Project idea form - small projects

Version 2.1

Registration no. (filled in by MA/JS only) _____

Project Idea Form

Date of submission 04/06/2025

1. Project idea identification

Project idea name	Empowering Women in STEM via Building Inclusive Innovation Ecosystems of Deep Tech in the Baltic Sea Region
Short name of the project	W-STEM BSR
Previous calls	yes ◯ no ◉
Seed money support	yes ◯ no ◉

2. Programme priority

	1. Innovative societies

3. Programme objective

	1.1. Resilient economies and communities

4. Potential lead applicant

Name of the organisation (original)	Latvijas Biozinātņu un tehnoloģiju universitāte
Name of the organisation (English)	Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies
Website	https://www.lbtu.lv
Country	LV

Type of Partner	Higher education and research institution

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Which organisation(s) in the planned partnership take part in a project within the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme for the first time? Please list the respective partners.

The Danish Center for Research on Women and Gender KVINFO (Denmark)
Kaunas Science and Technology Park (Lithuania)
Tallinn University of Technology – TalTech (Estonia)

5.1 Specific challenge to be adressed

Despite growing awareness of the importance of gender-balanced innovation ecosystems, women remain significantly underrepresented in Deep Tech and STEM entrepreneurship across the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). According to the OECD “Missing Entrepreneurs 2023” report, women represent only 30% of entrepreneurs in the EU, and in STEM-intensive and Deep Tech sectors, this share drops to fewer than 15%. Furthermore, women-led startups attract less than 3% of total venture capital in Europe, limiting their potential to scale and innovate.

In the Baltic States, recent national and regional studies have shown similar patterns. For instance:
- In Latvia, women represent only 11% of patent applicants and just 14% of Deep Tech startup founders (Zinātnes padome & ALINA data, 2024);
- In Estonia, a 2023 report by Startup Estonia showed that only 13% of tech company executives are women;
- In Lithuania, women account for less than 20% of founders in high-growth technology sectors (FIRSTPICK VC, 2023).

While various programs exist to support entrepreneurship or women in science, they rarely address the intersection of gender and Deep Tech innovation, nor are they coordinated across countries. There is no harmonised understanding of the barriers women face, nor data-based frameworks to support their participation from early-stage STEM education through to commercialization and leadership.

This project directly addresses these gaps by engaging:
- Women researchers and innovators in Deep Tech (from HEIs and research institutes)
- Students in STEM (particularly women at BSc/MSc/PhD levels)
- Innovation support organisations (incubators, accelerators, VCs)
- Policy and science governance bodies
- Young scientists' associations, who act as both representatives and change agents

Together, these actors will collaborate to map existing ecosystems, identify barriers, and co-create the first cross-border support framework tailored for women in Deep Tech across Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.

Expected outputs:
- A co-designed and tested Support Framework Model for women in Deep Tech
- A Joint Policy Recommendation Brief for uptake by national and regional innovation bodies

The project also builds on good practices from Denmark, where targeted mentoring models and inclusive accelerator strategies have shown measurable impact in supporting women’s participation in innovation.

5.2 Focus of the call

While innovation support and gender equality initiatives often concentrate in capital cities or national innovation hubs, women in Deep Tech from smaller cities, regional universities, and rural areas face disproportionate barriers to participation. These include limited access to tailored mentoring, weak professional networks, lack of regional role models, and geographic exclusion from national or international support structures.

This project explicitly addresses these disparities by involving regional universities (e.g., LBTU in Jelgava) and innovation support organisations with local reach (e.g., LIAA's 11 regional business incubators). These actors are uniquely positioned to reach and engage women in smaller municipalities, ensuring that project outputs—such as the support framework model and mentoring formats—are adapted to their realities and not just urban centres.

Additionally, by involving young scientists' associations and regional STEM education institutions, the project ensures systemic inclusion of underrepresented groups from smaller communities. Cross-border transfer of inclusive innovation practices from Denmark is adapted for the Baltic context, helping to strengthen the innovation potential of rural and less connected regions, reduce brain drain, and foster inclusive growth.

6. Transnational relevance

The underrepresentation of women in Deep Tech and STEM is a shared structural challenge across the Baltic States and much of the wider Baltic Sea Region. While national efforts exist, they are often fragmented, urban-centric, or limited in scope. Transnational cooperation is essential to build a systemic, coherent and scalable approach that addresses deep-rooted gender and innovation inequalities across borders.

First, women in Deep Tech face similar barriers across Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia—such as limited access to capital, weak representation in spin-offs, lack of targeted mentoring, and insufficient inclusion in innovation policy. Tackling these issues in isolation leads to duplication of efforts and slower progress. This project brings together partners from all three countries to jointly identify shared challenges, compare national contexts, and build a cross-border understanding of what works.

Second, the project benefits from transferring good practices from Denmark, a country with a more mature ecosystem of inclusive innovation support models. Adapting these models collaboratively allows Baltic partners to avoid reinventing the wheel and to tailor solutions that are regionally appropriate.

Third, the creation of a joint support framework and policy recommendation brief requires diverse regional perspectives and validation. By involving universities, incubators, and science policy stakeholders from all three countries, the project ensures outputs are not only relevant nationally but also harmonised regionally, facilitating uptake in other BSR countries.

Finally, many women in regional universities or smaller towns experience geographic exclusion from national innovation hubs. A transnational approach allows the pooling of resources and the creation of a wider support network that transcends national borders—providing greater visibility, mobility, and opportunity for women innovators regardless of their location.

7. Specific aims to be adressed

Building trust that could lead to further cooperation initiatives

Facilitates new cross-border collaboration between women researchers, STEM students, incubators, and science councils across Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. The project creates a safe and trusted space to co-design support mechanisms and exchange knowledge on inclusive innovation. Good practice transfer from Denmark helps build confidence, mutual learning, and strategic alignment among actors who have not previously worked together.

Initiating and keeping networks that are important for the BSR

Supports the creation of new cross-border networks among women in Deep Tech, innovation support entities, and policy-level actors. By mapping national ecosystems and piloting a joint support framework, the project lays the foundation for ongoing collaboration. The networks are embedded into institutional partners (e.g., universities and incubators), ensuring long-term maintenance and regional impact beyond the project lifespan.

Bringing the Programme closer to the citizens

Directly involves young women in STEM—students, early-career researchers, and innovators—from small towns and regional universities. Through participation in pilots and workshops, they actively participate in the support structures they need. This inclusive process empowers underrepresented

groups and demonstrates EU impact at the personal and community level.

Allowing a swift response to unpredictable and urgent challenges

Addresses an urgent need to improve gender equity in fast-growing Deep Tech sectors, where women remain vastly underrepresented. Without immediate action, the gap in access to capital, networks, and innovation leadership will widen. The project provides a rapid, collaborative response through analysis, knowledge transfer, and practical support model testing tailored to Baltic innovation ecosystems.

8. Target groups

The selected target groups are directly affected by gender and innovation challenges, including women in Deep Tech from both major urban centers and smaller cities or rural areas who face barriers like limited mentoring, weak networks, and geographic exclusion. By involving regional universities and local innovation support organisations, the project ensures outreach across diverse locations, adapting support frameworks to varied realities. Engaging young scientists' associations and STEM education institutions further promotes systemic inclusion. This approach, combined with cross-border transfer of proven inclusive practices, empowers underrepresented groups to positively influence innovation ecosystems and foster inclusive growth. The challenge cannot be effectively addressed by one country alone. Only through cross-border collaboration can the Baltic region build a stronger, more inclusive Deep Tech ecosystem that is aligned with EU gender equality and innovation goals.

	Please use the drop-down list to define up to five target groups that you will involve through your project's activities.	Please define a field of responsibility or an economic sector of the selected target group	Specify the countries and regions that the representatives of this target group come from.
1.	Higher education and research institution	Women researchers and innovators in Deep Tech; research commercialization and spin-off development	Latvia (LU, LBTU), Lithuania (KTU), Estonia (TalTech)
2.	Business support organisation	Innovation support organisations: VCs, incubators, accelerators, business hubs supporting female-led Deep Tech startups	Unilab, Latvia (LIAA incubators, Overkill VC), Lithuania (Kaunas STP, FIRSTPICK), Estonia (Startup Estonia, Tartu STP)

3. Sectoral agency	Science councils and policy advisory institutions co-developing policy recommendations and advancing gender-inclusive innovation	Latvia (Latvijas Zinātnes padome), Lithuania (LMT), Estonia (ETAG)
4. Interest group	Young scientist associations actively involved in mapping needs, piloting mentoring models and advocacy for inclusive ecosystems	Latvia (Latvijas Jauno zinātnieku apvienība), Lithuania (Lietuvos jaunųjų mokslininkų sąjunga), Estonia (EYAS)
5. Education/training centre and school	Female STEM students in bachelor, master and PhD levels engaged in mapping, workshops, and support model testing	Latvia (LBTU, LU), Lithuania (KTU), Estonia (TalTech, regional STEM institutions)

9. Contribution to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

Please indicate if your project idea has the potential to contribute to the implementation of the Action Plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (https://eusbsr.eu/implementation/).

yes ◉ no ◯

Please select which policy area(s) of the EUSBSR your project idea contributes to most.

PA Innovation

PA Education

The MA/JS may share your project idea form with the respective policy area coordinator(s) of the EUSBSR. You can find contacts of PACs at the EUSBSR website (https://eusbsr.eu/contact-us/).

☒ If you disagree, please tick here.

10. Partnership

Lead partner:

- Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies (Latvia)

Project administration and WP management
Overseeing project communication activities
Developing tested support framework model with implementation guidelines
Developing a Joint Policy Recommendation Brief

Partners:

- The Danish Center for Research on Women and Gender KVINFO (Denmark)

Involved in WP2 and WP3 for its expertise in women's participation in STEM. Proven Danish approaches—like mentoring and inclusive accelerators—will be adapted to the Baltic context through cross-border learning, strengthening gender-inclusive innovation across the region.

- Kaunas Science and Technology Park (Lithuania)

Involved in WP2 and WP3. Partner provides access to target groups for barriers and needs analysis and is actively involved in co-developing the first cross-border support framework. It also contributes to transferring good practices from Denmark to Lithuania and co-designs policy recommendations to support women in Deep Tech and STEM.

- Tallinn University of Technology – TalTech (Estonia)

Involved in WP2 and WP3. Provides access to target groups for barriers and needs analysis and is actively involved in co-developing the first cross-border support framework. It also contributes to transferring good practices from Denmark to Estonia and co-designs policy recommendations to support women in Deep Tech and STEM.

The partnership is complete; no additional partners or regions need to be added.

11. Workplan

WP1: Mapping & Analysis

The project will begin with a country-level ecosystem scan and stakeholder interviews in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. These activities will involve women researchers and innovators in Deep Tech, innovation support organisations, and STEM students. The findings will feed into a barriers and needs analysis, structured via a cross-country matrix that identifies gaps in access to funding, mentorship, visibility, and institutional support.

WP2: Good Practice Transfer

The project will adapt proven approaches from Denmark (e.g., mentoring schemes, inclusive accelerator practices) through cross-border learning workshops. Target groups (female innovators and students) will participate in co-learning sessions aimed at strengthening capacity, confidence, and ecosystem readiness for gender-inclusive innovation.

WP3: Support Framework Pilot

Partners will co-develop and test a first cross-border support framework for women in Deep Tech, including mentoring and networking formats in one partner organization. The pilot will be tested with women researchers and innovation support organisations to evaluate impact and feasibility. Insights from the pilot and previous activities will be used to develop policy recommendations in close cooperation with science councils and policy interest groups.

Project Outcomes WP3:

1. A tested support framework model with implementation guidelines
2. A Joint Policy Recommendation Brief targeting national-level policy makers and regional innovation bodies

Use of Final Outcomes:
- Universities and innovation support organisations will use the support framework and mentoring formats.
- Science councils and ministries will benefit from the policy brief for strategy design.
- Deep Tech clusters and SMEs can align internal practices with the inclusive framework.
- Students and early-career women in STEM will benefit from improved visibility and access to inclusive support services.
- While the pilot will be tested initially in one country (chosen during the project implementation period), its longevity will be ensured by preparing a plan to pilot the framework in the other two Baltic countries during the next project phases.

12. Planned budget

ERDF budget (planned expenditure of partners from the EU)	EUR 498,000.00
Norwegian budget (planned expenditure of partners from Norway)	EUR 0.00
Total budget (including preparatory costs)	**EUR 498,000.00**

13. Project consultation

Please indicate if you wish to have a consultation (online meeting) with the MA/JS to discuss your project idea
yes ◉ no ◯

14. Questions to the MA/JS

Questions related to the content of the planned project	Can mentoring and policy capacity-building actions be part of the eligible activities in WP3?
Questions related to budgeting and expenditure	Can travel costs for involved women innovators (as beneficiaries of workshops) be directly covered under small project budget?
Any other questions	*(max. 1.000 characters incl. spaces)*

15. Additional information

Project will use inclusive design tools and develop open-access materials to scale results beyond project partners.

Your account in BAMOS+

Please remember that to officially submit your application you need to access our electronic data exchange system BAMOS+. More information about the process of applying for your account in BAMOS+ you will find here:
https://interreg-baltic.eu/gateway/bamos-account