Meeting notes: IGLO Open – Union of skills

Date:	19.11.2025
Place of the event:	Czech Permanent Representation, Rue du Trone 130, Ixelles 1050
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Presentation by the European Commission on the Union of Skills

- Dalibor Mladenka, DG EAC, Unit C1 – Innovation and EIT

The Union of Skills

- Responding to persistent skills shortages in Europe and the growing gap between technological change and the responsiveness of education and training systems.

- Key Challenges
  - Skills shortages & gaps: Europe lacks sufficient skilled workers in both quantity and quality.
  - Transformation speed gap: Education and training systems struggle to keep up with rapid technological change.
  - Fragmented governance: Skills intelligence and coordination remain scattered among many actors.

- Main Initiatives under the Union of Skills
  - Equip citizens with skills for life and work.
  - Support upskilling and reskilling for future-oriented jobs.
  - Improve the circulation of skills within the single market.
  - Better attract and retain skilled workers from third countries.

University–Business Partnerships

- Industry–university collaboration is central to aligning education with labour market needs.
- Supported activities include:
  - partnerships in sectors with critical skills gaps,
  - work-integrated learning (apprenticeships, internships, project work),
  - university incubators and entrepreneurial support.
- New partnership initiatives will launch in 2026, focusing on high-demand sectors.

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- Entrepreneurship seen as essential for innovation.
- The Commission promotes embedding entrepreneurial learning in curricula, including creativity, risk-taking and problem-solving.
- Support provided through Erasmus+, European University Alliances and EIT KICs.

EIT Model & Education Initiatives

- EIT integrates knowledge, innovation and business through training, networking and entrepreneurship support.
- EIT Education contributes to Union of Skills targets (STEM participation, reducing underachievement, gender balance).
- Dedicated actions include:
    - STEM Education Strategic Plan,
    - Deep Tech Talent Initiative: 700,000 learners trained in digital, green and entrepreneurial skills; micro-credentials; teacher training; support to startups and scale-ups.
    - EIT Campus: a single online platform offering 250+ innovation and entrepreneurship courses; over 300,000 visitors and 50,000 learners since 2023; scaling up in 2026–28.
    - HEI Initiative: boosting innovation capacity in higher education (643 HEIs, 716 organisations supported so far).

European Skills Academies

- Focus on upskilling and reskilling for net-zero and other strategic industries under the NZIA.
- Target both low- and high-skilled workers to address persistent shortages.
- EIT leads the design and delivery through its KICs, with examples including the European Battery Alliance Academy and European Solar Academy.
    - Examples
        - European Battery Alliance (EBA) Academy
        - European Solar Academy

Presentation – Good Practice Example from the Czech Republic - MSIC

- Adéla Hradilová, Moravian-Silesian Innovation Centre (MSIC)

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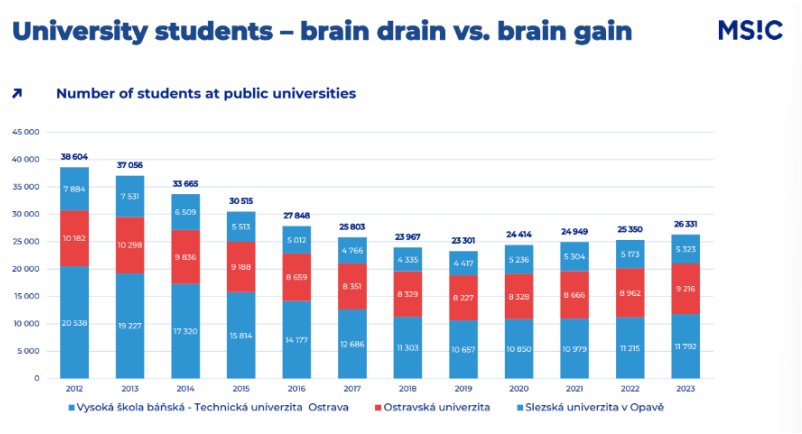
The presentation opened with key indicators illustrating the socio-economic situation of the Moravian-Silesian Region and the rationale for its ongoing transition “from coal to a more entrepreneurial and innovative region.”

As of 31 December 2022:

- MSR accounts for 8.8% of Czech GDP, confirming its relevance within the national economy, though still lagging behind the most dynamic regions.
- The region hosts 25,572 SMEs, indicating a broad but predominantly small-scale business base.
- Only 5.2 R&D employees per 1,000 economically active inhabitants work in corporate research, reflecting low private-sector innovation capacity.
- Just 15% of the population holds a university degree, signalling limited availability of highly skilled labour and contributing to talent outflow.
- The median gross monthly salary is 35,723 CZK, below the national average, which further challenges talent attraction.
- Unemployment stands at 4%, indicating a tight labour market where companies struggle to find qualified workers.

University student trends (public universities in the region):



MSIC – Mission and Vision

- MSIC is a purpose-driven, publicly owned innovation centre (5 public stakeholders) with the mission: “Enhancing the regional innovation ecosystem.”
- Vision 2030:
  - Become a leading actor in regional innovation ecosystem development.
  - Inspire entrepreneurship across age groups, support companies across all stages, attract talent to MSR.
- Key service areas:
  - Support for internationally successful startups
  - Technology innovation & internalisation of SMEs
  - Technology transfer and adoption
- Vision metrics:
  - 1000+ companies repeatedly using innovation services
  - 1800+ launches supported
  - 3× leverage of regional budgets
  - 1 unicorn + 30 scaleups

- Main activity pillars:
    - RIS MSR – long-term regional innovation strategy
    - T-PARK – facilities for tech and innovative companies
    - Business services – tailored support for startup and SME growth

MSIC and university students

- MSIC focuses on strengthening entrepreneurial and soft skills, complementing the strong technological education of local universities.
    - LabZero – Hands-on innovation and entrepreneurship support for students:
        - Reverse pitching: companies/researchers present innovation challenges
        - Student teams develop solutions
        - 3-day bootcamps, workshops, design thinking
        - Final demo day + optional incubation
    - Additional activities
        - Gallup CliftonStrengths testing and consultations
        - MSIC Startovárna: workshops, talks, and “fuck-up nights” across regional cities
        - Skills-building for aspiring entrepreneurs

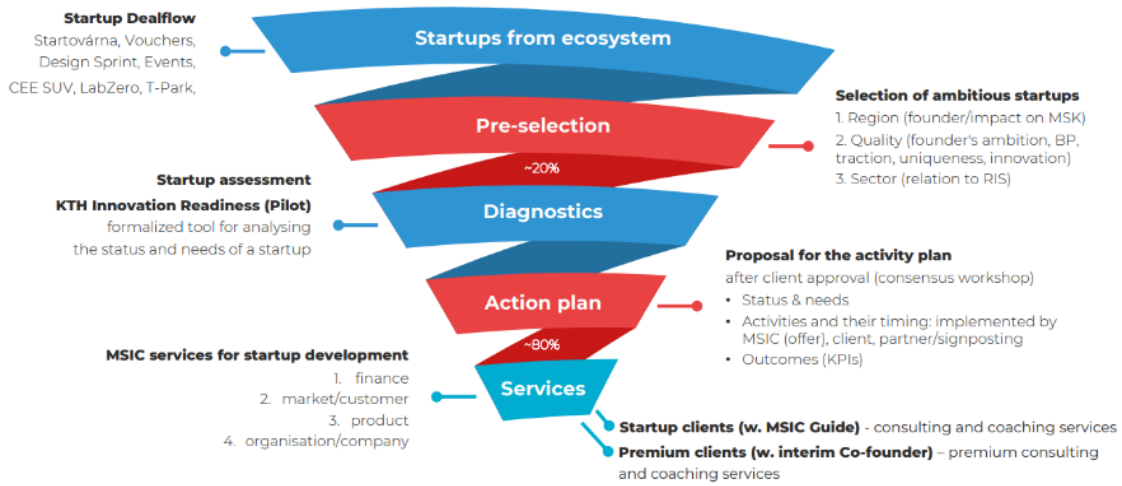
Startup development services

- MSIC provides structured startup support, using the Innovation Readiness Level (KTH) as an assessment tool and offering tailored development programmes:
    - Coaching & mentoring
        - Startup Impuls
        - Startup Expand
    - Acceleration & internationalisation
    - EnviBooster akcelerátor
    - CEE Startup Network / Vouchers

Grant advisory

- TAČR (Technology Agency CZ)
- Technology Incubation
- Cascade funding
- EIC Accelerator / pre-Accelerator

MSIC Startup Service Funnel



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Presentation – Good Practice Example from the Czech Republic – InnovPrecMed project

- Prof. Andrew David Miller, Mendel University ("honorary Czech")

21st century universities

- 19th century universities – focus on teaching and research (Humboldtian model)
- 21st century universities – focus on teaching, research and innovation

Deep Tech Precision Medicine

- Personalised medicine – means understanding the genetic, immunological and/or metabolic individuality of individual patients to match each given individual with the most appropriate active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) for disease treatment, "one size does not fit all"
- Precision therapeutics – means taking control of the delivery of APIs to disease-specific target sites and/or making use of APIs with extreme disease target specificity for a disease treatment
- The EIT HEI InnovPrecMed Consortium includes partners such as Lightly, PancrEvo, BioVendor Group, KP Therapeutics, Mendel University and others across Europe.
- Opportunities in Precision Medicine
    - Developing diagnostic tests and devices for disease-specific biomarkers
    - Designing APIs with extreme target specificity
    - Creating advanced lipid nanoparticle systems (LNPs/TNPs) for intravenous or alternative delivery
    - Improving techniques for concentrating nanomedicines at disease-specific sites

Vision of InnovPrecMed

- "To empower higher-education institutions to become engines of innovation in deep-tech precision medicine across Europe – starting in Central and Eastern Europe."
- The project focuses on building the capacity of universities, innovators, and companies to grow a sustainable precision-medicine ecosystem in the region.

Main Activities of Deep Tech Precision Medicine

- Bridging Business and Deep-Tech Precision Medicine
    - Development of online courses, mentoring and internship programmes for both scientists and business professionals
    - Bringing business skills to researchers and deep-tech understanding to industry actors
- Fuelling Innovation and Start-up Growth
    - Supporting scale-up of 12+ companies
    - Launching at least two new start-ups in precision medicine
    - Empowering innovators to commercialise research results
- Transforming the Innovation Ecosystem
    - Strengthening technology-transfer offices (TTOs)
    - Building ecosystem partnerships
    - Establishing "company-builder" functions within the consortium
    - Enhancing collaboration between universities, businesses and investors

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Future Opportunities for Growth

- Online growth – e-publishing of course materials and books
    - For Deep Tech Precision Medicine
    - For innovation, business and economics
- Internal growth – Ecosystem growth – initiatives to enhance local culture of innovation
- External growth – consortium growth – welcome new HEI, institution and company partnerships
    - The project collaborates with emerging spin-offs and partners such as:
        - MendelFOLD (cofounded company in Brno), NANTEO, Phoenestra (Vienna), Nano PrecMed (South Moravia and Austrian regions), MUNI, JIC, TAmiRNA, EVOBIOTIX, Brno Expat Centre

Q&A and Discussion

Question 1: How do you work with universities to encourage them to engage in the kinds of innovation activities you run at MSIC?

- Adéla Hradilová (MSIC):

Ms Hradilová explained that MSIC cooperates with three public universities in the region, all of which are part of European University Alliances. MSIC helps them design acceleration and incubation programmes, and some initiatives—such as the GreenLand programme—are already embedded directly at the universities.

MSIC connects institutions and students with entrepreneurs, supports innovative entrepreneurship during bachelor's studies, and provides contacts and mentoring. She also noted that there are significant differences between large and small universities, especially when it comes to leadership (e.g., rectors' openness to change).

Question 2: Starting something independently is difficult—legal constraints, institutional reluctance, and general barriers often discourage people. What systemic solutions would you recommend for someone who wants to innovate but faces too many obstacles?

- Andrew David Miller (Mendel University):

Mr Miller stressed that innovation must be seen as the essential future for universities. Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs) often have a protective legal mindset, which prioritises safeguarding the university rather than enabling innovation. Universities frequently want to own all intellectual property, but then lack the capacity to use it effectively—resulting in wasted opportunities. He argued for institutional reform, new innovation hubs, and opening dialogue about change. For universities to remain relevant, they must fully integrate innovation into their mission.

- Dalibor Mladenka (DG EAC):

Mr Mladenka referred to the EU Startup and Scale-up Strategy and the importance of changing mindsets around IP. The EU is offering courses to universities on how to work more effectively with intellectual property, because IP is still not seen as a growth tool by many institutions.

He emphasised that while legal frameworks can be complex, the decision to act ultimately lies with universities—legal obstacles do not prohibit innovation.

Participants noted that showcasing success stories and recognising that failure is part of the innovation process can help shift entrenched university cultures. If traditional universities refuse to adapt, new institutions and new models will emerge, as innovation often starts when old patterns fail. The consensus was that continued dialogue and cultural change are essential.

- Adéla Hradilová (MSIC):

In her closing remarks, Ms Hradilová added that persistence is key: “We must keep trying. We will fail many times before we succeed.” She also highlighted the importance of having creative lawyers who can help navigate institutional constraints rather than block progress.