



TALENT. TECH. TRUST.

Welcome to the latest edition of the 28DIGITAL newsletter!

European roots, global perspective. This first newsletter of 2026 comes at a moment of significant evolution for 28DIGITAL, as the organisation expands its role in Europe's innovation and talent landscape and acts as a leader in global talent mobilisation, skills circulation, and digital entrepreneurship. This edition highlights key developments shaping that trajectory — from [the work underway in Sardinia](#) to position the island as a competitive Mediterranean innovation hub, to [the new collaboration with e-Novia](#) that reinforces Europe's ability to translate research excellence into deep-tech ventures.

We also [report on the progress of FINEX](#), one of Horizon Europe's major coordinated efforts to move cleantech and deep-tech solutions from prototype to deployment across six partner countries.

Alongside these developments, the issue includes a range of opportunities — from GenAI incubation and founder support to targeted training and digital-skills initiatives — that reflect the growing demand for structured innovation pathways across Europe.

Taken together, these stories offer a clear view of how Europe's innovation capacity continues to expand through collaboration, capability building, and sustained investment in talent and technology.

Thank you for being part of this forward-looking, high-impact community!



What's Next for Sardinia's Innovation Future?

Can an island become one of Europe's most competitive innovation ecosystems?

That's the question at the heart of [the latest Makers & Shapers episode](#), where Alessandra Todde, President of the Region of Sardinia, in Italy, joins our CEO Federico Menna to explore how the island is rewriting its future as a hub for research, talent, and deep-tech growth.

At the core:

Sardinia is building on substantial assets — world-class research infrastructure such as the Einstein Telescope project, a one-terabit digital fibre ring, strong universities, and fast-growing sectors ranging from agrifood tech and water management to the blue economy, healthcare, and cultural-heritage technologies.

What's taking shape:

The region is confronting a major challenge: the loss of more than 60,000 young people in the past decade. [President Todde outlines](#) a strategy centred on collaboration with global and local companies, strengthening research capacity, and creating new innovation hubs across the island, supported by EU programmes for talent circulation and joint degrees.

The vision for 2030:

Modern transport, high-quality healthcare, strong R&D capacity, and a magnet for international talent — With coordinated action and long-term vision, Sardinia is shaping its path toward becoming a true European innovation island.



Europe's Deep-Tech Engine Just Got an Upgrade

28DIGITAL and Milan-based e-Novia **are joining forces** to turn high-potential European research into market-ready deep-tech ventures — right in line with the push from the European Commission to boost Europe's autonomy in critical technologies. Europe excels at research, but too many deep-tech breakthroughs never reach the market. This partnership tackles that gap head-on by giving researchers the entrepreneurial infrastructure, industrial access, and venture-building support they need.

At the core:

The partnership centres on **a new edition of SPIN**, 28DIGITAL's entrepreneurial training and pre-incubation programme, tailored for deep-tech domains like smart manufacturing and Industry 5.0, sustainable mobility, distributed energy and storage, advanced robotics, next-gen sensing, and Physical AI.

How it works:

28DIGITAL will deliver entrepreneurial training, fundraising support, and pan-European scouting of breakthrough research. e-Novia will bring its venture-studio muscle: engineering expertise, business development, and matchmaking with investors and industry partners. For the strongest teams, the collaboration will support company formation — with 28DIGITAL and e-Novia taking equity stakes alongside founders and investors to keep incentives aligned as ventures grow.

Bottom line:

By keeping innovation, IP, and value creation in Europe, **this alliance strengthens the continent's deep-tech backbone** — and gives research the runway it needs to become real-world impact.



Why Ecosystems Matter for Digital and Social Prosperity

Fresh from Kuwait: At the **International Digital Cooperation Forum** hosted by the Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO), the spotlight was on one big question: how do we turn innovation and investment into real digital and social prosperity? On the panel “**Fueling Growth: Innovation and Investment as Catalysts for Digital and Social Prosperity**,” 28DIGITAL CEO Federico Menna and fellow speakers focused on practical levers for change — not just high-level principles.

The friction points:

- Gender bias embedded in AI-driven investment models
- The need for equity-by-design approaches
- Building and applying ethical AI frameworks
- Deploying tools like InvestConnect and WE Elevate to widen access and opportunity

The bigger insight:

Growth doesn't happen at the funding stage alone. It starts with education, moves through entrepreneurial support, and continues into scaling and deployment. Miss one link in that chain, and the system underperforms.

What it comes down to:

Digital and social prosperity require more than capital. They require environments where talent, policy, infrastructure, and investment align.

Bottom line:

Innovation scales faster — and fairer — when ecosystems scale together.



**A New Bridge From Prototype to Real-World
Deployment**

Big development: [The FINEX project](#) — a Horizon Europe initiative spanning Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Finland — is becoming one of Europe's most coordinated efforts to push cleantech and deep-tech solutions beyond the prototype stage. The core insight: Europe has no shortage of breakthroughs, but too many stall due to fragmented testing access, low stakeholder visibility, and slow regulatory engagement.

At the centre:

28DIGITAL is powering the project's digital backbone, supporting pathways for deep-tech startups and hosting the newly launched **FINEX HelpDesk** — a platform that connects innovators directly to real-world test environments. The goal: shorten the distance between a promising technology and its first real deployment.

What's new:

The HelpDesk is built for companies in clean energy, sustainable mobility, circular construction, and smart-city systems that have reached **TRL 5+**. Through **the FINEX Resource Catalogue**, users can explore testbeds, experimentation facilities, business programmes, and funding options across all six partner countries.

Why it matters:

FINEX is creating a coordinated pathway for cleantech and deep-tech solutions to move from concept to implementation. By leveraging the geographic diversity of its network, the initiative is opening the door to **cross-regional pilots** that could bring new technologies to market across multiple European countries at once.



In Other News: GenAI Incubation, Startup Support & Training Opportunities

LLM-BRIDGE Venture Incubation Programme

Incubators working with early-stage startups in GenAI, multilingual AI, or NLP can now apply to run the next **12-week Europe-wide VIP cohort**. The selected organisation will train and mentor 30 startups, provide access to technical expertise and AI infrastructure, and contribute to the growth of Europe's GenAI ecosystem.

Applications are open until 23 March, with full details available on the LLM-BRIDGE open-call page and an **Info Session** scheduled on **25 February**.

□ ACCEND Scale-Up Accelerator — Cohort 2 Open

Applications are now open for the second cohort of the ACCEND Scale-Up Accelerator, targeting SMEs and startups working in Smart Cities, Net Zero Cities, and Regenerative Cities. Selected companies receive tailored services including investor matchmaking, internationalisation coaching, piloting in Living Labs and testbeds, procurement guidance, and access to public and private customers. Apply by **8 April**. An online info session **will take place** on **10 March**.

MentorMe Startup Support Programme

Early-stage digital and deep-tech startups with an MVP **can apply to MentorMe until 20 February**. The programme helps founders validate product–market fit, strengthen execution, and become investor-ready through a **4+2-month online format** covering team dynamics, funding readiness, sales, and marketing.

Pitch-Training Session for Startups & Scaleups

On 19 February, founders and C-suite leaders can join the free "**MadridTechConnect Online Training for Startups & Scaleups**", focused on crafting persuasive pitches for investors and customers. The session aims to help teams generate opportunities and build stronger strategic connections.

DIPS On-Demand Digital Skills Courses (Italian only)

The **DIPS project** offers free, on-demand **courses on AI, cybersecurity, and digital transformation** for SMEs and public organisations. Both beginner and advanced 12-hour modules are available, with participants given up to two years to complete the programme. Register **here**.

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