ecosystem in Portugal. Its primary goal is to enhance the growth of Portuguese startups, increase their international visibility, and strengthen their impact within the national and global markets. By fostering collaboration between entrepreneurs, investors, and various stakeholders, Associação 351 serves as a vital resource for driving innovation, business development, and the overall competitiveness of Portuguese startups. The association works across several sectors, focusing on creating favourable conditions for startups to thrive, including facilitating access to funding, resources, and networking opportunities. It also engages in advocacy efforts to ensure that the regulatory environment supports the needs of entrepreneurs, while promoting policies that encourage innovation, economic growth, and job creation. Through strategic initiatives, partnerships with other organizations, and the promotion of a strong, collaborative startup ecosystem, the 351 Portuguese Startup Association aims to position Portugal as a leading hub for entrepreneurship and innovation in Europe. Their activities contribute significantly to the visibility of Portuguese startups on the global stage and help to connect them with international markets and opportunities. By engaging this community, EPIC-X can amplify its outreach and visibility while collecting critical bottom-up insights that support continuous refinement of its tools, services, and capacity-building modules. Its agility and strong communication channels also make it a valuable asset in rapidly disseminating project results across early-stage startups.

UPTEC – Parque de Ciência e Tecnologia da Universidade do Porto, is one of the most prominent science and technology parks in Portugal, renowned for its ability to foster

⁴¹Startup Portugal. (2022). *Startup Ecosystem Report*.

⁴²European Research Area Platform. (2023). *Country Report Portugal*.

⁴³European Commission. (2024). *European Innovation Scoreboard 2024 – Country profile: Portugal*.

innovation through the integration of academia and industry. Located in Porto, UPTEC serves as a hub for over 300 companies and startups, focusing on several key areas of expertise that drive Portugal's technological and entrepreneurial growth. One of the core areas of expertise at UPTEC is digital technology, where it plays a central role in supporting the development of software solutions, IT services, and digital transformation tools. UPTEC's ecosystem nurtures startups working in fields such as artificial intelligence (AI), big data, cloud computing, and cybersecurity. These startups are supported by UPTEC's infrastructure, resources, and connections with the University of Porto, which provides access to cutting-edge research and talent in digital technologies. Another key area of focus is the creative industries, where UPTEC fosters collaboration between technology and the arts. This includes areas such as design, digital media, film production, gaming, and interactive media. The park supports both creative entrepreneurs and tech-driven startups that are creating innovative solutions for cultural expression, interactive entertainment, and artistic collaboration. By leveraging the university's expertise in media, design, and arts, UPTEC helps to position Porto as a growing center for creative industries in Europe. Health and life sciences also form a crucial pillar of UPTEC's ecosystem. Startups in this sector are developing breakthrough technologies and solutions in biotechnology, medical devices, digital health, and healthcare IT. UPTEC is strategically placed to support technology transfer from the University of Porto's renowned Faculty of Medicine and other research institutions. It fosters collaboration in areas like personalized medicine, health monitoring systems, and biomedical innovations, all while ensuring that startups have access to the resources needed to move from research to commercialization. In addition to these core areas, UPTEC also specializes in engineering and sustainability. This includes supporting startups working in clean tech, renewable energy, and environmental solutions. UPTEC helps these startups harness advanced technologies to address global environmental challenges, from sustainable energy solutions to waste management and resource efficiency. The park serves as a platform where innovative projects in sustainable technology can thrive, making an important contribution to Portugal's green transition. Through its focus on these key sectors—digital technologies, creative industries, health and life sciences, and sustainability—UPTEC offers a comprehensive and integrated environment for innovation. It provides startups with the necessary tools for research, product development, funding, and market access, ensuring that ideas are transformed into scalable and impactful solutions. As part of the EPIC-X project, UPTEC contributes its vast expertise and infrastructure to foster technology transfer, support the incubation of spin-offs, and enhance collaboration across disciplines. The hub's deep connections to the University of Porto's scientific community, combined with its diverse technological and cultural domains, ensure that EPIC-X can leverage the strengths of the park in advancing innovation and strengthening the European innovation ecosystem.

3XP – Triple Impact is a platform dedicated to fostering entrepreneurship and innovation that generates social, environmental, and economic value. 3XP – Triple Impact is a platform dedicated to fostering entrepreneurship and innovation that generates social, environmental, and economic value. It focuses on promoting sustainable business practices and supporting startups that are committed to creating a positive impact in society. The platform's core mission is to drive innovation in a way that balances profit with purpose, encouraging solutions that contribute to both the economy and the well-being of people and the planet. One of 3XP's key areas of expertise is social innovation. This involves the development of solutions that address societal challenges, such as poverty, inequality, and access to essential services. By supporting entrepreneurs who focus on social inclusion, education, healthcare, and community empowerment, 3XP helps to drive change in areas where traditional markets may

not fully meet the needs of vulnerable populations. The platform provides resources, mentorship, and funding opportunities to startups that are addressing social issues and working towards the betterment of communities. In terms of environmental impact, 3XP specializes in supporting innovations that contribute to environmental sustainability. This includes startups focused on clean technologies, circular economy models, renewable energy, and resource efficiency. The platform helps entrepreneurs develop solutions that reduce environmental harm, promote sustainable practices, and contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation. By guiding startups in these sectors, 3XP ensures that their businesses are aligned with global sustainability goals, fostering green innovations that can help tackle the most pressing environmental challenges of our time.

Instituto Pedro Nunes (IPN) is an innovation and technology centre renowned for its strong focus on technology transfer, entrepreneurship, business incubation and acceleration, and R&D services. Created in 1990 by the initiative of the University of Coimbra, IPN is a private, non-profit organization that promotes innovation and facilitates the transfer of technology, connecting the scientific and technological environments with the market. As an implementer and capacity builder, IPN brings valuable experience in bridging academic research and the entrepreneurial ecosystem. With a long track record in European projects, IPN has strong and solid experience in supporting entrepreneurs, having already supported the creation of over 500 new businesses and companies over 30 years of its Incubator. IPN also promoted ESA Space Solutions programs for 10 years, supporting 69 startups. IPN's expertise positions it as a key partner for the EPIC-X network, where it can support deep tech startups, assist in validating new business ideas and roadmaps, and help disseminate tools across both academic and industry environments. IPN's technological infrastructure includes six RTD laboratories covering diverse technological areas: Automatics, Materials, Informatics, Phytopathology, Electroanalysis, and Geotechnics. These state-of-the-art facilities, combined with IPN's established connections with higher education institutions, R&D organizations, and both national and international companies, place IPN in a privileged position for conducting joint R&D activities with companies. Furthermore, IPN provides multidisciplinary support for product creation and innovative processes within an entrepreneurial environment. This support includes research and technological development, access to funding sources, assistance with intellectual property issues, and guidance on entering international markets.

HER Venture HUB is a women-centric social enterprise dedicated to empowering women through social innovation and business strategy. Operating across four interconnected hubs—Impact, Social, Business, and Digital—it supports women entrepreneurs, leaders, and organizations by aligning strategy with measurable social impact and fostering inclusive innovation. The initiative provides services in ESG, DEI, ISO certification, global leadership, and workforce transformation, while also creating programs that support women and communities through inclusive innovation and collaboration. HER Venture HUB aims to drive systemic change and contribute to a more peaceful, inclusive, and human-centred future.

In line with the growing demand for collaboration and innovation, new stakeholders will be added to the EPIC-X network. These stakeholders will contribute to further enhancing regional innovation ecosystems and fostering impactful collaborations across Europe within the field of deep tech.



Key players from

Romania

5.13 Romania

Romania is rapidly emerging as a key player⁴⁴ in Central and Eastern Europe's innovation ecosystem⁴⁵. The country benefits from a strong entrepreneurial spirit, a growing tech sector, and an increasing number of initiatives aimed at fostering innovation⁴⁶, sustainability, and inclusive development⁴⁷. As part of the EPIC-X project, Romania's contribution is vital for grounding the network's vision in local realities, ensuring that the methodologies and tools developed are both scalable and impactful. This section highlights key Romanian stakeholders who will play an important role in the EPIC-X network. These organizations, ranging from accelerators to business incubators and innovation hubs, are crucial for implementing the project's objectives, shaping its methodologies, and ensuring its relevance to the local context. The following partners have expressed a willingness to join the network, further expanding its reach and collaborative potential.

UEFISCDI-Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation is a public institution in Romania operating under the Ministry of Education and Research. It serves as the central agency responsible for managing and distributing public funds for higher education, research, development, and innovation in the country. UEFISCDI's primary role is to allocate state funds to universities and research institutions, ensuring that the distribution aligns with national priorities and strategic objectives. In addition to managing funding, UEFISCDI coordinates national programs related to research and innovation, such as the National Plan for Research, Development, and Innovation (PNCDI). The agency oversees competitive research projects and ensures transparency and fairness in the allocation of resources. Furthermore, UEFISCDI plays a key role in implementing institutional development projects aimed at improving the infrastructure and operational capacities of Romania's higher education and research institutions. UEFISCDI also provides technical assistance and consultancy services to support the development and management of national and international research and innovation initiatives. Its work extends to promoting open science practices in Romania, where it has led the creation of the National Open Science Knowledge Hub. This initiative aims to promote open science practices and enhance Romania's engagement with international research and innovation networks. In addition to these responsibilities, UEFISCDI is actively involved in Romania's participation in the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC). It supports the integration of national infrastructures and services into the EOSC ecosystem, facilitating collaboration with other European countries on open science initiatives. Through these efforts, UEFISCDI contributes to advancing Romania's role in the European research and innovation landscape. In the context of EPIC-X, UEFISCDI is instrumental in aligning Romania's research and innovation activities with the EU's deep tech goals. It ensures that EPIC-X's tools and methodologies resonate with the needs of Romania's high-potential startups and innovation players. Through its involvement, UEFISCDI contributes to strengthening Romania's position in the European deep tech and innovation ecosystem, ensuring that the country remains a competitive player in driving sustainable, inclusive, and technologically advanced solutions across Europe.

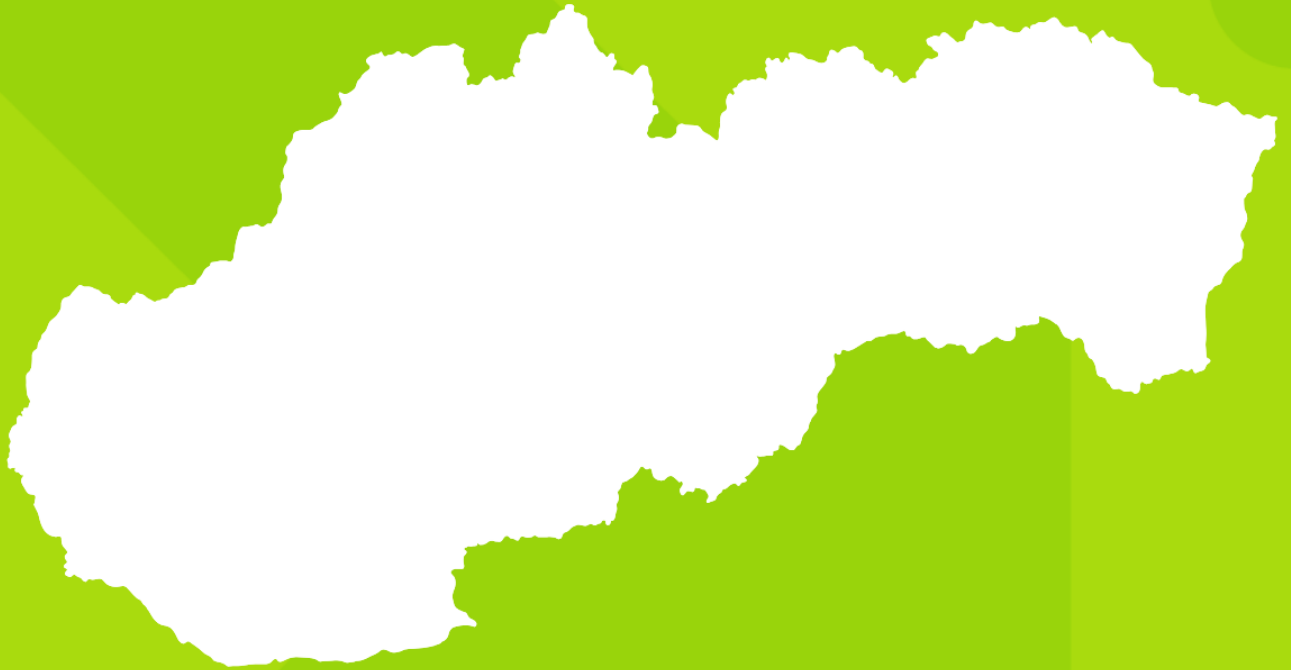
⁴⁴ European Commission. (2024). *European Innovation Scoreboard 2024 – Romania*.

⁴⁵ European Commission. (2023). *Country Report Romania – Economy and Finance*.

⁴⁶ European Commission. (2025). *European Digital Innovation Hubs Network*

⁴⁷ European Commission. (2023). *ERA Country Report 2023 – Romania*.

Impact Hub Bucharest, one of the most prominent accelerators in Romania, is dedicated to supporting early-stage startups, particularly those in the fields of technology, social innovation, and sustainability. Situated in the heart of Bucharest, Impact Hub Bucharest supports a diverse range of sectors, including technology, social innovation, sustainability, and education, with the mission to provide the necessary resources, mentorship, and community to help entrepreneurs transform their ideas into sustainable businesses. One of Impact Hub Bucharest's core areas of expertise is entrepreneurship and business development. It offers various acceleration programs, incubation services, and access to a vast network of mentors and business experts. These programs are tailored to support startups at different stages, from ideation to scaling. Notable initiatives include the Startup Impact Lab, which provides free coworking space, mentoring, and visibility opportunities for early-stage startups. Impact Hub Bucharest fosters social innovation through programs like Innovators for Children and CRAFT Impact Creators, supporting changemakers addressing societal challenges. In sustainability and climate action, it runs initiatives such as ClimAccelerator and WE.Circular, which back green startups and promote circular economy practices. As the EIT Food Hub in Romania, it also drives agri-food innovation, helping startups enhance food security and sustainability. Through Startarium, its educational platform, the hub offers e-learning, workshops, and tools to build entrepreneurial skills. With its broad focus and strong network, Impact Hub Bucharest plays a key role in growing Romania's entrepreneurial ecosystem and advancing impactful innovation. As an implementer in EPIC-X, Impact Hub Bucharest will provide essential resources and expertise to foster innovation and drive growth. The organization's experience in supporting startups, facilitating community-building, and developing sustainable business models aligns perfectly with the project's goals of promoting innovation, inclusion, and digital transformation. Through its established network, Impact Hub Bucharest will engage local entrepreneurs, offer pilot testing opportunities for EPIC-X tools, and help disseminate best practices across Romania. Involvement from Impact Hub Bucharest will ensure that EPIC-X benefits from deep local engagement and strong links to Romania's dynamic startup ecosystem. The organization's commitment to sustainability and social impact further enhances the project's ability to develop solutions that are not only innovative but also socially responsible and environmentally sustainable. By leveraging Impact Hub Bucharest's expertise in fostering innovation and supporting high-growth startups, EPIC-X will strengthen its presence in Romania and expand its influence across the region, ensuring that the network's methodologies are adaptable and impactful across diverse European contexts.



Key players from

Slovakia

5.14 Slovakia

Slovakia is home to a vibrant and evolving innovation ecosystem, marked by strong collaboration between academia, research institutions, incubators, and civil society⁴⁸. The country's active support for early-stage startups and technology transfer makes⁴⁹ it a vital contributor to the EPIC-X project. By integrating Slovakian stakeholders into the EPIC-X network, the project ensures that its tools and methodologies are grounded in local expertise while contributing to broader European innovation goals. This section highlights key Slovakian actors—ranging from accelerators and venture networks to grassroots organizations—who will serve as devisers, implementers, and receivers within the EPIC-X ecosystem. These partners not only foster scalable innovation but also promote inclusivity, particularly by supporting women-led and youth-driven initiatives. The following partners have expressed a willingness to join the network, further expanding its reach and collaborative potential.

AceON Accelerator, created by Accace and ZAKA VC, empowers early-stage startups across Europe with know-how and access to funding. Our acceleration programs feature online lectures, mentoring, and investment opportunities, offering founders practical insights into VC and fundraising, validation, sales, finance, and go-to-market strategy. The program concludes with a Demo Day, where high-potential startups pitch for funding from AceON. As a sector-agnostic accelerator, we support a wide range of scalable startups - from BioTech and HealthTech to digital platforms and SaaS. In our programs, we've also supported startups led by women. AceON Accelerator can contribute to EPIC-X as an investment-readiness and startup acceleration partner, providing early-stage deep tech and HealthTech founders with mentoring, VC insights, and fundraising support. Their sector-agnostic approach and inclusion of women-led startups align with EPIC-X's goals of building a diverse and scalable European innovation ecosystem.

Aj Ty v IT, is a women-led civil society organisation (CSO) founded in 2012, committed to breaking gender stereotypes and promoting equal access to digital skills and IT education for girls and women in Slovakia. Over the past 13 years, we have worked extensively with schools and universities across Slovakia, engaging over 62,000 girls and women, and building long-term relationships with teachers to promote systemic change. The core focus is motivating and educating girls aged 8–19 and women through programs that cover robotics, coding, cybersecurity, and other specialised IT skills. They offer digital and soft skills courses, clubs, and mentoring programs targeting high school girls, aiming to develop their digital competencies and encourage enrollment in STEM disciplines. Additionally, they facilitate connections with tech employers to support girls' career development and expand opportunities within the digital and IT sectors. A key part is involving strengthening the educational ecosystem by empowering teachers. They organise teacher training programs to support their professional growth and facilitate peer exchanges among schools and educators, promoting the sharing of best practices. Driven by the growing momentum for collaboration and innovation, the EPIC-X network is set to welcome new stakeholders. Their arrival marks an important step in enriching regional innovation ecosystems and weaving new connections across Europe's deep tech landscape—connections that promise to spark fresh ideas, strengthen partnerships, and amplify the impact of collective action. Aj Ty v IT can

⁴⁸ European Commission. *ERA Country Report 2023: Slovakia*. Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, 2024.

⁴⁹ European Commission. *Slovakia 2024 Digital Decade Country Report*. Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology, 2024.

contribute to EPIC-X as a gender inclusion and digital skills partner, empowering the next generation of women in tech through STEM education, mentoring, and teacher training. Their expertise in early engagement and systemic change will help build a more inclusive and future-ready innovation ecosystem across Europe.



Key players from

Slovenia

5.15 Slovenia

Slovenia stands out as a growing innovation hub within Central Europe⁵⁰, characterized by its robust research institutions⁵¹, highly skilled workforce⁵², and strong governmental support for entrepreneurship⁵³ and technological development⁵⁴. The country's innovation ecosystem is becoming increasingly interconnected, with a particular emphasis on fostering collaboration between academia, research centers, and startups. Within EPIC-X, the involvement of key Slovenian stakeholders is essential to ensure the project's methodologies are grounded in local realities, supporting scalable and sustainable innovation while aligning with national and European strategic goals. This section introduces a selection of Slovenian stakeholders—ranging from leading universities and research institutions to technology transfer offices (TTO) and startup incubators—who will play diverse roles in the EPIC-X network. These organizations will contribute as devisers, implementers, and receivers, each providing valuable expertise and facilitating the application of innovative solutions. Some will help shape strategic priorities and co-develop methodologies, while others will actively engage with local startups and research communities to apply tools, run pilot actions, and provide feedback. The following partners have expressed a willingness to join the network, further expanding its reach and collaborative potential.

The [University of Ljubljana \(UL\)](#) is Slovenia's oldest and largest higher education and scientific research institution, founded in 1919. With approximately 40,000 students and over 6,000 staff across 23 faculties and three art academies, UL serves as a central hub for research and innovation in Slovenia. The University is deeply committed to advancing deep tech innovations and plays a vital role in shaping the country's research and technological landscape. UL's focus on deep tech is evident through various initiatives and collaborations aimed at addressing complex societal challenges and fostering technological advancements. In the field of artificial intelligence (AI), the Faculty of Computer and Information Science (FRI) is actively involved in establishing the Slovenian Artificial Intelligence Factory (SLAIF), connecting experts in high-performance computing and AI. This initiative is focused on creating comprehensive solutions for industries such as agriculture, energy, and medicine. FRI is also enhancing its supercomputer infrastructure to support advanced AI research, including the development of a Slovenian large language model. Research at UL spans a range of deep tech fields, including AI and machine learning, with FRI's ViCoS Lab conducting cutting-edge research in computer vision, machine learning, and robotics. UL is also involved in quantum computing, collaborating with international partners to deploy inter-European quantum networks aimed at enhancing communication security. UL also fosters a robust innovation ecosystem through its Institute for Innovation and Development (IRI UL), which supports research and development, project management, expert counseling, and education. The Knowledge Transfer Office bridges the gap between research and industry, facilitating the commercialization of new ideas and fostering collaboration with business partners. Moreover, the Ljubljana University Incubator (LUI) supports deep tech startups in sectors like climate, AI,

⁵⁰ European Commission (2020). *European Innovation Scoreboard 2020: Slovenia's Innovation Performance*. Brussels: European Commission.

⁵¹ Slovenian Government (2021). *Slovenia's National Innovation Strategy: Strengthening Innovation for Growth and Competitiveness*. Ljubljana: Government of the Republic of Slovenia.

⁵² European Commission (2021). *Horizon Europe: Slovenia's Role in Driving Digital and Green Innovation*. Brussels: European Commission.

⁵³ European Investment Bank (2020). *Slovenia: Strengthening the Innovation Ecosystem through Research and Development Investment*. Luxembourg: European Investment Bank.

⁵⁴ OECD (2020). *OECD Review of Innovation Policy: Slovenia*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

materials, and health, providing programs and grants to help researchers bring their innovations to market. UL is also a signatory of the EIT Deep Tech Talent Initiative, further solidifying its commitment to developing deep tech talent and fostering international collaboration in deep tech education and innovation. The University's strategic involvement in initiatives such as DTLaunchPad positions it as a key player in shaping Slovenia's future in deep tech, ensuring its role in advancing technological solutions that drive economic growth and societal progress.

University of Maribor, one of Slovenia's leading academic institutions, is a cornerstone of the country's innovation ecosystem. Established in 1975, the university has developed a strong reputation for its high-quality research and academic excellence, with a particular focus on fostering collaboration between academia, industry, and the public sector. The university offers a wide range of programs and research opportunities across engineering, technology, business, and natural sciences, making it a key player in the development of cutting-edge technologies and knowledge-based solutions. A pivotal element of the university's innovation strategy is its Technology Transfer Office (TTO), which plays a critical role in bridging the gap between academic research and the business sector. The TTO is responsible for facilitating the commercialization of research findings, helping researchers translate their work into marketable products and services. By offering services such as patent licensing, startup incubation, and collaboration with industry partners, the TTO supports the university's mission to drive entrepreneurship and innovation across Slovenia and beyond. The university's expertise spans several fields, with a strong emphasis on engineering, digital technologies, sustainability, and advanced manufacturing. Through its research centers and collaborations with local and international stakeholders, the University of Maribor is at the forefront of developments in Industry 4.0 technologies, automation, and robotics, which are vital for transforming Slovenia's industrial base and aligning with the Smart Specialisation Strategy. The university also actively participates in EU-funded programs, contributing to Slovenia's broader goals of achieving digital transformation and sustainable innovation. As both a deviser and implementer within the EPIC-X project, the University of Maribor will bring its strong research expertise and innovation-driven approach to the initiative. The university will support the development of new methodologies, ensuring that the solutions developed within EPIC-X are grounded in scientific research and aligned with national innovation goals. Through its TTO, the university will facilitate the testing and scaling of innovations, leveraging its academic resources and industry connections to support the commercialization of research outcomes. This contribution will be instrumental in ensuring that EPIC-X delivers practical, scalable, and sustainable solutions that meet the needs of Slovenia's innovation landscape. Moreover, the University of Maribor's commitment to interdisciplinary research, entrepreneurship, and collaborative innovation makes it a valuable partner in EPIC-X. The university's participation will not only contribute to advancing the project's goals but will also ensure that its outcomes reflect Slovenia's broader aspirations to foster a more innovative, digital, and sustainable economy. Through its longstanding tradition of academic excellence and innovation, the University of Maribor continues to shape the future of Slovenia's research, technology, and business sectors.

Ljubljana University Incubator (LUI), located at Slovenia's largest and most prestigious university, plays a vital role as an implementer and ecosystem developer within the EPIC-X framework. With a focus on nurturing high-tech startups, LUI is dedicated to fostering the growth of innovative businesses, particularly in information technology, biotechnology, and sustainable energy. As part of the EPIC-X project, LUI provides incubation, acceleration, and access to funding, offering an ideal environment for startups to test and demonstrate new

business models, tools, and technologies. LUI's areas of expertise span several cutting-edge fields, reflecting its central role in Slovenia's entrepreneurial ecosystem. In information technology, the incubator supports startups working on the development of software solutions, AI applications, data analytics, blockchain, and IoT technologies. It offers mentorship and resources to help these startups scale and innovate within rapidly evolving digital markets, making a significant contribution to digital transformation across industries. In biotechnology, LUI is a key player in supporting startups focused on healthcare innovations, bioengineering, and sustainable agriculture. It facilitates the development of solutions that address global challenges, including the creation of biopharmaceuticals, medical devices, and environmentally friendly bio-based products. LUI's access to academic research from Ljubljana University ensures that the startups receive cutting-edge scientific knowledge, creating a robust pathway for translating research into commercially viable products. LUI is also at the forefront of sustainable energy innovation, assisting startups working on renewable energy solutions, energy efficiency technologies, and smart grid systems. The incubator supports the development of technologies that can reduce carbon footprints, optimize energy consumption, and contribute to the broader goals of climate action and environmental sustainability. This expertise aligns with Slovenia's growing focus on green technologies and the European Green Deal, ensuring that LUI's startups are positioned to meet the rising demand for sustainable solutions. In addition to these core areas, LUI fosters startups in other important fields, such as advanced manufacturing, smart cities, and mobility solutions, focusing on innovation and technology commercialization. The incubator's close ties with Ljubljana University and its research departments ensure that the latest scientific developments and breakthroughs are easily accessible to entrepreneurs, providing a vital bridge between academia and the startup ecosystem. As part of the EPIC-X project, LUI's role is crucial in supporting the testing and scaling of new business models and technological solutions, ensuring that EPIC-X remains closely connected to both academic research and the local startup scene. The incubator's resources, coupled with its comprehensive support system for startups, make it an indispensable partner in the EPIC-X initiative, contributing to the long-term success and growth of innovative enterprises across Slovenia and beyond. With their combined expertise in technology transfer, research commercialization, and startup incubation, University of Maribor and Ljubljana University Incubator will play crucial roles in EPIC-X, ensuring that the project's activities are grounded in the scientific and entrepreneurial landscapes of Slovenia. Their involvement will not only support the scaling of innovative solutions but also ensure that EPIC-X aligns with both national and European goals for sustainable and inclusive innovation, particularly through initiatives such as Horizon Europe, the Digital Europe Programme, and the European Green Deal. By leveraging the strengths of these Slovenian institutions, EPIC-X will be able to foster cross-border collaboration, accelerate the commercialization of deep-tech solutions, and contribute to building a resilient, smart, and sustainable future in Slovenia and across Europe.



Key players from

Spain

5.16 Spain

Spain hosts a vibrant and rapidly evolving innovation ecosystem⁵⁵, marked by strong public-private collaboration, dynamic startup communities, cutting-edge research institutions⁵⁶, and growing awareness of the need for inclusive and sustainable innovation⁵⁷. Within EPIC-X, the participation of key Spanish stakeholders is essential to ground the network's vision in real territorial contexts, ensuring relevance, experimentation, and scalability. This section introduces a selection of Spanish actors—ranging from national agencies and technology parks to startup platforms, research centres, and advocacy organisations—who will play diverse and complementary roles within the EPIC-X network. Some will act as devisers, helping to shape strategic priorities and co-develop methodologies. Others will serve as implementers, applying tools, running pilot actions, and engaging with entrepreneurs and researchers. Still others will participate as receivers, benefiting from the network's resources and contributing bottom-up insights essential to the project's evolution. By leveraging their specific strengths—policy influence, community mobilisation, technical excellence, or inclusivity advocacy—these Spanish stakeholders will ensure that EPIC-X is not only innovative in its design but also impactful, inclusive, and aligned with national and European ambitions for smart, sustainable, and resilient territories. The following partners have expressed a willingness to join the network, further expanding its reach and collaborative potential.

CEEI Asturias is the reference instrument for R&D connection, supporting spin-offs and technology-based companies in Asturias closely aligned with the strategies of the regional government of the Principality of Asturias. CEEI Asturias is a key player in the innovation ecosystem since it works in close connection with universities, research and technology centres, corporates, and financial entities, offering specific services as incubator and accelerator. It is the incubator and bioincubator in the Technology Park of Asturias approached to spin-offs and technology-based companies and manages the incubator for I4.0 in the Science and Technology Park of Gijón focused on deeptech companies related to digitalization. It provides not only working spaces for startups and growth but also specialized sectorial acceleration programs such as BioCEEI (for biotech and health business projects) or AsmiH (mobility), together with business and investment readiness services, networking, and scalability. CEEI Asturias counts with the EU accreditation as a Business Innovation Center (BIC) and relevant positioning in government teams in the main entrepreneurial and innovation support networks, like EBN or ANCES, which enables it to keep connected with international best practices and trends, with a high level of involvement in the European innovative ecosystem. As a result, it takes part in EU projects providing specialized expertise and innovation and is well-connected to women in deep tech startups through with an ecosystem of women leaders and managers to promote new leadership models adapted to today's environment. In response to the increasing need for collaboration and innovation, the EPIC-X network will continue to expand by welcoming new stakeholders from Spain. These additional actors will play a vital role in strengthening regional innovation ecosystems and driving meaningful partnerships across Europe in the deep tech domain. CEEI Asturias can contribute to EPIC-X as a regional innovation and incubation partner, supporting the growth of deep tech and biotech startups through specialized acceleration, investment readiness, and strong ecosystem connections.

⁵⁵ European Commission. *Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2023*. Publications Office of the European Union, 2023

⁵⁶ European Commission. *Spain – Horizon Europe Country Profile*. Brussels, EC, 2024.

⁵⁷ European Commission. *European Innovation Scoreboard 2023*. Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, 2023.

6. What we have achieved: key outcomes

The key outcomes of **deliverable 1.1** include:

Comprehensive Ecosystem Mapping: about 270 potential stakeholders were mapped across the 16 EU countries involved, painting a vivid picture of Europe's innovation landscape. At this stage, 41 stakeholders are formally engaged in the EPIC-X network. The mapping encompasses a diverse range of players, including universities, R&D hubs, investors, startups, corporates, accelerators, incubators, government agencies, innovation agencies, and independent thought leaders.

Enhanced Ecosystem Visibility: raise awareness of local innovation actors and their roles, enabling more targeted collaboration between public and private stakeholders.

Improved Cross-Border Connectivity: the Catalyst helps to pave the way for transnational partnerships and joint innovation initiatives. By collecting standardized data from the participating countries and ensuring consistency across entries, the project now possesses a valuable resource that not only reflects the diversity and strength of Europe's innovation landscape but also provides a practical foundation for coordinated engagement throughout the project's duration.

Strategic Insights for Policymakers: by mapping key ecosystem stakeholders and uncovering gaps and synergies across regions, the process created a strategic platform for targeted interventions, policy alignment, and cross-border collaborations.

Laying the Groundwork for Future Initiatives: The Catalyst rollout not only delivered immediate insights and connections but also established a robust foundation for the design and implementation of future innovation-driven initiatives. By mapping key ecosystem stakeholders and uncovering gaps and synergies across regions, the process created a strategic platform for targeted interventions, policy alignment, and cross-border collaborations. This groundwork enables future actions to be more responsive to local needs while remaining aligned with broader European innovation objectives, ensuring that momentum is sustained and scaled effectively across Member States.