Deliverable D10 Report on the acquired experiences in entrepreneurial ecosystems discovery

ExcellEnt: ***Excellency in Entrepreneurship: Expanding European entrepreneurship by boosting youth (self) employability and promoting a sharing resources culture***

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1. Executive Summary

WP3 of the ExcellEnt project has multiple objectives aimed at creating concrete opportunities for actors within the targeted entrepreneurial ecosystems. In particular, it seeks to:

Define a dedicated and replicable set of individual and collective support mechanisms to foster entrepreneurial development and strengthen connections across European ecosystems.

Offer immersive experiences to entrepreneurs, start-ups, academic and HEI representatives, and ecosystem builders, enabling them to explore opportunities within peer ecosystems.

Launch soft-landing missions to celebrate entrepreneurship, enhance connectivity among ecosystem members, and generate collaboration opportunities—while also exploring paths toward long-term sustainability.

2. About the ExcellEnt project

The ExcellEnt project aspires to explore novel ways to capture, preserve, curate, organise and communicate sets of unstructured entrepreneurial experiences, stories, narratives with an emphasis to those of younger audience that is addressing the challenge of (self)employability, so that they can constitute a shared resource that people can augment, and that individuals as well as institutions can delve into, to find inspiration for new ways of conceptualising and promoting entrepreneurship, and how these new ways can be reflected

into every-day practices and policies, and foundations for visions of our common European future.

3. Introduction

This task aimed to promote ecosystem exploration and enhance the mobility of entrepreneurs within the core network's ecosystems. It offered **bidirectional opportunities** for hub members to explore growth prospects in new ecosystems, supported by a tailored suite of services aligned with their specific development stage.

The initiative builds on **CREA**'s original *Scale-up Soft Landing* program—designed for fast-growing companies navigating territorial expansion—and adapts its methodology to the broader framework of the ExcellEnt project. The goal is to **transfer and scale this expertise**, enabling entrepreneurs and ecosystem stakeholders to pinpoint ecosystems that provide the right conditions and resources for their advancement.

A comprehensive service package has been delivered to support **immersive soft-landing experiences** across six ecosystems. A cohort of 20 participants has been selected based on the strength and impact potential of their "mission statement" in contributing to long-term ecosystem interconnectedness. Their participation costs *(1000 EUR/candidates)* for the discovery missions were fully covered.

These missions included guided visits *to emblematic locations, curated meetings with local stakeholders, and hands-on knowledge capitalisation workshops*, in three cases , embedded to *international conferences* , like **in Larissa, in Paris, and in Sofia.**

The experience fostered deep insights into the local ecosystems, **facilitated strategic partner identification, and stimulated meaningful cross-ecosystem collaboration.**

4. Overview of the Task 3.3.Immersive entrepreneurial ecosystems discovery

In an increasingly interconnected entrepreneurial landscape in western and eastern part of Europe, **Task 3.3** stands as a strategic initiative to strengthen transnational collaboration aiming to enhance ***ecosystem agility*****, foster** ***cross-border learning*****, and promote** ***innovation mobility*****.** At its heart, this task introduces and operationalizes the **soft-landing concept**—a strategic approach designed to reduce barriers for startups and scaleups exploring opportunities across European borders.

This section introduces the soft-landing concept within the **ExcellEnt project** framework, highlighting its role in promoting innovation-driven mobility and mutual learning among European entrepreneurial innovation ecosystems.

What Is Soft-Landing?

Soft-landing refers to a curated set of services and supports that ease the transition for entrepreneurs entering new markets. This includes:

- Tailored mentoring and coaching
- Access to coworking spaces and facilities
- Legal, financial, and cultural orientation
- Networking opportunities with local innovators and investors

Strategic Objectives

The strategic objectives of Task 3.3 are rooted in **fostering stronger connections between European innovation ecosystems.** A central aim is to promote ***mutual learning*** by facilitating the exchange of best practices, methodologies, and tools among entrepreneurial hubs. This is complemented by the goal of ***innovation-driven mobility***, which seeks to empower startups and scaleups to move fluidly across borders, enabling them to test and scale their solutions in diverse environments. Additionally, ***capacity building*** plays a key role, focusing on strengthening the preparedness of ecosystem actors to effectively support entrepreneurial talent both incoming and outgoing. Together, these objectives drive a more agile, interconnected, and resilient European innovation landscape.

Expected Outcomes

As a result of Task 3.3, the initiative anticipates the emergence of a **more cohesive, agile, and interconnected European startup environment**—one that enables innovation to travel seamlessly across borders. By fostering meaningful **engagement between innovation actors** in both Western and Eastern Europe, the project aims to catalyze **long-term partnerships** rooted in trust, shared goals, and mutual growth. Ultimately, these efforts contribute to building a **scalable soft-landing model that other European initiatives can adopt, advancing the broader mission of transnational entrepreneurship and collaborative innovation** across the continent.

5. Methodology and Participant Selection

To ensure relevance and impact, the soft-landing missions required a precise and inclusive approach to identifying both participants and host ecosystems. This section details the multi-criteria selection process that prioritized potential, diversity, and commitment, setting the stage for meaningful cross-ecosystem engagement.

Strategic Positioning of Host Countries

Each host country leveraged its unique strengths:

Country	Strategic Value Highlighted
Greece	Regional innovation in agri-food, health, and tourism
Türkiye	Industrial R&D and advanced manufacturing
Ukraine	Resilience, DefenceTech, and wartime innovation diplomacy
France	Deep tech scale-up and global investor access
Ireland	Innovation policy and startup support infrastructure
Bulgaria	Spinoff development and research commercialization

Table 1. Strategic values of participating countries in SLMs

6. Roadmap Overview

From kickoff to rollout, this section offers a chronological view of the timetable, key milestones, deliverables, and decision points that shaped the development of the soft-landing missions. It provides clarity on how the initiative unfolded and ensures a cohesive understanding of its strategic pacing.

Key Stages

1. Open Call (December 2024 - May 2025)

- Platform: **European Entrepreneurial Academy (EEA) and F6S Platforms** *(See Annex 1)*
- Target Participants:
  - **Startups/SMEs**
  - **Entrepreneurs**
  - **Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)**
  - **Incubators /Accelerators**
  - **Ecosystem Builders (BSO, TTO, Technoparks, Innovation Hubs etc.)**
  - **Investors**

2. Participant Selection (January - May 2025)

- Selection Criteria: **to be an actor by the defined target groups mainly from the entrepreneurial ecosystems in the ExcellEnt partner countries**
- Selection Volume: **20 participants per partner**
- Selection Process: **Conducted by the sending organisations**

3. Soft-Landing Missions (February - June 2025)

Destination Activities

- **Local Ecosystem Tours**

- **Stakeholder Meetings**
- **Market Validation**
- **Peer Learning & Workshops**

4. Participant Engagement

- **Cross-Ecosystem Collaboration**
- **Impact Assessment (Summer 2025)**
- **Continued Scaling Support**

Key Characteristics

- **Structured, time-bound program**
- **Multi-stakeholder approach**
- **Focus on collaborative learning and ecosystem development**

Timeline

- **Open Call: December 2024 - May 2025**
- **Participant Selection: January - May 2025**
- **Soft-Landing Missions: February - June 2025**
- **Impact Assessment: end of June 2025**

7. Soft-Landing Program Structure

Designed as a multilayered experience, the soft-landing program combined local immersion with targeted support services. This section breaks down its **structural components—orientation, matchmaking, stakeholder engagement, and learning labs—**showing how each element contributed to a comprehensive journey.

Ecosystem discovery missions

Audience	Objectives	KPIs
Entrepreneurs and students, HEIs and Universities, startups, incubators /accelerators, Business support organisations (Innovation hubs. Technoparks, TTOs)	Foster cross-cultural exchange, know the local ecosystems Offer networking and matchmaking opportunities with local businesses, support organizations, investors and policy makers Connect EU ecosystems and foster cooperation	6 missions 120 attendees

Table 2. Main audience - Objectives and targeted KPIs

8. Local Soft-Landing Mission Reports

Each ecosystem brought its own character, strengths, and offerings to the program. Through concise two-page insights, this section presents how local missions unfolded across **Greece, France, Ireland, Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Ukraine (in Paris),** showcasing *highlights,*

outcomes, and lessons drawn from each experience. A summary of the **ExcellEnt Soft-Landing Missions with their respective locations and dates**:

Country	City/Location	Dates	Highlights
Greece	Larissa	**Feb 14–15, 2025**	Innovent Forum, JOIST Innovation Park, University of Thessaly
Türkiye	Istanbul	**May 5–6, 2025**	Technoparks, SUNUM, TTO workshops, R&D centers
Ireland	Dublin	**May 26–27, 2025**	Enterprise Ireland, NovaUCD, DCU Alpha, VC networking
France	Paris	**June 11–13, 2025**	VivaTech 2025, Station F, Matrice, De Vinci Incubator
Ukraine	Paris (Bistrot St-Germain)	**June 13, 2025**	Ukraine-led event during VivaTech, showcasing ecosystem resilience
Bulgaria	Sofia	**June 19–20, 2025**	SPINOFF EUROPA Conference, Sofia Tech Park, GATE Institute

Table 3. Dates and venues of the Soft-landing missions

The ExcellEnt Soft-Landing Missions' Reports in Greece, France, Ireland, Turkiye, Bulgaria and Ukraine

- ## Greece (GR)

Soft-Landing Mission Report: [IED]

1. Date and Venue Date: February 14–15, 2025, Location: Larissa, Greece

2. Number and Type of Participants: Total participants: 23

Breakdown: *Startups: 17, Universities/HEIs: 0, Accelerators/Incubators: 1, SMEs: 5*

3. Agenda Overview

The Soft Landing Mission in Greece, held on February 14–15, 2025, provided participants with an immersive experience into the Greek innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem. The agenda combined institutional visits, thematic discussions, networking sessions, and interactive workshops—facilitating knowledge exchange, cross-border collaboration, and exposure to regional development opportunities.

Day 1 – Friday, February 14, 2025

Location: JOIST Innovation Park & University of Thessaly

09:00 – 09:30 | Arrival & Gathering – **Welcome coffee and networking at JOIST**

09:30 – 11:00 | **Visit to University of Thessaly** – Innovation and research presentations, campus tour, and Q&A

11:30 – 13:30 | Site Visit – Guided tour and engagement with local stakeholders

13:30 – 14:00 | Networking Break

14:00 – 15:00 | **Roundtable Discussion: Resilient & Sustainable – Reshaping Energy's Future**

15:00 – 17:00 | Free Networking & Optional 1:1 Meetings

17:25 – 18:10 | **Roundtable Discussion: Aeiforia Strategy for European SMEs in Energy, Environment & Agrifood**

18:10 – 18:30 | Closing Remarks & Wrap-up Networking

Day 2 – Saturday, February 15, 2025

Location: JOIST Innovation Park

11:00 – 11:30 | Arrival & Coffee Networking

11:30 – 12:30 | **Guided Tour of JOIST – Facilities, clusters, and partnership highlights**

12:30 – 14:30 | Lunch Break

14:30 – 15:30 | **Roundtable Discussion: farmB Forum – Shaping Agri-Tech Frontiers in the Age of AI and Robotics**

15:30 – 16:00 | Coffee Break & Networking

16:00 – 16:15 | **Innovation Talk at Future Learning Lab**

16:15 – 16:45 | **Roundtable Discussion: Female Entrepreneurship in Food and Energy Industries**

16:45 – 18:00 | Informal Networking

18:00 – 19:00 | **Interactive Workshop: Bridging Innovation Ecosystems – Lessons from Silicon Valley**

19:00 | Final Wrap-up & Networking Closure

4. Achievements Summary: *The Soft Landing Mission in Greece (February 14–15, 2025) achieved strong engagement between local ecosystem actors and visiting participants, as reflected in overwhelmingly positive feedback. The mission facilitated meaningful knowledge exchange, showcased regional innovation infrastructure, and served as a gateway for cross-border collaboration.*

Participants consistently rated core aspects of the mission—agenda clarity, communication, speaker quality, site visit relevance, and networking opportunities—above 4.5 out of 5. The friendly and responsive support team, engaging roundtables, and high-quality visits to JOIST Innovation Park and the University of Thessaly were frequently highlighted as standout elements.

Participants highlighted valuable networking opportunities, with several reporting over 10 new connections, both during the mission and via the matchmaking sessions. Informal discussions suggested interest in potential startup collaborations, particularly in agri-tech, energy, and AI-driven solutions, though no formal partnership outcomes were documented during the event. These insights reinforce Greece's emerging role as a connector between regional and international innovation ecosystems.

5. Testimonials:

Participant 1 "*Great mission and event – very friendly and attentive team.*"

Participant 2 "*It was a very interesting, multifaceted experience and meeting.*"

Participant 3 "*Networking was very useful and intensive.*"

6. Photos

- **France (FR)**

Soft-Landing Mission Report: [CREA]

1. Date and Venue Date: 11-14 June 2025, Location: Paris, France

2. Number and Type of Participants: Total participants: 45

Breakdown: *Startups: 39, Universities/HEIs: 2, Accelerators/Incubators: 1, Other(BSO):3*

3. Agenda Overview

Day 1 – June 11, 2025 (Wednesday)

*11.00 AM- 11.40 AM | **Panel Discussion*** : **Topic: "Internationalisation of Startups in Europe and Beyond"** Speakers: Yann Gozlan , President (Creative Cluster) & Paul Stefanut, CEO (Booster Labs) & Chris Lo, regional director, Europe, Central Asia and Israel (HKTDC).

*15:30 - 16.00 | **Business Afternoon:*** **Topic: "Secret Recipes for Competitive Business Idea Generation"** Speakers: Gildas Dussauze , Strategy Advisor & Vitaly Charushin, business consultant (Creative Cluster).

Day 2 – June 12, 2025 (Thursday)

10:00 AM - 10.40 AM | Business Breakfast 2 : **Topic: "Grants and Programs to Finance Your Innovative Projects in 2025/2026"** . Speaker: Tunde Kallai , EU senior Expert (CREA)

2:00 PM - 2.40 PM | Panel Discussion – "Why Invest in Your Company? Tips & Practical Insights" : Speakers: Gisela Sanchez, Head of European Affairs (Finance-Innovation) and Arnaut Melilli , Head of Development, Asia &Pacific (Choose Paris Region) .

Day 3 – June 13, 2025 (Friday)

9.00h- 11.00h - Visit at Station F:: Explore the world's largest startup campus, located in the heart of Paris, and witness how it supports early-stage startups with resources, mentoring, and networking opportunities. Link: https://stationf.co Address: **5, PARVIS ALAN TURING, 75013 PARIS**

11.30h- 13.30h Visit at Matrice:: Gain insights into this innovative institution that bridges the gap between education and entrepreneurship, fostering creativity and collaboration. Link: https://www.matrice.io

14.30h - 16.30h Visit at Leonard De Vinci Incubator in La Défense - Campus Cyber: Discover how this incubator supports startups in various industries, providing them with the necessary tools and resources to scale their ventures. Host: Nora Guessoum Entrepreneurship Lead, Antoine Pradoura Head of Development Institute for Future Technologies, François Teyssier Head of Entrepreneurship – **Cyber Campus Transfer Program.**

4. Achievements Summary: Event Objectives: *This three-day mission, organized by Creative Cluster and supported by the ExcellEnt project ,with collaboration of VivaTech 2025 International Conference, provided a unique platform for the coming international startups and researchers. The program focused on expanding market presence in France, to understand the main drivers and institutions in the French entrepreneurial ecosystems, visiting the emblematic accelerators and incubators in Paris.. By fostering valuable networking opportunities, and facilitating peer- learning and further business collaboration ,*

it initiated one-by-one discussions with all the participants , evaluating their business ideas and presentation techniques.

5. Testimonials:

Participant 1. :

"For us at Ideas Center UCU and Angel One Fund, this mission helped map out new partnership opportunities, meet like-minded ecosystem builders, and rethink how universities and venture players can co-drive innovation."

Participant 2:

"The Soft Landing mission was extremely relevant for us: It reinforced our vision of building transparent and tech-driven carbon market infrastructure.. It opened new doors for collaboration with international stakeholders passionate about climate action. And it strengthened our network across Europe and Asia, positioning us for sustainable global growth."

Participant 3:

"As our first time attending an event of this scale, we were blown away by the technologies, inspiring projects, and connections spanning continents. From groundbreaking ideas to future collaborations, VivaTech proved to be a hub of endless opportunities. Huge thanks to the organizers: and the ExcellEnt Project (the Soft Landing Mission to France) for this unforgettable opportunity. We're also deeply grateful to the participants and vibrant community. Highlights of the trip included not only VivaTech, but also visits to dynamic entrepreneurship and tech hubs: STATION F, Matrice Pôle Léonard de Vinci Incubator at Campus Cyber."

6. Photos

- **Ireland (IE)**

Soft-Landing Mission Report: [IDI]

1. Date and Venue Date: May 26–27, **Dublin, Ireland**

2. Number and Type of Participants: Total participants: 18

Breakdown: *Startups: 0, Universities/HEIs: 1, Accelerators/Incubators: 7, Other (BSO): 9, Investor: 1*

3. Agenda Overview

Day 1: VCs and Incubators

Guinness Enterprise Centre (GEC) was the first stop. Housed in a former Guinness storehouse, the GEC now shelters more than 120 early-stage ventures. Participants were treated to a rapid-fire series of talks:

- **Further VC** broke down how Irish VCs source deals and why "patient capital with global ambition" is the new mantra.
- **Irrus Investments** lifted the curtain on angel syndicates, stressing that founder-investor chemistry can make—or break—a seed round.
- **PwC Ireland** explained the tax incentives that have helped Ireland punch far above its weight in attracting founders and FDI alike.

In the afternoon participants visited **DCU Alpha**, Dublin City University's innovation campus. Thirty-five industrial and research-heavy firms—ranging from IoT champions to cleantech pioneers—call DCU Alpha home. The takeaway? Universities here don't just spin out IP; they curate entire neighbourhoods where industry and academia collide daily over coffee.

Day 2: Policy Makers

If Day 1 showcased the grassroots, Day 2 zoomed out to the policy level. Inside **Enterprise Ireland's** glass-lined HQ, we heard how the agency acts as "venture capitalist of last resort"

and why fewer than 5 million people can still produce global champions when public and private incentives align. Presentations from **Knowledge Transfer Ireland** and the **Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund** proved that IP strategy and grant finance are two sides of the same coin. The final stop was **NovaUCD** at University College Dublin where participants sat down with TTO staff who have systemised the path from lab bench to term sheet. The message was simple: *process beats luck.*

4. Achievements Summary

The study visit to Dublin offered an in-depth understanding of the Irish entrepreneurial ecosystem, particularly highlighting the policies and strategic approaches that have contributed to its success. Participants gained insights into how public agencies like Enterprise Ireland act as crucial enablers of growth, providing not only funding but also strategic support and market access. The focus on "patient capital with global ambition" from venture capitalists and the systematic approach to intellectual property commercialization by institutions like NovaUCD showcased a cohesive framework that bridges academic innovation with market realities. Discussions around tax incentives further illuminated the policy landscape designed to attract and retain entrepreneurial talent and foreign direct investment, demonstrating how coordinated public and private initiatives underpin Ireland's strong performance in the global innovation arena.

5. Testimonials:

Participant 1

"The ExcellEnt Project Soft-Landing Mission in Dublin (May 26–27) was a thoughtfully curated two-day experience that brought together a selected range of organizations and speakers, offering a concise yet vibrant snapshot of the Irish innovation and venture ecosystem. As a transmission of how national innovation systems operate in real time. … This mission wasn't simply about visiting institutions. It was about structural understanding. Through open, detailed, and honest conversations, a skill-

building model was revealed, transmitted generously by ecosystem leaders, funding agencies, and institutional stakeholders to our group of policy makers, researchers, and innovation facilitators."

Participant 2.

"Over two impactful days, we had the opportunity to engage with key players including Enterprise Ireland, Further, IRRUS INVESTMENTS, PwC Ireland, DCU ALPHA (Dublin City University's Innovation Campus) highlighted the power of public-private collaboration, strong institutional support, and long-term vision. This Soft Landing Mission was expertly led by International Development Ireland (IDI) and brought together innovation intermediaries from Greece, France, Turkey, and Ukraine — offering a valuable exchange of ideas, practices, and models for scaling innovation and supporting startups across borders. A sincere thank you to all our hosts for your openness and inspiration. Ireland's experience offers key lessons for building resilient, sustainable, and globally connected innovation ecosystems."

6. Photos

- **Türkiye (TR)**

Soft-Landing Mission Report: Sabanci

1. Date and Venue Date: May 5-6, 2025 Location: Istanbul, Turkey

2. Number and Type of Participants: Total participants: 19

Breakdown: *HEI representatives: 6, BSO (Technopark representatives): 2, SME: 11*

3. Agenda Overview

Day 1: Welcome and orientation, Ecosystem overview by Sabancı University, pitches of participants, site visits to Sabancı ARF, Yıldız Technical University, YTU Technopark, Thematic workshops (corporate venture capital, technology transfer from universities and spin-offs), networking dinner (optional)

Day 2: Site visits to MEXT, Sabancı University Campus, SuCool Incubation Center, Tubitak MAM Idea Incubation Center, Thematic workshops (robotics and digitalization, artificial intelligence in fintech, funding opportunities for startups), matchmaking & networking lunch, Wrap-up and key takeaways

4. Achievements Summary: *Strong engagement between local ecosystem actors and visiting participants., Multiple startup collaborations initiated—[e.g., 3 soft MoUs signed]., Highlighted opportunities in the [sector focus, e.g., agri-tech/AI/circular economy]. Participants reported enhanced understanding of the regional ecosystem and better clarity on potential market entry pathways. Strengthened the host's international positioning and set the foundation for follow-up partnerships under the ExcellEnt umbrella. etc***.**

In May 2025, a delegation of 19 participants from Ukraine, Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania — including university representatives, technopark managers, and entrepreneurs — joined a two-day ExcellEnt Soft-Landing Mission to Türkiye. The

goal was to explore one of the region's most developed, well-funded, and open innovation ecosystems. The mission began at Sabancı University's Minerva Han in Istanbul, where participants took part in an engaging session on the evolution of Türkiye's entrepreneurship landscape, followed by an icebreaker to encourage cross-country networking. At Sabancı Holding headquarters, home to the ARF corporate incubator, participants explored the role of corporate venture capital in supporting early-stage startups. Many were pleased to learn that international entrepreneurs can apply to ARF programs and funding. The group then visited Yıldız Technical University's incubator and YTU Teknopark, where they witnessed the scale of Türkiye's incubation infrastructure and a showcase of technology transfer achievements from university to industry. At MEXT, Türkiye's flagship digital factory, the group explored Industry 4.0 in action — robotics, AI, and simulation technologies offering a practical demonstration of smart manufacturing. The visit to Sabancı University's SuCOOL incubator provided additional insights into how university collaborations are nurtured in Türkiye. Participants learned about commercialization pathways, state-recognized entrepreneurial programs, and graduate opportunities — all within a campus that blends advanced research with green, community-oriented design. The final stop was TÜBİTAK Marmara Teknokent, where participants explored deeptech incubation programs and national funding opportunities provided through Türkiye's premier research council.

This Soft-Landing Mission delivered more than site visits — it offered new perspectives, concrete connections, and a clearer understanding of how local ecosystems function at the intersection of research, business, and policy. It's precisely the kind of bridge-building that the project is designed to enable.

5. Testimonials:

Participant 1.

"I really enjoyed the opportunity to explore Turkey's technological breakthrough and the diverse opportunities it offers for young people and entrepreneurs. I have no complaints. Everything was well organized! Very warm and good presentation from every speaker and organization! It is commendable and I am very impressed!"

Participant 2.

"I really like the Technopark as it is an area where engineers could realise their start up. The speakers were perfect, and these sessions were the most informative and interesting for me."

Participant 3.

"The opportunity to meet other people with the same/different mindset and goals for implementation ideas, to see the innovative opportunities in Turkey and to be even more motivated to achieve the goals I set for myself. I really liked the visit to MEXT and Tubitak".

Participant 4.

"I really liked everything. It was well prepared and straight to the point."

6. Photos

IDEA
incubation

- **Bulgaria (BG)**

Soft-Landing Mission Report: GATE

1. Date and Venue Date: February 19/20 June, 2025, Location: GATE- Sofia, Bulgaria

2. Number and Type of Participants: Total participants: 22

Breakdown: *Startups: 15, Universities/HEIs: 7, Accelerators/Incubators: 0*

3. Agenda Overview

Thursday, June 19, 2025

- **Institute Welcome Session & Panel Discussion:**
  We welcomed our guests at the institute with a brief presentation highlighting key project outcomes. This was followed by a panel discussion on *"How to Strengthen Europe's Tech Ecosystem."* The session was dynamic and highly engaging, with several participants staying afterwards for further informal discussions and idea exchanges.

- **Conference Invitation – Spinoff Europe 2025:**
  During the visit, participants were also invited to attend the Spinoff Europe 2025 conference. This flagship event focuses on university-industry collaboration, research commercialization, and the spinoff/startup ecosystem across Europe. As part of the mission, attendees were offered complimentary tickets, giving them access to keynote sessions, networking opportunities, and workshops featuring top-tier researchers, entrepreneurs, and innovation policy leaders.

- **Site Visit to Sofia Tech Park**:
  In the afternoon, we toured Sofia Tech Park, including two high-tech laboratories and Bulgaria's national supercomputer. The VR/XR Lab drew particular interest — participants had the opportunity to test headsets and navigate virtual environments using joysticks. This experience sparked lively conversations about the practical

applications of immersive technologies across education, healthcare, and cultural preservation.

- **Social Evening at GATE Institute:**
  The day concluded with an informal networking evening hosted at GATE Institute, providing an excellent opportunity for further interaction among mission participants, local researchers, and tech entrepreneurs.

Friday, June 20, 2025

- **Visit to IBM Bulgaria:**
  We spent 2.5 hours at IBM's Sofia office, where the team presented real-world use cases of AI in their products and services. They also introduced the structure and goals of the IBM Sofia Accelerator, focused on collaboration with startups from Central and Eastern Europe. Although the session was originally scheduled for one hour, it was extended due to high interest and active participation.

- **Visualization Lab Presentation:**
  Later in the day, we visited the visualization lab at GATE Institute, where Evgeni and Boris showcased AI use cases related to urban environments and digital twins. Two international participants — currently developing similar technologies — expressed strong interest in co-developing a use case applicable either in Bulgaria or for their international clients.

4. Achievement summary

The primary goal of the mission was to explore best practices in the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in both corporate and academic settings, and to identify opportunities for collaboration between innovation ecosystems across Europe.Sofia has shown itself to be a vibrant tech and academic hub, open to international collaboration and innovation partnerships. We established valuable direct connections with corporate experts and ecosystem stakeholders, with potential for joint pilot projects.

5. Testimonials

Participant 1.

"From digital twins at GATE to Gen AI at IBM and applied labs at Sofia Tech Park through the ritual at the edge of a new ecosystem at Spinoff Europe Conference, this mission offered a hands-on look into a quietly sophisticated, deeply coordinated ecosystem. Unlike the buzz, Sofia delivered depth, spatial, intentional and grounded in real venture readiness. Grateful to have joined the ExcellEnt Project delegation; what unfolded was not just a visit, but a slow-revealing architecture of tech transfer, alignment, and future-facing momentum. Looking forward to where the next soft-landing takes us — builder to builder, city to city"

Participant 2.

"This conference gathered participants from all over continental Europe: startupers, academics, and senior officials. Warm welcome and sharp organisation at the Gate Institute. The high-level presentations in plenary sessions have alternated with abundant exchanges one-on-one or in small groups about innovative projects on subjects as different as medtech, silver economy, robotic pets, real estate digital twins. This is good for entrepreneurship, good for the European economy and Bulgarian expansion!"

Participant 3.

"The most valuable part of the ExcellEnt Soft-Landing Mission in Bulgaria for me was the connections I made during the visits to the GATE Institute, IBM, and the Visualization Lab. These meetings gave me insights into technologies for creating digital twins and helped me establish contacts that may potentially grow into collaborations on new products. Another great experience was meeting the other participants of the mission, which unexpectedly gave me a deeper understanding of the real estate market in France and the demand for new technologies and products there."

6. Photos

- **Ukraine (UA)**

Soft-Landing Mission Report: TU

1. Date and Venue Date: June 13 , 2025 Location:Paris, France

2. Number and Type of Participants: Total participants: 30

Breakdown: *Startups: 20, Universities/HEIs: 2, Accelerators/Incubators: 2, Corporation: 1, Investor: 1, BSO: 2 , Other : 2*

3. Agenda Overview

Day 1-2: **Viva Technology 2024** The Ukrainian enforced delegation of 9 UA startups and innovation intermediaries/Universities visited Viva Technology, Europe's largest startup and tech event. During these two days, delegates actively engaged in the conference, attending keynotes and panel discussions, exploring technological innovations, and participating in extensive networking. A key focus was the promotion of the Ukrainian tech ecosystem, showcasing its resilience and potential to a global audience of investors, entrepreneurs, and corporate leaders.

Day 3: The ecosystem presentation and networking event Excellent Connect: Bridging EU's Innovation Frontiers, an official Viva Tech Side event.

Part 1: Ecosystem Presentation - "Innovation Horizons"

The event began with a welcome speech from the EXCELLENT project team from France and Ukraine. The key event of the first part was a special report "Technological Sustainability and the Future of Ukraine", where a representative of the Ukrainian tech community (TechUkraine) revealed the current state of the ecosystem, success stories, investment needs and vision of post-war growth within the EU.

This was followed by a dynamic session "Getting to Know Ecosystems", where representatives from France, Greece, Turkey, Ireland, Bulgaria and other countries presented key benefits of their ecosystems for investors, leading innovation sectors and successful cases in 5 minutes.

Part 2: Structured Networking — "Connect & Collaborate Hub"

This session was designed to turn ideas into concrete actions and was aimed at productive interaction.

It was organized as "Ecosystem Learning Points": Participants were able to freely communicate with representatives of each country at specially marked areas to obtain targeted information and establish first contacts.

Part 3: Informal Networking and Buffet – "European Mixer"

The final part of the event was held in a relaxed atmosphere over a glass of drinks and light snacks.

4. Achievements Summary:

The mission successfully enhanced the visibility and integration of the Ukrainian tech ecosystem within the broader European community. Key achievements include:

- *Strengthened Bilateral Relations: The "EXCELLENT Connect" event at Bistrot Saint-Germain, Paris, successfully brought together key stakeholders, including VCs, tech leaders, and institutional representatives from France and Ukraine, fostering a collaborative atmosphere.*
- *Showcased Ukrainian Resilience & Innovation: The presentation and following discussion effectively communicated the unique strengths, adaptability, and investment potential of the Ukrainian tech sector to a targeted international audience.*

- *Created Opportunities for Startups: The event provided a valuable platform for the Ukrainian delegation, enabling them to gain direct exposure, introduce their companies, and initiate conversations with potential investors and partners in the French and other EU markets, at the same time giving the international audience better understanding of Ukraine opportunities.*
- *Facilitated Strategic Networking: The mission generated significant networking outcomes, establishing numerous connections that lay the groundwork for future partnerships, investments, and joint projects.*

5. Testimonials:

Participant 1:

"Proud to assist this unique event in Paris with TechUkraine, which gathered over 40 participants from diverse ecosystems to exchange best practices and spark new collaborations. The event showcased the power of strong individual profiles, resilience, and shared values to strengthen bridges between Ukraine and Europe through innovation. A truly inspiring moment! Arnaud Lumet. "

Participant 2.

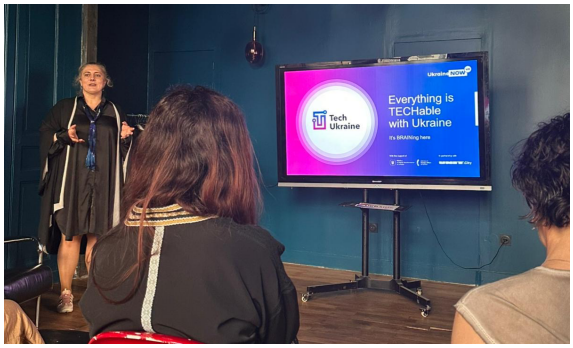
"As someone representing both the Ukrainian academic accelerator Ideas Center UCU and the Angel One Fund, I was proud to see Ukraine positioned as one of the core contributors to Europe's innovation and tech landscape. Excellent Connect brought together startups, investors, and ecosystem builders from France, Ireland, Greece, Bulgaria, Türkiye, and Ukraine in a setting that encouraged real, strategic conversations. The country presentations were thoughtful and well-curated, and Ukraine's message — of innovation rooted in resilience and bravery — clearly resonated."

“ What made the event stand out was the quality of dialogue and the openness to collaboration. Every conversation felt intentional, with participants eager to explore joint projects, cross-border scaling, and ecosystem synergies. Ukraine’s story was framed around talent, traction, and bold vision — met with genuine interest and respect. Excellent Connect as part of Excellent Project created the space for new partnerships to form, grounded in trust, talent, and a truly European spirit of collaboration”.

Participant 3.

‘*Grateful to have joined Excellent Connect: Bridging EU’s Innovation Frontiers. The event highlighted Europe’s drive for resilience, talent, and cross-border innovation — with a strong focus on Ukraine’s tech sector as a key player in the EU’s digital future. Great conversations with fellow startups, investors, and ecosystem leaders. Thanks to Nataly Veremeeva for organizing and sharing this opportunity! Proud our startup was selected for the mission — the insights and connections were truly valuable.”*

6. Photos



UKRAINE:
Europe's biggest Tech country

Bulgaria: A Prime
Destination for Venture
Capital in 2025

9. Organization and Promotion of the Soft-Landing Missions (SLMs)

To ensure meaningful engagement and visibility, the ExcellEnt Soft-Landing Missions were carefully **structured and actively promoted** across multiple platforms targeting entrepreneurs, ecosystem builders, and innovation stakeholders. The organizational model combined internal planning with external outreach:

- **Strategic Planning:** A shared implementation framework was developed by CREA, incorporating timelines, eligibility criteria, mission formats, and partner responsibilities. Each mission was co-designed with local partners to reflect ecosystem realities while ensuring consistency across the network.
- **Participant Engagement:** Open calls were launched with clear application guidelines, a transparent selection process, and emphasis on mission relevance, development potential, and ecosystem fit.
- **Multi-Channel Promotion:** To maximize awareness and participant diversity, the missions were promoted through:
- **EEA Platform** – Leveraging the European Entrepreneurs Association's wide-reaching network to engage pan-European entrepreneurial communities.
- **LinkedIn** – Sharing targeted updates, calls for participation, and success stories with a professional audience and relevant innovation networks.
- **Facebook** – Engaging broader community groups, local start-up circles, and innovation enthusiasts with interactive content and mission teasers.
- **F6S Platform** – Utilizing this global start-up portal to reach tech-savvy founders and early-stage teams, ensuring access to high-potential candidates across borders.

This multi-pronged strategy not only attracted quality applicants but also amplified the visibility of the ExcellEnt initiative as a flagship model of cross-ecosystem engagement in Europe.

10. Feedback forms and Key findings

To ensure the strategic effectiveness of each soft-landing mission, both **pre-mission** and **post-mission evaluations** were conducted as integral components of the SLMs process by each partner after the SLMs by online surveys.

The **pre-mission evaluation** aimed to assess the *readiness, expectations, and support needs of participating startups and ecosystem partners*. It provided baseline insights into market objectives, perceived barriers, and capacity levels—allowing host ecosystems to tailor their soft-landing services accordingly.

Meanwhile, the **post-mission evaluation** focused on *capturing outcomes, measuring impact, and surfacing lessons learned. It gathered qualitative and quantitative data on startup satisfaction, ecosystem engagement, and partnership sustainability*, while *identifying both enablers and challenges that can inform future program design and policymaking.*

Together, these *two evaluation layers created a robust feedback loop—enabling continuous improvement of the soft-landing framework and helping translate real-world experiences into strategic recommendations* for ***Deliverable D10 , D4.3 and beyond.***

The analysis of the Paris 2025 Soft-Landing Mission feedback form data reveals several key points regarding participant satisfaction and networking opportunities (as an example)

Key findings:

Pre-mission preparation and communication: Participants generally rated pre-mission preparation and communication highly, with satisfaction averages ranging from 4.13 to 4.61 out of 5. The registration process and pre-mission information were particularly appreciated.

During-mission experience: Evaluations of during-mission activities were also positive, with averages ranging from 3.87 to 4.48 out of 5. Networking opportunities were highly rated (4.48), and participants felt the mission met or exceeded their expectations (4.43).

Post-mission impact and future interest: Participants showed a strong interest in staying connected and receiving updates, with very high averages (4.77 and 4.91, respectively). They also feel more informed about opportunities in France (4.55).

Details and Interpretations:

Pre-mission Evaluations:

The registration process (4.61) and the clarity of the materials and information provided (4.35) were the strong points. The mission's publicity (4.26) and adequate preparation based on the information provided (4.22) also received high ratings.

Pre-mission networking opportunities (4.13) and the clarity of the instructions for matchmaking and site visits (4.13) were rated slightly lower, suggesting potential areas for improvement.

Pre-mission Evaluations:

The networking opportunities (4.48), the speakers' commitment and knowledge (4.39), and the balance between theoretical insights and practical experiences (4.30) were highly

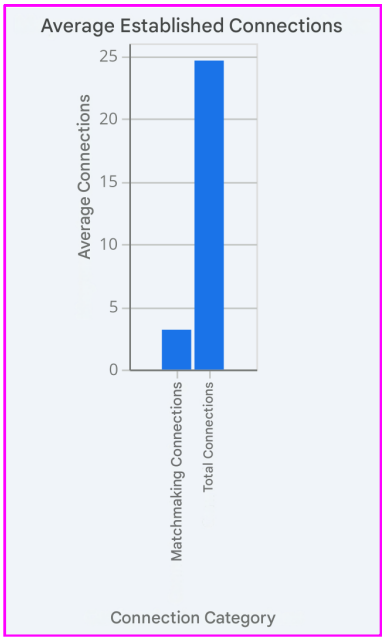
appreciated. The site visits provided valuable information (4.18), and the roundtable discussions and workshops were relevant (4.17).

The matchmaking event was rated useful (3.87), which is the lowest score in this category. This could indicate that, while deemed useful, there is room for improvement to maximize the effectiveness of these sessions.

Post-mission evaluations:

Participants are very interested in receiving **updates on future opportunities** (4.91) and staying connected with other participants (4.77). They feel more informed **about business and collaboration opportunities in France** (4.55), indicating a positive impact of the mission. Interest in participating in future soft-landing missions is also very high (4.62), confirming the overall success of the event.

Connections made: Participants made an average of 24.63 total connections during the mission.



On average, **3.17 connections were made specifically during matchmaking sessions.**

The graph *(Fig 1)* illustrates the average number of connections made during the Paris SLM.

Fig 1 Average established connections on Paris SLMs

11. Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Every mission leaves its mark, and every mark tells a story. This section reflects on what was achieved, what surprised us, and what we'd do differently. It offers candid lessons that can inspire future efforts to scale or replicate the initiative across Europe or beyond.It explores economic, institutional, and network-based impacts while touching on the broader value generated across stakeholder groups and the long-term potential of such engagements.

General Outcomes & Reflections from ExcellEnt SLMs:

The six missions—spanning **Greece, Türkiye, Ukraine (in Paris), France, Ireland, and Bulgaria**—offered a dynamic cross-section of Europe's innovation landscape. They catalyzed ***new partnerships, deepened ecosystem understanding, and empowered startups to scale across borders.***

KPI: Total Number of paid participants by Partner and Country on the all SLMs

Partner	Greece	France	Ireland	Turkiye	Bulgaria	Ukraine (Paris)	Total
IED	X	6	5	3	5	X	19
CREA	3	X	1	1	15	3	23
IDI	6	1	X	3	0	8	18
Sabanci	7	13	3	X	1	X	24
TU	4	5	5	4	3	X	21
GATE	6	6	0	6	X	2	20
						Total	**125**

Table 4 : Total number of paid participants in all the SLMs

The total number of paid participants by partners is **125**. Original KPI: **120.**

Type of Organisations Participating in SLMs by Partner

Throughout the Excellent Soft-Landing Mission, six key partners demonstrated deep commitment across multiple dimensions of the innovation ecosystem. Each played a distinct role, yet together they created a cohesive and complementary network of support for startups and entrepreneurs.

IED stood out as a comprehensive contributor, actively engaging in all major areas—supporting startups and SMEs, collaborating with higher education institutions, nurturing ecosystem development, and providing business and accelerator services.

CREA brought strength in strategic coordination and investment readiness. Even CREA directly linked to several universities, in the SLMs, CREA mainly involved universities in the Paris SLM and not sent participants to the other 4 countries SLMs. On the other side, CREA actively fostered ecosystem growth and offered both BSO and accelerator support, as well as investor engagement.

IDI made targeted contributions by supporting startups and strengthening the ecosystem infrastructure, focusing their efforts to amplify impact in those areas, It was not sent university representatives for the SLMs, but business support organisations has been invoplved in the Dublin SLMs.

Sabanci University served as a multifaceted powerhouse, leveraging its academic foundation while actively engaging with startups, ecosystem builders, BSOs, and accelerators—bridging the gap between education and enterprise.

TU mirrored this versatile involvement, integrating academic leadership with startup engagement and practical ecosystem services, fostering synergy between research, innovation, and business support.

Finally, **GATE** reinforced this all-round approach, delivering across every stakeholder group aside , making them a central catalyst for the mission's implementation.

Partner	Startups & SMEs	HEIs (Universities)	Ecosystem builders	Business Support Organisations (BSOs)	Incubators / Accelerators	Investors
IED	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	
CREA	☑		☑	☑	☑	☑
IDI	☑		☑			
Sabanci	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	
TU	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	
GATE	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	

Table 5: Type of organisations participating in SLMs by Partner

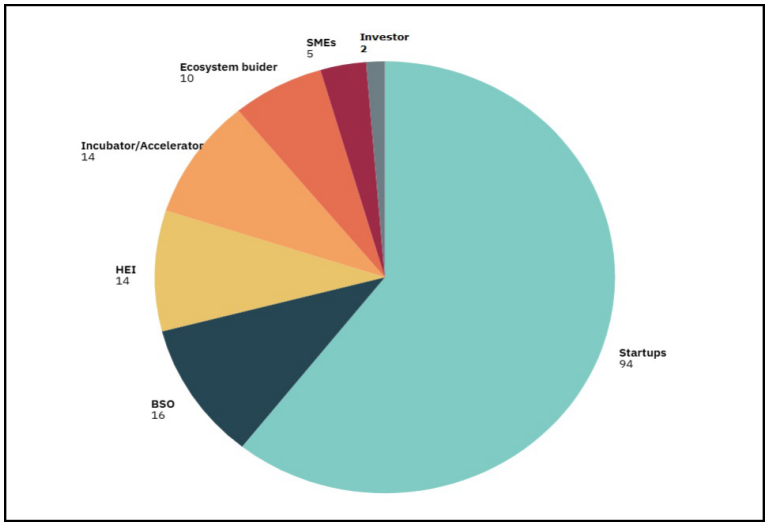


Fig. 2 *PIE Graph about the type and total number of organisations in all Soft-landing missions*

Through its implementation, **Task 3.3 delivers tangible benefits across three interconnected impact domains**:

1.First, in the area of ***Startup Empowerment and Market Readiness***, participating ventures gain critical exposure to diverse market conditions, enabling the validation of business models in real-world contexts. Targeted interventions such as investor pitch sessions, mentoring, and iterative feedback cycles enhance their fundraising potential, while curated matchmaking with local partners, incubators, and venture capital networks accelerates their international market entry.

2.Second, the task reinforces ***Cross-Border Collaboration and Ecosystem Building*** by fostering transnational partnerships among innovation hubs, universities, and accelerators.

It creates a fertile ground for peer-to-peer learning among key intermediaries—including technology transfer offices, incubators, and policy stakeholders—thereby strengthening the connective tissue of European innovation. Notably, this approach helps bridge gaps between Western and Eastern ecosystems, promoting a more balanced and inclusive innovation landscape.

3.Finally, the task advances ***Knowledge Transfer and Policy*** *Insights* by capturing and disseminating best practices in ***technology transfer, commercialization, and startup support mechanisms.*** These grassroots insights feed into broader EU innovation policymaking, ensuring alignment with the realities faced by emerging ecosystems.

At the same time, the initiative showcases the strategic value of soft-landing programs as **powerful instruments for ecosystem integration and transnational entrepreneurship.**

12. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Concluding the report, this section translates experiential insights that can be integrated into the ***D4.3 High level report for adoption measures (policy makers manual)*** , as an actionable guidance for policymakers. It outlines enablers and barriers to soft-landing success and provides strategic recommendations to integrate such programs into national and EU-level entrepreneurship and innovation agendas.

The **Excellent Soft-Landing Missions** successfully engaged a broad and diverse network of stakeholders across eastern and western part of Europe , the targeted and neighboring regions. In total, **157 entities** participated, reflecting a rich blend of innovation and collaboration:

- **Startups:** 94
- **Universities/HEIs:** 14
- **Accelerators/Incubators:** 14
- **SMEs:** 5
- **Business Support Organizations (BSOs):** 16
- **Ecosystem Builders:** 10
- **Investors:** 2
- **Large Enterprises:** 2

The geographical reach included key innovation actors of the entrepreneurial ecosystems such as **Greece (23)**, **France (45)**, **Ireland (18)**, **Turkey (19)**, **Bulgaria (22)**, and **Ukraine (30)**. This diverse engagement highlights the mission's role in **fostering cross-border connections and opening new channels for startups to expand beyond their home markets.**

The mission's outcome **reinforces the value of international cooperation, multidimensional stakeholder inclusion, and structured support systems** in building **resilient innovation ecosystems**. It laid strong groundwork for future soft-landing collaborations and growth opportunities.

Key Insights from Soft-Landing Missions for D4.3

1. Tailored Onboarding Maximizes Impact

Soft-landing is most effective when support services are customized to the startup's sector, stage, and market goals. One-size-fits-all models often fall short—localized mentoring, regulatory orientation, and cultural immersion proved essential to entrepreneurial success in new environments.

2. Trust-Based Relationships Drive Sustainability

Sustained transnational collaboration flourishes when built on trust, reciprocity, and shared value. Missions that prioritized peer-to-peer exchanges and long-term partnership intentions—beyond simple matchmaking—led to deeper ecosystem integration.

3. Cross-Sectoral Collaboration Unlocks Ecosystem Value

Engagements that involved academia, corporates, accelerators, and policymakers created richer outcomes than isolated efforts. These multi-stakeholder formats enhanced knowledge exchange and offered startups a more holistic entry point.

4. Mobility and Exposure Accelerate Learning

Real-world exposure to foreign markets enabled entrepreneurs to quickly validate assumptions, iterate on their business models, and identify product-market fit across borders—accelerating their internationalization journeys.

5. Barriers Persist but are navigable

Key challenges included:

- **Fragmented regulatory landscapes**
- **Language and cultural barriers**
- **Inconsistent support capacities among local intermediaries . These barriers underscore the need for harmonized soft-landing protocols and knowledge-sharing platforms across the EU.**

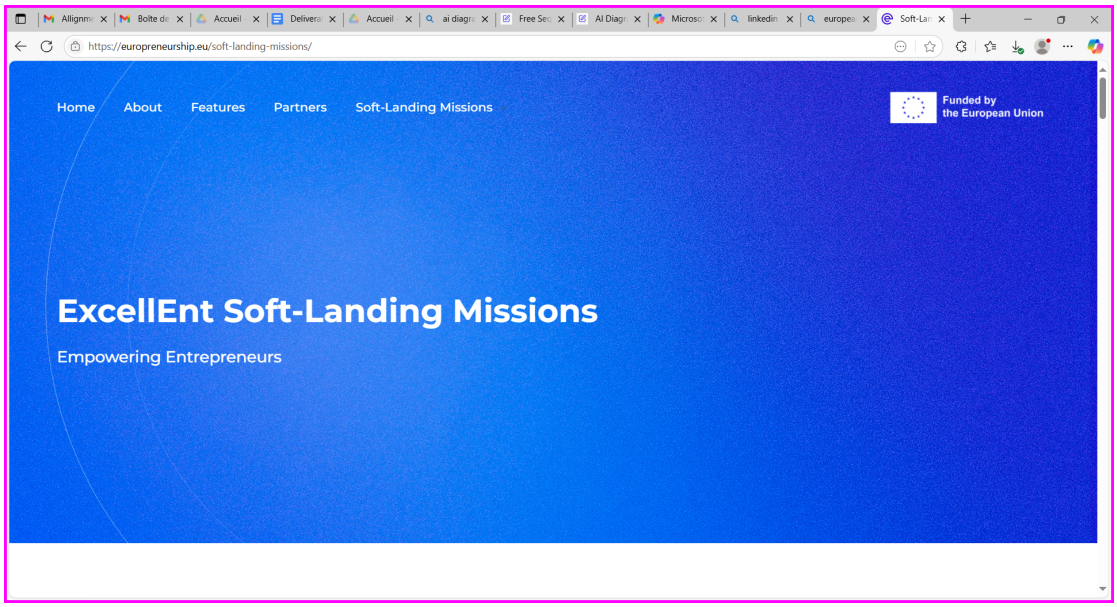
6. Soft-Landing as a Policy Instrument

Soft-landing programs aren't just startup services—they are strategic levers for regional development and internationalization. When embedded in national or EU innovation policy, they can support:

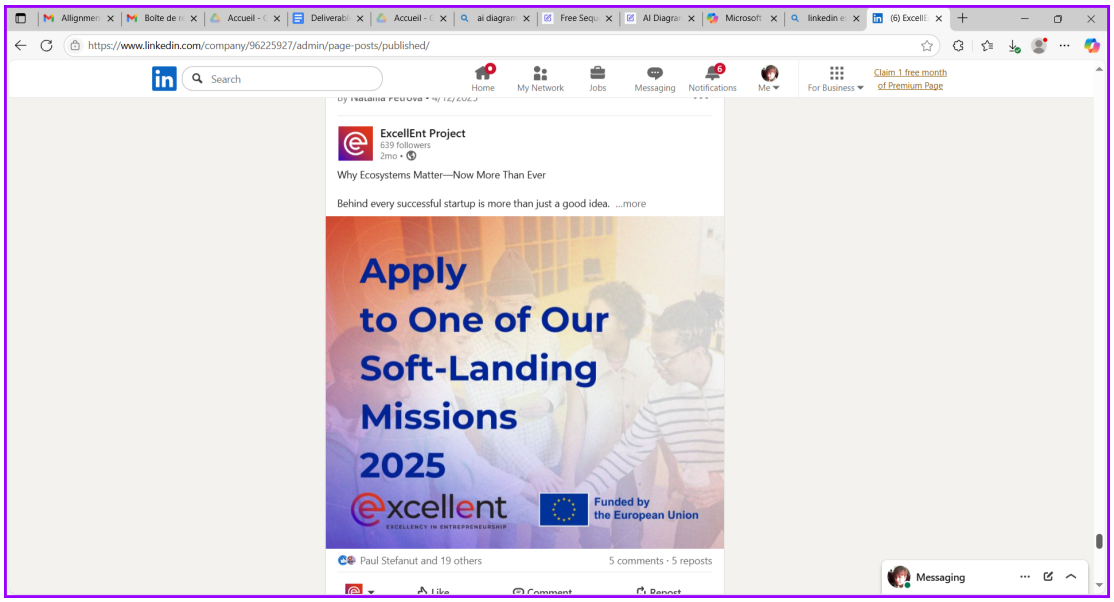
- **Talent mobility**
- **Smart specialization**
- **Balanced regional growth Their institutionalization increases visibility, funding opportunities, and long-term impact.**

Annex 1 : Promotional materials of the SLMs and Feedback forms

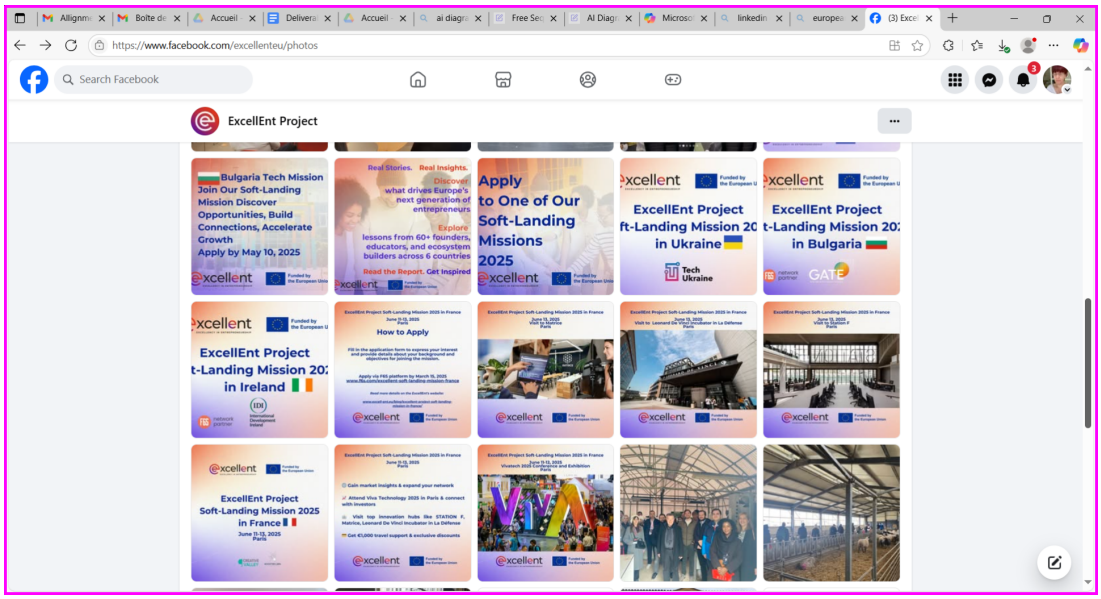
1. EEA platform



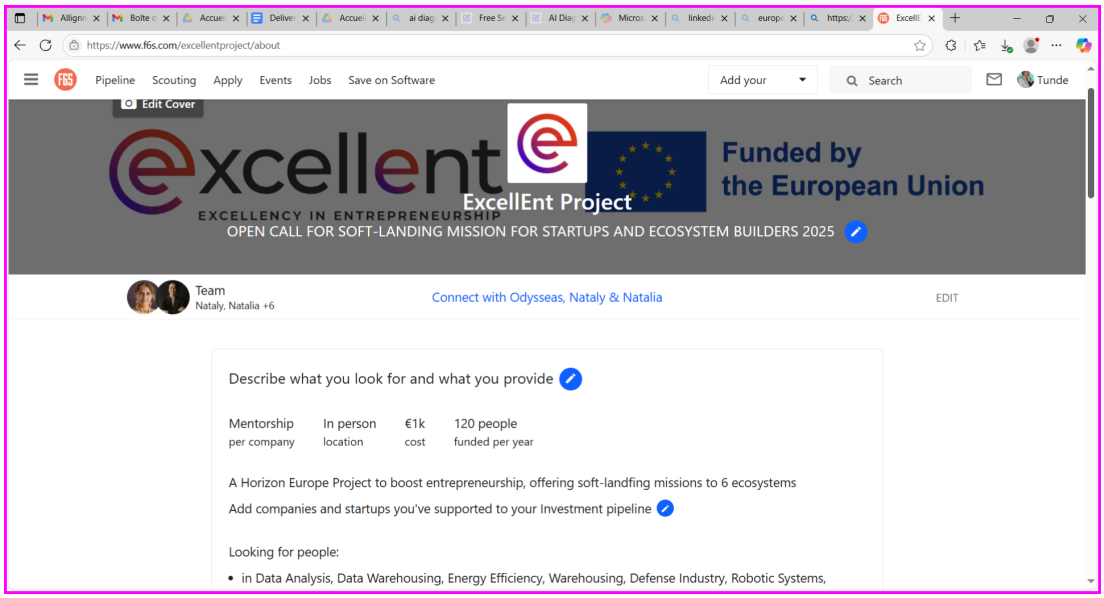
2. LinkedIn

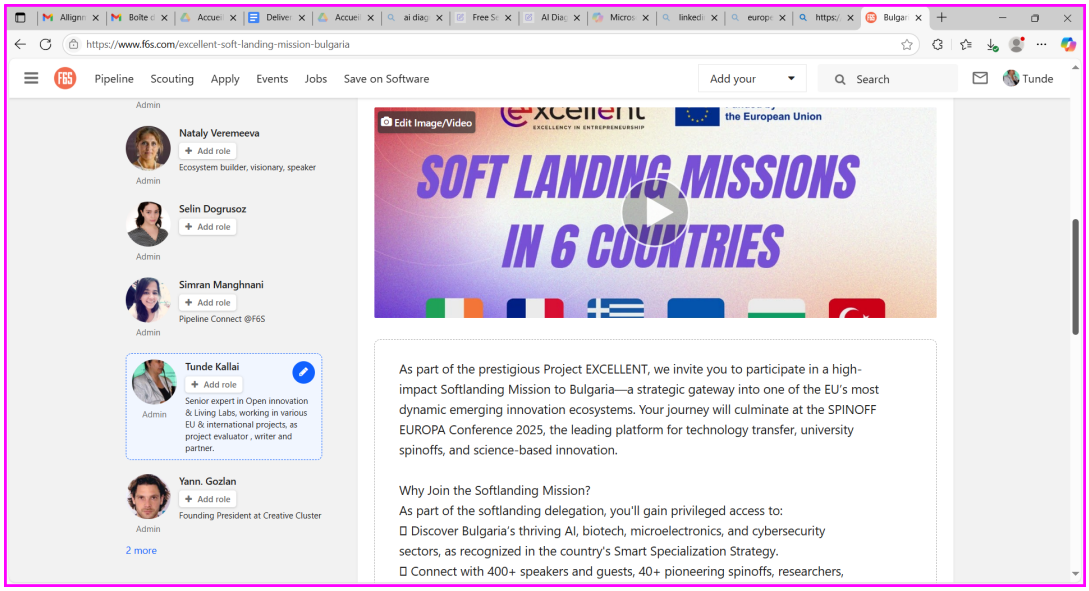


3. Facebook

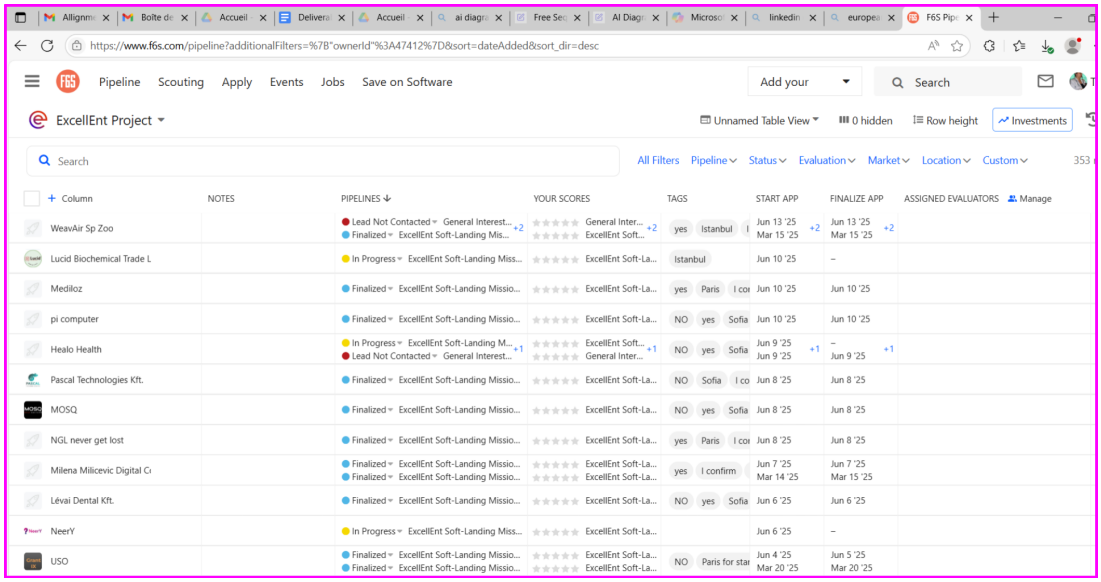


4. F6S platform

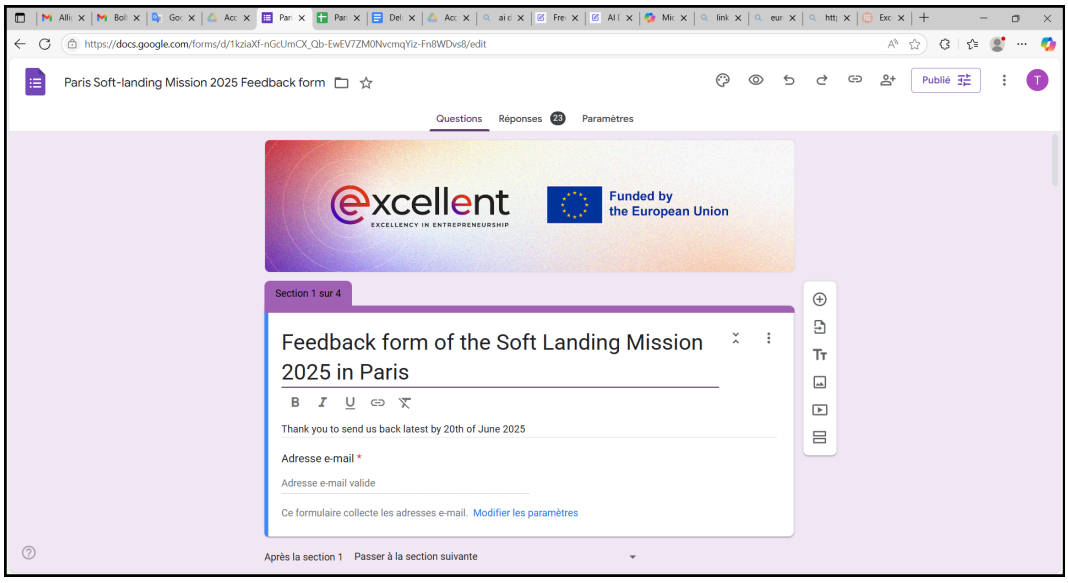
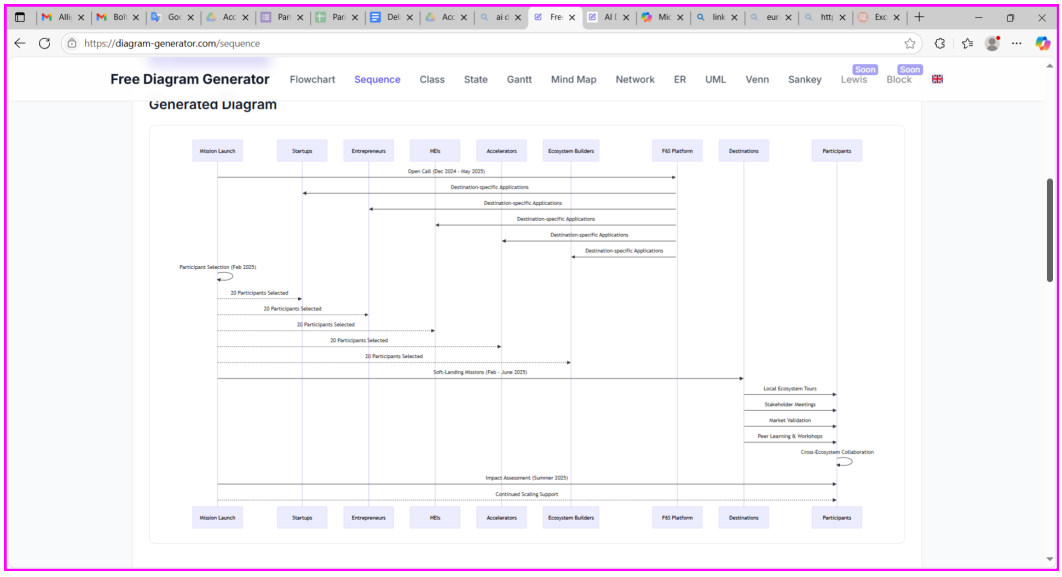




353 applicants has been recorded for 6 SLMs on the F6S platform



5. Feedback forms



6. SLMs preparation time sequence diagram