EPIC-X: Excelling deep tech through place-based innovation and connected ecosystems for women-led startups

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EPIC-X envisions a European effort that unites diverse stakeholders to create an inclusive and equitable deep tech ecosystem, empowering women-led startups, fostering cross-border collaboration, and dismantling systemic barriers to innovation across Europe

Advancing deep tech innovation with a gender-inclusive approach

EPIC-X is dedicated to accelerating innovation in deep tech by empowering women-led startups across Europe, particularly in countries with emerging or moderate innovation ecosystems. By fostering cross-border collaboration, the project bridges the innovation divide, creating an inclusive environment that supports female entrepreneurs in cutting-edge sectors such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Cybersecurity, Advanced Computing, and more.

Building a strong ecosystem across emerging and moderate innovators

EPIC-X unites a diverse range of stakeholders, including universities, research institutions, business associations, and government agencies, to create a dynamic innovation network spanning 16 European countries:

Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain. With over 100 key actors from various sectors, this multi-actor ecosystem fosters both local and cross-border collaboration. By connecting women-led startups to vital resources and networks, EPIC-X enables these ventures to scale and thrive. This cross-border collaboration promotes the exchange of ideas, expertise, and best practices, enhancing deep tech innovation across the region.

Research for deep tech blueprints and unbiased missions

EPIC-X's research investigated the systemic barriers that women-led deep tech startups face and produced actionable blueprints to address these challenges. The research employed a multi-method approach, combining documentary analysis, qualitative

interviews with over 60 women entrepreneurs, ecosystem builders, and policy experts, and a Delphi study to gather expert consensus on the key obstacles hindering women's success in the deep tech sector.

Key findings from the research reveal the persistent gender bias in funding access, where women-led startups receive less investment despite demonstrating comparable performance to their male counterparts. This disparity is largely driven by entrenched biases in investor networks, which are often male-dominated. Additionally, women-led ventures face exclusion from crucial networking opportunities and mentorship, which further limits their access to critical resources and growth opportunities.

The research also uncovered how these biases are exacerbated by cultural and institutional factors, including the lack of gender representation in leadership roles within the deep tech ecosystem and stereotypes that frame technological expertise and entrepreneurial legitimacy as predominantly male traits. These challenges contribute to the underrepresentation of women in key deep tech fields.

Based on these findings, EPIC-X is developing 'unbiased missions' to address these systemic barriers and create a more inclusive and equitable deep tech ecosystem. These missions are tailored to dismantle the gendered obstacles in funding, networks, and institutional support. Additionally, the deep tech blueprints informed by this research will guide the Acceleration+ Programme framework and strengthen the link to the smart specialization strategies of the targeted countries.

The Acceleration+ Programme: Empowering women-led startups

A major milestone for EPIC-X is the launch of the Acceleration+ Programme, which will provide grants of up to €60,000 and access to business coaching, investors, customers, and partners. Through the Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP) scheme, EPIC-X redistributes €1.2 million to support 20 women-led deep tech startups that have achieved market-product fit or raised at least one round of funding. This targeted support addresses key challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, including limited access to capital, mentorship, and networks.

The Acceleration+ Programme also includes business coaching as a critical component, helping startups navigate complex challenges and scale effectively. Expert business coaches provide personalized guidance on scaling strategies, market entry, funding, and operational issues, helping women-led startups build a strong foundation for growth.

Next steps: Launching the open call and the Acceleration+ Programme

In alignment with the insights from EPIC-X's research, the Acceleration+ Programme will be tailored to meet the specific needs of women entrepreneurs across the targeted regions. In October, an open call will be launched for women-led deep tech startups with high growth potential. This open call will be inclusive and accessible, ensuring that deserving ventures receive the support and resources they need to thrive in today's competitive innovation landscape.

Join the movement

As EPIC-X continues to grow, its vision of empowering women in deep tech is becoming a reality across Europe. Through active engagement with local ecosystems, fostering cross-border collaboration, and addressing gender disparities, EPIC-X is helping to create a more connected and inclusive innovation landscape. With strategic support, EPIC-X is unlocking the full potential of women-led startups, contributing to a more diverse, innovative, and sustainable future for Europe.

To stay updated on the open call and learn more about how you can participate, visit the official EPIC-X website. Together, we can empower the next generation of women innovators and contribute to Europe's deep tech revolution.

For more information, contact: general@epic-x.eu

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