

DRIVE NEWSLETTER



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Welcome to the inaugural Newsletter of **DRIVE** - **Driving Rural Innovation through startup Villages across Europe** - is a Horizon Europe Coordination and Support Action dedicated to strengthening rural innovation ecosystems. It does so by connecting startups with accelerators, mentors, and funding bodies through dynamic roadshows, hackathons, and training events.

The Challenge:

Empowering Rural Innovation Across Europe

In recent years, rural regions across Europe have faced significant challenges in maintaining economic vitality and social cohesion.

Despite their potential, many rural communities struggle with limited access to innovation networks, entrepreneurial support, and financing opportunities. These gaps are particularly visible in the bio-based economy, where startups often face difficulties scaling sustainable and circular solutions.

The EU's push towards a greener, more circular and digitally inclusive economy demands inclusive participation. To ensure that innovation reaches every corner of Europe—including its villages—DRIVE was launched.



The DRIVE Solution

1. Empower Local Startups and SMEs:

- Engage regional accelerators and incubators during roadshows to identify needs and opportunities.
- Reinforce the participation of startups in the circular bioeconomy.

2. Create Innovative Ecosystems:

- Organize hackathons and bootcamps to co-create new solutions with citizens, researchers, and innovators.
- Connect rural actors with cross-border networks.

3. Mentorship for Impact:

- Guide promising ideas toward investment-readiness.
- Support commercialization and access to EU and regional funding instruments.

4. Develop a European Startup Village Model:

- Foster replicable business models tailored to rural needs.
- Enable long-term engagement in sustainability and innovation.

Impact and Opportunity

DRIVE has the ambition to leave a lasting mark by:

- **Boosting local economies** through tailored support for rural startups.
- **Reducing urban-rural divides** by enhancing access to resources and innovation.
- **Strengthening resilience and sustainability** in line with the European Green Deal and Circular Economy Action Plan.
- **Fostering inclusive participation** across Member States, with a focus on underrepresented territories.

Through co-creation, capacity-building, and strategic matchmaking, DRIVE will scale promising ideas and equip local innovators to thrive.



Activities

The project is structured around the following strategic priorities:

Supporting Business Acceleration in Rural Areas

Organizes three regional roadshows and multiple co-creation events.

Roadshows, training, and awareness-raising

Offers tailored business support, training, and investor-readiness programs.

Community Building, action plan and policy uptake

Develops a replicable business model and impact strategy.

Kickoff Meeting in Milan

The project officially kicked off with an in-person meeting on **January 14-15, 2025**, in **Milan, Italy**, hosted by the coordinator **Consorzio Italbiotec**.

Partners from 11 countries gathered to:

- Align on shared goals and methodologies.
- Plan the upcoming roadshows and co-creation events.
- Build synergies among innovation networks, municipalities, and support agencies.

This successful meeting laid the foundation for a strong and collaborative implementation phase.

Stay Connected

Follow DRIVE and stay informed on the latest news, open calls, and results:



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