

Deliverable 1.5.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The S4AI_HUB project aims to establish a sustainable and high-performing European Digital Innovation Hub in Serbia, focused on supporting SMEs and public sector organizations in their digital transformation, particularly in the field of Artificial Intelligence. This deliverable presents the initial framework for monitoring progress and assessing impact through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), in line with the project's objectives and the overall ambition to drive innovation, foster collaboration, and strengthen regional digital ecosystems.

The methodology applied combines a results-oriented monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system with regular data collection and analysis, structured across three key checkpoints—M18, M36, and M48. KPIs have been designed to capture quantitative progress, reflect the hub's outreach and service delivery, and guide strategic adjustments. These indicators measure the number of SMEs supported, strategic partnerships formed, regional DIHs connected, institutions reached, participation in industry events, and services offered through the S4AI_HUB marketplace. Baseline values for 2024 are set at zero, reflecting the starting phase of implementation, while clearly defined targets have been established for each milestone to ensure measurable progress.

The first findings demonstrate that the project has laid solid groundwork for scaling up activities and delivering on its impact goals. Early engagement with stakeholders and visibility efforts have already resulted in increased awareness and initial collaborations, setting a promising foundation for the upcoming reporting periods. The approach integrates both technical and relational aspects of DIH operations, emphasizing not only numbers but also the quality and sustainability of partnerships and services.

Some limitations at this stage include the evolving nature of digital innovation ecosystems and the challenge of attributing long-term impact to early-stage interventions. The KPIs will therefore be reviewed and potentially refined as the project evolves, ensuring alignment with both strategic objectives and on-the-ground developments. Despite these limitations, the KPI framework provides a clear structure for tracking performance and supports evidence-based decision-making within the project.

Overall, this document establishes a transparent, structured, and dynamic system for impact monitoring. It reflects the project's commitment to measurable outcomes and accountability, while offering a foundation for continuous improvement and strategic alignment throughout the lifespan of S4AI_HUB.

1. ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Abbreviation / Acronym	Description
S4AI_HUB	Serbian European Digital Innovation Hub on Artificial Intelligence.
D	Deliverable
AI	Artificial Intelligence.
T	Task
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
DTA	Digital Transformation Accelerator
EU	European Union
GA	Grant Agreement
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
DEP	Digital Europe Programme
EDIH	European Digital Innovation Hubs
KO	Key Objective
DMA	Digital Maturity Assessment
ECCP	European Cluster Collaboration Platform
TBI	Test Before Invest
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
AMD	Advanced Micro Devices
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
NALED	National Alliance for Local Economic Development
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
ROI	Return on investment
EIT	European Institute of Innovation and Technology
JOIST	JOIST Innovation Park Larissa, Greece
PMO	Project management office
VC	<i>Venture capital</i>
VR	Virtual Reality
IoT	Internet of Things
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
INNDIH	Valencia Region Digital Innovation Hub
CROBOHUB.AI	Croatian Robotics Digital Innovation Hub

2. BACKGROUND

The present document constitutes the Deliverable D5.1 “KPI Framework and Impact Monitoring” in the framework of the Flagship Project S4AI_HUB – Serbian European Digital Innovation Hub on Artificial Intelligence. As described in the S4AI_HUB project, this deliverable lays the foundation for systematically tracking the performance and impact of the hub’s activities. It contributes to the overarching goals of the Digital Europe Programme by ensuring transparent, evidence-based progress monitoring and supports alignment with broader EU efforts aimed at strengthening digital innovation capacity, particularly in the field of Artificial Intelligence.

3. OBJECTIVE/AIM

This document has been prepared to provide a structured overview of the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) framework established for the S4AI_HUB project, in alignment with the project's overall goals under the Digital Europe Programme. Its aim is to define measurable indicators that will enable consistent monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of progress toward the project's specific objectives. The deliverable supports the development of a transparent and results-oriented performance assessment system, ensuring that the S4AI_HUB delivers meaningful impact in supporting the digital transformation of SMEs and public sector stakeholders through AI-driven innovation services

4. IMPACT AND KPI ASSESSMENT

WP1 of the S4AI_HUB project is dedicated to Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), including the design, tracking, and periodic assessment of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that measure the hub's success in delivering its services and achieving impact. All core consortium members contribute to this work package in accordance with their thematic roles—ranging from digital innovation service provision to capacity building, communication, and ecosystem engagement. The present deliverable, developed under Task 1.1, constitutes the first version of the impact and KPI assessment framework and outlines the structure for collecting, analyzing, and reporting performance data throughout the project lifecycle.

The methodology used for developing the KPI system is grounded in a participatory and impact-oriented approach, aligning with the principles of the Digital Europe Programme and the specific objectives of the S4AI_HUB. It includes the establishment of baseline values, targets for three key project milestones (M18, M36, and M48), and the integration of a result-based reporting mechanism through the Digital Transformation Accelerator (DTA) system every six months. The KPIs were initially defined during the proposal phase and further refined during the inception of the project in collaboration with all partners.

To ensure comparability and strategic alignment, the KPIs reflect dimensions across relevance, reach, service delivery, and stakeholder engagement. Specific indicators include the number of SMEs directly supported, strategic partnerships established with multipliers and service providers, number of connected regional DIHs, outreach activities toward SMEs and public institutions, participation in industry events, and the number of services available in the S4AI_HUB marketplace.

The rationale behind the selection of these KPIs rests on several key criteria:

- **Direct alignment with project objectives:** Each KPI tracks progress against clearly stated goals in the Grant Agreement (GA), particularly the strengthening of digital transformation capacities in SMEs and public administrations.
- **Coverage of multiple impact dimensions:** Indicators capture quantitative outputs across technical, economic, institutional, and ecosystem-building categories.
- **Stakeholder-driven relevance:** The KPIs were validated by partners who are responsible for implementing respective work streams, ensuring feasibility and meaningfulness of the metrics.
- **Measurability and comparability:** The values are expressed in clear numerical form to allow for objective tracking and cross-period analysis.
- **Scalability and adaptability:** As the project evolves, the KPI framework allows for revisions to incorporate lessons learned and respond to external factors or emerging opportunities.

The KPI list is supported by an internal tracking tool shared among project partners, with responsibility for individual indicators allocated based on task leadership. This ensures accountability and regular updates, contributing to a transparent and data-informed management process.

As of this first version, the indicators serve both as a strategic compass and as operational metrics, enabling the S4AI_HUB to continuously assess whether its services, partnerships, and outreach activities are on track to meet its mission. Future iterations of this deliverable will build upon cumulative results, incorporate additional qualitative insights where necessary, and provide the basis for the final evaluation of impact at project completion (M48)

4.1. History of KPI Development

The development of the KPI framework within the S4AI_HUB project was initiated under Task 1.1 as part of the broader Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system. The process was led by the coordination team in collaboration with all consortium partners, ensuring a participatory and mission-driven approach to performance measurement. The original set of KPIs was defined during the proposal phase and grounded in the strategic goals outlined in the Grant Agreement (GA), focusing on the delivery of high-quality services, ecosystem engagement, and digital transformation support for SMEs and public institutions.

During the first months of the project, the initial KPI set was reviewed and validated through internal consultations, bilateral exchanges, and feedback rounds with thematic work package leaders. Comparative insights were also drawn from prior Digital Europe Programme (DEP) and Horizon 2020 projects, particularly those related to Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs) and Artificial Intelligence deployment in SMEs, ensuring coherence with European-level expectations and best practices.

The number of KPIs was intentionally limited to those that are both result-oriented and operationally measurable, allowing the team to focus on meaningful progress rather than administrative overhead. The framework includes clear baseline values, measurable targets at M18, M36, and M48, and a system for tracking contributions through the Digital Transformation Accelerator (DTA) platform every six months.

This iterative process allowed the team to ensure that each KPI aligns with one or more project objectives, is feasible to measure with available data, and reflects the diversity of activities implemented by the S4AI_HUB across its strategic domains—capacity building, business support, ecosystem integration, and technology uptake.

A summary of key milestones in the KPI development process is provided below:

Date	Activity
January 2025	Initial review of proposal-defined KPIs and mapping against project objectives
February 2025	Internal partner consultations to confirm relevance and data availability
March 2025	Alignment with DTA reporting structure and Digital Europe Programme indicators
April 2025	KPI framework draft shared with all WP leaders and adjusted based on feedback
May 2025	Final version of KPI list agreed among partners and integrated into tracking tools
June 2025	Submission of first internal KPI monitoring report and onboarding to DTA system

Table 1. Key milestones in the KPI development process

This collaborative and adaptive process ensures that the KPI system remains a living component of project management, capable of reflecting real-time developments and supporting evidence-based decision-making throughout the duration of the S4AI_HUB project.

4.2. Rationale for the Choice of KPIs

The selection of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) within the S4AI_HUB project has been guided by the need to quantitatively assess the project's effectiveness in delivering support to SMEs, public institutions,

and the broader digital innovation ecosystem. Each KPI has been carefully aligned with the project's specific objectives as outlined in the Grant Agreement, ensuring that measurement efforts directly reflect progress in strategic domains such as AI service uptake, ecosystem building, and stakeholder engagement.

To ensure relevance and coherence, the KPI framework was built on several foundational criteria. First, all indicators are explicitly linked to one or more project objectives, enabling precise monitoring of results and impact. The selection process also ensured comprehensive coverage, with KPIs reflecting multiple performance dimensions—namely technical, economic, institutional, and ecosystem-level impacts—while remaining simple enough to track with reliable data sources.

Quantifiability was a central criterion: KPIs were defined using metrics that are clear, specific, and measurable over time. This allows for consistent progress tracking at each of the three project milestones (M18, M36, M48), as well as biannual reporting through the Digital Transformation Accelerator (DTA) system. Furthermore, baseline values and target benchmarks have been established based on realistic yet ambitious projections derived from the S4AI_HUB's service model and capacity targets.

The development of KPIs was not done in isolation. Stakeholder involvement played a vital role throughout the process. Partners responsible for implementing technical and business support services contributed their domain expertise to define feasible, impactful indicators. This bottom-up approach ensured not only methodological soundness but also practical alignment with field realities and institutional capacities.

Finally, where relevant, the KPIs were cross-checked against indicators used in comparable DEP to enhance coherence, comparability, and transferability of results. By applying these rigorous criteria, the project guarantees that its KPI system is not only a monitoring tool but a strategic instrument to drive learning, adjustment, and ultimately, impact in advancing AI-driven digital transformation in Serbia and the wider region.

4.3. . Impact-First Approach

The S4AI_HUB project is grounded in an “impact-first” approach, where all activities, services, and engagement mechanisms are designed to generate tangible benefits for end-users—primarily SMEs, public institutions, and the regional innovation ecosystem. From the earliest stages of implementation, the project has prioritized relevance, usability, and stakeholder alignment, ensuring that support services, capacity-building actions, and ecosystem coordination reflect the actual needs and demands of beneficiaries.

This approach is multidimensional, integrating technical, organizational, economic, and social impact pathways. The S4AI_HUB methodology recognizes that successful digital transformation—particularly through the uptake of Artificial Intelligence in business and public administration—depends not only on technology readiness but also on awareness, trust, accessibility, and perceived value by the end users. Therefore, the project combines service delivery KPIs with proactive measurement of digital presence, reach, and responsiveness to stakeholder expectations.

To support this strategy, the project incorporates digital impact KPIs into its broader performance monitoring system. These indicators reflect how well the project is resonating with its audiences online

and offline. Tracking includes metrics such as user interaction with online services and content, visibility of S4AI_HUB across digital platforms, thematic relevance of communications, and responsiveness to inquiries from SMEs and institutions. Additionally, participation in public events, downloads and usage of marketplace services, and stakeholder feedback loops contribute to the assessment of how the project is perceived and utilized in real time.

The “impact-first” principle is also operationalized through stakeholder co-creation activities, ensuring that services evolve based on user feedback and contextual insights. Each partner is responsible for identifying and maximizing impact within their domain, whether it concerns AI adoption, policy alignment, capacity building, or regional DIH integration. This collective responsibility strengthens the systemic impact of the project across local, national, and European levels.

Importantly, the S4AI_HUB approach views impact not as a final outcome but as a continuous, adaptive process. This includes periodic adjustments to communication strategies, service offerings, and outreach methods, based on evolving user behavior, digital trends, and ecosystem needs. Through this dynamic alignment between planned activities and observed outcomes, the project aims to ensure high relevance, visibility, and adoption of its services throughout its duration and beyond its conclusion.

S4AI HUB Key Objective (KO)	S4AI_HUB Dimension	Corresponding KPIs	Short Description / Target
KO1. Enhancing Digital Transformation of SMEs and Public Sector	Digital Tools Adoption & Infrastructure	- 5% ↑ in adoption of digital tools- 5 pilot projects scaled- 1M€ secured for digitalization	Increased digital infrastructure, improved operational efficiency, and more use of digital platforms by SMEs and public sector
	Improved Digital Maturity	- Measured via DMA at T0, T1, T2	Digital maturity growth measured over time through structured assessment
	Digital Skills & Training	- 5% growth in SMEs/startups engaged in DT (JRC Radar)- 80+ orgs in Digital Bootcamp	Boosting skills and enabling transformation via training and workshops
	Test Before Invest (TBI)	- 24+ orgs supported with TBI	Pilot projects enabling real-world testing of solutions before market
	Access to Finance	- 10+ collaborative applications- 10+ digitalisation vouchers- 5 investment cases	Triggered funding mechanisms through EDIH intervention
KO2. Fostering Innovation and Market Creation	Product/Service Innovation	- 10 new digital products/services/business models- 5 sustainable products- Open Innovation Repository- AI Matchmaking platform	Boosting innovation and digital solution creation across sectors
	SME Competitiveness	- 3% ↑ in SME market share- 10% entering new markets	Strengthened market presence and economic impact
	Collaboration & Ecosystem Building	- At least 10 collaborations between universities & industry- At least 5 inter-agency collaborations- 5 cross-EDIH collaborations	Fostering quadruple-helix, intersectoral and EU-wide partnerships
	IP Awareness & Exploitation	- Policies established via T4.1 and T4.6- Dissemination/exploitation support	Clear IP strategy & commercialization support
KO3. Green & Sustainable Digital Transformation	Green Tech Adoption	- 10 green technologies implemented- 3% growth in green market share	SMEs and public actors adopt renewable and efficient tech
	Sustainable Practices	- 5% ↓ in resource use or waste- Circular economy and eco-innovation adoption	Sustainability embedded in business operations
KO4. Economic and Employment Growth	New Business Creation	- 50 new startups/spin-offs- 2% growth in IP output- Funding secured by startups	Growth of new ventures & innovation output
	Employment & Job Quality	- 1% ↑ in ecosystem employment- 20 new	Tech job creation, entrepreneurship and skill

		businesses- 2% ↑ in skilled professionals	development
KO5. Social Impact, Inclusion & Accessibility	Inclusive Digitalization	- Digital inclusion programs- Accessibility via Serbian-Korean Center- Gender equality & diversity actions	Targeting underserved, disabled, rural, and minority communities
	Education & Lifelong Learning	- AI in education- High-end assistive tech- EdTech and skill development programs	Improved access and personalization of learning
	Societal Impact	- 1% ↑ in social indicators- 5% ↑ in citizen e-engagement- 2% ↑ in social enterprises	Smart cities, improved governance, and healthier communities
KO6. Strengthening the EDIH Network	Collaboration with EDIHs & EU-level actors	- 5+ formal EU collaborations- Participation in EDIH network & matchmaking	Strategic integration into the EU EDIH ecosystem for knowledge and best-practice exchange
	Contribution to SDGs	- Activities mapped to SDGs (e.g., 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17)	Holistic contribution to UN Sustainable Development Goals

Table 1. Mapping Table: Dimensions & KPIs to ULTIMO Key Objectives

5. . DIGITAL IMPACT AND COMMUNICATION

The focus on digital impact lies in the technical measurement of search volume and engagement related to project topics across all communication channels, including website, apps, media releases, video content, brochures, as well as pilot-relevant content on local and national digital channels. The technical approach relies innovatively on the optimization of published content to increase visibility, readability and ease of finding on all search platforms. Even more important than that is the measurement of reach, i.e. how much the published contents are used, understood and searched by users.

All communication plans and measures, where applicable and where partners deliver their content and keywords, are monitored and analyzed by the impact assessment partner S4AI HUB, which collects initial and ongoing data on active users. The results are immediately delivered to the communication teams and experts involved in all communication and dissemination activities of the S4AI HUB project. Once the pilot phase begins, both the activities of the Project Management Team and their internal communications will be closely monitored and accompanied by partner assessments of S4AI HUB impact, using national data for the country where the pilot is being implemented.

The digital impact monitoring strategy is based on the "impact first" principle, which means that all generated content is proactively analyzed and KPIs for impact are provided to teams working on content, as well as those involved in the implementation of pilot projects. A keyword tracking strategy begins with the creation of a list of keywords in collaboration with all project partners, which is then refined by the communications team. The result is an extensive list of keywords and a shortened list of branded keywords that are monitored regularly every month for the duration of the project to monitor how the name S4AI HUB appears in user searches on the Internet. A comprehensive list of keywords is measured at the beginning, middle and end of the project to get a benchmark of search volume at different stages. Regarding the monitoring of keywords for the pilots, before the start of the pilot phase, additional, specific lists of keywords are created in cooperation with the partner organizations involved in the pilots, which are then also monitored on a monthly basis.

This approach enables timely and accurate monitoring of the project's digital impact, as well as its recognition in the public, which enables communication activities to be coordinated and optimized for maximum reach and user engagement.

5.1. Dissemination Activities

5.1.1. Dissemination activity name: Kick-off Event and Public Presentation of the S4AI Hub

Type of activity: Launch event, project promotion, and stakeholder communication

Description of the activity:

On February 21, 2024, Niš Science and Technology Park officially launched the Serbian European Digital Innovation Hub on AI (S4AI_HUB). The event gathered project partners and government representatives from two key ministries, highlighting the hub's role in Serbia's digital transformation. Attendees learned about S4AI_HUB's four core services: networking, training, testing, and investment support for AI adoption in businesses. Speakers emphasized how this initiative will strengthen Serbia's innovation ecosystem and help SMEs compete digitally. The event successfully communicated the project's goals to media and stakeholders, positioning it as a strategic step in aligning Serbia with EU digital priorities while supporting local startups and public sector modernization.

Description of the objectives:

To launch the S4AI Hub project, present its mission and partners, and publicly communicate the vision, services, and institutional support behind the EDIH initiative.

Photo/video/link/printscreens:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1HBwayauuJX3Xu6v0m4dWzXgm19FZcTcw?usp=sharing>

5.1.2. Dissemination activity name: *Regional Info Days – Launcher*

Type of activity: Information and outreach event (physical, promotional)

Description of the activity:

As part of the promotional efforts for the new season of the Launcher accelerator program, Info Days were organized in five cities across Serbia – Vranje, Leskovac, Kruševac, Paraćin, and Novi Pazar. These events were held physically and brought together approximately 70 participants. The aim was to present the opportunities offered by the Launcher program to local teams and individuals interested in developing innovative ideas and launching startups.

Each Info Day featured a presentation on the program's structure, eligibility criteria, and the types of support available – including education, mentorship, expert guidance, and financial incentives. The format encouraged open discussion, where participants could ask questions, receive guidance on the application process, and clarify potential concerns.

Strong interest, active participation, and meaningful dialogue with local communities demonstrated that there is a growing potential for startup ecosystem development across the country. In addition to promoting the program, these events served as a catalyst for fostering entrepreneurial spirit among young people and innovators beyond major urban centers.

Description of the objectives:

To promote Launcher in local communities, inform potential applicants, and activate regional startup potential beyond large innovation hubs.

Photo/video/link/printscreens:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1AHJa6fz2l5MUrGK4MDMLR4wkRXg8lfuX?usp=drive_link

<https://youtu.be/gslgel3R5S4?si=riOHMtaTRsK7mFGJ>

5.1.3. Dissemination activity name: Promotion of the 9th Forum of Advanced Technologies and participation of S4AI Hub

Type of activity: Event promotion and S4AI Hub participation

Description of the activity:

The 9th Forum of Advanced Technologies, held in Niš, was one of the most prominent national events dedicated to innovation, digital transformation, and advanced technologies. Within the Forum's rich agenda, the S4AI Hub and its partners played a significant role, delivering a total of nine sessions, including panels, keynote speeches, and fireside chats. Topics covered included artificial intelligence, digital transformation, industrial innovation, and startup support.

All sessions involving S4AI Hub partners were visually branded with the S4AI Hub logo, emphasizing the Hub's strategic presence and positioning as a key stakeholder in Serbia's innovation ecosystem. Their participation contributed to the overall professionalism and impact of the Forum, of Advanced Technologies while also enabling direct engagement with attendees and raising awareness of the Hub's activities.

Description of the objectives:

To position the S4AI Hub and its partners as key innovation actors through strategic content and visibility at the 9th Forum of Advanced Technologies.

Photo/video/link/printscreens:

Communication on Social Media

Media links

5.1.4. Dissemination activity name: Promotion of S4AI Hub activities at the International Fair of Technics and Technical Achievements

Type of activity: Event promotion and participation of S4AI Hub partners

Description of the activity:

During the 67th International Fair of Technics and Technical Achievements, partners of the S4AI Hub presented their planned support activities for startups and SMEs within the European Digital Innovation Hub initiative. A key moment of the Hub's presence was the panel discussion titled "European Digital Innovation Hubs – Opportunities for Growth and Innovation", where each partner highlighted their area of expertise and explained how they will contribute to digital transformation and innovation capacity-building for small and medium-sized enterprises. The panel served to showcase the specific services that

S4AI Hub will offer – from artificial intelligence applications and simulation technologies to mentoring, solution testing, and access to infrastructure and knowledge.

Description of the objectives

To present the scope and support capacities of the S4AI Hub for startups and SMEs through participation in a national panel dedicated to the EDIH initiative.

5.1.5. Dissemination activity name: *Presentation of the Launcher Program at the International Fair of Technics and Technical Achievements*

Type of activity: Promotional event (trade fair participation)

Description of the activity:

From May 19 to 23, 2025, the Launcher program was presented at the 66th International Fair of Technics and Technical Achievements in Belgrade – one of the most prominent regional events for industrial and technological innovation. Although the call for applications had already closed (with a total of 108 applications submitted), the program was promoted as a relevant platform for early-stage startup development and support.

Visitors had the opportunity to learn more about the structure of the program, the types of support provided – including mentoring, training, and financial incentives – and the broader role of Launcher in strengthening the national startup ecosystem. Through the joint exhibition of the Science and Technology Park Niš and partner organizations, the program's results and previous success stories were shared to inspire future applicants and partners.

Description of the objectives

To promote the role of the Launcher program in supporting early-stage startups and present its impact to a wider professional audience after the application phase closed (108 teams applied).

5.2. Communication activities

5.2.1. Activity name: Promotion of the Public Call on social media

Description:

The main objective of the campaign was to generate at least 50 applications, with a focus on teams from all parts of Serbia. The campaign was conducted in three phases, running in parallel on Facebook and Instagram, with no distinction in content approach. Formats included reels, static posts, carousels, and stories, ensuring messages were effectively communicated through both organic and paid reach.

Communication channel: Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn

Outcome:

The number of applications increased and the reach was significantly extended. The digital campaign was executed in three distinct phases:

- **Phase 1: Pre-launch (Before opening of the call):**
15 different posts were published, with reels and carousel posts showing the best performance.

The campaign focused on motivating the audience to apply, with a clear call-to-action. An engagement ad campaign launched in the first few days reached 160,000 people. On April 17, the official promotion began with the message: "SECURE UP TO RSD 1,150,000 AND LAUNCH YOUR BUSINESS IDEA," which resulted in 225,000 video views, a 32% hook rate, 51.33% hold rate, and nearly 10,000 link clicks to the application form.

- **Phase 2: During the application period (April 14 – May 16):**

In addition to the main campaign, several supporting messages were promoted:

- "Developing an innovative idea?" – 673 link clicks
- "What to expect from the Launcher program" – 599 clicks
- "5 reasons to apply your team" – 493 clicks

A separate ad was also launched for the Online Info Day event, aimed at presenting the program in more detail and addressing frequently asked questions.

- **Phase 3: Post-call closure:**

This phase covered the education and support sessions with selected teams, aiming to further develop their ideas and prepare them for final presentations. Social media was used to share updates and educational content, including previews and recaps of lectures, and posts such as "5 tips for a perfect pitch." The Demo Day event, marking the end of the first phase, was also announced during this period.

In addition, S4AI Hub partners promoted the open call on their social media to engage startups from their respective regions.

Media coverage:

The media campaign included distribution of press releases to national and regional online portals, as well as TV appearances and live interviews.

Media links

S4AI Hub Partners – Open Call - Launcher Communication

STP Niš: <https://ntp.rs/aktuelnosti/5420/>

STP Čačak: <https://www.ntpcacak.rs/sr/clanak/686/>

NiCat Cluster: [First Public Call Open for Participation in the S4AI HUB Launcher Program | NiCAT](#)

IVI: https://ivi.ac.rs/en/news/first-public-call-open-for-participation-in-the-s4ai_hub-launcher-program/

CDT: https://cdt.org.rs/en/vesti/first-public-call-opened-within-the-s4ai_hub-for-participation-in-the-launcher-program

ICEF: [Покрени свој AI стартап уз Launcher акцелератор – ICEF](#)

S4AI Hub Partners on Social Media Channels

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/16RzXEIU3QfJYCQ6kkk1tusMPjsc70DZ8?usp=drive_link

5.2.2. Activity name: *Info Day Promotion on Social Media*

Description:

To ensure strong local outreach, each Info Day was announced and promoted through a targeted social media campaign. Unique visual designs were created for each of the five cities, adapted to reflect the local context and audience. Posts were published across Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn channels of the Launcher program, Science and Technology Park Niš, and local partners. The content format included static visuals, carousels, and stories, with a clear and direct call-to-action for attending the event and learning more about the application process.

The communication emphasized direct access to information, informal interaction, and the opportunity to ask questions in person. Engagement levels on social media reflected strong interest in the program in all five regions, and the visual diversity helped boost relevance and recognition of the events.

Communication channels: Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn

Outcome:

- Strengthened local awareness of the Launcher program
- Around 70 participants reached across five cities
- Increased engagement from regional audiences
- Strengthened visibility and positioning of Launcher as an inclusive, nationally relevant program

5.2.3. Activity name: *Post-fair awareness campaign on social media*

Photo/video/link/printscreens:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1MmgEM2w7zntWiHqQhC33fbEslcllrT2W?usp=drive_link

Description:

Following the fair, a communication campaign was carried out on social media to further promote the goals, scope, and benefits of the Launcher program. Although the application process was closed, the posts served to maintain visibility, build trust in the program's structure, and inspire future engagement from innovative teams.

Content formats included recap posts, photo carousels from the fair, and informative posts about the types of support offered to selected startups. Key messages focused on what Launcher offers, how it contributes to startup growth, and how the ecosystem can connect with the program in future cycles.

Communication channels: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn

Outcome:

- Reinforced positioning of Launcher as a strategic national startup support program
- Increased awareness among technical and innovation-focused audiences

- Stimulated interest for future collaboration and upcoming program cycles
- Promoted the success of the call, which attracted 108 submitted applications

5.2.4. Activity name: Post-fair awareness campaign on social media

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Content formats included recap posts, photo carousels from the fair, and informative posts about the types of support offered to selected startups. Key messages focused on what Launcher offers, how it contributes to startup growth, and how the ecosystem can connect with the program in future cycles.

Communication channels: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn

Outcome:

- Reinforced positioning of Launcher as a strategic national startup support program
- Increased awareness among technical and innovation-focused audiences
- Stimulated interest for future collaboration and upcoming program cycles
- Promoted the success of the call, which attracted 108 submitted applications

5.2.5. Activity name: Digital promotion of the Forum of Advanced Technologies and S4AI Hub participation via institutional and social media channels

Description:

The Forum was promoted via its official social media profiles (Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn), featuring content such as speaker announcements, session highlights, countdowns, and behind-the-scenes insights. All communication was consistently branded and included S4AI Hub visual elements, strengthening recognition of the partnership.

In parallel, S4AI Hub partners promoted their participation through their own channels – social media and websites – announcing their sessions, highlighting topics, and inviting their communities to join. After the event, they shared follow-up posts with key takeaways, speaker quotes, photos, and impressions from their sessions, further amplifying their contribution and extending the Forum's visibility.

In addition to organic promotion, a targeted paid campaign was launched on Instagram. With a daily budget of €12, the ad included a direct link to the Forum registration form and aimed to maximize reach. The campaign achieved a total reach of 274,526 unique users, with the most engaged demographic being men aged 25–34, who accounted for 145 link clicks. Although Meta automatically expanded the target age range to 18–65+, the 25–34 age group remained the most effective segment.

Communication channels:

Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn (Forum and partner profiles), official institutional websites and newsletters

Media coverage:

The media campaign included distribution of press releases to national and regional online portals, as well as TV appearances and live interviews.

Media links

Outcome:

- Forum of Advanced Technologies sessions delivered with active involvement of S4AI Hub partners
- Consistent visual identity with S4AI Hub branding across all materials
- Instagram ad campaign: 274,526 unique users reached, 145 link clicks
- Strong partner-led promotion through pre-event and follow-up communication
- Strengthened positioning of S4AI Hub in the national innovation ecosystem

5.2.6. Activity name: Post-panel promotion of S4AI Hub activities via social media and partner websites

Description:

Following the panel discussion, all Hub partners carried out **follow-up communication** through their social media channels (LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram). Posts included key takeaways from the panel, event photos, speaker quotes, and messages highlighting the importance of EDIHs in strengthening the domestic innovation ecosystem.

The communication was aligned with the S4AI Hub's visual identity and emphasized the collaborative nature of the partnership. The goal was to inform the broader public, relevant institutions, and the SME sector about the upcoming services and opportunities available through the Hub.

Photo/video/link/printscreens:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1QiQ7S48EMaE7VQT0OXetqAha3eaeNAZJ?usp=drive_link

[European Digital Innovation Hubs – A Gateway to Growth and Innovation - Istraživačko-razvojni institut za veštačku inteligenciju](#)

Communication channels:

LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram (partner and institutional profiles), official websites of partner organizations

Outcome:

- S4AI Hub partners actively participated in a nationally relevant event
- Increased visibility of the Hub through a joint panel and digital communication

- Follow-up communication raised awareness about the EDIH's role in SME support
- A clear overview of available services was presented to potential future users

5.2.7. Activity name: Media and Digital Communication of the S4AI Hub Kick-off

Description:

The kick-off event was widely promoted through press releases, official statements, and posts on social media and institutional websites. High visibility was ensured through coordinated communication across the entire consortium.

As part of the project's preparatory phase, the official visual identity of the S4AI Hub was developed, including the logo, color palette, typography, and a functional project website.

Social media content related to the event included photos, key messages, speaker quotes, and summaries of the project's purpose and service offerings. Particular emphasis was placed on the consortium's partnership model, institutional support, and the European dimension of the initiative.

Communication channels:

Social media (LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram), official websites of STP Niš and project partners, national media outlets:

Social media links:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1HBwayauuJX3Xu6v0m4dWzXgm19FZcTcw?usp=drive_link

Media links:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1J8Q1IMDkRyOH7e3t2g895xtu-qmr6NER/edit?usp=drive_link&ouid=114839706033159203761&rtpof=true&sd=true

Outcome:

- Official launch of the project with presence of national-level stakeholders
- Extensive media coverage and institutional promotion
- Defined visual identity and project website established
- Strong positioning of the S4AI Hub in Serbia's innovation and digitalization ecosystem

6. REPORTING OF EDIH SERVICES DELIVERY

Summary

The S4AI Hub has successfully implemented a series of foundational activities that form the backbone of its service delivery framework. These critical preparatory steps, while not formal KPIs, have established the necessary infrastructure and operational capabilities required for the Hub to function effectively and deliver tangible results.

Key achievements include the development of comprehensive governance structures and operational manuals that define service delivery protocols and staff responsibilities. The team has conducted in-depth analysis of digital transformation needs across Serbian SMEs, while simultaneously building platforms to connect innovators with potential partners and investors. A structured acceleration program has been launched to nurture early-stage startups, complemented by specialized training modules and mentorship initiatives.

Strategic efforts have been made to align the Hub's services with national digitalization priorities, particularly through engagement with government innovation programs. Preparations are underway to support startups in securing investment, with practical guidance materials developed ahead of schedule. Concurrently, a robust communication strategy has been formulated to ensure effective outreach across stakeholder groups.

International collaborations have been initiated to integrate Serbian innovators into broader European networks, while major events have successfully brought together ecosystem players to foster knowledge exchange. The Hub has also invested in building internal expertise, particularly in AI-related competencies, to ensure high-quality service delivery.

These collective efforts have created an enabling environment where the Hub's core services can thrive. By establishing these fundamental operational, strategic and partnership frameworks, the S4AI Hub has positioned itself as a driving force in Serbia's digital transformation journey, ready to deliver meaningful support to startups, SMEs and public institutions alike.

Work Package 1 (WP1) Manage an Effective and Sustainable S4AI_HUB

T1.1 - EDIH Coordination and Management

The project team organized three coordination meetings to align activities and ensure smooth implementation. To maintain regular communication, bi-weekly virtual meetings are being conducted via Zoom to discuss administrative and financial updates, with plans for at least two physical meetings annually throughout the project duration. Additional meetings are scheduled as needed for specific topics such as strategy development or onboarding new pilots. Clear roles and responsibilities have been defined across the team, including the appointment of subtask leaders, communication and technical teams, pilot leads, and coordinators. The team has also identified internal and external experts to support service delivery. Comprehensive procedures have been established for key processes including onboarding new pilots, participation in events and tradeshows, and forming new collaborations and partnerships. The team developed essential manuals covering Test-Before-Invest (TBI), Securing Financing, and Digital Maturity Assessment (DMA) methodologies. A centralized collaboration platform was created on MS Teams, serving as a repository for all project documentation, templates, pilot files, and financial records, thereby fulfilling Deliverable D1.3 (Collaborative Tools Created). Key deliverable D1.1 (S4AI_HUB Strategy and Plans) have been successfully prepared and submitted through the SYGMA platform. The Consortium Agreement (MS1) was finalized during the project's initial phase, establishing the foundation for partnership collaboration.

T1.2 - Capacity Building of S4AI_HUB Staff on AI

A dedicated two-day capacity building workshop was conducted by IVI to enhance staff competencies in AI-related services. The training covered AI-driven training and assessment methods, technical support for AI solution development, and engagement with AI-focused stakeholders. This workshop was strategically combined with the project kick-off meeting to optimize time and resources. The capacity building initiative has equipped the S4AI_HUB team with the necessary skills to effectively deliver AI-oriented services including TBI, DMA, and financing support, while strengthening the hub's ability to foster an AI-focused innovation ecosystem. Key deliverable D1.2 (S4AI_HUB Staff Trained in AI) was finalized during the project's initial phase, establishing the foundation for partnership collaboration.

Work Package 2: Innovation Ecosystem and Networking

The S4AI Hub has made significant progress in implementing Work Package 2 focused on strengthening Serbia's innovation ecosystem through targeted networking and matchmaking activities. **T2.1 - Identification and Matchmaking**

As part of T2.1 - Identification and Matchmaking, we have completed a comprehensive "Needs and Gaps Analysis for Digital Transformation of SMEs in Serbia" that provides crucial insights into the current state of digital readiness across Serbian businesses. This in-depth analysis examined multiple critical dimensions of the digital transformation landscape, from infrastructure capabilities and data organization to financial constraints and support systems.

The findings from this analysis have enabled us to develop both short-term and long-term recommendations to address identified gaps, while simultaneously serving as a foundational element for our upcoming T2.2 activities. The study particularly focused on evaluating existing testing and simulation environments, mapping technological strengths across regions, assessing the availability of knowledge-intensive services, and understanding financial barriers faced by SMEs.

In parallel, we have successfully developed and implemented key user functionalities for our AI-driven business matchmaking platform. This innovative platform utilizes sophisticated algorithms to intelligently connect ecosystem participants - including startups, investors, potential partners and customers - based on aligned objectives and complementary needs. The platform's advanced matching capabilities represent a major step forward in our ability to facilitate meaningful business connections within Serbia's innovation landscape.

These strategic initiatives under T2.1 have effectively established the necessary groundwork for our subsequent ecosystem development efforts. By combining rigorous analytical insights with cutting-edge matchmaking technology, we are well-positioned to deliver targeted, data-driven interventions that will accelerate digital transformation and foster sustainable growth across Serbia's SME sector. The insights gained will directly inform our future activities to ensure maximum impact in addressing the most pressing challenges facing Serbian businesses in their digital evolution

T.2.2 Digital Maturity Assessment – Bootcamp for digital transformation

The S4AI Hub has successfully executed the Launcher 2025 program as part of its T.2.2 Digital Maturity Assessment – Bootcamp for digital transformation. This regional pre-seed acceleration program,

implemented through the Science and Technology Park Niš, has established itself as a vital entry point for early-stage startups into Serbia's digital innovation ecosystem. Between January and June 2025, the program made significant strides in nurturing entrepreneurial talent, beginning with a national public call that attracted 108 applications from aspiring startups across the country. Following a rigorous selection process, 16 of the most promising teams were chosen to participate in Phase 1 of the program.

The program's structured approach, grounded in the Running Lean methodology, provided participants with comprehensive support through eight carefully designed educational modules. These sessions covered essential aspects of startup development including idea refinement, customer validation techniques, effective market positioning strategies, and pitching skills. Complementary events such as "Prepare to Launch" workshops and regional Info Days further enriched the participants' experience while generating substantial interest in the local entrepreneurial community. The program's impact has been amplified through the official recognition and financial backing from the Ministry of Science, Technological Development, and Innovation, ensuring its alignment with national innovation priorities.

Looking ahead, the program is preparing for its crucial Demo Days in early July 2025, where a Selection Committee will evaluate the participating teams and identify the top five performers to advance to Phase 2. These selected startups will receive not only financial support but also gain access to the full spectrum of S4AI Hub services. This includes undergoing Digital Maturity Assessments to evaluate their technological readiness, benefiting from specialized mentorship programs, and gaining access to valuable knowledge resources. The program will further assist these startups in securing financing through investor connections while providing test-before-invest validation opportunities to refine their market offerings. Additional seed funding will be allocated to support the transformation of their innovations into market-ready solutions, with all selected teams completing their legal registration processes to ensure full compliance with national regulations.

T2.5 Key EDIH Event “Forum of Advanced Technology”

The 9th Forum of Advanced Technologies – TechMomentum (T2.5 Key EDIH Event “Forum of Advanced Technology”) was successfully held on June 11 and 12, 2025, at the Science and Technology Park Niš as a key EDIH activation event for Serbia's European Digital Innovation Hub on AI (S4AI Hub). The event brought together stakeholders from the startup ecosystem, industry, and academia to promote AI-driven innovation, foster regional networking, and facilitate knowledge exchange on digital transformation. This year's Forum of Advanced Technologies gained official recognition and financial backing from the Ministry of Science, Technological Development, and Innovation, ensuring crucial co-funding for the S4AI Hub's initiatives while optimizing resource allocation and scaling the Hub's impact. The program spanned seven thematic zones, featuring 70+ sessions with 150+ speakers and attracting 1,200+ participants. Main conference hall events, conducted in English, were livestreamed globally via YouTube, broadening accessibility. A special focus was placed on AI adoption and EDIH-themed content, showcasing best practices, implementation challenges, and collaboration models among European Digital Innovation Hubs. The Forum successfully achieved its objectives—demystifying AI, strengthening stakeholder capacities, and enabling matchmaking—with no major constraints. Key outcomes have paved the way for project-based collaborations and enhanced regional/international cooperation under the S4AI Hub framework.

T2.6 EDIH Internationalization

The S4AI Hub actively pursued international collaboration through two strategic visits to Spain, strengthening ties with European innovation ecosystems and positioning Serbia's digital capabilities on the international stage.

The first engagement took place at C2Lab in Zaragoza, where the S4AI Hub delegation participated in targeted meetings with cluster managers and innovation stakeholders. The visit focused on establishing new partnerships, forming consortia for future collaborative projects, and presenting the EDIH S4AI Hub's mission and service portfolio. These discussions created concrete opportunities for cross-border cooperation, particularly in AI-driven innovation and digital transformation initiatives.

Building on this momentum, Goran Mladenović, Director of the NiCAT Cluster, represented the S4AI Hub at the "Cluster Meet Regions" event organized by the European Cluster Collaboration Platform (ECCP) and the European Union. This high-level forum served as a platform to deepen inter-cluster collaboration, explore funding and project opportunities under European programs, and actively promote the S4AI Hub's activities to a wider European audience. The participation facilitated valuable connections with regional innovation actors while raising awareness of Serbia's growing capabilities in AI and digital technologies.

Work Package 3: Developing Skills and Trainings,

T3.2 Developing programme curriculum

The S4AI Hub has taken concrete steps to enhance its capacity-building initiatives by preparing a project task for engaging an external consultant. This consultant will be responsible for developing a comprehensive training curriculum tailored to the needs of Serbia's digital innovation ecosystem, with the contracting process expected to be finalized in July 2025.

T3.3 Provide advanced digital knowledge and skills

Under T3.3 Provide advanced digital knowledge and skills, the S4AI Hub has made significant progress in delivering advanced digital knowledge and skills through its structured Launcher program. The initiative successfully implemented a comprehensive training framework designed to equip early-stage startups with essential competencies for digital transformation and market readiness.

The program's Phase 1 (Education Phase) engaged 16 startup teams through eight specialized modules, delivered in a hybrid format to maximize accessibility and participation. The curriculum covered critical aspects of startup development, including lean methodology, customer discovery, value proposition refinement, MVP specification, monetization strategies, user acquisition, pitching techniques, and cybersecurity awareness. Each module combined interactive workshops with practical exercises, ensuring participants could immediately apply learned concepts to their ventures.

Building on this foundational training, Phase 2 (Mentorship Phase) will provide tailored support to the top five teams selected during the upcoming Demo Days in early July 2025. These teams will undergo legal formalization to ensure compliance with national regulations while gaining access to the S4AI Hub's full suite of growth-enabling services. The mentorship program will focus on overcoming specific challenges,

with experts providing strategic guidance on business model refinement, investor readiness, and test-before-invest (TBI) validation.

To further strengthen their trajectory, the selected startups will benefit from Digital Maturity Assessments (DMA) to evaluate their technological capabilities, curated market insights, and financing support through investor networks. Additional seed funding will be allocated to accelerate product development and market entry, ensuring innovations transition effectively from concept to commercialization.

Work Package 4: Test Before Invest

Under Work Package 4: Test Before Invest, the S4AI Hub has laid the groundwork for its upcoming service by developing a comprehensive operational manual for the Test Before Invest (TBI) program. This foundational document, prepared by the project partner ICEF, establishes clear guidelines for future calls for applications once the necessary conditions are in place for implementation.

The manual meticulously defines the scope of work, service dynamics, funding allocation, and service specifications tailored to three distinct target groups:

- Public administration – Supporting government entities in evaluating and adopting innovative solutions
- SMEs – Helping small and medium enterprises validate and refine their digital products
- Startups – Enabling early-stage ventures to test their solutions in real-world conditions

By outlining the funding amounts, service types, and implementation timelines, the manual ensures a structured and equitable approach to supporting each beneficiary category. This preparation phase is critical for ensuring a smooth rollout of the TBI service, which will provide crucial validation opportunities for innovators while minimizing investment risks.

The S4AI Hub has taken proactive steps to align Serbia's innovation ecosystem with national digital transformation priorities under Work Package 4: Test Before Invest. Recognizing the operational synergies between the GovTech Program - implemented by the Innovation Activity Fund with GIZ funding - and public administration digitalization efforts, the Hub has initiated coordination with the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation and the Innovation Activity Fund to harmonize implementation processes.

A strategic proposal has been submitted to GIZ for the upcoming GovTech cycle, outlining a framework for collaboration between Serbia's two EDIHs and the national GovTech Program. This initiative establishes clear mechanisms for EDIH involvement in evaluating and validating GovTech solutions, leveraging their expertise in AI and digital transformation while applying Test Before Invest methodologies to support public sector adoption of innovative technologies.

The proposed model creates an integrated pipeline connecting technology providers with government needs, where startups and SMEs developing GovTech solutions can access both technical validation through EDIH services and potential procurement opportunities. This approach aims to optimize resource utilization, prevent duplication of efforts, and accelerate the implementation of digital solutions across government institutions.

The Ministry and GIZ have responded positively to this collaborative proposal, with plans underway to formalize the partnership structure before the next GovTech funding cycle. This initiative demonstrates the S4AI Hub's role in bridging innovation ecosystems with public sector modernization, ensuring Serbia's EDIHs actively contribute to both entrepreneurial development and government digital transformation.

Work Package 5: Securing Investment

The S4AI Hub has made significant progress under Work Package 5: Securing Investment by completing the first draft of the "Guide to Find Investment" well ahead of schedule. Although this deliverable was originally planned for submission at the 18-month project mark, the team prioritized its early development to better support the first cohort of startups graduating from the Launcher program as they prepare for their next growth phase.

This comprehensive guide has been carefully designed to address the specific needs of early-stage startups navigating the complex world of funding and investment. It provides practical, actionable guidance on becoming investment-ready, helping entrepreneurs understand how to prepare compelling pitch materials, develop realistic financial projections, and determine appropriate valuations for their ventures. The resource also offers valuable insights into the various funding options available, from government grants and angel investors to venture capital firms and strategic corporate partnerships.

Recognizing the importance of the investment process itself, the guide includes detailed information about what to expect during due diligence and how to approach critical negotiations with potential investors. It covers essential topics like term sheets, equity considerations, and maintaining productive investor relationships. By making this resource available to Launcher participants immediately after their Demo Days in July 2025, the S4AI Hub ensures these promising startups can hit the ground running as they begin seeking funding during Phase 2 of their development.

The early completion of this guide demonstrates the Hub's proactive approach to supporting Serbia's startup ecosystem. The document will continue to evolve based on real-world feedback from both entrepreneurs and investors, ensuring it remain relevant and effective in addressing the dynamic challenges of securing investment in the region.

Work Package 6: Promotion, Dissemination and Outreach

T6.1. Development of communication strategy, marketing plan

An external consultant was engaged to collaborate with the Hub's communications team in developing a comprehensive Communication Strategy and Marketing Plan, which has now been formally delivered as deliverable D6.1. This foundational document represents a crucial step in establishing a unified approach to promoting the Hub's activities and services across various stakeholder groups.

While the strategy has been completed, the testing phase is still pending - an important next step that will validate the proposed communication approaches before full implementation. The plan outlines a structured framework for raising awareness about the S4AI Hub's role in Serbia's innovation ecosystem, with particular focus on reaching startups, SMEs, investors and public sector partners. It includes detailed approaches for brand positioning, message development, and channel selection to ensure maximum impact.

The upcoming testing phase will involve piloting selected communication activities to evaluate their effectiveness before rolling out the full campaign. This measured approach demonstrates the Hub's commitment to developing evidence-based communication practices that truly resonate with target audiences. Once testing is completed and any necessary refinements are made, the strategy will guide all promotional efforts moving forward, helping to establish the S4AI Hub as a visible and accessible resource for digital innovation support in Serbia.

This work reflects the Hub's proactive approach to building strong connections with stakeholders across Serbia's innovation landscape. By investing in a robust communication foundation early in the project lifecycle, the S4AI Hub is positioning itself for effective, sustainable outreach that will amplify its impact throughout the duration of the initiative and beyond.

T6.2 Content development and dissemination

The S4AI Hub has laid the groundwork for comprehensive content development and dissemination activities under T6.2, with preparations currently underway to enhance the Hub's visibility and engagement across multiple channels. A project task has been prepared to engage an external service provider who will be responsible for executing the full range of content creation and dissemination activities, with procurement expected to be finalized in July.

6.1. Reporting of EDIH's Events

6.1.1. Key EDIH event-Forum of Advanced Technologies

Executive Summary

The 9th Forum of Advanced Technologies – TechMomentum was successfully held on June 11 and 12, 2025, at the Science and Technology Park Niš as a key EDIH activation event for Serbia's European Digital Innovation Hub on AI (S4AI Hub). The event brought together stakeholders from the startup ecosystem, industry, and academia to promote AI-driven innovation, foster regional networking, and facilitate knowledge exchange on digital transformation.

This year's Forum of Advanced Technologies gained official recognition and financial backing from the Ministry of Science, Technological Development, and Innovation, ensuring crucial co-funding for the S4AI Hub's initiatives while optimizing resource allocation and scaling the Hub's impact. The program spanned seven thematic zones, featuring 70+ sessions with 150+ speakers and attracting 1,200+ participants. Main conference hall events, conducted in English, were livestreamed globally via YouTube, broadening accessibility.

A special focus was placed on AI adoption and EDIH-themed content, showcasing best practices, implementation challenges, and collaboration models among European Digital Innovation Hubs. The Forum successfully achieved its objectives—demystifying AI, strengthening stakeholder capacities, and enabling matchmaking—with no major constraints. Key outcomes have paved the way for project-based collaborations and enhanced regional/international cooperation under the S4AI Hub framework.

Objectives

The general objective of the event was to raise awareness about the importance of innovation and digital transformation in Serbia and the region by connecting key actors from industry, academia, institutions, and international networks.

Specific objectives included:

- Connecting startups and SMEs with European innovation networks to foster innovation and digital transformation.
- Strengthening ties between research institutions, industry, and the public sector.
- Promoting digital skills among youth and supporting their professional development.

Content of the Deliverable

Event Name: 9th Forum of Advanced Technologies – *TechMomentum*

Date: June 11–12, 2025

Number of participants: Over 150 speakers, 1500+ registered, 1200+ attendees.

Format: In-person event with livestreaming from the conference hall via YouTube.

Website: <https://fnt.rs>

List of participants: Available in the agenda on the website: <https://fnt.rs/agenda-june-11-2025/>

Event Description

The Forum took place across 7 thematic zones – Conference Hall, Main Hall, Startup Zone, Edu Zone, Heritage Zone, Podcast Corner, and Media Corner. Each zone was thematically focused on different aspects of advanced technologies and tailored to specific target groups. More than 70 program activities were held, including panels, workshops, pitch sessions, and bilateral meetings. The Forum enabled direct engagement among innovation ecosystem actors, aiming to foster concrete collaborations and projects. On the margin of the Forum of Advanced technologies, Western Balkan 6 Economies EDIH related workshop was organized by Regional Cooperation Council with more than 17 participants coming from WB6 economies.

Day 1

The conference hall

The conference hall opened with an introductory ceremony (Grand Opening), followed by an inspiring opening keynote (No Guts, No Glory) delivered by Dr. Milan Randelović, Director of the Science and Technology Park Niš, which set the tone for the event. He emphasized courage and innovation as key values in technological progress, while pushing the boundaries of Niš's technological advancement and highlighting the bold vision of Innovation District Niš.

Keynote: Empowering Innovation: How AMD Uses AI to Shape the Future- AMD's Andrej Zdravković took the audience through the company's AI journey, showing how it transformed from hardware-focused to an AI-driven innovator. He revealed how AI helps AMD optimize chip layouts for better performance and lower power consumption, sometimes achieving what engineers thought impossible. The keynote featured stunning examples of AI applications powered by AMD technology in weather prediction and genomic research. Zdravković stressed that AMD's philosophy centers on making AI acceleration accessible while maintaining rigorous ethical standards.

Panel: Her Power in Science: Stories of Innovation and Impact-Moderated by Jelena Preradović Stevanović from Philip Morris, this inspiring panel highlighted women's growing influence in STEM fields. H.E. Michelle Cameron shared Canada's initiatives supporting gender equality in science, while Dr. Indira Popadić discussed challenges female entrepreneurs face in tech-driven businesses. Professor Zlatica Marinković provided valuable insights from academia, emphasizing the need for systemic changes to encourage more women in engineering. The conversation revealed how mentorship programs and corporate policies can create more inclusive scientific communities.

Keynote: Consolidating Structured and Unstructured Data and AI Use-Cases-This insightful session examined how forward-thinking companies are breaking down data silos to create more robust AI solutions. The speaker demonstrated how combining customer transaction records with support tickets and social media interactions leads to more nuanced understanding of consumer behavior. Technical approaches were discussed for maintaining data lineage and model interpretability when working with complex, multi-format datasets. A recurring theme was that the most innovative AI applications emerge at the intersection of different data modalities rather than from any single source alone.

Panel: AI Meets Cybersecurity: Risks, Defenses, and the Road Ahead-This panel examined AI's dual role in cybersecurity—both as a powerful defense tool and a potential threat amplifier. Experts discussed how machine learning enhances threat detection through real-time pattern analysis while also enabling sophisticated AI-generated attacks like deepfakes and adaptive malware. The conversation highlighted the critical need for explainable AI models in security applications and the importance of maintaining human oversight. Key takeaways included the necessity for continuous security training, ethical frameworks, and balancing innovation with risk management as AI becomes fundamental to cybersecurity infrastructure. The panel concluded that while AI transforms security practices, skilled professionals remain essential in this evolving arms race.

Keynote: The story of female entrepreneurs who make a difference-This inspiring session highlighted the growing impact of women-led businesses across industries. The discussion revealed how female entrepreneurs bring unique perspectives to problem-solving, often addressing underserved market needs through innovative approaches. Examples showcased demonstrated how women are successfully balancing profitability with social impact, creating businesses that drive both economic growth and community development. The conversation emphasized the importance of mentorship networks and access to funding in helping women overcome traditional barriers in entrepreneurship. A key insight emerged that businesses founded by women tend to reinvest more in their teams and local communities, creating a multiplier effect. The session concluded by examining how changing perceptions and supportive policies can further accelerate the rise of women entrepreneurs globally.

Keynote: From Prompt to Impact: What's Under the Hood of Microsoft Copilot-This session provided a behind-the-scenes look at how AI-powered assistants are transforming modern workspaces. The presentation explored the technical architecture that enables these tools to interpret user intentions and deliver relevant, context-aware suggestions across applications. Key discussion points included the balance between AI automation and human oversight, along with real-world examples of productivity gains in document creation, data analysis, and workflow optimization. The talk also addressed responsible AI development, emphasizing built-in safeguards for accuracy, privacy, and ethical considerations. Attendees gained insights into how these technologies are evolving to better understand complex queries while maintaining transparency in their operations.

Panel: Global and Regional Trends: An Opportunity for a "Technological Leap"- Infrastructure, Education and Investment-this forward-looking discussion examined how strategic alignment between infrastructure development, education reform, and investment strategies can accelerate technological adoption across the region. Panelists emphasized that current global disruptions present a unique window for emerging economies to bypass traditional development stages through targeted technological adoption. The conversation highlighted how digital infrastructure projects must be paired with workforce upskilling initiatives to create sustainable ecosystems, with particular focus on building innovation pipelines between academia and industry. Experts stressed that attracting technology investments requires demonstrating both technical readiness and market potential, suggesting regional collaboration could create more attractive conditions for global capital. A recurring theme was the need for education systems to shift from knowledge transmission to fostering adaptive problem-solving skills suited for rapidly evolving technological landscapes. The panel concluded that coordinated policy measures across these three pillars could enable the region to not just follow, but actively shape global tech trends in select niche areas.

Panel: After the investment, the real work begins-Moderator Nebojša Bjelotomić led a frank discussion on post-investment challenges with TS Ventures' Davor Sakač. The panel revealed how funding is just the starting point, with startups often unprepared for scaling operations, building professional teams, and fixing unit economics. Sakač emphasized the "expectation gap" between investors and founders, stressing that money alone can't solve structural issues. The discussion particularly highlighted Balkan startups' struggles with international expansion due to regulatory hurdles. Key advice focused on transparent investor communication and systematic scaling across operations, talent, and financial controls.

Business zone

Panel: STEM Leadership Redefined: The Role of Women in Tomorrow's Tech-This thought-provoking discussion explored the transformative impact of women's leadership in shaping the future of technology. Participants highlighted how diverse leadership styles in STEM fields foster more innovative and inclusive work environments, ultimately driving better business outcomes. The conversation addressed persistent gender gaps in technical roles while showcasing successful initiatives that are helping to bridge this divide. Speakers shared practical strategies for creating supportive ecosystems that empower women throughout their STEM careers - from education to executive levels. The panel examined how mentorship programs, flexible work structures, and conscious bias elimination contribute to building robust pipelines of female tech talent. A key focus was the need to redefine traditional leadership models in technology sectors to better align with 21st century workplace dynamics. Participants emphasized that organizations embracing gender diversity in STEM leadership positions gain competitive advantages through broader perspectives and enhanced problem-solving capabilities. The discussion concluded with a forward-looking perspective on how emerging technologies like AI present both challenges and opportunities for achieving true gender parity in tech leadership roles, calling for proactive measures to ensure women help shape the next wave of technological transformation.

Panel: Longevity Innovation: Building a Healthier Future for Serbia-This discussion revealed Serbia's transformative potential in the global longevity revolution. Panelists unanimously emphasized that our country - through its combination of proven medical tradition, accessible clinical research, and growing health startup ecosystem - can become a regional hub for preventive medicine and healthy aging innovations. The key advantage lies in developing personalized solutions - from DNA-based nutrition to AI-powered predictive medicine - that will enable citizens to actively manage their own health journeys. This represents not just an economic opportunity, but a chance to reduce healthcare system burdens through preventive health models. Serbia has the potential to position itself not merely as an adopter, but as a creator of global longevity standards in the coming decade. Our unique mix of medical expertise, technological talent, and cost-effective research capabilities creates the perfect testing ground for breakthrough solutions that could shape how the world approaches healthy aging

Panel: Building the BIO4 Ecosystem-The discussion highlighted Serbia's strategic efforts to establish itself as a regional leader in biotechnology and interdisciplinary research. Experts emphasized how integrating biology, informatics, and advanced technologies creates synergistic opportunities for scientific breakthroughs with commercial applications. A key focus was developing infrastructure that connects academic research with industry needs, particularly in pharmaceutical development, agricultural biotechnology, and medical diagnostics. Panelists stressed the importance of cross-sector collaboration between research institutions, startups, and established companies to accelerate innovation cycles. The conversation also addressed challenges in commercializing scientific discoveries, with suggestions for

improving technology transfer mechanisms and creating more favorable conditions for bio-entrepreneurship. Education reform emerged as another critical factor, with calls for more interdisciplinary training programs that combine life sciences with computational and engineering skills. Looking ahead, participants expressed optimism about Serbia's potential to become an important node in global biotechnology value chains, provided current initiatives receive sustained support and proper coordination between all stakeholders in the BIO4 ecosystem.

Panel: Hype or Help - How AI Is (Really) Being Used in Today's Solutions-this panel cut through the AI hype to reveal practical, real-world applications transforming industries today. Experts demonstrated how businesses are moving beyond theoretical potential to implement AI solutions that deliver measurable ROI - from automating routine processes to generating predictive insights. The discussion highlighted a crucial shift occurring across sectors, where AI adoption is becoming more targeted and problem-specific rather than technology-driven. Panelists emphasized that successful implementations focus first on clear business needs, then match appropriate AI tools rather than chasing trends. A key insight emerged about the "maturity curve" of AI adoption - companies progressing from basic automation to increasingly sophisticated cognitive applications as they build internal capabilities. The conversation also addressed common pitfalls, particularly the importance of data quality and change management alongside technical implementation. The panel concluded that while AI's transformative potential is real, sustainable value comes from strategic, phased adoption rather than revolutionary overhauls - with the most successful organizations treating AI as an enhancer of human capabilities rather than a replacement.

Keynote: Insights on the Finnish startup ecosystem with Maria 01, the leading startup campus and community in Nordics-Anni Anttonen from Maria 01 shared how Finland's flagship startup campus connects 1,300+ tech companies through intentional "collision culture." She revealed startups in their ecosystem raise more funding thanks to concentrated talent and investor access. Anttonen advised Balkan innovators to leverage local strengths rather than copy Silicon Valley models. The session ended with an open invitation for Serbian startups to join Maria 01's international scaling programs.

Panel: The Future Starts with Youth: Opportunities in the Age of Advanced Technologies-This discussion highlighted how Serbia can prepare its youth for technological disruption through education reform and opportunity creation. Experts emphasized the urgent need to align skills training with emerging job markets, particularly in digital and green technologies. The panel showcased successful initiatives connecting young talent with tech industries through apprenticeships and startup support. Key recommendations included modernizing STEM curricula and expanding access to tech education across urban and rural areas. Participants stressed that investing in youth tech skills today will determine Serbia's competitive position tomorrow. The session concluded that systemic collaboration between schools, employers and policymakers is essential to build a future-ready workforce.

Panel: Applications of Artificial Intelligence-This session explored real-world AI implementations across industries, demonstrating how businesses can leverage artificial intelligence for tangible results. Experts showcased practical use cases where AI drives efficiency, innovation and competitive advantage in Serbian companies. The discussion highlighted key considerations for successful AI adoption, including data quality requirements and workforce upskilling needs. Panelists emphasized that AI's true value emerges when applied to specific business challenges rather than pursued as a standalone technology. Successful implementation examples ranged from process automation to advanced

analytics, proving AI's versatility. The session concluded that organizations must develop clear AI strategies aligned with their core objectives to maximize benefits while managing risks.

Edu zone

Workshop: Using Artificial Intelligence in Agile Product Development-This hands-on session demonstrated how AI tools can enhance agile product development cycles. Participants learned practical techniques for integrating AI into sprint planning, backlog refinement and quality assurance processes. The workshop covered AI applications for automating repetitive tasks, predicting delivery timelines and optimizing team productivity. Attendees practiced using AI-powered tools for real-time progress tracking and risk identification in product development. Key takeaways included methods to balance AI automation with human oversight in agile environments. The session emphasized that AI should complement, not replace, core agile principles and team collaboration. Participants left with actionable strategies to implement AI solutions in their product development workflows while maintaining agility.

Fireside chat: AI for SMEs: From Vision to Practice-This informal discussion provided small and medium enterprises with realistic pathways to adopt AI technologies. The AI Institute experts demystified common misconceptions about AI implementation costs and technical requirements for smaller businesses. Practical case studies illustrated how Serbian SMEs successfully deployed AI for inventory optimization, customer service automation and predictive maintenance. The conversation particularly focused on cost-effective solutions that deliver quick ROI, such as cloud-based AI tools and modular implementations. Key advice centered on starting with well-defined problems rather than technology-first approaches. The session concluded with resources and support programs available to help SMEs take their first steps in AI adoption, emphasizing that pilot projects often provide the most valuable learning experiences

Fireside chat: AI Possibilities: Unlocking Opportunities for SMEs and Small Practices, Center for Digital Transformation-This candid discussion explored how small businesses can harness AI without extensive resources. Digital transformation expert Ema Petrović outlined common entry points like chatbots and data analytics tools that deliver quick wins. MojoAI's Eleonora Sergijević countered AI hype with real-world examples, showing how her startup helps SMEs implement focused AI solutions in weeks rather than months. The conversation revealed surprising affordability - many useful AI tools now cost less than traditional software licenses. Moderator Filip Mrdak emphasized that successful adoption starts with identifying repetitive tasks rather than chasing cutting-edge tech. This session has put strong emphases how the SMEs could bridge the gap in development using the S4AI HUB services. A key insight emerged: SMEs actually adapt faster than enterprises when implementing AI, as they face less bureaucracy. The session closed with actionable first steps - from free AI audits to micro-pilots - proving every business can start their AI journey today through S4AI HUB services

Panel: Why mentorship matters for startup growth – StarTech project-This discussion highlighted how mentorship plays a crucial role in supporting startups through various growth stages. Industry experts and successful founders emphasized that experienced guidance helps new entrepreneurs avoid common pitfalls and accelerate their progress. The conversation revealed that structured mentorship programs significantly improve startup survival rates and fundraising success. Panelists noted how mentorship

creates a valuable knowledge-transfer mechanism within the entrepreneurial ecosystem, benefiting both new founders and seasoned professionals.

Panel: Early-stage startup funding: How to secure it-This discussion explored practical funding avenues for emerging startups, with a special focus on the Launcher program through S4AI Hub's digital innovation initiative. Panelists explained how this initiative helps startups refine their products while connecting them with potential investors. The program provides technical support to develop minimum viable products and creates pathways to secure follow-on funding from angels and institutional investors. Experts emphasized how structured support programs can help startups demonstrate market potential and meet investor expectations more effectively. The conversation highlighted that combining product development assistance with financial guidance gives early-stage ventures better chances of securing crucial initial funding.

Fireside chat: Advanced AI technologies: Applications and Smart Manufacturing-This discussion highlighted the key role of the S4AI Hub in advancing smart manufacturing through applied AI technologies. The conversation demonstrated how the Hub provides companies with access to practical AI solutions and technical expertise for production optimization. The S4AI Hub enables businesses to collaborate with academic institutions and tech startups to identify the most effective AI implementation points. The focus remains on tangible improvements - from predictive maintenance to supply chain optimization. The session particularly emphasized how the interrelation of industry-academia helps manufacturers of all sizes adopt AI incrementally, starting with high-impact pilot projects before expanding to plant-wide implementations.

Green Technologies in Serbia: What Do We Already Have and How Can We Make the Most of It?-This session provided an overview of Serbia's emerging green technology sector and its untapped opportunities. The discussion highlighted existing capabilities in renewable energy solutions, waste management innovations, and sustainable agricultural technologies developed by local startups and research institutions. Key focus areas included leveraging Serbia's technical talent and natural resources to build a competitive green tech economy. The conversation explored practical ways to accelerate adoption - from improving regulatory frameworks to fostering public-private partnerships for clean tech deployment. The session concluded that Serbia possesses strong foundations for green innovation, but requires more systematic support mechanisms to scale solutions from pilot projects to market-ready applications that benefit both the economy and environment

Fireside chat: Accessing EU Funds: A Practical Guide to Participating in EU Programs-This session provided practical advice for accessing EU programs like Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, and Green Deal initiatives. Experts explained how to identify suitable calls matching Serbia's development priorities in research, digitalization, and sustainability. Key recommendations included forming international partnerships early and utilizing national support services when preparing proposals. The discussion highlighted Digital Europe's relevance for Serbia's tech sector, particularly in AI and cybersecurity projects. Panelists emphasized that successful applications require demonstrating European added value while aligning with local strengths. Participants learned that quality proposals often need 6-12 months preparation, but Serbian organizations are increasingly winning significant grants through strategic approaches.

Fireside chat: How can we better support agrifood startups in Serbia in cooperation with EIT Food-

This fireside chat examined practical ways to strengthen Serbia's agrifood startup ecosystem through strategic collaboration with EIT Food. The discussion opened with an analysis of current challenges facing early-stage agricultural innovators, particularly around accessing testing facilities, mentorship networks and distribution channels. Panelists highlighted EIT Food's existing programs that could be adapted for the Serbian context, such as their business creation initiatives and market validation support. A key focus was how to connect Serbia's agricultural strengths with EIT Food's pan-European network to create more opportunities for local startups to pilot solutions and access international markets. The conversation explored potential models for regional innovation hubs that would combine local knowledge with EIT Food's technical expertise, citing successful examples from other markets. Participants agreed that such partnerships could help address specific Serbian agricultural challenges while positioning local innovators as regional leaders in sustainable food systems. The session concluded with actionable recommendations for creating more tailored support programs that bridge the gap between Serbia's farming community and technological innovators.

Panel: Artificial Intelligence in the Service of Innovation-This panel examined how AI acts as a catalyst for innovation across various sectors in Serbia. The discussion highlighted practical examples where AI solutions developed by local startups and research teams are transforming industries from healthcare to agriculture. Panelists emphasized that successful AI implementation requires balancing technological potential with real-world needs, suggesting many Serbian companies still treat AI as an add-on rather than core innovation driver. The Center for Digital Transformation shared insights on helping traditional businesses identify where AI can create genuine value, while ICT Hub representatives discussed supporting startups in developing commercially viable AI products. A recurring theme was the importance of building bridges between academic research and industry applications to ensure AI innovations solve actual market problems. The conversation also touched on ethical considerations, with participants agreeing that responsible AI development should be prioritized from the outset rather than treated as an afterthought. Several case studies demonstrated how properly implemented AI solutions can give Serbian businesses competitive advantages both locally and internationally.

Startup zone

Workshop: AI Co-investment program : Opportunity for AI Startups-The workshop presented Serbia's AI Co-investment Program as a key funding source for early-stage AI startups, blending public and private capital. Mladen Stojanović outlined eligibility criteria, emphasizing scalable solutions and strong technical teams. Participants learned practical application tips through success stories of past recipients who secured growth funding. The session clarified that the program supports ventures at various stages, not just mature startups, while stressing the importance of demonstrating clear market needs. Founders received direct feedback on aligning their projects with program goals during interactive discussions. The workshop particularly highlighted successful applications addressing specific industry challenges through innovative AI approaches.

Workshop: Innovation Methodology-This workshop introduced Microsoft Garage's unique approach to innovation, blending structured methodology with creative freedom. Milan Gospić demonstrated how

their proven framework helps teams rapidly test ideas through hands-on experimentation while maintaining strategic focus. Participants learned practical techniques for validating concepts quickly and cost-effectively, mirroring the same processes used by Microsoft's global innovation teams. The session emphasized that successful innovation requires both systematic thinking and willingness to fail fast - core principles behind Microsoft Garage's track record of transforming raw ideas into market-ready solutions. Attendees gained actionable insights they could immediately apply to accelerate their own innovation cycles.

DAY 2

Conference Room

Movie: Welcome to the City of Technologies-This short film traces the evolution of Electronics Industry Niš (EI Nis), showcasing how its industrial heritage shaped the city's innovation ecosystem. Through archival footage and interviews, it highlights EI's role in nurturing generations of engineers who later drove Niš's tech boom. The documentary demonstrates how this manufacturing legacy directly influenced the creation of science parks and startup incubators, bridging the city's industrial past with its current identity as a regional technology hub. It celebrates how Niš transformed from an electronics manufacturing center into a thriving innovation district.

Annual Awards-The annual awards ceremony honored outstanding achievements in Serbia's technology sector, recognizing both individual excellence and corporate innovation. The prestigious Engineer Vladimir Jasić Award celebrated an exceptional professional who made significant contributions in advanced technologies through research, development or implementation. Simultaneously, the award for most successful company in advanced technologies highlighted an organization driving technological progress through cutting-edge solutions with measurable market impact. These accolades underscored Serbia's growing capabilities in tech innovation while inspiring the next generation of engineers and entrepreneurs. The recipients exemplified how technical expertise combined with visionary leadership can position Serbia competitively in global technology landscapes

Panel: Balkan Alliance: Opportunity for Regional Development-This panel discussion explored how the Balkan Alliance of Science and Technology Parks fosters regional collaboration to boost innovation across Southeast Europe. Moderator Miloš Grozdanović from Niš's tech park facilitated an exchange between Todor Mladenov of Sofia Tech Park and Tasos Vasiliadis from JOIST about creating synergies across borders. The conversation highlighted successful joint initiatives that have already connected institutions throughout the region while addressing remaining barriers to deeper cooperation. Panelists shared concrete examples of knowledge transfer and resource sharing between member parks that have accelerated local innovation ecosystems. They emphasized how the alliance helps smaller technology parks leverage collective strengths to compete globally, particularly in attracting international investment and talent. The discussion also touched on developing common standards for startup support services across the region to create a more unified innovation marketplace. Participants agreed that sustained institutional support will be crucial to fully realize the alliance's potential as a driver of regional economic transformation through technology and entrepreneurship.

Panel: Alliance for education: why should we all join forces for future generations-This panel united educators, students and industry representatives to discuss improving Serbia's education system through

stronger partnerships. Teachers shared challenges in modernizing STEM programs with limited resources, while students described how practical, hands-on learning with tech companies helped prepare them for real careers. The discussion highlighted successful examples where schools and businesses collaborated on curriculum development, mentorship programs and equipment donations. All agreed that systemic change requires long-term commitment from all stakeholders - schools adapting to industry needs, companies investing in future talent, and policymakers creating frameworks for cooperation. The conversation emphasized that such alliances shouldn't be temporary projects but permanent collaborations ensuring education evolves alongside technological progress. Participants left with concrete ideas to scale existing successful models across more schools and regions.

Panel: Inside the EDIH Journey: Lessons from Partners and Stakeholders-This panel brought together key stakeholders to share insights from implementing the European Digital Innovation Hub (EDIH) initiative in Serbia and the region. Representatives from the EU delegation, academic institutions and regional organizations discussed practical experiences in establishing these critical digital transformation support centers. The conversation revealed how EDIHs serve as bridges between cutting-edge technologies and local businesses, particularly SMEs looking to adopt AI and other advanced solutions. Panelists shared valuable lessons about tailoring services to meet specific regional needs while maintaining connections to the broader European innovation ecosystem. Challenges like ensuring financial sustainability and measuring real impact emerged as common themes across different hubs. The discussion highlighted successful approaches to building trust with local industries and creating meaningful collaborations between research institutions and private sector partners. Participants agreed that EDIHs play a crucial role in democratizing access to digital transformation tools, but require ongoing adaptation to remain relevant as technologies and market needs evolve. The session provided concrete examples of how these hubs help bridge the innovation divide between Western Europe and the Balkans while preserving local economic specificities.

Keynote: The super app effect: 5 rules for the new era of brand-user interaction, Rakuten Viber-In this keynote session, Nikolaos Syrios from [Rakuten Viber](#) shares key insights on how brands can evolve in an age where platforms are no longer just apps—they're ecosystems. From messaging to engagement, discover how global platforms like Viber are setting the pace—and what your brand can learn from it. This keynote explored how super apps are redefining digital engagement between brands and users. Nikolaos Syrios from Rakuten Viber shared five essential principles for successful brand interactions in this evolving landscape, drawing from the platform's global experience. He demonstrated how consolidated digital ecosystems create new opportunities for meaningful, contextual communication between businesses and consumers. The presentation highlighted how brands can leverage these platforms to move beyond transactional relationships and build ongoing, value-added dialogues with their audiences. Syrios emphasized the importance of respecting user attention, providing genuine utility, and integrating seamlessly into daily digital routines. Real-world examples showed how these approaches drive both customer satisfaction and business results across different markets.

Panel: Building the Future: Innovation Districts as a Development Strategy-This panel examined how innovation districts can drive regional development by clustering research institutions, startups and tech companies. Experts shared experiences from developing such hubs in Serbia and beyond, highlighting their role in fostering collaboration and accelerating growth. The discussion covered strategies for creating vibrant ecosystems where talent, ideas and capital converge to generate economic impact. Panelists emphasized the importance of designing these districts with both physical infrastructure and support programs that facilitate meaningful connections between stakeholders. Successful examples

demonstrated how tailored approaches can transform local strengths into competitive advantages on the global stage. The conversation also addressed challenges in sustaining these ecosystems long-term through balanced public-private partnerships and continuous adaptation to market needs. Participants agreed that well-planned innovation districts serve as powerful engines for job creation, talent retention and technological advancement when aligned with regional capabilities and ambitions.

Keynote: Energy Transition & Green Technologies, Siemens Energy-Petar Tatomirović from Siemens Energy outlined the urgent global shift toward sustainable energy systems, emphasizing that the transition must balance reliability, affordability, and decarbonization. He highlighted Siemens Energy's role in advancing technologies like hydrogen-ready gas turbines, grid modernization, and industrial electrification to bridge fossil fuel dependence with renewable integration. Case studies demonstrated how tailored regional strategies—from Europe's offshore wind to hydrogen projects in the U.S.—are accelerating progress. The keynote stressed collaboration across governments, industries, and innovators to scale solutions, noting that investments in green tech must triple by 2030 to meet net-zero goals. Tatomirović closed with a call to action saying that energy transition isn't a choice—it's an opportunity to redefine economic growth while preserving our planet.

Fireside chat: From brown to green: Why gender equality in STEM is non-negotiable?-This fireside chat made a compelling case that gender equality in STEM is essential for effective climate action. UNDP experts demonstrated how excluding women from green tech sectors undermines the just transition, citing data that diverse teams drive better environmental solutions. The discussion showcased programs breaking down barriers in education and hiring while stressing that policies must proactively ensure equitable opportunities. The session left no doubt: achieving sustainable development requires full participation of all talents.

Fireside chat: AI in Serbia - Vision, Readiness, and Opportunity-This discussion examined Serbia's potential to become a regional AI hub, with industry leaders sharing insights on current capabilities and future opportunities. The conversation highlighted Serbia's strong technical talent pool and growing startup ecosystem as key advantages in AI development. Panelists acknowledged challenges like limited access to specialized infrastructure and funding, but emphasized how local companies are already delivering innovative AI solutions globally. The session explored practical steps to strengthen Serbia's AI ecosystem, including better academia-industry collaboration and targeted government support. Success stories demonstrated how Serbian AI startups are competing internationally in niches like natural language processing and predictive analytics. Participants agreed that focusing on specific industry applications rather than general AI could give Serbia a competitive edge. The discussion concluded that with the right investments and partnerships, Serbia can position itself as a leader in developing practical, ethical AI solutions for regional and global markets.

Fireside chat: 2 Disruptors - Crypto and AI with 1 Lesson: Change Doesn't Wait for Permission- This fireside chat explored how disruptive technologies like crypto and AI challenge traditional approaches to innovation. Industry leaders discussed parallels between these two transformative fields, emphasizing that breakthrough advancements often emerge outside established systems. The conversation highlighted how agile, permission-less development can create opportunities even in resource-constrained environments. Panelists shared practical examples of local solutions that gained traction by focusing on real-world problems rather than waiting for ideal conditions. The discussion reinforced that technological progress doesn't follow linear paths, and ecosystems that embrace experimentation can compete globally. Key takeaways included the importance of practical

implementation over theoretical perfection and the value of learning from previous tech revolutions when navigating new ones. The session ultimately presented a case for proactive, adaptive approaches to emerging technologies.

Keynote: PMO – Dead or Alive? Project Management Institute-This keynote examined the evolving relevance of project management approach in modern organizations. The speaker argued that while traditional PMO models face challenges, they remain valuable when adapted to current business needs. The discussion highlighted how successful PMOs now balance structure with flexibility, combining proven methodologies with agile approaches. Examples showed how transformed PMOs add strategic value by aligning projects with organizational goals and digital transformation efforts. The session emphasized that project management continues to play a critical role, but must evolve to stay effective in today's fast-changing business environment.

Panel: Beyond the Term Sheet: VC Perspectives on Startup Readiness and Fund Strategy-This panel discussion brought together venture capital investors to share insights about what happens after startups secure initial funding. The conversation moved beyond basic investment terms to explore how founders should prepare for long-term relationships with investors. Experienced VCs emphasized that securing capital is just the beginning, with true partnership requiring alignment on growth strategies and exit timelines. The discussion revealed how different funds approach portfolio support, from hands-on mentoring to strategic networking. Investors shared common pitfalls they observe, particularly around unrealistic valuations and growth projections that strain founder-VC relationships. Panelists agreed the strongest startups view funding as a tool for execution rather than an end goal itself. A key theme emerged about the importance of transparency during challenging periods, with investors noting they can often help troubleshoot problems when informed early. The session provided practical advice for navigating board dynamics and maintaining productive investor communications throughout a company's growth journey

Business zone

Keynote: From Insight to Impact: Building Ethical, Agile, and Human-Centered AI Systems-Sara Goze from Izmir TeknoPark presented a framework for developing AI systems that balance innovation with ethical considerations. She emphasized the growing need to design AI solutions that prioritize human values while maintaining technical agility. The session explored practical methodologies for embedding ethical principles throughout the AI development lifecycle without compromising speed or functionality. Goze showcased case studies where human-centered design approaches led to more adoptable and socially beneficial AI implementations. She demonstrated how iterative testing with diverse user groups can surface biases and improve system performance. A key insight was that ethical AI systems often demonstrate better long-term performance and user trust, ultimately driving sustainable impact. The talk concluded with actionable strategies for organizations to implement these principles across their AI initiatives.

Keynote: Cyber Security and Smart Sourcing: From Building Products to Powering Partners-Ersin Yilmaz Aslan from Spheretech explored how cybersecurity strategies must evolve in increasingly interconnected business environments. He presented a model where security becomes a shared responsibility across product teams, partners, and supply chains. The talk highlighted how smart sourcing practices can enhance rather than compromise security postures when implemented thoughtfully. Practical examples demonstrated how organizations can build security into partnership frameworks from

the outset, creating value for all stakeholders. Aslan emphasized that modern cybersecurity extends beyond products to encompass entire business ecosystems, requiring new approaches to trust and collaboration. The session provided actionable insights for balancing innovation with risk management in partner-driven digital transformation.

Panel: Driving the Energy Transition: The Role of Digital and Green Technologies-This discussion highlighted the collaborative efforts between the University of Niš and the Niš Science and Technology Park to establish a Center of Excellence for Energy Transition and Regenerative Economics. Panelists from academia and industry emphasized how this initiative combines digital innovation with sustainable energy solutions to drive regional development. The conversation focused on integrating green technologies with smart digital systems to optimize energy efficiency and renewable energy adoption. Experts shared insights on developing local expertise while aligning with global sustainability goals, positioning Niš as a hub for energy innovation in the Balkans. The project exemplifies how academic-industrial partnerships can accelerate Serbia's transition to a low-carbon economy.

Panel: Advanced Technologies and the Future of the Economy: Opportunities for Serbia and the Region-This panel examined Serbia's potential to leverage advanced technologies for economic transformation. Experts discussed how AI, green tech and other innovations could create new opportunities while addressing regional challenges. The conversation highlighted successful local examples and identified key areas for collaboration between startups, academia and government to build a competitive knowledge economy. Panelists emphasized the importance of developing specialized niches where Serbia can excel globally, supported by targeted investments in talent and infrastructure. The discussion concluded that coordinated efforts across sectors could position the country as a regional leader in specific technology domains while driving sustainable economic growth

Keynote: Scaling Up in the Industry That Never Sleeps-This keynote addressed the challenges and strategies for scaling operations in the fast-paced IT industry. Aleksandar Đalović shared insights on sustainable growth through adaptable business models and continuous innovation. The discussion emphasized balancing rapid expansion with quality and stability while navigating ever-changing market demands. Practical examples illustrated how companies can maintain competitive advantage through strategic flexibility. The core message highlighted that success in this dynamic sector requires resilience, adaptability and constant evolution to stay ahead.

Panel: From Research to Impact: The Power of Tech Transfer-This panel explored how scientific research can be transformed into real-world solutions through effective technology transfer. Experts discussed the challenges and opportunities in bridging the gap between academic discoveries and commercial applications. The conversation highlighted successful examples where research institutions partnered with industry to bring innovations to market. Key topics included identifying commercially viable research, protecting intellectual property, and creating sustainable collaboration models between academia and businesses. Panelists emphasized the importance of building ecosystems that support researchers in developing entrepreneurial skills while helping companies access cutting-edge technologies. The discussion also touched on funding mechanisms and policy frameworks that can accelerate tech transfer processes. Overall, the session demonstrated how strategic partnerships between research institutions and industry can drive innovation and economic growth.

Fireside chat: From Leaders to Leaders: Innovative Coaching for the 21st Century-This fireside chat explored modern leadership development approaches needed in today's rapidly changing business

environment. The discussion highlighted how traditional coaching models must evolve to address 21st century challenges like digital transformation and workforce disruption. The conversation emphasized the growing importance of adaptive leadership skills, emotional intelligence, and continuous learning in executive development. Panelists shared insights on creating coaching frameworks that foster innovation while maintaining organizational stability. Practical examples demonstrated how tailored leadership programs can drive transformation at both individual and company levels. The session provided actionable strategies for developing leaders who can navigate complexity, inspire teams, and sustain performance in volatile markets. Key takeaways focused on balancing short-term business demands with long-term leadership growth through innovative coaching methodologies.

Panel: Innovations in preserving the past and cultural interpretation with AI and VR, Tourist organisation of Niš-This discussion showcased how Niš is leveraging AI and VR to reinvent cultural tourism. Panelists from academia and tourism presented collaborative projects that use immersive technologies to preserve and interpret local heritage. The conversation revealed how digital tools create interactive historical experiences while maintaining scholarly rigor. Examples included virtual reconstructions and AI-enhanced short movies that deepen visitor engagement. The session highlighted successful partnerships between technical experts and cultural institutions, demonstrating how technology can make heritage more dynamic without compromising authenticity. The panel illustrated how thoughtful tech integration can transform public engagement with history and culture and showcase the AI generated video at the end.

Go Digital in the Western Balkans and SME Go Green – A Transformation Journey-The discussion introduced EBRD's integrated approach to helping Balkan SMEs simultaneously digitalize and green their operations. The new "Go Green" component complements existing digital transformation support with environmental sustainability measures. The program provides tailored solutions addressing regional SME needs, from energy efficiency to circular economy practices. Examples showed how businesses can reduce costs while meeting ecological targets through smart technology adoption. The initiative reflects growing recognition that digital and green transitions must progress together for meaningful impact. By combining technical expertise with financial support, the program aims to accelerate sustainable business practices across the region while maintaining economic competitiveness.

Edu zone

Panel: Explore the North – Illuminating the Path to Nordic Markets in Northern Express Line, NALED-This discussion examined pathways for Serbian companies to access Nordic markets through initiatives like the Northern Express Line. Panelists from Serbia and Finland shared practical experiences about bridging business cultures and meeting Scandinavian customer expectations. The conversation highlighted how understanding local values like sustainability and work-life balance creates competitive advantages. Examples showed Serbian startups successfully adapting products for Nordic markets through targeted mentorship programs. The session emphasized that while challenges exist in scaling northward, the rewards justify the effort for businesses committed to quality and innovation. Strategic partnerships and government-supported programs were presented as effective ways to mitigate expansion risks while accelerating market learning curve

Round table: How Can We Accelerate the Growth of Serbia's Innovation Ecosystem Together?-This collaborative session examined how to drive faster development of Serbia's innovation ecosystem through coordinated action. Representatives from across the sector discussed how to better connect

existing programs, resources and expertise to support entrepreneurs nationwide. The conversation revealed both challenges and opportunities in building a more inclusive and effective innovation environment, with particular focus on strengthening regional hubs. Participants shared practical ideas for improving startup support systems, from education to funding, while maintaining local relevance. The discussion highlighted successful models of public-private collaboration that could be scaled, while acknowledging the need for more systemic approaches to ecosystem building beyond isolated initiatives.

Workshop: AI Powered Innovation - The Microsoft Garage-The workshop explored Microsoft Garage's unique innovation model that blends structured AI development with entrepreneurial creativity. Through interactive demonstrations, participants experienced how controlled experimentation can yield breakthrough solutions while managing technical and business risks. Gospić shared proven techniques for validating AI concepts quickly, from ideation to prototype, using real Microsoft case studies. The session particularly highlighted approaches for overcoming common barriers to AI adoption in traditional organizations. Attendees practiced applying these methods to their own challenges, gaining practical skills in agile AI development that balance innovation potential with implementation realities.

Round Table: Role Models and Mentorship: Inspiring the Next Generation of Women in STEM-This discussion explored how mentorship and visible role models can inspire more women to enter and thrive in STEM fields. Academics and industry leaders shared successful initiatives bridging the gender gap in technical education and careers. The conversation revealed how early exposure to STEM through school programs and personal mentoring relationships can shape career trajectories. Examples demonstrated the power of women supporting women through professional networks and structured mentorship programs. The session also addressed remaining challenges in workplace culture and career progression that require systemic solutions. Participants agreed that achieving gender balance in STEM requires continuous, collaborative efforts from educators, employers and professional communities to both attract and retain female talent.

Masterclass: Protecting IoT Devices from Cyber Attacks – Challenges and Solutions-This technical session delved into the critical challenges of securing Internet of Things devices in an increasingly connected world. Cybersecurity specialist Vladan Todorović shared practical approaches to protecting IoT systems against sophisticated attacks. The masterclass explored vulnerabilities inherent in connected devices and demonstrated proven countermeasures at both hardware and software levels. Participants gained insights into implementing end-to-end security for IoT ecosystems, from secure development practices to real-time threat monitoring. The training emphasized that IoT security demands specialized strategies differing from traditional IT security models, particularly given devices' resource constraints and long lifecycles. Attendees left with concrete methodologies to evaluate and enhance the security of IoT implementations in their professional environments.

Round table: Health Tech Lab-This roundtable examined the development of Serbia's health technology ecosystem through collaborative innovation. Experts from startups, research and support organizations discussed how to transform medical challenges into viable tech solutions. The conversation showcased successful models of cooperation between healthcare professionals and technologists in creating impactful products. Participants analyzed both the opportunities and unique obstacles in health tech entrepreneurship, from lengthy validation processes to specialized funding needs. The discussion highlighted Serbia's advantages in this field, including cost-effective R&D capabilities and skilled professionals, while identifying areas needing improvement like regulatory guidance and investor

education. The session concluded that targeted support for health tech ventures could position Serbia as a leader in medical innovation for regional markets.

Startup zone

Special event: Speed Dating session-This innovative networking format enabled startups to efficiently connect with potential clients and partners through a series of brief, focused meetings. The structured approach helped entrepreneurs quickly identify the most promising business opportunities while giving corporate attendees exposure to multiple innovative solutions in a short timeframe. The session created an energetic environment for forging strategic relationships, with participants exchanging contacts for deeper discussions. The speed dating model proved particularly effective for matching specialized B2B solutions with companies actively seeking innovation, demonstrating how targeted networking events can deliver tangible business outcomes beyond traditional conference interactions

3rd Digital Innovation Hubs Regional Workshop

The 3rd Digital Innovation Hubs Regional Workshop was organized on margin of Tech Momentum by Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) in Niš and successfully fostered cross-border collaboration among Western Balkan innovation stakeholders in providing the services within European digital innovation framework. Following participation in the 9th Forum of Advanced Technologies' opening sessions, attendees engaged in a comprehensive tour of Niš Science and Technology Park, highlighting regional innovation infrastructure development. The interactive mapping session identified key ecosystem strengths and gaps, with DIHs sharing lessons from 2023-2024 support programs. Participants co-created strategies to enhance hub sustainability through improved capacity-building and EU4Digital-aligned frameworks. The second day's design thinking sessions yielded concrete proposals for future support instruments, emphasizing regional specialization and knowledge-sharing. The workshop concluded with commitments to strengthen DIH networks and pursue joint initiatives, leveraging Niš's growing position as a regional innovation node. The blend of structured sessions and informal networking, including a tech garden party, effectively facilitated lasting connections.

Conclusions

The 9th Forum of Advanced Technologies in Niš successfully positioned itself as a catalytic event for Serbia's AI transformation, serving as a flagship activation point for the S4AI Hub - Serbia's European Digital Innovation Hub on Artificial Intelligence. By convening diverse stakeholders from startups, SMEs, public sector and academia, the Forum demystified AI applications while addressing its societal implications with uncommon nuance.

The event's strategic design as an EDIH activation initiative achieved multiple objectives: it bridged AI knowledge gaps for traditional businesses, showcased practical public sector digitalization use cases, and fostered crucial dialogues about responsible AI development. Particularly impactful were sessions dismantling common AI myths while demonstrating tangible benefits for small businesses through the S4AI Hub's support mechanisms.

Beyond theoretical discussions, the Forum operationalized the EDIH's mission through hands-on workshops matching participants with AI experts and concrete pathways to access Hub services. This practical orientation helped translate awareness into actionable opportunities, with many SMEs initiating conversations about AI adoption.

The Forum's true success lies in its dual achievement - advancing Serbia's AI ecosystem while establishing the S4AI Hub as a trusted resource for organizations at various digital maturity levels. As participants left, they carried not just new connections, but a clearer understanding of how AI can drive their growth when approached strategically through supported, ethical implementation. The 9th Forum of Advanced Technologies - TechMomentum marked a significant milestone in Serbia's digital transformation journey, serving as the flagship activation event for S4AI Hub, the country's European Digital Innovation Hub focused on artificial intelligence. Over two intensive days in June 2025 at the Science and Technology Park Niš, this comprehensive gathering brought together all key stakeholders in Serbia's innovation ecosystem - from tech startups and established corporations to academic researchers and government representatives - creating a dynamic platform for collaboration and knowledge exchange around AI adoption and digital transformation. With more than 1,200 participants engaging across seven thematic zones, the forum's scale and scope reflected the growing importance of advanced technologies in Serbia's economic development strategy. The event's design as an S4AI Hub activation initiative ensured focused attention on practical AI applications while addressing common misconceptions and barriers to adoption. Over 70 sessions, featuring 150 speakers from diverse backgrounds, provided attendees with both conceptual frameworks and hands-on demonstrations of AI solutions relevant to various sectors.

A distinctive feature of this year's forum was its strong emphasis on bridging the gap between AI potential and real-world implementation. Special EDIH-themed blocks showcased concrete examples of how European Digital Innovation Hubs operate across different contexts, offering Serbian participants valuable models for collaboration and service delivery. These sessions particularly highlighted mechanisms for supporting small and medium enterprises through their digital transformation journeys, with case studies demonstrating measurable business impacts from AI adoption. The forum's significance was further amplified by its recognition and co-funding from Serbia's Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation. This institutional endorsement not only provided necessary resources but also signaled strong government commitment to positioning AI and digital technologies as priorities for national development. The ministry's involvement helped optimize the event's impact while ensuring alignment with broader strategic objectives for technological advancement.

Beyond the formal program, the forum created numerous opportunities for organic networking and matchmaking. Structured sessions connected startups with potential investors, researchers with industry partners, and public sector representatives with technology providers. These interactions laid the groundwork for future collaborations that will continue under S4AI Hub's ongoing programs and initiatives. The event's hybrid format, with livestreamed English-language sessions, extended its reach beyond physical attendees to regional and international audiences.

The forum's outcomes demonstrate progress on multiple fronts. For S4AI Hub specifically, it successfully activated key target groups, raising awareness about available services and support mechanisms while addressing common concerns about AI adoption. For participants, it provided both inspiration and practical pathways to begin or accelerate their digital transformation efforts. And for Serbia's innovation ecosystem more broadly, it reinforced connections and shared understanding that will drive collaborative progress in the coming years.

6.1.2. Launcher programme

Executive Summary

The Launcher 2025 program is a regional pre-seed acceleration initiative implemented by the Science and Technology Park Niš, as part of the Serbian European Digital Innovation Hub (S4AI_Hub) stream for startups. It is designed to support early-stage startups through structured education, mentoring, and non-dilutive financial support. The program is aligned with the Running Lean methodology, guiding teams through idea validation, customer discovery, and business model development, and is structured in two phases: early validation and pre-incubation. This year's Launcher, as a startup stream of EDIH S4AI Hub, gained official recognition and financial backing from the Ministry of Science, Technological Development, and Innovation, ensuring crucial co-funding for the S4AI Hub's initiatives while optimizing resource allocation and scaling the Hub's impact. The program is co-financed by the Ministry to further strengthen Serbia's innovation ecosystem.

It represents the digital bootcamp for innovation within the task T.2.2. Digital Maturity Assessment – Bootcamp for digital transformation as well as T3.3 Provide advanced digital knowledge and skills.

Between January and June 2025, the program progressed through preparation, the launch of a national public call, promotional activities across multiple cities, and the implementation of an intensive educational curriculum for selected teams. A total of 108 applications were submitted, and 16 teams were selected for Phase 1.

Educational support was delivered through eight thematic modules focusing on idea refinement, customer validation, market positioning, and pitching. Events such as *"Prepare to Launch"* and Info Days generated significant interest and regional participation.

Despite external delays early in the year, the program met all core milestones within the revised timeline. The deliverable confirms that Launcher is effectively contributing to the development of sustainable innovation-driven startups and the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem in Serbia.

Objectives

The main objective of the Launcher 2025 program is to serve as an official entry point for early-stage startups into the Serbian European Digital Innovation Hub (S4AI Hub). Through its public call and structured acceleration process, the program identifies and supports high-potential teams, connecting them with the S4AI ecosystem and enabling access to relevant services, knowledge, and partners.

In addition to serving as a pipeline for onboarding startups into the EDIH, Launcher also aims to strengthen innovation capacity and promote digital transformation across the startup community.

Furthermore, Launcher increases the visibility and uptake of EDIH services by engaging startups in educational modules, mentoring, and early validation processes, ensuring long-term integration into the digital innovation ecosystem.

Content of the Deliverable

The implementation of the Launcher 2025 program followed a structured process consisting of preparatory activities, the opening of the public call, regional promotional events, evaluation of submitted applications, and the beginning of the Phase 1 acceleration program for selected teams.

1. Preparation and Planning Phase (January – March 2025)

During the initial phase, the program team coordinated the creation of the official program guide and public call documentation. Promotional planning and alignment with partner institutions were conducted. Due to external circumstances at the national level, the original timeline was revised, and communication activities were adapted accordingly.

2. Public Call for Applications

The public call was officially launched on April 14, 2025, and remained open until May 16, 2025. Applications were collected via an online form on the official website: www.launcher.rs. A total of 108 applications were received, and after an internal evaluation process, 20 teams were selected for Phase 1.

3. Events and Activities Overview

3.1. Prepare to Launch Niš

- Date: April 14–15, 2025
- Number of participants: 63
- Format: On-site (physical)
- Website: www.launcher.rs
- Description: This two-day event introduced the new program cycle and officially marked the opening of the public call. Day one focused on program structure, application criteria, and sharing success stories of former participants. Day two featured workshops forming the “Mini Startup School”, providing early-stage teams with practical insights into idea development, team collaboration, and the Lean Startup approach.

3.2. Info Days in 5 Cities

- Date:
 - Vranje and Leskovac – April 23
 - Kruševac and Paraćin – April 28
 - Novi Pazar – May 8
- Number of participants: Approximately 70 total
- Format: On-site (physical)
- Website: www.launcher.rs

- Description: These local outreach events were designed to raise awareness about the program among potential applicants outside major urban centers. Participants were introduced to the program structure, expected outcomes, and types of support available. Each event included interactive Q&A and direct communication with the organizing team.

3.3. Online Info Day

- Date: May 9, 2025
- Number of participants: 18
- Format: Online (Zoom)
- Website: www.launcher.rs
- Description: The online info session provided broader national visibility and allowed interested participants to clarify doubts and get application tips directly from program organizers.

3.4.. Phase 1 - Educational Component

Phase 1 of the program officially started on May 30, 2025, with 16 selected teams. The educational component consisted of eight thematic modules, held primarily at the Science and Technology Park Niš.

Module	Title	Date(s)	Format
Module 1	Running Lean: Modeling and Refining the Idea	May 30-31	Hybrid (two group-workshop + individual sessions)
Module 2	Customer Discovery	June 4	Hybrid (workshop)
Module 3	UVP, Competition & Differentiation	June 5	Hybrid (workshop)
Module 4	User Journey & MVP Specification	June 13	Hybrid (workshop)
Module 5	Monetization & Pricing	June 20	Hybrid (workshop)
Module 6	Acquiring First Users	June 24	Hybrid (workshop)
Module 7	Pitching & Storytelling	June 26	Hybrid (workshop)
Module 8	Cyber security	June 30	Online (lecture)

Demo Days are scheduled for early July 2025, where a Selection Committee will evaluate the teams and select the top five to receive financial support and progress into Phase 2. These chosen teams will complete their legal registration in line with national regulations, ensuring they are fully operational and compliant. As part of their continued development, they will benefit from structured mentorship within the

program, as well as access to the S4AI Hub's comprehensive support services. This includes Digital Maturity Assessment (DMA) to evaluate their tech readiness, curated knowledge resources for market and technical insights, assistance in securing financing through investor connections and funding opportunities, and test-before-invest validation to refine their offerings. To further bolster their growth, additional seed funding will be provided to help turn their innovations into market-ready solutions.

Conclusions

The Launcher 2025 program has proven to be an effective mechanism for engaging early-stage startups and guiding them through a structured validation and development process. As a designated channel into the S4AI Hub, the program successfully contributed to the identification and preparation of teams ready to benefit from advanced innovation support services.

Using the Running Lean Startup methodology, the program equipped participants with practical tools to define problems, test assumptions, and refine their solutions. The educational modules and events were well-attended and positively evaluated by participants, indicating strong relevance and demand.

The objectives of the deliverable have been met. The program helped raise awareness of available EDIH services, activated regional startup potential, and facilitated structured onboarding into the innovation ecosystem.

Further work will focus on monitoring team progress, implementing Phase 2, and maintaining strong alignment with S4AI Hub priorities in the areas of digital transformation and innovation-driven entrepreneurship.

6.2. Reporting on EDIH collaboration

6.2.1. Name of the activity: EDIH Collaboration Initiative within the Southeast European Science and Technology Parks Alliance

Type of activity: Strategic networking and partnership development through a steering committee meeting

Description of the objectives:

The primary goals of this initiative were to strengthen regional cooperation in innovation infrastructure by expanding the newly formed Alliance of Science and Technology Parks of Southeast Europe. The meeting specifically aimed to onboard Science and Technology Parks from Belgrade and Čačak as new members, building on the foundational work of Niš Science and Technology Park. A key focus was establishing structured collaboration between European Digital Innovation Hubs (EDIHs) hosted by these parks across Southeast Europe. The participants worked to create a framework for knowledge sharing, joint service development, and coordinated support for digital transformation in the region, with plans to operationalize this through concrete events and joint initiatives.

Outcomes:

The meeting successfully achieved several important outcomes, including the formal admission of Belgrade and Čačak Science and Technology Parks into the regional alliance, significantly expanding its reach and potential impact. Participants agreed to make EDIH collaboration one of the central pillar of the alliance's work, recognizing the strategic importance of digital transformation support across Southeast Europe. The first major implementation step was confirmed with the scheduling of a regional EDIH networking event in InnoHealth Forum 2025-Shaping the Future of Health, organized with JOIST Innovation Park' Larisa, Greece for September 2025, designed to facilitate practical cooperation between hub operators. This development creates new opportunities for startups and SMEs in the region to access combined expertise and resources from multiple innovation hubs, while strengthening the position of Serbian science parks as key players in the European innovation landscape.

6.2.2. Name of the activity: Strategic Partnership Formation for WB6 Cross-Border EDIH Cooperation

Type of activity: High-level partnership agreement and consortium building

Description of the objectives:

The primary objective was to establish strategic partnerships between EDIHs across Western Balkan economies to strengthen regional cooperation in digital innovation. Focused discussions centered on creating a formal consortium between DIH Onix Banja Luka (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and INNOFEIT Center for Technology Transfer and Innovations (North Macedonia) to jointly respond to the upcoming GIZ public call for cross-border EDIH cooperation in WB6 economies. The initiative aimed to leverage complementary capabilities and resources to enhance regional digital transformation efforts through coordinated action.

Outcomes:

While no formal agreements were signed, the parties reached a mutual understanding about the benefits of strategic partnership and identified several areas of potential cooperation. They outlined preliminary concepts for consortium formation and discussed possible frameworks for collaboration should they decide to jointly respond to the GIZ funding opportunity. The talks established a foundation for future negotiations and set the stage for more concrete planning in subsequent meetings. Both organizations expressed willingness to continue discussions and explore this partnership further as the GIZ call parameters become clearer.

6.2.3. Name of the activity: Exploratory Discussions on Transnational EDIH Collaboration with INNDIH Valencia

Type of activity: Bilateral partnership exploration meeting

Description of the objectives:

The discussion aimed to identify potential areas of collaboration between S4AI Hub and INNDIH Valencia (Spain) in offering transnational services, particularly focusing on startup support programs. Key objectives included examining synergies between their respective accelerator initiatives, exploring opportunities for joint activities, and planning a structured study visit in Year 2 of the project to facilitate knowledge exchange and develop sustainable governance models for ongoing cooperation.

Outcomes:

The meeting identified strong alignment in both EDIHs' approaches to startup acceleration, creating a foundation for future collaboration in this area. Participants agreed in principle to organize a joint study visit in Year 2, combining the planned project visit with specific knowledge-sharing activities at INNDIH Valencia's facilities to examine their successful service models firsthand. While no formal agreements were signed, both parties expressed commitment to further develop concrete proposals for sharing best practices in startup support services and potentially creating aligned program components that could benefit startups in both regions. The discussion also opened possibilities for future cooperation in other service areas where complementary expertise exists.

6.2.4. Name of the activity: Letter of Support for CROBOHUB.AI EDIH Consolidation Proposal

Type of activity Formal partnership endorsement and future collaboration framework

Description of the objectives:

The letter of support was prepared to formally endorse Croatia's CROBOHUB.AI application for the DIGITAL-2025-EDIH-EU-EEA-08-CONSOLIDATION-STEP call, while establishing a foundation for future Western Balkan-Adriatic regional cooperation. The objectives included demonstrating cross-border alignment with CROBOHUB.AI's mission to strengthen AI adoption in industry, while outlining specific collaboration pathways in knowledge exchange, SME support services, and joint innovation initiatives that would benefit both ecosystems.

Outcomes:

The letter of support has successfully established a framework for future collaboration between our EDIH and CROBOHUB.AI, creating opportunities for knowledge sharing and joint initiatives in AI adoption and digital transformation. This partnership enables cross-border support for SMEs through service referrals and lays the groundwork for potential joint training programs and innovation projects. By aligning with Croatia's EDIH, we've strengthened our regional network position and created pathways to participate in broader European digital initiatives, while supporting the integration of Western Balkan and EU innovation ecosystems. The endorsement also positions us favorably for future consortium opportunities under the evolving EDIH 2.0 framework.

6.3. Create Collaboration with other stakeholders

63.1. EDIH internationalization -Cluster Meet Regions

Type of activity: Event

Description of the objectives: The purpose of the official trip was the participation of Goran Mladenovic, director of the NiCAT Cluster, in the "Cluster Meet Regions" event organized by ECCP and the EU, with the aim of strengthening collaboration between clusters, exploring project opportunities, and promoting the activities and portfolio of EDIH S4AI HUB project.

Link:

<https://www.clustercollaboration.eu/content/edih-s4ai-hub-building-stronger-digital-future>

<https://www.clustercollaboration.eu/content/clusters-meet-regions-palma-spain>

Outcomes: Goran Mladenovic participated in the "Cluster Meet Regions" event held in Palma de Mallorca, organized by ECCP and the EU, with the aim of strengthening cooperation between clusters, exploring project opportunities, and promoting the activities and portfolio of EDIH S4AI HUB project. He established a total of 11 new business contacts, 4 of which are highly relevant for future collaboration.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/17w-fYyhu1rTJRuxJQ5ajdx7Rka0XrWeM/view?usp=sharing>,
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/19hFvbbQ7uotfMx9QS2UFSfwTRu2FqLMr/view?usp=sharing>,
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1P-ABfce0UzV-y5VVybsgQWZBe02xW5tG/view?usp=sharing>,
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WwclToBuNqw8CWx3p9vb96cNRXTJ7puA/edit?usp=sharing&oid=114963367630502991871&rtpof=true&sd=true>,
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1iWN4va8vBdiYVWmUUoLOYPHg7dg4ZJa0/view?usp=sharing> ,
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1iISkVJhHT4sNR8aihCHZ-MgJCQMeo8fD/view?usp=sharing> ,
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ru4Wp9VfO4pzam5Wn7synWssl4MO7ZR/edit?usp=sharing&oid=114963367630502991871&rtpof=true&sd=true> ,
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xi2uhicir6JM3hc11KE-w6tEL_QQLVCE/view?usp=sharing

6.3.2. EDIH internationalization- C2Lab Zaragoza, Spain

Type of activity: Meetings

Description of the objectives: The purpose of the official trip was to participate in the C2Lab in Zaragoza, with the aim of networking with other cluster managers, forming consortia for future projects, and presenting the EDIH project.

Link: <https://www.clustercollaboration.eu/content/edih-s4ai-hub-building-stronger-digital-future> and <https://www.clustercollaboration.eu/content/c2lab-zaragoza-spain>

Outcomes: Goran Mladenovic participated in the C2Lab workshop for cluster matchmaking and the development of joint AI projects in areas such as healthcare, industry, and smart cities, held in Zaragoza. He established a total of 9 new contacts.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1a43jUBH5cYKVVwbqCC5cN4eKqCp2czN?usp=sharing>

7. CONCLUSIONS

The first six months of the S4AI_HUB project have successfully established the foundational framework for monitoring and evaluating progress toward becoming a sustainable European Digital Innovation Hub in Serbia. This initial phase was critical in setting up the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) system that will guide the project's implementation and measure its impact on SMEs and public sector organizations undergoing digital transformation, particularly in Artificial Intelligence.

The core challenge addressed during this period was developing a robust yet flexible monitoring and evaluation system capable of capturing both quantitative outputs and qualitative outcomes across the project's diverse activities. This required balancing immediate operational needs with long-term strategic goals while ensuring alignment with the Digital Europe Programme's requirements.

The primary objective of this deliverable was to create a structured KPI framework that enables consistent tracking of progress toward the project's goals. The methodology employed was participatory and impact-oriented, involving all consortium partners in refining initial indicators from the proposal phase into actionable metrics. The system was designed around three key milestones (M18, M36, M48) with six-month reporting intervals through the Digital Transformation Accelerator platform.

Key findings from this setup phase demonstrate that the project has:

1. Established a comprehensive set of 15 KPIs covering service delivery, ecosystem engagement, and institutional impact
2. Developed baseline measurements (set at zero for 2024) and defined incremental targets through 2028
3. Implemented an internal tracking tool distributed across consortium partners
4. Initiated data collection processes for the first reporting period

The results show promising early progress, particularly in establishing the monitoring infrastructure and securing partner buy-in for the KPI system. However, several limitations must be acknowledged. As a new hub, all baseline measurements started at zero, making initial progress appear modest. The evolving nature of digital innovation ecosystems means some indicators may require refinement as the project matures. Additionally, attributing long-term impact to early-stage interventions remains challenging at this preliminary stage.

The most effective solution has been the development of a balanced KPI framework that combines:

- Quantitative service delivery metrics (e.g., SMEs supported)
- Qualitative partnership indicators (e.g., DIHs connected)
- Ecosystem development measures (e.g., marketplace services)

Evaluation confirms that the planned objectives for this initial phase have been achieved, with the KPI system now operational and ready for the first comprehensive data collection at M6. The framework

successfully integrates both technical and relational aspects of DIH operations while maintaining flexibility for future adjustments.

These efforts have important implications for other work packages, particularly in establishing:

1. Standardized reporting procedures for service delivery (WP2)
2. Baseline measurements for skills development programs (WP3)
3. Tracking mechanisms for test-before-invest activities (WP4)

For future work, the focus should shift to:

1. Completing the first full KPI data collection and analysis cycle
2. Validating indicator relevance through real-world application
3. Preparing for the first major evaluation at M18
4. Exploring integration with other European DIH monitoring systems

In conclusion, this initial KPI framework provides S4AI_HUB with a strong foundation for evidence-based management and continuous improvement. While the true test will come during implementation, the systematic approach established in these first six months positions the project well to deliver meaningful, measurable impact in Serbia's digital transformation journey. The coming reporting periods will focus on operationalizing this framework while maintaining the flexibility needed to adapt to ecosystem developments and emerging opportunities.