Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE

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FI4INN

# 7x Regional piloting concepts, time plan and expected results

# Table of contents

# A. Executive Summary

This deliverable documents the development and implementation of **seven regional piloting concepts** within the FI4INN project, contributing to the delivery of pilot actions under the programme framework. The pilots were implemented **between Q1 2025 and Q1 2026** in alignment with the project framework, including the structured co-design methodology and the Transnational Peer Review Mechanism (TPRM). The piloting phase built on a prior period of transnational exchange and transfer activities that progressively shaped the conceptual foundations of the seven regional configurations.

The **seven territories** — Friuli Venezia Giulia (IT), Piemonte (IT), Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Carinthia (AT) and Silesia (PL) — operated in diverse financial and institutional contexts. Despite these differences, all pilots followed a shared structural logic based on stakeholder co-creation, application of the FI4INN Canvas, progressive ESG integration and structured monitoring supported by the monitoring tools.

**Six pilots focused on the redesign or optimisation of existing financial instruments**, while **one** (Piemonte) **introduced a new market-based capital pooling mechanism** (Basket Bond). Together, they addressed early-stage startups, RDI-intensive SMEs, deep-tech ventures, social enterprises and growth-oriented companies.

Implementation combined **local co-design** with structured **transnational peer interaction**. The Transnational Peer Review Mechanism (TPRM) operated through regular online peer reviews supported by the Quality & Monitoring Tool, in-presence peer review sessions during Exchanges of Experience (EOE), dedicated thematic ESG/impact alignment sessions, and a final analytical reassessment round organised in thematic subgroups. This ensured methodological coherence, structured benchmarking and traceable refinement without homogenising regional solutions.

**At regional level, results** ranged from governance clarification and evaluation transparency (FVG) to capital market mobilisation (Piemonte), modularisation of mid-TRL financing (Slovenia), strengthening of co-investment models (Hungary), incubation targeting refinement (Czech Republic), integration of grant and equity logic (Carinthia), and enhanced investment readiness through loan-education hybrids (Silesia).

**At transnational level**, added value emerged through structured comparison of financial architectures, governance benchmarking, ESG positioning exchanges and reciprocal participation in regional dissemination activities. This reinforced methodological coherence while preserving territorial specificity.

The seven pilot actions have been jointly developed and implemented within the project lifetime in accordance with the programme requirements. **Implementation refers to the completion of defined co-design processes, structured peer-review refinement and the achievement of documented operational or institutional milestones, as detailed in the respective Pilot Action Reports**. The pilot implementation phase has been completed within the project timeframe. Any further testing, adoption or scaling activities fall outside the scope of the pilot actions. This deliverable concludes the piloting implementation phase and positions the seven concepts for structured validation in the subsequent Pilot Results Validation Workshop, where maturity, transferability and scalability conditions are assessed.
The diversity of final configurations reflects how each region adapted a common analytical framework through a documented joint development process.

# 1. Common Framework for Regional Piloting

The methodological framework applied to the seven regional pilots builds directly on the project framework on piloting scope, approach and Transnational Peer Review Mechanism (TPRM). This framework defined the piloting scope, outlined the structured approach, clarified partner roles and responsibilities, and introduced the Transnational Peer Review Mechanism as the backbone of the implementation phase. The present document translates that structured protocol into practice, applying it consistently across the seven participating regions.

## 1.1. Pilot Typologies (New Instrument / Improvement)

The framework defines two possible pilot configurations:

**Option A** – Co-design of a new innovative financing scheme, building on solutions explored in WP1 and supported by the Virtual Knowledge Center (VKC).

**Option B** – Improvement of an existing financial instrument, through redesign and optimisation of regional schemes dedicated to SMEs and start-ups.

Each region selected the configuration most appropriate to its territorial context and financial ecosystem. This flexibility allowed adaptation to local needs while preserving methodological coherence at transnational level.

## 1.2. Core Structural Elements Applied Across Regions

As defined in as defined in the framework on piloting scope and approach, all seven pilots share the following structural elements:

- **Co-creation and stakeholder engagement.** Each pilot is developed through Local Stakeholder Groups (LSGs), involving financial institutions, public authorities, SMEs/start-ups and business support organisations. This approach anchors instrument design in regional demand and strengthens territorial ownership from the outset.
- **Shared implementation framework and checkpoints.** A common timeline agreed milestones and coordinated progress monitoring provide consistency across regions and facilitate comparability of pilot evolution.
- **Transnational Peer Review Mechanism (TPRM).** The TPRM was implemented through a combination of in-presence peer review workshops during Exchanges of Experience (including Bielsko-Biała and Ljubljana), a dedicated ESG/KPI thematic session during Impact Days in Vienna, regular online plenary review meetings, thematic subgroup analytical sessions, and structured feedback and consolidation moments. The process was supported by shared operational tools, including the Quality & Monitoring (Q&M) Tool. Partners with specific expertise in ESG and impact topics, notably ZEF and Impact Hub Vienna, contributed to the alignment of financial and impact logic during dedicated thematic sessions. Through this mechanism, pilot concepts were progressively refined and aligned at transnational level, strengthening their jointly developed character. Beyond formal peer review sessions, these partners provided targeted support to regional pilots, including participation in local workshops, thematic events and dissemination activities. This cross-support contributed to strengthening conceptual clarity and practical understanding of ESG integration within different territorial contexts. The availability of specialized expertise within the partnership, and its mobilisation across regional boundaries, represents a concrete expression of the joint development logic underpinning FI4INN. It reinforced the collective learning dimension of the piloting phase and supported a gradual convergence in impact-oriented thinking, even where regulatory and institutional contexts differed.

- **Use of common tools.** The common methodology was supported by a set of shared operational tools designed to ensure comparability across regions while allowing adaptation to territorial specificities. These include:
    - FI4INN Canvas – A structured template used for the design or redesign of financial instruments, supporting clarity on value proposition, governance structure, target beneficiaries and impact logic.
    - Virtual Knowledge Center (VKC) – A shared digital repository providing access to analytical materials, good practices and reference documentation collected throughout the project.
    - Dynamic Tool (Power BI prototype) – A visualisation tool developed to support structured data aggregation and comparative analysis of pilot evolution.
    - Quality & Monitoring (Q&M) Tool– A structured coordination and aggregation framework developed by the Lead Partner to monitor pilot implementation across the seven regions. The tool tracks key milestones, implementation phases and alignment checkpoints, enabling comparability of progress and supporting verification of pilot advancement.
- **ESG and impact integration.** ESG considerations and multidimensional impact logic were progressively embedded in pilot design and monitoring activities, in alignment with the project's ESG and impact methodologies. This approach broadened the assessment of innovative financing schemes beyond financial performance to include environmental and social dimensions. During the piloting phase, ESG integration evolved unevenly across territories. At transnational level, supported by the expertise of Impact Hub Vienna and ZEF, partners strengthened their understanding of ESG frameworks and comparative practices. At the same time, adjustments to EU sustainability reporting rules in 2025, including modifications to CSRD implementation and reporting thresholds, influenced local stakeholder priorities. As a result, while ESG elements were progressively incorporated into pilot design and monitoring, the depth and pace of integration varied across regions.

The framework supported the development of pilot concepts that were methodologically consistent, co-designed with stakeholders, reviewed across regions, attentive to ESG and impact dimensions, and prepared for validation in the subsequent phase.

In addition, the piloting phase fostered **structured interaction** among financial intermediaries, regional authorities, fund managers and business support organisations from the outset. Given the complexity of financing schemes and their regulatory environments, early stakeholder engagement contributed not only to instrument refinement but also to strengthened strategic dialogue at regional level.

The **transnational dimension** further reinforced this dynamic by enabling comparative reflection on governance models, risk assessment approaches and impact integration practices across Central Europe. Overall, these elements enhanced consistency and transparency across the seven regional piloting concepts and provided a solid foundation for structured validation.

The piloting phase built upon a structured transnational learning trajectory initiated during the first part of the project. The **Exchanges of Experience** and the **initial transfer workshops** provided the **conceptual foundation** for the pilots by enabling partners to compare financing ecosystems, identify common structural bottlenecks and progressively refine the FI4INN Canvas as a shared design tool. The seven pilots therefore emerged from a **cumulative cross-regional learning process** rather than isolated regional initiatives.

# 2. The 7 Regional Piloting Concepts

Structured piloting journey toward jointly developed pilot configurations.

Detailed Pilot Action Reports for each territory are attached to this deliverable (Annex A). The present chapter provides a comparative synthesis of the seven piloting concepts, highlighting their specific territorial focus, implementation progress and the evolution induced through transnational peer interaction. Each pilot resulted in a refined solution for validation in a subsequent activity.

This chapter documents the seven pilot actions implemented during pilot implementation phase, contributing to pilot implementation. Each pilot originated from a structured identification of regional needs and priorities. This process is built on the analysis of SME satisfaction, stakeholder consultations, ecosystem mapping and dialogue within Local Stakeholder Groups. The selection of pilot focus areas was therefore evidence-based and territorial grounded, addressing specific financing gaps, governance bottlenecks or ecosystem constraints identified in each region.

The pilots presented below have reached defined implementation milestones, as documented in their respective Pilot Action Reports (Annex A), including completion of co-design phases, operational deployment, formalised redesign outputs or advanced preparatory stages.

Each pilot is presented using a standardised structure to ensure comparability and to demonstrate implementation progress and joint development.
The description integrates:

- Regional context and identified challenge
- Type of intervention (new financial instrument / redesign of existing financial instrument),
- Implementation timeline,
- Stakeholder engagement,
- Transnational peer involvement,
- Current implementation status,
- Reference to Monitoring & Quality Abstract,
- Alignment with FI4INN Canvas dimensions (value proposition, target identikit, financial logic, governance positioning, ESG positioning).

All seven pilots were developed within the common FI4INN methodological framework and participated in the Transnational Peer Review Mechanism (TPRM). The intensity and format of peer interaction varied across territories; however, each pilot contributed to and benefited from structured cross-regional exchange. The implementation status refers exclusively to the **completed pilot actions**, in line with Programme requirements. No duplication of annexed Pilot Action Reports is included.
Table 1. Overview of the 7 Regional Piloting Concepts.

| Territory | Pilot Focus / Solution Direction | Target Group | Implementation Status | ESG Integration Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Friuli Venezia Giulia (IT)** | Venture Guarantee Fund governance and evaluation logic. | Innovative startups and SMEs applying to the FVG Venture Capital Guarantee Fund; | FI Tool Redesign completed | ESG-light embedded in BP CORE structure; ESG advanced module |

| Territory | Pilot Focus / Solution Direction | Target Group | Implementation Status | ESG Integration Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | optional; no binding KPI conditionality |
| **Piemonte (IT)** | New FI (SME Basket Bond capital pooling mechanism) | mature/high-performing SMEs | New financial instrument technical design completed | ESG encouraged through investor policies; some ESG Basket Bonds; not uniformly applied |
| **Slovenia (national)** | Modular redesign of TRL 3-6 financing architecture | RDI-intensive SMEs and start-ups (TRL 3-6) | Gap analysis and modular redesign completed | ESG proposed via self-assessment tools and light indicators; formal KPI framework not embedded |
| **Hungary** | Incubator-based co-investment refinement | Early-stage startups (≤5 years), incubators; Medtech-focused ventures | Redesign phase completed | Compliance with EU DNSH principles; ESG criteria not formally embedded at instrument level |
| **Czech Republic (nationwide)** | Incubation programme targeting refinement | Innovative startups supported through incubation programmes | Redesign + recommendations completed | ESG addressed through capacity-building components; not embedded as formal eligibility criterion |
| **Carinthia (AT)** | Redesign existing FI (Carinthian Venture Fonds coordination model) | Early-stage startups and SMEs (< €2M turnover) | Redesign completed | ESG assessment tools introduced; basic metrics linked to investment criteria |
| **Silesia (PL)** | Loan-education hybrid model (redesign) | Startups (unemployed/jobseekers/students) and Social Enterprises (PES) | Redesign action completed | Incentive-based ESG mechanisms; no formal certification framework |

Collectively, the seven pilots demonstrated structured joint development through shared methodology, coordinated peer review and cross-regional exchange, while reflecting differentiated territorial starting points and institutional contexts.

**Analytical Positioning of the Seven Piloting Concepts**

Beyond their individual implementation milestones, the seven regional pilots can be analytically positioned according to the nature and level of intervention they address. The matrix below illustrates differentiated trajectories emerging from the co-design process, distinguishing between governance and programme

refinement, market-based capital innovation, institutional coordination models and hybrid operational approaches. While embedded in diverse territorial and regulatory contexts, all pilots evolve within the shared FI4INN methodological framework and through structured transnational peer interaction. This positioning highlights convergence in approach despite structural diversity and frames the transition toward the subsequent validation phase.

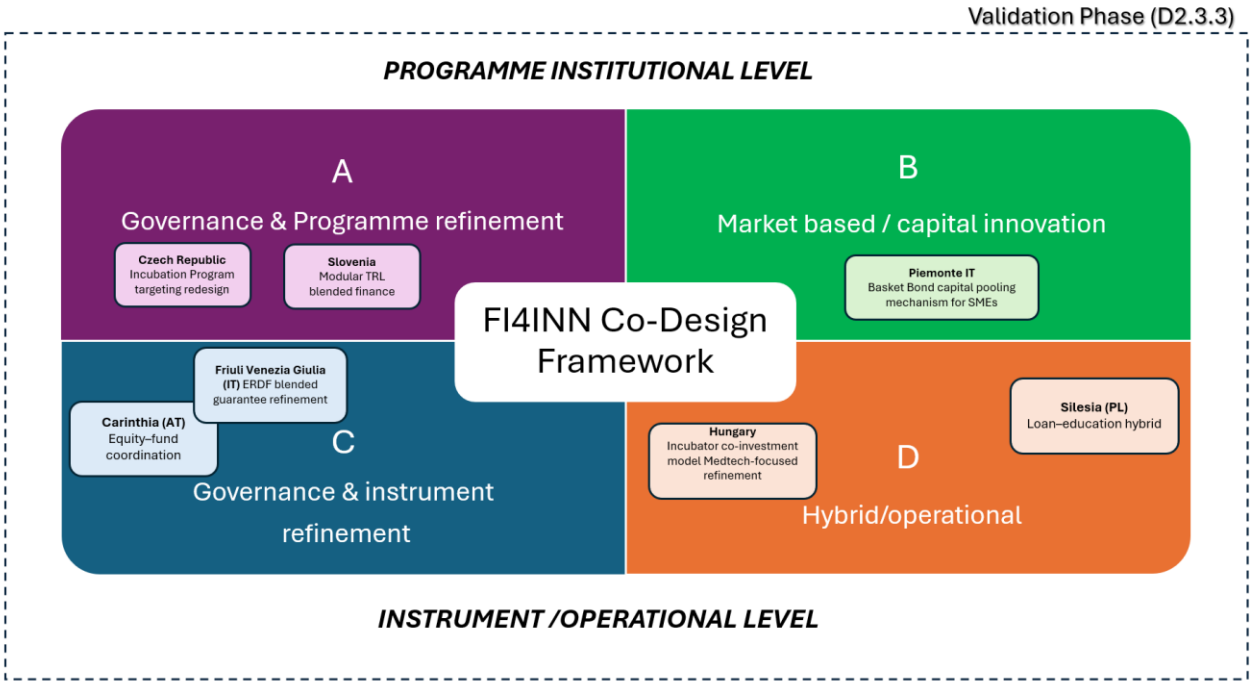


Figure 1 – Analytical matrix of emerging piloting trajectories across the seven regional pilots.

**Cross-Territorial Positioning**

The seven piloting concepts illustrate **differentiated implementation pathways** developed within a shared methodological and transnational peer-review framework. While six pilots focused on the redesign or optimisation of existing financial instruments and one introduced a new market-based mechanism, all seven were structured and implemented in accordance with the common protocol defined in the framework on piloting scope and approach. This includes stakeholder co-design processes, application of the FI4INN Canvas, structured participation in the Transnational Peer Review Mechanism(TPRM), and coordinated monitoring through the Quality & Monitoring framework. The pilots operate within diverse institutional, regulatory and financial ecosystems and address heterogeneous groups — from early-stage startups and RDI-intensive

SMEs to social enterprises and growth-oriented companies. Consequently, their implementation maturity levels differ. Some pilots completed co-design phases and entered testing or preparatory stages within the pilot scope; others reached advanced conceptual consolidation or institutional preparation phases prior to formal adoption or roll-out. In all cases, however, defined implementation milestones — as documented in the respective Pilot Action Reports (Annex A) — were achieved within the agreed timeframe (Q1 2025 – Q1 2026). The differentiated maturity levels **reflect contextual governance conditions**, regulatory procedures and financial ecosystem characteristics rather than inconsistencies in implementation progress.

Transnational peer review exchanges influenced pilot trajectories in differentiated but traceable ways. In certain territories, peer feedback contributed primarily to governance clarification, modular structuring or evaluation alignment.

In others, it supported refinement of risk-sharing logic, targeting mechanisms, monitoring architecture or proportional ESG integration. The intensity and thematic focus of peer input varied according to territorial needs, yet **each pilot both contributed to and benefited from the collective learning process** embedded in the TPRM architecture. The diversity observed across the seven pilots reflected contextual adaptation of a common co-design and peer-review logic rather than fragmentation.

**Methodological coherence** was ensured through shared tools, aligned implementation checkpoints and documented cross-border collaboration, while substantive financial architectures remain territorially specific. The subsequent pilot results validation workshop is intended to assess the maturity, transferability conditions and potential scalability pathways of these differentiated pilot configurations, building on the jointly developed foundations established during the implementation phase.

## 2.1. Friuli Venezia Giulia (IT)

**Regional Context and Identified Challenge**

Friuli Venezia Giulia presented a structurally strong innovation ecosystem characterised by high startup density and concentration in digital and R&D-intensive sectors. However, continuous monitoring through the "Startup Monitor FVG" has revealed a structural mismatch between innovation capacity and availability of early-stage venture capital — an “innovation density without capital density” condition. Innovative startups frequently display negative or marginal EBITDA in early years, equity dependence and intangible-asset-intensive business models, patterns that conflict with traditional financial risk metrics.

Within this context, the FVG Venture Capital Guarantee Fund, managed by FVG Plus and backed by ERDF resources, operated as a risk-sharing mechanism to leverage private equity investment. Stakeholder consultations and beneficiary interviews conducted within the pilot highlighted persistent divergences in the interpretation of “bankability”, heterogeneous documentation standards and evaluation asymmetries affecting transparency and comparability.

The identified challenge therefore concerned governance and evaluation alignment rather than financial architecture redesign.

**Type of Intervention**

Refinement of an ERDF-backed blended guarantee instrument through governance clarification, evaluation alignment and development of a shared technical reference framework.

**Implementation Timeline**

Structured co-design activities were conducted throughout 2025, including stakeholder consultations and technical workshops. The co-design and local validation phases have been completed. A testing and refinement phase was completed within the project timeframe, followed by transition to the Pilot Results Validation Workshop which represents a separate phase of the project.

**Stakeholder Engagement**

The pilot involved Regione Friuli Venezia Giulia (SACI), FVG Plus, financial intermediaries, venture capital actors, startups and ecosystem representatives. The diagnostic phase combined quantitative monitoring evidence with qualitative stakeholder validation. IRES FVG supported impact analysis during co-creation workshops, reinforcing the analytical robustness of the governance refinement process.

**Emerging Solution Trajectory**

Through structured local co-design, the pilot developed a modular multi-actor Business Plan framework composed of a shared CORE structure and dedicated modules. The framework operates as a governance alignment tool, reducing information asymmetries, improving comparability of proposals and enhancing evaluation transparency without altering the financial architecture of the Guarantee Fund. Transnational peer exchanges reinforced clarification of governance roles and supported proportional ESG-light integration, particularly through expert-guided thematic discussions. The emerging trajectory consolidates a governance and evaluation refinement model within an ERDF-backed blended guarantee instrument.

**Current Implementation Status**

Co-design and institutional consolidation of the modular Business Plan framework were completed. Testing and structured refinement were completed within the project timeframe.

**Reference to Monitoring & Quality Abstract**

The target identikit was clearly defined (innovative startups and SMEs applying to the FVG Venture Capital Guarantee Fund). A modular CORE structure was operationalised. ESG considerations were

embedded at a light level within the CORE module, with an advanced module available on a voluntary basis and no binding KPI-based conditionality.

**FI4INN Canvas Positioning**

The intervention refined governance and evaluation logic while preserving the underlying financial instrument. Innovation lies in improved coherence between value proposition, target identikit and assessment framework within a multi-layered public-private governance ecosystem.

## 2.2. Piemonte (IT)

**Regional Context and Identified Challenge**

The Piemonte pilot responds to the region's structural reliance on traditional bank lending and the limited uptake of capital market instruments among SMEs. The intervention introduces the first Basket Bond initiative in Piemonte, designed to enable high-performing, innovative SMEs to access non-bank finance through aggregated minibond issuance, while mobilising private capital and leveraging targeted public intervention under market conditions.

**Type of Intervention**

New market-based capital pooling mechanism (Basket Bond) structured as a diversified portfolioof minibonds subscribed by public and private investors (blended finance logic).

**Implementation Timeline**

Stakeholder engagement and technical design were completed between February 2024 and October 2025.

The pilot focused on the design and structuring of the Basket Bond instrument, including the definition of the arranger selection process and the preparation of the operational architecture. The selection of the arranger represents the transition from technical design to operational deployment (not part of the pilot action), enabling the structuring, placement and issuance phases of the pooled minibond portfolio.

**Stakeholder Engagement**

The co-design process followed a top-down, investor-led approach aimed at securing political endorsement and early commitment of key financial actors. Stakeholders involved include the Regione Piemonte (strategic direction), Finpiemonte (technical lead and facilitator), arranger/technical advisory actors, institutional investors (including Mediocredito Centrale, also linked to the Central Guarantee Fund framework), and business representative organisations supporting dissemination and company pipeline building.

**Emerging Solution Trajectory**

Within the FI4INN framework, the pilot consolidated a capital-market-aligned Basket Bond structure combining pooled issuance structure, clarified governance roles and risk mitigation mechanisms to ensure investor credibility and SME accessibility. Transnational peer exchanges did not modify the investor-led structure of the Basket Bond. They clarified governance roles, strengthened articulation of blended risk-sharing conditions and supported reflection on ESG feasibility within a market-driven instrument, reinforcing coherence and positioning of the pilot as a jointly developed solution trajectory. The emerging trajectory therefore consolidates a regional capital-market financing model within a blended public-private framework.

**FI4INN Canvas Positioning**

The pilot introduced a new financial architecture aligned with capital market assumptions (risk-return, maturity, tradability), linking a clear value proposition (diversification of SME finance) to a selective target identikit and a pooled portfolio logic supported by public-private governance and leverage effects.

## 2.3. Slovenia

**Regional Context and Identified Challenge**

The Slovenian pilot addressed a structural funding gap in the TRL 3–6 phase of the national RDI ecosystem — the "valley of death" between research and market deployment. While Slovenia benefits from a strong research base and established ERDF-funded grant schemes implemented by implementing agencies, stakeholder consultations revealed persistent limitations, including administrative rigidity, limited flexibility for SMEs and start-ups, fragmented cross-ministerial coordination, weak integration of private capital and insufficient ESG embedding. The challenge therefore concerns not only funding availability but systemic modernization of the national RDI financing architecture.

**Type of Intervention**

Modular redesign of the existing TRL 3–6 instrument through a blended finance model integrating grants, repayable elements and advisory services.

**Implementation Timeline**

Gap analysis and structured stakeholder consultations were conducted throughout 2024–2025. A national validation workshop (September 2025, 40+ stakeholders) consolidated the proposal. The modular concept was defined and refined through peer exchange. Institutional adoption by competent authorities is foreseen beyond the project timeframe and does not fall within the scope of the pilot action.

**Stakeholder Engagement**

The pilot was developed at national level through consultations with: Ministry of the Economy, Tourism and Sport; Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation; ARIS (implementing agency); Regional development actors; Companies and research institutions; CCIS coordination platforms. The Local Support Group operated through existing national advisory platforms, ensuring institutional continuity.

**Emerging Solution Trajectory**

The pilot developed a three-module architecture: Module A (TRL 3–4): feasibility and concept validation; Module B (TRL 4–6): development and demonstration; Module C (TRL 7–9): market acceleration with repayable elements and advisory support. The modular structure was designed to introduce flexibility, continuity from research to market and gradual integration of blended finance logic beyond pure grant mechanisms. Transnational peer exchanges within the TPRM played a substantive role in validating the blended finance direction, strengthening cross-ministerial coordination framing and refining proportional ESG integration. Peer discussions highlighted governance capacity requirements, scalability constraints and the need for balanced public–private alignment. The peer process did not generate the modular concept itself but reinforced its systemic positioning and monitoring coherence within the project framework. The emerging trajectory therefore consolidated a nationally coordinated, modular blended finance proposal forming the basis for subsequent institutional adoption.

**Current Implementation Status**

Conceptual model was developed and validated through stakeholder consultation and peer review. Institutional ownership and operational adoption are foreseen beyond the project timeframe and are not part of the pilot action.

**Reference to Monitoring & Quality Abstract**

Target group defined as RDI-intensive SMEs and start-ups operating in TRL 3–6 stages. Modular A/B/C structure documented. ESG self-assessment tools and light indicators proposed; no formal KPI-based conditionality embedded at this stage.

**FI4INN Canvas Positioning**

The intervention reconfigured the value proposition, governance structure and financial logic of the national TRL 3–6 instrument through phased modularisation and progressive blended finance integration. Innovation was achieved through systemic coordination and flexibility rather than creation of a new standalone instrument.

## 2.4. Hungary

**Regional Context and Identified Challenge**

The Hungarian pilot builds on the Startup Factory (SF) programme, a public–private co-investment instrument managed by the Hungarian Innovation Agency (NIÜ) and implemented at national level. The programme supports early-stage startups through accredited incubators that combine capital provision, incubation and knowledge transfer. Despite recent regulatory improvements — including the introduction of convertible note frameworks, ESOP reform and favourable tax incentives — the Hungarian innovation ecosystem continues to face structural challenges. These include a strong dependence on non-repayable grants, limited depth of early-stage private investors, cultural resistance to equity-based financing, funding gaps in the €100K–€1.5M range, and underexploited deep-tech and Medtech potential emerging from hospitals and universities. The pilot therefore addresses systemic weaknesses in early-stage financing and was designed to strengthen delegated co-investment logic, specialization capacity and ecosystem coordination within the national innovation framework.

**Type of Intervention**

Refinement of an existing public–private co-investment instrument (Startup Factory), including development of a specialized Medtech call within the same governance architecture.

**Implementation Timeline**

Stakeholder consultations and internal refinement processes were conducted throughout 2024–2025. The pilot focused on the design and preparation of a specialized Medtech call within the Startup Factory framework, including stakeholder engagement, definition of eligibility criteria and structuring of the intervention model. Subsequent steps related to call publication, evaluation and implementation are foreseen beyond the project timeframe and are not part of the pilot action.

**Stakeholder Engagement**

The pilot engaged a broad national Local Stakeholder Group including accredited incubators (11 active in current cycle); investors (VCs, business angels); hospitals and healthcare managers (for Medtech scouting); universities and HUN-REN research network; startups and deep-tech ventures. Structured interviews, workshops, info-days and internal coordination sessions were conducted to refine eligibility criteria, incubation services, performance incentives and specialization focus.

**Emerging Solution Trajectory**

The pilot consolidated a delegated co-investment model in which pre-selected incubators invest public funds alongside private capital, combined with a two–three-year incubation phase and performance-based milestones. Medtech specialization complemented this structure by introducing hospital-based innovation scouting, cooperation agreements with healthcare institutions, sector-specific evaluation procedures and a stronger focus on health and social impact outcomes. Transnational peer exchanges within the TPRM contributed to refining the KPI and monitoring framework, clarifying governance roles between NIÜ and incubators, and strengthening impact framing, including health system efficiency and patient outcomes, as well as scalability and blended-finance complementarities. Comparative learning from FVG's guarantee model and Piemonte's basket bond structure further supported positioning within the Central European financing landscape.

**Current Implementation Status**

Instrument refinement was completed within the project timeframe.The Medtech call was finalized as part of the pilot design. Subsequent steps related to publication and implementation are foreseen beyond the project timeframe and are not part of the pilot action. The preparation of the next Startup Factory cycle builds on the results of the pilot.

**Reference to Monitoring & Quality Abstract**

The defined target groups included early-stage startups (≤5 years), deep-tech ventures and Medtech-focused projects. The monitoring framework tracked key performance indicators such as the number of startups incubated (approximately 50–70 per cycle), external funding attracted, job creation and follow-on investment, alongside ESG and health impact indicators where applicable. No formal ESG conditionality is embedded at instrument level; compliance with EU DNSH principles applies.

## 2.5. Czech Republic

**Regional Context and Identified Challenge**

The Czech pilot focuses on the refinement of the Technology Incubation (TI) programme, the largest publicly funded startup incubation instrument implemented by CzechInvest at national level. The first round of the programme provided valuable operational insights and revealed gaps between the programme's design and the actual needs of early-stage innovative startups. Although the Czech Republic benefits from a strong R&D base and established innovation infrastructures, the ecosystem remains characterized by regional concentration of innovation activities in Prague and Brno, administrative and procedural complexity, limited commercialization culture in academia, and insufficient long-term financing for deep-tech startups beyond the early stage. Bureaucratic burden, process rigidity and limited integration between incubation and market financing were identified as structural bottlenecks. The pilot therefore addresses programme-level inefficiencies and aimed to improve targeting, simplify processes and strengthen ecosystem coordination in preparation for Technology Incubation 2.0.

**Type of Intervention**

Redesign and optimisation of an existing national startup incubation instrument (Technology Incubation), with the objective of informing the design of its successor, Technology Incubation 2.0.

**Implementation Timeline**

The pilot followed a structured co-creation process throughout 2025, combining data analysis, stakeholder consultations and prioritisation of key inputs using cost–benefit and Pareto logic. Implementation of Technology Incubation 2.0 falls beyond the project timeframe and is not part of the pilot action.

**Stakeholder Engagement**

The Local Stakeholder Group included startups, regional innovation infrastructures, universities and R&D centres, VC funds and business angels, corporate partners, associations and relevant government institutions. Engagement was carried out through surveys, focus groups, structured interviews, roundtables and internal data analysis. The co-creation processes combined stakeholder feedback with programme data to generate evidence-based recommendations for redesign.

**Emerging Solution Trajectory**

The pilot developed a structured redesign framework for Technology Incubation based on five phases: goal setting, analytical assessment, prioritisation, recommendation development and implementation planning. A distribution matrix was introduced to categorise improvement proposals across applicant-facing and internal management dimensions, followed by prioritisation using a cost-benefit methodology based on

Pareto logic. This approach enabled transparent identification of quick wins, strategic changes and measures with limited added value. Key areas identified for improvement include strengthening pre-incubation and scouting mechanisms, clarifying the definition and eligibility of startups, adjusting financing modalities and eligible costs, reducing administrative burden, integrating CRM-based management tools and AI-supported process optimisation, reinforcing alumni and investor linkages, and introducing structured ESG and impact-related capacity building through mentoring rather than formal eligibility conditions.

Transnational peer exchanges within the TPRM contributed primarily at the methodological level. Guidance from Impact Hub Vienna supported the integration of impact-oriented thinking, while comparative discussions with Hungary, Slovenia, Silesia, Austria and FVG enriched reflection on incubation structures, ecosystem-building approaches and access-to-finance models. Peer input strengthened impact awareness, monitoring coherence and cross-regional comparability, whereas the core redesign logic was grounded in the national analytical and co-creation process. The emerging trajectory therefore consolidates a programme redesign model centred on targeting refinement, administrative simplification and ecosystem integration, rather than structural transformation of the financial instrument architecture.

**Current Implementation Status**

The analytical and prioritisation phases have been completed and strategic recommendations formulated. The pilot action has been completed through the redesign of Technology Incubation 2.0, whose operational deployment may occur beyond the FI4INN project timeframe.

**Reference to Monitoring & Quality Abstract**

The defined target group includes innovative startups and deep-tech ventures supported under the Technology Incubation programme. Monitoring focuses on programme efficiency, stakeholder satisfaction, reduction of administrative burden, quality of supported projects and improved ecosystem linkage. ESG is not embedded as a formal eligibility criterion but is addressed through mentoring, sector focus and indirect impact-related capacity-building measures.

## 2.6. Carinthia (AT)

**Regional Context and Identified Challenge**

The Carinthian pilot focuses on the structural transformation of a traditional non-repayable grant scheme into a more sustainable, equity-oriented financing model with revolving characteristics. The regional ecosystem is characterised by strong institutional cooperation among the Kärntner Wirtschaftsförderungs Fonds (KWF), the Carinthian Venture Fund (CVF) and the build! Gründungszentrum, yet historically fragmented funding and financing logics between grant instruments and equity-based support. While Carinthia benefits from a compact and trust-based innovation ecosystem with short coordination paths, public support has been predominantly grant-driven, limiting long-term leverage of public resources and weakening continuity between early-stage subsidy support and growth-oriented financing. The pilot therefore addresses discontinuity between subsidy logic and market-based instruments and aims to strengthen governance alignment across public funding, venture capital and incubation support.

**Type of Intervention**

Redesign of an existing public grant instrument toward a hybrid, equity-oriented model with revolving characteristics, potentially implemented through a trustee structure involving CVF within the existing regional governance framework.

**Implementation Timeline**

Throughout 2024–2025, structured trilateral coordination between KWF, CVF and build! was conducted to assess legal feasibility, state aid implications and governance adjustments required for instrument transformation. The co-design phase included analysis of regulatory constraints, scenario simulations and development of a governance roadmap. Peer review validation occurred during Exchanges of Experience and dedicated analytical sessions. IThe pilot action has been completed at conceptual validation level, while further operational implementation may occur beyond the project timeframe.

**Stakeholder Engagement**

The Local Stakeholder Group includes KWF as regional funding authority, CVF as venture capital instrument, build! as incubator and ecosystem orchestrator, as well as startups and SMEs providing user feedback. Co-creation occurred through structured working sessions, bilateral consultations and governance alignment workshops. The compact regional ecosystem enabled rapid feedback loops and high institutional coordination intensity.

**Emerging Solution Trajectory**

The pilot developed a governance coordination model aimed at integrating grants, equity financing and incubation support into a coherent financing pathway. The emerging structure introduced the possibility of combining a grant component with an equity-like participation managed through CVF under a trustee logic, enabling revolving effects while preserving regulatory compliance.

Transnational peer exchanges within the TPRM contributed primarily to governance clarification and strategic positioning. Comparative discussions with FVG highlighted differences between guarantee-based and equity-oriented approaches; exchanges with Hungary supported reflection on delegated investment logic; and ESG-oriented sessions led by Impact Hub Vienna reinforced impact-aware structuring without overburdening regulatory feasibility. Peer review did not fundamentally alter the strategic direction but strengthened conceptual robustness, regulatory awareness and transferability logic. The emerging trajectory therefore consolidated a governance coordination and equity-transition model within a public innovation funding system.

**Current Implementation Status**

Conceptual redesign completed. Governance roadmap defined. The pilot action has been completed, while further implementation remains subject to regional policy decision processes.

**Reference to Monitoring & Quality Abstract**

Target group: early-stage startups and SMEs within the Carinthian innovation ecosystem. Monitoring focuses on governance coordination, institutional alignment, feasibility of revolving mechanisms and expected long-term leverage of public funds. ESG elements were integrated through impact-oriented assessment tools linked to investment criteria rather than formal eligibility conditionality.

**FI4INN Canvas Positioning**

Systemic governance redesign aimed at integrating public grants and equity financing within a coordinated regional innovation finance architecture.

## 2.7. Silesia (PL)

**Regional Context and Identified Challenge**

The Silesian pilot, implemented by ARRSA in the Podbeskidzie sub-region of the Silesian Voivodeship, addresses a structural "investment readiness" gap affecting early-stage startups and Social Economy Entities (PES). Although the region combines an industrial base with a growing IT cluster and a strong presence of social enterprises, beneficiaries remain highly dependent on grants or bootstrapping and exhibit low awareness and limited capability to access repayable instruments.

The ecosystem was characterised by high bureaucracy, fragmented institutional responsibilities and significant fear of debt among target groups. Many social entities lacked financial reserves and strategic planning capacity, while early-stage startups struggle with liquidity gaps and insufficient collateral. The pilot therefore addressed not the absence of financial instruments, but the lack of effective navigation and readiness to use them.

**Type of Intervention**

Redesign and operational strengthening of existing preferential loan instruments through integration of structured educational and mentoring components, forming a "competence + capital" hybrid support model.

**Implementation Timeline**

During 2024–2025, ARRSA conducted diagnostic research, stakeholder consultations and co-design workshops to map ecosystem gaps. Educational webinars, Q&A sessions and awareness activities were launched in 2025. Capacity-building workshops and further digital tool deployment were planned within the pilot design; subsequent implementation falls outside the pilot action. Loan instruments were operational throughout the pilot period.

**Stakeholder Engagement**

The Local Stakeholder Group includes ARRSA, the Marshal Office of the Silesian Voivodeship, Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (BGK), Social Economy Support Centres (OWES), startup foundations, NGOs and beneficiary representatives. Engagement methods comprised surveys, bilateral meetings, ecosystem events, institutional consultations and co-design workshops aligned with FI4INN stakeholder engagement guidelines.

**Emerging Solution Trajectory**

TThe pilot consolidated a hybrid support model combining preferential repayable loans with mandatory financial literacy training, mentoring and business plan validation. For the "First Business" loan, financial collateral was partially substituted by "knowledge collateral," whereby beneficiaries completed structured training before accessing capital. For Social Economy Entities, a capital forgiveness mechanism linked partial loan conversion into grants to the achievement of social impact objectives, thereby embedding incentive-based impact logic.

Transnational peer exchanges within the TPRM reinforced methodological structuring and ESG positioning. Impact-focused sessions supported alignment with Common Good Economy and Theory of Change concepts; governance discussions highlighted tensions between user-friendly simplification and regulatory rigidity; and cross-regional comparison validated the transferability of combining financial instruments with non-financial support. Peer review strengthened impact measurement coherence and scalability awareness without altering the core education-first strategy.The resulting trajectory consolidated a loan-plus-education hybrid model aimed at transforming "unbankable" entities into investment-ready actors.

**Current Implementation Status**

Loan instruments were operational. Educational and mentoring components were implemented. Digital navigation tools were developed. The pilot action has been completed, while institutional mainstreaming remains subject to further post-project development.

**Reference to Monitoring & Quality Abstract**

Target groups included early-stage startups and Social Economy Entities. Monitoring tracked loan uptake, beneficiary preparedness, financial literacy improvement, job creation, sustainability of supported entities and impact-linked performance indicators.

ESG logic was primarily embedded through social mission conditionality and impact-based loan forgiveness rather than formal ESG screening frameworks.

**FI4INN Canvas Positioning**

Integration of repayable financial instruments with structured educational and mentoring components to strengthen investment readiness and ecosystem navigation capacity.

# 3. Time plan and Implementation Progress

The seven regional pilot actions were implemented between Q1 2025 and February 2026. Preparatory activities including stakeholder engagement, analytical groundwork and transnational peer learning — had already been initiated during 2024 following the adoption of the common framework defined in the report on piloting scope, objectives, approach and Transnational Peer Review Mechanism. The formal implementation phase under the pilot implementation activity built upon a continuum of preparatory co-design and methodological alignment processes, ensuring coherence between design groundwork and structured pilot execution. The implementation was structured around four interconnected workstreams carried out in parallel across all regions:

1. Pilot setup and structuring of the financial instrument
2. Continuous local stakeholder engagement and co-design
3. Transnational peer review
4. Progressive pilot consolidation and preparation for validation

The pilots were not implemented through strictly sequential phases. Instead, pilot setup, refinement and consolidation overlapped throughout the implementation period. This approach ensured that financial instrument design evolved progressively, integrating both local stakeholder input and transnational feedback.

Local stakeholders (including regional authorities, financial intermediaries, SMEs, business associations and financial actors) were actively involved throughout the entire pilot lifecycle until February 2026. Their contribution supported the refinement of eligibility criteria, instrument features, ESG integration and operational feasibility.

In parallel, the Transnational Peer Review Mechanism operated across the pilot lifecycle. Regional partners participated in structured peer exchanges aimed at aligning pilot concepts, sharing feedback and refining instrument design. This ensured methodological consistency and joint development across the partnership.

The overall timeline can be summarised as follows:

- **Q1 2025:** Finalisation of pilot concepts and launch of stakeholder engagement
- **Q2-Q3 2025:** Intensive co-design activities and transnational peer review, with iterative refinement of instrument features
- **Q3-Q4 2025:** Consolidation of pilot actions and definition of expected results
- **Q1 2026:** Finalisation of pilot documentation and preparation for validation

This coordinated implementation ensured that all regional pilots were developed in line with a common framework while remaining anchored in their respective regional financial ecosystems.

The table below summarises the implementation progress of the seven pilots across the agreed workstreams and time horizon (Q1 2025 – Q1 2026), illustrating the parallel and iterative nature of the piloting process.

Table 2 – Implementation timeline and workstream progress overview

| Workstream | Q1 2025 | Q2 2025 | Q3 2025 | Q4 2025 | Q1 2026 | Main Outputs |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pilot Structuring & Design | ●●● | ● | - | - | - | Structured pilot framework |

| Workstream | Q1 2025 | Q2 2025 | Q3 2025 | Q4 2025 | Q1 2026 | Main Outputs |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Local Stakeholder Engagement | ● | ●●● | ●●● | ●● | ● | Refined instrument features |
| Transnational Peer Review | ● | ●● | ●● | ●● | ● | Cross-regional alignment |
| Pilot Refinement & Consolidation | ● | ●● | ●●● | ●●● | ● | Consolidated pilot action |
| Documentation & Validation Preparation | - | - | ● | ●● | ●●● | Documentation ready for next step |

The implementation process unfolded within heterogeneous regulatory and institutional environments, generating differentiated challenges across territories. These included alignment between public authorities and private financial actors, regulatory constraints affecting instrument modification, varying levels of ESG maturity, and differences in institutional decision-making timelines. Addressing these challenges required iterative clarification of governance roles and peer exchange, ultimately strengthening the robustness and contextual adaptability of the pilot configurations.

# 4. Expected results

This chapter presents the expected results as described in the respective Pilot Action Reports. The content reflects explicit statements contained in the reports. No inference or extrapolation is introduced.

## 4.1. Regional Expected Results

Friuli Venezia Giulia (IT)

The pilot aimed to improve transparency and alignment in the assessment of "bankability" within the FVG Start-up Guarantee Fund. The refinement focused on governance articulation and clarification of evaluation criteria. The Monitoring and Evaluation Action Plan is foreseen to formalise ESG and impact considerations in a proportionate manner.

Piemonte (IT)

The pilot was design to enable the operational launch of the Basket Bond instrument and the mobilisation of private capital through pooled minibond issuance. The structure is intended to diversify SME financing sources and reduce dependence on traditional bank lending. Further similar operations may be implemented within the regional territory.

Slovenia (National)

The pilot aimed to support the introduction of a modular blended finance model for TRL 3–6 projects. The expected result includes improved access to mid-TRL funding and better coordination within the RDI governance framework. Institutional adoption of the modular structure is required for implementation.

Hungary

The pilot aimed to support the publication and implementation of the Medtech call within the Startup Factory programme. The intervention aims to address pre-seed funding gaps and strengthen incubator-based co-investment structures.

Czech Republic (Nationwide)

The pilot was designed to inform through prepared recommendations the redesign of Technology Incubation 2.0. The intended outcome is improved targeting and adjustment of support mechanisms for startups.

Carinthia (AT)

The pilot aimed to improve coordination between CVF and KWF through the redesigned cooperation model. Evaluation results are expected to inform further implementation within the regional equity and funding ecosystem.

Silesia (PL)

The pilot aimed to strengthened access to preferential loan instruments combined with structured educational programmes. The continuation of loan deployment and mentoring activities is foreseen.

## 4.2. Cross-Regional Added Value

The Pilot Action Reports documented structured cross-regional interaction through participation in the Transnational Peer Review Mechanism (TPRM), subgroup exchanges and Exchanges of Experience organised within the FI4INN framework. Beyond formal peer review sessions, cross-regional added value also emerged through direct participation of partners in each other's regional stakeholder and dissemination events.

Concrete examples include the presentation of the Virtual Knowledge Center (VKC) and the Piemonte pilot by Finpiemonte during a Slovenian stakeholder event, as well as the participation of CzechInvest and NIÜ and ZEF representatives in dissemination initiatives organised in Friuli Venezia Giulia. These reciprocal interventions contributed to practical benchmarking, strengthened visibility of alternative financing models and enhanced local stakeholder awareness of transnational perspectives.

For Friuli Venezia Giulia, Slovenia and Piemonte, the reports explicitly described how peer benchmarking and transnational exchanges contributed to refinement of governance positioning, clarification of financial logic and proportionate integration of ESG considerations. In these cases, peer interaction was directly linked to conceptual consolidation and design adjustments.

For Hungary, Czech Republic, Carinthia and Silesia, participation in the FI4INN peer framework was documented through engagement in TPRM workshops, thematic sessions and comparative exchanges. While subgroup-level analytical refinement was not always described in detail, cross-regional dialogue contributed to methodological alignment, improved governance awareness and clearer positioning of local instruments within a broader Central European innovation finance landscape.

Across all territories, the documented cross-regional added value included:

- structured comparison of financial instrument architectures,
- exchange of practices regarding governance, monitoring and ESG positioning,
- peer benchmarking of risk-sharing and blended finance arrangements,
- discussion of regulatory and market conditions influencing instrument feasibility,
- mutual participation in regional dissemination activities, reinforcing practical transferability and stakeholder-level learning.

The cross-regional dimension therefore extended beyond analytical comparison and contributed to strengthened ecosystem dialogue, improved transparency and increased readiness for structured validation under the subsequent pilot result validation workshop.

# 5. Transnational Peer Review and Joint Development

This chapter documents the implementation of the Transnational Peer Review Mechanism (TPRM) as defined in in the report on piloting scope, objectives, approach and transnational peer review mechanism and applied throughout the piloting phase. It describes the architecture, analytical framework and documented impact of peer exchange on the refinement and consolidation of the seven regional pilot concepts.

## 5.1. TPRM Architecture and Timeline

The TPRM, as established in the Report on Piloting Scope, Approach and Transnational Peer Review Mechanism, was implemented as a structured, multi-phase process accompanying the entire pilot implementation period. The mechanism combined analytical subgroup exchanges, in-presence validation workshops, thematic ESG alignment sessions and continuous monitoring-based peer review. It operated on predefined review criteria derived from the FI4INN Canvas (Value Proposition, Target Identikit, Financial Instrument Logic and Impact dimension) and was supported by the Quality & Monitoring Tool. The TPRM ensured structured documentation of feedback, traceability of refinements and compliance with programme requirements on jointly developed pilot actions.

Table 3 – Transnational peer review mechanism (TPRM) architecture and implementation timeline.

| Phase/status | Date(s) | Format | Location | Objective | Contribution to Pilot Development |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Cycle 1 - Structured Analytical Peer Review -** | February 2025 | Peer review online workshop | Online | Apply common analytical template (FI4INN Canvas) to all pilots; compare design logic, ESG integration and governance assumptions | Ensured methodological alignment across regions; identified regulatory asymmetries, ESG variability and institutional ownership gaps |
| **In-Presence Consolidation - Exchange of Experience #4** | 18-20 March 2025 | Peer review workshop (IMPACT) | Bielsko-Biała | Validate pilot architecture and governance in transnational setting | Strengthened instrument structure; clarified blended finance logic; refined stakeholder engagement models |
| **Impact Alignment Phase - "Impact Days- Vienna"** | 13-14 May 2025 | Thematic ESG/KPI session | Vienna | Align financial performance logic with ESG and impact measurement | Introduced structured KPI alignment logic; strengthened integration between pilot design and Monitoring & Evaluation framework . |
| **Consolidation - Exchange of Experience #5** | 16-18 September 2025 | Dedicated WP2 + TPRM session | Ljubljana | Integrate lessons learned into KPI and M&E tools, ensuring readiness for validation. | Consolidated ESG proportionality approach; ensured methodological coherence with monitoring deliverables. |
| **Final Analytical Peer Review Round** | 26 February 2026 | Two parallel subgroups | Online | Reassess pilot maturity, scalability and institutional anchoring | Reassessed pilot maturity, ensuring readiness for validation. |

## 5.2. Analytical Framework Applied

The Final Analytical Round (26 February 2026) represented a structured comparative reassessment of all seven pilots. Partners were divided into two thematic subgroups and applied a common guiding matrix addressing five core analytical dimensions: co-design adaptation, ESG/impact integration, regulatory and financial constraints, scalability conditions and institutional anchoring.

Rather than generating new pilot content, the session enabled a structured comparison of maturity levels, governance configurations and replication conditions. The discussion highlighted both convergence patterns and contextual differentiation across regions.

Across pilots, the FI4INN co-design methodology and Canvas framework were consistently applied, though adapted through either bottom-up stakeholder engagement processes (e.g. FVG, Slovenia) or more market-driven and investor-led approaches (e.g. Piemonte). ESG integration emerged predominantly as a proportional or enabling component rather than a binding eligibility criterion, often constrained by regulatory frameworks or funding source conditions.

Common obstacles included regulatory rigidity, complex public governance environments, negotiation challenges at national level, and tensions between administrative compliance and user-friendly instrument design. Scalability was generally linked to governance stability, regulatory compatibility and institutional commitment rather than direct instrument replication.

The comparative discussion also highlighted recurring tensions between the objective of simplifying financial instrument access and the regulatory constraints imposed by public funding frameworks, a pattern consistently observed across multiple pilots.

The table below synthesises the comparative findings of the Final Analytical Round and documents their impact on pilot positioning and validation readiness.

**Table 4** – Comparative findings of the final analytical round

| **Analytical Dimension** | **Guiding Question Addressed** | **Application in Feb 2025 (pilot kick off phase)** | **Reassessment (26 Feb 2026)** | **Comparative Findings and Validation Implications** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adaptation of Co-Design Methodology | **How was the FI4INN co-design approach adapted to regional context and stakeholders?** | Structured comparison across 7 regions using FI4INN Canvas | Comparative reassessment of adaptation models (bottom-up vs market-driven approaches) | Confirmed consistent application of FI4INN methodology across pilots, with contextual differentiation between stakeholder-driven and investor-driven co-design models; strengthened transparency of governance articulation. |
| ESG / Impact Integration | **How are ESG criteria or impact goals** | Identification of heterogeneous | Verification of proportional | Confirmed predominantly proportional ESG integration |

| Analytical Dimension | Guiding Question Addressed | Application in Feb 2025 (pilot kick off phase) | Reassessment (26 Feb 2026 | Comparative Findings and Validation Implications |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **integrated into pilot design and monitoring?** | approaches to ESG integration | integration and monitoring alignment | Approaches; ESG embedded mainly through monitoring logic, sector targeting or mentoring support rather than binding eligibility conditionality. |
| Regulatory & Financial Obstacles | **What regulatory, stakeholders or financial barriers emerged?** | Mapping of constraints across regions | Comparative verification of mitigation strategies and institutional negotiation processes | Identified recurring structural constraints (regulatory rigidity, complex public governance, negotiation with national authorities, tension between simplification and compliance); refinement of mitigation approaches documented. |
| Scalability & Replication Conditions | **What conditions are required for transferring to other CE regions?** | Preliminary assessment of replication feasibility | Structured discussion on governance and regulatory preconditions | Clarified that transferability depends primarily on governance stability, regulatory compatibility and institutional capacity rather than direct instrument replication. |
| Institutional Ownership & Mainstreaming | **Which actors will mainstream the pilot after project closure?** | Identification of responsible institutions | Confirmation of institutional anchoring and commitment levels | Documented clear institutional ownership structures (regional authorities, fund managers, ministries, VC entities); sustainability linked to political continuity and governance commitment. |

To facilitate structured comparative discussion during the Final Analytical Round (26 February 2026), partners were organised into two thematic subgroups reflecting the dominant orientation of their pilot concepts. The subdivision was not hierarchical but analytical, aiming to cluster pilots with comparable structural characteristics to enable more focused peer exchange.

Group 1 concentrated primarily on pilots involving financial instrument redesign and blended finance configurations. Group 2 focused on incubation, startup support models and operational support structures.

Each subgroup was coordinated by a designated lead partner responsible for facilitating discussion, ensuring adherence to the common analytical matrix and consolidating findings for plenary reporting. The composition of the two subgroups and their analytical focus are summarised in table below.

| Subgroup | Lead Partner | Participating Partners | Pilot Focus | Role of Lead |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Group 1 | TEC4I | FINPIE, GZS | Blended finance / FI redesign | Facilitation |
| Group 2 | CzechInvest | NIU, BUILD, ARRSA | Startup support models | Facilitation |

Table 5 – Subgroup composition and roles

## 5.3. Evidence of Peer Exchange Impact

The peer review mechanism did not merely accompany implementation but operated as a structured cross-regional analytical refinement process, influencing governance clarification, monitoring alignment, proportional ESG integration and validation readiness across territories.

The table below provides a structured overview of the main peer review milestones under the TPRM, outlining the type of exchange, the added value generated and the concrete improvements achieved across the seven pilots.

**Table 6** – Evidence of peer exchange impact

| Peer Review Moment | Type of Exchange | Main Added Value Generated | Concrete Improvement in Pilots |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Pilots kick off online meeting** | Structured analytical comparison | Cross-regional benchmarking of financial instrument architecture and ESG positioning | Clarification of pilot scope, strengthened governance articulation and alignment with FI4INN Canvas dimensions |
| **EOE#4 - Bielsko-Biała** | In-presence validation workshop | Exchange of impact-oriented governance models and blended finance structures | Refinement of instrument design logic and improved stakeholder engagement configurations |
| **Impact Days - Vienna** | Dedicated ESG/KPI alignment session | Alignment between financial performance logic and impact measurement approaches | Introduction of structured KPI alignment and proportional ESG monitoring integration |
| **EOE#5 - Ljubljana** | Consolidation and toolkit alignment | Integration of pilot insights into monitoring and evaluation tools | Stronger coherence between pilot actions and M&E framework |
| **Final round (26 Feb 2026)** | Final analytical reassessment | Comparative verification of scalability conditions and institutional anchoring | Confirmation of pilot maturity and validation readiness for project validation workshop |

Joint development is demonstrated through documented methodological coherence, structured cross-regional benchmarking and iterative refinement cycles evidenced throughout the TPRM tables presented in this chapter. The **diversity** of final pilot configurations **reflected contextual adaptation** within a shared analytical, governance and monitoring framework rather than instrument homogenisation.

**Transnational peer review constituted the operational backbone** ensuring compliance with programme requirements on jointly developed pilot actions by providing traceable evidence of transnational contribution, structured peer input and progressive analytical consolidation of pilot maturity prior to formal pilot results validation workshop.

Beyond alignment and structured feedback, the Transnational Peer Review Mechanism functioned as a **reciprocal learning platform**. Partners developing new instruments — such as the Basket Bond structure in Piemonte — provided practical insights for other regions exploring capital market logic or blended finance approaches. Likewise, governance refinement models, modular financing structures and ESG integration practices developed in other territories informed peer reflection and adaptation. The peer review process therefore fostered **cross-fertilisation of innovative practices** in addition to methodological coherence.

# 6. Conclusions and transition to validation Phase

This deliverable documents the development and implementation of seven regional pilot concepts within the FI4INN project, contributing to programme requirements on jointly developed pilot actions. The pilots were carried out in accordance with the common framework defined in the report on piloting scope, objectives, approach and Transnational Peer Review Mechanism and implemented through coordinated local stakeholder engagement and structured transnational peer review.

Across all regions, pilot concepts were structured, refined and consolidated within the agreed timeframe (Q1 2025 – Q1 2026). This integrated approach enabled the parallel advancement of instrument design, stakeholder co-creation and transnational alignment, ensuring methodological consistency while preserving territorial specificity.

**At regional level**, the pilot results reflected the progressive consolidation of innovative or improved financing schemes tailored to SMEs and start-ups. **At transnational level**, the coordinated peer review mechanism ensured comparability, alignment and mutual learning across the partnership.

Implementation is therefore considered completed within the project timeframe, in line with programme requirements on jointly developed pilot actions. The seven pilots reached defined implementation milestones, as documented in their respective Pilot Action Reports. Any further testing, institutional adoption or scaling activities fall outside the scope of the pilot actions and the project timeframe.

The pilots are now positioned for the next phase of the project cycle. The pilot results validation workshop, scheduled for 25 March 2026 during the final Exchange of Experience in Budapest, assess the maturity, transferability and scalability conditions of the piloting concepts, with the objective of consolidating jointly developed solutions. The validation phase examines the structural readiness of the instruments and their potential for replication across Central Europe.

**This deliverable therefore marks the completion of the pilot implementation phase.** Validation and solution consolidation are not part of this document and are addressed in subsequent project phases.

# 7. Annexes

## 7.1. Annex A 1-7: Pilot Reports

## 7.2. Annex B: Monitoring & Quality Abstract

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# Pilot Action Report TEC4I

Version 2

11/2023

# A. TABLE OF CONTENTS

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Purpose of the Action Plan

The TEC4I pilot action aimed to enhance the effectiveness, transparency and accessibility of the Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) Venture Capital Guarantee Fund, a regional financial instrument managed by FVG Plus that supports equity and quasi-equity investments in innovative start-ups. The intervention focused on improving the governance, evaluation and operational alignment of the instrument to better respond to the structural characteristics of innovation-driven enterprises.

Within the FI4INN project framework, the pilot fell under **Option B**, namely the improvement of an existing financial instrument through structured co-design and governance refinement. Rather than redesigning the financial architecture of the Fund, the pilot concentrated on strengthening its evaluative clarity, reducing informational asymmetries, and enhancing comparability across investment proposals.

The action contributed to the broader objectives of FI4INN by improving regional SMEs' access to venture capital, increasing financial literacy, embedding proportionate ESG considerations, and promoting more resilient and sustainable growth trajectories. By aligning public guarantees with the real financial lifecycle of innovative startups, the pilot fostered regional financial innovation, supports job creation, and strengthened the attractiveness of FVG as a territory for high-potential entrepreneurial initiatives.

In this sense, the pilot did not operate as a standalone intervention but as a systemic refinement of an existing financial ecosystem mechanism, reinforcing its capacity to support innovation-intensive enterprises while maintaining institutional sustainability.

*Suggested visual content:*

- Territorial map of Friuli Venezia Giulia within the Central European context
- Stakeholder table illustrating the roles of Region FVG, FVG Plus, TEC4I, financial intermediaries, startups and ecosystem actors

*** Visual content (Suggested tables &graphs): Add territorial map or similar, Stakeholder Table.*

Useful link: https://www.regione.fvg.it/rafvg/cms/RAFVG/economia-imprese/accesso_al_credito/FOGLIA357/

## 1.2. Territorial Action Plan

The pilot was implemented at the regional level in Friuli Venezia Giulia, a territory characterized by a strong SME base, a strategic cross-border positioning, and a diversified industrial and innovation ecosystem. The region combines traditional manufacturing excellence with a growing presence of digital, engineering and R&D-intensive sectors.

Key stakeholders involved in the pilot include the Regional Administration (through SACI – Servizio per l'Accesso al Credito delle Imprese), FVG Plus as manager of the Guarantee Fund, venture capital investors, financial intermediaries, business support organizations, incubators, universities and research centres. TEC4I operates both as pilot coordinator and as innovation observatory, ensuring methodological coherence and ecosystem alignment.

The territorial action plan was grounded in structured evidence base derived from the Startup Monitor FVG, an ongoing monitoring activity implemented by TEC4I. This analytical infrastructure tracked the evolution of innovative enterprises in the region, providing data on enterprise demography, sectoral distribution, territorial concentration and financial performance by firm age. The targeted startups

addressed by the pilot are therefore not a generic category, but the result of systematic monitoring and classification within the regional innovation ecosystem.

The monitoring activity revealed and confirmed structural characteristics of innovative startups in Friuli Venezia Giulia, including a high concentration in digital technologies and R&D-intensive sectors, negative or marginal EBITDA during the first years of activity, revenue acceleration typically emerging from year three onward, strong dependence on equity financing rather than debt, intangible-asset-intensive business models, and volatile capitalization patterns in early growth stages. These patterns are structural and recurring, reflecting the intrinsic dynamics of innovation-driven enterprises rather than temporary anomalies.

When combined with focus groups and targeted interviews conducted with beneficiaries and stakeholders of the Venture Capital Guarantee Fund, the monitoring evidence exposed systemic weaknesses affecting access to venture capital. These included misalignment between innovation growth trajectories and traditional financial risk assessment metrics, informational asymmetries between startups and financial intermediaries, fragmentation in business plan structures and evaluation logic, and the absence of a shared technical reference framework to support comparability.

Interviews with Guarantee Fund beneficiaries further confirmed difficulties in articulating financial assumptions coherently, divergences in the interpretation of "bankability", and delays in evaluation processes caused by heterogeneous documentation standards.

This triangulated evidence base — quantitative monitoring, qualitative stakeholder validation and direct beneficiary feedback — directly shaped the focus of the pilot action. The intervention concentrated on addressing recurring structural financial behavior of early-stage innovative firms, measured bankability gaps emerging from observed financial indicators, empirical sector concentration patterns influencing risk perception, and documented governance weaknesses affecting transparency and comparability.

As a result, TEC4I designed a pilot that refines governance and evaluation mechanisms of the Venture Capital Guarantee Fund while developing a modular and flexible Business Plan model as a technical alignment tool. The model introduces a common CORE structure with optional modules, integrates proportionate ESG-light indicators, and improves clarity and comparability without imposing rigid or prescriptive standards.

The pilot action should therefore be understood as a monitoring-informed governance intervention responding to structurally observed ecosystem dynamics. It represents the operational translation of a clear causal sequence:

Continuous Monitoring Evidence → Identification of Structural Gaps → Governance Refinement and Technical Tool Development → Improved Access to Venture Capital for Innovative Startups.

The governance architecture of the FVG Venture Capital Guarantee Fund is structured across interconnected institutional and ecosystem layers. At the policy level, the Regione Autonoma Friuli Venezia Giulia (through SACI) defined the regulatory framework and strategic orientation of the instrument, ensuring alignment with regional economic development objectives. At the operational level, FVG Plus manages the Fund, evaluated guarantee requests and oversees portfolio monitoring, while banks acted as financial intermediaries,

structuring financial operations, performing due diligence and transmitting guarantee applications. Venture capital investors provide market-based equity financing supported by the public guarantee mechanism.

Parallel to this institutional structure, TEC4I operated as pilot coordinator and ecosystem intelligence hub, leveraging the Startup Monitor FVG to ground the intervention in continuous monitoring evidence. Within the co-design dimension of the pilot, IRES FVG contributed to the co-creation workshops and supported the impact analysis process, reinforcing the analytical robustness of the diagnostic phase and the validation of structural gaps. This collaborative layer ensured that monitoring evidence, stakeholder feedback and governance analysis converged into a coherent refinement strategy. The interaction between policy authority, operational management, financial intermediaries, market actors and analytical partners created a multi-layered governance ecosystem in which the pilot action strengthens transparency, comparability and alignment between innovation-driven enterprises and financial evaluation mechanisms.

| *Stakeholder* | Institutional Role | Role in the Financial Instrument | Role in the Pilot Action | Strategic Contribution |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Regione Autonoma Friuli Venezia Giulia (SACI – Servizio Accesso al Credito Imprese)*** | Policy authority and associated partner in FI4INN | Defines regulatory framework, eligibility criteria and strategic orientation of the Guarantee Fund | Institutional reference point; participates in alignment and validation discussions | Ensures regulatory coherence, policy continuity and potential mainstreaming |
| ***FVG Plus*** | Fund Manager | Manages operational procedures, evaluates guarantee requests, monitors compliance and manages the guarantee portfolio | Core technical stakeholder in co-design and governance refinement | Provides operational evidence on evaluation processes, bottlenecks and procedural consistency |
| ***Banks (Financial Intermediaries for Guarantee Assignment)*** | Credit institutions acting as intermediaries | Structure financial operations; perform due diligence; submit and manage guarantee requests toward FVG Plus; act as transmission channel between startups/investors and the Fund | Contribute to identification of bankability gaps and documentation misalignment | Represent market-based risk assessment logic and highlight mismatches with innovation growth profiles |
| ***Venture Capital Investors / Business Angels*** | Private equity investors | Provide equity or quasi-equity investments supported by the public guarantee | Provide perspective on investment readiness and financial coherence | Ensure alignment with market expectations and long-term sustainability |
| ***TEC4I FVG*** | Pilot Coordinator and Innovation Hub | Not directly involved in fund management; operates as ecosystem intermediary | Leads pilot implementation; develops Modular Business Plan tool; implements Startup Monitor FVG; facilitates stakeholder engagement | Ensures evidence-based design, convergence of stakeholders and monitoring-informed governance refinement |
| ***IRES FVG*** | Independent research and socio-economic analysis institute | No operational role in the financial instrument | Contributes to co-creation workshops; supports impact analysis and diagnostic validation; provides analytical input | Strengthens methodological robustness, supports impact-oriented analysis and reinforces evidence triangulation |
| ***Innovative Startups (Guarantee Fund Beneficiaries)*** | Final recipients | Apply for investments supported by the public guarantee; present business plans and financial projections | Participate in interviews, focus groups and validation of the Business Plan model | Provide empirical evidence on structural financial behavior and evaluation challenges |
| ***Business Support Organizations (Incubators, Advisors, Innovation Hubs)*** | Ecosystem support actors | Support startups in preparing documentation and financial plans | Contribute to alignment of Business Plan structure and comparability logic | Reduce informational asymmetries and improve financial articulation quality |
| ***Universities and Research Centres*** | R&D ecosystem actors | Indirect contributors to startup pipeline through research and technology transfer | Strengthen innovation intensity of regional startup base | Support sectoral specialization patterns observed in monitoring activity |
| ***FI4INN Transnational Partners (TPRM)*** | Cross-border peer reviewers | No operational role in the FVG Fund | Provide benchmarking, ESG alignment input and methodological validation | Ensure jointly developed dimension and reinforce robustness of governance refinement |

Table 1 – Governance and Stakeholder Ecosystem of the FVG Venture Capital Guarantee Fund within the TEC4I Pilot Action

# 2. Strategic Alignment

## 2.1. Alignment with Project Objectives

The enhancement of the FVG Venture Capital Guarantee Fund contributed to the broader FI4INN ambition of strengthening regional innovation capacities through more effective financial instruments. By focusing on the governance and accessibility of a risk-sharing mechanism supporting early-stage equity investments, the pilot reinforced the conditions under which innovative SMEs can scale and attract private capital.

Rather than introducing a new subsidy scheme, the intervention improved an existing ERDF-backed financial instrument, shifting attention from capital allocation alone to the quality and coherence of evaluation processes. In doing so, it supports innovation-driven enterprises operating in digital and R&D-intensive sectors, whose financial trajectories often differ from traditional SME profiles. This refinement increased transparency, comparability and trust among startups, investors, financial intermediaries and public authorities.

The pilot also contributed to strengthening investment readiness and financial literacy by introducing a modular Business Plan framework designed to reduce information asymmetries and improve the articulation of financial assumptions. Through this approach, the Guarantee Fund evolved from a purely financial tool into a coordination mechanism that aligns policy objectives, financial engineering and ecosystem activation.

Impact and sustainability considerations were progressively embedded within the evaluation logic, enabling future integration of ESG-related indicators and performance metrics. This reflected a transition from purely financial risk mitigation toward a broader public value perspective, consistent with the evolution of innovation-oriented financial instruments across Europe.

The intervention was developed and validated within the Transnational Peer Review Mechanism, ensuring that local refinement benefits from shared learning and joint methodological alignment. The resulting framework strengthened not only access to venture capital in Friuli Venezia Giulia, but also contributed to a more coherent and accountable innovation finance architecture within the FI4INN cooperation area.

## 2.2. Reference to Strategic Project Documents

In line with Option B described in described in the Report on piloting scope, approach and typologies, the pilot focuses on the redesign and improvement of an existing financial instrument. The structured co-design logic, the use of the FI4INN Canvas and the embedding of the Transnational Peer Review Mechanism (TPRM) provided the operational backbone of the intervention, ensuring joint development, iterative refinement and compliance with project indicators.

The pilot also builds on **the Analysis of SME Satisfaction with the Current Opportunities**, which identified persistent barriers in financial accessibility, including bureaucratic complexity and limited diversification of financing schemes. These findings supported the need to improve transparency, comparability and governance efficiency within the FVG Venture Capital Guarantee Fund.

The **Virtual Knowledge Center repository** provided benchmarking references on innovative and diversified financial schemes, reinforcing the strategic positioning of the Guarantee Fund as a risk-sharing instrument capable of leveraging private capital. Additionally, **the Recommendations to Simplify Financial**

**Instrument Access** informed the pilot's focus on reducing informational asymmetries and standardizing documentation through the modular Business Plan framework.

The pilot design was further strengthened through participation in FI4INN **Exchange of Experience (EoE)** sessions and TPRM workshops, where peer feedback and cross-regional comparison contributed to refining governance aspects and evaluation logic.

Although not formally required under Option B, insights from **WP3 documents**, particularly **the Guidelines on Significant KPIs**, influenced the integration of ESG-light and impact-oriented considerations within the redesigned instrument, enhancing its accountability and long-term sustainability alignment.

Together, these strategic project documents ensured that the TEC4I pilot is methodologically grounded, transnationally validated and coherent with FI4INN's objectives and programme indicator framework.

# 3. Territorial Analysis

## 3.1. Current State Assessment

Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) presented a structurally strong innovation ecosystem, characterized by a high density of innovative startups and a significant concentration in digital and R&D-intensive sectors. Approximately 4–5% of newly incorporated companies in the region qualify as innovative startups, placing FVG among the most dynamic territories in Italy in terms of startup intensity. The regional ecosystem benefited from strong ICT specialization, an active network of innovation actors, and a favourable policy framework supported by ERDF resources under PR FESR 2021–2027.

FVG was classified as a "Strong Innovator" in the EU Regional Innovation Scoreboard,[1] with above-average performance in SME innovation and investment. However, despite this high innovation density, the availability of early-stage venture capital remained structurally limited. This created a systemic mismatch between innovation potential and capital availability — an "innovation density without capital density" condition that constrains scaling capacity.

The FVG Venture Capital Guarantee Fund was originally introduced as a risk-sharing policy response to this structural gap. Although technically sound and operational since 2020, stakeholder consultations carried out within the FI4INN pilot — including meetings with SACI, FVG Plus, financial intermediaries and startup beneficiaries — revealed persistent frictions affecting its effectiveness. These included information asymmetries during application and due diligence processes, limited comparability of business plans and financial documentation, evaluation inefficiencies resulting from heterogeneous assessment standards, and uneven levels of financial literacy and investment readiness among startups. Data analysis through the Startup Monitor FVG[2] confirmed recurring financial patterns among innovative startups, including early-stage negative or marginal EBITDA, strong equity dependence and intangible-asset-intensive business models. These structural characteristics often conflicted with traditional financial risk metrics, reinforcing evaluation complexity and investor caution.

Overall, the current state assessment revealed a robust and innovation-driven regional ecosystem that requires improved coordination mechanisms and more coherent financial evaluation standards to unlock its full potential. Within this context, the Guarantee Fund operated not only as a financial instrument but as a

[1] https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/statistics/performance-indicators/regional-innovation-scoreboard_en

[2] The Startup Monitor FVG is a first prototype of a more advanced analytical tool being developed by TEC4I to monitor the regional startup ecosystem, including sectoral trends and financial patterns. It provided the evidence base for refining the Venture Capital Guarantee Fund within the FI4INN pilot.

systemic lever capable of strengthening trust, transparency and alignment between public authorities, financial intermediaries and innovative enterprises.


*Figure 1 – Startup Monitor FVG Dashboard by TEC4I*

The figure shows a dashboard extract from the Startup Monitor FVG (Edizione 2025), presenting the territorial and sectoral distribution of enterprises in Friuli Venezia Giulia. It reports 4,045 new companies, including 134 innovative startups and 4 innovative SMEs. The map highlighted strong clustering around Udine and Pordenone, confirming localized innovation hubs. The sectoral breakdown showed a significant concentration in digital and R&D-intensive activities. The dashboard provided the evidence base supporting the refinement of the FVG Venture Capital Guarantee Fund within the TEC4I pilot.

## 3.2. Challenges and Opportunities[3]

Friuli Venezia Giulia's financial ecosystem was innovation-intensive but structurally constrained in its capacity to support startup scaling. A central challenge was the limited availability of early-stage venture capital relative to the region's innovation density. While the startup base was dynamic and concentrated in digital and R&D-intensive sectors, risk capital remained comparatively scarce, creating a structural mismatch between growth potential and financial resources.

[3] Sources: European Commission, Regional Innovation Scoreboard (latest edition); Regione Autonoma FVG, PR FESR 2021–2027; FI4INN Deliverables D1.1.1, D1.1.2, D2.3.1, D2.1.1, D3.2.1; TEC4I Startup Monitor FVG (2025).

Innovative startups frequently display financial patterns — negative or marginal EBITDA in early years, strong equity dependence and intangible-asset-heavy models — that do not align with traditional bank-oriented risk metrics. This generated evaluation complexity and conservative risk perception among financial intermediaries. Stakeholder consultations within the FI4INN pilot further revealed information asymmetries during application and due diligence phases, limited comparability of business plans, heterogeneous assessment standards and uneven financial literacy among founders. Fragmentation between policy actors, fund managers, banks and enterprises contributed to procedural inefficiencies and slows capital allocation. ESG integration also remained uneven, particularly in early-stage firms lacking structured reporting and KPI frameworks.

At the same time, the region offered significant opportunities. FVG was classified as a "Strong Innovator" at EU level and benefits from ERDF-backed financial instruments, a coordinated governance architecture, and a dense innovation network including universities, research centres, and business support organisations.

The FVG Venture Capital Guarantee Fund already operated as a risk-sharing mechanism capable of leveraging private investment, providing a solid institutional foundation for refinement rather than replacement.

**SWOT Analysis – Friuli Venezia Giulia Financial Ecosystem in Relation to the FI4INN Pilot**

| Strengths | Weaknesses |
|---|---|
| High density of innovative startups (above national average) | Structurally limited early-stage venture capital availability |
| Strong ICT and R&D sector specialization | Information asymmetries in financial applications and due diligence |
| EU classification as "Strong Innovator" | Limited comparability of business plans and documentation standards |
| ERDF-backed Venture Capital Guarantee Fund already operational | Evaluation inefficiencies and heterogeneous assessment criteria |
| Coordinated regional governance architecture (Region, FVG Plus, TEC4I) | Uneven financial literacy and investment readiness among startups |
| **Opportunities** | **Threats** |
| Leverage ERDF risk-sharing to activate greater private capital | Persistent gap between innovation growth patterns and traditional risk metrics |
| Strengthen ESG and impact-oriented evaluation frameworks | Investor mistrust due to inconsistent financial articulation |
| Develop shared financial language through modular Business Plan model | Capital scarcity limiting scaling of high-potential startups |
| Position the Guarantee Fund as a coordination mechanism | Fragmentation between policy, financial actors and enterprises |
| Replicability of the risk-sharing model in other regions | Over-reliance on public instruments without sufficient private engagement |

Within this context, the FI4INN pilot created an opportunity to strengthen coordination through the development of a shared financial language (modular Business Plan framework), improved comparability standards, and ESG-light impact logic aligned with WP3 guidance. The pilot action result therefore functioned as a catalyst for mobilising additional private capital, enhancing transparency, and reinforcing trust between public authorities, financial intermediaries, and innovative enterprises

## 3.3. Vision

From the perspective of the Regione Autonoma Friuli Venezia Giulia – SACI, the Venture Capital Guarantee Fund pilot represented a strategic step toward consolidating a more effective, transparent, and innovation-oriented regional financial ecosystem. The vision was not to replace existing instruments, but to enhance their governance, comparability, and systemic impact, ensuring that public risk-sharing mechanisms operate as efficient multipliers of private capital.

In the medium to long term, the Region aimed to reduce the structural gap between innovation capacity and capital availability by strengthening evaluation standards, harmonising financial documentation practices, and embedding proportionate ESG considerations within financial assessment processes. By improving coordination among public authorities, FVG Plus, financial intermediaries, and innovation support actors, SACI seeked to reinforce institutional trust and increased the attractiveness of the regional startup ecosystem for private and institutional investors.

The redesigned Guarantee Fund was intended to function as a stable and credible policy instrument capable of mobilizing additional private resources, supporting the scale-up of innovative enterprises, and contributing to regional economic resilience. Within the FI4INN framework, the Region envisioned the pilot as a replicable governance improvement model, demonstrating how structured peer review, shared financial

language, and coordinated public-private action could strengthen innovation-driven financial instruments across Central Europe.

# 4. Pilot Action Objective

The primary objective of the FVG pilot action was to improve the investment readiness of potential applicants to the Regional Venture Guarantee Fund by strengthening their capacity to develop coherent, assumption-based and evaluable business and financial plans.

To achieve this, the pilot designed and tested, through a public-private co-creation process, a modular multi-actor Business Plan and Financial Plan framework that reduced fragmentation, enhanced comparability, and fostered a shared financial language across startups, fund managers, banks, and investors.

In parallel, the pilot seeked to increase awareness and effective promotion of the Venture Guarantee Fund among business angels, venture capitalists, and ecosystem stakeholders, thereby improving alignment between financial supply and startup demand.

The action also aimed to develop structured financial engineering-oriented support initiatives for startups, designed to:

- strengthen financial literacy and strategic financial planning.
- improve the ability to articulate funding mix strategies and capital requirements.
- enhance the bankability and investment attractiveness of innovative ventures.
- increase the overall maturity of the regional startup pipeline.

Finally, ESG integration was considered within the pilot scope, while its further structuring within the impact measurement framework falls outside the pilot action. The pilot established the groundwork for incorporating sustainability-related financial risk awareness into business planning processes, including increased sensitivity to risks such as regulatory non-compliance, revenue loss linked to sustainability-driven investor and customer preferences, and missed cost-efficiency opportunities. By linking ESG considerations to financial strategy and decision-making, the pilot contributed to more resilient and forward-looking financial planning practices.

# 5. Methodology

The TEC4I pilot applied a structured, monitoring-informed and governance-oriented methodology consistent with the FI4INN the Report on piloting scope, objectives, approach and tTransnational Peer Review Mechanism and the piloting logic defined for Option B (improvement of an existing financial instrument). The intervention followed a clear implementation chain: monitoring evidence led to structural gap identification, which informed co-design refinement, tool development, cross-regional validation and institutional consolidation. **The methodology operated across two interconnected levels.**

**At local level**, the pilot combined continuous ecosystem intelligence with structured stakeholder engagement. The diagnostic phase, conducted between May and July 2025, relied on Startup Monitor FVG data, interviews with financed startups and investors, and a Focus Group involving seven regional stakeholders. This phase confirmed systemic bottlenecks affecting the Venture Capital Guarantee Fund, including fragmented documentation standards, narrative-financial incoherence, limited comparability and uneven financial literacy. Building on this evidence, the co-design phase (September-October 2025) translated identified gaps into a modular and flexible multi-actor Business Plan architecture composed of a shared CORE and optional modules. The FI4INN Canvas functioned as both structuring and self-assessment tool, ensuring alignment between target needs, governance refinement actions and expected systemic

outcomes. Validation and consolidation continued through ecosystem dissemination (November 2025) and a Technical Table process (January–February 2026), which formalized the "Stele Rosetta" multi-actor approach and prepared the model for solution validation.

**At transnational level**, the pilot was continuously embedded in the Transnational Peer Review Mechanism. Regular PPS and Working Group meetings throughout 2025 and early 2026, participation in Exchange of Experience sessions and Impact-oriented workshops ensured methodological alignment, ESG-light integration and KPI coherence. Peer feedback was incorporated iteratively, reinforcing robustness, transferability and consistency with FI4INN objectives.

This dual-level methodology ensured that local governance refinement was systematically validated through cross-regional exchange, positioning the modular Business Plan framework as a jointly developed and transferable solution in line with the with the project's results progression.

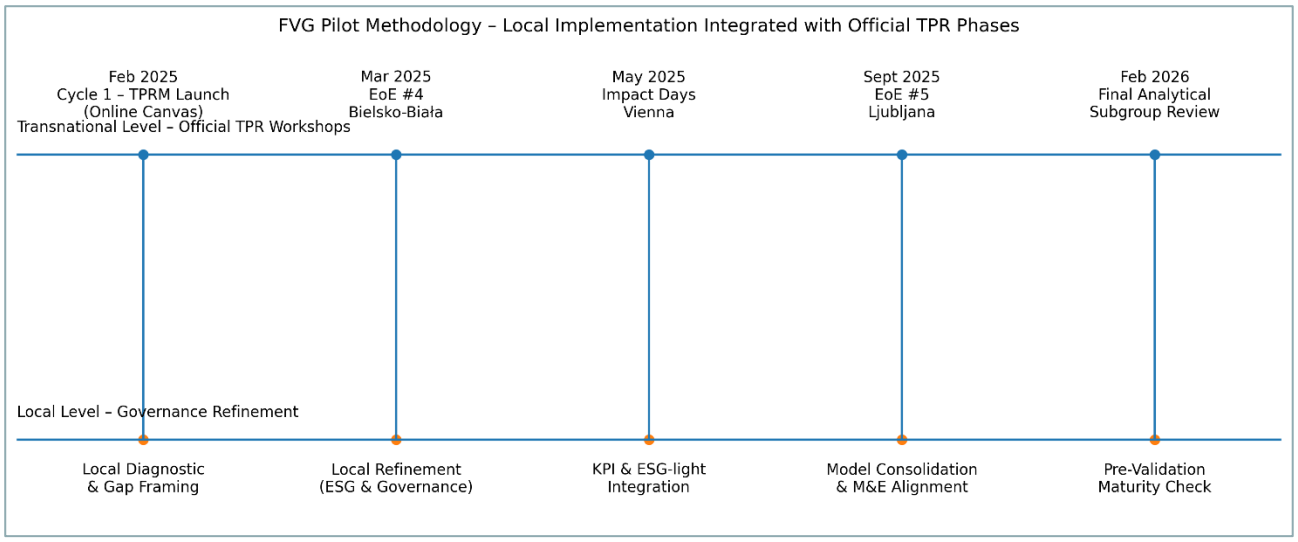


Figure 2 – Causal Chain Diagram

# 6. Planned Actions

| Phase | Q1 2025 | Q2 2025 | Q3 2025 | Q4 2025 | Q1 2026 – MILESTONE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Stakeholder Engagement** | **LSG kick-off**; institutional & fund-level meetings; initial stakeholder mapping | Structured interviews; ESG & inclusivity integration | Focus Group validation of findings | Technical alignment meetings with key stakeholders | **Roundtable confirmation & institutional endorsement** |
| **Co-Design & Model Development** | Problem framing & needs structuring | FI4INN Canvas refinement; co-design alignment | Definition of **CORE + optional modules** architecture | Internal technical testing & refinement | **Final technical validation (Tavolo Tecnico)** |
| **Transnational Peer Review (TPRM)** | Initial peer exchange (TPRM launch) | Peer Review WS1 – ESG & sustainability focus | Peer Review WS2–3 – scalability & systemic impacts | Consolidation feedback & cross-regional alignment | **Final subgroup validation session** |
| **Documentation & Reporting** | – | – | Draft model documentation | Structured pre-read preparation; feedback tools | **Final documentation package & transition to WP3** |

Table 3 – Pilot Timeline Overview

- February–March 2025: Bilateral meetings with FVG Plus (fund manager), desk analysis, stakeholder

engagement, ESG expert selection.

- July–August 2025: Final stakeholder engagement and data collection.
- September–October 2025: Focus group and co-creation workshop with regional stakeholders.
- November 2025: Regional and transnational events
- December 2025: Finalization and documentation of the pilot results.
- January February 2026 Validation a tools completion

**February 2025 - July 2025 _** Stakeholder engagement and data collection (completed)

Initial activities focused on engaging key regional financial stakeholders, including the Associate Partner (Regione FVG – SACI), the Fund manager (FVG Plus), investors, startups and ecosystem representatives.

Bilateral meetings and institutional exchanges enabled the identification of operational gaps in fund outreach, evaluation standards and documentation comparability. Structured interviews with financed startups and investors were conducted to gather qualitative evidence on access-to-finance processes and instrument performance.

This phase also included ESG and inclusivity integration discussions, ensuring that sustainability dimensions were embedded in the refinement logic from the outset.

The phase culminated in a Focus Group validation session (July 2025), consolidating the problem framing and confirming priority areas for instrument refinement.

**Milestone achieved**: Completion of stakeholder engagement and validated problem diagnosis (July 2025).

**March 2025 - December 2025**

Technical meetings and co-development of the modular model (completed)

Dedicated technical meetings were organized with institutional and ecosystem stakeholders to define the structure of the Modular Business Plan & Financial Plan Model.

The pilot action monitoring and quality assessment based on FI4INN Canvas was progressively refined and aligned with stakeholder inputs, clarifying governance roles, target groups and ESG-light dimensions. A structured co-creation phase (September–October 2025) enabled the formal definition of the CORE and optional modules architecture.

Internal technical refinement sessions in Q4 2025 ensured operational feasibility and coherence with the Venture Capital Guarantee Fund context.

A regional dissemination event (5th November 2025) supported ecosystem positioning and feedback consolidation.

**Milestone achieved:** Definition of the Modular multistakeholder Business Plan architecture (December 2025).

**January 2025 - February 2026**

Transnational peer review and methodological refinement (completed within reporting period)

Peer exchange and validation activities were conducted within the Transnational Peer Review Mechanism (TPRM). These included thematic workshops on ESG integration, scalability and systemic impacts, followed by consolidation feedback sessions and final subgroup validation.

These exchanges ensured alignment with FI4INN strategic objectives and strengthened the robustness and replicability of the pilot structure through cross-regional benchmarking.

Milestone achieved: Cross-regional methodological alignment confirmed (February 2026).

January 2026 – February 2026

Institutional consolidation and finalisation (completed)

The final implementation phase consisted of a structured multi-actor co-development process involving Regione FVG (SACI), FVG Plus, TEC4I and selected ecosystem stakeholders.

This phase focused on validating the CORE and optional module architecture, confirming alignment between narrative and financial sections, and verifying the usability of the tool within regional evaluation processes.

The process resulted in the formal consolidation of the Modular Business Plan Model as a shared reference framework for improving transparency and comparability in access-to-finance procedures.

Milestone achieved: local institutional validation and consolidation of the Modular Business Plan Model (February 2026).

Documentation and Transferability (final phase)

All pilot phases, methodologies and validation steps were documented to support knowledge transfer within FI4INN. The final documentation package, completed in Q1 2026, ensured traceability of the intervention logic and prepares the transition toward subsequent project activities.

This documentation supported the potential replicability of the modular model and contributed to governance-level learning within the FI4INN partnership.

# 7. Recommendations from Monitoring and Evaluation

The FI4INN Canvas self-assessment highlighted two areas for further strengthening:

1. Institutionalization of Support Schemes
   While co-design workshops and technical exchanges functioned effectively as alignment mechanisms, the need for structured, permanent mentoring pathways was identified to increase long-term effectiveness.
2. Progressive ESG Conditionality
   Although ESG-light indicators were embedded within the CORE and an advanced ESG module was available, fthe potential for linking ESG KPIs more explicitly to evaluation processes within the Guarantee Fund was identified.

These recommendations do not affect the structural validity of the pilot but provide guidance for scaling and institutional consolidation beyond the scope of the pilot action.

**Contribution of the Transnational Peer Review Mechanism (TPRM)**

The exchanges conducted within the Transnational Peer Review Mechanism (TPRM) substantially reinforced the conceptual robustness, governance clarity and transferability potential of the FVG pilot.

The dialogue with build! (Carinthia) provided structural inspiration regarding the transition from grant-based schemes to hybrid, equity-oriented instruments. The Carinthian experience highlighted the importance of clear governance coordination between public authorities, fund managers, incubators and private investors. This exchange confirmed the FVG strategic choice to focus on governance refinement — improving transparency, role alignment and evaluation coherence within the existing ERDF-backed Guarantee Fund — rather than redesigning its financial architecture.

Exchanges with NIÜ (Hungary) addressed early-stage financing gaps and co-investment mechanisms. Discussions revealed recurring "bankability" challenges across regions, including informational asymmetries and fragmented evaluation logic. The interest expressed in the FVG Guarantee Fund model also opened exploratory dialogue on possible adaptation in Hungary, reinforcing the pilot's scalability and cross-regional relevance.

The contribution of ZEF, as ESG expert partner, was instrumental in refining the proportional ESG integration approach. Dedicated exchanges clarified how to embed ESG dimensions without imposing excessive compliance burdens on early-stage startups. This ensured that ESG-light indicators remain meaningful, pragmatic and aligned with EU sustainability priorities.

Similarly, Impact Hub Vienna (IHV) strengthened the impact-oriented dimension of the pilot. The interaction supported the alignment of the modular Business Plan framework with impact logic and KPI coherence, reinforcing the connection between financial evaluation, accountability and public value generation. This positioned the pilot not only as a governance-refinement exercise but also as a step toward more impact-aware financial instruments.

The peer exchange with CzechInvest further reinforced the methodological dimension of the pilot. The Technology Incubation 2.0 process demonstrated a structured approach to stakeholder consultation, analytical prioritisation and systematic transformation of feedback into actionable recommendations.
This exchange supported TEC4I in:

- Strengthening the analytical framing of governance adjustments within the Regional Guarantee Fund;
- Clarifying how structured feedback loops increase transparency and legitimacy of evaluation criteria;
- Prioritising refinements based on impact versus implementation complexity;
- Consolidating documentation in a transferable and replicable format.

Collectively, the TPRM exchanges strengthened the articulation, methodological consistency and transferability logic of the FVG pilot. The intervention emerged as a governance-refinement model shaped through structured transnational comparison, evidence-based adjustment and peer validation.

Rather than constituting a local administrative improvement, the pilot demonstrated how risk-sharing instruments can evolve into coordination mechanisms connecting public authorities, financial intermediaries and innovative enterprises, in line with FI4INN's jointly developed pilot action framework.

# 8. Dissemination and Communication

Communication and dissemination activities within the TEC4I Pilot Action were conceived not as isolated visibility actions, but as an integral part of the pilot's co-design and ecosystem-building logic. The objective was to create structured opportunities for dialogue, knowledge transfer, and alignment around innovative financial instruments supporting startups and SMEs.

The central dissemination milestone was the regional event "Financing Innovation – From Finance to Impact: solutions to support and monitor the growth of startups and SMEs", held on 13 November 2025 in Udine and organised by TEC4I FVG

The event gathered 40 participants representing regional authorities, financial institutions, innovation agencies, startups, SMEs, and FI4INN transnational partners.

More than a presentation forum, the event was structured as a space for collective reflection on how financial instruments can evolve from purely financial mechanisms into impact-oriented tools. The

programme combined institutional perspectives, regional funding instruments, transnational pilot experiences, ESG integration approaches, and ecosystem monitoring tools. Through this structure, the FVG pilot results were positioned within a broader European policy and financial context, encouraging participants to connect regional practice with transnational learning.

During the event, TEC4I presented the FI4INN framework and its main outputs — including the Virtual Knowledge Center, the Dynamic Tool, and the Monitoring & Evaluation Strategy — while highlighting the regional pilot direction, particularly the development of a shared and bankable business plan model aligned with the FI4INN Canvas. Contributions from partners in Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovenia reinforced the transnational dimension, strengthening peer exchange and showcasing different approaches to blended finance, innovation support and ESG-linked incentives.

Dissemination of the pilot results was not limited to the regional event. TEC4I also presented the pilot action in events organised by other projects and partners, ensuring cross-project visibility and fostering inter-project learning. For example, on 25 September the pilot approach and its objectives were presented within the framework of the DIGISOLO project, contributing to knowledge exchange beyond the FI4INN partnership and reaching additional stakeholders from related innovation and digitalisation initiatives.

Communication activities were further supported through TEC4I FVG's LinkedIn channel. Posts highlighted the FI4INN project, the regional dissemination event, institutional collaboration, and themes related to access to finance and innovative support schemes. This digital outreach extended the visibility of the pilot to a broader audience, including startups, SMEs, financial intermediaries, investors, and policy stakeholders who were not directly involved in the in-person events.

Stakeholder engagement therefore developed across multiple levels. At institutional level, dialogue with the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia and financial actors contributed to aligning pilot insights with regional policy frameworks. At ecosystem level, startups, SMEs and innovation organisations engaged in discussions around financial readiness, blended finance opportunities, and sustainability-related requirements. At transnational level, exchange with FI4INN partners ensured that dissemination simultaneously contributed to peer learning and joint reflection across Central Europe.

Overall, communication and dissemination within the TEC4I Pilot Action aimed to strengthen awareness, improve coordination among financial actors, and promote a culture of impact-oriented and evidence-based financing. By combining a structured regional event, participation in external project initiatives, and regular digital communication, the pilot results were positioned as an active contribution to the regional and transnational innovation ecosystem, supporting future refinement, uptake and potential scalability of innovative financial solutions.

List of related Linkedin posts:

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/tec4ifvg_tec4ifvg-fvg-imprenditorialitaeq-activity-7395445474150846464-h9Ih?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAE5NYQABYu8cpt5AUL4oA1PWrO-ddobFqvI

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/tec4ifvg_evento-nuoveimprese-fvg-activity-7386304621901848577-W4Ga?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAE5NYQABYu8cpt5AUL4oA1PWrO-ddobFqvI

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/tec4ifvg_si-%C3%A8-svolto-presso-la-sede-di-tec4i-fvg-il-activity-7379509990056771584-gmNE?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAE5NYQABYu8cpt5AUL4oA1PWrO-ddobFqvI

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/tec4ifvg_fi4inn-tec4ifvg-fasthub-activity-7318221482856210433-P9NQ?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAE5NYQABYu8cpt5AUL4oA1PWrO-ddobFqvI attendi ulteriori informazioni.

The consolidated Modular Business Plan framework represented the structural basis for a jointly developed solution, to be formally assessed in subsequent project activities.

Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE

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FI4INN

# Pilot Action Report FINPIE

Version 2

11/2023

| Work package | WP 2 |
|---|---|
| Task | A2.3 |
| Due date | 16/02/2026 |
| Submission date | 19/02/2026 |
| Document lead | Finpiemonte SpA |
| Version | 2 |
| Authors | Susanna Longo, Gianfranco Di Salvo, Cristiana Tabacco |

## Disclaimer

# A. TABLE OF CONTENTS

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Purpose of the Action Plan

The pilot action developed within the FI4INN project represents the first Basket Bond initiative in the Piemonte Region, structured as a portfolio of minibonds issued by high-performing and innovative regional SMEs.

The action has been designed to complement the existing range of regional financial instruments—currently mainly focused on traditional debt schemes under both European and regional programmes—by introducing a tool that supports the diversification of SMEs' financing sources, facilitates the attraction of private investors through blended finance mechanisms, and generates a leverage effect in relation to public intervention.

The pilot action is fully aligned with the overall objectives of the FI4INN project, which aims to innovate regional financial support models while strengthening regional development dynamics.

By fostering the involvement of private investors within the regional innovation and financial ecosystem, together with representative SME organisations, and by engaging these actors in a co-creation process grounded in capital market-validated assumptions, the pilot aimed to generate a positive impact on the development of local investment projects, with a direct contribution to the regional economy.

Beyond the innovation introduced in the design process, the pilot also stands out for the technical sophistication of the financial instrument, which enables SMEs to diversify their capital-raising strategies while enhancing competition among investors.

## 1.2. Territorial Action Plan

The Basket Bond is implemented at regional level across Piemonte, without distinctions between sub-territories and without sectoral restrictions.

The instrument targets mature SMEs with sound profitability, a solid financial structure, and established production capacity.

The structure of the instrument is based on the issuance of debt securities (minibonds) by selected SMEs, which are subsequently screened and pooled into a diversified portfolio subscribed by both public and private investors.

The stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of the instrument represent a broad and complementary set of actors, covering all key components required to develop a financial product that is not solely driven by public support logic, but is also aligned with market-based principles of tradability, commercial viability, and profitability.

The stakeholders involved in the design and implementation include:

| Stakeholder category | Organisation | Role in the co-design process |
|---|---|---|
| **Public policymaking & coordination** | **Piedmont Region (Directorates for Competitiveness; Budget; Education, Training and Labour)** | Political endorsement and strategic direction of the pilot action; coordination of the joint working group responsible for the development of the regional Basket Bond; definition of the financial framework and regional support measures. |
| **Technical design & facilitation** | **Finpiemonte** | Technical lead of the pilot; facilitation of the co-design process; development and implementation of the Minibond and Basket Bond solutions; coordination of stakeholders and contribution to structuring, implementation and dissemination of the instrument. |

| Stakeholder category | Organisation | Role in the co-design process |
|---|---|---|
| Financial market actors | ADB | Contribution as arranger and technical advisor; support to the structuring and implementation of the Basket Bond instrument and validation of its technical feasibility. |
| | Banca Sella | Participation as potential investor; contribution to the assessment of bankability, market alignment and attractiveness of the instrument. |
| | Mediocredito Centrale | Participation as institutional investor; commitment to subscribe a significant share of the securitised portfolio and contribution to defining the guarantee framework through the Central Guarantee Fund. |
| | Cassa Depositi e Prestiti | Institutional coordination and technical support; contribution to assessing the feasibility and identifying suitable modalities to support the Basket Bond initiative within the national financial ecosystem. |
| | Finpiemonte | Participation as public investor, contributing to strengthening the financial credibility and implementation capacity of the instrument. |
| Sectoral coordination and knowledge exchange | ANFIR - Italian Association of Regional Financial Institutions | Contribution to benchmarking and exchange of regional experiences; support to the validation and alignment of the pilot with national and regional models of innovative financial instruments. |
| Business support & representation | Torino Finance Committee | Agenda-setting role; identification of barriers to the uptake of minibonds; support to stakeholder mobilisation, coordination and dissemination of the Basket Bond initiative. |
| | Unione Industriali Torino | Representation of industrial enterprises; support to the Basket Bond as an accessible long-term financing tool; contribution to validation, dissemination and stakeholder engagement. |
| | API Torino | Representation of SMEs; contribution to the validation, dissemination and accessibility of the Basket Bond model, ensuring alignment with SME financing needs. |
| | Unione Industriali Cuneo | Support to dissemination and awareness raising through stakeholder engagement and public presentation events; contribution to validation of the instrument from the perspective of regional enterprises. |
| | Unione Industriali Verbania | Support to dissemination and stakeholder engagement; contribution to promoting the Basket Bond initiative and ensuring alignment with business community needs. |
| | Unione Industriali Biella | Contribution to dissemination and stakeholder engagement through public events and outreach activities, supporting the mobilisation of regional enterprises. |

# 2. Strategic Alignment

## 2.1. Alignment with Project Objectives

| Objectives | Key points |
|---|---|
| Foster innovation in regional financial instruments by designing, testing and validating new or improved models that better respond to the evolving financing needs of SMEs. | • The Basket Bond has never previously been implemented in the Piedmont region.<br>• Minibonds are not yet a widely used form of financing among regional SMEs. |
| Support SMEs' access to finance by diversifying available funding sources, reducing over-reliance on traditional bank lending, and facilitating the use of market-based and blended finance solutions. | • Minibonds represent an alternative form of financing to traditional bank loans.<br>• Investors participating in the Basket Bond are primarily non-bank institutional investors. |
| Promote the involvement of private investors within regional financial and innovation ecosystems, strengthening public-private cooperation and enhancing leverage effects of public intervention. | In the Basket Bond, public intervention is limited to targeted support measures, including grants and guarantee mechanisms under market conditions.<br>The instrument mobilises more than 50% of private capital, generating a strong leverage effect on public resources. |
| Enhance the bankability and scalability of innovative SME projects by aligning financial instruments with capital market assumptions and investor requirements. | The Basket Bond enhances bankability by providing SMEs with access to non-bank capital and a more diversified financing structure.<br>Designed in accordance with capital market principles of risk, return, and maturity, the instrument enhances investor transparency and supports project scalability.<br>By aligning with market-based risk-return assessment criteria, SMEs strengthen their financial planning and improve their future bankability across different financing sources. |
| Integrate ESG principles into financial support mechanisms, encouraging SMEs to improve environmental, social and governance performance and supporting the alignment of regional financial instruments with EU sustainability objectives. | Due to the policies and investment criteria of private investors, the Basket Bond encourages SMEs to adopt ESG practices.<br>The Basket Bond aligns regional financial instruments with EU sustainability goals, attracting private capital committed to responsible investment. |
| Strengthen regional development and competitiveness by reinforcing local financial ecosystems and enabling the transferability and replicability of tested financial solutions across regions. | The Basket Bond strengthens local financial ecosystems, mobilizing private capital to boost SME growth and regional competitiveness.<br>Its structure is replicable across regions, enabling tested financial solutions to support broader regional development. |

## 2.2. Reference to Strategic Project Documents

The design and implementation of the Piemonte Basket Bond pilot builds directly on the "Analysis of SME satisfaction with the current opportunities", which identified a significant gap between SMEs' financing needs and the availability of diversified financial instruments. The analysis highlighted the need to mobilise private capital, develop blended finance solutions, and introduce scalable and innovative instruments beyond traditional grants and bank loans. These findings provided a strategic foundation for the

pilot structure, which combines public support with market-based financing to improve access to capital for innovative SMEs.

The FI4INN Virtual Knowledge Center recognises basket bonds as an innovative portfolio instrument, enabling groups of SMEs to access capital markets collectively through aggregated bond issuance. These strategic inputs guided the design and implementation of the pilot, ensuring alignment with FI4INN objectives and contributing to the development of a scalable and replicable financial solution.

In addition, the FI4INN “Exchange of Experience” event held in Turin in March 2024, which included the participation of a representative from a leading arranger company, enabled the exploration of similar experiences implemented in other regions. This exchange contributed to initiating the design process and provided key technical and strategic insights that supported the subsequent development of the regional Basket Bond initiative.

# 3. Territorial Analysis

## 3.1. Current State Assessment

Piedmont is one of Italy's most industrialised and innovation-oriented regions, with a diversified manufacturing base spanning automotive, aerospace, mechatronics, agrifood, and advanced materials. The region hosts a dense network of SMEs, many of which are export-oriented and embedded in established industrial clusters. Turin represents a major innovation hub, supported by leading universities (Politecnico di Torino, Università degli Studi di Torino), technology transfer centres, and incubators, contributing to a dynamic and well-developed R&D ecosystem.

The regional financial ecosystem includes traditional banking institutions, cooperative banks, regional financial intermediaries such as Finpiemonte, and national development actors. While bank lending remains the primary funding source for SMEs, stakeholder consultations highlight growing awareness of alternative financing instruments, particularly minibonds and structured debt solutions. However, access to capital markets remains uneven, with many SMEs facing structural limitations related to scale, financial structuring capacity, and investor readiness.

Available data indicates strong export performance and a relatively high concentration of innovative SMEs compared to the national average. Nevertheless, leverage levels remain significant, and equity capitalisation is often limited. Although the innovation ecosystem benefits from public-private partnerships and EU-funded programmes, fragmentation in financial advisory services and limited familiarity with capital market instruments continue to represent structural barriers.

Consultations with business associations, financial intermediaries, and institutional stakeholders confirm strong interest in diversified financing instruments to support business growth, digital transition, and sustainability investments. In this context, the introduction of a regional Basket Bond represents a strategic response to broaden financing channels, enhance financial resilience, and strengthen SMEs' investment capacity.

## 3.2. Challenges and Opportunities

Piedmont's financial ecosystem is well-developed but still characterised by structural constraints that limit SMEs' growth potential. A key challenge is the strong dependence on traditional bank lending, which exposes companies to credit tightening and cyclical financial conditions. Many SMEs lack the internal financial expertise and organisational capacity required to access capital market instruments, and their size often limits visibility and attractiveness for institutional investors. ESG integration also remains uneven, as smaller enterprises frequently lack adequate reporting systems, data availability, and technical expertise.

Fragmentation among advisory services and limited coordination between financial actors further constrain the development and scaling of innovative financing solutions. In addition, rising interest rates and broader macroeconomic uncertainty contribute to increased financing costs and risk perception.

At the same time, Piedmont offers significant opportunities. The region benefits from a strong industrial base, high export orientation, and well-established innovation networks supported by universities, competence centres, and technology clusters. Public institutions and regional financial intermediaries demonstrate openness to innovative financial instruments such as basket bonds, which enable aggregation of issuances, reduction of transaction costs, and improved access to institutional capital. Furthermore, EU and national policies supporting digital and green transition are increasing investment demand, reinforcing the relevance of structured financing solutions.

In this context, the Basket Bond initiative can act as a catalyst to diversify financing sources, strengthen financial capacity, and promote ESG integration across the regional SME ecosystem.

## 3.3. Vision

The Piemonte Basket Bond pilot aims to position the region as a benchmark for innovative SME financing in Italy, contributing to the development of a more resilient, diversified, and sustainable regional financial ecosystem. The initiative seeks to reduce structural dependence on traditional bank lending by facilitating SMEs' access to capital markets through aggregated bond issuances, lowering entry barriers and transaction costs.

In the medium to long term, the pilot aims to strengthen SMEs' financial capacity, promote ESG integration, and support investments in digitalisation, internationalisation, and green transition. By mobilising institutional capital and reinforcing collaboration among public authorities, financial intermediaries, and private investors, the initiative contributes to strengthening the regional financial ecosystem. Within the FI4INN framework, the pilot is expected to serve as a scalable and replicable model, supporting regional competitiveness and enabling transferability to other European regions.

# 4. Pilot Action Objective

The specific objective of developing the first Basket Bond in Piemonte is to introduce an innovative financial instrument designed to:

- Facilitate SMEs' access to finance by diversifying funding sources
- Support investments in growth, innovation, internationalisation, and sustainability
- Reduce structural dependence on traditional bank lending
- Strengthen SMEs' financial structure and access to capital markets
- Establish a stable financing channel between SMEs and institutional investors
- Attract private capital into the regional economy
- Contribute to regional development and competitiveness

In line with the FI4INN Monitoring framework, the pilot resulted in the definition and structuring of a Basket Bond model, enabling the issuance of minibonds by selected SMEs, the mobilisation of private capital, and improved access to market-based finance.

# 5. Methodology

**Premise:** a top-down approach was required to ensure strong political endorsement and the active engagement of key financial stakeholders from the early stages. The co-creation process was therefore carried out at a strategic and institutional level, involving public authorities, financial institutions, and relevant ecosystem actors. Final beneficiaries were not directly involved at this stage; their needs and perspectives are represented through intermediary and representative organisations. However, key decision-makers remained the investors, whose commitment was essential to ensure the financial viability, credibility, and effective implementation of the instrument.

1) Territorial analysis (if not already available). Since this was a highly selective financial instrument aimed at companies with very demanding entry requirements, the design of a regional Basket Bond must start with a preliminary assessment of the local business fabric, in order to verify that there is a sufficient number of companies with such characteristics to build a portfolio of significant size (indicatively above€30 million).
2) Informal engagement of stakeholders. The instrument was strongly dependent on the participation of private investors; therefore, a preliminary check of their interest in the instrument and in a regionally based investment portfolio was required.
3) Strong technical support. Also to carry out the verification mentioned in point 2), it iwas essential for the policymaker to appoint a qualified technical advisor, which in the case of a Basket Bond was an arranger company. The partner to be selected through a public procedure, but it is advisable to preliminarily verify the interest of one or more parties in carrying out the transaction. The arranger does not work on a fixed fee, but is remunerated upon completion of the transaction and bears the risk of a potential failure to close the deal.
4) Formal acquisition of interest from all other stakeholders, in particular anchor investors, but also companies (through their representatives), to ensure broad dissemination of the initiative during the selection process of participating firms.
5) Closing of the agreement among investors. Each investor must formally approve their participation and subscription of portfolio shares, enabling the arranger to formally and legally launch the transaction by establishing the fund, defining the engagement rules, and completing the required legal steps and procedures with the regulated market (e.g., the stock exchange).
6) Selection of companies and issuance of minibonds. Also thanks to the involvement of business associations, the process proceeds with the selection of companies issuing the minibonds and the inclusion of the bonds within the portfolio (basket).


**Reference to the FI4INN Canvas (Logic)**

The design and monitoring of the Piemonte Basket Bond pilot were structured in coherence with the FI4INN Canvas (Logic), which supported the clarification of the target group (mature, non-listed SMEs with growth plans), the identification of the financing gap addressed (limited access to capital market instruments), and the definition of the instrument's value proposition (aggregated minibond issuance with blended public-private participation). The Canvas framework also guided the mapping of key stakeholders (public authorities, arranger, institutional investors, business associations), the leverage mechanism, and the expected outputs in terms of private capital mobilisation and portfolio creation. The aggregated metrics dashboard was used to ensure alignment between these elements and the FI4INN Monitoring & Quality framework, strengthening the internal coherence and methodological transparency of the pilot.

# 6. Planned Actions

The pilot implementation in Piedmont followed a structured and phased approach, aligned with the timeline defined in the FI4INN Monitoring & Quality framework, including the following phases:

- pilot setup
- stakeholder engagement and technical design
- transnational peer review and refinement
- operational implementation and portfolio deployment (post-project phase not part of the pilot action)

**February 2024-October 2025. Stakeholder engagement and data collection (completed)**
Initial activities focused on engaging key financial stakeholders, including institutional investors, public authorities, financial intermediaries, and business representative organisations. Bilateral meetings and technical exchanges enabled the definition of the financial model and its validation with potential investors. This phase also included the completion of the fundraising process, with investors confirming their interest and providing indicative commitments. Continuous engagement was maintained to support both the structuring and implementation phases.

**March 2024 - July 2025. Technical meetings for instrument design (completed)**
Dedicated technical meetings were organised with financial and institutional stakeholders to define the operational structure of the Basket Bond. These sessions supported the consolidation of the financial model, the identification of roles and responsibilities, and the preparation of the tender procedure for the selection of the arranger. This milestone was formally achieved with the approval of the tender procedure.

**Peer review and refinement (completed)**
Peer exchange and refinement of the activities are conducted through consultations with FI4INN partners, financial experts, and institutional stakeholders. These interactions ensure alignment with FI4INN strategic objectives and support the refinement of the pilot structure, ensuring its robustness, replicability, and consistency with European best practices.

**Pilot documentation and knowledge transfer (completed)**
All pilot phases, methodologies, and results have been documented to support knowledge transfer within the FI4INN project. This ensures the replicability of the model and contributes to the development of policy recommendations and financial instrument design guidelines at regional and European level.

**Operational implementation and finalisation (post-project phase)**
The operational implementation phase includes the selection and appointment of the arranger, followed by the identification and selection of beneficiary companies, based on lead generation activities supported by project stakeholders and business associations. The issuance of the bonds and the subscription by investors are foreseen in this phase. This phase is expected to result in the full operationalisation of the Basket Bond instrument. These activities are foreseen beyond the project timeframe and are not part of the pilot action. Key milestones of the pilot refer exclusively to the design and structuring of the financial instrument and include:

- Stakeholder engagement and technical design phase completed.
  - Step 1: activation of negotiations with two or more potential arrangers
  - Step 2: identification of potential public investors, anchor investors, and/or risk mitigation.
  - Step 3: analysis of costs and remuneration mechanisms.
  - Step 4: identification private investors (investment funds, banks, etc.).
- Structuring phase and preparation of the instrument completed (within the project timeframe).
  - Step 5: selection of the arrangers.
  - Step 6: legal/formal setting up of the instrument (agreement, SPV, legal entity, etc)
- Subsequent milestones related to the operational implementation of the instrument, including selection of beneficiary SMEs, issuance of minibonds, portfolio creation and full operationalisation, are foreseen beyond the project timeframe and are not part of the pilot action.

# 7. Recommendations from Monitoring and Evaluation

The co-creation process is strongly influenced by both public and private investors; therefore, it is necessary to arrive at a solution that satisfies diverse, and in some cases even conflicting, interests. Monitoring activities and stakeholder consultations confirmed that the co-design process is not linear or one-directional: the development of the instrument required iterative adjustments based on investor requirements, regulatory constraints, and market conditions. It is therefore a mixed process, both design-driven and empirical.

Monitoring feedback highlighted that what works on paper does not always translate directly into practice, particularly regarding factors affecting investor and guarantor risk assessment, which do not always align with the needs of innovative SMEs. These include: portfolio diversification, fragmentation, expected returns (which translate into costs for companies), commitment quotas, guarantee mechanisms, characteristics of the target companies, and so on. As a result, the pilot structure was progressively refined to ensure both financial viability and accessibility for eligible SMEs.

During the design phase, guidance and inputs from the FI4INN project were considered and integrated with appropriate adjustments. Examples include the possibility of incorporating ESG-related elements, the difficulty of defining fully predictable outcomes for the policymaker, the impossibility of making the instrument fully inclusive, and other factors.

In addition, the pilot benefited from the Transnational Peer Review activities conducted within the FI4INN project. For the purpose of the Transnational Peer Review process, pilot actions were clustered into groups based on similarities in their design and implementation approach to facilitate targeted peer exchange. The Piemonte Basket Bond pilot was assigned to Group 2, together with TEC4I and GZS. This clustering enabled structured exchanges focused on common challenges and implementation conditions.

Peer review discussions addressed the adaptation of the co-design methodology to regional contexts, ESG integration, regulatory and financial sustainability constraints, and conditions for scalability and long-term implementation.

In the case of Piemonte, the exchanges confirmed the relevance of adopting a market-oriented, top-down approach driven by private investors, supported by targeted consultations with business associations. Feedback highlighted the importance of balancing financial attractiveness for SMEs with investor requirements, ensuring regulatory compatibility, and maintaining coordination between public and private stakeholders. ESG considerations were also discussed, highlighting that their integration largely depends on investor policies and market practices, while public actors contribute mainly through facilitation, coordination, and methodological guidance.

These insights supported the refinement of the pilot structure and reinforced its scalability, replicability, and long-term sustainability within the regional financial ecosystem.

**Transnational Peer Review**

The Piemonte Basket Bond pilot benefited from structured exchanges within the Transnational Peer Review Mechanism (TPRM), which supported the refinement and validation of the instrument throughout its development.

**Transnational exchanges on governance and blended finance**

- Comparative discussions on governance models and public–private cooperation frameworks.

- Reinforced the importance of clearly defining institutional roles and long-term anchoring of the instrument.

**ESG and impact alignment sessions**

- Exchange of approaches on ESG integration within financial instruments.
- Confirmed that, for a market-driven instrument such as the Basket Bond, ESG integration is mainly shaped by investor policies, while public actors play a facilitation and coordination role.

**Scalability and regulatory dialogue**

- Peer comparison of regulatory constraints and implementation challenges across regions.
- Strengthened the assessment of transferability and scalability conditions of the model.

**Subgroup peer review activities**

- Participation in a dedicated analytical subgroup composed of regional partners implementing comparable pilot typologies (including TEC4I and GZS), facilitated at transnational level.
- Enabled focused comparison of pilot architecture, governance structures, regulatory feasibility and institutional anchoring.
- Contributed to validating the robustness, maturity level and replicability of the Piemonte Basket Bond prior to the final validation phase.

The TPRM did not substantially alter the strategic direction of the pilot, which remains investor-led and market-oriented. However, it enhanced methodological clarity, reinforced ESG and monitoring alignment, and confirmed the pilot's positioning as a jointly developed and transferable solution within the FI4INN framework.

# 8. Dissemination and Communication

The initiative was officially presented to the wider audience on 24 February 2026 through the dissemination event “Capital for Innovation and Growth – The new Basket Bond Piemonte model and the FI4INN project,” held at the Regione Piemonte headquarters.

Institutional opening remarks were delivered by high-level regional policy makers. The Director General of Finpiemonte presented the Basket Bond model and its integration within the FI4INN pilot framework. A representative from Mediocredito Centrale illustrated the contribution of national guarantee schemes, in its role as public guarantor supporting the risk mitigation and financial sustainability of the instrument. ADB Corporate Advisory, acting as arranger, and Sinloc Investimenti SGR, as institutional investor and potential investment manager, presented the technical structuring and operational functioning of the Basket Bond. This ensured that the operational logic, financial structure, and implementation pathway of the instrument were presented directly by the key actors involved in its execution.

In addition, on 26 February 2026, a dedicated technical session was organised within the Torino Finance Committee, a regional platform bringing together key actors of the financial and economic ecosystem, including major banking institutions, financial intermediaries, business associations, regional public financial bodies, professional orders, universities, innovation hubs, and business support organisations. The objective of this session was to raise awareness among financial ecosystem stakeholders about the Basket Bond model and, more broadly, to disseminate the results and strategic insights emerging from the FI4INN project. This activity plays a crucial role in facilitating investor engagement, strengthening market readiness, and supporting the identification of potential beneficiary companies.

Dissemination activities are further supported through Finpiemonte’s institutional website, newsletters, and social media channels.

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# Pilot Action Report GZS

Version 2

11/2023

| Work package | WP 2 |
|---|---|
| Task | A2.3 |
| Due date | 16/02/2026 |
| Submission date | 18/02/2026 |
| Document lead | Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia |
| Version | 0.1 |
| Authors | Katja Bučan |

## Disclaimer

# A. TABLE OF CONTENTS

# 1. Introduction

The purpose of this Pilot Action Plan was to present the development and refinement of *RDI Next Slovenia*, a proposed financial instrument aimed to improve the national support mechanism for research, development, and innovation (RDI), particularly in the TRL 3–6 phase.

Within the framework of the FI4INN project, this pilot addressed a critical structural gap in Slovenia's innovation ecosystem – the limited accessibility, flexibility, and coordination of existing financial instruments supporting the transition from research to market. The action plan contributed to financial innovation by introducing a modular, blended finance model integrating grants, repayable support, and ESG-based advisory services.

By fostering multi-stakeholder cooperation and aligning public and private financing mechanisms, the pilot supported regional competitiveness, strengthens SME participation in innovation activities, and promoted sustainable and responsible investment practices.

## 1.1. Territorial Action Plan

The pilot is implemented at the **national level in Slovenia**, addressing the entire RDI ecosystem.

Slovenia had a well-developed research base, strong public research organizations, and a growing number of innovative SMEs and start-ups. However, challenges remained in translating research results into commercial innovation, particularly in mid-TRL stages. Key stakeholders include:

- Ministry of the Economy, Tourism and Sport
- Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation
- Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS)
- Regional development agencies
- Companies and research institutions
- Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia (CCIS)

The Slovenian economy was characterized by a strong industrial tradition, increasing digital transformation efforts, and a growing emphasis on green transition and ESG compliance. The pilot responded to these structural characteristics by proposing a financial instrument tailored to national needs while maintaining European alignment.

# 2. Strategic Alignment

## 2.1. Alignment with Project Objectives

The Slovenian pilot *RDI Next Slovenia* was fully aligned with the overarching objectives of the FI4INN project. It contributes to the project goals in the following ways:

- **Fostering financial innovation:** By proposing a modular, blended finance instrument that combined grants, repayable support, and advisory services, moving beyond traditional grant-based schemes.
- **Supporting SMEs and start-ups:** By simplifying access conditions, reducing administrative burdens, and introducing tailored entry points adapted to different TRL stages.
- **Promoting ESG compliance:** Through the integration of structured ESG self-assessment tools and mentoring mechanisms, ensuring that innovation financing contributes to environmental, social, and governance standards.
- **Strengthening multi-level governance:** By improving coordination between ministries, implementing agencies, and business stakeholders.
- **Encouraging transnational learning:** By developing a transferable model that can be adapted and replicated in other Central European regions.

Overall, the pilot supported FI4INN's ambition to modernize financial instruments and make them more responsive to innovation ecosystems.

## 2.2. Reference to Strategic Project Documents

The pilot designed and implementation were fully aligned with the FI4INN strategic framework and guidance documents. In particular, the following documents were used as methodological references:

- **Report on Piloting Scope, Approach, and Transnational Peer Review Mechanism**
- **FI4INN Pilot Tool Table**
- **FI4INN Canvas methodology**
- **Monitoring and Quality Framework**

These tools structured the pilot process by guiding stakeholder engagement, defining target groups and value propositions, and mapping systemic gaps in the existing TRL 3–6 instrument. The Canvas methodology supported the design of the modular blended finance model, while monitoring guidelines ensured measurable objectives and peer-review integration throughout the pilot implementation.

# 3. Territorial Analysis

## 3.1. Current State Assessment

Slovenia had a relatively well-developed research and innovation ecosystem, supported by public RDI funding schemes, Smart Specialization Strategy (S5) priorities, and a strong network of research institutions and

technology-oriented SMEs. The main national instrument targeting mid-stage innovation is the TRL 3–6 grant scheme, funded through ERDF and implemented by Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS).

While the system supports collaboration between research organizations and companies, stakeholder consultations conducted within the FI4INN pilot revealed structural limitations. The current instrument was predominantly grant-based, administratively demanding, and designed mainly for large consortia. Smaller companies and start-ups often struggle with complex eligibility requirements, long evaluation timelines, and rigid financial structures.

Consultations with ministries, implementing agencies, regional development actors, companies and other stakeholders identified key systemic challenges:

- Fragmented coordination between ministries and funding bodies
- Limited flexibility and slow procedures
- Insufficient integration of ESG criteria
- Weak involvement of private investors in mid-TRL stages
- Capacity gaps in designing and monitoring advanced financial instruments

At the same time, the ecosystem demonstrated strong assets:

- High-quality research base
- Active industry associations and coordination platforms
- Strong willingness among stakeholders to modernize instruments

This assessment confirmed the need for a more modular, blended, and flexible financial instrument capable of bridging the funding gap between research and market deployment.

## 3.2. Challenges and Opportunities

The pilot identified several structural challenges within Slovenia's RDI financing ecosystem, alongside important opportunities for reform and modernization.

**Key Challenges:**

- A persistent funding gap in TRL 3–6 ("valley of death"), where projects are too advanced for basic research funding but too risky for private investment.
- Limited engagement of private capital in early-stage innovation financing.
- Administrative complexity and lengthy procedures that discourage SMEs and start-ups.
- Insufficient integration of ESG principles into existing financial instruments.
- Shortage of skilled experts in the design, implementation, and monitoring of advanced financial instruments.
- Fragmented coordination between ministries and implementing bodies.

**Key Opportunities:**

- A strong national research base and established university–industry collaboration.
- Active innovation networks, including the Strategic Research and Innovation Partnerships (SRIPs).

- High stakeholder willingness for reform, confirmed through consultations and workshops.
- Alignment with EU priorities on green and digital transitions.
- Potential to expand blended finance mechanisms and attract private investors.

Together, these factors created a clear mandate for systemic modernization of RDI financing.

## 3.3. Vision

The vision of the pilot was to contribute to a more agile, coordinated, and future-oriented RDI financing framework in Slovenia. The intended outcome was a modular and blended financial instrument that ensures continuity from idea to market, reduces fragmentation, and strengthens alignment between research, innovation, and industrial policy.

The pilot aimed to create a system that better supports SMEs and start-ups, integrates ESG principles as a driver of competitiveness, and encouraged stronger cooperation between public authorities and private investors. In the longer term, the vision was to foster a more resilient, green, and internationally competitive innovation ecosystem, capable of adapting to rapid technological and market changes.

# 4. Pilot Action Objective

The objective of the pilot was to redesign the existing TRL 3–6 financial instrument by introducing a modular, blended finance model that improves accessibility for SMEs and start-ups, strengthens ESG integration, and enhances coordination between national stakeholders.

The pilot also aimed to simplify administrative procedures, shorten implementation cycles, and encourage greater involvement of private capital, while ensuring alignment with Slovenia's strategic innovation and sustainability priorities.

# 5. Methodology

The pilot was developed through a structured, participatory co-creation methodology aligned with the FI4INN framework and peer review mechanism. The approach combined stakeholder engagement and iterative design, based on continuous dialogue with ecosystem stakeholders and on insights collected through regular interactions.

1. **Stakeholder Engagement and Co-Creation**

Continuous dialogue was maintained with Slovenian ministries, Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS), regional development actors, companies, research organizations, and CCIS-coordinated bodies (Startup and Scale-up Section, Strategic Council for RDI at CCIS – SSRRI and Innovation Alliance – IN-ZA). These interactions addressed broader challenges within Slovenia's RDI financing ecosystem. Discussions highlighted recurring themes such as mid-TRL funding gaps, administrative complexity, fragmented governance, limited private capital involvement, and emerging ESG requirements.

Regular working meetings and consultations with stakeholders ensured that the pilot reflects real ecosystem needs. A national event and workshop *Future of Financial Instruments for Slovenian economy* (4 September 2025) gathered more than 40 stakeholders and served as a validation platform for discussing general systemic improvements of financial instruments in Slovenia.

Within the Slovenian pilot, the Local Support Group (LSG) was operated through existing national coordination and advisory platforms. Stakeholder engagement was conducted through structured consultations, ensuring efficiency and institutional continuity.

2. **Application of FI4INN Tools**

The FI4INN Canvas methodology was used to structure the pilot concept, defining target groups, value proposition, governance structure, financial logic, and expected impact. The Pilot Tool Table and guidance from D2.3.1 (Report on Piloting Scope) supported systematic gap identification and alignment with project objectives. Monitoring principles were aligned with the FI4INN quality framework and peer-review logic.

3. **Gap Analysis and Ecosystem Mapping**

A structured assessment of the existing TRL 3–6 instrument was conducted, identifying administrative bottlenecks, limited flexibility for SMEs, weak ESG integration, and insufficient leverage of private capital. This analytical phase formed the basis for the redesign proposal.

4. **Instrument Design and Structuring**

Based on these findings, a modular blended finance model was developed:

- **Module A (TRL 3-4):** Feasibility and concept validation.
- **Module B (TRL 4-6):** Development, prototyping, and demonstration.
- **Module C (TRL 7-9):** Market acceleration and scaling, including repayable elements and advisory support.

The modular structure was designed to improve flexibility and continuity from idea to market, while integrating proportionate ESG elements.

5. **Monitoring, Evaluation and Peer Review**

Feedback was embedded throughout the process. Stakeholder inputs were consolidated and reflected in the evolving pilot concept, while monitoring principles were aligned with the FI4INN quality framework to support future evaluation and potential policy integration.

The Slovenian pilot actively participated in the FI4INN Transnational Peer Review Mechanism (TPRM), contributing to structured workshops focusing on ESG integration, collaboration, scalability, and systemic impact. These exchanges provided external validation and constructive feedback on governance design, proportional ESG integration, and the balance between public policy objectives and private investment logic.

Peer discussions highlighted the importance of cross-ministerial coordination and institutional capacity for implementing advanced financial instruments. The insights gained through the peer review process were systematically incorporated into the refinement of the modular blended finance concept and its monitoring approach.

# 6. Planned Actions

The pilot action has been completed through structured stakeholder engagement, co-design activities, and iterative refinement of the proposed financial instrument model.

The implementation phase included consultations with ministries, ARIS, regional development actors, and representatives of the business and research community, ensuring alignment with institutional priorities and regulatory conditions.

The process resulted in the definition of a modular and blended finance model for TRL 3–6 innovation support, reflecting identified ecosystem needs and governance requirements.

Any further institutional adoption, operationalisation or integration into national programming frameworks falls outside the scope of the pilot action.

# 7. Recommendations from Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and peer review activities carried out within FI4INN confirmed the strategic relevance of the Slovenian pilot and provided valuable refinement points.

Key recommendations include:

- Strong validation of the modular and blended finance approach, which was seen as adaptable and aligned with SME needs.
- The need for clear cross-ministerial ownership and coordination, as financial instruments require shared responsibility beyond one institution.
- Further efforts to simplify administrative procedures and shorten decision timelines.
- Ensuring that ESG integration remains practical, supportive, and incentive-based, rather than adding reporting burden.
- Addressing capacity gaps within public administration, particularly in the design and monitoring of complex financial instruments.

Peer discussions emphasized that systemic reform required long-term political commitment and continuous stakeholder alignment.

# 8. Dissemination and Communication

Effective dissemination of the pilot results require a structured, multi-level communication approach targeting policymakers, funding bodies, companies, and innovation stakeholders. Ensuring transparency and continued dialogue is important to build institutional ownership and maintain the focus.

Pilot outcomes to be shared and discussed through:

- National workshops and stakeholder meetings organized by CCIS.
- Regular sessions of the Startup and Scale-up Section, Strategic Council for Research, Development and Innovation (SSRRI) and the Innovation Alliance (IN-ZA).
- FI4INN partner exchanges, peer review meetings, and transnational learning activities.
- Presentations at international conferences and innovation-related events.
- CCIS communication channels, including the official website, newsletters, and direct outreach to member companies.

Rather than a formal submission process, broader policy uptake would depend on continuous dialogue with relevant ministries and implementing authorities.

Sustained communication efforts and stakeholder engagement are therefore important for supporting potential integration of the proposal into future national RDI programming frameworks.

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# Pilot Action Report NIU

Version 2

11/2023

| Work package | WP 2 |
|---|---|
| Task | A.2.3. |
| Due date | 16/02/2026 |
| Submission date | 16/02/2026 |
| Document lead | NIÜ (Hungary) |
| Version | 3.0 |
| Authors | Antal Nikodémusz, Milán Töltősi, Zoltán Palotai, Zoltán Buzási, Katalin Papp |

## Disclaimer

# A. TABLE OF CONTENTS

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Purpose of the Action Plan

The pilot action within the FI4INN project focused on refining and enhancing support for startups through the Startup Factory program (SF), a key instrument in Hungary's innovation ecosystem managed by the Hungarian Innovation Agency (NIÜ). Building on the program's proven track record since 2015 and its multiple rounds - including the current cycle launched via the 2023 call - this pilot draws valuable insights from the implementation process to further optimize early-stage incubation.

The primary objective was to strengthen the program's effectiveness by addressing specific needs and challenges of newly established innovative firms, particularly through combined co-investment, capital provision, and knowledge transfer via selected incubators. By evaluating results from the active round (supporting 11 incubators, including specialized deep-tech and life sciences incubators), the pilot identifies improvements in eligibility, value-added services, and alignment with regional startup needs.

The pilot action aligned with FI4INN's broader aims to innovate support models and boost regional development. Through multi-stakeholder engagement - including incubators, investors, and startups, - it fostered stronger collaboration in the Hungarian ecosystem, gathers feedback from participants, and generates recommendations to refine the instrument and inform future schemes.

## 1.2. Territorial Action Plan

The pilot action operated at the national level in Hungary, with a primary focus on Budapest and the broader Central Hungarian region being the core of the country's startup and innovation ecosystem. Key stakeholders were the NIÜ as lead coordinator, selected technology incubators (including specialized ones in life sciences/Medtech and deep tech), universities/research institutions (e.g., HUN-REN network), hospitals/healthcare providers, investors (angels, VCs, co-investment funds), and innovative SMEs/startups.

The SF – since the launch of the it (2013)[1] - was at the core of our early stage startup supporting structure, bridging between **the startup and deep-tech client's segments,** having strong synergies with the elements of the comprehensive R&D&I program portfolio for the developing of the Hungarian startup ecosystem.

In the business environment, new regulations were empowering the startup ecosystem, including Europe's most favourable ESOP regulation (since 2024) Convertible note regulation (since 2023) Tax-free IP apport to businesses (since 2025). In addition, the NIÜ's educational programs (HSUP for students; Pathway to Business for PhD students) had the potential to reach approximately 20,000 entrepreneurial talents. Regarding funding: a key factor in the financing structure was the direct and indirect support or business R&D 2. Investment activity showed stagnation, while early-stage startups remained resilient. The cumulative investment amount of €54 million was almost identical to last year's performance, but far below the records set in previous years. Last year's most significant round was Colossyan's €22 million Series A investment (see Figure 1).

[1] Since 2013, 4 technology incubator programs have been launched.

[2] Which ranks third by the EIS component among EU Member States (EIS 2025)

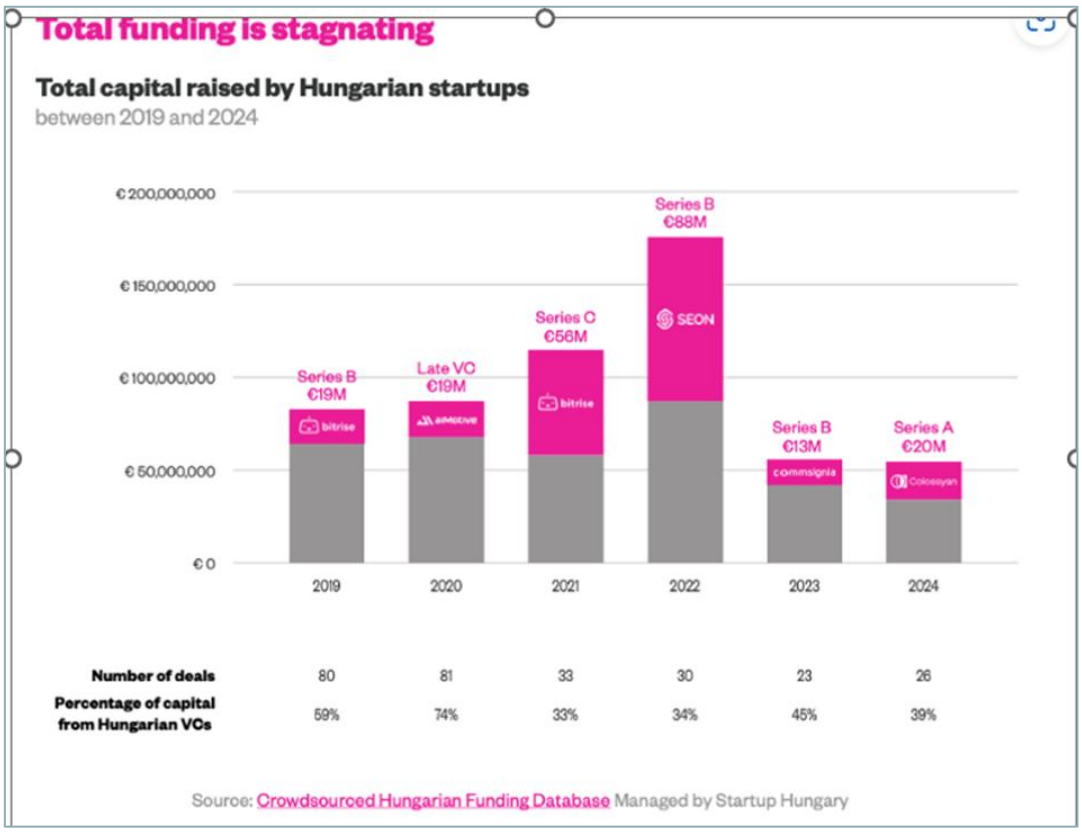


Figure 1. – Total funding in stagnating in Hungary (2019-2024)
Source: Crowdsourced Hungarian Funding Database Managed by Startup Hungary

At the same time the scale of the support instrument (Startup Factory) itself in the frame of this pilot action was not only focus on nationwide, but it also covered the investment ecosystem of the CEE region, addressing the unique innovation ecosystems of the region. The human resource and talent dimension was very impactful. By benchmarking against CEE countries in talent, funding, and early-stage start-up activity, and combining our strengths with the scaling-up investment of lead countries, we could significantly improve our deep-tech ecosystem as a way out of the middle-income trap. Encouraging a positive development was the emergence of international early-stage investors, such as Lakestar, Haystack, Frontline Ventures, and Emerge Education. This activity was another milestone on the path to an investment culture measured against international standards.

SF program was based on its funding concept as a public-private co-investment model. It was highly dependent on stakeholder engagement. Key stakeholders in the startup/deep tech ecosystem included:

- Innovative SMEs and Start-ups (incl. deep-tech and AI ventures). They were the primary beneficiaries of the SF program and cross-border connectivity, supporting them through Investment Readiness services, mentoring, matchmaking and exposure to investors, improving their visibility, pitch quality and access to cross-border capital and EU funding pathways.
- Regional Innovation Ecosystem Actors (innovation agencies, incubators, accelerators, clusters, DIHs, EDIHs), AI native startup studios. They acted as catalysts of deep-tech investment ecosystems, supporting startups and investors both locally and on a CEE scale. This pilot action engaged them through ecosystem mapping, peer-learning activities and shared tools, integrating them into the CEE Network to strengthen interregional cooperation and coordinated investment support.
- The NIÜ in cooperation with the National Research, Development and Innovation Office (NRDI), as a main funding entity, was the national body responsible for fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and research excellence in Hungary. NIÜ served as the primary catalyst in the innovation ecosystem, particularly for deep-tech startups, bridging government, academia, industry, and civil society to

ensure innovation policy aligns with societal and economic needs. NIÜ was the government's most important partner in developing the business environment for innovative SMEs, including the startup and deep-tech ecosystem.

- Investors (VCs, business angels, corporate venture units): were key enablers of startup scaling and cross-border investment flows but often face high information asymmetries and limited visibility of into deal flow in emerging/moderate ecosystems. This pilot action directly addressed these barriers using the FI4INN Virtual Knowledge Centre[3] by providing curated access to investment-ready startups, structured deal-flow exposure through open/demo days, investment forums, international conferences and practical guidance. Investors benefit from reduced market-entry frictions, trusted local intermediaries and improved understanding of regional conditions, incentives and pipelines
- Investor Networks and Associations (e.g. *Startup Hungary, Knowledge to Money*) they played a key role in scaling investment opportunities and analyzing the ecosystem and identifying trends[4]
- Research and Knowledge Organizations (universities, TTOs, applied research centers, TTCs): generated research-based innovation and spin-offs, which require access to investment ecosystems. Our pilot action tried to connect them to investors and intermediaries through the renewed SF, ecosystem mapping, best-practice exchange and investment-readiness pathways.
- Above the national level - additionally in the framework of the Project- FI4INN partners: they provided transnational knowledge-, and Peer Review feedback.

# 2. Strategic Alignment

## 2.1. Alignment with Project Objectives

The Hungarian pilot action aligned directly with the FI4INN project objectives of improving access to innovative financial instruments for SMEs and startups in Central Europe, enhancing multi-level stakeholder collaboration, and promoting sustainable, impact-driven financing models. By refining the SF program (including its Medtech specialization), the pilot addresses systemic challenges in Hungary's innovation ecosystem: the heavy reliance on grants, early-stage funding gaps, and limited scalability of support for innovative firms (pre-seed to growth phase). It combined co-investment, capital provision, incubation, acceleration, and knowledge transfer to bridge pre-seed/seed needs, drawing on government priorities such as simplified convertible notes, ESOP/SAFE clarification to transition toward repayable instruments like soft loans, venture capital, and equity tools, thereby increasing absorption capacity at later stages. The pilot leveraged multi-stakeholder co-design involving the NIÜ, incubators, hospitals, investors through workshops, interviews, and peer reviews to refine eligibility, services, and alignment with real needs. It builds on FI4INN deliverables and workshops by embedding impact considerations in the new Medtech-focused incubation, targeting healthcare quality, efficiency, patient outcomes, and operational sustainability, while encouraging broader ESG integration in future instrument design. Expected outcomes include refined instrument prototypes, scalability guidelines, and a monitoring framework with performance and ESG metrics, all of which contributed to diversified financial instrument portfolios and long-term ecosystem sustainability in the region. The Strategic Alignment Matrix can be seen in Figure 2.

| FI4INN Objective | Hungarian Pilot Contribution | Key Elements |
|---|---|---|
| Improve access to innovative FI for R&I | Refined Startup Factory (+ new Medtech call); | Co-investment, convertible notes, SAFE |

[3] Startup Factory is the Hungarian best practice presented by Virtual Knowledge Centre within the FI4INN

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Support SMEs/startups in early/growth stages | Targets pre-seed gaps; incubation | Stakeholder feedback |
| Foster multi-level stakeholder collaboration | NIÜ-led workshops, interviews, peer reviews | Co-design, capacity building |
| Promote ESG/sustainability in financing | Integrates ESG tools if possible; Medtech social/health impact | Impact metrics, long-term value |

Figure 2. Strategic Alignment Matrix

### 2.1.2 Reference to Strategic Project Documents

The implementation of NIÜ's Pilot Action relied on several key deliverables of the Project that had been previously reached/provided. Key inputs included initial analyses of start-up needs. Regarding to the co-design methodology, referencing tools such as the FI4INN Canvas or the Dynamic Power BI tool were used.

List of key documents:

- Analysis of SME satisfaction with the current opportunities,
- Recommendations to simplify FIs access,
- Virtual Knowledge Center for innovative support schemes,
- 3 transnational knowledge transfer workshops on innovative intervention models (report),
- Strategy for a more diversified portfolio of financing schemes in CE regions
- Guidelines to effective multi-level stakeholders' engagement in financial ecosystems
- Handbook embodying a framework for the pilots' development
- Report on Piloting scope, objectives, approach and Transnational Peer Review Mechanism

# 3. Territorial Analysis

## 3.1. Current State Assessment

Hungary's innovation and financial ecosystem operated primarily at the national level, focused on Budapest as the main hub. Key elements included the Hungarian Innovation Agency (NIÜ), a network of incubators/accelerators, universities (e.g., HUN-REN), hospitals for Medtech sourcing, investors (angels/VCs), and innovative SMEs/startups.

According to the European Innovation Scoreboard and StartupBlink Global Startup Ecosystem Index 2025 (Hungary ranks #51 globally, +8% growth[4]), the ecosystem showed strengths in private R&D expenditure, collaborative public-private publications, sectoral mobility, mid-high-tech exports, and ICT specialists' employment (competitive in CEE). The radar graph (Figure 3) illustrated relative advantages (e.g., Employed ICT specialists, R&D in the business sector) against EU averages, but highlighted weaknesses in knowledge valorisation and entrepreneurship: low trademark/design/PCT patent applications, limited innovative SME collaboration, and few business process innovators.

[4] Global Startup Ecosystem Index 2025. Hungary #51 globally, +8% growth. https://www.startupblink.com/startup-ecosystem/hungary

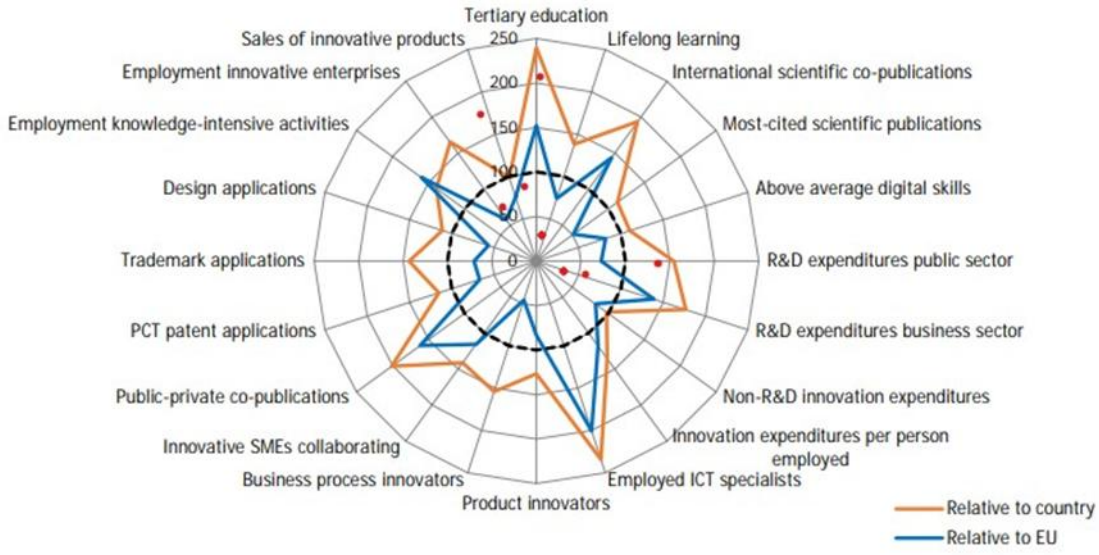


Figure 3. Hungary's innovation performance radar (relative to country orange / EU blue)

Source: European Innovation Scoreboard 2025.

Investment covered the full lifecycle (from pre-seed/incubation to M&A), but domestic funds (€5M–€400M) rely heavily on public support for early stages. Newly established bodies such as NIÜ enhanced dynamism by connecting stakeholders and providing services (IPR, market-entry support, R&D advice).

Stakeholder consultations (incubators, hospital managers, investors) emphasized untapped Medtech potential from hospitals (low patent/startup output vs. EU leaders), talent retention needs, and demand for diversified instruments.

This context tailored the FI4INN pilot: refining the Startup Factory with Medtech specialization, addressing early-stage gaps, leveraging strengths (ICT talent, government support), fostering collaboration, and promoting scalable financial tools to support ecosystem health and competitiveness.

## 3.2. Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges included few high-profile exits, no unicorns (unlike Estonia), lower valuations/transaction sizes (€50K–€1M typical), and underperformance in quality (traction, funding/exits) and business environment (regulatory quality, top universities) per StartupBlink. VC inflows lag Western hotspots; Budapest remained underdeveloped in scaleup density and combined funding since 2022 (Danube Tech Valley analyses). CEE scaleups had historically raised less per capita than their Baltic peers, though 2025 VC trends indicate uneven recovery, with defense tech potential.

However, major challenges in Hungary's innovation ecosystem included heavy reliance on non-repayable grants for SME innovation, limiting scalability and private co-investment; limited domestic VC depth (funds €5–400M, typical tickets €50K–€1M); international funds rarely present locally (deals managed from London/Berlin); cultural resistance among traditional SMEs to equity/VC models (ownership dilution fears, especially for uncertain outcomes); strict bank collateral/high interest rates; and critical funding gaps (€100K, €700K–1.5M[5]), where projects were too large for angels but too small/risky for VC. Few exits/no unicorns reduce investor confidence, while ESG awareness remained low among SMEs, hindering sustainable access to financing.

[5] HVCA Investment Monitoring Report H1 2025: average deal sizes (VC seed ~HUF 116M/€300K), persistent gaps below €100K and €700K–1.5M. https://www.hvca.hu/EN/statistics

Opportunities stemmed from government push to shift from grants to repayable/diversified instruments (e.g., Startup Factory refinements, Medtech calls, convertible notes/ESOP/SAFE clarifications, R&D tax incentives); state-subsidized loans often yield more effective projects than grants; growing early-stage momentum (H1 2025 funding rebound in finance/cyber/health[6]); untapped Medtech/ deep-tech from hospitals/universities; and FI4INN deliverables (BÉT ESG guide/workshops) enabling impact integration for healthcare efficiency/social outcomes.

Stakeholder consultations (incubators, hospitals, investors) confirmed these gaps and highlight demand for tailored co-investment/incubation to bridge them.

**SWOT Table**

| **STRENGTHS** | **WEAKNESSES** |
|---|---|
| ***Improving regulatory system***<br>• ease of incorporation and liquidation.<br>• favorable tax environment for both founders and investors (ESOP, SAFE, convertible note)<br>***Innovation governance, organizational and operational capacity***<br>• transparency and access to local and international start-up ecosystem with specific incubating and mentoring programs (integrated in the R&D&I Program strategy)<br>• network of contacts and cooperation with the stakeholders, both for the preparation and of the implementation phase /regular events (Demo/open Days)<br>• experience in innovation management and services (SF, XPAND) including business and entrepreneurship support and development, including startups/spin-offs | ***Strategic allocation of public financing due to the weak role of innovative financial instruments,***<br>• financial and operational constraints<br>• potentially higher financial demands of supported investments in terms of the average ticket size<br>***Low innovation capacity and fragmented VC market***<br>• lack of added value from the investor side thus success rate of startups is lagging (western/northern) European countries<br>• more than 90% of VCs only invested in companies more mature than seed or cover multiple phases.<br>• few early-stage private investors known as "business angels"<br>• most VC & some accelerators are generalist instead of specialization<br>***Administrative and procedural complexity***<br>• complexity of the project management system, process settings, length of management, system flexibility<br>• administrative demands on project participants and employees<br>• external subsidy system (including related topics – access to data, visualization, archiving)<br>***Capacity and expertise limitations*** |

[6] HVCA Investment Monitoring Report H1 2025; average deal sizes and gaps data.

| | |
|---|---|
| | • high professional demands on project employees<br>• lack of defined job positions at the operator on the part of the managing authority<br>• need to ensure long-term stable and predictable project funding<br>***Shortcomings in program design***<br>• too narrow a focus for the project (given the deep tech topic being addressed)<br>• introduction of completely new and untested procedures<br>• design of multi-stage and ongoing project publicity<br>• impossibility of long-term cooperation with startups on a KAM basis |
| **OPPORTUNITIES**<br>***Development of the deep-tech ecosystem***<br>• underfunded CEE countries show a great opportunity to fill in investment gaps and fund impactful fast growth startups<br>• great scientific research in great universities and research institutions<br>• methodology and mindset for entrepreneurs, corporations, and governments to improve the efficiency of early-stage startup building and increase the number of new ventures, spin-offs.<br>• novel elements and synergies with other programs: Medtech incubator start-up,<br>***Strengthening innovation capacity***<br>• access to educational opportunities for founders and key talents, cap-table training for startups.<br>• involving academic sector (HUN REN) and enforcement of the entrepreneurship by the universities (HSUP, Pathway to Business)<br>• technology transfer, IP management for the academic sector based on professional background (TTC, wide network of mentors and know-how) | **THREATS**<br>***Ecosystem constraints***<br>• investors rely on hands-on field due to lack of data and investment guide<br>• insufficient absorption capacity in the deep tech program for startups<br>• insufficient "entrepreneurial mindset" at universities / research institutions lacks spin-offs<br>• shortcomings in terms of deep-tech ecosystem components (business environment, small talent pool entrepreneurs, insufficient interest from corporate sector, high-tech R&D centers, insufficient public and VC funding<br>***Technological and business development risks***<br>• risks associated with the rapidly changing technology<br>• risk to the processes into stages and stage gates (sub optimal deal flow)<br>• risk to the processes into an integrated system<br>***Financial and governance risks***<br>• Stagnation in the market-based incentive system for building the startup ecosystem, |

| | |
|---|---|
| • opportunity to intensify cooperation with corporate R&D sector, including high-tech centers involving technology Platforms (Industry 4.0)<br>• support for research-based deep-tech projects by the university spinoffs within current trends and fields (ESG, cyber, AI, CSR, etc.) | • insufficient balance in the development of the deep tech and startup ecosystems<br>• Inadequate transition between pre-seed and market financing<br>***Risks associated with project implementation***<br>• Financial instability – budget cuts and lack of funding for startups<br>• conflict of interest and information asymmetry between the accredited incubators and the MA<br>• Administrative complexity – high bureaucratic burden may discourage startups. Slows down the valorization of innovation, prevents scalability, hinders scale ups<br>• Regulatory barriers – lack of legal support for innovative technologies (regulatory sandbox)<br>***Venture capital financing is culturally distant from the majority of Hungarian SMEs, who are reluctant to give up their business in favor of an outside investor, especially in exchange for financing an innovation project with a more elusive outcome.*** |

## 3.3. Vision

The vision for Hungary's innovation ecosystem was to transform the country into a Central European innovation powerhouse, breaking free from the middle-income trap through high-impact, technology-driven growth and the emergence of globally competitive startups and unicorns. This offensive strategy emphasizes deep-tech and market-driven innovations that fuel long-term economic renewal, high-value jobs, talent retention, and enhanced scientific-technological potential.

The NIÜ played a pivotal, catalytic role, aligning with SWOT-identified ecosystem needs by advancing key strategic tasks: (i) talent pipeline development (e.g., Hungarian Startup University Program reaching 20,000+ students); (ii) strategic public financing shift toward innovative instruments (e.g., "smart money" co-investment with mentorship); (iii) founder incentives and entrepreneurship culture; (iv) access to education/mentoring; (v) international connectivity, and integrated R&D&I programs. Complemented by reforms in incorporation/liquidation ease and founder/investor-friendly taxes.

The FI4INN pilot contributed by refining the Startup Factory including Medtech specialization to bridge early-stage gaps, mobilize private capital, embed ESG/impact considerations, and deliver scalable frameworks. Intended outcomes: diversified financing portfolios, stronger multi-stakeholder collaboration, increased startup success rates, and measurable progress toward a resilient, high-innovation economy by 2030.

# 4. Pilot Action Objective

The primary objective of the Hungarian pilot action was to refine and enhance the Startup Factory call for 2026 - including its specialized Medtech call for 2026 - as a flagship innovative financial instrument within the national innovation ecosystem. The work was based on experiences from the existing Startup Factory 2023 call and stakeholder feedbacks. By combining co-investment, capital provision, incubation, and knowledge transfer, the pilot bridges early-stage (pre-seed) funding gaps for innovative startups, particularly in deep-tech and healthcare.

This supports the John von Neumann Programme's broader vision of fostering market-driven R&I, boosting startup success rates, mobilizing private capital, and generating scalable frameworks for sustainable SME/startup financing in Hungary and Central Europe.

# 5. Methodology

The methodology for the Hungarian pilot action follows a co-creation and iterative design thinking approach, aligned with FI4INN's piloting framework (Report on Piloting Scope, Approach and Transnational Peer Review Mechanism). It emphasizes stakeholder engagement, peer learning, and continuous refinement to redesign and enhance the Startup Factory program - including Medtech specialization - as an innovative financial instrument for early-stage SMEs/startups.

**Key methodological steps**:

1. **Stakeholder mapping and prioritization** - Using the power/interest matrix from D2.1.1 Guidelines on Effective Multilevel Stakeholders' Engagement, identify and engage Local Stakeholder Groups (LSGs): NIÜ, incubators, hospitals (for medtech), investors (angels/VCs), universities and research institutes (HUN-REN), and startups. Conduct structured interviews, workshops, and surveys to gather real-world needs and feedback.
2. **Co-design using FI4INN Canvas** - Applying the Canvas as a structured tool for instrument redesign: populate sections with features (co-investment, incubation, knowledge transfer), objectives (bridge pre-seed/seed gaps), beneficiaries (deep-tech/Medtech startups), and operations. Integrate best practices from D1.2.1 Virtual Knowledge Center and D1.2.2 workshops.
3. **Iterative implementation and transnational peer review** - Run info-days and peer review sessions (with transnational partners) for feedback loops. Test prototypes (e.g., eligibility refinements, value-added services) during active cycles, incorporating insights to improve scalability/transferability.
4. **Monitoring and evaluation** - Adopt FI4INN's framework: define KPIs (funding disbursed, startups incubated ~50–70, follow-on investment attracted, job creation, ESG metrics). Use incubators' sectional reports (professional/financial milestones) and NIÜ oversight for quarterly reviews, ensuring alignment with project goals and iterative adjustments.

**Tool Integration Table**

| Methodological Step | Tools / FI4INN Resources Used | Purpose of Tool Use | Concrete Activities | Expected Outputs |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Stakeholder Mapping & Prioritization** | • Power/Interest Matrix (from *D2.1.1 Guidelines on Effective Multilevel Stakeholders' Engagement*)<br>• Structured interview templates<br>• Survey & workshop facilitation tools | • Identify and prioritize Local Stakeholder Groups (LSGs)<br>• Ensure engagement focuses on actors with highest influence and relevance | • Mapping NIÜ, incubators, hospitals, investors (angels/VCs), universities (HUNREN), startups<br>• Conduct interviews, workshops, surveys to capture needs and bottlenecks | • Validated stakeholder map<br>• Prioritized LSG list<br>• Needs assessment report |
| **2. CoDesign Using FI4INN Canvas** | • FI4INN Canvas (core redesign tool)<br>• D1.2.1 Virtual Knowledge Center input<br>• D1.2.2 Workshop materials | • Structure instrument redesign in a visual and comparable format<br>• Integrate good practices and lessons learned | • Populate Canvas blocks: features (coinvestment, incubation, knowledge transfer), objectives (bridge preseed/seed gap), beneficiaries (deep tech/medtech), operations | • Completed FI4INN Canvas for the redesigned instrument<br>• Consolidated co-design documentation<br>• Bestpractice integration notes |
| **3. Iterative Implementation & Transnational Peer Review** | • Peer review methodology<br>• Prototyping templates<br>• Infoday formats | • Validate the redesigned instrument via transnational exchange<br>• Run feedback loops during active implementation | •Organize infodays with national stakeholders<br>• Conduct peer review sessions with transnational partners<br>• Test prototypes (eligibility rules, value-added services) | • Peer review reports<br>• Prototype test results<br>• Improved scalability & transferability recommendations |
| **4. Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)** | • FI4INN Monitoring Framework<br>• Incubator sectional reporting formats<br>• NIÜ quarterly oversight protocols | • Track performance and ensure alignment with FI4INN objectives<br>• Enable adaptive management of the instrument | • Define KPIs: funding disbursed, 50-70 startups incubated, follow-on investment attracted, job creation, ESG metrics<br>• Quarterly reviews based on incubator and NIÜ reports | • KPI dashboard<br>• Quarterly M&E reports<br>• Recommendations for iterative adjustments |

# 6. Planned Actions

The main planned actions of the Hungarian pilot action within FI4INN focus on refining and enhancing the **SF program** (the new call planned for 2026 and the new Medtech focused call) as a key innovative financial instrument for early-stage startups, particularly in deep-tech and healthcare. The pilot builds on multi-stakeholder co-creation, iterative feedback, and alignment with national strategies (e.g., John von Neumann Programme and NIÜ ecosystem services), while drawing on FI4INN deliverables (e.g., Canvas, stakeholder guidelines, peer review mechanism). No impact measurement has been conducted within the

pilot timeframe; the focus remains on design refinement, process optimization, stakeholder alignment, and preparation for future implementation.

**Main actions, timelines, and milestones** (Q4 2024 – Q2 2026):

1. **Stakeholder engagement and data collection** (ongoing since Q4 2024 – Q2 2025): consultations, structured interviews, and workshops with key LSGs (technology incubators, investors, universities/HUN-REN, startups). For SF: multiple internal coordination meetings, alignment sessions with existing incubators (11 active in 2023–2025 cycle), and early 2025 reporting obligations fulfilled by incubators (professional/financial milestones). Several rounds of internal discussions and feedback loops were held to review performance, identify gaps (e.g., eligibility, value-added services, mentoring effectiveness), and prepare refinements. Much of the detailed planning material and ongoing adjustments remain in an internal/classified status due to ongoing fine-tuning and coordination. For Medtech: several dedicated stakeholder workshops (e.g., June 19, 2025 info day with 40 participants including 17 incubators/investors/hospital leaders)[1] and in-depth interviews with senior hospital managers on feasibility, bottlenecks, and suggestions.
2. **Co-design and workshops for instrument redesign** (Q1–Q3 2025): Apply design thinking and FI4INN Canvas to refine Startup Factory elements (co-investment matching, incubation 2–3 years, knowledge transfer) and adapt for Medtech (sectoral focus on digital health, medical devices, hospital processes, patient-centered solutions). Capacity-building sessions for mentors/incubators on innovative financing navigation, including synergies with other NIÜ programs (XPAND, Gartner services, IRL concept, Creative Accelerator deep-tech focus).
3. **Peer review sessions and iterative refinement** (Q2–Q4 2025): NIÜ info-days (primary peer review forum), bi-monthly where incubators/VCs/Angel investors present pipeline building methods, results, investment strategy, incubation methodology, success stories, and university relations. Transnational FI4INN peer reviews for feedback (e.g., KPIs, performance indicators like external funding attracted, sustainabilty). Incorporate cross-border insights to enhance scalability (e.g., interregional mentor programs like XPAND for market entry). Startup Factory Info Day and Demo Day (June 2025) inviting domestic and foreign investors, researchers, and stakeholders, linked to FI4INN Transnational Peer Review Mechanism.
4. **Finalization, documentation, and preparation for broader rollout** (Q4 2025 – Q2 2026): For Startup Factory: ongoing evaluation of current cycle and planning next round (design refinements based on 2025 feedback). Document refined instruments, scalability guidelines, and monitoring framework structure (incubators' sectional reports for professional/financial milestones, NIÜ involvement; no impact assessment within pilot). For the Medtech call: call finalization (Q4 2025, with international jury including experts from Portugal, Israel, Germany)[2]; publication (Q1 2026); application evaluation and grant agreements (Q2 2026); kick-off.

**Value propositions** (Medtech emphasis, building on Startup Factory experiences):

1. Untapping innovation source: Unlock hospital/clinical inventions for patenting/market entry, leveraging the experience gained from the critical mass ~8 million care days/year - and international models.
2. Optimizing "smart money" investments: Incubators pre-selected by international jury; getting investment support that should be supplement with app. 20% own resources, which was given to selected startups with agreed performance-base (investments, additional external capital raised, specified market results).
3. Integrating best practices: Adaptation of Israeli/Finnish/Dutch/Singapore models and lessons learnt from the ongoing HU Startup Factory program for the Medtech call.
4. Interregional embedding: Encourage entry to foreign market, cross-incubator/startup cooperation.

5. Boosting attractiveness: Simplified access, demand-oriented innovation procurement.
6. Supplementing public funds': Mobilize private resources (external investments during/after incubation), risk-sharing for high-potential projects.
7. Innovation potential enhancement: Strengthen Medtech/biotech maturity (HU lags EU leaders e.g., Spain 800+ startups/€559M received investment vs. HU 33/€37M)[4], improve healthcare quality/efficiency/patient outcomes.
8. Innovation pipeline: One of the undisguised goals of the grant scheme is to involve incubators in building a healthcare innovation ecosystem. The program already requires the submission of MOUs signed with at least two healthcare institutions, in which incubators can scout projects of inventors with innovative ideas.

| | Main Action | Key Milestone / Output |
|---|---|---|
| Q1–Q2 2025 | Stakeholder engagement & data collection | Workshops/info day (June 2025), internal alignments, incubator reports to NIÜ |
| Q2–Q3 2025 | Co-design workshops & Canvas application | Refined Startup Factory + Medtech prototypes, best practices integration |
| Q3–Q4 2025 | Peer review & iteration | Feedback incorporated, call finalization (Medtech) |
| Q1–Q2 2026 | Finalization & launch | Medtech call publication/evaluation/kick-off; Startup Factory next cycle planning |

# 7. Recommendations from Monitoring and Evaluation

The pilot focuses on iterative refinement of the Startup Factory program including Medtech specialization through co-creation and peer review processes, without conducting any impact assessment or outcome measurement during the FI4INN timeframe. Monitoring and evaluation follow FI4INN frameworks (D2.3.1) and national multi-stakeholder engagement strategies, emphasizing process quality, relevance, applicability, stakeholder alignment, and feedback loops for future improvements.

Key insights and recommendations from ongoing monitoring tasks (incubator sectional reports, NIÜ coordination) and transnational peer reviews (pilot action report review session):

- Strengthen university-incubator linkages: University relations remain the weakest point; recommend dedicated thematic exchanges and joint pipeline-building activities in future cycles.
- Refine eligibility and risk incentives for specialized calls: Feedback suggests clearer healthcare experience requirements for Medtech incubators and balanced incentives to support riskier, high-potential early-stage projects.
- Enhance pipeline diversity and co-investor focus: Incubators should prioritize outreach for co-investors (angels/VCs) and diversify application sources; expand success story sharing during info-days.
- Improve synergies and knowledge sharing: Leverage novel elements (IRL concept, Gartner services, XPAND opportunities, Creative Accelerator deep-tech portfolio) more systematically; plan Startup Factory Conference/Demo Day (H2 June 2025) to integrate transnational peer insights and promote cross-program collaboration.

- Keep FI4INN tools dynamic: Regular Canvas updates based on pilot feedback to address gaps, align with real needs, and expand applicability; promote among policymakers and business support organizations.

Besides the Startup Factory program, the following FI4INN pilot actions provided inspiration for Hungary's innovation financing, and have been examined in more details aiming at a possible transposition:

- Italy (FVG): the Regional Startup Guarantee Fund model which is an inspirering model for improving the access to finance.
- Italy (FINPIE): the basket bond type of financial instrument that is able to lower the risk of investors.

# 8. Dissemination and Communication

**Key dissemination activities and channels**:

- **Regional Event - Budapest** (June 2025): Key FI4INN deliverables (data, policymaker tools, international best practices) were presented, emphasizing improvements to startup/SME support mechanisms from policymakers' and designers' perspectives.
- **BÉT Meeting (Dissemination Event)** (October 2024)**:** The Startup Factory program and FI4INN pilot refinements were showcased at a dedicated meeting with the Budapest Stock Exchange (BÉT), focusing on ESG integration, innovative financing tools, and alignment with capital market opportunities for innovative startups/SMEs.
- **Ready4 Invest - Knowledge to Money Event** (February 2026)**:** The Startup Factory was presented as a flagship instrument, highlighting knowledge transfer, co-investment models, and pathways from early-stage ideas to market-ready funding, with emphasis on bridging knowledge and capital for deep-tech and medtech ventures.
- **Online Technical Session - Hungary** (September 2025): Centered on transferring innovation support expertise from mature to emerging ecosystems, highlighting FI4INN results and practical tools. The session gathered startups, founders, and venture capital representatives (approximately 9 out of 11 active Startup Factory-linked VCs participated), enabling discussions on early-stage finance needs, delegated investment models, co-syndicated rounds, and targeted specialization (including Medtech call).
- **Regional Event - Ostrava** (November 2025): Project outputs (datasets, interactive tools, foreign good practices) were showcased, with focus on strengthening support instruments for startups/SMEs. Discussions centered on evolving Czechia's flagship Technological Incubation programme.
- **International dissemination events**
  - Partner TECH4I (Italy, FVG region, Udine, November 2025): "Financing Innovation: From Finance to Impact" – Startup Factory presented with focus on startups and impact-oriented financing.
  - Partner GZS (Slovenia, Ljubljana, September 2025): "Future of Financial Instruments in Slovenia" – Startup Factory highlighted as a model for evolving financial support mechanisms.
- **Social Media:** Regular LinkedIn posts shared project progress, key highlights, and results.

- **Internal Dissemination:** Targeted awareness-raising among NIÜ staff enabled them to act as ambassadors. Incubator reports from 2025 (professional/financial milestones submitted to NIÜ) were used internally to inform ongoing refinements and knowledge sharing.
- **Ongoing Stakeholder Collaboration:** Project findings continue to be shared and applied through sustained stakeholder collaboration, supporting long-term ecosystem development.
- Based on the Memorandum of Understanding signed within the project framework, national and international discussions were ensured, contributing to the continuity of the results of the FI4INN project.

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# Pilot Action Report CzechInvest

Version 2

11/2023

| Work package | WP 2 |
|---|---|
| Task | A2.3 |
| Due date | 27/02/2026 |
| Submission date | 27/02/2026 |
| Document lead | CzechInvest |
| Version | 1.2 |
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## Disclaimer

# A. TABLE OF CONTENTS

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Purpose of the Action Plan

The pilot action within the FI4INN project was designed to refine and enhance the support provided to startups through the Technology Incubation (TI) programme. The first round of the programme offered valuable insights into the specific needs and challenges faced by early-stage businesses in the region. Building on this foundation, the second round contributed to the development of a more effective and tailored incubation programme.

The primary objective of the pilot action was to bridge the gap between the programme's offerings and the actual requirements of startups. Through a thorough analysis of the first round, the organisers identified areas for improvement and developed a more targeted approach. In addition, the pilot action supported stronger collaboration within the regional innovation ecosystem by actively engaging key stakeholders, such as investors, mentors and corporate partners, contributing to a more supportive environment for startups.

The pilot action aligned with the broader goals of the FI4INN project, contributing to the improvement of support instrument models and regional development. Through cooperation with key stakeholders and active involvement of startups in feedback collection and co-creation processes, the pilot contributed to strengthening the development of local projects and their impact on the regional economy.

The data, feedback from innovative companies/startups and resulting recommendations contributed to improving existing tools at CzechInvest and provided a basis for the preparation of future strategies and programmes within the institution and beyond.

## 1.2. Territorial Action Plan

The Technology Incubation programme is tailored to the strategic goals of the Czech Republic in the field of innovation development and support. In addition to the scale of the support instrument itself, the pilot action focused on its nationwide scope. The Technology Incubation programme contributes to stimulating the startup ecosystem in the Czech Republic, where domestic investors tend to invest at later stages of product or service development. Although most Czech startups are concentrated in Prague, Brno and a few other large cities, the pilot action contributed to stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship in less developed regions.
The Czech Republic offers a favourable environment for startups, characterized by a highly skilled workforce, a strong R&D base and a growing number of innovation infrastructures.

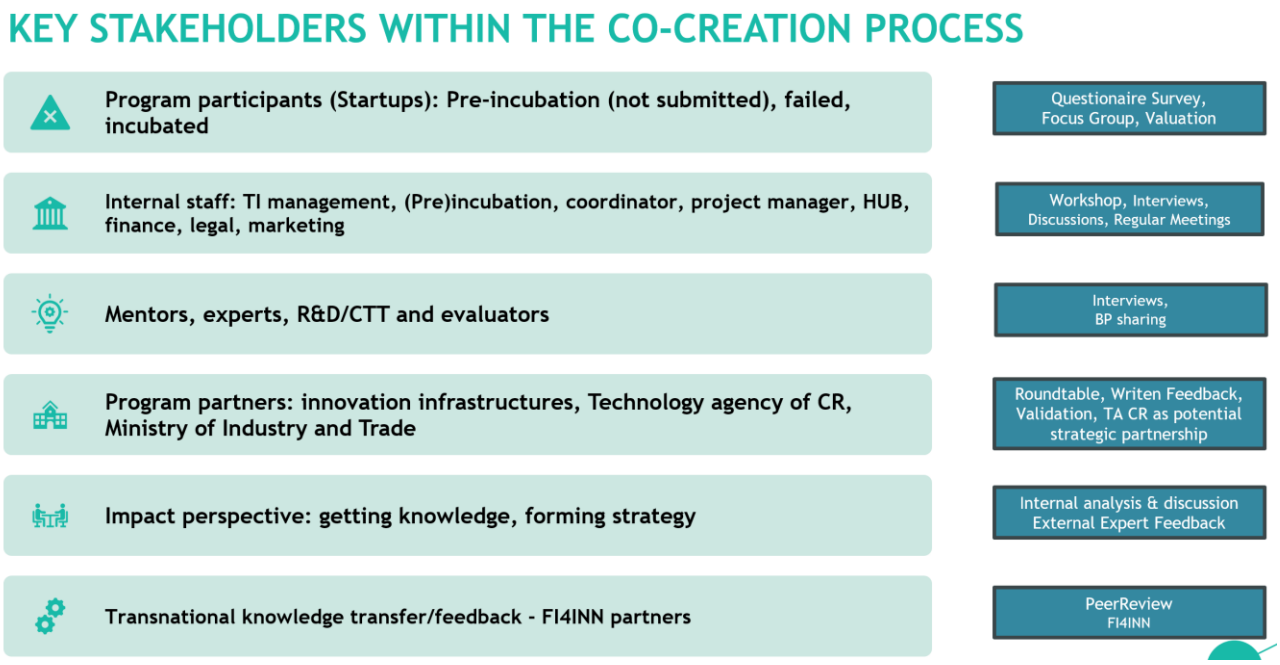
Key stakeholders in the regional innovation ecosystem include:

- **Regional Innovation Infrastructures:** These centres play a crucial role in supporting startups by providing access to resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities. They often collaborate with universities and local governments to foster innovation. (e.g. South Moravian Innovation Centre, Moravian-Silesian Innovation Centre, Business and Innovation Centre Pilsen, Central Bohemian Innovation Centre etc.)
- **Universities & R&D Centres:** Czech universities are home to world-class research facilities and produce a steady stream of talented graduates. Many universities have established technology transfer offices to facilitate the commercialization of research findings. (e.g. Charles University,

Czech Technical University in Prague, Masaryk University Brno, VŠB – Technical University of Ostrava etc.)

- **Innovative Companies:** A growing number of established companies in the Czech Republic are investing in R&D and innovation activities. This opens a great opportunity for the potential for cooperation with startups through corporate venture capital funds, partnerships or mentorship programs. (e.g. startups, innovative SMEs, proactive corporates…)
- **VC Funds & Business Angels:** VC funds provide capital and expertise to help more advanced startups to develop and grow. Business Angels, even if in limited numbers, typically invest earlier and offer hands-on mentoring and networks. (e.g. Lighthouse Ventures, Presto Ventures, Credo Ventures, Rockaway Capital etc.)
- **Associations:** Industry associations and professional unions support innovative SMEs and startups by creating a collaborative community, representing their interests, and providing access to shared resources and expertise. They help shape regulations, connect ecosystem players, and amplify the visibility of emerging innovators. **(**Czech Startup Association, Confederation of Industry and Transport etc.)
- **Government Agencies:** At the national level, the Ministry of Industry and Trade, along with sectoral government agencies, provides funding and support for innovation and entrepreneurship. These institutions often collaborate with regional authorities to implement regional development strategies. (e.g. the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Technology agency of the Czech Republic – TA CR, the National Development Bank - NDB, R&D&I Council etc.)

**Key stakeholders of the co-creation process**




By targeting also regions outside of the major urban centres, the Technology Incubation program helped to address regional disparities in innovation and entrepreneurship. This is achieved by:

- **Decentralizing Support:** The program provided targeted support to startups located regions, helping to create a more equitable innovation ecosystem.

- **Fostering Regional Collaboration:** By encouraging collaboration between regional stakeholders, the program aims to strengthen regional innovation ecosystems and helps slow down the brain drain of regions.
- **Leveraging Regional Strengths:** The program identifies and leverages the unique strengths and resources of each regional ecosystem, helping to create a more diversified and resilient economy.
-

# 2. Strategic Alignment

## 2.1. Alignment with Project Objectives

The pilot action focusing on enhancement of the Technology Incubation program iwas aligned with the major goals of the FI4INN project. By directly targeting the needs of innovative startups, this initiative contributes significantly to the broader objectives of fostering innovation, supporting entrepreneurship in the form of SMEs and ease the access to finance for such companies. ESG compliance and impact approach also becomes an important issue within its second round.

The Technology Incubation program acted as a catalyst for innovation by:

- Continuous improvement of the support ecosystem (cooperation with local infrastructure, mentors, experts)
- Bridging the gap between R&D and market: Matching of startups with potential investors, partners, and customers
- Promoting a culture of innovation by encouraging startups to explore new ideas and to transform them into businesses

By specifically focusing on newly founded innovative SMEs, the program addresses the unique challenges faced by these businesses:

- Access to resources: Direct financial support
- Business development: Cooperation with experts within different fields of business development services

While the program may not have a specific ESG focus, it indirectly contributes to ESG compliance by:

- Supporting Eco-Tech projects as one of the 3 most represented sectors by the incubated startup projects
- Considering implementation of ESG/impact frameworks in indirect support of the program (mentoring, expert services)

Although Technology Incubation represented an innovative support model, in some respects its level of innovation remained limited. The pilot identified areas for further improvement and, considering the target group (startups) and thematic focus (development, innovation, technology), the data collected and resulting recommendations contributed to upgrading existing instruments on the Czech market and informing the design of new support instruments.

## 2.2. Reference to Strategic Project Documents

The implementation of CzechInvest's Pilot Action drew on a number of previous deliverables that were created as part of the project. Key inputs included initial analyses of start-up needs in the context of the current state of support and follow-up recommendations, examples of innovative tools and functioning ecosystems abroad, expert opinions, a guidebook for working with stakeholders, and a framework for implementing pilot actions, including tools such as the Financial Instrument Canvas.

List of key documents:

- Analysis of SME satisfaction with the current opportunities,
- Recommendations to simplify FIs access,
- Virtual knowledge centre for innovative support schemes,
- 3 transnational knowledge transfer workshops on innovative intervention models (report),
- Strategy for a more diversified portfolio of financing schemes in CE regions
- Guidelines to effective multi-level stakeholders' engagement in financial ecosystems
- Handbook embodying a framework for the pilots' development
- Report on Piloting scope, objectives, approach and Transnational Peer Review Mechanism.

# 3. Territorial Analysis

## 3.1. Current State Assessment

The Czech Republic is a medium-sized country whose GDP is largely dependent on industry. Yet most companies do not offer complete solutions, but rather focus on Tier 1 and 2 deliveries. This unfortunately results in a relatively low level of R&D in Czech companies, which often serve as suppliers to parent companies, mostly from Germany. Support for start-ups and innovation development is the responsibility of several institutions, namely, the CzechInvest agency, the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic, regional development agencies and start-up incubators and accelerators, technology transfer centres, science and technology parks, etc. Unfortunately, at present the level of newly established companies with innovative products is concentrated only in Prague and to a lesser extent in Brno, despite wide regional networks. Other Czech regions are lagging compared to these cities. With long-term low unemployment and relatively broad employee benefits, most companies are reluctant to take the risk of their own business and the entrepreneurial spirit of the 1990s is rather a thing of the past. One of the factors may be the relatively excessive bureaucracy, not only at national but also at European level, which does not contribute to national efforts to support small entrepreneurs, start-ups and spin-offs.

## 3.2. Challenges and Opportunities

The region faces significant challenges related to administrative complexity, limited capacity of specialized experts, and the absence of stable long-term funding mechanisms for deep-tech startups beyond early-stage support. Additional barriers include weak commercialization culture in academia, regulatory constraints for emerging technologies, and insufficient absorption capacity for high-risk innovation projects. At the same time, strong innovation networks, experienced intermediary institutions, growing interest in tech entrepreneurship, and the opportunity to establish new, more agile support mechanisms create favourable

conditions to strengthen the deep-tech ecosystem and position the region as a leader in advanced innovation support.

## 3.3. Vision

The vision is to build a more accessible, flexible, and innovation-driven financial and support ecosystem that enables deep-tech startups to move efficiently from proof-of-concept toward market readiness. Through the pilot, the region aims to introduce simplified processes, stronger academia–industry collaboration, and smarter use of digital and AI tools, resulting in higher-quality startups, improved investment readiness, and stronger integration of innovation into the regional economy.

Current state data visualization of the Technology Incubation 1.0 programme is available **HERE**.

***SWOT Analysis***

| | |
|---|---|
| ***Strengths***<br>***Organizational and operational experience***<br>*Experience in project management and implementation (TI 1.0, ESA BIC, CA, CD, CM, internationalization)*<br>*Experience in business and entrepreneurship support and development, including startups/spin-offs*<br>***Network of contacts and cooperation***<br>*Functioning cooperation with innovation infrastructure, research organizations, and other stakeholders*<br>*Regional and foreign representation and knowledge of individual regions and territories*<br>*Active role as an intermediary between the private and public sectors*<br>***Professional background***<br>*A relatively robust ecosystem (internal and external team)*<br>*A wide network of contacts and know-how, networking, and cooperating entities*<br>*The expertise of current positions accelerates support for startups (this is not a subsidy scheme)* | ***Weaknesses***<br>***Administrative and procedural complexity***<br>*Complexity of the project management system, process settings, length of management, system flexibility*<br>*Administrative demands on project participants and employees*<br>*External subsidy system (including related topics - access to data, visualization, archiving)*<br>***Capacity and expertise limitations***<br>*High professional demands on project employees*<br>*Lack of defined job positions at the operator on the part of the managing authority*<br>***Financial and operational constraints***<br>*Potentially higher financial demands of supported projects (than the de minimis regime)*<br>*Need to ensure long-term stable and predictable project funding*<br>***Shortcomings in program design***<br>*Too narrow a focus for the project (given the deep tech topic being addressed)*<br>*Introduction of completely new and untested procedures*<br>*Design of multi-stage and ongoing project publicity• Impossibility of long-term cooperation with startups on a KAM basis* |
| ***Opportunities***<br>***Development of the startup ecosystem***<br>*Support for the technology and business development of new and emerging companies through incubation*<br>*Increased interest in establishing innovative companies in the Czech Republic (incoming, talent attraction)*<br>*Absence of a similar mechanism in the Czech Republic (deep tech for startups - in the POC+ phase)*<br>***Strengthening cooperation***<br>*Opportunity to intensify cooperation with academia, the private sector, and other entities*<br>*Development of national innovation hubs in cooperation with stakeholders*<br>*Support for deeptech projects within current trends and fields (ESG, cyber, AI, CSR, etc.)*<br>***Setting new processes and standards***<br>*Opportunity to set up a completely new system (acceleration, simplification)*<br>*Integration of AI on topics of presentation of outputs and results and streamlining of internal processes*<br>*Opportunity to integrate program improvements (scope of eligible expenses, financing, conditions)* | ***Threats***<br>***Ecosystem constraints***<br>*Insufficient absorption capacity in the deep tech program for startups*<br>*Inadequate legislation for emerging markets and legislative restrictions for providers*<br>*Insufficient "entrepreneurial mindset" at universities / lack of spin-offs*<br>***Financial and personnel risks***<br>*Growing competition from the private sector in recruiting qualified experts*<br>*Lack of partners with appropriate references and experience*<br>***Risks associated with participants and partners***<br>*Low quality of submitted projects*<br>*Lack of interest from partners, participants, experts, and other potential stakeholders*<br>*Conflict of interest (participants, mentors, etc.)*<br>***4. Risks associated with project implementation***<br>*Financial instability - budget cuts and lack of funding for startups*<br>*Low quality of submitted startups - possible involvement of less promising projects*<br>*Administrative complexity - high bureaucratic burden may discourage startups*<br>*Lack of investors and partners - weak links with the market and commercial sphere*<br>*Regulatory barriers - lack of legal support for innovative technologies* |

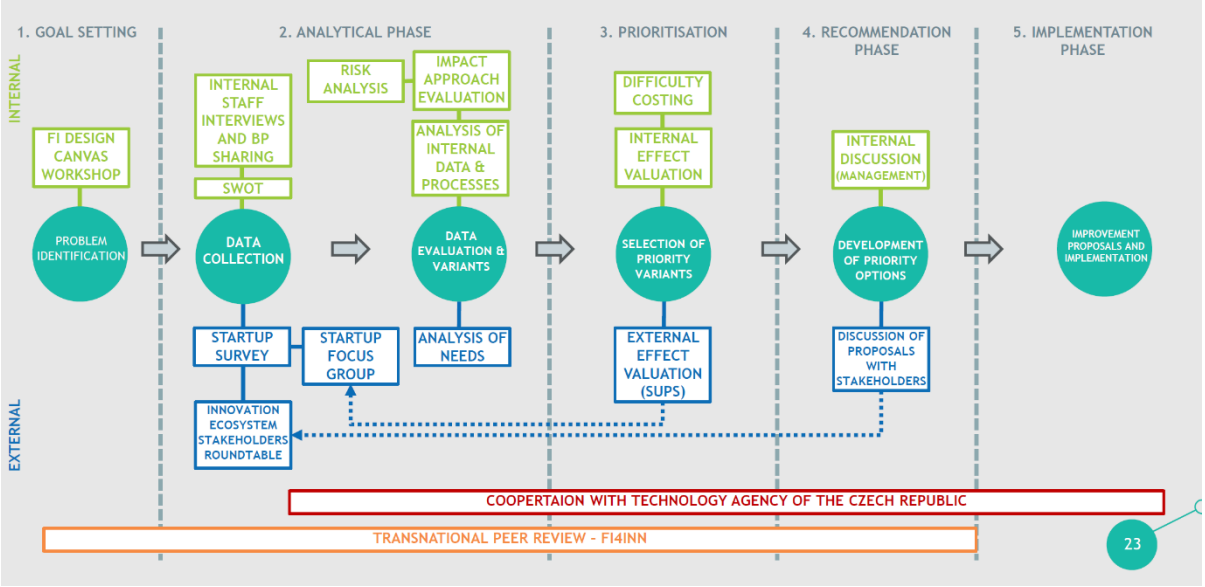
# 4. Pilot Action Objective

The pilot aimed to enhance the efficiency and quality of support for innovative startups by co-creating financial instruments and services with active stakeholder involvement. The focus was on improving the Technology Incubation programme, the largest Czech publicly funded startup incubation programme, and informing the design of its successor. The overall objective was to adapt existing instruments to the needs of startups and to strengthen regional cooperation within the innovation ecosystem.

# 5. Methodology

The co-creation process was structured around a scheme that emphasized the involvement of key stakeholders, including startups, regional innovation centres, internal staff and external experts. A critical component of this process was the systematic use of both internal and external data to inform decision-making. The process consisted of five main phases: (1) Goal Setting, where objectives were defined; (2) Analytical Phase, involving data collection, evaluation and risk analysis; (3) Prioritisation, including cost-benefit assessment using methods such as Pareto analysis; (4) Recommendation Phase, focused on developing priority options and discussing proposals with stakeholders; and (5) Implementation, referring to the translation of recommendations into actionable improvements. Subsequent implementation falls outside the pilot scope. This structured approach ensured that stakeholder input and data-driven insights were integrated into the design and refinement of effective support measures.

**Pilot Action Scheme / Co-Creation Process**

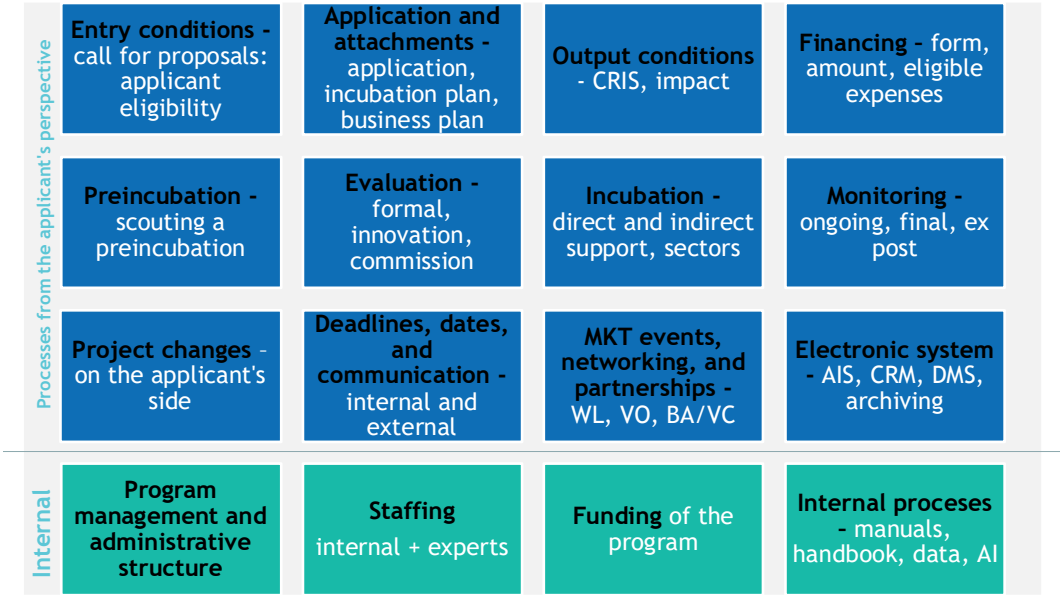



[1] During the goal setting phase, the FI4INN canvas was used as a tool for defining the parameters of the tool. Detailed elaboration is available in the attached Excel file.

**Distribution matrix**

The distribution matrix was used as a structured categorisation framework for collecting and organising inputs within the Technology Incubation programme. It divided all suggestions into external (applicants' processes) and internal (programme management) areas, ensuring that every aspect of the programme — from eligibility, evaluation and incubation support to staffing, funding and internal workflows — was systematically captured. For each category, a dedicated issue card (catalogue) was prepared, serving as the basis for further analysis, prioritisation and improvement of the programme's processes.

***Distribution matrix***




**Cost-Benefit Analysis / Pareto traffic lights**

The Pareto Traffic Lights method was used to systematically evaluate suggestions from various stakeholders through a simple and understandable cost-benefit analysis. Individual proposals were classified according to their expected benefit to the organisation and the applicant, as well as the estimated complexity of implementation (time, capacity or financial costs). Each criterion was assigned a score from 0 to 3. The result was a visualisation in the form of a "traffic light" – a Pareto chart dividing the suggestions into four quadrants:

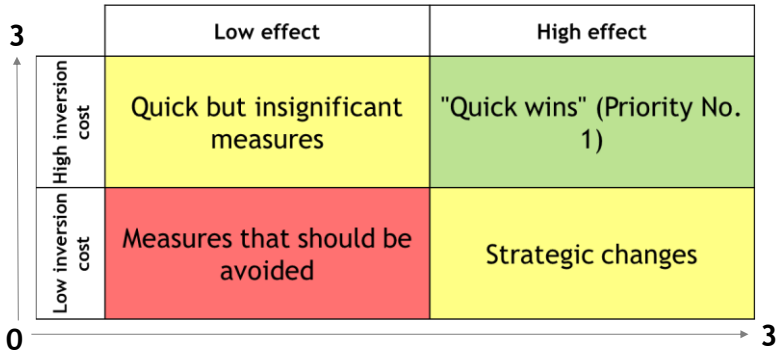
- Quick wins (high effect, low cost),
- Strategic changes (high effect, high costs),
- Quick but insignificant measures (low effect, low costs),
- Measures that should be avoided (low effect, high costs).

*NOTE: The threshold values between individual segments were also important, for which separate categories were created within the evaluation of the analysis results.*

This approach enabled for transparent prioritization and decision-making on which suggestions should be prioritsed for implementation.

*Pareto Traffic Lights / Calculation Methodology*

| Valuation | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cost (time for CI) / MH/D | 0,1-0,99MD | 1-4,99MD | 5MD-19,99MD | 20MD+ |
| Benefit of the organization | zero or negative benefit (0) | Not very significant benefit (+) | Noticeable benefit (++) | Significant benefit (+++) |
| Benefit for applicants | zero or negative benefit (0) | Not very significant benefit (+) | Noticeable benefit (++) | Significant benefit (+++) |




**Example of a card with categorized suggestions**

This tool provided a structured categorisation of all proposed changes and suggestions within the "Application Conditions" area of the Technology Incubation programme. It compared the existing setup with potential modifications and assigned each proposal a Pareto logic code, reflecting the estimated balance of benefits and costs for applicants and the programme provider. The matrix served as a systematic way to collect inputs, transparently evaluate the effectiveness of individual measures, and prioritise which adjustments should be further developed and assessed within the pilot scope.

## 1. APPLICATION CONDITIONS - CALL/COMPETITION: APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

| Current status (TI1.0) | Modification/addition variants (TI2.0)* | **Pareto logic |
|---|---|---|
| | **Legal entity with its registered off** | 1_A_0 |
| | NEW: Necessity to establish a legal entity by the date of issuance of thesubsidy contract | 1_A_1 |
| | NEW suggestion: Specifically address the participation of foreign companies | 1_A_2 |
| | | 1_B_0 |
| | NEW: 0-5 years | 1_B_1 |
| | NEW: 0-7 years | 1_B_2 |
| | | 1_C_0 |
| (balance sheet total, turnover, number of employees, interconnectedness) | NEW: change of the size of company (e. g. small midcap/UNI spinoff | 1_C_1 |
| | | 1_C_2 |
| | | 1_D_0 |
| | – e | 1_D_1 |
| | | 1_E_0 |
| | | 1_E_1 |
| | | 1_E_2 |
| | | 1_F_0 |
| | | 1_F_1 |
| | | 1_F_2 |

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46

# 6. Planned Actions

Pilot Action Gantt

| Phase | 1/25 | 2/25 | 3/25 | 4/25 | 5/25 | 6/25 | 7/25 | 8/25 | 9/25 | 10/25 | 11/25 | 12/25 | 1/26 | 2/26 | 3/26 | 4/26+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Goal Setting | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Analytical phase | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Prioritisation phase | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Recommendation Phase | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Validation (Intermediate phase) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Implementation phase | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Post-project |

**Goal Setting:**

- Kick-off Workshop: Defined goals and priorities
- Meetings and discussions within the internal project team and key stakeholders

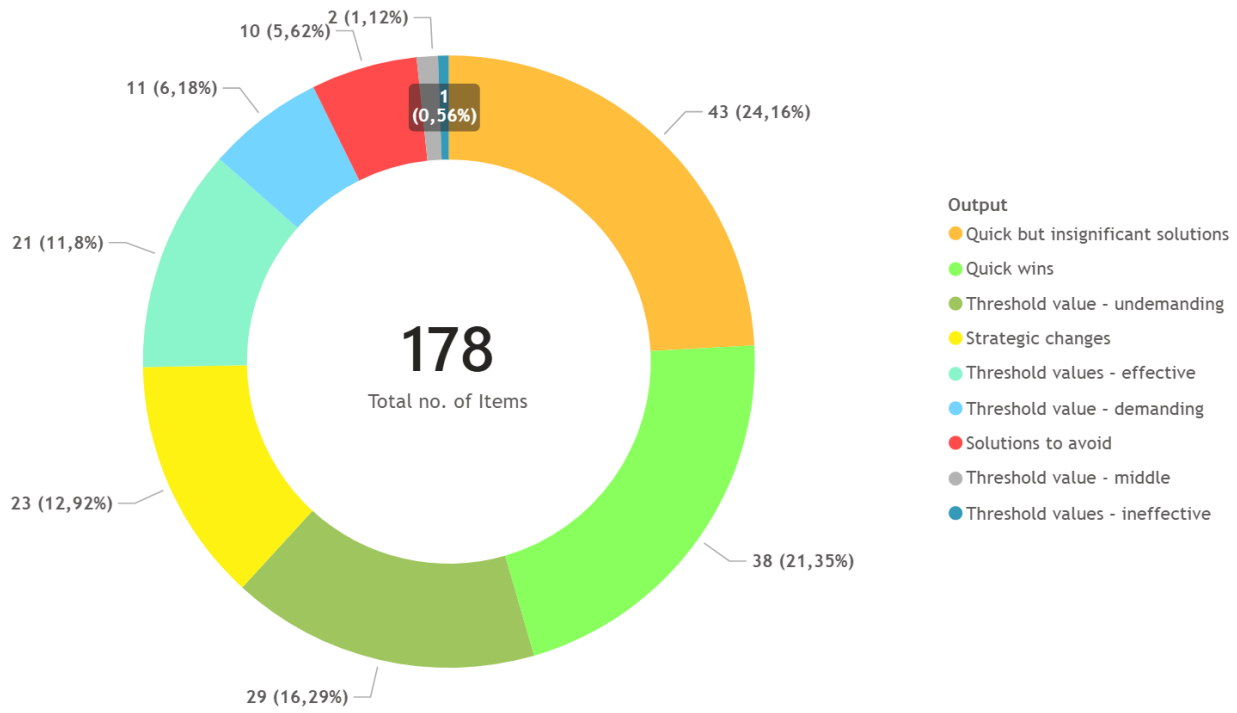
**Analytical Phase:**

- Processed **internal data** from 2,000+ project concepts
- Conducted a startup survey with 100+ responses
- Organized **focus group** with selected startups to discuss needs and satisfaction with current support.
- Held a **roundtable with innovation infrastructures**, collected written feedback, and conducted interviews with experts and CzechInvest staff.
- **Data Collection:** Gathered 130+ suggestions for improvements to be categorized as potential measures and assessing implementation complexity vs. potential positive effect (cost/benefit & Pareto logic). Another 40+ items represent so-called zero variants, i.e., maintaining the current status quo (with possibilities of minor corrections).

**Prioritisation Phase**

The main part of the prioritization phase was a cost-benefit analysis using Pareto logic. The main criteria were the simplicity of implementation of the solution (or its inverse value) and the overall effect, i.e., internal towards the organization and processes and external primarily towards startups as applicants for support, or secondarily towards key stakeholders (see the methodology chapter). A **total of 178 items** (including the zero variants) were subjected to C/B analysis. The result was the following breakdown of proposed measures into categories according to priority:

## Distribution of variants based on C/B analysis




**Summary of the main findings**[2]

The main potential for improvement was idenfied in the following areas:

- Pre-incubation, scouting, and program entry
- Project financing and support
- Startup engagement and program management

The proposed methodology was designed to be applicable not only within CzechInvest, but also by project partners and the broader expert community. It was based on a co-creation approach, where a strong sense of shared ownership and long-term ecosystem sustainability represented key principles.

The suggested measures were aimed at reducing the administrative burden placed on applicants, while balancing this with the provision of flexible, tailored services on the provider's side.

**Recommendation Phase**

The recommendation phase aimed to evaluate priority areas and develop individual proposals for change into specific recommendations. The following section provides a summary of the main recommendations.

[2] A complete summary of the C/B analysis results is included in the Power BI report (and will be attached as PowerBI file .pbix in JEMS).

**Summary of the main recommendations /** Clustered overview of potential strategic adjustments

- Pre-incubation, scouting, and entry conditions – applicant eligibility
    - Establishment of a clear startup definition (validated self-assessment tool combined with institutional endorsement) to enable project filtering, rapid objective feedback, and a system-based certification mechanism
    - Strenghtening the focus on deep-tech projects through technical expert validation by implementing institutions
    - Introduction of a structured startup marketplace integrated with CRM profiles to support matchmaking in pre-incubation (e.g. speed-dating between founders and research teams), access to experts (e.g. one-hour consultation format), and talent engagement (connections to platforms such as Demola or experts.ai). This addressed early-stage needs and contributed to strengthening networking, knowledge-sharing and quality orientation.
- Project financing (form, intensity, eligible costs)
    - Option to apply block exemption schemes for capital-intensive projects and introduce two support modalities
    - Applicant co-financing requirements linked to VC engagement and due diligence processes
    - Exploration of an independent and self-sustainable National Innovation Hub funding model (PPP-type approach)
    - Expansion of eligible cost categories beyond expert services (e.g. personnel costs)
- Startup engagement during and after incubation (including impact/ESG aspect)
    - Provision of indirect support for capacity building in impact areas (e.g. ESG reporting), enabling startups to finish the incubation with a validated/certified input/output benchmarking, supporting strategic alignment, responsible entrepreneurship, talent attraction, and access to capital
    - Strenghtening of systematic work with alumni projects, including connections to VC funding, impact initiatives, grants, and networks such as EEN or EIT
- Project evaluation and administration
    - Consideration of alternative application management systems with CRM integration
    - Streamlining of applications by removing publicly available information requirements and introducing pre-filled forms with validation features
    - Deployment of AI/LLM-supported tools (or internal model) for application assessment
    - Additional use for FAQ handling and chatbot support (internal/external) – Improving process efficiency, accelerating administration, and reducing barriers
- Quick-win segment — examples of immediate measures:
    - Development of methodologies, guidelines, manuals, checklists, and template applications
    - Adjustment of eligible cost rules (timing and categories) and project cash-flow settings
    - UX optimisation of the application process and option to attach pitch decks
    - Structured data management (information systems, data teams, datasets)
    - Enhanced ecosystem collaboration (national hubs, infrastructures, business angels, VC)

- Marketing adjustments — alumni programme development, promotion of social impact R&D, founder meetups

**Implementation phase**

Activities related to the implementation phase were initiated and discussed within the pilot scope. However, the full implementation of the follow-up programme falls outside the scope of the Pilot Action and is carried out beyond the project timeframe.

# 7. Recommendations from Monitoring and Evaluation

The following section presents several selected points that contributed to the implementation of the Czech pilot action and serve as inspiring concepts/activities for further development in the Czech innovation ecosystem.

**Austria - Impact Hub Vienna | Impact approach**

- A workshop for CzechInvest management was facilitated, providing guidance on goal setting, including the impact dimension.
- Specific options for implementing an impact-driven approach within the activities were explored
- Participation in Impact Days Vienna provided valuable insights into trends and best practices in ESG and impact-oriented innovation, and supported discussion on the integration of ESG/impact approaches into startup support instruments

**Hungary - NIU | Startup Factory vs. Technology Incubation**

- Comparative discussions on both concepts were conducted, focusing on differences shaped by national innovation ecosystem specificities.
- Mutual learning through exchange of approaches, models, and lessons learned.
- Similarities were identified in ESG/impact approach (support of specific "impact" sectors, such as MedTech; ESG not as a criterion but as a topic for training/mentoring) and in key challenges (e.g. regulatory framework, budget…)

**Slovenia - GZS | ESG Accelerator**

- A hybrid training program for SMEs focused on ESG topics was explored.
- The concept was identified as highly inspiring, especially due to the combination of training, support mechanisms, and practical application.

**Poland (Silesia) - ARRSA | Regional ecosystem building**

- Learned from the process of building a startup ecosystem from scratch in the context of regional economic transformation.
- Identified valuable transferable practices and examples worth following in regional innovation development.
- Similarities in approach to impact (focus of selected sectors to support impact projects; ideal of having the impact/ESG as a part of the support/instrument) and in conditions/challenges (e.g. too complex support system of SMEs/startups, national regulations, budget negotiation, …)

**Build! (Austria) – Regional ecosystem setup**

- Gained insights into working with startups across their lifecycle and relevant specific needs.
- Noted strong university connections, cross-regional cooperation, and emphasis on ESG and the role of clusters.
- Similarities in ESG approach (ESG not as a criterion but as a topic for training/mentoring) and similar ecosystem model as in some Czech regions and issues to be faces (regulatory constraints)

**Italy (FVG) – TEC4I | A unique regional support instrument**

- Considered the Regional Guarantee Fund model as an inspiring and innovative approach to improving access to finance.
- Recognized the model as a unique and noteworthy European example of good practice.

# 8. Dissemination and Communication

- Regional Event Ostrava - The FI4INN project's outputs (data, interactive tools for policymakers, best practices from abroad etc.) in the area of improving support instruments for startups and SMEs from the perspective of policymakers and support instrument designers were presented. One of the important topics was the improvement of the biggest Czech public startup program Technology Incubation. Bringing together representatives of stakeholders in the Czech innovation ecosystem in one place was a great opportunity to discuss current challenges and the potential for future development in the area of innovation funding.
- Online Technical Session Czechia - Transfer of innovation support know-how from developed regional ecosystems to less developed ones, with an emphasis on the outputs of the FI4INN project
- Dissemination event - Presenting and discussing key outputs of the FI4INN project, including pilot actions and evaluation results, with key stakeholders of the national (end regional) innovation ecosystem and to support the preparation of Technology Incubation 2.0 (TI 2.0)
- Innovation Conference Brno – *Project outcomes were presented at the conference on innovation supported by EU cohesion policy funds in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.*
- Social media – Dissemination activities were carried out through LinkedIn posts.
- Internal dissemination - Awareness of project outputs was raised among internal staff, supporting their role as multipliers of FI4INN knowledge.
- Project results are disseminated through ongoing cooperation with stakeholders at both central (startup department) and regional (regional offices) levels, contributing to the development of innovation ecosystems.
- The outcomes of the project provided valuable input for possible follow-up projects.

The results of the pilot action were positioned as a starting point for further development rather than a final output. The insights, data and methodologies developed contributed to improving the design of future national support instruments for startups in the Czech Republic. More broadly, the project outcomes contributed to strengthening the overall innovation ecosystem at both national and regional levels. This was supported through improved data sharing, the dissemination of good practices among stakeholders and continued cooperation with partners involved in the pilot. These elements contributed to ensuring a longer-term impact beyond the project's duration.

Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE

Co-funded by the European Union

FI4INN

# Pilot Action Report Build!

Version 2

11/2023

| Work package | WP 2 |
|---|---|
| Task | A2.3.2 |
| Due date | 16/02/2026 |
| Submission date | 18/01/2026 |
| Document lead | build! |
| Version | 1.0 |
| Authors | Melanie Tenekeci (build!) |

## Disclaimer

# A. TABLE OF CONTENTS

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Purpose of the Action Plan

A key strategic objective of the Pilot Action was the transformation of a traditional non-repayable grant scheme into an equity-oriented financing instrument with revolving characteristics. This aimed to improve the sustainability and long-term impact of public funds by enabling return flows and reinvestment mechanisms. Implemented as a Pilot Action within the FI4INN project, it addressed the challenge of fragmented public funding schemes and financing instruments by fostering structured cooperation between the Carinthian Venture Fund (CVF), the Kärntner Wirtschaftsförderungs Fonds (KWF) and the build! Gründungszentrum.

The Action Plan aimed to improve the effectiveness, transparency and strategic alignment of grants, equity financing and non-financial support services along the full company development journey, from early-stage ideation to growth and scaling phases. By applying the FI4INN Canvas and a co-design methodology, the pilot actively involved end users (start-ups and SMEs), financial actors and public institutions in the development of a coherent funding and financing pathway.

Within the FI4INN context, the Action Plan contributed to financial innovation by testing new forms of coordinated public–private interaction, combining funding instruments with venture capital and incubation support. At regional level, it strengthened the innovation ecosystem, enhanced the efficient use of public resources and increases the attractiveness of Carinthia as a location for innovative, growth-oriented enterprises. The Action Plan also layed the foundation for transferability and replication in other regions participating in the FI4INN project.

## 1.2. Territorial Action Plan

The Pilot Action was implemented at regional level in Carinthia (Austria), a region characterized by a strong base of small and medium-sized enterprises, a growing start-up scene and a high relevance of public support instruments for innovation-driven development. Carinthia's economic structure is dominated by SMEs, complemented by an emerging group of innovative start-ups with high growth potential, particularly in technology-driven and knowledge-intensive sectors.

Key regional stakeholders involved in the Pilot Action include the Kärntner Wirtschaftsförderungs Fonds (KWF) as the central public funding authority, the Carinthian Venture Fund (CVF) as the regional venture capital and equity financing instrument, and the build! Gründungszentrum as the regional incubator and ecosystem orchestrator. Together, these actors represented the core pillars of Carinthia's innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem, covering public funding, private investment and non-financial support services.

Relevant industries in the region include information and communication technologies, microelectronics, energy and sustainability-related technologies, advanced manufacturing, digital services and creative industries. Carinthia benefits from strong research and education institutions, cross-border linkages within the Alpine–Adriatic area and a tradition of close cooperation between public authorities, academia and business.

Within this territorial context, the Pilot Action responded to the specific regional challenge of fragmented funding and financing pathways by strengthening coordination among key actors. At the same time, it

leveraged Carinthia's compact ecosystem structure, enabling close stakeholder interaction, rapid feedback loops and effective co-design with start-ups and SMEs, thereby creating a suitable testing ground for innovative financial instruments under the FI4INN framework.

# 2. Strategic Alignment

## 2.1. Alignment with Project Objectives

The Pilot Action was fully aligned with the overarching objectives of the FI4INN project by addressing structural barriers in regional innovation financing and improving coordinated access to financial instruments for start-ups and SMEs. By strengthening cooperation between the public funding authority KWF, a regional venture capital instrument and the incubator ecosystem, the pilot supports FI4INN's objective of fostering integrated and more sustainable financial ecosystems.

A core component of the Pilot Action was the structural transformation of an existing non-repayable grant scheme into an equity-oriented financial instrument with revolving characteristics. This redesign aimed to increase the long-term leverage and sustainability of public funds by generating return flows that can be reinvested in future innovation projects.

The transformation required adjustments of regulatory and governance frameworks, as KWF operates as a public authority under regional, national and EU state aid regulations. Through co-design, peer review and structured policy learning, the pilot contributed to responsible finance, improved SME support and ESG-aligned decision-making, generating transferable insights for other Central European regions.

## 2.2. Reference to Strategic Project Documents

The design and implementation of the Pilot Action were closely aligned with the strategic framework and methodological guidance provided by the FI4INN project. In particular, the FI4INN Pilot Action Guidelines served as the main reference document, defining the scope, objectives and expected outcomes of the pilot, as well as the requirements for experimentation, monitoring and transferability.

The FI4INN Canvas was applied as a core operational tool throughout the pilot design and execution. It was used to structure the analysis of existing funding and financing instruments, map the start-up and SME development journey, identify gaps and overlaps, and support the co-design of a coordinated funding and financing pathway. The Canvas also provided a common language for stakeholders from different institutional backgrounds.

In addition, insights from FI4INN peer-learning activities, workshops and good-practice exchanges were integrated into the pilot, supporting continuous refinement and alignment with project-wide objectives. Together, these strategic documents and tools ensured methodological consistency, comparability across regions and effective contribution of the pilot to the overall FI4INN project objectives.

# 3. Territorial Analysis

## 3.1. Current State Assessment

The financial and innovation ecosystem in Carinthia is characterised by a strong reliance on public support instruments, a dense SME structure and an emerging start-up scene with increasing growth ambitions. Public funding – primarily in the form of non-repayable grants – plays a central role in enabling innovation,

particularly in early stages. However, access to structured equity financing remains limited and highly selective, creating a structural gap between grant-based support and growth-oriented capital.

Key ecosystem actors include the Kärntner Wirtschaftsförderungs Fonds (KWF) as the main public funding authority, the Carinthian Venture Fund (CVF) as the regional equity instrument, and build! Gründungszentrum as incubator and ecosystem orchestrator. Additional stakeholders comprise universities, research institutions, banks and sector-specific clusters in ICT, microelectronics, energy and sustainability.

Stakeholder consultations highlighted strong institutional trust, short coordination paths and high operational know-how in start-up support. At the same time, weaknesses were identified in fragmented funding logics, limited revolving mechanisms and insufficient alignment between subsidy instruments and equity financing. Data and user feedback confirm that companies struggle when transitioning from pure grant schemes, such as Start F&E, towards structured investment readiness.

Within this context, the FI4INN Pilot Action addresses a systemic need: **transforming selected grant instruments into equity-oriented or hybrid models with revolving characteristics,** potentially managed via CVF as trustee, thereby increasing long-term financial sustainability while maintaining strong incubation support through build!.

## 3.2. Challenges and Opportunities

Carinthia's innovation ecosystem faces structural challenges that affect innovative start-ups and SMEs. A major issue is the discontinuity between non-repayable grants and market-based financing. Instruments such as Start F&E are designed as pure subsidies, which limits the possibility of revolving returns and reduces long-term leverage of public funds. In addition, differing regulatory frameworks, state aid requirements and institutional mandates complicate the transformation toward equity-like models. The limited availability of regional risk capital further constrains scaling opportunities.

At the same time, significant opportunities exist. The region benefits from strong institutional cooperation between KWF, CVF and build!, short decision-making channels and high trust among public and financial actors. There is political willingness to modernise instruments and explore hybrid models combining grants with equity-like components. The presence of CVF as a professional portfolio manager creates favourable conditions for holding participations in a trustee structure, while build! ensures operational support beyond funding.

These framework conditions provided a solid basis for piloting a redesigned instrument with revolving characteristics, improving financial sustainability and generating transferable insights for other Central European regions.

## 3.3. Vision

The long-term vision for Carinthia was to establish a coherent, transparent and impact-oriented funding and financing ecosystem that enables innovative start-ups and SMEs to grow sustainably and competitively. Building on the results of the FI4INN Pilot Action, the region aims not only to improve coordination among existing instruments, but to gradually transform selected non-repayable grant schemes into sustainable, equity-oriented financing models with revolving effects.

The intended outcome is an ecosystem in which companies can easily navigate financing options, access the right instruments at the right time and benefit from a structured pathway that combines grants, equity participation and non-financial support. By introducing an equity-like component into selected public funding programmes, public resources can generate long-term returns that are reinvested into future innovation projects. This approach strengthens financial sustainability while maintaining ESG-compliant and responsible investment principles.

In the medium to long term, Carinthia seeks to position itself as a pioneer in transforming traditional subsidy logic into a modern, impact-oriented innovation finance model within Central Europe. By embedding this approach into regional policy frameworks and sharing transferable lessons through the FI4INN network, the region contributes to resilient, future-proof innovation ecosystems that combine public responsibility with sustainable financial leverage beyond regional borders.

# 4. Pilot Action Objective

The objective of the Pilot Action was to redesign a selected non-repayable grant instrument (e.g. Start F&E) into a hybrid, equity-oriented model with revolving characteristics. Instead of a pure subsidy, the new structure may combined a grant component with an equity contribution held in trustee form by CVF and accompanied by incubation support from build!. The aim was to increase sustainability of public funds by enabling potential returns and reinvestment in future innovation projects.

# 5. Methodology

The Pilot Action followed a structured co-creation and research-action methodology in line with FI4INN principles. The core focus was the conceptual redesign of a traditional grant instrument into a hybrid or equity-like model with revolving characteristics, requiring regulatory, financial and governance adjustments.

Co-creation was ensured through intensive bilateral and trilateral coordination between KWF, CVF and build!. Workshops and working sessions analysed legal constraints, state aid implications and governance options, including a potential trustee model in which CVF holds and manages participations on behalf of the public authority. Start-ups and SMEs provided user feedback regarding feasibility, attractiveness and investment readiness implications.

The FI4INN Canvas served as the central design tool to map the current instrument logic, identified structural gaps and defined the future financing pathway from grant to equity participation. Peer review sessions within the FI4INN partnership provided external validation, challenge assumptions and support transferability.

Monitoring combined qualitative and structural indicators, including regulatory feasibility, stakeholder alignment, model robustness and expected revolving effects. Continuous reflection within the peer review mechanism ensures policy learning and gradual refinement toward an implementable, scalable instrument design.

# 6. Planned Actions

The Pilot Action was implemented through a structured sequence of interrelated actions aimed at redesigning a traditional non-repayable grant instrument into a hybrid, equity-oriented model with revolving characteristics.

### 1. Stakeholder engagement and regulatory assessment (Months 1-3)

The initial phase focused on intensive coordination between KWF, CVF and build!. Bilateral and trilateral meetings analysed the current design of selected grant instruments (e.g. Start F&E), regulatory constraints, state aid implications and governance requirements. User perspectives from start-ups and SMEs were collected to understand transition challenges from grants to equity financing.
Milestone: Shared assessment of legal, financial and operational framework conditions for instrument transformation.

### 2. Co-design and structural instrument development (Months 4-6)

Structured working sessions were organised to develop a hybrid model combining a grant component with an equity contribution. Design options included a trustee structure in which CVF holds and portfolio-manages participations on behalf of KWF. Roles, risk allocation, return mechanisms and reinvestment logic were defined using the FI4INN Canvas as analytical framework.

Milestone: Draft hybrid instrument structure including governance and revolving mechanism.

### 3. Peer review and feasibility validation (Months 7-8)

The draft model was presented in FI4INN peer review sessions. Feedback focused on regulatory robustness, ESG alignment, financial sustainability and transferability to other regions. Necessary refinements are incorporated.

Milestone: Validated instrument design reflecting peer review recommendations.

### 4. Conceptual testing and scenario simulation (Months 9-11)

Given regulatory complexity, testing focuses on structured simulations and use-case modelling rather than immediate financial implementation. Selected company scenarios were analysed to assess capital structure impact, return flows and operational feasibility.

Milestone: Scenario-based validation of financial and governance logic.

### 5. Finalisation and policy documentation (Month 12)

The final phase consolidated governance design, regulatory recommendations and implementation roadmap. The transformed instrument concept was documented as a scalable and transferable model within FI4INN, including reinvestment logic and long-term impact expectations.

Milestone: Final pilot documentation and policy integration roadmap.

## 7. Recommendations from Monitoring and Evaluation

Feedback from FI4INN peer review sessions and ongoing monitoring activities provided valuable guidance for refining the Pilot Action. Peer reviewers emphasised the importance of clearly defining roles and interfaces between public funding authorities, venture capital instruments and incubation actors to avoid overlaps and ensure efficient coordination. In particular, recommendations highlighted the need to strengthen communication towards start-ups and SMEs by simplifying messages around eligibility, sequencing and timing of funding and financing instruments.

Monitoring activities and stakeholder feedback underlined the relevance of early and continuous involvement of end users to improve usability and acceptance of the coordinated approach. Reviewers also recommended further strengthening the ESG dimension by making sustainability-related expectations more explicit within assessment and mentoring processes. In addition, peer feedback stressed the value of documenting the pilot in a structured and transferable way, including governance arrangements, implementation steps and success factors, to facilitate replication in other regions. These recommendations have been integrated into the refinement of the pilot design and will guide final implementation and documentation.

# 8. Dissemination and Communication

The results of the Pilot Action are being actively disseminated to ensure visibility, stakeholder engagement and long-term impact beyond the FI4INN project duration. Dissemination activities target start-ups and SMEs, public authorities, financial institutions, innovation intermediaries and policy makers at regional and European levels.

At regional level, pilot outcomes and lessons learned will be shared through build! Gründungszentrum communication channels, including newsletters, websites and social media, as well as through dedicated information events, workshops and pitch formats. Pilot results will be presented at relevant ecosystem events, such as demo days, networking sessions and innovation forums, providing direct engagement with start-ups, investors and support organisations.

At project and European level, results will be disseminated through FI4INN communication channels, including project websites, partner newsletters and peer learning events. Structured case studies and policy-oriented summaries will be prepared to support knowledge transfer and replication in other regions. In addition, targeted outreach to regional policy actors and funding bodies will support the mainstreaming of pilot results into existing instruments and strategies.

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# Pilot Action Report ARRSA

Version 2

11/2023

| Work package | WP 2 |
|---|---|
| Task | A2.3 |
| Due date | 16/02/2026 |
| Submission date | 20/02/2026 |
| Document lead | ARRSA |
| Version | 0.1 |
| Authors | Patrycja Wegrzyn-Byrdy |

## Disclaimer

# A. TABLE OF CONTENTS

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Purpose of the Action Plan

The Polish pilot action, implemented by the Regional Development Agency in Bielsko-Biała (ARRSA), focuses on a critical innovation in the regional financial ecosystem: **the integration of repayable financial instruments with educational and mentoring components**. The primary purpose is to address the "investment readiness" gap among early-stage startups and Social Economy Entities (PES) that currently rely heavily on grants or bootstrapping.

**Addressing the Awareness Gap** A fundamental challenge identified during the diagnostic phase is the generally low level of awareness among regional entrepreneurs regarding the financial landscape. As highlighted also in the project-level *Recommendations to simplify FIs access*, many businesses, especially newer and smaller ones, are often not fully aware of the various grants, loans, and other resources accessible to them. This lack of awareness acts as a barrier, preventing entities from seeking funding that could accelerate their growth. Second challenge recognized is bureaucracy and complexity of formal requirements – indicated target groups often are afraid of the procedures standing behind the financial support.

**Strategic Objective: Navigation and Matching** Therefore, beyond the specific deployment of products, a core objective of this Action Plan is to **raise general awareness about what is available on the market**. The pilot aims to educate potential beneficiaries on how to navigate the financial ecosystem effectively. This involves teaching entrepreneurs how to identify and source the appropriate funding type (grant, debt, or equity) that specifically matches their **current stage of development** (incubation, start, growth) and their **target group profile** (social impact vs. technological scalability).

This Action Plan aims to redesign the user journey for two specific instruments distributed by ARRSA as intermediary institutions: the "Social Economy Support Loan" (PES Loan) and the "First Business – Support in Start" loan. By shifting the paradigm from a purely transactional financial transfer to a holistic "competence + capital" model, the pilot seeks to empower unemployed individuals and social entrepreneurs to effectively utilize debt financing. This approach is significant because it directly tackles the high mortality rate of startups caused by financial mismanagement and aims to professionalize the social economy sector, moving it towards self-sustainability.

## 1.2. Territorial Action Plan

The pilot action targets **Podbeskidzie**, the southern sub-region of the **Silesian Voivodeship**, with **Bielsko-Biała** as its functional economic hub. While part of the highly industrialized Silesia region (Poland's 2nd most populous voivodeship), Podbeskidzie maintains a distinct economic identity characterized by a robust "IT in the Mountains" cluster. Despite this potential, the region faces a dichotomy: it possesses a mature industrial base and a growing IT sector, yet its early-stage ecosystem remains fragmented and undercapitalized.

**To address this effectively, the pilot distinguishes between two critical target groups - social economy entities and early stage startups - with divergent characteristics but converging needs for financial education.**

**Social Economy Entities (PES):** Targeted by the **"PES Liquidity & Development Loan."** The Silesian Voivodeship is a leader in this sector, ranking **second in Poland with 154 registered Social Enterprises**. However, the sector remains financially fragile; recent studies indicate that **52% of these entities possess no financial reserves** to sustain operations for more than three months. This structural vulnerability makes the pilot's combination of preferential loans with financial literacy training essential for their long-term survival.

**Early-Stage Startups:** Targeted by the **"First Business - Support in Start" Loan.** The local ecosystem is ambitious, with **39% of Podbeskidzie startups already operating on international markets (Europe)**. However, they face a critical "capital gap." In 2024, **97% of local startups did not obtain any external financing**, relying almost exclusively on bootstrapping due to a lack of collateral and credit history. The pilot addresses this specific market failure by preparing founders to access public debt financing they previously avoided.

**Key Stakeholders & Vision** Key stakeholders include **ARRSA** (Regional Development Agency), **Marshal Office Of Sielsia Voivodeship** (Managing Authority of European Funds on regional level) **Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego** (fund operator), **OWES** (social entrepreneurship Support Centres), local NGOs supporting entrepreneurship and innovation, like **Silesian Startup Foundation, Startup Podbeskidzie Foundation** or IT in the Mountains association.

The pilot's goal is to leverage this network to transition beneficiaries from "unbankable" to "investment-ready," thereby professionalizing the third sector and de-risking the startup ecosystem.

# 2. Strategic Alignment

## 2.1. Alignment with Project Objectives

ARRSA pilot is deeply rooted in the core objectives of the FI4INN project, specifically regarding the modernization of support schemes and the promotion of ESG standards.

• **Fostering Innovation & SME Support:** The pilot aligns with the goal of improving access to finance for "unbankable" entities. By providing educational support alongside loans (e.g., "First Business"), ARRSA addresses the FI4INN objective of reducing the risk profile of innovative SMEs and startups, thereby facilitating their entry into the financial market.

• **Promoting ESG Compliance:** The pilot places a strong emphasis on the "S" (Social) in ESG. The financial instruments targeted (PES loans) are inherently designed to support social inclusion, job creation for marginalized groups, and community services. The pilot reinforces this by introducing ESG awareness training as part of the capacity-building workshops, ensuring that beneficiaries not only receive funds but also align their business models with sustainable development goals.

## 2.2. Reference to Strategic Project Documents

The design and execution of the pilot action are deeply rooted in the methodological framework and tools developed by the FI4INN consortium. ARRSA, as the leader of **Work Package 2**, leverages these outputs to ensure the pilot serves as a valid testing ground for the project's transnational solutions.

The pilot directly addresses the specific "pains" identified in **D1.1.1 Analysis of SME satisfaction** gap analysis, such as "stringent eligibility criteria," "lack of credit history," and the high complexity of application processes,. The pilot mitigates these barriers by offering "First Business" loans that do not require a commercial credit history, replacing financial collateral with "knowledge collateral" built through mandatory training.

ARRSA has adopted the core recommendation from this **D1.1.2** to **"combine financial instruments with non-financial support"** (mentoring, training, and consulting) to increase the survival rate of beneficiaries,. This responds to the finding that capital alone is insufficient for early-stage success without accompanying business competence.

**FI4INN Canvas & Power BI:** The pilot utilizes the *Business Model Canvas* methodology adapted for financial instruments to map out the value proposition for social entrepreneurs and early stage startups. Additionally, ARRSA is working on integrating a regional **Power BI dashboard**, adapting the tool originally developed by the partner **CzechInvest**,. This digital tool acts as a regional node of the project's **Virtual Knowledge Centre (D1.2.1)**, aiming to map available financing options and address the "low level of awareness" among beneficiaries regarding funding opportunities,.

The pilot's governance structure strictly follows the guidelines for engaging a diverse range of stakeholders (**D2.1.1 Guidelines to effective multi-level stakeholders' engagement**). ARRSA has established a working group involving relevant regional stakeholders and potential financial instrument beneficiaries – target groups. This ensures that the educational curriculum is not imposed top-down but is co-designed to meet the real needs of the market.

# 3. Territorial Analysis

## 3.1. Current State Assessment

The following analysis summarizes the internal strengths and weaknesses of the Podbeskidzie/Silesia ecosystem, alongside external opportunities and threats, specifically regarding the target groups (PES and Startups) and their access to finance.

| STRENGTHS (Internal) | WEAKNESSES (Internal) |
|---|---|
| **1. Robust IT Sector as Anchor:** The region possesses a mature IT sector where 61% of firms are self-funded and 39% operate internationally, providing a strong base for knowledge transfer<br>**2. High Density of Social Entities:** Silesia ranks 2nd in Poland for the number of registered Social Enterprises, indicating a strong foundation for social innovation<br>**3. Educational Background:** Founders are highly educated (97% with higher education), providing strong technical potential<br>**4. B2B Focus:** Local startups are pragmatic, with 48% targeting the stable B2B sector rather than risky B2C markets. | **1. Severe Capital Gap:** 97% of local startups rely on bootstrapping (personal savings) and lack access to external funding,.<br>**2. Financial Fragility of PES:** 52% of Social Economy Entities have no financial reserves, and 59% of their budget depends on grants, creating a "grant trap<br>**3. Lack of Strategic Planning:** 64% of social enterprises operate without a long-term strategy, focusing only on survival<br>**4. "Island-like" Fragmentation:** The ecosystem is disjointed; beneficiaries do not know where to find support, and 17% of registered PES are inactive,. |
| **OPPORTUNITIES (External)** | **THREATS (External)** |
| **1. Demand for "Smart Money":** There is a proven market demand for mentoring combined with finance; 32% of startups actively seek business partners for growth<br>**2. Productization of Services:** 43% of IT firms plan to develop their own products, creating an opportunity for R&D financing instruments<br>**3. Institutional Network:** Strong presence of support institutions (OWES, ARRSA) capable of distributing new financial instruments<br>**4. New Legal Frameworks:** The Social Economy Act creates opportunities for professionalizing PES, provided they receive adequate training. | **1. Rising Costs:** 69% of firms identify increasing labor costs and inflation as a major threat to liquidity<br>**2. Lack of Local Investors:** 27% of founders cite the absence of local VC funds and Business Angels as a critical barrier to scaling.<br>**3. Bureaucratic Burden:** "Excessive bureaucracy" is cited by 69% of PES as a major hurdle, discouraging them from applying for repayable instruments<br>**4. Talent Drain:** High competition for specialists and rotation of employees threatens the stability of early-stage ventures. |

Summary of Challenges & Opportunities

## 3.2. Challenges and Opportunities

**Startups (Early-Stage)**

• **Challenges:** The primary barrier is a severe liquidity crisis; **70% of local startups report cash flow issues** as a major threat to their existence. Combined with a **97% exclusion rate from external financing**, the

lack of credit history prevents scaling. Operationally, the biggest hurdle is the "competence gap" in **sales and marketing**, cited as the top challenge by founders.

• **Opportunities:** The ecosystem shows resilience through a strong B2B focus (**52% target SMEs**), reducing reliance on volatile consumer markets. There is a proven demand for "smart money"—**28% of startups actively seek investors** and mentorship, validating the pilot's hybrid support model.

**Social Economy Entities (PES)**

• **Challenges:** The sector faces a "profitability trap," with **73% citing lack of financial stability** as their top challenge. Excessive bureaucracy (**69%**) and a lack of financial reserves deter entities from applying for repayable instruments. Many suffer from a lack of strategic planning skills necessary for debt management.

• **Opportunities:** There is a growing push for professionalization; beneficiaries are moving beyond charity models, with a critical mass prioritizing **"acquiring new customers"** and fundraising skills. The pilot leverages this willingness to learn, transforming grant-dependent entities into competitive service providers.

## 3.3. Vision

The vision is to catalyze a cultural shift in the Silesian financial landscape: moving from **"passive administration of grants"** to **"active investment in potential."** ARRSA pilot strives to create an inclusive environment where access to finance is democratized through education.

**Key Mechanisms & Goals:**

• **De-risking through Education:** We envision a system where the risk of lending to "unbankable" entities (PES and startups) is mitigated not by collateral, but by mandatory financial literacy training and mentorship. This "education-first" approach will unlock capital for those previously excluded by commercial banks.

• **Operational Simplicity:** The vision entails a radical simplification of procedures. Pilot aims to create recommendations to minimize administrative burdens, allowing entrepreneurs to focus on growth rather than paperwork.

# 4. Pilot Action Objective

The primary objective of the ARRSA pilot action was to **operationalize a "hybrid support model"** that combines repayable financial instruments with non-financial capacity building.

Two financial instruments tackled by the action were:

1. First Business – Support in Start Loan

This instrument was designed for aspiring entrepreneurs—such as students, the unemployed, or caregivers returning to work—who are often rejected by commercial banks due to a lack of credit history. Instead requiring physical assets for security, the loan utilizes a **"knowledge collateral"** model: applicants received mandatory training and mentoring to validate their business plans. The loan offers highly preferential terms, including a fixed interest rate as low as **0.1%**, a repayment period of up to 7 years, and a 12-month grace period. It aims to remove financial barriers for those with high potential but low initial capital, turning "unbankable" individuals into capable business owners.

2. PES Liquidity & Development Loan

This was a hybrid financial instrument tailored for Social Economy Entities (e.g., social cooperatives, foundations) that combined business activity with a social mission. It addresses the sector's lack of financial reserves by offering loans up to **500,000 PLN** with potentially 0% interest. The key innovation is the **capital forgiveness mechanism**: up to **25% of the loan** can be written off (turned into a grant) if the entity achieves specific social goals, such as retaining jobs for socially excluded individuals. This incentivizes "impact" while helping social enterprises transition from grant dependency to sustainable business models

**Specific Objectives:**

1. **Increase Accessibility:** To open access to capital (PES loans and First Business loans) for entities that lack collateral or credit history by substituting financial collateral with "knowledge collateral" (business plan validation, awareness raising, education support).

**2. Build Strategic Competence & System Navigation:** To equip beneficiaries with the practical skills necessary to navigate the complex financial ecosystem effectively. This objective focuses on three core competencies:

• **Navigating Opportunities:** Teaching beneficiaries how to identify and match specific financial instruments (grants vs. repayable loans) to their stage of development (Power BI tool)

• **Business Planning:** Providing hands-on training in drafting "bankable" business plans and financial models, addressing the lack of forecasting skills identified in early-stage entities.

• **Decoding Regulations:** Helping entrepreneurs translate complex formal language and bureaucratic requirements into clear, actionable steps, lowering the barrier to entry. This approach directly addresses the "competence gap," responding to the **29% of Social Enterprises (PES)** that indicate a critical need for staff qualification improvement, ensuring they transition from passive applicants to informed, investment-ready partners.

# 5. Methodology

The methodology adopted for this pilot was User-Centric Co-Creation, utilizing tools developed within the FI4INN consortium.

**Diagnostic Phase (Completed):** We utilized the "matrix of pains and cures" methodology to diagnose regional gaps. Surveys involving 31 startups and numerous social entities revealed that the main barrier is not the lack of capital availability, but the lack of *access capability* (fear of debt, lack of business planning skills).

To ensure a holistic diagnosis of the regional ecosystem, ARRSA moved beyond desk research, actively participating in field studies and multi-stakeholder consultations. We utilized the project's "**matrix of pains and cures**" methodology to structure the findings from the following sources:

• **Empirical Research:** We directly participated in the data collection for the *Startup and IT Companies in Podbeskidzie Region*, analyzing responses from **31 startups** and 30 IT companies. We also participated in the Diagnosis of the Silesian Startup Ecosystem conducted by Silesian Startup Foundation, Simultaneously, we analyzed the situation of the social economy sector through the *SAMO-ES* study involving numerous social entities. These datasets allowed us to precisely define the market gaps.

• **Institutional Dialogue (Supply Side):** Even though in the pilot we are focusing on our own financial instruments, we also held strategic meetings with regional financing institutions, including the **Marshal's Office of the Silesian Voivodeship** and the **Silesian Development Fund**, to discuss common regulatory and operational constraints of existing support schemes. We also actively participated in the meetings organizes by Ministry of Finance

• **Ecosystem Partnerships (Competence Side):** We consulted with key ecosystem builders such as **Fundacja Startup Podbeskidzie** and the **Silesian Startup Foundation**. These partners provided insights into the "soft" barriers faced by founders, such as the lack of mentorship and networking opportunities.

• **Direct Beneficiary Engagement:** To gain a full perspective, we engaged directly with the target groups—startups and Social Economy Entities. This was achieved during the region's vibrant event calendar (e.g., BBDays4.IT), through bilateral meetings and by the combination with EU funded projects activities.

**Key Finding:** This comprehensive diagnostic process revealed that the main barrier is not the lack of capital availability, but the lack of **access capability**. Beneficiaries struggle with a fear of debt, a lack of business planning skills, and low investment readiness, preventing them from utilizing existing funds

**Co-Design with Stakeholders**: Following the "Guidelines to effective multi-level stakeholders' engagement" (D2.1.1), ARRSA established a working group with relevant stakeholders described in the section above but in the same time taking advantage of existing connections, bilateral meetings and calendar of events to expand the dialogue and gain wider perspective.

This ensures the educational curriculum matches the actual needs and challenges on the regional level.

**Tool Adaptation:**

- **FI4INN Financial Instrument Canvas:** Used to map the customer journey of target groups, identifying friction points in the application process.
- **Power BI**: ARRSA is adapting the CzechInvest Power BI dashboard model to visualize regional data on financial instrument uptake

# 6. Planned Actions

The pilot action was structured into a logical, iterative sequence designed to first build capacity and awareness, and subsequently facilitate access to funding. This "education-first" approach directly responded to the diagnostic finding that lack of knowledge, rather than lack of capital, was the primary barrier. The plan combined completed preparatory actions with future strategic milestones.

**Action 1: Stakeholder Alignment & Co-Design (Continuous Phase)** This action formed the foundation of the pilot, ensuring the support offered was not theoretical but grounded in market reality.

• **Completed Activities:** We have already conducted intensive workshops using the **FI4INN Financial Instrument Canvas** with key regional decision-makers, including the Marshal's Office of the Silesian Voivodeship. Simultaneously, we held strategic workshops with the **Silesian Startup Foundation** and other financial intermediaries to map the specific "pains and cures" of the local ecosystem. These sessions allowed us to define the precise gap between the offer of public funds and the expectations of beneficiaries (February 2025)

• **Continuous Dialogue:** Regular discussions with Social Economy Support Centre (OWES) and local NGOs are maintained to keep the "First Business" loan criteria aligned with dynamic labor market needs,.

Continuous cooperation with stakeholders (Startup Podbeskdzie and Silesian Startup Foundation, Marshal Office of Silesia Voivodeship) in gathering and analyzing regional data related to condition of startup ecosystem (participation with FI4INN project in 2024 and 2025 editions)

**Action 2: "Demystification" & Educational Webinars (July 2025, Nov 2025 - Feb 2026)** The objective here was to shift the mindset from grant dependency to investment readiness and clarify the administrative rules and formalities related to apply for financial support.

• **Completed Activities:** We have successfully launched a series of online Q&A sessions targeting Social Economy Entities (PES). These sessions focused on explaining the mechanics of the "PES Loan," specifically clarifying the criteria for loan forgiveness (capital turns into a grant upon delivering social impact).

• **Focus:** The ongoing webinars aim to "demystify" repayable instruments. We explained the fundamental differences between grants and loans, teaching how to calculate Return on Investment (ROI) for social projects, and addressing the fear of debt common among non-profit organizations.

• **Expected Effect:** A significant increase in the "financial literacy" of potential applicants, reducing the number of inquiries about basic eligibility and shifting the conversation towards strategic growth,.

**Action 3: Capacity Building Workshops (Feb 2026)** Moving from theory to practice, this action provided hands-on training to prepare beneficiaries for the application process – two editions of events, separately for each target group (deep-dive workshops focused on **Business Model Canvas creation**, financial forecasting, and selecting appropriate funding sources). **ESG Integration:** For social enterprises, these workshops included a module on ESG compliance, helping them formalize their social impact into reportable metrics required for preferential financing terms.

• **Goal:** To ensure that participants submit high-quality, mature loan applications that require minimal formal correction, thereby speeding up the time-to-money.

**Action 4: Digital Tool & Knowledge Transfer (Q2 2026)** To address the information asymmetry identified in Recommendations to simplify FIs access, ARRSA deployed digital tools to simplify navigation through the complex support ecosystem.

• **Power BI Deployment:** We are launching a regional adaptation of the **Power BI dashboard** (based on the CzechInvest template). This tool will serve as a "one-stop-shop," visualizing available financing options and matching them to the beneficiary's development stage.

• **User-Friendly Handbook:** Complementing the digital tool, we developed a **"User-Friendly Finance Handbook."** This guide translated complex financial jargon and regulatory requirements into plain language, acting as a practical manual for first-time borrowers. It aimed to lower the psychological barrier to entry for those intimidated by banking procedures,.

# 7. Recommendations from Monitoring and Evaluation

ARRSA participated in all transnational peer review steps, expect the workshop in Lubljana. TPRM mechanism confirmed initial idea of the ARRSA pilot action, but also fed the final concept with both methodological as well as content related insight.

The following section presents several selected points derived from the Monitoring and Evaluation process, including the Transnational Peer Review Mechanism (TPRM), that contributed to the implementation of the Polish pilot action (ARRSA) and serve as key recommendations integrated by ARRSA

**TPRM Structured Analytical Peer Review | Methodology & Co-design**

- application of the FI4INN co-design methodology, particularly the effective use of the FI4INN Canvas and stakeholder engagement methods (designed by ARRSA and Impact Hub at the beginning of the project)
- Benefited from continuous knowledge sharing and co-designing solutions directly with key regional players – Virtual Knowledge Centre as a good practice base

**EOE#4 (Bielsko-Biała) & Impact Days (Vienna) | ESG and Impact Integration**

ARRSA organized the 4th Exchange of Experience in Bielsko-Biała that was one of the crucial parts in terms of TPRM mechanism. On the one side, in relation to ecosystem building good practices in Poland that might be potentially transferred to other partners, and impact related workshops organized by Impact Hub Vienna.

Crucial recommendations in terms of impact:

- Identified initial variability in ESG integration and addressed it by emphasizing that the impact is driven inherently by the nature of the supported beneficiaries, specifically Social Economy Entities.
- Strengthened the instrument's structure by focusing on the Common Good Economy and Impact Theory of Change.
- Aligned financial performance logic with ESG principles and introduced a harmonized KPI approach to better measure impact.

**Systemic Ecosystem Challenges | Navigating Bureaucracy**

- Identified significant obstacles when working with public money providers, including high bureaucracy, excessive paperwork, and a highly complex ecosystem with too many actors.
- Noted a frequent "clash" between the effort to make financial instruments user-friendly and the rigid criteria demanded by higher authorities.
- Recommended addressing these regulatory constraints and differing decision logics by developing a simple, user-friendly manual to help beneficiaries navigate the system.

**Scalability and Validation | Regional Ecosystem Setup**

- Recognized that the ARRSA support model is highly replicable and can be easily transferred to other similar small-scale European regions.
- Confirmed the pilot's maturity and readiness for transferability ahead of the final Validation phase in Budapest.

**Institutional Ownership | Future Sustainability**

- Emphasized that ensuring the pilot's sustainability requires strong institutional commitment at the regional level.

- Highlighted the necessity of building good personal connections and conducting continuous negotiations with national bodies, acknowledging that political decisions and funding conditions can be uncertain.

# 8. Dissemination and Communication

To ensure the pilot's impact extended beyond the project duration and effectively reached the fragmented regional ecosystem, a robust dissemination strategy was implemented. The strategy combines high-level ecosystem events with targeted technical sessions.

**Target Audiences & Messaging Strategy** The communication is segmented to address the specific psychological barriers of each group:

• **Beneficiaries (Startups/PES):** The core message focuses on **"Safety," "Education," and "Opportunity."** We deliberately avoid complex financial jargon to reduce anxiety. The narrative shifts from "taking debt" to "investing in growth with a safety net (mentoring)."

• **Intermediaries (Labor Offices/NGOs/OWES):** The messaging focuses on **"Efficiency"** and **"Higher Success Rates."** We demonstrate that referring clients to the ARRSA pilot reduces the intermediary's workload because the applicant returns better prepared and "bankable."

• **Internal Stakeholders (ARRSA Staff):** we treat internal employees as **"Ambassadors."** Raising awareness among ARRSA's own consultants ensures they can cross-sell the hybrid instrument to clients seeking other services,.

**Key Channels & Planned Activities**

1. **Flagship Regional Events (Showcasing Results):**

**BBDays4.IT Festival:** The pilot results and the "First Business" instrument will be showcased at this major regional tech festival. This creates a direct channel to the IT community and potential startup founders, positioning public support as a viable alternative to bootstrapping,.

**Dissemination Conference:** A dedicated event bringing together key stakeholders (Marshalls Office, BGK, OWES, NGOs) to present the evaluation results of the pilot. This event will focus on the policy impact, advocating for the inclusion of the "hybrid model" in future regional operational programs,.

2. **Digital Engagement & Technical Sessions:**

**Regional Webinars & Success Stories:** Utilizing the digital platform to host "demystification" sessions. Unlike standard info-days, these will feature **testimonials**—success stories of local beneficiaries who successfully utilized the loan+mentoring package. This peer-to-peer validation is crucial for building trust.

**Online Technical Sessions:** these deep-dive sessions are designed for BSOs and consultants to transfer and continuous development the specific know-how of the "FI4INN methodology"

3. **Knowledge Centre (Digital Tool):**

The regional **Power BI dashboard** will not only be a tool but a communication channel itself. By visualizing funding gaps and opportunities, it serves as a content generator for social media (LinkedIn) and newsletters, keeping the ecosystem engaged with fresh data.

**Key Message:** *"Finance is a tool, not a goal. We provide the skills to use this tool safely."* This central narrative directly addresses the **fear of debt** identified in the diagnostic phase and promotes a culture of responsible, informed entrepreneurship. By 2026, the goal is to make "Smart Money" (Capital + Competence) the expected standard in the Podbeskidzie region

**FINN/TEC4I**

| **Purpose**: Provide a summary of the pilot action, objectives, | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pilot Name** | **Region** | **Pilot Objectives** | **Selected Option (New FI / Redesign Existing FI)** | **Key Stakeholders** | **Key Milestones (linked to timeline)** | **Milestones Details** |
| Enhancing the FVG Guarantee Fund for Venture Capital Investments in Start-up Enterprises and Facilitating Startup and Venture Access | Friuli Venezia Giulia | The primary objective of the FVG pilot action is to improve the investment readiness of potential applicants to the Regional Venture Guarantee Fund by strengthening their capacity to develop coherent, assumption-based and evaluable business and financial plans.<br>To achieve this, the pilot intends to design and test, through a public–private co-creation process, a modular multi-actor Business Plan and Financial Plan framework that reduces fragmentation, enhances comparability, and fosters a shared financial language across startups, fund managers, banks, and investors.<br>In parallel, the pilot seeks to increase awareness and effective promotion of the Venture Guarantee Fund among business angels, venture capitalists, and ecosystem stakeholders, thereby improving alignment between financial supply and startup demand.<br>The action also aims to develop structured financial engineering-oriented support initiatives for startups, designed to:<br>•strengthen financial literacy and strategic financial planning;<br>•improve the ability to articulate funding mix strategies and capital requirements;<br>•enhance the bankability and investment attractiveness of innovative ventures;<br>•increase the overall maturity of the regional startup pipeline.<br>Finally, while ESG integration to be further structured within WP3, the pilot intends to lay the groundwork for incorporating sustainability-related financial risk awareness into business planning processes. This includes increasing sensitivity to risks such as regulatory non-compliance, revenue loss linked to sustainability-driven investor and customer preferences, and missed cost-efficiency opportunities. By linking ESG considerations to financial strategy and decision-making, the pilot aims to promote more resilient and forward-looking financial planning practices. | **REDESIGN EXISTING FI** | REGION FVG (Associate Partner) , FVG PLUS (REGIONAL FUND FOR ENTEPRISES); BANKS (referent for NATIONAL GUARANTEE FUND FOR STARTUPS; ESG EXPERTS (ANIMA IMPRESA, IRES FVG,) BUSINESS MANAGEMENT , ACCOUNTANTS EXPERTS FOR BUSINESS PLAN CERTIFICATION, STARTUPS AND INNOVATIVE SMES | Q1–Q2 → Problem Analysis (incl. Focus Group + Co-creation Workshop) \Q2–Q3 → Co-design (design of modular & flexible model) \nQ3 → Validation (technical validation + feedback consolidation) \nQ3–Q4 → Testing & Refinement (iteration of model and assessment logic) \nQ4 → Dissemination & Ecosystem Alignment (incl. 5.11.2025 event) \nMarch 2026 → Transition to Solution Validation Workshop | May–Jun 2025 Interviews → 16 Jul 2025 Focus Group → Sept–Oct 2025 Co-Design (model development) → 13 Nov 2025 Dissemination → Jan–Feb 2026 Technical consolidation & preparation for validation |

PILOT ACTION : FVG Guarantee Fund for Venture Capital Investments

FI4INN Canvas Pilot Monitoring and Quality assessment Purpose: Track qualitative indicators for monitoring and final quality progress.

| Section | CriteriaF7F4B4:F13B4:FB4:F13 | Scoring Range | Guiding Questions | Answers (udpate 02.2026) | evaluation | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Target Identikit | Clear identification of target group | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are the target group's financial, ESG, and innovation needs clearly defined? | The target is now clearly defined as innovative startups and SMEs applying to the FVG Venture Capital Guarantee Fund, with explicit financial, innovation, and ESG-light needs embedded in the CORE structure. | 5 | Strong clarity; needs translated into structured BP architecture. |
| Target Identikit | Relevance to regional context | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the selected target group reflect local needs and opportunities? | Fully aligned with FVG regional financial ecosystem (SACI, FVG Plus, regional VC activation). Addresses local structural bottlenecks in evaluation and comparability. | 5 | High territorial coherence and policy alignment. |
| Target Identikit | Metrics to track target needs | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are quantifiable metrics provided to describe the target group (e.g., turnover, growth, ESG challenges)? | KPIs are now explicitly embedded in the CORE (cash flow, financial need, minimum KPIs including ESG light). Modular structure allows measurable evaluation criteria. | 5 | **Improvement from previous 4 → now structured and operational.** |
| Financial Instrument Design | Key features align with objectives | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are the financial instrument's features (e.g., duration, funding terms) practical and achievable? | The pilot evolved from pure financial architecture to systemic tool design: modular BP structure enhances evaluation efficiency and reduces information asymmetry. | 5 | Strong alignment between tool and access-to-finance objective. |
| Financial Instrument Design | Support schemes enhance success | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are proposed support activities (e.g., workshops, mentoring) sufficient and relevant? | The instrument propose innovative approache to funding by attracting capitals and strenthening Startups looking for capitals . The technical session, feedback loop, and stakeholder alignment sessions act as structured support mechanisms. However, ongoing mentoring pathways are not yet formalized. | **4** | **Clear improvement (from 3 → 4), but long-term support framework still to be institutionalized.** |
| Financial Instrument Design | Innovation in design | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the instrument propose innovative approaches to funding? | Modular CORE + optional modules (Debt, Equity, Grant, ESG advanced) represent an innovative governance-level intervention addressing structural market failure. | 5 | Innovation moved from financial engineering to systemic process innovation. |
| Impact | Defined ESG compliance standards | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are clear ESG standards and metrics identified? | ESG light included in CORE; advanced ESG module available. Clear intention of integration, but no binding KPI conditionality yet embedded into guarantee mechanism. | **4** | **Improved operational clarity but still not fully conditional.** |
| Impact | Systemic impact potential | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the pilot address broader economic, social, or environmental challenges? | Addresses structural inefficiencies: heterogeneity of BP models, evaluation delays, comparability issues, information asymmetry. High ecosystem-level impact. | 5 | Strong structural reform logic. |
| Impact | Scalability and transferability | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Can the financial instrument or improvements be scaled to other regions or sectors? | The modular architecture is fully replicable across regions, instruments, and funding schemes. Compatible with FI4INN joint pilot logic (RCO84 → RCO116). | 5 | High transferability at EU level. |

**FINPIEMONTE**

| **Purpose**: Provide a summary of the pilot action, objectives, | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pilot Name** | **Region** | **Pilot Objectives** | **Selected Option (New FI / Redesign Existing FI)** | **Key Stakeholders** | **Key Milestones (linked to timeline)** | **CANVAS MURAL LINK** |
| Basket Bond for innovation | Piemonte (IT) | • Facilitate SMEs' access to finance by diversifying funding sources<br>• Support investments in growth, innovation, internationalisation, and sustainability<br>• Reduce structural dependence on traditional bank lending<br>• Strengthen SMEs' financial structure and access to capital markets<br>• Establish a stable financing channel between SMEs and institutional investors<br>• Attract private capital into the regional economy<br>• Contribute to regional development and competitiveness | New FI | • Three Directorates of the Piedmont Region (Competitiveness; Budget; Education, Training, and Labor),<br>• ADB (as a potential arranger from the private sector),<br>• Banca Sella (as a potential investor from the private banking sector),<br>• The Torino Finance Committee,<br>• The Turin Industrial Association,<br>• The Association of Small Enterprises (API Torino),<br>• Finpiemonte (as possible public investor). | • **Completion of stakeholder engagement and technical design phase (October 2025)**<br>- Step 1: Activate negotiation with two or more possible arrangers<br>- Step 2: Identify potential public investors, anchor investors, and/or risk mitigation mechanisms.<br>- Step 3: Analyze implementation costs and remuneration.<br>- Step 4: Identify private investors (investment funds, banks, etc.).<br>• **Selection and appointment of the arranger (March 2026)**<br>- Step 5: select the arrangers who manage the operation.<br>- Step 6: legal/formal setting up of the instrument (agreement, SPV, legal entity, etc)<br>• **Selection of beneficiary SMEs (August 2026)**<br>• **Issuance of minibonds and portfolio creation (September–October 2026)**<br>• **Full operationalisation of the Basket Bond instrument (October 2026)** | https://app.mural.co/t/claudia6382/m/claudia6382/1740474953005/87834cd1b350754aea68000f28888490ffa2a67b |

**Purpose**: Track qualitative indicators
TARGET IDENTIKIT CRITERIA https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=e

| Section | Criteria | Scoring Range | Guiding Questions | Answers | evaluation 1-5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Target Identikit | Clear identification of target group | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are the target group's financial, ESG, and innovation needs clearly defined? | The target group is clearly defined: non-listed SMEs with growth plans, operating in specific regions; financial needs are clear, ESG and innovation needs are partially addressed. | 4 |
| Target Identikit | Relevance to regional context | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the selected target group reflect local needs and opportunities? | The selected target group reflects regional needs: Basket Bonds are promoted by regional agencies to address local SME financing gaps. | 5 |
| Target Identikit | Metrics to track target needs | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are quantifiable metrics provided to describe the target group (e.g., turnover, growth, ESG challenges)? | Basic metrics are provided (e.g., turnover, investment needs), but ESG and innovation-related indicators are less systematically tracked. | 3 |
| Financial Instrument Design | Key features align with objectives | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are the financial instrument's features (e.g., duration, funding terms) practical and achievable? | The instrument is well-aligned with SME needs: flexible duration, manageable ticket size, and aggregation makes market access feasible. | 5 |
| Financial Instrument Design | Support schemes enhance success | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are proposed support activities (e.g., workshops, mentoring) sufficient and relevant? | Support measures (workshops, technical assistance, public facilitation) are in place, though scope and intensity vary by region. | 4 |
| Financial Instrument Design | Innovation in design | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the instrument propose innovative approaches to funding? | The design is highly innovative: combines traditional mini-bonds with a pooled structure, sometimes integrating ESG or sustainability features. | 5 |
| Impact | Defined ESG compliance standards | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are clear ESG standards and metrics identified? | Some Basket Bonds include clear ESG criteria (e.g., ESG Basket Bond), but standards are not universally applied across all initiatives. | 3 |
| Impact | Systemic impact potential | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the pilot address broader economic, social, or environmental challenges? | The model helps diversify SME financing sources, contributing to long-term improvements in the regional economic system. | 5 |
| Impact | Scalability and transferability | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Can the financial instrument or improvements be scaled to other regions or sectors? | The structure has already been replicated across multiple Italian regions and sectors, proving high scalability and adaptability. | 5 |

**GZS**

| **Purpose**: Provide a summary of the pilot action, objectives, | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pilot Name** | **Region** | **Pilot Objectives** | **Selected Option (New FI / Redesign Existing FI)** | **Key Stakeholders** | **Key Milestones (linked to timeline)** | **CANVAS MURAL LINK** |
| RDI Next Slovenia (Redesign of TRL 3–6 instrument) | Slovenia (national) | Redesign the existing national TRL 3–6 RDI instrument by introducing a modular, blended finance approach (grants + repayable support + advisory services), strengthening SME/start-up accessibility, integrating ESG, and improving coordination among national stakeholders. | Redesigned Existing FI | - Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation<br>- Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS)<br>- Regional development agencies<br>- Companies and research institutions<br>- Startup and Scaleup Section, coordinated by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of SLovenia<br>- Strategic Council for Research, Development and Innovation (SSRRI), coordinated by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia<br>- Innovation Alliance (IN-ZA), coordinated by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia | 1. Stakeholder engagement<br><br>2. Gap analysis of current TRL 3–6 instrument<br><br>3. National workshop (4 Sept, 40+ stakeholders) – validation of directions<br><br>4. Design of modular blended model (Modules A/B/C + monitoring principles)<br><br>5. Peer review / feedback integration + refinement | https://app.mural.co/t/claudia6382/m/claudia6382/1737016689825/e6601c3f881103f4274215baea7b0a6032c19314 |

GZS focuses on connecting research and development (R&D) initiatives with SMEs, addressing the challenges SMEs face in accessing innovation support.
Through facilitated workshops with stakeholders, GZS works to identify gaps in financial support and explore the development or improvement of financial instruments.
Potential synergies with regional funds enhance the pilot's capacity to foster innovation and strengthen collaboration between SMEs and R&D entities.

**Purpose**: Track  qualitative indicators for monitoring progress.
TARGET IDENTIKIT CRIT https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiY2M5M2QxM2ItYTAyYS00MzE4LWE3ZTEtZjczYmY1YTQxZGE2IiwidCI6ImZhMGJjOGFiLWI0YzctNDNiMS1hZjIzLTE4MDJkMTk1MDc5NiIsImMiOjh9)

| Section | Criteria | Scoring Range | Guiding Questions | Answers | Reccomandation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Target Identikit | Clear identification of target group | 4/5 | Are the target group's financial, ESG, and innovation needs clearly defined? | Yes. The target group includes RDI-intensive SMEs and start-ups operating at TRL 3–6, facing limited access to blended finance, fragmented support structures, and growing ESG-related requirements. | Further segment the target group by size, sector, and innovation maturity to improve instrument targeting and eligibility precision. |
| Target Identikit | Relevance to regional context | 5/5 | Does the selected target group reflect local needs and opportunities? | Yes. The pilot aligns with Slovenia's RIS3 priorities, green and digital transition goals, and addresses a well-recognised funding gap in mid-TRL innovation stages. | Strengthen explicit links with national recovery funds and Smart Specialisation platforms (SRIPs). |
| Target Identikit | Metrics to track target needs | 3/5 | Are quantifiable metrics provided to describe the target group (e.g., turnover, growth, ESG challenges)? | Partially. TRL levels and innovation typologies are defined; however, structured financial and ESG baseline indicators are not yet formally embedded. | Define baseline indicators (e.g., funding success rate, ESG readiness, time-to-market) to support future monitoring. |
| Financial Instrument Design | Key features align with objectives | 3/5 | Are the financial instrument's features (e.g., duration, funding terms) practical and achievable? | Partially. The existing instrument supports TRL 3–6 projects through grants, but lacks flexibility, modularity, and blended finance features. The proposed redesign addresses these gaps. | Propose simplified access mechanisms, faster review cycles, and modular co-funding options. |
| Financial Instrument Design | Support schemes enhance success | 3/5 | Are proposed support activities (e.g., workshops, mentoring) sufficient and relevant? | Currently limited. At present, support services (e.g., mentoring, ESG guidance) are not structurally embedded in the FI package. | Ensure structured non-financial support is integrated into the final instrument architecture. |
| Financial Instrument Design | Innovation in design | 4/5 | Does the instrument propose innovative approaches to funding? | Moderate. The redesign introduces modularity, blended finance elements, and ESG integration. Full innovation depends on institutional adoption. | Further develop risk-sharing mechanisms and private capital leverage models. |
| Impact | Defined ESG compliance standards | 3/5 | Are clear ESG standards and metrics identified? | Partially defined. ESG integration is proposed through self-assessment tools and light indicators; formal KPI frameworks would require institutional adoption. | Align ESG indicators with EU Taxonomy and introduce proportionate monitoring mechanisms. |
| Impact | Systemic impact potential | 4/5 | Does the pilot address broader economic, social, or environmental challenges? | High. The pilot addresses structural underfunding in early-stage R&D, supports competitiveness, and strengthens innovation governance coordination. | Embed long-term monitoring mechanisms to assess systemic effects. |
| Impact | Scalability and transferability | 4/5 | Can the financial instrument or improvements be scaled to other regions or sectors? | High. As a modular national instrument, it can be adapted regionally or thematically, subject to governance and regulatory conditions. | Develop a replication guideline outlining minimum governance and funding conditions. |

**NIU**

**Purpose**: Provide a summary of the pilot action, objectives,

| Pilot Name | Region | Pilot Objectives | Selected Option (New FI / Redesign Existing FI) | Key Stakeholders | Key Milestones (linked to timeline) | CANVAS MURAL LINK |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hungarian Pilot: Refinement and Enhancement of the Startup Factory Program (including Medtech special call)) | Hungary | - Refine and optimize the Startup Factory (SF) program as a flagship innovative financial instrument for early-stage startups.<br>- Introduce and finalize a specialized Medtech call for 2026.<br>- Bridge pre-seed funding gaps through co-investment, incubation, capital provision and knowledge transfer.<br>- Incorporate stakeholder feedback to improve eligibility, value-added services and alignment with deep-tech/Medtech needs. -<br>Generate scalable frameworks and recommendations for sustainable SME/startup financing in Hungary and Central Europe. | Redesign Existing FI (Startup Factory program – ongoing since 2023, refinements based on current implementation + new Medtech call) | - Ministry of Innovation and Culture, National Innovation Office (NRDIO)<br>- Incubators (11 active in 2023–2025 cycle, including deep-tech and life sciences)<br>- Hospitals/healthcare providers (for the Medtech call for 2026)<br>- Investors (business angels, VCs, corporate venture units)<br>- Universities/research institutions (HUN-REN network, TTOs)<br>- Startups/innovative SMEs (primary beneficiaries, deep-tech/AI/Medtech)<br>- Transnational FI4INN partners (peer review and knowledge transfer) | - Q4 2024 – Q2 2025: Stakeholder engagement, consultations, workshops, incubator reports and data collection<br>- Q1–Q3 2025: Co-design workshops, FI4INN Canvas application, instrument redesign (SF + Medtech)<br>- Q2–Q4 2025 and Q1 2026 Transnational peer reviews, info-days, feedback integration, Medtech call finalization<br>- Q4 2025: Medtech call preparation and international jury setup<br>- Q1 2026: Medtech call publication and application phase<br>- Q2-Q3 2026: Application evaluation, grant agreements; | https://app.mural.co/t/claudia6382/m/claudia6382/1740474927807/41d56cb31b087ab1e7772bdfa52f62c0b09a571b?sender=u769bad12b46c319881f98367 |

**Purpose**: Track qualitative indicators for monitoring progress.
TARGET IDENTIKIT CRITERIA https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiY2M5M2QxM2ItYTAyYS00MzE4LWE3ZTEtZjczYmY1YTQxZGE2IiwidCI6ImZhMGJjOGFiLWI0YzctNDNiMS1hZjIzLTE4MDJkMTk1MDc5NiIsImMiOjh9)

| Section | Criteria | Scoring Range | Guiding Questions | Answers |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Target Identikit | Clear identification of target group | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are the target group's financial, ESG, and innovation needs clearly defined? | Financial & innovation: Yes , ESG: No |
| Target Identikit | Relevance to regional context | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the selected target group reflect local needs and opportunities? | Yes (Hungarian healthcare innovation gaps, hospital ideas, low startup/VC ratio) |
| Target Identikit | Metrics to track target needs | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are quantifiable metrics provided to describe the target group (e.g., turnover, growth, ESG challenges)? | Yes (startups: max. 5 years, 20 employees, €10M; incubators: min. 10 projects/100M HUF; ESG: none) |
| Financial Instrument Design | Key features align with objectives | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are the financial instrument's features (e.g., duration, funding terms) practical and achievable? | Yes (800M-1B HUF, 36-42 months, 25% private equity, proven in prior programs) |
| Financial Instrument Design | Support schemes enhance success | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are proposed support activities (e.g., workshops, mentoring) sufficient and relevant? | Yes (mentoring, market entry, 3 annual events + idea competition) |
| Financial Instrument Design | Innovation in design | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the instrument propose innovative approaches to funding? | Yes (state-private co-investment via incubators, risk-sharing) |
| Impact | Defined ESG compliance standards | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are clear ESG standards and metrics identified? | No (no ESG mentioned). The main purpose of the Medtech call is for a "social" goal (better health). This is a special call within the SF program. SF has no special ESG compliance standards, besides general EU rules (DNSH). |
| Impact | Systemic impact potential | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the pilot address broader economic, social, or environmental challenges? | Yes (economic: innovation/VC - have more innovative SMEs, startups with good solutions; social: healthcare improvement (main purpose of the MedTech call); environmental: no special challenges). |
| Impact | Scalability and transferability | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Can the financial instrument or improvements be scaled to other regions or sectors? | Yes (based on international examples, prior Startup Factory programs). Since it is a complex program, adaptation to new environment is needed. |

**Czechinvest**

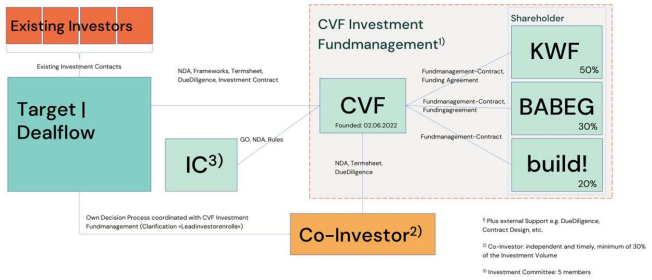
| **Purpose**: Provide a summary of the pilot action, objectives | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pilot Name** | **Region** | **Pilot Objectives** | **Selected Option (New FI / Redesign Existing FI)** | **Key Stakeholders** | **Key Milestones (linked to timeline)** | **CANVAS MURAL LINK** |
| Technology Incubation 2.0 | The Czech Republic (nationwide) | The objective is to improve the programmes for startups in the Czech Republic through proper targeting and setting the most effective support mechanisms. The findings should be reflected primarily in the preparation of the follow-up programme (working title Technological Incubation 2.0), but also in the future in other programmes not only of CzechInvest, but also of other (regional) providers. | Redesignin Existing FI | innovation centres, innovative startups, universities, technology trensfet cetres, Ministry of industry and trade | - PA initial workshop<br>- questionaire survey (startups)<br>- roundtable with innovation centres<br>- online focus group with startups<br>- online focus group with R&D and TT centres<br>- recommendations for TI redesign | https://app.mural.co/t/claudia6382/m/claudia6382/1740493298885/3a72f1ff8c6aa3c4ce5b91d25e8cb7f91f4249fc |

**Purpose**: Track qualitative indicators for monitoring progress.
TARGET IDENTIKIT CRITERIA https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiY2M5M2QxM2ItYTAyYS00MzE4LWE3ZTEtZjczYmY1YTQxZGE2IiwidCI6ImZhMGJjOGFiLWI0YzctNDNiMS1hZjIzLTE4MDJkMTk1MDc5NiIsImMiOjh9)

| Section | Criteria | Scoring Range | Guiding Questions | Answer |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Target Identikit | Clear identification of target group | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are the target group's financial, ESG, and innovation needs clearly defined? | Self-assesment score: 4<br>Legal definition or a certification of the startup status could be helpful |
| Target Identikit | Relevance to regional context | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the selected target group reflect local needs and opportunities? | Self-assesment score: 3 / Appropriate selection of the target group of potential applicants, potential adjustment towards greater support for deep tech projects |
| Target Identikit | Metrics to track target needs | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are quantifiable metrics provided to describe the target group (e.g., turnover, growth, ESG challenges)? | Self-assesment score: 4 / Could be slightelly improvoved - from formal results to more real impact based metrics - at the same time not to overload the beneficiaries |
| Financial Instrument Design | Key features align with objectives | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are the financial instrument's features (e.g., duration, funding terms) practical and achievable? | Self-assesment score: 4 / The conditions are practical and achievable – it is necessary to balance the suitability of the financial instrument and the control of the rules (possible release of other types of eligible expenditure) |
| Financial Instrument Design | Support schemes enhance success | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are proposed support activities (e.g., workshops, mentoring) sufficient and relevant? | Self-assesment score: 3 / Better focus, wider selection of experts within the indirect support, add sector specific actitities/events |
| Financial Instrument Design | Innovation in design | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the instrument propose innovative approaches to funding? | Self-assesment score: 3 / The incubation program financial instrument is innovative and could incorporate other elements (cascade financing, co-financing, greater links with VC funds). |
| Impact | Defined ESG compliance standards | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are clear ESG standards and metrics identified? | Self-assesment score: 2 / ESG/impact is not a criterion, but is implemented in the support itself (ESG/impact training, mentoring, etc.), but the pilot action is testing the use of impact development at the program level. |
| Impact | Systemic impact potential | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the pilot address broader economic, social, or environmental challenges? | Self-assesment score: 3 / Selection of supported sectors with higher socio-environmental impact in nature (EcoTech, HealthTech/MedTech, Creative etc.) seems to good way how to adress this issue in cace of starups |
| Impact | Scalability and transferability | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Can the financial instrument or improvements be scaled to other regions or sectors? | Self-assesment score: 4 / Similar approaches foud also in other reagions (Carintia, Hungary, Silesia) |

**BUILD!**

| **Purpose**: Provide a summary of the pilot action, objectives, | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Pilot Name** | **Region** | **Pilot Objectives** | **Selected Option (New FI / Redesign Existing FI)** | **Key Stakeholders** | **Key Milestones (linked to timeline)** | **CANVAS MURAL LINK** |
| Tbd | Carinthia (Austria) | Improvement of the Carinthian Venture Fonds GmbH (CVF) through strong coordinated financing actions between CVF and KWF =>Optimized Funding \| Investment Activities for innovative Startups and SME with a connex to Carinthia (integration of existing funding)<br>Integration of Knowhow from KWF through their audit procedures regarding enterprises (SME and Startups) – enlarging of the Fund-Management Team from now 3.6 up to 9!<br>Embedding in the regional, supra-regional, interregional ecosystem through existing Guidelines (needed private Co-Investor, limited regional Dealflow)<br>Increased Attractiveness for Startups \| SME: Simplified access to financing Options<br>Effective use of Public Funds (Combination of Equity Financing and Funding Instruments)<br>Enhancing Innovation Potential: Supporting future-oriented Business Models | Carinthian Venture Fonds GmbH (CVF) | build!, CVF, KWF, BABEG | Q1 2025: Analysis of the current financing structure and identification of concret improvement potential<br>Q2 2025: Development of new cooperation models (redesign) between the CVF and Funding Institutions (especially KWF), Target (end user) definition, design, functionality, and operational framework, Development of Impact Alignment<br>Q3 2025: Pilot implementation of the new financing strategy \| instrument \| support scheme with selected Startups \| SME<br>Q4 2025: Evaluation of results and preparation final support scheme (activities, resources, partners) \| financial instrument for broader implementation, Impact Definition | https://app.mural.co/t/claudia6382/m/claudia6382/1740474939781/49010c889cd5bcd88bdd8181e7c21f8d1ee71514 |



**Purpose**: Track qualitative indicators for monitoring progress.
TARGET IDENTIKIT CRITERIA https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiY2M5M2QxM2ItYTAyYS00MzE4LWE3ZTEtZjczYmY1YTQxZGE2IiwidCI6ImZhMGJjOGFiLWI0YzctNDNiMS1hZjIzLTE4MDJkMTk1MDc5NiIsImMiOjh9)

| Section | Criteria | Scoring Range | Guiding Questions | Answers | Reccomandation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Target Identikit | Clear identification of target group | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are the target group's financial, ESG, and innovation needs clearly defined? | Yes, the pilot targets early-stage startups and SMEs with limited access to tailored financing. Their needs include improved access to seed capital, support in integrating ESG principles, and assistance in developing innovative, scalable business models. | Conduct a structured needs assessment (survey or interviews) with the target group at the beginning of the pilot to gather precise data on financing barriers, ESG awareness, and innovation potential. |
| Target Identikit | Relevance to regional context | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the selected target group reflect local needs and opportunities? | Yes, the target group reflects regional priorities in Carinthia, where strengthening the startup ecosystem and supporting sustainable, innovation-driven growth are key strategic goals. The selection aligns with local economic development plans. | Align the pilot more closely with regional development strategies and Smart Specialisation priorities. Collaborate with local policymakers to ensure the target group is well integrated into broader innovation efforts. |
| Target Identikit | Metrics to track target needs | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are quantifiable metrics provided to describe the target group (e.g., turnover, growth, ESG challenges)? | Yes, the pilot focuses on startups with < €2M annual turnover, high growth potential, and limited ESG integration capacity. Data on funding gaps and regional innovation performance were used to define the group. | Define clear KPIs (e.g., number of employees, annual turnover, ESG maturity level) and collect baseline data. Use these to measure progress and demonstrate the relevance of the group |
| Financial Instrument Design | Key features align with objectives | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are the financial instrument's features (e.g., duration, funding terms) practical and achievable? | Yes, the proposed improvements to existing regional funding instruments (e.g., via KWF or CVF) are grounded in current practice and stakeholder input. Funding terms are adapted to startup needs, with achievable durations and conditions. | Recommendation: Regularly consult financial institutions and startups to ensure the funding terms (e.g., repayment conditions, duration) are realistic. Pilot flexible options (e.g. revenue-based financing) if possible. |
| Financial Instrument Design | Support schemes enhance success | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are proposed support activities (e.g., workshops, mentoring) sufficient and relevant? | Yes, the pilot includes relevant support measures such as startup mentoring, investor readiness workshops, and ESG capacity building. These are designed in collaboration with regional stakeholders to meet actual needs. | Co-create the support activities with the target group (e.g., via co-design workshops). Consider tailoring workshops to maturity levels—e.g., beginner vs. investment-ready startups. |
| Financial Instrument Design | Innovation in design | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the instrument propose innovative approaches to funding? | Yes, the pilot explores more flexible and innovation-oriented funding tools, including hybrid financing models and ESG-linked investment criteria, which are not yet widely used in the region. | Explore combining public funding with private investment (e.g., blended finance or convertible instruments) and integrate ESG incentives (e.g., better terms for sustainable startups). |
| Impact | Defined ESG compliance standards | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are clear ESG standards and metrics identified? | Yes, the pilot introduces ESG assessment tools and defines basic metrics (e.g., environmental footprint, social impact indicators) to guide startups and funders in responsible innovation financing. | Define a minimum ESG framework (e.g., based on SDGs or EU Taxonomy) and offer simple tools or templates to help startups assess and improve their ESG performance. |
| Impact | Systemic impact potential | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the pilot address broader economic, social, or environmental challenges? | Yes, the pilot contributes to regional innovation capacity, supports sustainable business models, and fosters inclusion by encouraging ESG-oriented startups and founders with diverse backgrounds. | Explicitly map how the pilot contributes to regional or EU-wide challenges (e.g. digitalisation, green transition, inclusion). Include this in your communication materials to strengthen the narrative. |
| Impact | Scalability and transferability | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Can the financial instrument or improvements be scaled to other regions or sectors? | Yes, the pilot is designed with scalability in mind. The tools, processes, and lessons learned can be transferred to other CE regions with similar needs, especially those aiming to modernize startup funding ecosystems. | Document the pilot process clearly (methods, lessons, tools) to create a transferable model. Engage peer regions early for feedback and potential replication opportunities. |

**ARRSA**

**Purpose**: Provide a summary of the pilot action, objectives,

| Pilot Name | Region | Pilot Objectives | Selected Option (New FI / Redesign Existing FI) | Key Stakeholders | Key Milestones (linked to timeline) | CANVAS MURAL LINK |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pairing financial support with educational & awarness raising programs to equip beneficiaries - startups and social entrepreneurs - with knowledge for sustainable early-stage entrepreneurship. | Silesia | The primary objective of the pilot action "Pairing financial support with educational programs to equip beneficiaries – startups and social entrepreneurs – with knowledge for sustainable early-stage entrepreneurship" is **to raise awareness about the availability and potential of financial nstruments** dedicated to social economy entities and young entrepreneurs in the Silesian region. The pilot aims to **enhance the capacity of potential beneficiaries** to access and effectively utilize these financial tools, particularly in the early stages of business development.<br><br>In addition, the action seeks to **deliver targeted educational initiatives** that help startups and social enterprises understand how to secure financing, manage early growth, and integrate responsible business practices. These programs will focus on strengthening financial literacy, business planning, and investment readiness, tailored to the unique needs of emerging ventures in the region.<br><br>In the pilot action, **ESG principles will be promoted by linking them directly to the financial advantages** offered by the PES and First Business loans—such as lower interest rates and extended repayment terms for socially impactful activities. Educational support will help beneficiaries understand how integrating social and governance practices (e.g. job creation, inclusive services) can improve their financing conditions and long-term business resilience | Redesign existing financial instruments: (1) Loan for Social Economic Entities (PES);<br>(2) First Busieness - Support in Start - preferential loan<br>(3) Fund for Young Entrepreneurs<br><br>*(1) & (2) are distributed by ARRSA in regional consortiums ; (3) call for tenders stage, decision will be made in September* | Marshal Office of Silesia Voivodeship; Regional Development Agency in Częstochowa, Rudzka Regional Development Agency "Inwestor"; Local Development Agency in Sosnowiec, Silesia Startup Foundation, Startup Podbeskidzie Foundation; Upper Silesia Fund | October 2025 – **Regional Event on Addressed Topics**: A dedicated event involving key stakeholders to discuss and promote the main themes of the pilot action, including financial education, venture capital access, and ESG criteria in financing. | [LINK TO PPS DEDICATE MURAL CANVAS BOARD] |

**Purpose**: Track qualitative indicators for monitoring progress.

TARGET IDENTIKIT CRITERIA https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiY2M5M2QxM2ItYTAyYS00MzE4LWE3ZTEtZjczYmY1YTQxZGE2IiwidCI6ImZhMGJjOGFiLWI0YzctNDNiMS1hZjIzLTE4MDJkMTk1MDc5NiIsImMiOjh9)

# STARTUPS

| Section | CriteriaF7F4B4:F13B4:FB4:F13 | Scoring Range | Guiding Questions | Answers | evaluation | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Target Identikit | Clear identification of target group | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are the target group's financial, ESG, and innovation needs clearly defined? | clear: defined as unemployed/jobseekers or students who haven't operated a business for 12 months; needs are spelled out in financial (startup capital), ESG (inclusive services), and innovation terms (digitization, service models). | 5 | |
| Target Identikit | Relevance to regional context | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the selected target group reflect local needs and opportunities? | Silesi faces youth unemployment, inclusion challenges, and low early-stage business support. | 5 | |
| Target Identikit | Metrics to track target needs | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are quantifiable metrics provided to describe the target group (e.g., turnover, growth, ESG challenges)? | While hard revenue data is limited at startup phase, indicators like job creation, service delivery, and business survival are defined. Could be improved with more ESG-specific KPIs | 4 | |
| Financial Instrument Design | Key features align with objectives | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are the financial instrument's features (e.g., duration, funding terms) practical and achievable? | The loan's long maturity, ultra-low interest rate, and grace period directly support startups with no financial history. Bonus: inclusive services unlock even better terms | 5 | |
| Financial Instrument Design | Support schemes enhance success | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are proposed support activities (e.g., workshops, mentoring) sufficient and relevant? | Mandatory mentoring, training, and access to business support organizations are built into the program. Application guidance and onboarding available through multiple partners | 5 | |
| Financial Instrument Design | Innovation in design | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the instrument propose innovative approaches to funding? | While not technologically revolutionary, the inclusion of low-interest loans for social objectives + mandatory capacity-building is an effective twist. But it's more innovative socially than financially. | 4 | |
| Impact | Defined ESG compliance standards | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are clear ESG standards and metrics identified? | ESG is more incentive-based than standard-based here. Inclusive services = lower interest, but no formal ESG certification or scoring mechanism | 3 | |
| Impact | Systemic impact potential | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the pilot address broader economic, social, or environmental challenges? | Strong potential to reduce unemployment and increase economic inclusion, especially among underserved groups. Could be stronger with deeper ESG follow-up. | 4 | |
| Impact | Scalability and transferability | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Can the financial instrument or improvements be scaled to other regions or sectors? | Already operating across Poland. The simple structure, plus digital advisory components, makes it easy to replicate in other regions or contexts with minor adaptation | 5 | |

# SOCIAL ENTREPRISES (PES)

| Section | CriteriaF7F4B4:F13B4:FB4:F13 | Scoring Range | Guiding Questions | Answers | evaluation | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Target Identikit | Clear identification of target group | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are the target group's financial, ESG, and innovation needs clearly defined? | program defines eligible entities clearly: registered social economy actors (e.g., cooperatives, foundations) who operate for public benefit and prioritize social inclusion. Their financial needs (working capital, service scaling), innovation types (social/organizational), and ESG focus (employment of vulnerable groups) are explicitly acknowledged | 5 | |
| Target Identikit | Relevance to regional context | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the selected target group reflect local needs and opportunities? | Silesia (and other Polish regions) has a growing but under-supported social enterprise ecosystem. PES responds directly to gaps in inclusive employment, access to finance, and community-based services. It addresses both social and economic marginalization, aligning with national and EU strategies. | 5 | |
| Target Identikit | Metrics to track target needs | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are quantifiable metrics provided to describe the target group (e.g., turnover, growth, ESG challenges)? | KPIs such as job creation, job retention, social service delivery, and % of capital reduction are used. However, environmental and governance-specific metrics are still qualitative or loosely defined. More structured ESG tracking tools would strengthen this. | 4 | |
| Financial Instrument Design | Key features align with objectives | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are the financial instrument's features (e.g., duration, funding terms) practical and achievable? | zero or low interest, long repayment horizon (up to 7 years), partial capital reduction based on social outcomes (25%), and flexibility in eligible expenses. These features are tailor-made for low-margin, impact-oriented organizations. | 5 | |
| Financial Instrument Design | Support schemes enhance success | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are proposed support activities (e.g., workshops, mentoring) sufficient and relevant? | Support is available via BSOs and regional partners—however, not all regions offer the same depth of training or ongoing advisory. Mentoring depends on partner capacity and could vary in quality | 4 | |
| Financial Instrument Design | Innovation in design | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the instrument propose innovative approaches to funding? | loan reduction based on job creation, flexible grace periods, and legal alignment with EU de minimis rules. It's innovative in public finance terms, especially for a social sector audience. | 4 | |
| Impact | Defined ESG compliance standards | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Are clear ESG standards and metrics identified? | ESG is embedded rather than certified: entities must meet national social enterprise definitions, track job impact, and demonstrate alignment with social objectives. Yet formal ESG frameworks or benchmarks (like SDG alignment, ISO) are not required or incentivized | 4 | |
| Impact | Systemic impact potential | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Does the pilot address broader economic, social, or environmental challenges? | This instrument contributes to inclusive labor markets, local service resilience, and reduced grant dependence. It builds a long-term foundation for systemic social economy participation—especially in underserved or rural areas. | 5 | |
| Impact | Scalability and transferability | 1 (Poor) to 5 (Excellent) | Can the financial instrument or improvements be scaled to other regions or sectors? | Already deployed across multiple voivodeships; structure is replicable with minor legal/administrative adaptations. Can be scaled regionally or tailored to niche sectors (e.g., green jobs, circular economy). The revolving fund model adds financial sustainability | 5 | |

# FI4INN - TPRM

| | How did you adapt the FI4INN co-design methodology to your regional context and stakeholders? | How are ESG criteria or social impact goals integrated into your pilot design and monitoring? | What are the key obstacles you faced (regulatory, stakeholder engagement, financial sustainability) and how did you address them? | Which conditions are most critical for ensuring scalability or replication of your pilot in other CE regions? | Who are the institutional owners or policy actors expected to mainstream your pilot after the project? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gospodarska zbornica Slovenije | | | | | |
| FINPIEMONTE risorse per il territorio | | | | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gospodarska zbornica Slovenije | | | | | |
| TECNOLOGIE PER L'INNOVAZIONE FVG | | | | | |
| FINPIEMONTE risorse per il territorio | | | | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FINPIEMONTE risorse per il territorio | | | | | |
| TECNOLOGIE PER L'INNOVAZIONE FVG | | | | | |
| Gospodarska zbornica Slovenije | | | | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| build! GRÜNDUNGSZENTRUM KÄRNTEN | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| CZECHINVEST | | | | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| build! GRÜNDUNGSZENTRUM KÄRNTEN | | | | | |
| ARR | | | | | |
| AIÜ | | | | | |
| CZECHINVEST | | | | | |

# FI4INN - TPRM

| | How did you adapt the FI4INN co-design methodology to your regional context and stakeholders? | How are ESG criteria or social impact goals integrated into your pilot design and monitoring? | What are the key obstacles you faced (regulatory, stakeholder engagement, financial sustainability) and how did you address them? | Which conditions are most critical for ensuring scalability or replication of your pilot in other CE regions? | Who are the institutional owners or policy actors expected to mainstream your pilot after the project? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ARR | | | | | |
| build! GRÜNDUNGSZENTRUM KÄRNTEN | | | | | |
| CZECHINVEST | | | | | |

# FI4INN - TPRM

| | How did you adapt the FI4INN co-design methodology to your regional context and stakeholders? | How are ESG criteria or social impact goals integrated into your pilot design and monitoring? | What are the key obstacles you faced (regulatory, stakeholder engagement, financial sustainability) and how did you address them? | Which conditions are most critical for ensuring scalability or replication of your pilot in other CE regions? | Who are the institutional owners or policy actors expected to mainstream your pilot after the project? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CZECHINVEST | | | | | |
| ARR | | | | | |
| build! GRÜNDUNGSZENTRUM KÄRNTEN | | | | | |
| AIU | | | | | |

# FI4INN - interview

| | From your perspective, which elements of the pilots are most transferable across regions? | How can transversal expertise (communication, KPI/ESG, impact reporting) increase the pilots' visibility and policy uptake? | How can implementing partners better use your guidelines (e.g. KPI framework, ESG integration tools) in practice? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Startup Europe REGIONS NETWORK | | | |
| IMPACT HUB Vienna | | | |
| ZEF Zadruga za etično financiranje | | | |