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Research, technology and innovation partnerships

uncovering new bilateral opportunity

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Introduction

In *Technology Report: understanding and advancing the UK/Romania opportunity* we explored ties between the tech ecosystems of the two countries and pathways for their further strengthening.

Its purpose was to better visualise the landscape of bilateral entrepreneurship across the sector, and to establish a framework and recommendations to support the further development of partnerships between startups, investors, corporates and ecosystem enablers, and boost the value these relationships generate for both economies.

Our new publication, ***Research, technology and innovation partnerships: uncovering new bilateral opportunity,*** develops this specifically by focussing on two of the earlier report's recommendations – those centred on "corporate innovation, outsourcing and research partnerships", and "nurturing an innovation culture".

This follow-up work is also informed by a parallel study commissioned by the UK Science and Technology Network, a joint initiative of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, *Technology and Innovation in Central and Eastern Europe: Mapping regional strengths and opportunities against the UK's Five Priority Technologies*, likewise an attempt to understand where future bilateral and regional collaborations might most usefully be forged.

Reflecting on these two reports, below we explore how the UK and Romania work together in research, technology and innovation, where future collaborative opportunities might lie, and possible ways to make these partnerships more effective.

This work benefits from the assistance of Biomentorhub, DOORS Black Sea Special Interest Group, EIT Hub UK, INNO, Launch Romania, Măgurele Science Park, the Romanian Space Initiative, Social Innovation Solutions, Transilvania IT Cluster and UEFISCDI.

The Report is made possible thanks to support from SCSK {digital}.

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Foreword from EIT Hub UK

Innovation creates new markets and better solutions.

By uniting the best minds and diverse perspectives we come to understand the challenges faced by the world. Applying deep expertise we conjure into being products and processes that make our lives happier and healthier, impacting the planet positively and in ways once unimaginable.

A fundamentally collaborative activity, the European Institute of Innovation and Technology is Europe's largest innovation community – one working to deliver the best connections.

EIT brings together organisations across business, education, and research to find and commercialise solutions to pressing global problems. Our objectives are tied with those of Horizon Europe, the EU's €95.5 billion funding programme for research and innovation, and dedicated to boosting the EU's global competitiveness and economic growth. We work best by finding synergies, and with the UK now back as part of Horizon, EIT can again amplify that international impact through the easier inclusion of its many world leading research institutes and universities in our work.

A year into my role as Manager of EIT Hub UK I've worked with colleagues across Europe in a range of programmes, events, and initiatives that provide valuable support and resources to entrepreneurs and innovators, empowering them to scale their ventures and make a meaningful impact on a global scale. In October 2024 we welcomed to London our largest EIT delegation to-date, amongst them Romanian organisations active in their own ecosystem. In March this year an EIT Community RIS Hub opened in Romania in partnership with Iceberg+.

Building a strong innovation ecosystem in Romania is key to driving its economic growth, fostering local entrepreneurship, and enhancing the country's global competitiveness. Romania's network is formed of universities, research institutes, and tech hubs, each playing a crucial part in knowledge transfer and technological advancements. It can leverage these national strengths in priority sectors such as ICT, energy, bioeconomy, advanced manufacturing, and health, and by aligning research and innovation efforts with regional economic strengths, help enhance competitiveness at both national and international levels.

This is where EIT can play a role.

UK/Romania Business

With our budget of €3 billion, we strengthen sustainable innovation ecosystems across Europe creating synergies and added value within the Horizon programme. Romania is steadily increasing its share of available funds and putting them effectively to work through programmes dedicated to business and higher education related activities, or specific initiatives like EIT Manufacturing.

Sitting here in London my focus is making connections for European researchers, innovators and entrepreneurs with their equivalents in the UK – startups trying to access new markets, patent holders seeking to commercialise their work, corporates ready to tap new ideas. I'm in the business of bridging gaps and bringing these groups together. A year on from the opening of EIT Hub UK, and alongside the launch of EIT Community RIS Hub Romania, I am delighted to see and to support the publication of this new report by UK/Romania Business, *Research, technology and innovation partnerships: uncovering new bilateral opportunity*.

Leslie Harris
Manager

eit Hub UK

1. Understanding Romania's research, technology and innovation landscape

A core purpose of UK/Romania Business is to advocate for wider and deeper ties between the two countries. A barrier to this has often been lack of awareness and understanding of Romania in the British mind, or an outdated perception of the country. This is something that needs corrected.

Starting with a simple sketch of Romania we note a few themes considered most relevant to the further development of research, technology and innovation partnerships.

1.1 Sketching Romania

The eighth largest EU country by landmass and sixth largest by population (around 20m people), since Ceaușescu's fall in 1989 Romania has evolved into an emerging market economy joining NATO in 2004 and the European Union in 2007. More recently it became an OECD accession candidate in 2022 and hopes to complete the process in 2026.

As our earlier publication, Technology Report: understanding and advancing the UK/Romania opportunity detailed, Romania is recognised as a hub for IT outsourcing and software engineering with now a growing startup ecosystem around cities like Bucharest, Cluj, Iași and Oradea.

Elsewhere the country attracts significant foreign investment in its manufacturing sectors, including automotive production, due to a cost-effective workforce, strategic location and rise now in near-shoring. In tandem Romania is gaining growing importance as a European logistics hub.

Producing both offshore oil and gas, and onshore wind and solar, alongside its domestic nuclear capacity the country is energy abundant.[1] It claims Europe's largest onshore windfarm at Fântânele-Cogealac (now owned by Macquarie Infrastructure and Real Assets)[2] and soon Europe's biggest solar plant, Dama Solar under the management of Rezolv Energy and backed by London-HQ'd Actis.[3]

Bordering the Black Sea it is the dependable anchor of NATO's southern flank. After the expansion of Mihail Kogălniceanu is complete, Romania will be home to the largest NATO military base in Europe – one already host to regular RAF air-policing missions.

It is also a country with its own strong traditions in aerospace, defence manufacturing and ship-building, attracting partnership interest from companies like Airbus, Babcock, BAE, Marshall Group and Rolls-Royce.

Buffeted by global winds its defence spending and modernisation has accelerated, and recently the Romanian Ministry of Defence has indicated an intention to develop advanced drone manufacturing capabilities pooling its many domestic talents.

These national strengths in technology and energy/infrastructure, together with the strategic importance of defence cooperation and manufacturing are why UK/Romania Business considers these to be key areas for future collaborations, a purpose shared by the UK government.[4]

Underpinning Romania's research, technology and innovation ecosystem are its universities with their particular historic strengths in STEM.

Amongst the most notable are the University of Bucharest, one of the most prestigious in the region; Babeș-Bolyai University (UBB) in Cluj, known for a wide range of programmes and strong research output; Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iași, and, Politehnica University of Bucharest renowned for its engineering and technical programmes. Each consistently shows progress in research output, international collaboration, and academic quality highlighting their standing as centres of excellence in Eastern Europe.

Beyond its universities many of Romania's specialist national research institutions are found in Măgurele near Bucharest and affiliated with the Măgurele Science Park Association – the support organisation behind the development of the largest state-of-the-art science and technology community in the country. Those it hosts include the National Institute for Laser, Plasma and Radiation Physics, the Institute of Atomic Physics and the Horia Hulubei National Institute for R&D in Physics and Nuclear Engineering.[5] This last is home to the most powerful laser system in the world – one able to focus for the first time 10 petawatt laser pulses on solid targets.[6]

Elsewhere, Cluj has leveraged its strengths in software engineering and outsourcing through collaborative organisations like the Transilvania IT Cluster to foster a culture of innovation, growth and global connectivity amongst companies in the region. We dive deep with Măgurele Science Park and Transilvania IT Cluster later in this report.

The UK's Science and Technology Network (previously Science and Innovation Network – SIN) leads on developing science partnerships and deploying science diplomacy around the world. STN has three objectives (1) projecting UK science, technology and innovation excellence and leadership globally (2) actively building and facilitating science, technology and innovation collaborations of value to the UK and (3) providing insights and intelligence. Its overview of Romania is reproduced below.

1.2 UK Science and Innovation Network Country Snapshot: Romania

Romania's traditions are making the country a leader in a number of science areas, such as nuclear and particle physics, photonics, lasers and plasma, nanomaterials and technologies, engineering, materials science, medical science, physics and astronomy, computer science and maths. Romania has a strong offer in ICT (there are more ICT specialists per 1000 people than in the US) and renewables (high in Ember ranking for the shortest times to get solar and wind energy projects approved). There is a potential for the development of AI, cyber and smart cities. Romania is committed to investment in several existing research infrastructures such as the Extreme Light Infrastructure project to create a "Laser Valley", the International Centre for Water Research Danubius, and building a 4th generation nuclear reactor Alfred. Bucharest will also host the European Cybersecurity Industrial, Technology and Research Centre.

The Romanian government has identified long term R&I priorities in its National Smart Specialisations Strategy (2021-26): bioeconomy, digital economy and space technologies, energy, mobility, environment and eco-technologies, advanced functional materials and manufacturing, and health.

Investment in R&D

In 2020, Romania's gross domestic expenditure on research and development (GERD) remained low: 0.47% (0.28% for the private and 0.19% for the public sectors). This is below the national target of 2% and the EU average (2.32%).

By the end of 2026 Romania will receive funding of over €29bn (€14bn grant and €15bn loan) via the EU National Recovery and Resilience Plan. Four reforms and six investments worth €314m are foreseen for R&I as part of this plan. European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs) play a role in financing much of Romania's R&D. During the 2014-2020 period Romania had nine operational programmes with a total of €41.6bn of which 2.9% went to R&D.

Institutions

The responsibility for R&D policy lies with the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation which coordinates Romania's R&D policy and system, and implements the two main funding instruments of the National R&D Strategy: the National Plan for Innovation, R&D, and the Competitiveness Operational Programme. The Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding, the Romanian Space Agency, and the Institute for Atomic Physics execute the National Plan for R&D.

Romania's R&D system is large and fragmented, it consists of 90 universities, 43 National R&D institutes, and the Romanian Academy's 51 research institutes and 18 centres. The universities have full freedom to manage their research budgets and autonomously design research agendas and topics of research specialisation, but are limited due to budget constraints. The Romanian Academy has its own chapter in the national budget, distributing its budget across its research institutes and centres. Each of the branch academies (Academy of Agricultural Sciences and Forestry, and Academy of Health Sciences) operates 25 institutes. There are also centres of technological transfer and information, business and technology angels, and science & technology parks, involved in the dissemination of information and research results.

Although Romania's higher education sector contributes the lowest share of GERD, it has the highest scientific output in terms of International Scientific Indexing publications and patents. The top five Romanian Universities, according to Scimago ranking 2020 are Babeş-Bolyai University, University of Medicine and Pharmacy Cluj Napoca, University of Medicine and Pharmacy (Bucharest), Bucharest Politehnica University and Bucharest University. These are also high in the research institutions, ranking with high success rates in Horizon 2020 and scholarly outputs.

Strategies

According to EC reports, the challenges for R&I policy-making in Romania include: (1) increasing public R&I expenditure; (2) reducing the significant brain drain which leads to a lack of skilled human resources in the country; (3) improving the governance of the R&I system at national, regional and institutional level; (4) enhancing the efficiency of public expenditure in R&I and education, monitoring, and evaluation; (5) improving the framework for private RDI investment and collaboration with the public sector; (6) lack of predictability.

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan envisages several measures to address these challenges. It supports the integration of research organisations into the European Research Area, and their capacity to access European funds for R&D&I, as well as grant schemes aiming at attracting and rewarding talent. It also provides a framework to streamline R&D&I governance, reform the research career, enhance cooperation between business and research.

Innovation potential

Romania is a modest innovator and holds 48th position in the Global Innovation Index 2021 (2 positions lower than 2020) behind the UK (4), Czech Republic (24), Slovenia (32), Bulgaria (35), Slovakia (37), Poland (40). Romania holds 55th position in the Ease of Doing Business global ranking 2020 (3 positions lower). Romania's innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem has potential but is still at the early stage of development. R&D tax deduction introduced in 2010 for companies to stimulate investments in RDI activities was increased from 20% to 50% in 2013.

UK-Romania scientific collaboration

Romanian researchers are participating in 3,061 Horizon 2020 projects with a total of €635.8m of net EU contribution, and the UK is a partner in 1,657 of these projects (54%, Jan 2023). In Horizon 2020, UK ranks 5th as a collaborative partner for Romania after Italy, Spain, France and Germany, whilst Romania is the UK's 18th collaborative partner in Europe. Romanian academic diaspora is one of the largest foreign communities in the UK R&D sector and contributes to maintaining cooperation with Romanian research institutions. UK is also the top destination for Romanian Marie Curie fellows and students, making Romania the 8th highest sending country in the EU. Romania and the UK are important partners in the European Space Agency, CERN and ITER (international nuclear fusion project). Romania is a Member of the UN (1955), International Monetary Fund and World Bank (1972), NATO (2004), EU (2007) and is a founding member of the WTO.

SIN Romania recent stories

SIN Romania promotes the UK's S&I excellence and expertise in Romania in areas of mutual interest, presents the UK as a role model in areas of emerging and future mutual potential; identifies Romanian excellence in S&I; and seeks opportunities for UK-Romania bilateral collaboration.

In 2022 SIN Romania continued to promote the UK knowledge to local networks of senior government, academic, and business contacts, including the latest information around our association to Horizon Europe and the UK financial guarantee for successful UK applicants, and supported bilateral collaboration through the beginning of the new EU scientific programme. SIN Romania supported bilateral exchanges on climate, AI and green technologies to deliver the UK's Innovation Strategy and science priorities. This included a series of meetings, webinars and conferences in areas such as smart city decarbonisation, renewable energy (hydrogen, waste), development of tech transfer, research-intensive universities and support to SMEs models, national AI strategy development, promotion of joint grant applications between UK and local researchers.

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1.3 Tackling Romania's research and innovation challenges

"While Romania's research sector shows elements of strength, it does not perform as a coherent system. The combination of a fragmented public research sector, lack of financial stability and predictability, splintered governance, departure of human capital, under-utilised public-private sector interaction, uneven monitoring and evaluation, and unpredictable political support, has formed a vicious circle – one that needs to be broken" says Mădălin Ioniță, Executive Director at Măgurele Science Park Association.

Romania ranks 47 of 132 in the Global Innovation Index 2023 but places bottom of the European Innovation Scoreboard 2024 pointing to some of its continuing challenges. This is something recognised by government, and that it is keen to address.

Within Romania, responsibilities for research and innovation reside across two government departments, the Ministry of Economy, Digitalisation, Entrepreneurship and Tourism, and the Ministry for Education and Research. The latter is the sponsoring organisation for the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI), the national equivalent to UK Research and Innovation.

The National Research, Innovation and Smart Specialisation Strategy 2022-2027 (SNCISI),[7] developed under the earlier Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation (MCID), sets out Romania's priorities and objectives in areas relevant to this report. It sets a vision for 2030:

> "Romania provides a welcoming environment for researchers with experience and international visibility, who can consolidate the scientific performance and support the training of future talents. Career development is supported on specific trajectories, with an emphasis on encouraging the evolution from PhD students to field leaders.
>
> With predictable, performance based funding, and effective project, strong leadership and management, the research institutes and universities become attractive to researchers.
>
> Research, including basic research, remains the fundament for the development of the innovation and/or ensuring technology transfer.
>
> Centres of excellence, set up through partnerships of research organisations, ensure that the resources (infrastructure, people) are concentrated around research agendas at the scientific frontier, linked to societal challenges and smart specialisation priorities. Research, including research in the social sciences and humanities, is part of an effort to define, understand and address societal challenges specific to Romania or globally. Romania actively participates in addressing global challenges through research, joining European missions and partnerships where it has the potential to contribute with innovative solutions."
>
> Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalisation

The strategy goes on to describe actions toward accomplishing this including increased allocation of national funds, gaining a higher share of EU money, and the need for greater collaboration at European and international levels.[8]

If the UK is not specifically referenced, its research, technology and innovation expertise can certainly be applied to support Romania's aspirations for improved systems and outcomes. Here it is organisations like the Science and Technology Network, Innovate UK, EIT Hub UK and UK/Romania Business that can play a critical role in fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange.

Romania

Explore the country regions profile →

Romania is an Emerging Innovator with performance at 34% of the EU average in 2024. Performance is below the average of the Emerging Innovators. Performance is increasing less than the EU since 2017 (+1.5 vs +10.0%-points).

Innovation index 2024

37.4 | Rank 36

vs 2023	vs 2017
▼ -1.6	▲ 1.5

Index evolution

- Emerging Innovators: Below 70% of 2024 EU average
- Moderate Innovators: Between 70% and 100% of 2024 EU average
- Strong Innovators: Between 100% and 125% of 2024 EU average
- Innovation Leaders: Above 125% of 2024 EU average

Relative strengths

- Broadband penetration
- Exports of medium and high technology products
- Air emissions by fine particulates

Relative weaknesses

- Population with tertiary education
- SMEs introducing business process innovations
- Innovative SMEs collaborating with others

Strong increases since 2017

- Broadband penetration
- Scientific publications among the top 10% most cited
- Enterprises providing ICT training

Strong decreases since 2017

- Environment-related technologies
- Non-R&D innovation expenditures
- New doctorate graduates

Strong increases since 2023

- Enterprises providing ICT training
- Population involved in lifelong learning
- Broadband penetration

Strong decreases since 2023

- Environment-related technologies
- Sales of new-to-market and new-to-firm innovations
- Non-R&D innovation expenditures

1.4 The role of UEFISCDI

For practical purposes, and most relevant to the partnership development of interest here, we focus below on the role of UEFISCDI in research and innovation, and how it engages with the UK.

Overall it notes 38 projects with joint UK/Romania involvement, 31 of which came through H2020 and seven via Horizon. Two of those Horizon projects – including QuantERA which subsidises the development of quantum technologies – are listed to start in 2025.

For deeper insight into the work of UEFISCDI, UK/Romania Business spoke with Marius Mitroi PhD, an Innovation and Entrepreneurship Advisor at the organisation.

What are some of UEFISCDI's most impactful programmes to support innovation in Romania?

MM: UEFISCDI plays a central role in Romania's innovation landscape by developing and implementing financial instruments aimed at strengthening research, technology transfer, and innovation capacity. The agency implements the National Research, Innovation, and Smart Specialisation Strategy (2022-2027) through the National Plan for Research, Development, and Innovation. Some key initiatives include:

- Partnership for Competitiveness programme – fostering collaboration between businesses and public/private R&D institutions
- Technology Transfer in Support of Competitiveness – strengthening technology transfer networks, commercialising research results, and enhancing research visibility
- BrainMap – Romania's digital research and innovation community, facilitating networking and collaboration
- ERRIS – a booking platform for research infrastructure and technology services, and M100 Hub – a flagship initiative where UEFISCDI acts as a secretariat and thematic owner, fostering cross-sectoral dialogue and supporting cities in climate-neutral innovation strategies.

Beyond funding, UEFISCDI also works on capacity building in areas such as gender equality (via the First Gender Equality Plan - GEP), Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), digital health innovation, and open science.

What projects or collaborations has UEFISCDI undertaken with UK organisations or institutions? Are there particular success stories from the UK/Romania partnerships it has facilitated?

MM: UEFISCDI has engaged in multiple collaborations with UK institutions, notably the Leaders in Innovation Fellowship (LIF) Programme partnering with the Royal Academy of Engineering and Oxentia to support Romanian innovators in technology commercialisation. In 2023, five innovators from Romania participated, with two winning the Pitching Award Prize. Unfortunately, it ceased in 2024 due to lack of funding. I'd also highlight Horizon and ERASMUS+ projects:

- UNITE – Digital Health Ecosystem: A pan-European initiative supporting digital health innovation, in collaboration with Scottish Enterprise. The project facilitates knowledge exchange on digital health solutions, addressing challenges like aging populations and healthcare workforce shortages
- SEE-ERA.NET – a collaborative initiative focused on gender equality in research and innovation. This project strengthens regional cooperation in addressing gender imbalances in STEM fields
- SME/HPC (Erasmus+ Knowledge Alliances) – a project supporting SMEs in adopting high-performance computing (HPC) technologies. A UK-based partner, Vega Press Ltd, contributed to developing training materials on advanced technology adoption.

Are there emerging areas of research or innovation where you find high potential for collaboration with the UK?

MM: There is strong potential for collaboration in technology transfer and commercialisation. UK institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge Universities, as well as Oxentia, have provided insights into tech transfer models, now integrated into Romania's innovation policies. Joint efforts could focus on:

- capacity building for technology transfer offices (TTOs) in Romania
- intellectual property (IP) management training
- innovation acceleration programmes for startups and SMEs.

We also see potential in strategic research and innovation programmes – for example joint efforts in research security, climate-neutral urban development, and health innovation that align with Romania's Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3). Additionally, climate-neutral cities and sustainable innovation is somewhere in which the UK's experience in urban transformation strategies could complement Romania's M100 Forum,

where cities collaborate on climate neutrality and urban resilience.

What are the main obstacles blocking expansion of UK/Romania partnerships?

MM: Post-Brexit barriers since its EU departure have complicated joint initiatives affecting researcher mobility as well as adding new constraints around funding. There is also the prospect of regulatory divergence and the uncertainty that comes from this. Beyond that at present there are limited bilateral funding programmes i.e. unlike other EU-associated countries, there is no dedicated UK/Romania innovation fund, making long-term collaboration uncertain. Finally, legislative differences and varying legal frameworks for R&D tax incentives, startup policies, and IP commercialisation create barriers for joint ventures between the UK and Romania.

What role can universities, research parks, and startups play in strengthening bilateral innovation ties?

MM: These organisations can each play important roles – universities by facilitating knowledge exchange through co-hosted research programs, joint PhDs, and innovation hubs; research parks and incubators could establish startup soft-landing programmes where UK and Romanian tech startups can access each other's markets, funding, and mentoring; and startups and SMEs themselves can explore joint participation in EU Horizon and bilateral funding calls, focusing on common challenges like climate change, digital health, and AI-driven innovation.

From your perspective, what should be the strategic priorities for the UK and Romania if they are to deepen collaboration in research and innovation?

MM: One area is enhancing Technology Transfer and commercialisation by leveraging the UK's expertise to build stronger TTO networks in Romania. The creation of joint funding mechanisms and a dedicated UK/Romania innovation fund to support research, startups, and talent mobility would address another gap, while greater collaboration around shared priorities like climate-neutral and smart cities would drive sustainability-focused innovation between UK urban innovation hubs and Romanian cities in initiatives like M100.

How can both countries work together to support knowledge exchange, such as researchers and innovators moving between the UK and Romania?

MM: Establishing a twinning programme to connect UK and Romanian research institutions through joint mentorship, researcher mobility, and innovation fellowships. This might also include training for tech transfer experts and organising workshops on IP protection, startup incubation, and industry partnerships, leveraging the UK's more advanced commercialisation models. Reviving the Leaders in Innovation Fellowship Programme and relaunching a UK/Romania fellowship for deep tech entrepreneurs and innovators is a further aspiration as is establishing a dedicated initiative for safeguarding innovation through secure collaboration frameworks.

What infrastructure or support mechanisms could be developed or enhanced to facilitate smoother bilateral partnerships?

MM: Establishing a bilateral innovation fund to co-finance joint research and commercialisation efforts has to be high up the list. Facilitating Romanian startups' entry into the UK's funding and incubation networks is also key. Third a dedicated platform where UK and Romanian policymakers and researchers can co-develop strategies on tech transfer, digital innovation, and sustainability. Wrapping these strands together and promoting them we could explore hosting thematic networking events in both countries.

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Photo credit: Thales Group

2. Building bilateral partnerships

UK/Romania Business

Our thesis here is that Romania is under-explored and under-appreciated as an innovation partner for the UK. A corollary to this is that opportunities are overlooked.

Recognising structural factors it still needs to address, the focus now is organisations that can be engaged to support partnership development, together with examples of successful and emergent collaborations between the two countries.

2.1 Enablers and connectors

If UEFISCDI is central to the innovation landscape in Romania – including as the national contact point for Horizon Europe – its National Research, Innovation, and Smart Specialisation Strategy also envisages an enhanced role for the regions.

In *Technology Report* we noted the importance of Rubik Hub and Make IT in Oradea as tech specific local organisations under the respective patronages of ADR Nord Est and ADR Nord Vest, two of Romania's eight Regional Development Agencies.

The potentially pivotal role of RDA's is referenced by the OECD in its report *Enhancing Strategic Planning and Innovation Services: Supporting Romanian Regional Development Agencies.*[9] They are also among the main contact points for the Enterprise Europe Network as well as acting as a broker for public-private initiatives through bodies like INNO, also part of ADR Nord Vest.

Alongside these more formal public authority structures are member-led associations connecting enterprises and research communities and enabling partnerships both bilaterally, and through EU-funded projects.

Two of the most important actors here are Măgurele Science Park Association and Transilvania IT Cluster.

2.2 Măgurele Science Park Association

Măgurele Science Park Association (MSP) is the support organisation delivering the development of the largest state-of-the-art science and technology park in Romania. It fosters dialogue between researchers and academia, entrepreneurs and businesses, and public authorities to stimulate economic growth and competitiveness through greater technological transfer between them, and through their more innovative commercial application. It is led by Mădălin Ioniță whom we speak with below.

What are Romania's primary research and innovation strengths?

MI: If Romania still needs to raise its standing in research and innovation overall we can certainly identify some foundational strengths to build from – for example the high-quality research institutes and universities here and which are highly competitive in EU projects. We have scientific excellence particularly in engineering, electrical and electronics, material science and chemistry – fields accounting for the largest share of publications from our scientists, and a human resources pool, in particular early career researchers, that provides the energy and brain power for the research system. I'm encouraged by the role assigned to the Regional Development Agencies (as developer of the Regional Smart Specialisation Strategies) in the current National Strategy for Research, Innovation and Smart Specialisation, and which increases the funds allocated at regional level for public/private partnerships. Smart specialisations at the national level primarily (but not exclusively) target research intensive fields (technologies of the future) for which the national dimension of collaboration is important – bioeconomy; digital economy and space technologies; energy and mobility; advanced manufacturing; advanced functional materials; environment and eco-technologies; prevention, diagnosis, and advanced health treatment – and which have the potential to produce spillover effects in the economy and society. It is good to see a boost in private sector R&D expenditures alongside these governmental efforts.

What role does MSP play in fostering collaboration between academia, industry, and government?

To support the development of our ecosystem the MSP team fosters collaboration amongst the approximately 300 entities (universities, national R&D institutes, private research centres, SMEs, corporates, other support entities, local and regional authorities) in our community through a variety of initiatives to matchmake, identify research and funding opportunities and enhance skills. We also organise specific thematic events around community needs – topics such as internationalisation and technology transfer as well as programmes like the Laser Valley Innovation Bootcamp aimed more at students and giving them the

opportunity to be mentored by researchers and entrepreneurs over three days and prototype new ideas. The third edition of the Bootcamp is in May 2025 supported again by Launch Romania.

What industries or sectors have benefited most from the Park's establishment?

MI: The idea for Măgurele Science Park developed from discussions between research organisations, 2016-2018, in the Bucharest–Ilfov region and our focus reflects their strengths and priorities. In particular we seek to advance:

- Digital: artificial intelligence, high performing computing (HPC) technologies, quantum computing, cybersecurity
- Green: renewable energy sources, energy capture and storage technologies, intelligent energy management systems, energy technologies with low carbon emission
- Advanced Technologies and Materials: new materials, nanomaterials and nanotechnologies, biomaterials, materials for energy, clean energy production technologies, hydrogen production from renewables or waste
- Nuclear Physics: advanced physics and nuclear applications, industrial applications for nuclear material management, waste imaging, advanced medical devices, healthcare applications.

We're also supporting emerging expertise in agricultural engineering, food technologies, health sciences and research and innovation related consulting.

What role do EU funding programmes or national initiatives play in supporting research and technology partnerships in Romania?

MI: EU funding is vital. Its programmes are predictable, transparent and with less bureaucracy. However, specific actions and tools could be implemented to increase the presence of Romanian RDI entities within international partnerships (such as incentives, motivational salaries for researchers, training in project management, supporting funds for contract winners etc). At national level there is much more to do. Public funding for R&D is critically low and achievements are not aligned with the targets set in strategies – raising the intensity of R&D is not yet in sight. At national level it is important to ensure predictability and effectiveness of public funding for the R&I system. The funding itself aside we can also learn here from EU processes.

How does MSP fit into the broader European research and innovation landscape?

MI: We've worked on the SME4GREEN project financed through COSME and the PROSME project (as part of Enterprise Europe Network) financed by EC/Single market programme. In these projects, together with our international partners, we offered specialised services to SMEs such as support for internationalisation, acces2finance, sustainability, RDI partnerships, startup and spinoffs development. Through to 2026 we're running ENTRANT, also a ERASMUS+ project, addressing SMEs needs around entrepreneurship skills improvement via a digital learning platform and from July 2025 will partner on a new PROSME/EEN project for another 4 years again co-financed by the EC. Our experience from this will help MSP ramp up its international support offerings as we grow to full operational functionality.

What lessons have you learned from other international collaborations that could apply to future UK partnerships?

MI: I would mention the importance of visibility to partners and exercises where members of both Romanian and international communities can get to know each other and their respective offers and needs. UK organisations can bring a lot of experience and added value to partnerships with Romanian entities (universities, national RDI institutes, SMEs) especially in regard to research, technology and innovation but the mechanisms to introduce them and to then track partnerships has been largely absent.

How can UK-based organisations better engage with Romanian researchers, startups, or businesses?

MI: Facilitator entities like MSP and UK/Romania Business can create a framework to bridge the geographical gap between the UK and RO through digital tools. For instance, a digital matchmaking platform on which to present expertise, patents, offers and needs, and to rapidly find appropriate partners. We've previously held an online series of bridging events for the several Romanian regions and this format can similarly be applied to our two countries. We can build from there to in-person events in both the UK and Romania.

What advice do you have for UK organisations or researchers looking to establish partnerships in Romania?

MI: Be open minded. Don't start with preconceived notions that Romanian partners

lack experience in developing and implementing international partnerships. Some may be more experienced than others, but all are willing to seriously engage and build toward achieving shared project goals. Show partners from Romania they are equally valued to those from elsewhere – even if sometimes there is a gap in funds or life experience. You'll win the trust of partners in Romania by showing them trust in turn and this is one of the most important aspects within any partnership.

in cooperation with other specialised international teams from countries including the UK and might be supported by Romania's RDI entities through a contracting scheme.

Mădălin Ioniță
Executive Director

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What is your vision for MSP and its place in driving international collaboration over the next five years?

MI: Expanded international collaboration for our member organisations and tenants is one of the main objectives in our business model. In 4-5 years Măgurele Science Park will be fully operational and by this point our offering should include specific consultancy services to engage Romanian organisations as much as possible in international partnerships and projects. Our plan is to allocate funds to create and further develop a specialised consultant team to provide advice such as idea identification and validation, partnership development, proposal preparation, contracting support and, most important, project management implementation. These kinds of services should also be developed

MAGURELE SCIENCE PARK

Selected members of the Măgurele Science Park Association community[10]

COMOTI ROMANIAN RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE FOR GAS TURBINES

The National Institute for Research and Development of Turbomotors (COMOTI) specialises in scientific research, design, production, experimentation, testing, technology transfer and innovation in the field of aviation turbo motors, industrial gas turbines and high speed blade machines.

GeoEcoMar

The National Research and Development Institute for Marine Geology and Geoecology (GeoEcoMar) pursues complex research of the Danube macro-geosystem and Black Sea littoral area. GeoEcoMar is part of the DOORS Black Sea Special Interest Group.

ICI®

The National Institute for Research and Development in Informatics is Romania's key research, development and innovation institute in the field of ICT developing the scientific and technological support for structures and services specific to the knowledge-based information society.

IFIN-HH

Horia Hulubei National Institute for R&D in Physics and Nuclear Engineering engages in fundamental, applied research and technological development in nuclear physics and engineering. At ELI-NP it hosts the world's most powerful laser developed in conjunction with Thales.

INCAS

The National Institute for Aerospace Research "Elie Carafoli" (INCAS) is Romania's aerospace sciences research institute. With a 75 year history in aerospace engineering, flow physics and applied aerodynamics, it offers dedicated R&D services to both the domestic and international aerospace community.

2.3 Transilvania IT Cluster

Outside of Bucharest, Cluj is Romania's major innovation hub. As we wrote in Technology Report: understanding and advancing the UK/Romania opportunity

> Cluj has been a major winner from Romania's software engineering and outsourcing boom. If smaller in absolute terms than the industry in Bucharest – 60% v 18% according to ANIS – software is more dominant as a proportion of the local economy. It's story reflects the evolution of the tech economy in Romania.
>
> UK/Romania Business

An anchor contributing to this success, Transilvania IT Cluster works at the intersection between entrepreneurship, researchers, innovators, and public administration, pushing forward discussion and action around digital transformation and enhancing community development through digitisation. Founded in 2013 it started by supporting employees of member companies in the acquisition of technical and soft skills, as well as to offer a platform of knowledge and training for the implementation of collaborative projects. In its twelve years of operation, as its co-founder Bianca Muntean describes, the Cluster has evolved alongside the development of the IT sector in Cluj.

What role does Transilvania IT Cluster play in fostering collaboration between academia, industry, and government?

BM: Romania's strengths lie in sectors such as ICT, energy, digital health, and AI, underpinned by a well-trained workforce and a growing innovation ecosystem, but bringing them together matters. Transilvania IT Cluster acts as a bridge between academia, industry, and government through a quadruple-helix approach. We connect startups, universities, research centres, public institutions, and large companies to drive innovation, technology transfer, and digital transformation. Our initiatives, such as working groups in Industry 4.0, Digital Health, and Green Transition, create synergies that align regional strengths with European and global trends. Another initiative that creates connections between entities and supports digital transformation in the region is The European Digital Innovation Hub in Transilvania. The consortium in this project, consisting of Transilvania IT Cluster, OLI-Hygia, Babeș-Bolyai University, the Technical University, and the National Institute for Research and Development of Isotopic and Molecular Technologies, has developed complementary and customised services, fostering close collaboration between the several parties.

What are the industries or sectors benefitting most from the Cluster's activities and initiatives?

BM: I'll highlight four sectors where I think Transilvania IT Cluster has proved particularly effective (1) Digital Health, through the Digital Health Working Group and projects like DIHs_P4Medicine, we have helped advance personalised medicine and health-tech innovation, (2) IICT and Industry 4.0 where our initiatives such as TEDIHT and AI-PRISM have supported startups and SMEs in adopting AI, Big Data, and HPC solutions for increased competitiveness, (3) our work on Smart Cities and Green Transition where projects like the NZC Blueprint focus on urban sustainability and climate-neutral solutions and, (4) the ZeroW project around agriculture and food waste which demonstrates the Cluster's efforts in applying technology to sustainability challenges.

How does the Cluster fit into the broader European research and innovation landscape?

BM: As a gold-labelled cluster and orchestrator of TEDIHT, Transilvania IT Cluster is deeply embedded in the European innovation network. We actively contribute to initiatives like Enterprise Europe Network and Horizon Europe, serving as a gateway for SMEs and startups to access European markets, funding, and expertise. Our partnerships with clusters across the Danube Region further expand our impact at a regional level.

What role do EU funding programmes or national initiatives play in supporting research and technology partnerships in Romania?

BM: EU programmes like Digital Europe and Horizon Europe are instrumental in financing cutting-edge projects, while national initiatives like the Digital Decade Action Plan emphasise digital skills and enterprise transformation. Transilvania IT Cluster leverages these frameworks to implement projects such as AI-PRISM and ZeroW, supporting both our members and Romania's strategic goals.

How do you see the UK as a partner for research and innovation? What do

successful collaborations look like?

BM: The UK is a strong partner with its mature innovation ecosystem, advanced tech hubs, and robust funding frameworks. Collaborations like ours with UK/Romania Business can create opportunities for partnerships in eHealth, smart mobility, and digital skills development. The Innovation Partnerships report and project launch in March 2025 reflects growing bilateral interest in fostering advanced research and technology collaborations.

What lessons have you learned from other international collaborations that could apply to future UK partnerships?

BM: There's a lot we've taken from our involvements in other projects that I think could be applied as we work more with the UK:

- recognise the value of co-creation – co-designing projects ensures alignment with local and regional priorities
- cultural understanding – building trust and understanding local business practices are critical for sustained partnerships, and
- a focus on complementary strengths – leveraging Romania's digital capabilities with, for example. UK expertise in commercialisation and scaling can create win-win outcomes.

How could UK-based organisations better engage with Romanian researchers, startups and businesses?

BM: One way is through increased networking opportunities for example organising matchmaking events or hackathons to bring together academia, startups, and corporates. We might also better leverage Digital Innovation Hubs giving UK organisations chances to collaborate with TEDIHT and access Romanian talent, test innovative solutions, and scale technology projects. Similarly by organising bilateral innovation bootcamps – tailored programmes like Global Tech Connect's Energy Transition Bootcamp 2025, open to Romanian startups – could focus on opportunities relevant to both countries.

Are there untapped opportunities for joint funding, research projects, or technology transfer between the UK and Romania?

BM: Yes, we see opportunities through Horizon Europe – joint applications for funding programmes targeting sustainability, AI, and digital health. In technology transfer we could look to build consortia for tech commercialisation in the energy and manufacturing sectors and with EIT Initiatives including programmes focused on climate, digital, and urban mobility. These all would align UK and Romanian interests.

What advice would you give to UK organisations or researchers looking to establish partnerships in Romania?

BM: Firstly engage local ecosystems – work with clusters like Transilvania IT to navigate the domestic innovation landscape and connect with key stakeholders. It can also make sense to start small and begin with pilot projects or joint workshops to build trust and prove feasibility. From there both sides can begin to focus on long-term goals and invest in sustained partnerships rather than simply short-term gains.

What is your vision for Transilvania IT Cluster and its role in driving international collaboration over the next five years?

BM: Our vision is to position Transilvania IT Cluster as a European leader in fostering cross-border collaborations, leveraging our expertise to:

- expand partnerships with global innovation hubs, including the UK
- increase participation in strategic EU projects focused on digital health, AI, and sustainability
- act as a catalyst for knowledge-sharing and technology transfer, empowering startups and SMEs to thrive in a globalised economy.

Through these efforts, we aim to create a resilient and inclusive ecosystem that drives innovation for societal and economic progress.

Bianca Muntean
Co-founder and Cluster Manager

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TRANSILVANIA IT CLUSTER

THE EUROPEAN DIGITAL INNOVATION HUB IN TRANSILVANIA

2.4 The European Institute of Innovation and Technology

The UK's exit from the EU inevitably adds some practical frictions to its dealings with European partners as well as uncertainties around future regulatory divergence.

Most evident in the cross-border movement of people and goods, Brexit effects can also be felt in research, technology and innovation partnerships – particularly where these may involve EU funding.

Seen by all sides as sub-optimal, the UK became an associated country to Horizon Europe in January 2024 bringing it back into the world's largest multinational research and innovation funding programme.

Offering a majority of the benefits previously enjoyed as an EU member, British startups, researchers and corporates can again use this avenue to support innovation and growth. It likewise provides a restored channel for Romanian organisations to partner with UK peers.

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) is central to the operation of Horizon and in March 2024 it opened a new London office providing an essential bridge for UK-EU collaboration.

It is led by Leslie Harris.

What is Horizon Europe?

LH: Horizon Europe is the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation. It facilitates collaboration and strengthens the impact of research and innovation in developing, supporting and implementing EU policies while tackling global challenges. It supports creating and better dispersing of excellent knowledge and technologies, promotes industrial competitiveness and optimises investment impact within a strengthened European Research Area. Legal entities from the EU and associated countries like the UK can participate.

EIT Hub UK's Connect and Experience delegation to London, October 2024

Where does EIT fit in?

LH: The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) is an integral part of Horizon Europe by supporting the commercialisation of European innovation and the success of European entrepreneurship through collaboration and addressing barriers to innovation. It acts by bringing together the knowledge triangle of industry, universities and research centres.

How does EIT support innovation and collaboration across different sectors?

LH: EIT delivers impact through its Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICS), each of which is a public-private partnership made up of hundreds of actors across Europe. At present, there are nine EIT KICs: EIT Digital, Climate-KIC, EIT Health, EIT Raw Materials, EIT InnoEneregy, EIT Food, EIT Urban Mobility, EIT Manufacturing, and EIT Culture & Creativity. A new KIC, EIT Water, will be formed in 2026. The KICs all support European innovation by providing entrepreneurial education and training to the next generation of innovators, supporting innovation projects to bring new products to market, and support startups and scaleups through accelerator and market access programmes. EIT's main strength is its ability to bring its network of over 2,400 best in class organisations together through events and initiatives.

What are the main challenges you find in fostering cross-border collaborations?

LH: There are perennial challenges of finding partners and finding funding. EIT's network is a great place to find both as well as the expertise to access larger pots of funding. The innovation partnerships EIT funds naturally bring together startups, research institutions and corporate as many of these projects require a startup or spin-out, a potential purchaser, and validation activity. This tends to make each eager to engage and collaborate with one another. Likewise, our accelerator programmes often include corporates and our open innovation programmes bring startups to help solve challenges identified by industry partners.

What role can EIT play in helping UK and Romanian startups scale into other European markets?

LH: This is one of EIT's key value propositions. EIT helps EU startups pilot and validate technologies across different European contexts and scale into new markets, whether it's bringing a new medical technology from Romania into the NHS or bringing a technology from a UK university to be adopted by Romanian corporates. EIT's extensive network of key European entities allows technologies to be validated in different environments with the involvement of potential purchasers and other mentors and experts to support on market access, IP, finance, etc. There are numerous instances of Romanian technologies and particularly startups being very successful in EIT

programmes. In health alone, EIT Health has supported a number of promising startups. An example is lumen, a company that created a device to aid the visually impaired with mobility. The headset understands the environment, computes navigation paths, and delivers information via sound and forehead impulses. Lumen participated in EIT Headstart and Catapult programmes, has since raised 5m, joined World Economic Forum's Technology Pioneers Cohort and joined the EIT Scaling Club. Romanian organisations should engage directly with the new EIT Hub in Romania and the individual KIC office that covers Romania in the domain they are interested in. They will find well-connected and knowledgeable ecosystem leads who can guide them to partnership and funding opportunities. Startups will be able to learn about grant funding, investment and acceleration and scaleup programmes run by both EIT and delivered by their partner organisations.

Have you dealt directly with the Romanian ecosystem in this new role?

LH: In October I hosted a Romanian health tech ecosystem leader, Freshblood, helping them to understand UK opportunities for the startups they support. Through EIT Hub UK dealings with UK/Romania Business and Global Tech Connect the London office is strengthening its connections to and direct knowledge of Romania, and we'll be running a programme for mature startups to scale to the UK later in the year. I hope some from Romania will apply.

What opportunities do you see for strengthening UK/Romania innovation partnerships?

LH: Historically, the UK, with its world-leading universities and innovation ecosystem, over-performed in European funding and projects, but as a country, we are finding our feet again in the European collaboration space. It takes time, effort and persistence to rebuild trust, find potential collaborators and the right opportunities. Romania has a highly educated and skilled workforce, great strengths in cyber, AI, health tech and biotech, to name a few. It has institutional support for innovation but is still a developing innovation ecosystem. This presents a great opportunity for organisations from the UK and Romania to work together, leveraging their unique strengths to greater benefit. Every EIT-funded project is required to have partners in more than one region and to engage different kinds of partners (academic and corporate). This means that a UK university could partner with a Romanian company on an innovation project or a Romanian startup could do a pilot in the UK market with a local corporate, and with the validation or support of a university in a third country. So there is ample opportunity for partnerships just within EIT, let alone the rest of Horizon Europe. Aside from EIT, stand-out organisations such as Măgurele Science Park and Transilvania IT Cluster have deep networks of Romanian talent, connections with the UK, and expertise in collaboration and research funding, so can be an excellent source of partners and new technologies

Are there specific funding mechanisms or programmes within EIT that could support UK/Romania collaborations?

LH: Yes. EIT is committed to addressing inequalities in innovation capacity throughout Europe. Romania is considered a RIS (Regional Innovation Scheme) country, which means it has a less developed innovation ecosystem, particularly in terms of investment. A new RIS Hub has just opened in Romania in collaboration with Iceberg+, an award-winning accelerator and key EIT partner. This will act as a point of contact for all EIT initiatives to ensure Romanian entities and startups are better able to access EIT finding, initiatives, and collaborations.

What upcoming EIT initiatives could be relevant for UK/Romania collaborations?

LH: Each EIT funds open calls for proposals as well as opportunities geared at promising startups at different stages of development. There are calls currently open in Food, Culture & Creativity and will soon be followed by calls in Manufacturing and Health, all of which are relevant for bilateral collaboration. Startups with fairly mature technologies should also check out the relevant calls in the KIC most relevant to their technology. Beyond EIT, there are wider opportunities within Horizon Europe for UK/Romania collaborations for less-developed technologies.

Leslie Harris
Manager

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2.5 Ongoing UK involvement in Romania

Understanding more about how Romania's research and innovation ecosystem is evolving, and organisations best placed to support when building bilateral and multilateral projects, it is helpful also to consider active UK partnerships in the country, sectors in which they operate, their objectives, and where they have been successful.

We start by highlighting two projects – a multinational partnership drawn to the Black Sea because of its unique ecology and opportunity, and a project flourishing in the UK and led by Romanian-born researchers keen to utilise their networks and knowledge in biotechnology to encourage a stronger parallel ecosystem in Romania.

2.5.1 DOORS Black Sea Special Interest Group

Thirty years ago, the impacts of pollution, overfishing and other human influences caused a major environmental crisis in the Black Sea. Its fragile recovery is now threatened by new challenges, including pollutants and marine litter, regional conflict, and the effects of climate change. However, managed appropriately, the Black Sea can provide a sustainable foundation for a range of industries.

Developing Optimal and Open Research Support for the Black Sea (DOORS) is a €9m EU-funded research project linking citizens, science and industry for critical Black Sea regeneration.

Amongst its 35 member institutions are three Romanian partners GeoEcoMar, a member of the Măgurele Science Park community, the National Institute for Marine Research and Development, and Mare Nostrum. The collaboration between UK and Romanian institutions sees the University of Stirling bring its world-leading expertise in Earth observation technology to address the environmental impacts of pollution, overfishing and other human influences around the Black Sea.

> "For more than three years, the DOORS project has been working to generate deeper knowledge and understanding of the processes and dynamics of the Black Sea's ecosystems, and the thresholds that we need to respect to have a healthy and productive sea. Our combined focus on research, innovation and engagement is helping to harmonise understanding and build collective action to drive real, sustainable change."
>
> Adrian Stănică, DOORS

Collectively, the DOORS project has created three interconnected work programmes to shape the economic future of the region and from them a four initiative has emerged – the Black Sea Special Interest Group.

The Black Sea System of Systems

The Black Sea System of Systems (SoS) is a unique, first-of-its-kind digital observatory, developed as part of the DOORS project. Led by the University of Stirling in collaboration with GeoEcoMar and other partners, its objective is to transform understanding of the Black Sea, provide the evidence to support more effective decision making, whilst providing the data, information and insights to aid a thriving regional blue economy.

The SoS draws together siloed and inaccessible sources of digital data from sensors, satellites and models, along with that collected from national and international research cruises, into a single, easy-to-access dedicated platform.

Model outputs provide the information to explore the consequences of climate change and other activity on the Black Sea. For example, working with the University's partners in Romania and Ukraine, DOORS researchers can show the impact of the Kakhovka Dam destruction on the Northwest Black Sea region, and the implications on the ecological status of these waters.

The rich SoS data pool can also be tapped by other interfaces – including novel digital products harnessing the power of AI – to support a range of ventures from land management, shipping and navigation, and tourism, to environmental conservation and the region's growing aquaculture sector.

SoS is a platform on which further regional innovation can be built, and its components are providing the foundations for a digital twin of the Black Sea – something that will enable near real-time monitoring and modelling of the area and the exploration of 'what if' scenarios into its future.

> "New technologies are enabling more sophisticated, joined-up approaches to understanding the Black Sea, its environment, and our

interaction with its ecosystems. This enhanced understanding can help foster intelligent new approaches to economic development, supporting new businesses and enabling more effective regulation."

Andrew Tyler, DOORS

Blue Growth Accelerator

The Blue Growth Accelerator (BGA) is a programme of activity to identify the Black Sea's blue growth sectors, innovators and entrepreneurs, and provide support to unlock their potential, enhance the exploitation of knowledge, and facilitate access to investors.

Following a series of calls within the region and across Europe, the team has been working with a diverse group that includes startups, SMEs, larger enterprises, universities, and research institutions. In focus are innovative ideas or ventures related to maritime industries, marine conservation, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, heritage and coastal tourism, renewable energy, shipping, and other sectors contributing to the sustainable development of the Black Sea region.

In February 2025, as part of the BGA roll out, a Black Sea Blue Economy Investor Showcase event was hosted in London. It will be followed by two further events in April, in Bucharest and Burgas (Bulgaria).

Knowledge Transfer and Training

Knowledge Transfer and Training (KTT) builds upon existing collaborations across the region between the various actors in science and policy to encourage new opportunities and tools that promote a culture of openness and best practice in knowledge sharing.

A series of formal and informal learning, education and training platforms are under development not only to apply the SoS's technology, but to add capacity to adapt and optimise the capabilities of the system and reach further areas of research and application through international collaboration.

Black Sea Special Interest Group

Building upon earlier DOORS' initiatives, and launched formally in September 2024, the Black Sea Special Interest Group (SIG) champions the opportunities presented by the blue economy – the sustainable use of ocean, sea and coastal resources for economic prosperity – with the Black Sea a natural incubator for innovations in the sector. Co-ordinated by the University of Stirling, and under the chairmanship of Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale, the SIG is working through the DOORS project and its wider regional and global networks to transform regional opportunities.

"The Black Sea and its coast are a remarkable region of Europe with a distinct history, but an even more promising future. There is definite untapped potential to develop the region's economic prospects sustainably, building a thriving blue economy that can benefit both people and planet."

Lord McConnell of Glenscorrodale, DOORS

Areas of focus include energy, sustainable tourism, best practice in aquaculture, and digital technologies to support safer shipping and navigation.

Novel applications of the SoS in the defence and security are also being explored.

The success of DOORS, and the SIG in particular, is testament to the strength of partnership working between the UK and Romania, including researchers, politicians and diplomats through an international collaboration to fulfil the Black Sea's blue economy potential.

Professor Andrew Tyler
HydroNation Chair, University of Stirling

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DOORS BLACK SEA

2.5.2 Biomentorhub

Founded in 2020, Biomentorhub is a Romania-based association with a UK chapter supporting and engaging Romanian specialists from the diaspora with research experience in life sciences. Biomentorhub facilitates their access to peer mentoring and collaboration opportunities with a focus on the development of scientific research and innovation in Romania. Michael-Bogdan Mărgineanu, its Founder and President, described its work.

How does Biomentorhub help foster collaboration between academia, industry, and government?

MBM: We're connecting biotech entrepreneurs and researchers with experienced mentors from academia, industry, and venture capital; helping early-stage biotech companies refine their business models, validate technologies, and access funding opportunities; organising workshops, panels, and events that facilitate collaboration among researchers, investors, and policymakers, and partnering with global institutions to support Romanian biotech startups in expanding their reach and securing international funding. While systemic challenges remain in the country I think some clear national strengths can be identified and exploited. Here I'd highlight emerging biotech and life sciences talent and Romania's strong pool of young researchers and professionals with expertise in medicine, molecular biology, bioinformatics, and biomedical engineering and universities and research institutes that are competitive in EU-funded projects, particularly in areas like neuroscience, regenerative medicine, and drug discovery. Health, bioeconomy, and digital transformation have been identified as priority areas in Romania's Research and Innovation Strategy – we hope to see progress here – but private sector R&D expenditures are showing steady growth, particularly in biotech-related fields.[11]

What are the main sectors of focus for Biomentorhub in its activities and initiatives?

MBM:Biomentorhub is primarily focused on fostering innovation and growth in five biotech-related sectors:

- neuroscience and neurodegenerative disease research e.g. supporting startups working on novel treatments for Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and other neurological disorders
- regenerative medicine and tissue engineering encouraging research in stem cell therapies and advanced biomaterials
- precision medicine and digital health by helping companies working on AI-driven diagnostics, personalised treatments, and biotech data analytics
- pharmaceutical and drug discovery supporting projects that utilise computational drug design and synthetic biology, and
- agricultural biotechnology and bioeconomy promoting research in sustainable agriculture, plant genetics, and biomanufacturing.

I'd also highlight another bilateral programme in a related area – the British-Romanian Academic Institute of Neuroscience at the University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science and Technology Târgu Mureș and linked to the University of Southampton.

How do you see the UK as a partner for research, technology, and innovation?

MBM: The UK has a well-established biotech ecosystem, with strengths in translational research, regulatory expertise, and venture capital investment. There is great potential for partnerships between UK-based research institutions, biotech startups, and investors with Romanian scientists and entrepreneurs and indeed Biomentorhub actively seeks collaborations with UK-based biotech accelerators, research hubs, and funding bodies. While we are still in the early stages of formalising partnerships, some key areas of interest include (1) joint research projects leveraging UK and EU funding schemes for collaborative biotech R&D, (2) knowledge exchange programmes including organising visits, training sessions, and mentorship programmes between UK and Romanian researchers, and (3) biotech investment networks to facilitate introductions between UK venture capitalists and Romanian startups.

How can UK-based organisations better engage with Romanian researchers, startups and businesses?

MBM: To foster deeper engagement, UK-based stakeholders could create joint mentorship programmes where its scientists, investors, and industry leaders provide guidance to Romanian biotech entrepreneurs and host joint networking events to facilitate direct interactions between UK and Romanian biotech professionals. From this we might develop a digital collaboration platform to connect Romanian biotech researchers with a needed network in the UK which in turn could help establish funding mechanisms tailored for startups seeking to enter the UK market. Romanian biotech startups need more exposure in international forums so its important to make efforts to enhance visibility and awareness when engaging the UK.

Are there untapped opportunities for joint funding, research projects, or technology transfer between the two countries?

MBM: Absolutely. While formal collaboration is still limited, there are significant opportunities for joint grant applications through Horizon Europe, EIC Accelerator, and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) funding programs. There is a definite need for technology transfer partnerships where Romanian research outputs (e.g., patents, biomaterials, novel compounds) can be commercialised with the help of UK-based companies. Equally there is a gap for startup incubation programmes where UK accelerators support Romanian biotech startups with business development and market entry strategies.

How does Biomentorhub fit into the broader European research and innovation landscape?

MBM: Biomentorhub is positioned as a key player in Romania's biotech ecosystem, acting as a bridge between local talent and international opportunities. We work within the broader EU research and innovation landscape by participating in EU-funded projects that support biotech innovation, building partnerships with European biotech hubs in Germany, France, and the UK, and creating a knowledge-sharing network that connects Romanian biotech startups with European investors and regulators.

What role do EU funding programmes or national initiatives play in supporting biotech partnerships in Romania?

MBM: EU funding is critical for biotech innovation in Romania as national funding mechanisms are limited. Key EU programmes that support biotech R&D include:

- Horizon Europe – offering substantial funding for biotech startups and research collaborations
- EIC Accelerator – providing equity funding for deep-tech startups, including biotech ventures
- Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) – funds mobility and training programmes for biotech researchers
- European Innovation Council (EIC) Pathfinder – supporting high-risk/reward research projects in biotechnology.

At the national level, Romania needs to increase predictability and effectiveness of public R&D funding, provide more financial incentives for biotech startups and researchers, and establish dedicated national biotech funds to support early-stage research.

What advice would you give to UK organisations or researchers looking to establish partnerships in Romania?

MBM: Be open-minded about Romania's biotech potential. While the ecosystem is still developing, there is significant talent and innovation. That means investing in trust-building efforts. Partnerships should be long-term and based on mutual respect. We see Biomentorhub as a key facilitator here, able to help UK organisations navigate the Romanian biotech landscape and identify collaboration opportunities and leverage EU funding mechanism. Many joint funding opportunities exist but they require significant planning so go into it these relationships with the necessary timeframe in mind.

What is your vision for Biomentorhub over the next five years, and for its role in driving international collaboration?

MBM: In the next five years, Biomentorhub plans to expand its mentorship network to include more international biotech leaders; launch a dedicated biotech accelerator programme in collaboration with European partners; facilitate cross-border funding opportunities for Romanian startups; host an annual international biotech summit to connect Romanian startups with global investors and researchers, and develop a digital knowledge-sharing platform to streamline collaboration between academia, industry, and investors. By doing so, Biomentorhub will solidify its role as a key enabler of biotech innovation in Romania and a bridge to global research and investment networks.

Michael-Bogdan Mărgineanu
Founder and President

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2.6 Think-tanks, NGOs and education

A little removed from the primary focus of this report we can also highlight some bilateral research collaborations between think-tanks and universities including The Rațiu Forum, a joint project of Rațiu Family Charitable Foundation, the Rațiu Democracy Centre and LSE IDEAS,[12] and a separate collaboration between LSE IDEAS and the New Strategy Center.[13]

While the former deals more with civil society and democratic resilience, the latter focusses on geopolitical questions and so feeds into wider Black Sea defence and energy security considerations, and the role these subjects play in the bilateral relationship. Both topics are core themes in the work of UK/Romania Business.[14]

Similarly there are projects between universities and business. Transilvania Executive Education offers Executive MBA and continuing education programmes in Cluj. It delivers this with three British universities – Buckingham, Hull and Suffolk – and local partners Babeș-Bolyai University and the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca. Further development of this type of collaboration can help consolidate business ties between the two countries as well as strengthen Romania's entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystem.

Within the broader education realm activities like the Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme Romania, often offered through British international schools, provide opportunities to widen the experience of young people and develop skills that are critical to later life success. Supporters of the scheme in Romania include UK-origin companies Betfair Development, Endava and the London Stock Exchange Group.

UK/Romania Business believes there is scope for further initiatives at youth and young person level particularly around innovation and entrepreneurship.

2.7 Commercial research, technology and innovation partnerships

In *Technology Report* we referenced the presence of the UK's Betfair Development, Endava and London Stock Exchange Group in Romania, and given its clear strengths in IT, many of the recent commercial-led research, technology and innovation partnerships between the UK and Romania involve outsourcing and software engineering.

Founded in 2007, and now with over 2,000 people based in Cluj, Betfair Development is Flutter Entertainment's largest technology hub delivering projects for its sports betting and iGaming brands.

Growing its footprint in the country LSEG opened a new office in Cluj in September 2024 adding 200 people to its existing 1000 person Bucharest-based operation. This new site is responsible for Tora – a cloud-based multi-asset, cross-region front-to-back end trading solution that supports buy-side customers trading across global equities, fixed income, FX, derivatives and digital assets.[15]

Opened in 2023, Vodafone Innovation Hub is hosted at the Faculty of Electronics, Telecommunications and Information Technology of University Politehnica Bucharest. It is a research, development, and innovation incubator in areas including 5G/6G, IoT/IoE, AI, MPN, open RAN, edge computing, and robotics.

Spanning research, technology and innovation across the energy and aerospace domains, Rolls-Royce established collaborations with Aerostar Bacău and Turbomecanica.[16] It is also part of the EU's €700 million Clean Aviation programme which funds 20 research and innovation programmes from across the industry. Here we highlight HE-ART (Hybrid Electric propulsion system for regional AiRcrafT), a consortium consisting of a diverse industrial, research and academic team led by Rolls-Royce with partners from countries including Romania. "HE-ART focuses on demonstrating enabling technologies for hybridisation by ground demonstration of a hybrid-electric thermal turboprop (e-TP) while taking important steps towards an optimised hybrid propulsion system for a future regional aircraft."[17]

Separately Rolls-Royce has supplied three mtu customised and containerised combined cooling, heat and power plant (CCHP) trigeneration units to Romanian cloud service provider ClusterPower at its new technology campus near Craiova – planned as the largest data centre in Romania.[18]

Two other commercial technology innovation partnerships – London-based SCSK {digital} Europe Ltd's with Roweb, and Engine by Starling's collaboration with Romanian neobank, Salt – are looked at in more detail below.

SCSK {digital} and Roweb partnership: from PoC to a trusted development partner

UK/Romania Business

SCSK {digital}

Unchain complexity

SCSK {digital} is the Digital Transformation (DX) unit of SCSK Europe Ltd., a trusted IT solutions provider since 1990. SCSK {digital} specialises in end-to-end Digital Transformation consultancy, Customer Experience (CX), and Data/AI governance and consultancy services across various sectors.

roweb
PART OF SIRMA GROUP

Roweb is a software services company specialising in delivering tailored solutions for global clients. With experienced development teams, we have successfully executed complex projects across 30+ countries and 12 main verticals.

At SCSK {digital} we believe in building strong, reliable partnerships that drive digital transformation.

Our collaboration with Roweb began as an internal proof of concept (PoC), allowing us to evaluate their expertise in firsthand. After a successful initial project, we have entrusted Roweb with client-facing projects, expanding our collaboration into a long-term partnership. Below, we highlight three key projects that showcase our collaboration.

SCSK {digital} website development

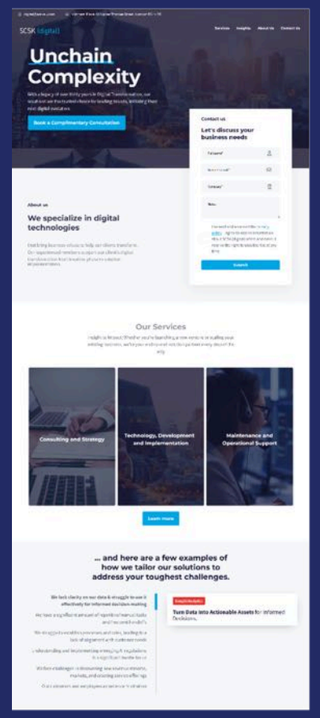
Objectives The Digital Transformation (DX) Unit of SCSK Europe Ltd was rebranding as SCSK {digital}, including the establishment of a new website www.scskdigital.com to present a modern and professional appearance to align with current standards.

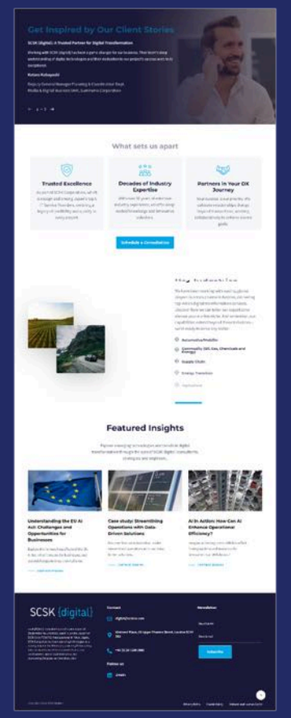
Solution SCSK {digital} worked with Roweb for website development to meet industry standards with a mobile responsive design and functionalities that align with its digital marketing and sales strategies. marketing functionalities (forms, CTAs, thank-you pages) and it is integrated into marketing tools such as HubSpot.

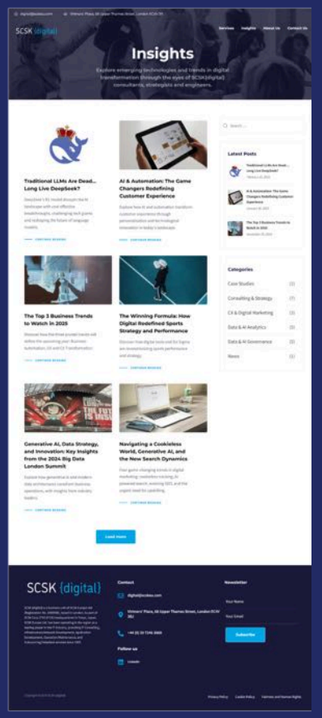
Project timeline Completed successfully in 6 weeks

Outcome

- enhanced brand visibility and brand recognition
- showcasing services, projects, and case studies effectively
- supporting social media activities
- generating traffic and leads to support sales and marketing efforts
- gathering valuable insights to build data-driven strategies.







SCSK {digital}

Unchain complexity

Knowledge and learning platform development for SCSK {digital}`s client

Client objectives

- enable regional CoE function with a vision to expand function globally.
- equip employees and group company members with digital/IT knowledge and skills
- foster a culture of digital innovation
- improve employee efficiency, effectiveness, engagement and satisfaction.

Solution SCSK {digital} and Roweb developed a comprehensive, mobile responsive Knowledge and Learning Platform featuring an advanced search function, multi-level admin access, event/webinar registration (including archive videos and relevant documents access), playbooks, reports, on-demand online courses, articles, case studies, and more.

Project timeline Completed successfully in 12 weeks (officially launched in January 2025)

Outcome All learning materials and resources are now available in one platform, empowering users to access essential DX and IT knowledge to enhance their skills and engage in a culture of digital innovation. The platform also allows our client to showcase their products and services compactly.

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E-commerce web shop development for SCSK {digital}`s client (ongoing project)

Client objectives A leading Japanese global cutting tool manufacturer aims for its website and webshop to align with evolving customer expectations. They approached SCSK {digital} to redesign their platform with an eCommerce function, aiming to gain a competitive edge in the industry.

Client challenges with the existing website

- outdated website and webshop design and functionality
- poor navigation and usability where customers struggle to find relevant information.
- lack of key selling points
- insufficient technical content support
- customer and distributor disengagement.

Solution SCSK {digital} and Roweb are building a redesigned, customer-centric digital platform, with ecommerce capabilities, to enhance user experience and engagement. The platform is also optimised for SEO and multilingual support, ensuring high visibility, organic traffic growth, and seamless global accessibility.

SCSK {digital}

Unchain complexity

E-commerce web shop development for SCSK {digital}`s client [continued]

Project timeline Ongoing – planned to be completed in 9 months

Expected outcomes

- establish a strong competitive edge on a global scale
- improved user experience
- increased sales and conversion rates
- higher organic traffic and visibility
- stronger brand perception.

roweb
PART OF SIRMA GROUP

“After a successful trial collaboration on SCSK {digital}'s website development, we have continued to trust Roweb`s expertise, technical capabilities, and commitment to delivering results, assigning increasingly complex projects each time. Their team is responsive and a pleasure to work with, always approaching challenges with a proactive and solution-oriented mindset. We are pleased with our partnership and look forward to further strengthening our collaboration with more projects in the future.”

Asena Atilla Saunders

Asena Atilla Saunders
CX and Digital Marketing Consultant, SCSK {digital}

asena.saunders@scskeu.com

Engine by Starling x Salt bank:
a best-in-class platform for seamless digital experiences

UK/Romania Business

Salt Bank is Romania's first 100% digital bank and part of Banca Transilvania, the largest financial services group in Southeastern Europe. By partnering with Engine, Starling Bank's proprietary technology, the bank was built in just 12 months, starting from the moment the first line of code was written. In April 2024, Salt launched its mobile app, and through an early adopter program, it onboarded 100,000 customers in its first 10 days. Today, Salt serves over 480,000 customers.

Engine was selected as Salt's core banking provider, tasked with delivering the cloud-native platform that would allow the bank to stand up their new digital proposition and customer experience.

> "We are determined to transform the banking landscape in Romania by delivering simple, seamless, and innovative digital experiences for our customers. By disrupting the local industry, we will redefine how customers engage with financial services."
>
> Gabriela Nistor, CEO, Salt Bank

We worked closely with Salt's team of in-house experts from the discovery stage of the project right the way through to delivery. We localised and configured the platform to meet regulatory and market requirements, while employing collaborative processes, such as embedding our team in Bucharest, to ensure rapid and efficient product testing and deployment, real-time decision making and effective planning through each phase of the project.

Salt offers transaction accounts in local and 17 foreign currencies for retail customers with automated digital onboarding supported by a manual review workflow in Engine for marginal cases. Customers have access to innovative, self-serve banking features like saving spaces, spending insights, card controls, and Apple and Google Pay in-app provisioning. This also includes a Platinum Debit Mastercard, which offers a secure, seamless, and trusted payment experience. These cards were available to early adopters as part of the innovative "Founders" campaign and unlocked special benefits such as travel insurance for Founders and their families, as well as local airport lounge access.

Much like Starling Bank, Salt has also chosen to retain human touchpoints for customer service, with 24/7 support available via real agents in a dedicated Care Centre leveraging Engine's contact centre capability and single customer view.

From the customer experience to the back office, Salt has also put the employee experience at the heart of the new bank. They wanted to give the teams running operations, from financial crime and customer support to payment and card operations, the best possible processes and workflows that would empower them in their roles and help deliver the service excellence envisioned in an efficient manner.

It was important to Salt that the bank was cloud-native and so AWS became the cloud provider for the project. Engine has extensive experience working with AWS through the development and running of Starling, and the provider's proven ability to enhance availability and agility, enable rapid development and maintain high security was essential for Salt's comprehensive cloud strategy.

It is an exciting time for Salt and the public launch in April 2024 was an important milestone. Here at Engine, we're looking forward to working closely with the Salt team as they achieve their ambitions of providing Romanian customers a smarter way to bank.

engine by Starling

Turn digital banking ambition into reality with Engine by Starling. We know what it takes to run a highly competitive and cost-efficient bank, and our platform provides the capabilities to offer new, fully developed products that delight customers.

Salt

At Salt Bank we're proud to be Romania's first 100% digital bank — as secure as a traditional bank and as flexible as a fintech. We develop financial products that deliver a simple, secure, and seamless payment and savings experience, along with a range of customer-centric solutions. We offer "banking, as you want!"

Photo credit: Karsten Wuerth

3. Uncovering new bilateral opportunity

UK/Romania Business

The contention of this report is that Romania is a research, technology and innovation partner of great potential importance to the UK.

The willingness and capacity is there on its part, and with such a strong diaspora network in the UK – an impressive core of whom populate startups, technology companies, academia and research institutes – we have a head start in cultural connection.

We've also noted a reticence amongst some to engage with Romania, perhaps put-off by outdated assumptions about the country or its innovation rankings by some measures. Below we challenge this by focussing on specific areas of high-value and strategic significance for the UK.

3.1 Romania in the context of UK technology strategy priorities

The UK's International Technology Strategy (2023), drawing on other departmental work and considerations, defines five key domains for focus – artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, engineering biology, semiconductors and future telecoms – and amongst its ten priorities:

- create the world's most extensive and capable technology diplomacy network, increasing the number of UK Tech Envoys, increasing our tech expertise across our global network
- establish a prioritised set of technology-based partnerships with key partners around the world, delivering mutually beneficial objectives and unlocking new opportunities
- promote the best of British technology expertise and leadership through our embassies and high commissions around the world.

Further to this PUBLIC, in its UK Science and Technology Network commissioned report Technology and Innovation in Central and Eastern Europe: Mapping regional strengths and opportunities against the UK's Five Priority Technologies stresses

> "Partnering with the CEE is essential for the UK's strategic ambition to expand its global role in emerging technologies. It is also pivotal to keep pace with international counterparts – including the US, European Union, and East Asia – who are increasingly forging partnerships, investments, and networks in the region.
>
> Collaborative technology partnerships with such a dynamic and emerging region present an opportunity for collective engagement in shaping future development across the ITS areas, leveraging the region's unique expertise to contribute meaningfully to global discussions and developments.
>
> By tapping into the CEE, the UK stands to bolster its own technological ecosystem while fostering mutually beneficial collaborations with counterparts across the region."[19]
>
> PUBLIC

Offering some assessment of Romania's strengths against the five strategic priorities of the UK International Technology Strategy – it sees Artificial Intelligence, engineering biology and semiconductors as the most immediately promising areas of the five for bilateral collaboration – PUBLIC concludes its section on the country with "UK stakeholders can fill a critical gap in Romania's technology regulation via advisory and policy exchanges to de-risk local entrepreneurship", continuing

> "There is a unique opportunity to support technology transfer, and commercialise existing knowledge assets that exist within Romania's tech ecosystem, whilst establishing regulatory frameworks and international standards."
>
> PUBLIC

It recommends also to "capitalise on mutual high-priority verticals for actionable collaboration, including defence and semiconductor partnerships [...where] the UK and Romania can build upon these already established industries to convene networks of key stakeholders and ecosystem enablers and establish tech champions to help navigate the ecosystem when building partnerships across various sectors", and finally

> "by promoting the flow of technical researchers,

> professors and students between the UK and Romania, the number of technology links between the diaspora and between each country will increase, furthering opportunities for future partnership and collaboration."[20]

PUBLIC

Translating this for our purposes, a useful further filter is the Romanian-British Strategic Partnership document (March 2023) and later agreements building on its "six dialogues".[21]

Of the six, and in-keeping with the core focus of UK/Romania Business, we highlight aspects of two in particular, "defence and security"

- exploring co-operation on defence research, capability development, interoperability of armed forces, and outer space matters
- enhancing our defence, cyber and security procurement relationship, including greater cooperation between our respective industries

and, "promoting trade, investment and entrepreneurship"

- deepening bilateral economic cooperation, trade and investment links through the establishment of a working group for trade and investment, coordinated by the relevant institutions, with the aim of defining priority areas and opportunities of common interest and an action plan[22]
- sharing policy expertise on priority sectors, including clean growth, renewable energy, green finance, agriculture, digital economy and technology
- promoting dialogue between the startup communities in Romania and the UK, in order to focus on innovation and entrepreneurship and to better expose Romanian startups to UK investment funds
- facilitating collaboration within large-scale research infrastructures and research and innovation projects of mutual interest.

Additionally, we note the Partnership document's reference to "strengthening bilateral exchanges in higher education", a point from its "people-to-people links" dialogue.

The opportunities here are now explored.

3.2 Defence, security, spacetech and dual-use

This report opened noting the growing geopolitical relevance of Romania and its value to the NATO alliance. Its importance elevates defence to being a core theme of UK/Romania Business and one that will be the subject of a dedicated future report.

Its bilateral prominence is also underscored in the November 2024 UK/Romania Defence Cooperation Agreement providing a framework through which the two countries will reinforce their relationship and better work together to combat shared threats.

The military-to-military elements aside the Agreement's nine aims include:

- to strive to optimise the use of their defence resources and improve cost-efficiency; and
- to achieve technological benefits, efficiency and develop capabilities related to defence procurement and equipment support.

We see this as an obvious opportunity for further engagement around weapons systems with spill over into dual-use technologies including spacetech and drones. Indeed new uncertainties around America's future security posture toward Europe make developing such partnerships all the more pressing.

The British Ambassador to Romania during NATO's DACIA 25 exercise, February 2025

Compelling circumstances aside, defence is anyway a natural sector in which to deepen research, technology and innovation partnerships.

It is conditioned on government to government confidences and offsets often play a significant role in procurement – something that means technology transfer and licensing can follow already established pathways.

The foundation for bilateral industrial defence and aerospace collaboration has been supply chain integration with UK companies initially benefitting from the lower cost of

manufacturing in Romania, and within aviation especially, through maintenance, repair and overhaul agreements.

Romania's 2004 NATO accession (and preparation for joining) provided a trusted framework for government to government dealings and on which post-Cold War collaborations have been built. By the late 2000's this took form in an agreement to upgrade Royal Air Force Puma helicopters at IAR Brașov (Eurocopter).

> "It's a good example of Smart Defence – how, as allies and partners in NATO and the EU, Britain and Romania can share our respective expertise in defence and in our defence industries to develop the kind of forces and capabilities we need for the future.
>
> Romania is a trusted partner for the UK on security and defence, because Romania is prepared to play a full and active part in NATO and EU operations. And the RAF has also been glad to entrust its fleet of Puma helicopters to Eurocopter Romania to kit them out for the joint challenges our armed forces will face in the years to come."[23]
>
> Martin Harris, British Ambassador to Romania, 2010-2014

The nature of defence means many details of partnerships – and the extent to which Romanian Intellectual Property contributes to these projects – remain outside public view. Given the known pedigree of its mechanical and software engineers we are confident its companies can play an increasingly important role in aerospace and defence including with emerging technologies.

Romanian delegation at Farnborough Airshow, July 2024

Within tech, the sophistication of Romania's cybersecurity community is well known and the potential of its startups validated, for example, through Global Tech Connect Bootcamps on the theme.[24] Representatives from the NATO Innovation Fund and DIANA programme participate at How to Web, Eastern Europe's pre-eminent startup conference and two UK-based companies with Romanian founders have been part of early DIANA cohorts.[25]

A rapidly evolving technology used to great effect by Ukrainian forces against the Russian invaders are unmanned aerial vehicles.

One ongoing partnership involves the UK's U-TacS and Romanian companies Aerostar Bacău, INCAS (a Măgurele Science Park community member), Romaero S.A. and Thales Systems Romania to deliver Watchkeeper X.[26]

Romania is also keen to further enhance its own independent drone manufacturing capabilities. In November 2024 a protocol was signed between the (then) Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Tourism, the Ministry for Research, Innovation and Digitisation and INCAS for the first national integrated drone programme with MCID financing to support innovation for the further development of relevant dual-use technologies.[27] Companies already active in this area include BlueSpace Technology (separately a partner of the UK's Marshall Group),[28] Oves Enterprise, Phoenix Aerospace and Skyline Drones. Romania is also home to the software hub of Polish military drone manufacturer, Orbotix Industries.

Spacetech, a particular dual-use application of aerospace and other advanced technologies, is a further high-potential area for UK/Romania partnership.

Connected through the European Space Agency, and the work of companies like Airbus, Deimos, GMV and Inmarsat across both countries, there is a platform on which to build.[29] A next step could be greater Romanian involvement with the UK's industry leading Seraphim Accelerator, a programme operated by Seraphim VC.

Demonstrating growing local investor interest in spacetech, Morphosis Capital, the country's leading private equity group, recently took a position in Bulgaria's EnduroSat – a leading European provider of high-end satellites and space services – its first investment outside Romania.[30]

Alongside this are potential partner entities like the Institute of Space Science (another Măgurele Science Park community member) and the Romanian Space Initiative (ROSPIN), working with the next generation of spacetech adjacent professionals.

3.3 The Romanian Space Initiative

The Romanian Space Initiative (ROSPIN) is a non-governmental organisation started by a group of young space scientists to develop the local ecosystem through hands-on activities like technical projects, educational programmes, competitions and community events.

Adrian Dumitrescu joined in January 2021 as Technical Lead for the ROSPIN-SAT-1 satellite project later becoming the organisation's overall Technical Director, starting their high school education programme, ROSPIN School, and joining the ROSPIN Board where he also leads on fundraising.

What is the origin of ROSPIN and what is it trying to do?

AD: ROSPIN began as a student satellite development project in 2019 evolving into a more structured form in early 2021 when we delivered ROSPIN Academy – our first space education course for students. We saw a lack of practical space related activities in Romania and wanted to address this. Our vision is to create a united national community of individuals with similar aspirations for the development of the domestic space sector and its better international integration. For me a major success has been our two space education programmes ROSPIN School (for high schoolers) and ROSPIN Academy (university students) with now nearly 2000 participants over their four years of operation. These programmes have helped us bring the space industry closer to pupils in over 30 counties across Romania, drawing them into the ROSPIN community and enhancing their future appeal to both universities and space companies in Romania and abroad. Another key achievement was participating in the European Space Agency Fly Your Satellite Design Booster Programme with our ROSPIN-SAT-1 project – only the second group from Romania to be selected, joining five other teams from Western Europe. We were part of the programme January 2023-June 2024 and hope to get our mission into space within the next two years. A third accomplishment has been the expansion of ROPSIN to 15 cities across Romania where we organise monthly events for our community of young space enthusiasts. We've now held more than 100 events hosting 4500 participants in the last two years which together with our frequent appearances in the media is helping ROSPIN take space engineering into the Romanian mainstream.

How does ROSPIN engage with UK-based organisations, universities or companies?

AD: There is a strong link between the UK and our organisation. Two of the three ROSPIN Board members have studied Aerospace Engineering in the UK. I completed my Bachelors, MEng and PhD at the University of Southampton and Maria-Alexandra Nita completed her Bachelors and Masters at the University of Manchester before a second Masters in Space Systems at the University of Southampton. ROSPIN is now the national organiser for the Romanian Space Design Competition (ROSDC), part of the International Space Settlement Design Competition (ISSDC) high school competition supported by NASA. ISSDC is coordinated at European level by UK Space Design who have hosted Romanian participants at Imperial College for the competition. ROSPIN is also in contact with UKSEDS, the UK space student's association, to organise a joint online event sharing our experience in running space education organisations. UK universities themselves have become less accessible since Brexit but ROSPIN would like to help develop an exchange programme for its hundreds of students with UK universities and/or companies interested in the space industry. With the UK now returning to exchange programmes like ERASMUS the benefits can work both ways as some of the biggest space companies present in the UK (Thales, GMV, Deimos) are also present in Romania.

What can Romania best contribute to international aerospace collaborations, including with the UK? What does it still most need to address?

AD: Romania has excelled at producing high performing graduates in computer science, mathematics and physics. This naturally translates into the development of a domestic aerospace industry focussed around software development for satellite communications, satellite navigation and cybersecurity. What we've lacked is hardware development and innovation due to the much higher upfront costs and investments specifically required here but we do have the fundamental capacities. There are high-skilled workers in adjacent industries such as automotive and with many Romanians like myself working in relevant roles outside the country collaborations in software development and downstream applications in general can expand into other parts of production. A great example to follow is the EnduroSat satellite company in Bulgaria – thriving despite being outside the European Space Agency. If they can become a leader in the satellite industry so can we.

What areas of aerospace/spacetech do you think offer the greatest current potential for UK/Romania partnerships?

AD: For now I think it is still downstream

space applications that are most likely to produce bilateral collaborations or Romanian spacetech startups. Applications around Earth Observation data processing and insights are relatively cheap to build and can benefit a wide range of industries from agriculture to energy to transportation. ROSPIN organised the 7th edition of the EU-funded Cassini Hackathon in 2024 with more than 70 participants in Bucharest, Cluj and Timisoara developing solutions for tackling climate change and carbon footprint reporting with space data. We have the desire to build towards a space application startup incubator in Bucharest and any UK collaboration and influx of capital would be welcome. Separately Rareș Bisag, the founder of ROSPIN, and I have started a private company, AIM Space, where we work with a group of young professionals to develop Earth Observation based insights for urban applications. We are open to UK collaborations here too!

How might governments, funding bodies, or industry associations better support collaboration between the two countries?

AD: The first thing that comes to mind are bilateral fund agreements between Romania and the UK. There is a precedent in the UK with Innovate UK putting up funds for various bilateral projects with e.g. Germany, Israel and Switzerland, and these pots of money can be used very effectively as the UK and Romania can complement each other when it comes to space development projects. Opening these funds up to NGOs as well as the usual research institutes and private companies can also allow organisations such as ROSPIN to contribute and benefit from hands-on cutting edge projects for our top technical members. A second pathway can be the space companies present in both countries (Thales, GMV, Deimos etc) who could be encouraged and incentivised to exchange experiences and collaborate on more bilateral projects. This would expose both sides to different ways of working and would open up opportunities for new developments in the two countries. On the education route, any programme that supports Romanian students or high school pupils gain exposure to the UK system for a certain period of time is welcome. ROSPIN has the capacity to run such mobility programmes and both sides would certainly benefit as Romanian students would again see the UK as an option despite Brexit thus creating a pipeline of undergraduates and graduates for UK universities.

How do you see ROSPIN developing over the next five years and where does bilateral collaboration fit into this?

AD: On the educational side, ROSPIN has two medium/long term goals:

- turn ROSPIN Academy into a Masters of Space Systems available in Romania with certification from a European University and with speakers from European academia and industry. There is a precedent here from the Bucharest International School of Management (BISM) with certifications from the Maastricht School of Management (Netherlands) and the UK's Abertay University. There is high potential for collaboration with the UK given the demand from students here, the number of UK universities teaching Aerospace Engineering and the lack of undergraduate courses taught in English elsewhere around Europe (95% are in the UK)
- expand our online learning platform, SpacedIn, where we run both ROSPIN School and ROSPIN Academy, into a large scale MOOC platform for space education for anyone, anywhere. There is a gap in the market here and with strong international collaborations we can bring quality content to our platform and build a community beyond Romania.

On the technology development side our objective is to successfully launch ROSPIN-SAT-1 and following that become a small satellite integrator. Adjacent to this ambition, ROSPIN aims to plant the seeds for a startup incubator focused on space applications in Romania (not necessarily in Bucharest). There are many avenues towards this goal, including contributing to setting up an ESA Business Incubator Centre (ESA BIC) in Romania. Both directions on the technical side are based on international collaboration as being a satellite integrator needs a strong European supply chain and a business incubator relies on VC funding from home and abroad.

Dr Adrian Dumitrescu
Co-founder Technical Director

contact@rospin.org

ROMANIAN SPACE INITIATIVE

3.4 Energy transition, clean growth and smart cities

The second theme highlighted from the Romanian-British Strategic Partnership was "promoting trade, investment and entrepreneurship" including both tech and an interest in sharing expertise on clean growth, renewable energy and green finance.

Our activities in tech already significant, Energy/Infrastructure is a further core pillar around which the UK/Romania Business project is built. Underlining their cross-sector synergies we are encouraged by successes like RebelDot whose software developed for Danish company Lautec is now used in 80% of offshore wind turbines worldwide.

Maintaining focus on research, technology and innovation partnerships, we see much to build upon from the impressive international collaboration, *Climate Paths: Innovative Methods for Mitigating Climate and Environmental Impact*, forged between Romania's Social Innovation Solutions, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway grants (EEA Grants) and Innovation Norway.

> "The project strengthens cooperation between Romania and Norway in combating climate change and advancing the green transition. The goal is to develop innovative and sustainable solutions to Europe's climate challenges, supporting the acceleration of the green transition through best practices and technology transfer. This project represents a unique opportunity for Romania to collaborate with Norwegian partners in the field of climate research and innovation and includes an exchange of expertise between experts from both countries to identify and adopt best practices in the green transition."
>
> Social Innovation Solutions

Published in February 2025, an output of this work is the Climate Paths Guide, "a strategic tool, developed to support research institutes and funding bodies in redefining research and innovation... By improving the quality of research, using resources efficiently, stimulating collaborations and diversifying access to funding, the guide charts a clear path to align Romanian research with current economic and social priorities."[31]

The document emphasises "the importance of collaboration between the various public, private and academic sectors to implement efficient technological solutions and generate a positive long-term impact", continuing "innovation, applied research and international partnerships are essential in this process, and Romania has the opportunity to strengthen its position in an increasingly sustainability-oriented European and global landscape."[32]

We consider the UK well-placed to further support and advise on this development – both in terms of the sophistication of its research ecosystem, and specific strengths around renewable energy. This is reaffirmed directly by Social Innovation Solutions indicating their particular interest in collaborating with the UK on:

- joint research projects focused on climate mitigation and adaptation, particularly in the context of Romania's unique environmental and economic challenges
- collaborations in renewable energy, energy efficiency, and sustainable infrastructure developing innovative solutions to reduce emissions and improve resilience to climate change
- partnering on the development of comprehensive climate strategies, policies, and regulations that align with both EU and global climate objectives
- establishing training programmes and workshops to build local capacity in climate science, sustainable practices, and green entrepreneurship, to help foster a new generation of innovators in Romania, equipped with the skills to lead in the green economy.

Another important area is cleantech.

Relatively light in its startup focussed content, the Climate Paths Guide does advocate for mentoring programmes and accelerators for startups and spinoffs from research institutes.[33]

Here we note an increase in the number, particularly of EU-funded, climate-orientated startup programmes in Romania – for example CleanTech Nexus, ClimAccelerator, GreenLeap, SynergistEIC and the DOORS Black Sea Accelerator – and while there is also growth in numbers of its startups tackling agritech and green challenges,[34] most have yet to demonstrate an ability to scale internationally – a critical missing piece.

Limitations in the local startup ecosystem are addressed in detail in *Technology* Report,[35] but its useful to revisit those challenges here in the context of the Strategic Partnership's

interest in promoting dialogue between the startup communities in Romania and the UK, issues we summarised as:

- a need to build appropriate products – those capable of scaling beyond Romania
- building them in a better way i.e. with the right customers in mind and a better understanding of go to market
- having access to sufficient funding at key points in the startup journey.

Linked, and not considerations unique to Romania, their interplay explains a lot about where the country is and what needs to change for its ecosystem to level up.

Additionally it was noted

> "complex regulations and bureaucratic procedures can be daunting... There needs to be a simplification here and effort to adapt laws to the specific needs of digital and technological startups, to give them a different status than SMEs generally, and reduce or eliminate taxes for startups. Support could also be provided for business internationalisation through government programmes and partnerships."[36]
>
> Mircea Vădan, Activize

and that "a further step can be for local accelerators to more effectively incorporate overseas market discovery elements within their programmes, or partner with international equivalents."

These are all areas where knowledge sharing and partnerships with the UK can be of benefit to Romania – both in the cleantech sector specifically, and for its startup ecosystem overall – and this is where the ongoing work of UK/Romania Tech Hub, a vertical of UK/Romania Business, and its partnership with Global Tech Connect already provides direct value for Romanian startups.

The two energy-related startups showing most international potential, OgreAI and Tinia Group, have each been involved with these organisations whether as part of the Global Tech Connect Net Zero Energy Bootcamp 2023, or featuring in *Technology Report*. Beyond them, however, the cleantech pipeline is limited and only one emerging Romanian startup will be involved in the next Global Tech Connect Energy Transition Bootcamp (April 2025), and then only as part of its early stage online component, not the delegation to Innovation Zero World Congress in London.

Cleantech also intersects with the broader theme of smart cities.

Based at University Politehnica Bucharest, the National Competence Centre and solutions for the development of Climate Neutral and Smart Cities (NetZeRoCities), is a hub for research and innovation helping cities around Romania make the best use of existing EU programmes, address their funding and financing gaps, and act as support toward achieving EU Climate Mission milestones.

The project is also deeply tied to Cluj, one of 100 EU Mission Cities, and selected in 2023 amongst 53 pilot cities aiming for climate neutrality and smart infrastructure integration by 2030. Partners locally include Babeș-Bolyai University, the Technical University Cluj, and Transilvania IT Cluster. Another related project in Cluj is the EIT Urban Mobility Startup Support programme operated by Spherik Accelerator.

Past UK engagement has included a conference organised by the Science and Technology Network in Cluj,[37] but a future partnership might incorporate Connected Places Catapult, the UK's innovation accelerator for cities, transport and place leadership, within the Innovate UK network.

3.5 Encouraging innovation and entrepreneurial culture

In parallel with the above are questions around the vitality of research, technology and innovation culture in Romania.

If historical strengths in STEM have proved a national asset these need maintained both through a constant repopulation of its talent pool, and attention to providing sufficient levels of opportunity and reward for pursuing a career in Romania. That UK companies, startups and research institutes boast such exceptional Romanian professionals points to the extent of brain drain in previous years, and while the country itself is getting richer and providing more career options locally, public sector R&D and its associated infrastructure – the underpinnings of the innovation ecosystem – does still need to catchup.

> "Our low EU ranking is not down to lack of expertise or capability in research and innovation, but is to a fair degree a function of national policies when it comes to public-private partnerships, higher education regulations on research and innovation, or

> lack of common ground when it comes to intellectual property. Bureaucracy is high, processes are slow, and tech transfer offices are few and underdeveloped."[38]

Anca Roman, INNO

The public policy prescription for this is set out in the National Research, Innovation, and Smart Specialisation Strategy[39] and through the activities of UEFISCDI and those to whom it delegates. Here there is some ongoing and positive bilateral government to government dialogue. It builds upon past UK/Romania collaborations and is helping to identify new areas of potential cooperation through, for example, the UK Science and Technology Network and the British Council in Romania.[40]

We come at this from a different angle.

In *Technology Report* we considered innovation culture from a startup perspective noting a Romanian business culture not especially encouraging of risk taking and in need of establishing better industry-specific frameworks e.g. for the adoption of employee share option programmes.

In this report the necessary lens is spin-outs, technology transfer and building an innovation and commercialisation friendly research environment.

> "Startups come from other companies. The most successful founders in Romania worked for other software or product companies in the past and that informs their decision making and management and leadership capabilities. I don't think we have almost any university spin-off that has raised significant money. I think it's very hard to make a successful company right out of college in Romania as the research environment is very academic-oriented rather than commercially driven. You don't go into research with the assumption that one day you will spin out a startup."[41]

Bogdan Iordache, Underline Ventures

Anca Roman, Head of INNO Platform and Investment Attraction at the North West Development Agency confirms this, "researchers and academics we met during our focus groups are not that interested in this transition, even reluctant to commercialise research-generated products. Its about incentives and mindset – with universities focusing mainly on academic output and researchers mainly guided by funding opportunities, technology transfer doesn't get a lot of bandwidth."

> "Each university in our region has its own TTO focused on identifying, developing, and accelerating research with market potential, creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem, nurturing innovation and crafting pathways to impact. In practice, the TTOs' job has proven difficult – researchers remain reluctant to think about their work this way and the TTOs themselves don't always have enough employees to push for commercialisation even when the research product is excellent."

Anca Roman, INNO

While pointing to several financing programmes attempting to shift this she argues these might be better understood as promoting Research as a Service (RaaS) to external companies, rather than aimed at commercialising research in the form of spin-outs. Similarly Roman believes a fundamental problem persists around Intellectual Property frameworks and their influence on any subsequent commercial exploitation of research.

Boxed in by these policy and legislative constraints spin-out programmes have struggled to gain traction, or their design has lacked a necessary tailoring to Romanian conditions.

INNO is one trying now to iterate its approach based on this contact with reality.

Working with several teams to help them orient research towards the market they have adapted their approach to fostering technology transfer. Early results are encouraging and they hope to scale the programme "what we propose is to help TTOs implement new models, mainly market-oriented ones, but this probably first implies proposing policy changes."

Oxentia, a UK innovation consultancy with some experience in Romania – and Romanian-origin Andreea Iacoban on staff –

describe what they are finding in the country:

> “Technology transfer is a major growth opportunity for the ecosystem and Romania has a lot of potential here. Many ventures in Romania are built by corporate entrepreneurs in the digital sector, but there aren’t yet many university/ research organisation spinouts, even though Romania has a high relative percentage of STEM graduates. I’d argue there’s an opportunity to leverage the universities’ strong focus in disciplines beyond the digital space, such as medicine, life science, biology, manufacturing and engineering to generate more innovation in these sectors.”
>
> Andreea Iacoban, Oxentia

Part of this, she continues, might be down to under engagement between industry and universities, “corporates tend to work well with startups, but corporates-universities and SME-universities not so much.”

On how the UK and Romania could tackle this together she believes “an innovation policy collaboration/programme would benefit both ecosystems for sectors in which Romania is very strong and which are also a UK priority, and where there are rapidly evolving regulations: AI, quantum, blockchain.”

Reflecting on Oxentia’s track record of building technology transfer capabilities in international ecosystems Iacoban concludes, “I see a lot of value in a capacity-building programme for technology transfer offices in Romania, where the UK can lead on providing expertise and lessons learned and potentially offer training through a secondment programme.”[42]

Mihai Sfintescu, one of the first VC active in Romania and now deeply involved with the European Innovation Council, goes further seeing an opening for it to become a regional leader in tech transfer and spin-outs with the right strategic improvements.

His prescription is five-fold (1) foster partnerships between academia and industry to bridge the gap in tech transfer, (2) develop targeted financial instruments for spin-outs, especially in deep tech sectors, (3) simplify intellectual property regulations to help researchers and entrepreneurs commercialise innovations and transfer IP rights to spin-outs, (4) build specialised clusters to encourage collaboration and resource sharing among startups, universities, and investors, and (5) strengthen tech transfer offices in universities and research institutes to provide consistent guidance and resources for spin-outs.

Noting many of these actions are ongoing, Sfintescu says what matters now is to accelerate this and that here Romania would benefit significantly from international cooperation, particularly with strategic partners like the UK.[43]

If the policy framework to achieve this has to be set at government level, the energy and practical solutions to what is missing is often best found at grassroots.

ROSPIN School and ROSPIN Academy are powerful examples of individuals taking the lead to create initiatives addressing Romania’s entrepreneurial ambition and awareness gap. Alongside it we highlight two other exceptional programmes, Innovation Labs and Launch Romania.

Founded in 2012 by Professor Răzvan Rughiniș of University Politehnica Bucharest and serial entrepreneur Andrei Pitiș, Innovation Labs is the main university based startup accelerator programme in Romania.

Innovation Labs Bucharest, March 2025

Its vision is to bridge the gap between technical education and entrepreneurial practice, fostering a culture of innovation among students and young professionals.

> “we are at the beginning of the funnel. We’re a nationwide pre-accelerator creating teams for the other accelerators and for the VC funds and for the rest of the ecosystem.”[44]
>
> Andrei Pitiș, Innovation Labs

Now operating three streams ‘student driven’, ‘university research spin-off’ and ‘senior team’ in nine technology tracks – including cybersecurity, smart cities and sustainability – it has guided almost 700 teams in 22 universities and 11 cities across the country through hackathon and pre-acceleration phases before a Demo Day, and recently,

chance to secure investment from Early Game Ventures, one of the leading VC in Romania.A 2024 prize winner, Pentra, was later accepted into the Global Tech Connect Cybersecurity Bootcamp 2024.

We referenced the importance of Innovation Labs in *Technology Report* writing "equipping young people with the skills they need to succeed as innovators is a particularly impactful intervention. Inspired by the work of Innovation Labs, UK/Romania Business will seek to extend this activity by encouraging founders in the UK to participate in this and similar initiatives. A further possible step is to take these founders directly into Romanian schools."

We take a step forward in that now through our partnership with Launch Romania, Măgurele Science Park Association and in their work on the Laser Valley Innovation Bootcamp.

Started as an initiative of MCID alongside Launch Romania, MSP, and supported by Banca Comercială Română (BCR), Laser Valley Innovation Bootcamp creates connections for researchers from Romania's top national research and development institutes with entrepreneurs and students over an intense three day period.

Introducing teams to topics like project financing, the creation of minimum viable products, and technology transfer, the mixed teams of researchers, students and entrepreneurs race to develop new innovative projects or further evolve existing initiatives. The third edition of Laser Valley Innovation Bootcamp takes place in May 2025.[45]

Laser Valley Bootcamp 2024

As with Innovation Labs, Launch Romania defines its mission around supporting a new generation of founders and technology talent in Romania, helping them anticipate, understand and solve startup challenges. Via a community-based approach it wants to help build an entrepreneurial ecosystem that encourages risk-takers, nurtures innovation, and integrates education, research, and industry to drive startup creation and growth.

To do this, and supported by BCR, in collaboration with Google Romania and founding partner, How To Web, it is has expanded its offering beyond founders to two other groups: students, as the founders of the future; and researchers, to better promote innovation and technology transfer.

And Launch Romania's deep link to How to Web – the Bucharest-based group behind the leading tech conference in Eastern Europe – is core to its grasp of the challenge and design of its interventions:

> "Before proposing solutions, we needed to truly understand what holds back entrepreneurial growth in Romania. How to Web has been organising startup events for more than a decade and working with hundreds of founders and they've seen patterns emerge – money isn't the first barrier in Romania, mindset is. Teams aren't hard to build because of lack of talent here but because it is not connected. Resources exist across the ecosystem but they are not optimally utilised."
>
> Andrei Cojan, Launch Romania

That How to Web connection serves also as a magnet.

Launch Romania can showcase emerging founders through their conference platform and use it to engage an international audience and expertise otherwise beyond it – a side event at How to Web 2024 focussed on best practice in technology transfer. "We learn from international ecosystems ahead of us, while our experienced founders share real stories and prove what's possible here. The right programmes, people, and strategic partnerships – including with the UK – are precursors to Romania's transformation."

Since its 2021 founding Launch Romania has hosted more than 150 events – 48 across 11 cities and attracting over 2800 attendees in 2024 alone. These are supplemented by its podcast series, LaunchPod, and extensive programme of online meetings. Supported again by BCR they opened "Builders House" in 2024 as a home and base for founders, tech professionals, students and researchers "A permanent physical community matters," says Cojan, "we're seeing and shaping a future where ideas can be validated and every innovator finds support. Collective actions create a ripple effect of positive change and Builders House will be one of those key nodes."

Photo credit: Mylo Heemsbergen

4. Conclusions and recommendations

UK/Romania Business

We approached this report from two angles – from the UK side noting misperceptions in its understanding of Romania, and with a recognition there are still shortcomings to be addressed if the country is to improve its research, technology and innovation outcomes.

We set out some areas where bilateral engagement has high upside potential, and where the UK has an ability to offer support and guidance in a more general sense.

To conclude we look at ways of better bridging the two ecosystems and propose pathways along which to develop enhanced and more productive future partnerships.

4.1 Re-imagining the UK/Romania relationship

In March 2023, to coincide with the signing of the Romanian-UK Strategic Partnership, the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Romania hosted an event at the Palace of Westminster 'Re-imagining Romania: what have we been getting wrong?' with a panel of four Romaniaphile British nationals discussing some common misperceptions.[46]

Romania's image here has, of course, changed in the 18 years since its EU accession. If migration has become a contentious political issue, with one million plus of its nationals now in the UK, this person to person contact undermines the negative stereotypes sometimes seen in headlines. As noted, many highly talented and hard-working Romanians contribute substantially to the UK economy with research and technology talent particularly well represented.

But this only goes so far.

As a country we in Britain can still lazily see it as a cheap outsourcing option rather a than cost-effective collaborator moving rapidly up the value chain. In writing our report we occasionally encountered this assumption when advocating for Romania as a research and innovation partner.

This mental filter can limit UK willingness to engage in Romania or influence funding available for bilateral initiatives. If present at institutional level it may also penetrate into a unfavourable framing of the UK/Romania relationship with the risk of an overly narrow belief in what can be accomplished between the two countries. It might manifest as project-design boxed in by a lack of ambition, and an unconscious expectation – or tolerance toward – mediocrity in outcome.

On the other side, conversations with Romanian partners for this report identified a need to broaden and deepen the foundation of the country's research, technology and innovation ecosystem. Here they noted a number of clear touchpoints for increased bilateral engagement.

And *increase* comes over as the central point.

Much of current engagement seems focussed on government to government dialogue. This is both important and necessary but can only be one part of the story.

We argue a broader discussion must be driven by ecosystem leaders, and around their priorities and needs. This is likely to produce a set of actions – or emphasis within them – that differ from those established by intergovernmental KPIs.

This also points to the inadequacy of legacy mechanisms occupying the bilateral space.

It is the gap UK/Romania Business is created to fill, and in the context of this report, to outline a plan for stronger research, technology and innovation partnerships built around five powerful action points:

- enhance the visibility of Romania within the UK research and innovation ecosystem
- improve access to, and use of funding, at national, bilateral and EU levels
- strengthen technology transfer and commercialisation knowledge sharing
- encourage sector-specific partnerships in core areas of strategic and commercial importance
- develop and promote new or enhanced channels and mechanisms for collaboration

These sit alongside our already extensive work connecting Romanian startups to the UK ecosystem and its investors via UK/Romania Tech Hub the project initiated by our first publication, *Technology Report: understanding and advancing the UK/Romania opportunity*.

i. Improving Romania's visibility in the UK innovation ecosystem

Our argument throughout has been Romania is under-appreciated as an innovation partner for the UK. This is an education, visibility and persistence problem.

Building on the impressive foundations laid by the under-resourced UK Science and Technology Network and its dialogue with UEFISCDI at the G2G level, and in-line with an objective of the Romanian-UK Strategic Partnership, we will work with them to foster deeper bilateral links with UKRI, its Innovate UK offshoot, and the nine specialised Catapults under its umbrella.

Additionally UK/Romania Business will take the lead in brokering connections between UK R&I bodies and organisations like Măgurele Science Park Association and Transilvania IT Cluster. For sector specific entities e.g. Biomentorhub and ROSPIN, this will extend to engaging the several Catapult offshoots intersecting their work.

ii. Accessing funding opportunities

Facing a domestic investment deficit the focus of Romanian partners on external funding opportunities is understandable. It has also often struggled to tap, or absorb effectively, available EU monies.

With the UK again part of Horizon new possibilities arise for joint bids uniting the British and Romanian research and innovation communities. DOORS is a good example of success here and potentially a model we can promote as best practice.

We also benefit now from the support of EIT Hub UK and an EIT Community Hub in Romania. UK/Romania Business and its Romanian partners will work with them to identify and promote both bilateral and pan-European initiatives.

Our efforts to increase the visibility of Romanian research capabilities in the UK, and relationship building with UKRI and others, may also have the effect of opening up these channels as new funding sources. This might include a new bilateral pathway similar to those operated by Innovate UK with Germany, Israel and Switzerland.

The focus of UK/Romania Business on strategically important sectors is also a strength here. New geopolitical realities will likely concentrate funding pools around themes like dual-use and energy independence technologies.

We will work with partners to identify and promote research and innovation expertise in both the UK and Romania and based on synergies encourage joint funding bids. In addition we will advocate for a bilateral innovation fund to co-finance joint research and commercialisation efforts.

iii. Tech transfer and commercialisation

Enhancing Romania's technology transfer infrastructure and creating new pathways for the commercialisation of research output are force-multipliers for its innovation ecosystem and wider economy.

This translates here as assisting the formation of UK-supported Technology Transfer Offices within Romanian universities and providing training for its researchers on IP protection, licensing, and startup incubation.

Our proposal, alongside the partner organisations in this report, is to first utilise the Romanian research diaspora in the UK as a conduit between leading universities and institutes in both countries, working toward memorandums of understanding and more formal tech transfer mentoring partnerships.

In addition we will highlight and promote the expertise and specific interventions offered by Oxentia and others, and examples like Founders at the University of Cambridge, a strategic initiative building on its research expertise to bring innovation to life through new business creation.

iv. Sector-specific partnerships

Above we sketched two major areas in which UK/Romania Business sees high-potential for bilateral partnership – defence and energy/infrastructure. They sit alongside technology, the subject of our first report, as three of our core operational themes. Each will be the subject of a dedicated future report and in which we'll set out our plans for sector-specific partnerships.

We also highlighted the example of collaboration between Engine by Starling and Salt Bank. That intersection of technology and finance is one to which UK/Romania Business will similarly return.

And as the work of Biomentorhub shows there are additional high promise areas, and in the context of the UK's International Technology Strategy further incentive for partnerships in e.g. AI, quantum technologies and semiconductors.[47]

The bilateral space is rich with opportunity and our work to improve the visibility of Romania in the UK will help to surface these for others. We will continue to champion them and stay involved in their development.

v. Better collaborative mechanisms

Each of the four recommendations above reveal an explicit need for better bilateral information sharing or platforms for communication and collaboration; that conversations too often take place in silos or amongst those going through the motions of connecting Britain and Romania.

Hub organisations including Măgurele Science Park, Transilvania IT Cluster and UK/Romania Business will step in here, connecting their strong networks to provide a vital channel through which to cascade knowledge and share opportunity.

Starting with online discovery and matchmaking sessions bringing together researchers, startups, and corporates, and moving from there to focussed in-person missions in both countries and Enterprise Europe Network brokerage events, we'll help build the familiarity and trust necessary for long-term partnerships.

These platforms will also provide an avenue for UK companies to discover patents, access research as a service (RaaS), or establish direct B2B connections of the type illustrated by the SCSK {digital} collaboration with Roweb and Engine by Starling's work with Salt Bank.

4.2 The impact of UK/Romania Tech Hub

Startups are not directly a focus of this report, but in its innovation culture and spin-out sections, and the interest of report partners in acceleration programmes and international scaling, the demand to service this space is clear.

We make no specific recommendation here on supporting this ecosystem, directing attention instead to the ongoing work of UK/Romania Tech Hub, the project launched in June 2024 alongside our first publication, *Technology Report: understanding and advancing the UK/Romania opportunity*.

Nine months on we spotlight its activities and accomplishments.

Ecosystem partnerships

Active in Romania through our engagement across the local tech ecosystem and investor network, we presented *Technology Report* in Cluj at RebelDot in September 2025. We have partnered with How to Web on the London launch of its *Venture in Eastern Europe 2024* report, and with Endeavor Romania, Make IT in Oradea and Rubik Hub on their UK outreach activities.

Working alongside Blue Lake VC and Oasis we're helping them create a community for international founders in London – a place where Romanian startups can find a home.

Taking the message wider we spoke at a Web Summit 24 fringe event organised by the British Embassy in Lisbon, showcasing the Romanian ecosystem and highlighting the value of bilateral partnerships.

Fireside series

The Fireside Series are conversations inspired by the startup stories and ecosystem builders featured in *Technology Report*. In these intimate and exclusive gatherings we hear directly from founders, VC and influential voices in the diaspora tech community, sharing insights from their entrepreneurial journeys. Events to-date have featured Digitail, Neurolabs and Tractable – this last, the UK's 100th unicorn and its first with a Romanian co-founder. More are planned for later in the year.

Global Tech Connect

Through Global Tech Connect – the alliance of UK-based bilateral startup programmes – UK/Romania Tech Hub is integrated with an international community of founders, investors and corporates, and we're supporting Romanian startups participate in sector-specific Bootcamps including cybersecurity, energy transition and fintech.

Partners here have included Bosch, Citi, Clean Growth Fund, Climate First, CMS, Dawn Capital, Department for Business and Trade/Global Entrepreneur Programme, JLR, HSBC, Innovation Zero, Mastercard, Nauta Capital, Softbank, Schneider Electric, Shell Ventures, Stripe, Sumitomo Corporation Europe Ltd and Sustainable Ventures.

UK/Romania Tech Hub is the first and most established strand of UK/Romania Business. We'll adapt its successful approach to build communities and promote opportunities in our three other key domains – defence, energy/infrastructure and financial services.

Concentrating only on areas where our effort, precisely applied, delivers the greatest commercial impact, and where our value is amplified by cross-sector synergies, UK/Romania Business is moving the needle, not just ticking boxes.

Be part of what we're building.

Support UK/Romania Business

uk-romania.business/mission

5. Acknowledgements and endnotes

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Endnotes

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[3] https://rezolv.energy/project/dama-solar. Rezolv Energy is also developing the 600MW capacity New Dunarea East & West Wind farms in Romania

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[7] An English language version of the report is available for direct download at https://uefiscdi.gov.ro/resource-867892-SNCISIenglish-version.pdf

[8] As PUBLIC write "The EU is a pivotal enabler for the region's technology ecosystem on technology policy priorities, standards, funding local public digitalisation, research, and commercial opportunities. Frameworks and organisations like the European Investment Fund, Horizon Europe, European Regional and Development Fund, and EU Cohesion Fund enable countless research activities, compound the impact of local funding efforts, and improve market maturity across CEE." p.44, *Technology and Innovation in Central and Eastern Europe*

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[12] This report's author, Dr David Webster, has enjoyed a long association with the Rațiu family and is affiliated with the Rațiu Forum including now supporting the development of an as yet unannounced new project

[13] See https://newstrategycenter.ro/project/security-challenges-in-the-black-sea-nato-the-wider-region-and-the-global-order-pledging-for-a-free-and-open-black-sea

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[19] p.5. This author participated as a consultee in the PUBLIC report

[20] pp. 82-84, *Technology and Innovation in Central and Eastern Europe*

[21] Those six themes are foreign affairs; defence and security; law enforcement, home affairs and justice cooperation; people-to-people links; cybersecurity, technology and hybrid threats; and, promoting trade, investment and entrepreneurship. The full text is linked in note 4 above

[22] An overview of the UK's trade relationship with Romania is available from the Department for Business and Trade https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67b70151bd116e3d7b1cf323/romania-trade-and-investment-factsheet-2025-02-21.pdf

[23] https://blogs.fcdo.gov.uk/martinharris/2012/09/24/more-power-to-the-pumas. The outline of the agreement was reached by the then Conservative Defence Minister, Quentin Davies, subsequently a long-time member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Romania. The author of this report has provided Secretariat to APPG Romania since 2017

[24] See also the 2024 UK/Romania Business report, Discovering Romania's cybersecurity ecosystem

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[32] p.99, *Ghid de bune practici*

[33] p.29, *Ghid de bune practici*

[34] See Romanian Green Startups Overview Report 2023, a collaborative effort by Activize,

Impact Hub Bucharest, and Spherik, supported by EIT Climate-KIC and in partnership with Raiffeisen Bank and OMV Petrom

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[36] p.33, *Technology Report*

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[39] See particularly Section 5 ‘General and specific objectives; challenges and directions for action,’ pp. 22-35 and Section 8 ‘Governance’ pp.96-103

[40] https://agerpres.ro/2025/03/06/comunicat-de-presa---ministrul-educatiei-si-cercetarii--1428574

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[42] All quotes taken and adapted with approval from email correspondence with Oxentia

[43] All quotes taken and adapted with approval from email correspondence with Marius

[44] Excerpted from ‘Innovation Labs, the stepping stone for the future startup founders’ an extended interview conducted by Start-up.ro as part of their *Romanian Startups: Roaring Tigers of Europe* documentary project. Watch the full documentary here

[45] Details of UK/Romania Business involvements will be announced at a later date

[46] Since 2017 this author has provided secretariat to APPG Romania, creating the event referenced here

[47] IBM is to set up a quantum innovation centre in Iași, and the Romanian government is planning to create a domestic semiconductor manufacturing capability

About the author

Dr David Webster is the Founder of UK/Romania Business and Co-founder and Managing Partner of Global Tech Connect, the alliance of UK-based international tech programmes uniting these to better support startups from those partner nations enter, learn from or scale in the UK.

A government relations professional by background he first visited Romania in 1999 and since 2017 has served as Secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Romania. Other roles include advisor (Romania), Foundation for Jewish Heritage; member of the Advisory Board at the Diaspora Initiative, and as an advisor to the Rațiu Forum.

The views expressed in this report are solely the author’s own and do not reflect the opinions and beliefs of the supporting partners.

About UK/Romania Business

UK/Romania Business is trade and investment evolved, the next generation vector for discovery, development and delivery of opportunity – designed to drive targeted commercial success.

Anchored in London, we concentrate on four themes – technology, energy/infrastructure, defence and. Financial services – areas where our effort, precisely applied, delivers the greatest commercial impact and where our value is amplified through cross-sector synergies.

Now incubating UK/Romania Tech Hub – a network of startups, investors, corporates and mentors to support companies as they scale, and connect businesses with the innovation they need – we'll adapt this approach to build communities and promote opportunities in our other key domains.

About the report partners and main contributors

UK/Romania Business

The Biomentorhub Association is a non-governmental, non-profit, non-political, independent association connecting students interested in the fields of biosciences and medicine with experienced mentors specialised in these fields and supporting Romanian specialists from the diaspora with research experience in biosciences or medicine interested in discovering professional and collaboration opportunities in Romania and contributing to the development of scientific research.

DOORS is €9 research and innovation project, financed by the European Commission's Horizon 2020 research funding programme, and bringing together 35 partner institutions from the Black Sea region and across Europe, led by Romania's National Institute for Research and Development on Marine Geology and Geo-ecology. Development of the System of Systems is co-led by Professor Andrew Tyler with partners in the region.

EIT Hub UK is an outreach location of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). The Hub creates synergies between the EIT community and the UK innovation ecosystem to support the growth of innovative startups and increase the numbers of EU – UK collaborative projects together with the EIT Knowledge Innovation Communities (KICs). The main activities of all the KICs include entrepreneurship education, innovation-driven projects, and business creation services.

INNO, part of the Northwest Regional Development Agency (ADR Nord Vest), contributes to regional development by attracting foreign investment and developing the innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem. The INNO platform is a digital tool developed as a point of interaction for regional stakeholders in the innovation ecosystem with the aim of increasing regional competitiveness by supporting access to technology transfer and developing an innovation-based economy.

Launch Romania is a community of the next generation of founders and technology talent in Romania. Whether you are a founder, student, researcher, professional or stakeholder in the technology industry at Launch you'll find resources and opportunities to increase your chances of success: events, workshops, Q&A, pilot projects, expertise, feedback and much more.

Măgurele Science Park Association is the support organisation behind the development of the largest state-of-the-art science and technology park in Romania. We foster dialogue between research and academia, entrepreneurs and businesses, and the public authorities to stimulate economic growth and competitiveness in the Bucharest-Ilfov region through technological transfer and innovation, and encourage a more intense technological transfer between research and production, technology, services, and innovative commercial applications.

The Romanian Space Initiative (ROSPIN) is a non-governmental organisation born from the passion of young people with great ambitions, united by a single goal – to develop the Romanian space ecosystem through various activities such as hands-on technical projects, educational programmes, competitions and community events. The vision is to create a united community of individuals with similar aspirations in regard to the space sector in Romania and its international integration.

Social Innovation Solutions find, create and expand solutions for the future supporting youth, entrepreneurs and governments for a better tomorrow. We do that on 3 levels (i) supporting youth to understand entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship as career options (ii) supporting entrepreneurs and large businesses to understand and support social innovation and be better prepared for a complex future and (iii) supporting governments and public authorities to create inclusive and forward-thinking public policies.

Transilvania IT Cluster works at the intersection between entrepreneurship, researchers, innovators, and public administration, pushing forward discussion and action around digital transformation and enhancing community development through digitisation. Founded in 2013 by Aries Transilvania, the Cluster originally supported employees of member companies in the acquisition of technical and soft skills, as well as offering a platform of knowledge and training for the implementation of collaborative projects. While this remains an important focus, Transilvania IT Cluster has evolved in tandem with the sector development in Cluj.

The Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI) is an autonomous research funding agency in Romania, under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Research whose mission is to promote quality and leadership for higher education, research, development and innovation. It is the national contact point for Horizon Europe.

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