

Stocktaking: Swiss EP. May 2025

# Summary of Lessons Learned over the last 10 years

---

*The following lessons have been distracted and distilled based on the Annual Reports of Swiss EP since its inception. They are meant to serve as a reflection and guidance for the further development of this or similar programs.*

**Community Building is Vital:** Creating and nurturing communities within ecosystems is crucial for fostering collaboration and support among entrepreneurs and relevant actors. These informal communities help build trust and facilitate the sharing of resources and expertise.

*Example: In Phase I, we organized events like the “Startup Breakfast” in Serbia to bring ecosystem actors together for networking and discussion, thus fostering collaboration and support among entrepreneurs.*

**Local Adaptation Within a Global Framework:** While maintaining a global vision, the program's success hinges on its ability to adapt to local realities and tailor interventions to meet the continuously evolving needs of diverse ecosystems.

*Example: Implementing the “Entrepreneur's Journey Model” by Techstars, first in Albania and other Western Balkan countries to map and segment activities and organizations, allowing for tailored interventions based on local ecosystem dynamics and gaps in support.*

**Empowering Local Stakeholders:** A bottom-up approach that empowers local organizations to lead their developmental paths fosters a sense of ownership and sustains progress beyond the program's lifecycle.

*Example: In Phase I, bringing together the few people actively involved in angel investing and venture capital was instrumental for creating that sense of ownership which transformed into a self-sustaining industry-level association in Peru (PECAP) that continues providing value to the investment ecosystem and beyond.*

**Continuous Engagement and Feedback:** Maintaining ongoing dialogue with beneficiaries and stakeholders ensures that interventions remain relevant and effective. Regular feedback loops help refine interventions and improve outcomes.

*Example: Permanent feedback loops of ecosystem facilitators with the beneficiaries through formal and informal channels.*

**Long-term Mentorship and Expertise:** Establishing effective mentorship networks takes time and sustained effort. Embedding Entrepreneurs in Residence (EIRs) and leveraging returning short-term experts (STEs)<sup>1</sup> provide deeper insights and more effective support.

---

<sup>1</sup> Swiss EP works with 2 types of international experts – Short-Term Experts (STE) and Entrepreneurs-in-Residence(EIR). The STE missions are tailored to a concrete challenge for one of our partners and last for a few

*Example: Embedding Entrepreneurs in Residence (EIRs) in infant local ecosystems, such as in the Western Balkans in Phase 1, brings a broad understanding and expertise on ecosystem development to beneficiaries and stakeholders.*

**Challenges of Scaling Startups:** Addressing the needs of scaling startups is crucial for their growth. This includes developing tailored services and facilitating access to investors.

*Example: Addressing the need for specialized support for scaleups in Western Balkans by initiating the Founders Retreat model, bringing growth-oriented startups together offline for an intensive learning, networking and mentoring experience, followed by online low intensity mentoring to reach specific KPIs. Working with scaleups in Vietnam to build up the online sales capabilities enabling the sales process to be more effective and expand quickly beyond relationship sales.*

**Sustainability of Partner Organizations:** Working towards financial viability of partner organizations by fostering sustainable business models is key to creating a solid ecosystem.

*Examples: Encouraging governments to take a long-term, public policy view on supporting entrepreneurship, in particular in the startup idea-stage, to financially contribute to the operations of local organizations, for them to raise awareness, build basic skills and ensure a solid funnel of startup ideas. In Albania, the Startup Agency offers grants to local organizations, while in North Macedonia previous governments supported the establishment of accelerators. In Serbia, ICT Hub broadened its portfolio of services into co-working, corporate innovation and project implementation, in search of organizational sustainability. It is not until very recently that profit-seeking and privately funded organizations have begun to emerge, such as SEEUP accelerator in Serbia and Aspire Ignite in Vietnam. In Peru, considering that incubators and accelerators are often tied to universities, financial viability and relevance within the greater structure of the organization is key to ensuring success such as UTEC Ventures.*

**Pipeline Development and Tech Talent:** Strengthening the pipeline of entrepreneurial talent and addressing the tech talent gap are ongoing challenges. Raising awareness and providing targeted support to foster entrepreneurship and innovation and attract talent are key strategies.

*Example: Addressing the tech talent gap by supporting initiatives like coding bootcamps in Kosovo and partnering with organizations like Laboratoria in Peru to empower women to work as programmers.*

**Role of Government and Policy:** Governments play a crucial role in supporting entrepreneurship, especially in creating an enabling environment and filling gaps in the funding landscape at the idea- and early stages of startup development. Tailored interventions by government bodies can enhance the ecosystem's effectiveness.

*Examples: Supporting state-run innovation funds in financially and technically supporting talented startups in a transparent manner is creating much needed continuity and predictability in the ecosystem. In the Western Balkans, Serbia now hosts the only functional innovation fund.*

*In Vietnam MOST has had their 844 program. Swiss EP has supported, but has avoided official collaboration with the government, which often requires official status as an NGO and that hampers flexibility.*

---

days while the EIRs spend a minimum of one month in the field supporting a variety of ecosystem actors and entrepreneurs and working on their day to day challenges.

*In Peru, acting as a facilitator for conversations and between certain relevant actors supported quicker processing of certain key initiatives, such as COFIDE's Fund of Funds.*

**Agility and Flexibility:** Remaining responsive and adaptable to changing needs and opportunities is essential. This involves being ready to adjust program elements and support initiatives as ecosystems evolve.

*Example: Adopting the value proposition of our experts in Phase II to accommodate ever-changing service demands, local contexts and costs realities, allowing for more in-depth immersion, often in the form of combined and cost-effective offline and online expert missions.*

**Data Collection and Performance Measurement:** Establishing clear metrics and regularly collecting data are vital for monitoring progress and guiding decision-making. Encouraging partners to adopt similar practices enhances transparency and accountability and has positive effects on the whole ecosystem.

*Example: Working with SECO to establish clear quality and informative metrics and collect data regularly to monitor program performance. Begun a collaboration StartupBlink to monitor ecosystem performance.*

**Internationalization and Global Networks:** Facilitating international connections and exposure for organisations and startups broadens market opportunities and strengthens local ecosystems by integrating global best practices and networks.

*Example: Supporting startups in North Macedonia through programs like "Expand Macedonia" to facilitate market research and go-to-market strategies for international expansion and support startups in Serbia linked to the Digital Serbia Initiative to get the most out of a trade mission to Singapore. Co-hosting pitch events in Switzerland, such as with Impact Hub Zürich and GEW in Basel, creating the opportunity for our startups to engage with international investors.*

*Example: Ecomdy is a tech company behaving a bit like an accelerator, and its whole business is enabling internationalization. New business models are popping up like this, creating opportunities to promote internationalization*

*Example: In Peru, supporting PO initiatives for startups who want to internationalize and doing so with experts who are from the region help generate the global networks needed.*

**Fostering Inclusivity:** Supporting women-led initiatives requires addressing systemic barriers and creating inclusive ecosystems that provide equal opportunities for all entrepreneurs.

*Example: Supporting women-led initiatives by collaborating with organizations like WISE in Vietnam, Women Founders Network in Albania, Women Entrepreneurs in Kosovo and Preduzimanje in Serbia to develop communities of women founders and investors. Organizing the Women Entrepreneurs Week in Phase II in Switzerland.*