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Scale-Up Lab Western Balkans



IFC International Finance Corporation WORLD BANK GROUP

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
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Swiss Confederation

Federal Department of Economic Affairs,
Education and Research EAER
State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO

About Scale-Up Lab Western Balkans:
Unlock Global Clients, Secure Funding, and Grow Your Ecosystem

The **Scale-Up Lab Western Balkans** is a growth program for the region's most ambitious founders. Built around three high-impact European startup events, it's designed to provide Scale-Ups opportunities they can capitalise on, by connecting you directly to the people, partners, and capital that matter. It is delivered by **IFC (World Bank Group)** and **Plug and Play** – one of the world's largest innovation platforms, behind companies like PayPal, Dropbox, and N26.

- 10 companies are selected per cohort
- No equity is taken
- No fees are charged

Application Cohort II: Click here



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01.
Program's Purpose

The vision

You've proven the model - real revenue, real traction. Now it's about scaling globally, raising the right capital, and unlocking the next stage of growth. The Scale-Up Lab Western Balkans Program helps you do exactly that.

Delivered by **IFC (World Bank Group)** and **Plug and Play.** This program is implemented in partnership with the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs of Switzerland SECO.



In three months, you will..

Work directly with founders who have built **$1B+** companies – not consultants, not coaches.

Access **Plug and Play's 550+ corporate partners** for venture clienting opportunities.

Get in front of 50+ investors and corporates across Europe, including VCs at **GITEX Europe, STARTUP AUTOBAHN powered by Plug and Play, TechBBQ, Bits & Pretzels** etc.

Direct access to investors and corporates at Plug and Play HQ while experiencing **Silicon Valley** firsthand. *(Selected startups)*

Leave with a **scalable organisation**, **real customer pipeline**, and **a powerful growth narrative for global expansion**.



A Hands-On Scale-Up circuit Platform for Western Balkans Startups

3 months

Cohort 1 - April – July 2026
Cohort 2 - July – Sept 2026

Silicon Valley Deep Dive – Nov 2026 (selected startups)

3 x Pre-activation Sprints

Expert support for maximum preparation for conference success, identify audience, outcomes and targets.

3 x Masterclasses

Intimate sessions with world experts on international revenue machines, organisational changes for Scale-Ups, GTM for international success.

3 x Mentor 1-1s

Tailored mentoring based on your scale-ups strengths and challenges, from world expert mentors, including unicorn founders, investment principals, corporate decision makers.

3 x conferences

Cohort 1:

ViennaUP, VivaTech, GITEX Europe, STARTUP AUTOBAHN powered by Plug and Play

Cohort 2:

GITEX Europe, STARTUP AUTOBAHN powered by Plug and Play, TechBBQ, Bits & Pretzels

ViennaUP The Startup Festival

VIVATECH 17–20 JUNE 2026 / PARIS

BITS & PRETZELS THE FOUNDERS FESTIVAL

GITEX AI EUROPE Berlin 2026

STARTUPAUTOBAHN powered by PLUGANDPLAY

TECHBBQ

*Event tickets and 1 hotel room per started are provided
*Flight tickets at your own expense

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Who we are looking for:

- Growth stage with initial traction (beyond idea/validation).
- First investors and paying clients already secured.
- At least 2 co-founders or a small core team.
- Clear intention to scale internationally.
- Founded and primarily operating in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia).
- Tech-enabled companies across all industries are welcome.

02.
Program structure

Stages are delivered through a hybrid model, online working sessions combined with curated in-person ecosystem activations, structured around 5 core elements

Strategic Company Development

Workshops and mentoring tackle organisational, commercial, and strategic scaling challenges.

Global Mentor Network

Access to experienced founders, VCs, and corporate leaders providing practical, hands-on guidance.

Online Sessions

Expert mentoring, mastermind groups, and applied workshops between sessions.

In-Person Activations

Curated participation in leading European startup events with investors and corporate partners.

Silicon Valley Immersion

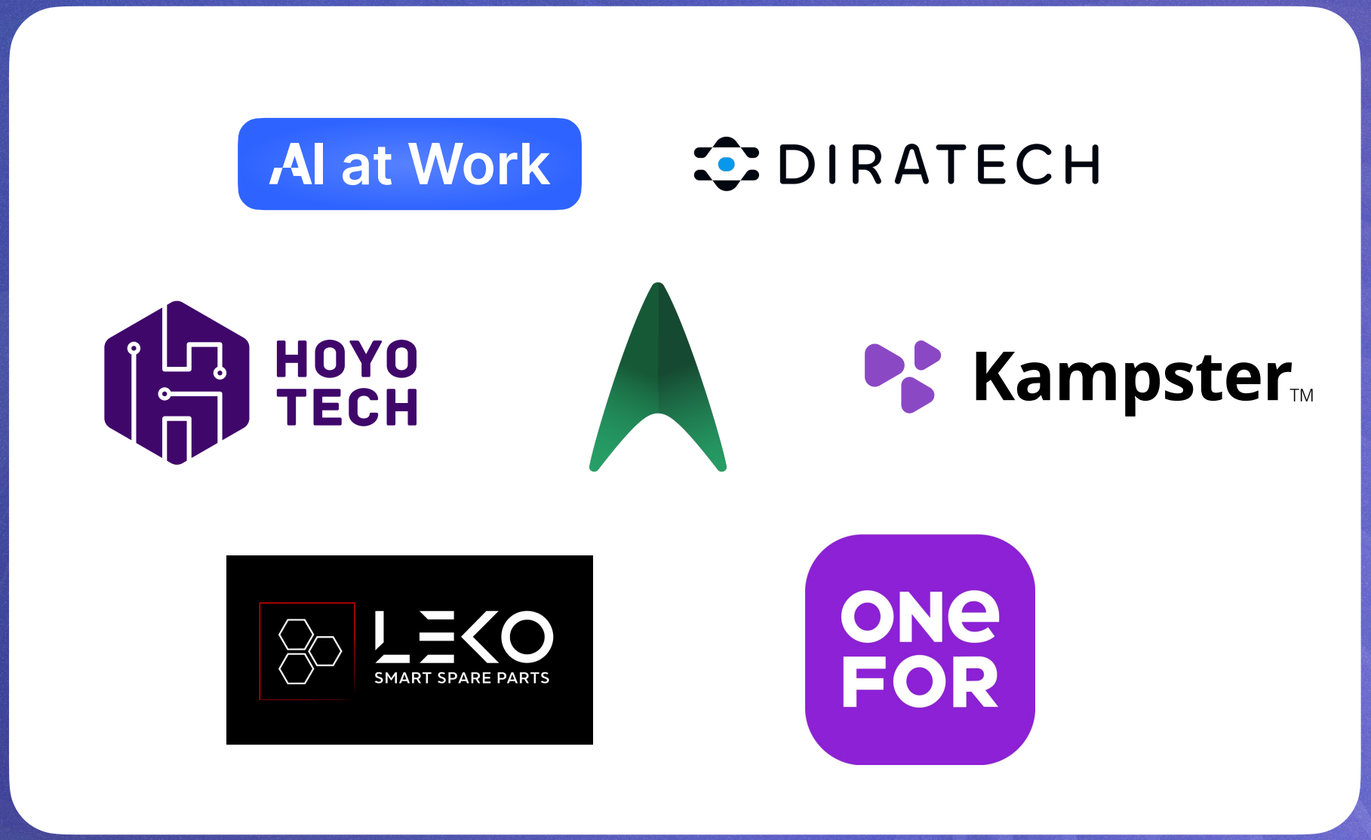
Selected founders gain direct access to investors and corporates at Plug and Play HQ.

Two cohorts run in 2026, each following a structured journey of curated in-person activations at top European startup events, interspersed with online sessions and mentoring

When	Focus	Event & Location
Cohort 1: April – July 2026		
April 2026	Program Kick-Off	Launch & founder onboarding
May 2026	Leadership & Revenue	ViennaUP, Austria - corporates, investors, and market entry partners across the DACH and Central European ecosystems
June 2026	Investor Roadshow	VivaTech, Paris – meetings with European venture capital investors
July 2026	Corporate Ecosystem	Startup Autobahn & GITEX Europe, Stuttgart – venture clienting & corporate partnerships
Cohort 2: July – November 2026		
June 2026	Program Kick-Off	Launch & founder onboarding
July 2026	Corporate Ecosystem	GITEX Europe & Startup Autobahn, Stuttgart – launch & corporate ecosystem access
August 2026	Venture Clienting & Sales	TechBBQ, Copenhagen – Nordic VC access & enterprise sales workshops
September 2026	Investor Ecosystem	Bits & Pretzels, Munich – VC access & founder leadership sessions
Both Cohorts		
November 2026	Silicon Valley Immersion	Plug and Play HQ – 4 selected founders, 2 from each cohort

03.
Selection Criteria & Process

Cohort 1 Startups



04.
Mentor examples

Our mentors are experienced founders, executives, and corporate leaders who bring practical insights and first-hand experience scaling global companies

Inspire and Motivate
Encourage startups, build confidence, and keep them engaged throughout the program.

Engage and Understand
Get to know the startups, their challenges, and their context to provide tailored guidance.

Share Experience and Support
Offer advice, answer questions, and help startups navigate obstacles with your expertise.



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Organisation & Leadership



Benjamin Pieck

Head of Training

L'Oréal - one of the world's largest global brands

Benjamin brings the perspective of how large global organisations develop leadership talent and scale management capabilities across complex international structures - directly relevant for founders building teams that need to operate without them.



Alexander Rinke

Co-Founder & Co-CEO

Celonis - $10B+ global decacorn

Alexander co-founded Celonis at university and scaled it into one of Europe's most successful enterprise software companies, pioneering the category of process mining. His journey from student founder to global technology CEO is one of Europe's most remarkable scaling stories.



Benedikt Brand

CEO

Flip - Europe's fastest-growing workplace tech

Benedikt scaled Flip from a small founding team to 150+ employees with enterprise customers across manufacturing, logistics, healthcare, and retail. His hands-on experience building culture and organisation during rapid growth is directly applicable to founders at scale-up stage.

Commercial Traction & Venture Clienting



Anna Lena Drewitz

Head of Corporate Strategy

Lufthansa Group Business Services

Anna Lena works on strategic initiatives, innovation, and international partnerships within one of the world's largest aviation groups. For startups seeking to work with global corporations, she provides direct guidance on how large organisations evaluate and structure startup partnerships.



Renand Grando

Global AI Strategic Partnerships

Linde - one of the world's largest industrial companies

Renand leads global AI partnership initiatives at Linde, identifying and integrating innovative startup technologies into one of the world's largest industrial operations. He provides founders with direct insight into scaling innovation partnerships with global corporates.



Sebastian Tietz

Director Startup Collaboration

Bosch - global industrial technology leader

Sebastian leads startup collaboration within Bosch, working directly with startups to integrate their technologies into Bosch's innovation ecosystem. He gives founders an unfiltered view of how large corporations actually evaluate and onboard startup partners.

Investment Readiness & International Expansion



Florian Reuter

Former Founder & CEO

Volocopter - global deep-tech pioneer in electric air mobility

Florian led Volocopter through its transformation from emerging startup to globally recognised deep-tech company, attracting significant international investment and partnerships with major aerospace organisations. His experience is directly relevant for founders building capital-intensive technologies.



Hui Zhang

Group Vice President

NIO - one of the world's fastest-growing EV companies

Hui brings extensive experience in global technology development and international market expansion from one of the most closely watched technology companies in the world. His insights into scaling across multiple regions and markets provide a valuable benchmark for ambitious founders.



Daniel Krauss

Co-Founder

Flix - one of Europe's most successful mobility platforms

Daniel co-founded Flix and helped build it into a globally recognised mobility platform operating across multiple continents. His experience scaling operations, international expansion, and building marketplace platforms across diverse markets is a direct reference point for Program founders.

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Click here to apply

Cohort 2 Application Deadline: Jun 12, 2026

For more information:

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