

EU-WB6 INVESTMENT FORUM
SIDE-EVENT: INNOVISION FORUM 2025

Policy Recommendations Based on the work of 2 Sessions
during the InnoVision Forum 2025

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WELCOMING REMARKS

- Mrs. Delina Ibrahimaj, Minister, Ministry of Economy and Innovation, Albania
- Mrs. Andjela Jaksic-Stojanovic, Minister, Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, Montenegro
- Mrs. Ana Kapaj, Vice Minister, Ministry of Education, Albania
- Mrs. Ritva Heikkinen, Head of Cooperation, Delegation of European Union to Albania
- Mr. Ignazio Zullo, Senator, Republic of Italy

Panel I: Tech Parks as Drivers of Growth and Innovation

- Mrs. Florensa Haxhi, Ph.D., Executive Director, Durana Tech Park, Albania
- Mr. Josep Piqué, President, La Salle Technova Barcelona – La Salle Innovation Park (Former President of IASP), Spain
- Mr. Hans Juergen Cassens, Head of Innovation and Training Park, Prizren, Kosovo
- Mr. Paris Kokorotsikos, President, European Innovation Solution, Greece
- Mr. Tomas Cernevicius, Director of Lithuanian Association of Innovation Parks and Entrepreneurship, Lithuania

Panel II: EU Integration, Skills, and the Labour Market

- Mrs. Olta Manjani, Vice Minister, Ministry of Economy and Innovation, Albania
- Mr. Amir Emadi, Executive Director, Airwai, USA
- Mrs. Albana Shkurta, Executive Director, Lufthansa Solution, Albania
- Mr. Angjelos Shkurti, Executive Director, Wyn Enterprise, USA
- Mrs. Mira Mezini, Co-Director/Professor, Hesse Research Center for Artificial Intelligence, Germany
- Mrs. Carina Rapetti, Professor, Ramon Llull University, Spain
- Mr. Georgios A. Dafoulas, Director, Computer Science Programme, Middlesex University, UK

CONCLUSION REMARKS

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TECH PARKS AS DRIVERS OF GROWTH AND INNOVATION

Innovation ecosystems are essential engines of competitiveness, productivity, and sustainable growth. Their foundation rests on three interconnected pillars: Talent, Technology, and Funding. When strategically aligned, these elements generate value, foster entrepreneurship, and attract both domestic and international investment.

To be effective, innovative systems in the Western Balkans (WB) must embrace the Quadruple Helix model, bringing together academia, industry, government, and civil society. This integrated approach ensures that innovation responds to societal needs while producing measurable economic and social impact.

Each innovative ecosystem should build upon its vocational dimensions:

- **Territorial** – rooted in local context, identity, and assets.
- **Economic** – driving competitiveness, productivity, and enterprise creation.
- **Social** – generating inclusive and sustainable impact for communities.

Successful ecosystems operate through multi-level connections:

- **Local** – via *Living Labs* that enable experimentation and citizen co-creation.
- **Regional and Global** – through partnerships with international hubs that facilitate knowledge exchange, visibility, and access to global value chains.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) National Governments and Local Authorities Should:

- Designate Tech Parks, especially Durana Tech Park, as strategic infrastructure zones, enabling access to EU structural funds and national incentives for innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Foster integration between Tech Parks and higher education institutions, creating joint research programs, shared innovation spaces, and entrepreneurship academies that promote a strong talent pipeline and applied learning.
- Develop enabling regulatory and fiscal frameworks that incentivize R&D investment, intellectual property creation, and technology transfer. Simplified tax incentives reduced bureaucratic barriers, and innovation-friendly procurement policies can catalyze private-sector participation.
- Promote cross-border cooperation among Western Balkan Tech Parks and innovation agencies to co-develop regional value chains, thematic clusters (e.g., AI, green tech, smart mobility), and joint projects aligned with EU priorities such as the *Green Deal* and *Digital Agenda*.
- Strengthen local innovation ecosystems through *Living Labs*, municipal innovation funds, and citizen-driven projects that support social innovation, green transition, and community-based entrepreneurship.

- Institutionalize monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure innovation outputs and impact using standardized Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) such as job creation, startup growth, research collaboration, and investment attraction.
- Enhance inter-ministerial coordination by establishing Innovation Councils or Steering Committees that align industrial policy, digitalization, and education reforms toward a unified innovation agenda.

(2) Tech Parks and Research Institutions Should:

- Act as catalysts of innovation, nurturing collaboration among startups, SMEs, and research institutions while providing access to shared labs, accelerators, and digital testing environments.
- Develop and deploy a Tech Park Performance Dashboard tracking key outcomes like employment growth, startup success rates, R&D expenditure, gender participation in entrepreneurship, and regional investment flows.
- Create Centers of Excellence in priority domains (e.g., AI, renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, cybersecurity, business intelligence, adoption of digital technologies) to attract partnerships with EU universities and multinational enterprises.
- Facilitate open innovation mechanisms, such as joint R&D challenges, industrial PhD programs, and technology transfer offices (TTOs), to link academic discoveries with industrial application.
- Techno Parks should provide the necessary infrastructure for TTOs and incubation hubs to be jointly used by different research institutions and academic departments for their respective areas of expertise and R&D niches.
- Implement continuous capacity-building programs for entrepreneurs and researchers in business modeling, patenting, digital marketing, and sustainability practices.
- Build partnerships with local financial institutions and investors to create dedicated seed and venture capital mechanisms supporting early-stage and scaling enterprises.
- Techno Parks should incorporate in their strategy the deployment of a knowledge transfer framework and capacity building mechanisms for micro businesses and SMEs. The role of the techno park would be to act as an alignment channel and fostering networking between training providers and business stakeholders. This could become a service available for an extended network of enterprises beyond those residing in the techno park.
- Promote diversity and inclusion in innovation — ensuring gender equality, youth participation, and accessibility in Tech Park programs and governance structures.

(3) The European Union and Regional Partners Should:

- Integrate Western Balkan Tech Parks into EU innovation networks, facilitating access to collaborative research, digital innovation hubs, and cross-border cluster initiatives under *Horizon Europe* and *EIT Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs)*.
- Raising and strengthening the capacity of Technology Parks to successfully access and manage Horizon Europe funds.
- Provide dedicated financial instruments to strengthen Tech Park governance, infrastructure, and digital readiness through *IPA III* and *InvestEU* frameworks.
- Support alignment with EU Smart Specialization Strategies (RIS3), offering technical assistance and joint policy platforms to harmonize regional innovation priorities with EU competitiveness goals.
- Encourage the development of Western Balkan Innovation Corridors — cross-border clusters linking national Tech Parks around common thematic priorities (e.g., digital transition, green industry, creative economy).
- Ensure policy coherence across regional programs by establishing an EU–WB6 Innovation Policy Forum to coordinate initiatives, avoid duplication, and share success stories.
- Promote inclusion of WB innovation ecosystems in pan-European initiatives such as the *European Innovation Council (EIC)* and *Digital Europe Programme* to enhance visibility, trust, and investment appeal.
- Provide concrete support to Technology Parks in their development, recognizing their role as catalysts for EU integration. Specifically, for Durana Tech Park, the support would target the development of virtual spaces and digital infrastructure to enhance and accelerate its operations.

EU INTEGRATION, SKILLS, AND THE LABOUR MARKET

The Western Balkans are at a crossroads between labour export and knowledge retention. While the region has long provided affordable and adaptable labour to EU markets, this model is no longer sustainable in the era of rapid digitalization and global competition.

To align with EU integration pathways, the region must undergo a strategic shift — from being a source of low-cost labour to becoming a hub for high-value, knowledge-intensive work and innovation-driven outsourcing.

This transformation requires:

- Legislative alignment with EU frameworks on labour mobility, digital work, and innovation.
- Stronger industry–academia–policy cooperation to produce future-ready skills.
- Tech Parks and innovation infrastructures to serve as key platforms for skilling, employment creation, and technology Upskilling, job transformation through the integration of

digital technologies in traditional roles and monetisation of the advances achieved through the integration of AI and similar technologies in typical business operations.

“Durana Tech Park is envisioned as a model ecosystem for this transformation — integrating education, research, and enterprise to produce a workforce aligned with EU standards and global innovation trends”

A modern labour market must be:

- Adaptive – capable of responding to rapid technological change.
- Inclusive – ensuring access to skills for youth, women, and marginalized groups.
- Connected – linked to both regional and global innovation ecosystems.
- Strategic – focused on high-value sectors such as AI, FinTech, Cybersecurity, Business Intelligence, and Green Technologies.

The development of a skilled workforce aligned with EU market needs requires effective governance based on:

- Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) that align education outputs with economic needs.
- Industrial Boards combining business and academia to define emerging skills and job profiles.
- Agile regulation reduces bureaucracy and accelerates recognition of new professions.
- Cross-border cooperation among Western Balkan states to create a shared labour and skills ecosystem connected to the EU.
- Unbundling of traditional education programmes to create micro credentials that would offer recognized and accredited "learning nuggets", i.e. manageable learning experiences for corporate stakeholders.
- Create strategic partnerships with agile and forward-thinking educational institutions from the EU, UK and US focusing on the deployment of adaptive knowledge transfer offerings and the disruptive innovation in life-long learning courses.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) National Governments and Regional Authorities Should:

- Shift national labour strategies from low-cost employment models toward high-skill outsourcing ecosystems by incentivizing knowledge-intensive industries and digital freelancing.
 - *This includes legal frameworks that support remote work, gig economy regulation, and intellectual property protection for digital creators.*
- Introduce fiscal and policy incentives (tax reliefs, grants, and startup credits) to retain and attract high-skilled professionals — creating *brain-retain* and *brain-regain* programs that counter long-term emigration.

- Integrate innovation infrastructure into labour policy, positioning Tech Parks as *employment engines* that connect local talent with global industries through outsourcing, offshoring, and remote collaboration.
- Establish Industrial Boards under each Tech Park to define skill development roadmaps, anticipate future competencies, and align training with evolving industry demand.
- Strengthen cross-ministerial coordination (education, economy, labour, ICT) to implement a unified Skills for Innovation Framework aligned with the *EU Pact for Skills* and *European Skills Agenda*.
- Recognize micro-credentials and modular qualifications nationally, ensuring their interoperability across the Western Balkans and the EU — enabling lifelong learning and mobility.
- Reform employment policies to include flexibility for new forms of work, ensuring that freelance and hybrid professionals’ benefit from protection, social security, and continuous training opportunities.
- Strengthen the role of Tech Parks by establishing structured programs endorsed by national authorities and aligned with EU funding mechanisms.

(2) Tech Parks and Innovation Ecosystems Should:

- Serve as bridges between academia, industry, and government, ensuring that research outcomes lead to practical technologies and jobs.
- Establish Centres for Future Skills and Digital Transformation that provide targeted reskilling and upskilling programs aligned with smart specialization areas (e.g., AI, data analytics, green transition).
- Host continuous Training Needs and Skill Gap Analyses (TNA/SGA) to identify current and future skill shortages, linking these insights to curriculum updates and innovation priorities.
- Create dynamic repositories of CPD, vocational, and short courses, accessible to both professionals and enterprises, enabling flexible pathways for lifelong learning.
- Facilitate micro-credential programs through partnerships with universities and online learning platforms, ensuring international recognition.
- Promote co-creation models where students and researchers engage directly with companies on real-world challenges through *venture studio* and *living lab* approaches.
- Encourage entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship by supporting both commercial and social innovation initiatives addressing local community priorities.
- Help enterprises evolve from CSR to ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) by introducing measurable frameworks for sustainability and societal impact.
- Provide comprehensive support services within Tech Parks — including incubation, mentorship, funding access, and export assistance — creating a full innovation-to-employment pipeline.

(3) Universities and Higher Education Institutions Should:

- Modernize curricula to align with the digital economy and the EU's *European Education Area (EEA)* framework.
- Adopt micro-credential systems for flexible and stackable learning, allowing students and professionals to update their skills continuously.
- Establish industrial PhD programs and dual-education pathways that embed students in real-world projects co-supervised by academia and business.
- Foster academic spin-offs and innovation projects within Tech Parks to commercialize research and create local employment.
- Strengthen career services and university incubators as pipelines into Tech Park ecosystems.

(4) The EU and International Partners Should:

- Support legislative and institutional reforms to align Western Balkan labour and education systems with EU standards for mobility, skills recognition, and digitalization.
- Facilitate the inclusion of Western Balkan institutions in EU programs such as *Erasmus+*, *Horizon Europe*, *Digital Europe*, and *Creative Europe*, ensuring stronger research–industry linkages.
- Establish a Western Balkans Skills and Innovation Platform, integrating data on regional skills demand, talent mobility, and innovation outcomes to guide EU investment decisions.
- Provide funding for vocational excellence centres and Tech Park-based training hubs connected to the *European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA)* and *Pact for Skills*.
- Encourage EU enterprises to engage in outsourcing and co-development partnerships with Western Balkan SMEs and Tech Parks through the *InvestEU* and *Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)* frameworks.
- Promote exchange programs and joint master's degrees in critical technologies (AI, cybersecurity, green transition) to harmonize qualifications and boost regional employability.