



FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY WORKSHOP 2026 SUMMARY REPORT

Looking Ahead: European Partnerships and Pathways to Sustainability

26 FEBRUARY 2026

Executive Summary

The Financial Sustainability Workshop 2026 - “Looking Ahead: European Partnerships and Pathways to Sustainability” was a dedicated workshop designed to serve as a continuation of the European Partnership Stakeholder Forum 2025 discussions. Its goal was to support partnerships further developing their financial sustainability agendas as an integral part of their phasing-out strategies towards finalization and adoption and to start thinking about the implementation (from plan to action). The workshop explored the possibilities of collaboration and synergies between different formats of European Partnerships, and beyond.

The overall objective of the workshop was to facilitate the exchange of EIT’s knowledge and experience with European Partnerships, and to demonstrate the strategic and operational flexibility inherent in the EIT KIC model, which enables different EIT Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) to effectively address their sustainability challenges.

The workshop was opened with a shared keynote speech by Ms. Fabienne Gautier, Head of Unit Common Missions & Partnerships Service (RTD.G.4) and Mr. Luca Perego, Head of Unit Innovation and EIT (EAC.C.1). They set the scene for the discussions by reflecting on the experience of the EIT KICs and the potential lessons this model can offer to EU partnerships.

The speakers highlighted that KICs operate as pan-European ecosystems with a strong business-oriented logic at their core. This structure enables them to connect actors across research, education and industry and to implement activities across the full innovation cycle. The speakers highlighted that this experience could provide valuable insights for other European Partnerships seeking to strengthen collaboration across sectors and countries.

The keynote speech emphasized that the KIC model offers practical examples of how to facilitate the knowledge triangle, while also addressing the legal and organizational frameworks required to support such cooperation. It was noted that drawing on this experience could help EU partnerships further develop and advance their strategies, moving beyond planning towards concrete implementation and measurable action.



Speakers underlined that EU partnerships and KICs differ in their institutional nature and governance structures. While KICs operate with a significant degree of autonomy, they nevertheless function within a clearly defined Strategic Agenda, established by the EIT, including strategic guidance, partnership agreements and dedicated funding schemes. They encouraged participants to use the experience gained by KICs, particularly in understanding how funding can be effectively deployed, to support knowledge triangle activities and to foresee where practical limitations may arise.

The main objective of the Financial Sustainability Workshop was to help partnerships refine their approaches, explore possible models for financial sustainability, and test the robustness of their strategies considering future challenges.

Key Outcomes

- **Strengthened understanding of financial sustainability:** Participants gained insights into diversified revenue streams and the importance of a clear, credible value proposition supported by tangible benefits and transparency.
- **Enhanced guidance on implementation:** The workshop explored the legal and funding models that organizations need to consider to effectively attract funding, and it emphasized the importance of building strong connections with national and regional innovation ecosystems
- **Reinforced mutual support mechanisms:** Participants acknowledged the added value of collaborating with each other, and with the KICs, recognizing that networking, information sharing, and strategic alignment all contribute to greater complementarity of activities. The examples of collaboration presented during the workshop clearly demonstrated the added value.
- **Improved pathways for future activities:** The discussions confirmed a shared understanding that collective efforts are essential for addressing TRL gaps. By collaborating, they can more effectively channel future activities towards higher TRL instruments and European programmes.

Overall, the workshop provided a valuable platform for knowledge sharing, networking and potential future collaboration, and generated practical ideas that can contribute to financial sustainability.

Based on the high level of participant satisfaction, as well as **survey results indicating that more than 95% of respondents would be interested in attending another event on financial sustainability like this in the future**, a follow-up session could be considered.



A subsequent iteration of the workshop could offer a valuable opportunity to deepen exchange, further strengthen mutual learning and advance the development of (a) more concrete action plan(s).

Workshop Overview

Workshop Title: Looking ahead: European Partnerships and Pathways to Sustainability

Date: 26 February 2026, in Brussels; co-organized by EIT HQ & ERA Learn

Participants: 70+ participants, including 45 representatives from 34 different European Partnerships, 15 representatives from 8 KICs and representatives from the European Commission and the EIT HQ.

Purpose: The overall objective of the workshop was to facilitate the exchange of EIT's knowledge and experience with European Partnerships, and to demonstrate the strategic and operational flexibility inherent in the EIT KIC model, which enables different KICs to effectively address their sustainability challenges.

Format: The workshop featured a keynote speech, a panel discussion on balancing public funding and market orientation, and interactive breakout sessions on key funding pathways. It concluded with case presentations showcasing cooperation between European Partnerships and KICs, followed by an open discussion.

Organisation: Co-organized by EIT and ERA-LEARN.

Speakers:

Keynote Speakers: Fabienne Gautier, Head of Unit Common Missions & Partnerships Service (RTD.G.4)

Luca Perego, Head of Unit Innovation and EIT (EAC.C.1)

Moderator: Alessandra Pala (EIT)

Setting the scene: Noemi Bergesio (CNR and ERA-LEARN)

Panel Discussion Participants: Marco Brueckner (EIT), Philippe Vanrie (University of Vaasa), Miguel Galdiz (InnoEnergy) Daria Julkowska (ERDERA) and Maria del Mar Baldares del Barco (EUIPO).



Breakout Session Moderators & Rapporteurs: EIT: Laurent Roux, Vasco de Oliveira Janeiro, Bilyana Nikolova / ERA Learn: Noemi Bergesio, Beate Warneck, Effie Amanatidou

Examples of cooperation between EU Partnerships & KICS: Denisa Naidin, Programme development lead for the Partnership on Innovative SMEs, Eureka Network & Adriana Diaz Arias, Innovation Director, EIT Urban Mobility.

Key Discussion Points

Setting the scene

CNR and ERA-LEARN's representative presented the outcomes of previous workshops on the phasing-out of European Partnerships and their financial sustainability, organized either by the European Commission (September 2025 and February 2026) or by ERA-LEARN and EIT during the European Partnerships Stakeholder Forum 2025. It highlighted that earlier discussions helped clarify the timing, process, and objectives of phasing out EU Framework Programme funding, while identifying key challenges and success factors. In particular, the workshops explored possible future funding pathways – including membership fees, alternative EU instruments, private funding, and public-public models – and stressed the need for flexible, hybrid strategies to preserve the partnerships' impact and legacy beyond EU support. The feedback and outcomes of previous workshops helped inform the organization and structure of the “Financial Sustainability Workshop.”

Panel discussion: Public funding and market orientation? How to steer the Partnership towards impact and sustainability?

The discussion highlighted different approaches to ensuring sustainability and continuity beyond EU Framework Programme funding.

ERDERA presented its long-term vision of evolving into a European Rare Disease Institute, with the aim of establishing a dedicated and sustainable infrastructure connecting hospitals, patients and other relevant stakeholders. This was presented as a pathway towards a more stable institutional framework capable of supporting collaboration, facilitating access to expertise and resources, and ensuring long-term impact.

InnoEnergy shared its experience as an example of a sustainability model built on a strong business rationale from the outset. Its establishment as a private limited company reflected a deliberate decision to embed a business-oriented approach from the beginning. It was



emphasized that strong strategic planning should come first, and that funding should support an existing long-term plan rather than shape it. In this context, only funding opportunities aligned with the overall strategy should be pursued. The importance of combining policy relevance with a clear business case was also highlighted as a key condition for long-term sustainability.

EUIPO underlined the importance of intellectual property (IP) as a strategic intangible asset that should be considered among the core business assets of partnerships. IP was presented as a source of value creation and a potential contributor to financial stability, particularly in the context of sustainability strategies beyond public funding. Reference was made to the strong economic relevance of IPR-intensive industries.

University of Vaasa's expert on financial sustainability stressed the importance of strategic positioning, emphasizing that partnerships should carefully consider their cost model, alliance structures, and corporate governance. The expert advised partnerships to focus on their core strengths, including leveraging and materializing assets such as their startups and scaleups portfolio. Furthermore, the representative recommended not relying too heavily on public funding but rather moving towards a more diversified income model.

The contributions from the panel discussion showed that **long-term sustainability** may rely on different but **complementary pathways, including institutionalization, business-oriented models, strategic repositioning, enforcing a cost model and strategic management of intangible assets**.

Breakout Sessions

Discussions were organized through three rotating breakout discussions covering membership fees and partnership resources, private funding, and public funding. Participants rotated across all three themes, while moderators and rapporteurs remained at their respective tables to ensure continuity in facilitation and consistency in reporting. EIT KIC representatives were assigned to and remained with one of the three topics to ensure that relevant experience and knowledge could be continuously shared. The discussions were subsequently brought back to plenary, where the main conclusions from each thematic area were presented and consolidated.

Key Highlights

A. Membership fees & sources of partnership

Current status





Membership fees were recognized as a **key mechanism** to ensure financial sustainability by EU Partnerships.

Partnerships vary widely in their composition, scope, and legal structure; the adoption of membership fees is not uniform but tailored according to the characteristics and capacities of the entities involved. This leads to a **variety of models and approaches**, including **tiered fee structures** that differentiate contributions based on objective criteria.

Financial threshold & fee model

Fee models should be simple, transparent, adaptable, and **aligned with member roles and size**.

Implementation needs & actions

Membership fees rarely cover the full operational or programme costs and **primarily contribute to core sustainability**. Therefore, establishing a clear and credible **value proposition** is essential, emphasizing tangible benefits such as networking opportunities, events, visibility, grant support, and transparent reporting on the return on investment.

Management and Challenges

The governance structure remains a **critical factor** for effective and sustainable operations. In several cases, complex governance arrangements can hinder timely decision-making. Furthermore, membership fees are frequently **linked to legal status and associated voting rights**, which may create imbalances and limit flexibility.

There is an ongoing risk of partner disengagement, particularly where the distinction between shareholders and members results in varying levels of long-term commitment to sustainability objectives. Ensuring inclusiveness within the governance model also continues to pose challenges.

In addition, national funding constraints increasingly affect the **capacity of partners** to contribute and participate fully. The reduction of EU funding presents a **broader systemic risk**, potentially jeopardizing continuity and long-term planning.

Finally, clearly articulating and **demonstrating the Value Proposition remains complex**, particularly in environments where there is a tendency to revert to simpler organizational models.

B. Private funding: Return of Investment, Donations etc.

Current status



The topic is not yet in front of mind for non-KIC EU Partnerships, and there are still **limited understanding and alignment** around it. Partnerships noted that their legal structure restricts them from pursuing profit-oriented activities. EIT KICs shared their experience in creating a **suitable legal structure** for attracting private funding. They explained that successful attraction of private funding goes far beyond simply seeking financial resources—it fundamentally requires a **clear understanding and articulation of partnerships, mission and purpose**. It differentiates you in a competitive environment and enables the creation of a compelling **value proposition** that speaks directly to funders' needs and expectations, thereby **unlocking the financial and strategic support** needed for sustainable impact.

Value Proposition

Partnerships should seek to clarify their mission and vision for the future. A crucial question for them to consider is: What kind of partnership do you aspire to become, one that would genuinely attract private funding? Value proposition could be potentially centered around an ecosystem-based model and bridging the gaps in TRL.

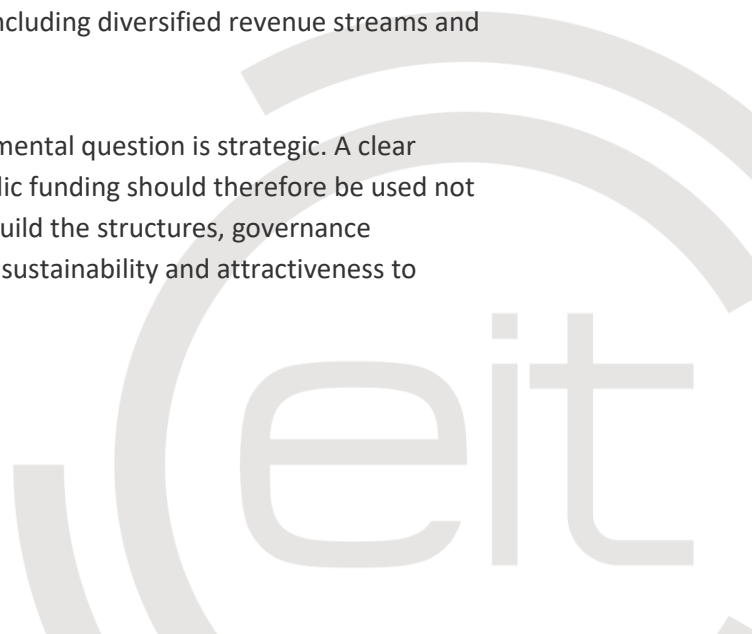
Implementation capacities and governance structures

A transition to a new legal structure will be necessary once the current funding period ends, ensuring that partnerships can operate sustainably and independently. To support this shift, a clearly defined value proposition is essential, one that articulates the benefits for all stakeholders, and the rationale for continued engagement beyond the funded phase. Establishing this foundation early will help ensure a smooth transition to an operational model.

Management & Challenges

A robust legal basis is crucial for the future, particularly in view of a possible transition toward full financial self-sustainability after funding ends. The legal structure must be sufficiently flexible to accommodate and attract private funding, including diversified revenue streams and partnership models.

However, beyond legal consideration, the more fundamental question is strategic. A clear vision of its future positioning is essential. Current public funding should therefore be used not only to deliver ongoing activities, but strategically, to build the structures, governance capacity, and value proposition required for long-term sustainability and attractiveness to private investors.





C. Public funding: EC, Member States, Regional level

Current status

Some of the partnerships are primarily financed through public funding and focus on areas of high public interest, such as, for example, health, sustainable urban development or climate neutrality. KICs actively diversify their revenue sources, as this principle is an inevitable part of their strategic agendas.

Collaboration between EU partnerships and EIT KICs can create synergies along the Technology Readiness Level (TRL) spectrum. For example, cooperation between EIT Urban Mobility, NetZeroCities, and the Driving Urban Transitions (DUT) Partnership enables the connection of early-stage research and innovation with large-scale demonstrations and deployment in cities. By linking activities across different TRL levels, these partnerships help ensure that promising ideas and technologies can move more effectively from research and experimentation toward real-world implementation and impact.

EU, National and Regional Funding Instruments

Participants highlighted the relevance of complementary funding streams from other European Commission services, Horizon Europe, and national/regional programmes. Several opportunities were identified, but these require an established legal entity capable of participating in such schemes. It was noted that additional expertise and skills may be needed to fully exploit these instruments. The EIT's mission was recognized as supporting dedicated activities in RIS countries, and KICs were seen as potential tools for implementing national and regional innovation policies.

Implementation Capacities and Governance Structures

Discussions emphasized the importance of co-location centers that effectively leverage national and regional capacities, ecosystems, and funding sources. Strong local actors are essential for successful implementation. A lean and efficient operational model is needed to ensure clear added value for participating members. Key challenges include establishing a legal entity to enable participation and IP exploitation, engaging funder organizations as partners, and bridging differences in organizational culture, particularly regarding financial sustainability, business-oriented thinking, and governance language.

Opportunities Identified

Participants noted significant potential to build upon existing networks, expertise, and established regional/national capacities. There is also an opportunity to continue developing long-term strategies supported by diversified funding sources, enhancing resilience and impact.



Examples of cooperation between European Partnerships and KICs

Participants were introduced to two concrete examples of cooperation.

The first example showcased success story of joint efforts of **Eureka, EIC and EIT Food** to support the **German scaleup *constellr***, which started as a spinout from Fraunhofer EMI. This case illustrated how the **three organizations complemented each other** by combining their respective support mechanisms and strengths to accelerate the development and scaling of innovative solutions. **The EIC and EIT Food** provided structural and larger financing for **core developments**, while **Eureka** projects allowed *constellr* to explore the **commercial and application side**.

The second example demonstrated that collaboration is essential for **building competitive and resilient mobility ecosystems**. **EIT Urban Mobility** is in the process of entering into the **Driving Urban Transition (DUT) partnership** as an Associate Partner. The mutual benefits were articulated as opportunities for joint activities and exchange on mobility-related topics, stronger dissemination, visibility and ecosystem outreach, as well as joint policy recommendations. DUT will benefit from EIT UM's commercial exploitation and market readiness expertise, access to new stakeholders from business/industry/start-ups for DUT calls, and strategic input to innovation and mobility related activities and policies. EIT UM will benefit from strategic market intelligence, policy insights and topical expertise derived from the DUT 15 min City project portfolio to support EIT UM activities.

Key Results and Conclusions

Participants gained a **deeper practical understanding of financial sustainability** approaches. Discussions highlighted the importance of **diversified income streams**, including education revenue, membership fees, services and consulting, and alternative funding sources. In addition, they gained valuable insight into the **importance of assessing the specific conditions required for each model to operate effectively**, ensuring that collaboration and funding approaches are applied in the most suitable context. A **clear and credible value proposition** was identified as a **central success factor**, supported by concrete benefits such as networking opportunities, visibility, events, and advisory or grant related support, as well as transparency regarding the expected return for stakeholders.

The workshop provided valuable **guidance on practical implementation**. The exchange of experience emphasized the relevance of **establishing an appropriate legal entity**, understanding the requirements associated with different funding and governance models, and improving access to more innovation-oriented calls or hubs. Strengthening the **link**



between colocation centers and national, or regional, innovation ecosystems emerged as an important factor for **operational resilience** and long-term sustainability.

Participants underlined the importance of **mutual support** across communities. This includes structured networking, systematic information exchange, participation in governance bodies, and strategic alignment to reinforce complementarity. Sharing project outputs, coordinating activities to avoid overlap, and partnering in relevant initiatives were highlighted as effective means to enhance efficiency and collective impact.

The workshop confirmed the **value of collaboration for bridging gaps across Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) and strengthening the overall innovation pipeline**. Examples such as InnoSMEs, EIT accelerator schemes, and Flagship initiatives demonstrated how coordinated efforts and complementary instruments enable ecosystems to support the maturation and scaling of promising innovations.

Strategic collaboration was identified as a driving force for strengthening Europe's innovative landscape. Discussions highlighted how legal and funding models, when properly aligned, can unlock new opportunities for investment and growth. Participants recognized that networking, knowledge sharing, and shared strategic objectives are essential for maximizing complementarities across activities and accelerating impact.

The two cooperation examples further demonstrated the practical value of these principles. The partnership between Eureka and EIT Food illustrates how complementary instruments can jointly support the development and scaling of breakthrough solutions. Likewise, the collaboration between EIT Urban Mobility and the Driving Urban Transitions partnership showed how coordinated efforts contribute to more competitive, resilient, and sustainable mobility ecosystems.

Overall, the workshop reaffirmed that **strengthened collaboration** across programmes, sectors, and innovation communities is essential to boosting Europe's capacity to innovate and respond effectively to emerging challenges.

As a key takeaway, the workshop not only supported the partnerships in finalizing their strategies but also laid out the groundwork for a **long-term understanding** of the importance of **financial sustainability**. Participants developed a clear appreciation that establishing a forward-looking **vision** is the first critical step, followed by articulating a **clear value proposition** derived from that vision. Building on this foundation, **strategic planning** with **diversified income streams** can then be developed, enabling a more targeted and effective search for suitable **funding sources**. Embedding this structured approach from the earliest stages is essential to ensuring their **future stability and long-term financial sustainability**.





Next Steps

Continue systemic exchanges between European Partnerships and EIT KICs

Strengthen regular dialogue and structured knowledge exchange between European Partnerships and KICs. This should include guidance and sharing of practical experience on topics such as legal entity options, diversified income sources, business case development, value proposition, governance adjustments, and cultural or mindset shifts needed to enable sustainable collaboration models.

Develop further strategic synergies among partnerships, KICs, and related initiatives

Enhance coordinated efforts between Partnership Structures, KICs and other relevant European initiatives to support a more coherent and connected innovation landscape. This should aim at reinforcing complementarities across the full TRL pathway, ensuring that promising ideas can progress smoothly from early-stage research to market ready innovation.

Maintain and deepen cooperation between ERA-LEARN / the European Commission and EIT

Given the highly positive participant feedback and the demonstrated impact of the event, the cooperation between ERA-LEARN, the European Commission, and EIT HQ should be continued and expanded. Several follow-up ideas have already emerged; however, these will require time to mature, be structured, and evolve into concrete joint actions.

Acknowledge strong participant satisfaction and plan further events accordingly

The high level of participant satisfaction should be considered when planning future activities. Survey results indicate that **over 95% of respondents expressed interest in attending another similar event on financial sustainability**, confirming both the relevance of the topic and the value of this workshop format. Shared experience, sources of private funding, information related to membership fees, policy outlook, and sources of public funding were indicated as of highest interest to participants. This **positive feedback** provides a strong basis for **considering additional follow-up events and deeper capacity-building initiatives** in this area.





ANNEX I FS Workshop Agenda

Place: CENTRE ALBERT BORSCHETTE, RUE FROISSART 36, 1040 ETTERBEEK, BRUSSELS

08:30 – 09:00	<i>Welcome Coffee</i>
09:00 – 09:15	Keynote speech “Looking ahead: European Partnerships and Pathways to Sustainability” <i>Fabienne Gautier, Head of Unit Common Missions & Partnerships Service (RTD.G.4)</i> <i>Luca Perego, Head of Unit Innovation and EIT (EAC.C.1)</i>
09.15 -09.30	Setting the scene – Results of previous workshops <i>Noemi Bergesio, ERA-LEARN</i>
09:30 – 10:30	Panel discussion: Public funding and market orientation? How to steer the Partnership towards impact and sustainability? <i>Philippe Vanrie, University of Vaasa</i> <i>Miguel Galdiz, InnoEnergy</i> <i>Daria Julkowska, European Rare Diseases Research Alliance (ERDERA)</i> <i>Maria del Mar Baldares del Barco, EUIPO</i>
10:30 – 11:00	<i>Coffee break</i>
11:00 – 11:45	Rotating Breakout Sessions (each participant will discuss each topic): Potential pathways, challenges, solutions, open issues: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Membership fees & sources of partnership2. Private funding: Return of Investment, Donations etc.3. Public funding: EC, Member States, Regional level etc.
11:45 – 12:45	<i>Lunch break</i>
12:45 – 14:15	Rotating Breakout Sessions (each participant will discuss each topic): Potential pathways, challenges, solutions, open issues: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Membership fees & sources of partnership2. Private funding: Return of Investment, Donations etc.3. Public funding: EC, Member States, Regional level etc.
14:15 – 15:00	Plenary: Reporting back from the breakout sessions & Discussion



15:00 – 15:30	<i>Coffee break</i>
15:30 – 16:00	European Partnerships and KICs – examples of cooperation & Discussion (2 examples of cooperation will be presented) <i>Denisa Naidin, Programme development lead for the Partnership on Innovative SMEs, Eureka Network</i> <i>Adriana Diaz Arias, Innovation Director, EIT Urban Mobility</i>
16:00 – 16:15	Outlook: From Plan to Action <i>Effie Amanatidou, ERA-LEARN</i>
16:15 – 16:30	Wrap up & farewell

