



International collaboration initiatives in the field of startups and digital entrepreneurship: Spain on the global stage

Monographic

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1. Introduction

Spain, as a member of the European Union and the European Startup Nation Alliance (hereinafter, ESNA), has been helping innovative emerging companies at all stages of development. u development: from the beginning and growth to its release to the market. It is doing so fundamentally from three approaches: promoting the connection between ecosystems, offering support for internationalization and facilitating access to financing. All these measures have the **objective of turning Europe and, therefore, Spain and the rest of the member states, into a benchmark in innovation, and being recognized as a “Nation of emerging companies.”**

Currently, access to financing is not the main challenge for startups . The main obstacle is the maturity of the ecosystem, and in particular, the limited collaboration between agents. It is not easy for startups to meet other newly created companies like theirs, to come into contact with investors who can help with the technology or with large companies that can support the commercialization of their product or service. These factors are what shape the quality of the ecosystem and influence the reasons why startups end up moving to other more mature ecosystems.

Faced with these challenges, various public policies are being implemented aimed at supporting emerging companies and scaleups within their borders, with the aim of positioning Europe and its member states at the center of entrepreneurship. Thus, **the Digital Decade Policy Program** establishes ambitious digital goals, focused on the growth of innovative companies and improving access to financing.

The objective of this initiative is to at least double the number of “unicorns” in the European Union by 2030 and guarantee that more than 90% of small and medium-sized companies reach a basic level of digital intensity by that same date.

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In a significant step towards achieving these objectives, the European Union has launched various actions in which Spain participates, such as the Startup Europe Initiative, the European Business Network, the Innovation Radar, and the Declaration "An European Union Approach to Startups and Scaleups ", among others.

- The **European Business Network and Startup Europe** present themselves as essential contact points for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups seeking advice and networking to explore new markets. These initiatives provide a conducive environment for knowledge exchange and collaboration between companies, thus driving innovation and business development.
- **The Innovation Radar** is presumed to be a strategic tool to monitor and evaluate innovative trends in the region. This platform could play a crucial role in providing very valuable information on aspects such as; technological developments, market opportunities and investment opportunities.
- The **Declaration "An European Union Approach to Startups and Scaleups"** establishes a collective vision of the European Union towards startups and scaleups in the near future. This declaration, promoted by Spain within the framework of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, acts as a strategic guide that will influence the initiatives and programs aimed at actively supporting the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Europe. Almost all of the ESNA member countries have adhered to the declaration.

In the context of political collaboration with Ibero-America, the European Union has also launched initiatives alongside Spain, such as the **Ibero-American Program of Science and Technology for Development** (hereinafter referred to as CYTED) and IBEROEKA, among others.

- The **Ibero-American Program of Science and Technology for Development** (hereinafter referred to as CYTED) created by the governments of Ibero-American countries along with Spain and Portugal, aims to promote cooperation in the fields related to science, technology, and innovation for the harmonious development of Ibero-America.
- **IBEROEKA** is an initiative within CYTED that supports R&D projects among companies, universities, and/or research centers across Ibero-America, Spain, and Portugal. This initiative aims to enhance the competitiveness and productivity of these entities through projects that contribute to the harmonious and sustainable development of Ibero-America.

Therefore, all these measures not only promote digital transformation and improve competitiveness, but also create a **favorable environment for emerging companies in the European Union and Latin America**. This collective approach reflects the strategic importance that emerging and expanding companies have in boosting the productivity of participating countries, in generating employment, and in getting innovation to market, thus stimulating cooperation between national and regional innovation agents. and local.

2. Main internacional initiatives

2.1 European initiatives

Below are the main European initiatives in which Spain actively participates. As already mentioned, its objective is not only to strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem itself, but also to contribute to the joint development of innovative solutions that address global challenges from the European Union.

- **Enterprise Europe Network**
- **Startup Europe**
- **Innovation Radar**
- **Declaration " An European Union Approach to Startups and Scaleups**



■ Enterprise Europe Network

The European Business Network serves as a contact point for SMEs and startups seeking mentoring services and access to networks. It constitutes one of the largest support networks for businesses. Specifically, the network offers personalized support, facilitates alliances between the different actors within the ecosystem, and provides advice on accessing financing.

The main functions of the European Business Network include:

- **Business consulting:** Advice and guidance is provided to companies in areas such as internationalisation, innovation, financing and business law.
- **Technology transfer and innovation:** Facilitates collaboration between companies and research centers, promoting technology transfer and promoting innovation.
- **Access to finance:** Informs companies about the different financing options available at European and national level, helping them access financial resources for their growth and expansion.
- **Cross-border business cooperation:** Facilitates cooperation between companies from different countries, promoting commercial and strategic partnerships.
- **Internationalization:** Supports companies in their expansion to international markets, providing information on business opportunities (search for new business partners), commercial regulations (intellectual property) and local regulations.
- **Business events and meetings:** Organize events, seminars and trade missions that allow companies to establish contacts, exchange knowledge and explore collaboration opportunities with other agents in the ecosystem.

The European Business Network **operates through local nodes or consortia present in all European regions**. These nodes are made up of regional development agencies, technology hubs, innovation support organizations, universities and research institutes, and chambers of commerce and industry. **In Spain, the European Business Network has 9 nodes** each made up of its regional agencies:

ENN Actis (Aragón, Extremadura, Castilla La -Mancha, Navarra and La Rioja)

- Technological Institute of Aragon.
- Confederation of Businessmen of Aragon.
- FUNDECYT-PCTEx Foundation.
- Official Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Toledo.
- Castilla-La Mancha university.
- Confederation of Businessmen of Albacete.
- Navarra Industry Association.
- University of Navarra.
- Economic Development Agency of La Rioja.
- Federation of Companies of La Rioja.

ENN Balears (Islas Baleares)

- Balearic Innovation and Technology Foundation.
- Business University Foundation of the Balearic Islands.
- Official Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Navigation of Mallorca.

ENN Basque (País Vasco)

- PRI – Basque Business Development Agency.
- Basque Internationalization Agency.
- Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Navigation of Bilbao.
- Basque Innovation Agency- Berrikuntzaren Euskal Agentzia (INNOBASQUE).
- BEAZ, SA
- Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Navigation of Gipuzkoa.
- Álava Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

ENN Canarias (Islas Canarias)

- General Directorate of Economic Promotion of the Ministry of Economy, Knowledge and Employment of the Government of the Canary Islands.
- Canary Islands Economic Development Society SA (PROEXCA).
- Technological Institute of the Canary Islands (ITC).
- Official Chamber of Commerce.
- Industry, Services and Navigation of Gran Canaria.
- Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Services and Navigation of Santa Cruz De Tenerife.

ENN Catcim (Cataluña)

- Agency for Business Competitiveness (ACCIÓ).
- Official Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Services and Navigation of Barcelona.
- General Council of the Official Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Navigation of Catalonia.
- Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises of Catalonia (PIMEC).
- Official Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Services of Terrassa.

ENN Galacteaplus (Asturias, Galicia, Cantabria y Castilla and León)

- Foundation for the Promotion of Applied Scientific Research and Technology in Asturias.
- Asturian Science, Business Competitiveness and Innovation Agency.
- Asturian Federation of Businessmen (FADE).
- Society for the Regional Development of Cantabria.
- Chamber of Commerce of Cantabria.
- FSE CEOE-CEPYME Cantabria.
- Institute for Business Competitiveness of Castilla y León.
- Confederation of Business Organizations of Castilla y León.
- Confederation of Businessmen of Galicia (CEG).
- Galician Innovation Agency – GAIN.

ENN Ceseand (Andalucía)

- Andalusian Innovation and Development Agency.
- Andalusian Knowledge Agency.
- Confederation of Businessmen of Andalusia.
- Andalusian Council of Official Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Services and Navigation

ENN Madrid (Comunidad de Madrid)

- Madrid Knowledge Foundation.
- Madrid Science Park Foundation (FPCM).
- Official Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Services of Madrid.
- Madrid Network Association.
- Henares Business Association (AEDHE).
- Association of Metal Entrepreneurs (AECIM).
- Madrid Business Confederation-CEOE (CEIM).

ENN Seimed (Comunidad Valenciana and Región de Murcia)

- Valencian Institute of Business Competitiveness.
- Network of Technological Institutes of the Valencian Community.
- Official Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Navigation of Valencia.
- Council of Official Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Navigation of the Valencian Community.
- CEEI Valencia – European Center of Innovative Companies of Valencia.
- Business Confederation of the Valencian Community.
- University of Alicante.
- Development Institute of the Region of Murcia.

All of these agencies are dedicated to providing comprehensive support to companies, through advice, with the aim of promoting sustainable business growth and boosting competitiveness.

Some success stories of Spanish companies, thanks to the support provided by the consortia that make up the European Business Network, are:

- **Ekobin – Wondereko.** Obtained a patent thanks to industrial property advisory services. The patent consists of an intelligent storage device that is used to identify the waste that has been introduced into it. It stores plastic waste, crushes it and cuts it into small pieces to solve the problem of waste storage and transportation. Once the system is full, it can be emptied into a plastic bag.
- **Boluda & Suarez General Cargo SL.** It received logistical support to carry out the transshipment of 6,000 km of submarine telecommunications cable that connects to the Atlantic Ocean. This submarine cable is part of the hub that connects Egypt, Marseille, Tokyo or Singapore with other locations.
- **Aganova.** Implementation of the company's Innovation Strategy through an innovation management diagnosis carried out by the consortium. Likewise, he obtained advice for searching for partners through participation in international events with bilateral meetings, on the protection of Industrial Property and to access training courses on innovation.

■ Startup Europe

Startup Europe is an initiative that brings together high-tech startups, growing startups, investors, accelerators, business networks, universities and the media with the aim of driving collaboration, investment and growth of startups in the entire European Union.

The mission of Startup Europe is to position the European Union as a “Nation of Emerging Companies” by implementing good practices that facilitate the expansion of the companies that participate in this initiative beyond European borders. The objective is to democratize the startup phenomenon so that European citizens have the opportunity to create their company successfully, regardless of the country where they reside.

- **Sepiia.** Winner of the Startup Europe Awards 2022 . It developed a tool that allows it to accelerate and scale its textile technology with 100% recycled and circular fibers, worldwide, through cutting-edge technical garments and fabrics in which “functionality and design” are combined. Thanks to this recognition, Sepiia gained visibility in the StartUp Europe environment, made up of more than 30 media outlets, accessing information related to opportunities to internationalize its project, as well as a financial award of 10,000 euros for its project.
- **Waynabox.** Winner of the Startup Europe Awards 2017. It is the first company in the world to offer surprise travel packages with no defined destination. It allows you to enjoy a weekend trip to a surprise city for 150 euros. The end user discovers their destination just two days before the trip, which makes the adventure more unexpected and exciting. Through this award, Waynabox achieved greater international visibility, access to various programs financed by European funds, and also obtained a financial award worth 10,000 euros to accelerate the project.

■ Innovation Radar

The Innovation Radar is another initiative of the European Commission that was created with the main objective of identifying and promoting high-potential innovation within research and innovation projects supported by the European Union (EU).



The specific objectives pursued by the Innovation Radar are:

- **Make known the innovative projects** developed in the European Union.
- **Connect innovative people at national and European level.**
- **Advise researchers and innovators** funded by the European Union **to reach the market with their innovation.**
- Raise awareness of the **role of the European Union in funding innovative projects.**

Additionally, Innovation Radar is supported by Dealflow.eu, a platform that provides support to high-potential innovative people identified by the initiative. Dealflow.eu plays a crucial role in supporting these people, helping them in the development of their projects and accelerating their arrival to the market.

Since the implementation of the tool in 2018, the Spanish startups that have received the Innovation Radar award are the following:

- **ZYMBOL.**

Awarded in 2023. Biotechnology company specialized in the design, development and application of molecular modeling software to

sustainably design and discover new enzymes for the food, personal care and pharmaceutical industries.



- **Mjn.**

Awarded in 2023. She won the “Women-Led Innovation” award for her wearable device designed to alert people living with drug-resistant

epilepsy, and their caregivers, of a seizure 1 to 3 minutes before it occurs.



- **CATEC (Centro Avanzado de Tecnologías Aeroespaciales).**

Awarded in 2017. Spanish aviation research center that developed industrial drones. Their drones not

only allow you to "see" from the air, but also "touch and feel." CATEC drones - which integrate a robotic arm, advanced software and state-of-the-art sensors - open up new possibilities for carrying out industrial inspections that require contact, thus considerably reducing the exposure of people to this type of high-risk operations.



■ Declaración “An European Union Approach to Startups and Scaleups”

Finally, it is worth noting that at the celebration of the Third Meeting of the European Startup Nation Alliance, the Spanish presidency of the Council of the European Union promoted the Declaration “ An European Union Approach to Startups and Scaleups ” that establishes a collective vision of the Union European towards startups and scaleups in the near future.

This new commitment, signed by 19 Member States, is presented as a comprehensive guide that will guide the initiatives and programs aimed at supporting emerging companies and scaleups within the European Union.

The Declaration “ An European Union Approach to Startups and Scaleups ” seeks to achieve a series of objectives so that Europe becomes an attractive destination for emerging companies. Specifically, the strategy proposes:

- **Guarantee the centralized coordination** of startups and scaleups in the European Union.
- **Promote discussions for the creation of an overall European Union** framework that supports emerging and expanding companies in Europe.
- **Support the establishment and development of non-binding regulatory sandboxes across the European Union** to help entrepreneurs and foster innovation.
- Implement **links of the European startup ecosystem with other international ecosystems**.

In the same way, the declaration exposes the relevance of startups and scaleups in Europe and includes the following as its main ideas:

- Startups and scaleups are fundamental for **the European economy and society of the future**.
- Europe must continue working to offer opportunities to European startups - from their ideation phase to the acceleration phase - so that they can become globally competitive scaleups.
- The promotion by the **European Commission of a Strategy for startups and scaleups**.
- The **homogenization of national frameworks** to support technological entrepreneurship in the European Union.
- Supporting the **establishment and development of regulatory sandboxes across the European Union**, including cross-border ones, to help entrepreneurs comply with digital regulation and foster innovation.
- The establishment of links with **startup ecosystems from relevant regions of the world**, in particular, in the context of the European Union - Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) Digital Alliance.

2.2 Ibero-American initiatives

In the Ibero-American context, Spain's participation translates into the creation of bridges between entrepreneurial ecosystems, promoting the generation of synergies and the exchange of knowledge between the different Ibero-American countries.

These initiatives not only enrich the business fabric, but also strengthen cultural and economic ties, contributing to the promotion of innovative solutions and the sustainable development of the regions.

Below are the main European initiatives in which Spain actively participates.

- **CYTED Program**
- **IBEROEKA**



■ CYTED Programs

CYTED was created in 1984 through an Interinstitutional Framework Agreement signed by 21 Spanish-Portuguese speaking countries. Since 1995, the CYTED Program has been formally included among the Cooperation Programs of the Ibero-American Summits of Heads of State and Government.

CYTED has the following specific objectives:

- **Promote the integration of the Ibero-American Scientific and Technological Community**, promoting an agenda of shared priorities for the region.
- **Strengthen the technological development capacity of Ibero-America** by promoting scientific research, the transfer of knowledge and techniques, and the exchange of scientists and technologists between R&D&I groups of the member countries.
- Promote the participation of business sectors from **member countries interested in innovation processes**, in accordance with the research and technological development of the Ibero-American Scientific and Technological Community.
- Promote the **participation of research personnel in other multilateral research programs through agreements**.

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To achieve this, CYTED has different financial instruments for business people, researchers and experts, which allows them to train and generate research, development and innovation projects together. In this way, the countries that make up the CYTED Program are up to date on the latest scientific-technological advances and developments.

Since its creation in 1984, more than 28,000 business people, researchers and experts in priority areas of knowledge have participated in the Program.

The results of the Program include the generation of strategic R&D projects where companies and experts participate who, from the CYTED cooperation platform, can access important international funds.

It is also the vocation of the CYTED Program to act as a bridge between the European Union and Latin America for interregional cooperation in Science and Technology.

Coordinated actions or actions in which Spanish research personnel are participating

Coordinator	Institution	Network	Area
Marcos Lafoz Pastor	Center for Energy, Environmental and Technological Research	Opportunities for integration into Ibero-American electricity networks of marine energies (2021-2024)	Energy
Jesús De la Casa Hernández	Higher Technical School of Jaén	Network for large-scale integration of renewable energies into electrical systems (2023-2026)	Energy

Coordinator	Institution	Network	Area
Concepción Marañón Lizana	Andalusian Public Foundation for Progress and Health	Ibero-American network of biomarkers in systemic lupus erythematosus (2021-2024)	Health
David Rodríguez Arias	Public Health Ethics Group for Action, Care, and Social Observation. University of Granada, Philolab Excellence Unit	Ibero-American laboratory of ethics and public health (2023-2026)	Science and Society
Sergi Diez Salvador	Institute of Environmental Diagnosis and Water Studies	Ibero-American network of mercury studies (2020-2024)	Sustainable development
Josep A. Ivars Baidal	University Institute for Tourism Research	Strategic action for post-COVID tourism (2022-2025)	Industrial development
Silvia Román Suero	UNEX	Research network on models of sustainable energy management systems (2022-2025)	Energy
Juana María Navarro Llorens	Complutense University of Madrid	Ibero-American network for the treatment of effluents with microalgae (2020-2024)	Industrial development
Jaime Bastida Armengol	University of Barcelona	Natural resources for the treatment of Chagas disease (2023-2026)	Health
José David Bienvenido Huertas	University of Granada	Ibero-American network for efficiency and healthiness in buildings (2023-2026)	Energy
Luis Martínez López	University of Jaén	Ibero-American network of artificial intelligence and data analytics (2023-2026)	ICTs

Coordinator	Institution	Network	Area
Lluís Pla Aragóns	Universitat de Lleida	Red iberoamericana para el desarrollo de sistemas inteligentes para la agricultura (2024-2027)	ICTs
María Cruz Díaz de Terán Velasco	Universitat de Navarra	Red iberoamericana de innovación y formación para fortalecer el impacto femenino (2020-2024)	Science and Society
María Eugenia Suárez Ojeda	Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona	(BIO)TECNOLOGÍA para un futuro sostenible (2024-2027)	Sustainable development
Rodrigo Ramírez Pisco	Universitat Carlemany	Tecnologies habilitadores per a edificacions quasi zero a Iberoamèrica (2024-2027)	Energy
Ana María Gil Lafuente	Universitat de Barcelona	Sistemes intel·ligents i experts models computacionals iberoamericans (2022-2025)	ITCs

■ IBEROEKA

IBEROEKA is an initiative within CYTED to support R&D projects between companies, universities and/or research centers between Latin America, Spain and Portugal. This initiative aims to improve the competitiveness and productivity of entities by carrying out projects that contribute to the harmonious and sustainable development of Ibero-America.

IBEROEKA promotes the development of innovative products, processes and services using advanced technologies to improve the productive sectors and the competitiveness of the participating regions.

This initiative was born in 1991 at the request of Spain, following the model of the EUREKA program.

Below are the main characteristics of the IBEROEKA program projects:

- **Technological R&D projects are generated by the consortium itself.**
- There are **no predetermined technological areas** (participating entities can undertake projects adapted to their specific technological needs).
- The **project management, evaluation and financing process is decentralized:**
 - Management of the initiative in each country.
 - Evaluation of projects in each country.
 - Financing of projects in each country.
- **Projects** must have a **consortium of entities made up of at least two countries.**
- The main objective of the **project must be to generate an innovative product, process or service.**
- The results of the projects are the property of the participating entities.

Below are some examples of projects in which Spanish companies have participated.

- **DEPROACUI Projet.** The companies Farm Biocontrol SL and Envasados del Pirineo SL together with Chile with Durán y Cía Ltda, Primar SA and Innovaideas SL participated on behalf of Spain. This project aimed to develop products and processes for livestock farming in general, with special attention to the sector. aquaculture, in the field of hygiene and biosafety, in order to improve the productivity of the farm and reduce the contribution of drugs and chemicals to the human food chain.
- **WAGYUMEAT Projet.** The company Agrocinegética Modelo SL (Spain) and GURE-AMETZA SA (Argentina) participated with the aim of using Wagyu genetics and crossing it with other breeds to obtain a new product (Wagyu meat) with differentiated characteristics in the Spanish market.
- **PROBENOX Projet.** PROBENA (Spain) and QUINABRA (Brazil) participated with the aim of studying the properties resulting from the association between ascorbic acid and bioflavonoids, and the benefit that different doses of these compounds produce on intensive livestock farming.
- **ICOMDEST Projet.** Participation of Araldi S.L. and Virtual Knowledge SAU (España), Inter Cultura SRL, Ejido Asesores CUMDEO SRL (Argentina)) and Iale Tecnología Chile Ltda (Chile) participated with the objective of developing a Technological Platform for the comprehensive management of Tourism Observatories, articulated through a Competitive Intelligence System combined with information from Specialized Knowledge Networks.

3. Conclusions

In summary, international collaboration initiatives in the field of startups and digital entrepreneurship, both at the European and Latin American levels, constitute a strategy for Spain, strengthening its business ecosystem, promoting innovation and promoting economic development. As an active member of various alliances and programs, Spain plays a fundamental role in creating support networks, facilitating access to financial resources and promoting the internationalization of emerging companies.

From the European Business Network to programs such as Startup Europe, the Innovation Radar and the Declaration "An European Union Approach to Startups and Scaleups", a comprehensive approach is evident to foster collaboration, access to resources and the internationalization of startups . These actions not only drive innovation and competitiveness, but also generate employment and promote economic development throughout the region.

Furthermore, Spain's participation in initiatives such as the CYTED and IBEROEKA Program reflects its commitment to regional cooperation in Ibero-America, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, technologies and good practices between participating countries. These actions not only contribute to the technological and economic development of the region, but also strengthen cultural ties and promote more equitable and sustainable growth.

In short, these international collaboration initiatives are essential to promote innovation, economic growth and sustainable development in both Europe and Latin America. Spain's continued commitment to collaboration and the creation of support networks reflects its crucial role in this joint effort, demonstrating its strategic importance and contribution to the promotion of digital entrepreneurship and sustainable economic development globally.



4. References

- Digital Decade Policies Program ([link](#))
- Enterprise Europe Network ([link](#))
- Startup Europe ([link](#))
- Innovation Radar([link](#))
- An EU Approach to Startups and Scaleups ([link](#))
- Ibero-American Program of Science and Technology for Development (CYTED) ([link](#))
- IBEROEKA ([link](#))



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