

Roadmap for Entrepreneurial Mobility between Belgium and Georgia

ICMPD EMLINK Project

A roadmap for the internationalisation of startups, innovation, and strategic partnerships in Belgium, designed to equip entrepreneurs with the skills, knowledge, and network to scale their ventures in European Union member states.

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Executive Summary

The project, implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), is a pioneering initiative designed to strengthen economic ties between Belgium and Georgia. By fostering temporary mobility for Georgian entrepreneurs, the project provided startups with access to Belgium's entrepreneurial ecosystem, facilitating market expansion, knowledge exchange, and long-term bilateral cooperation.

This roadmap offers a comprehensive overview of the project, documenting the project's implementation across its stages. The **Background and Context** section highlights how EMLINK aligns with national policies and the rationale for fostering entrepreneurial mobility. The **Objectives of the Roadmap** emphasise its dual purpose as an implementation guide and a resource for future entrepreneurial mobility programmes. The **Needs Assessment** section details the methodologies used to identify the startups' specific needs through questionnaires and interviews. In **Training and Capacity Building**, the roadmap describes a tailored curriculum and the delivery of eight sessions that blended theoretical knowledge and practical skills to prepare startups for internationalisation. The **Networking and Matchmaking Activities** section focuses on connecting Georgian startups with Belgian stakeholders through meetings, networking events, and matchmaking opportunities. The **Study Tour to Belgium** section explores the structured 10-day visit, which included innovation hub visits, one-on-one meetings, and sector-specific workshops. Finally, the roadmap concludes with **Lessons Learned, Outcomes, and Recommendations**, providing insights for enhancing future initiatives.

Lessons learned from EMLINK include the need for programmes to balance general and tailored activities, ensuring alignment with participant needs. **Targeted pitch training, practical guidance on navigating foreign regulatory environments, and leveraging local expertise for impactful engagements were crucial components of the program.** The value of sector-specific programming and sustained post-programme mentorship emerged as key factors for success.

The project demonstrated the **transformative potential of entrepreneurial mobility programmes** in strengthening startup ecosystems and fostering bilateral cooperation. Georgian startups gained exposure to Belgium's advanced innovation landscape, building meaningful connections with stakeholders and unlocking opportunities for collaboration and market entry.

Future initiatives should prioritise the inclusion of experienced experts, whose networks and knowledge enable tailored guidance. Developing focused, sector-specific itineraries would maximise impact, while offering practical, actionable information on market entry and compliance. These actions would enhance startup readiness. Structured networking opportunities and sustained mentorship post-programme completion would further amplify results.

The EMLINK project serves as a model for entrepreneurial mobility initiatives, showcasing how international collaboration can foster innovation, economic development, and stronger migration management frameworks. By incorporating lessons learned and addressing recommendations, future programmes can replicate and expand upon this success.

1. Introduction

The “Strengthening the Partnership between Belgium and Georgia through Temporary Mobility of Entrepreneurs (EMLINK-Entrepreneurial Mobility Link)” project is funded by the European Union through the Migration Partnership Facility (MPF) and implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) on behalf of Belgium. The general objective of the action is to establish an enabling environment for a mobility model involving Georgian start-ups and Belgian counterparts in the innovation and entrepreneurship sector.

The initiative is aimed at strengthening bilateral cooperation between Belgium and Georgia by designing a pilot temporary mobility model for outstanding entrepreneurs. By promoting the managed mobility of business people, the initiative is designed to facilitate access to new markets and business opportunities, all while increasing the competitiveness of the private sector, incentivising job creation, and increasing foreign investment. Consequently, the initiative will lead to improved economic and political cooperation between the two countries, as well as a better migration management framework. In addition, this pilot initiative is targeted to promote a safe environment for institutional dialogue around professional mobility between Belgium and Georgia, paving the way for the exploration of more avenues of cooperation modality between the countries.

The action also envisages the establishment of a stakeholder cooperation and exchange platform including public and private sector representatives. The platform aims to foster trust and understanding of entrepreneurial mobility as a safe channel for temporary migration, focusing in particular on start-ups in Georgia and Belgium. Consequently, in addition to enriching the entrepreneurship ecosystem in Georgia, the action foresees the minimisation of irregular migration from Georgia through prioritisation of legal migration channels for business development.

The project’s specific objectives include:

- 1. Increasing cooperation and exchange between state institutions, private sector representatives, and start-ups in Belgium and Georgia, focusing on temporary entrepreneurial mobility development.**
- 2. Increasing the capacity of Georgian start-ups to grow and support skill and talent retention.**

Considering the objectives of the ICMPD EMLINK project, the project followed a structured path, beginning with startup selection. Next, stakeholder mapping, tailored capacity-building programmes, networking, and matchmaking activities took place. A key highlight of the project was the study tour to Belgium, which provided Georgian startups with direct exposure to Belgian innovation hubs, accelerators, and market stakeholders. This roadmap documents the entire implementation process, offering a replicable framework for similar initiatives aimed at fostering entrepreneurial mobility and cross-border collaboration.

The comprehensive approach of the project underscores the transformative potential of international partnerships in enhancing startup ecosystems, creating legal migration pathways, and strengthening bilateral ties between nations.

2. Background and Context

The EMLINK project ICMPD implemented aimed to strengthen economic partnership between Belgium and Georgia through a temporary mobility programme for entrepreneurs. By fostering regulated mobility for Georgian business professionals, the project seeks to expand market access, enhance commercial opportunities, and promote knowledge exchange. This initiative is positioned as a catalyst for improved private sector competitiveness, job creation, and foreign investment, thereby paving the way for deeper economic and political cooperation between the two nations. The project also serves as a platform for institutional dialogue on professional mobility, creating a safer and more structured framework for temporary migration.

The EMLINK project aligns closely with the national priorities outlined in Georgia's strategic frameworks. The Small and Medium Entrepreneurship Development Strategy of Georgia 2021–2025 emphasises fostering entrepreneurial skills, promoting the internationalisation of startups, and supporting innovation. Similarly, the Migration Strategy of Georgia 2021–2030 highlights the importance of developing structured labour migration schemes, enhancing migration management frameworks, and addressing brain drain by creating opportunities for knowledge transfer and return migration. EMLINK's objectives, particularly its focus on equipping Georgian startups with the tools and international exposure needed for growth, directly contribute to these priorities. By building bridges between the entrepreneurial ecosystems of Belgium and Georgia, the project addresses critical challenges in entrepreneurship development while reinforcing legal and managed mobility pathways.

Entrepreneurial mobility offers significant advantages for innovation, market expansion, and economic growth. By enabling Georgian entrepreneurs to interact with Belgian counterparts, the EMLINK project facilitates the exchange of expertise and best practices, allowing startups to gain insights into more developed ecosystems. Such interactions are essential for enhancing the competitiveness of Georgian businesses, many of which operate in a nascent entrepreneurial landscape.

Moreover, international partnerships like those fostered through EMLINK create opportunities for co-innovation, investment, and capacity building. They also strengthen bilateral ties by promoting mutual understanding and collaboration in both the public and private sectors. Entrepreneurial mobility, supported through structured initiatives like EMLINK, ensures that temporary migration serves as a tool for economic empowerment and innovation rather than contributing to brain drain (i.e. the flight of human capital from a country). This framework not only helps entrepreneurs expand their businesses but also contributes to broader socio-economic benefits such as increased employment opportunities and enhanced economic resilience in Georgia.

The EMLINK project was implemented over a 23-month period, beginning in September 2023. The project progressed through a series of well-defined stages, starting with stakeholder mapping and ecosystem analysis in both Belgium and Georgia. This was followed by the development of tailored capacity-building programmes

for Georgian startups, including a multi-session compact acceleration course. Networking events, consultations, and matchmaking efforts connected Georgian entrepreneurs with Belgian counterparts. The project culminated in a study tour to Belgium, facilitating direct interaction with stakeholders, hubs, and accelerators, while capturing lessons learned and preparing a roadmap to support replication of similar initiatives.



3. Objectives of the Roadmap

The roadmap serves as a comprehensive guide to the implementation of EMLINK, documenting its progression from startup selection to the final phases of the project. It is designed to provide organisations and stakeholders interested in developing similar programmes or compact acceleration courses with a structured overview of processes, methodologies, and lessons learned.

The roadmap's primary aim is to function as both an implementation framework and a repository of insights gained during EMLINK. By detailing each stage of the project, it facilitates knowledge sharing and fosters replication of best practices in entrepreneurial mobility initiatives. The roadmap aims to demonstrate the mechanisms that ensured EMLINK's success, from fostering partnerships to achieving its broader goals of economic cooperation and startup development.

The roadmap is intended to serve as a comprehensive guide, documenting the implementation of EMLINK at all stages and offering valuable insights for replication in similar entrepreneurial mobility programmes. By focusing on the core phases of the project—from startup selection to training, stakeholder engagement, and study tours—it provides a **detailed account of the project's path**, ensuring clarity and accessibility for target audiences.

A central aim of the roadmap is to **capture lessons learned throughout the project**. It reflects on the successes, challenges, and adaptations made during EMLINK's implementation, offering actionable insights for organisations looking to develop comparable initiatives. By documenting these experiences, the roadmap enables the design of more effective and impactful startup support programmes.

The document emphasises the **methodologies and tools used in key processes**, such as startup selection, needs assessment, and curriculum development. These elements are presented as adaptable frameworks that can be tailored to a variety of contexts, ensuring that the roadmap remains relevant to a broad audience. Additionally, it highlights the **value of international partnerships** in fostering innovation and strengthening entrepreneurial ecosystems, drawing on the successful collaboration between Belgium and Georgia.

Finally, the roadmap aspires to promote **sustainability and adaptability**, encouraging stakeholders to build on EMLINK's achievements. It provides strategies for integrating entrepreneurial mobility into broader economic and migration frameworks while maintaining flexibility to address regional and organisational priorities. By engaging stakeholders from both public and private sectors, the roadmap aims to inspire and guide future initiatives that contribute to long-term growth and cooperation.

This document not only serves as a guide but also as a strategic reference for advancing entrepreneurial mobility and fostering impactful collaborations.

4. Methodology

The roadmap was developed following the completion of the EMLINK Compact Acceleration Course, with a focus on documenting its key processes, outputs, and lessons learned. Its preparation involved a thorough analysis of the project's deliverables, including the mapping report, agendas of networking and consultation meetings, **interviews with startups**, and **input from engaged experts**. This structured approach ensures that the roadmap captures the full scope of the project while offering actionable insights for similar initiatives.

The development process was guided by the need to synthesise a wealth of qualitative and quantitative data into a coherent narrative. By drawing from multiple sources, the roadmap reflects the collaborative efforts of stakeholders and the dynamic nature of EMLINK's implementation. It highlights not only the methodologies employed but also the outcomes achieved and challenges encountered, making it a valuable resource for future initiatives.

Engagement with Stakeholders and Expert Consultations

The preparation of the roadmap was rooted in extensive **engagement with stakeholders**, including startups, experts, and public and private sector representatives from both Belgium and Georgia. Throughout the project, consultations were conducted to ensure alignment with the needs of the Georgian entrepreneurial ecosystem and the goals of international collaboration.

Expert input played a pivotal role in shaping the roadmap. Consultations with professionals involved in startup acceleration, entrepreneurial mobility, and migration management provided critical insights into the strategies that underpinned EMLINK's success. These engagements not only informed the content of the roadmap but also ensured its relevance to a diverse range of audiences.

Data Collection and Analysis

The roadmap was built on a robust foundation of data collected during the project. This included:

- **Mapping exercises**, which identified key stakeholders, accelerators, and ecosystem players in both Belgium and Georgia. These exercises were instrumental in defining the framework for collaboration and matchmaking.
- **Interviews with startups**, which provided a first-hand account of their experiences, challenges, and the support they received during the project. This feedback was vital in understanding the impact of EMLINK and shaping recommendations for future initiatives.

- **Insights from engaged experts**, whose contributions informed the methodological and practical aspects of the project. These interviews captured the nuanced challenges of implementing entrepreneurial mobility programmes and offered strategies for overcoming them.
- **Analysis of project outputs**, such as meeting agendas, training session outcomes, and stakeholder engagement activities. These documents provided a comprehensive view of the project's implementation and served as key references for the roadmap.

By integrating these diverse sources of information, the roadmap ensures that EMLINK's journey is presented in a way that is both reflective and forward-looking. It offers a structured account of the project's path while equipping stakeholders with the tools and insights necessary to replicate its success and adapt to other environs.

5. Project Implementation Process

5.1 Selection of Experts



The selection of experts for the EMLINK project was guided by the need to ensure a blend of expertise, experience, and understanding of the startup ecosystems in both Belgium and Georgia. The criteria focused on identifying individuals with a proven track record in startup development, innovation management, and entrepreneurial mobility. Candidates were required to demonstrate extensive knowledge of the challenges and opportunities within the Georgian and Belgian startup landscapes, along with an ability to design and implement tailored support mechanisms.

Key attributes for selection included:

- Experience in startup acceleration and innovation programmes, particularly those with an international component.
- Strong understanding of the needs and dynamics of early-stage startups, including knowledge of financing, product development, and market expansion strategies.
- Proven ability to foster cross-border collaboration and facilitate knowledge transfer between stakeholders.
- Excellent communication and mentoring skills to effectively engage with startups and other stakeholders.

Recruitment Process and Roles of Selected Experts

The recruitment process for experts involved a comprehensive evaluation of qualifications, professional experience, and compatibility with EMLINK's objectives. The selection committee reviewed applications, conducted interviews, and assessed candidates' ability to contribute to the project's goals. A diverse panel of three foreign experts and three local experts were ultimately chosen to provide a balanced perspective and expertise.

Foreign Experts. Three international experts with diverse backgrounds in startup ecosystem development were recruited. These experts brought significant experience from regions with advanced innovation ecosystems, providing valuable insights into best practices. Their roles included leading capacity-building sessions, advising startups on market entry strategies, and fostering collaboration between Georgian and Belgian stakeholders. With expertise in areas such as venture capital, innovation management, and entrepreneurship policy, the foreign experts served as key advisors throughout the project.

Local Experts. The local experts were selected based on their in-depth knowledge of the Georgian startup ecosystem, including its unique challenges and opportunities. These experts acted as a bridge between the international team and Georgian startups, ensuring that the project's activities were tailored to local needs. Their role included facilitating communication with Georgian stakeholders, identifying startups for participation, and providing cultural and contextual insights to guide the project's implementation.

The three foreign experts brought a wealth of experience from diverse innovation-driven industries. One had a background in managing global acceleration programmes, specialising in helping startups scale internationally and attract investment. The second expert was an innovation strategist with expertise in linking startups to corporate partners and venture capital networks. The third expert was an academic and consultant with extensive experience in entrepreneurship research and policy advisory, with a specialty in topics related to internationalisation and mobility. The local experts were seasoned professionals with deep ties to the Georgian entrepreneurial ecosystem, having worked extensively with local startups and innovation hubs. Furthermore, the experts were experienced in legal and regulatory frameworks, especially with regard to digital ecosystems, skills, migration, and public-private partnerships (PPPs). Their experience in conducting needs assessments and designing tailored support programmes for Georgian startups made them a critical asset for the project. Together, this team of experts provided the knowledge, strategic guidance, and mentorship necessary to achieve the project's goals.

5.2 Start-up Selection



Methodology for Identifying and Selecting Startups

The selection of startups for participation in EMLINK was based on a sector-agnostic, merit-driven methodology aimed at identifying early-stage Georgian startups with high potential for international growth. The process was designed to align with the project's objectives of fostering innovation, encouraging internationalisation, and promoting knowledge exchange.

The criteria for selection focused on startups with a demonstrated commitment to innovation, scalability, and market readiness. Specific considerations included:

- A focus on technology and innovation, offering unique and scalable solutions.
- Potential for rapid growth and scalability within the Georgian ecosystem and beyond.
- A readiness to attract investment and enter international markets, particularly in Belgium.
- An operational stage between pre-seed and seed, with a functional MVP (Minimum Viable Product) or product on the market.
- Strong founding teams with proven ability to execute their vision effectively.
- A commitment to the programme's objectives, including full participation in training and international mobility.

Detailed Process

1. Application Submission

The selection process began with an open call for applications, widely promoted through multiple channels, including ICMPD's website, social media platforms, and local TV programmes. Applicants were required to submit:

- A completed application form.
- A pitch deck detailing their business model, product, and market strategy.
- CVs of the founders and key team members.
- Supporting documents such as financial performance records and growth metrics.

To ensure a broad and diverse pool of candidates, the application phase was open for six weeks.

2. Document Review

An initial screening was conducted to assess the completeness and eligibility of applications. The selection committee reviewed the applications against predefined evaluation criteria, focusing on problem-solution clarity, innovation, market potential, business model viability, and alignment with EMLINK's objectives.

3. Shortlisting and Interviews

Following the document review, 17 shortlisted candidates were invited for interviews. These 30-minute online sessions evaluated the startups' pitching abilities, strategic vision, and motivation for participating in the programme. The interview allowed the selection committee to assess each startup's readiness for internationalisation and compatibility with the Belgian entrepreneurial ecosystem.

4. Final Selection



A final cohort of 11 startups was selected based on the combined results of the document review and interview. These startups represented a diverse range of industries and demonstrated the potential to benefit significantly from the programme's training, networking, and mobility components.

Evaluation Criteria

Startups were evaluated for their:

- Clarity in addressing a defined problem with an innovative solution.
- Feasibility and scalability of their business model.
- Product-Market fit.
- Evidence of traction or market interest.
- Founders' and team members' qualifications and commitment.
- Strategic alignment with EMLINK's goals of fostering bilateral entrepreneurial collaboration.

The selection process ensured that the chosen startups were well-positioned to maximally benefit from the programme, while also contributing to the broader objectives of fostering economic and innovation ties between Belgium and Georgia.

Sector	Startup	Intro
Fintech	 Payze	PAYZE is a way to clear and effortless online payments. We provide various technical solutions that allow you to manage your payment processes in the blink of an eye.
Lifescience	 Sidekick	Sidekick is a habit-building app where users get matched with accountability partners for a habit-building journey, receiving guidance in the form of CBT techniques every step of the way.
	 Biterium AI	Monitor your health and prevent cardiovascular diseases at an early stage.
	 Forma Healthy	Diet and workout B2B2C marketplace with AI Nutritionist.
	 Neuropilot VR	Intervention of Neuroscience, Psychology, and the Latest Technology in the Treatment of Anxiety and Depression. All this via VR therapy.
High-tech	 Elven Technologies	Fireproof enclosures are built using our proprietary patent pending flexible flameproof material technology, that can withstand extreme temperatures (2000 degrees celsius/3600 fahrenheit) and direct flame, thus enabling us to build such an enclosure, that will contain full-blown EV/storage battery fire as well as temperature, protecting human lives and precious property.
Marketplace	 Biliki AI	Biliki AI is developing an AI-powered travel planning platform to help environmentally conscious travellers plan sustainable trips reducing their carbon footprint by 10% with innovative and eco-friendly itinerary suggestions.
	 Herio	We connect Businesses requiring part-time employees with youth wishing to make money fast.
Mar-tech	 Stori AI	Stori is an AI-powered brand automation platform that empowers SMBs to create and publish branded content across social media. It is an ecosystem for multi-brand collaboration.
	 Printomato	Ads through photo prints in crowded locations.
SAAS (Service As A Software)	 Signify (Operations Automation)	Signify is a digital contracting platform for SMEs to prepare, sign, store and manage their legal documents in one place.



5.3 Mapping Exercise

Mapping Process

The stakeholder mapping process under the EMLINK project was a structured exercise aimed at identifying key actors across the entrepreneurial ecosystems of Belgium and Georgia. The mapping involved a **mixed-methods approach**, incorporating data from government policies, industry reports, academic literature, and direct consultations with relevant stakeholders. Experts from Belgium and Georgia collaborated with the ICMPD team to ensure a comprehensive and balanced representation of both ecosystems.

The process focused on categorising stakeholders into specific groups to provide a detailed understanding of their roles, influence, and potential contributions. These groups included:

- **Public sector stakeholders**, such as government agencies and institutions involved in migration, entrepreneurship, and innovation policy.
- **Private sector actors**, including incubators, accelerators, venture capital firms, angel investors, and successful startups.
- **Supporting organisations**, such as research institutions and non-profits working in entrepreneurship development.

Purpose of the Mapping

The mapping exercise served several strategic purposes for the EMLINK project, as described below.

Foundation for Collaboration

By identifying key stakeholders, the mapping created a knowledge base that facilitated partnerships between Georgian and Belgian actors. This was essential for enabling structured dialogue and mutual understanding around professional mobility and entrepreneurial collaboration.

Informing Project Activities

The insights from the mapping guided the design and implementation of the project's key components, including the compact acceleration course, study tours, and matchmaking events. Identified stakeholders served as critical touchpoints for capacity-building, mentoring, and investment opportunities for Georgian startups.

Tailoring Programme Design

The mapping allowed the project to align its objectives with the specific needs and capabilities of stakeholders in both countries. For example, the exercise identified accelerators and investors in Belgium that matched the growth stage and industry focus of participating Georgian startups.

Policy Alignment

The mapping supported the alignment of EMLINK’s objectives with national policies in Belgium and Georgia, particularly in areas such as innovation, migration management, and entrepreneurship support. It highlighted synergies that could enhance the policy impact of the project.

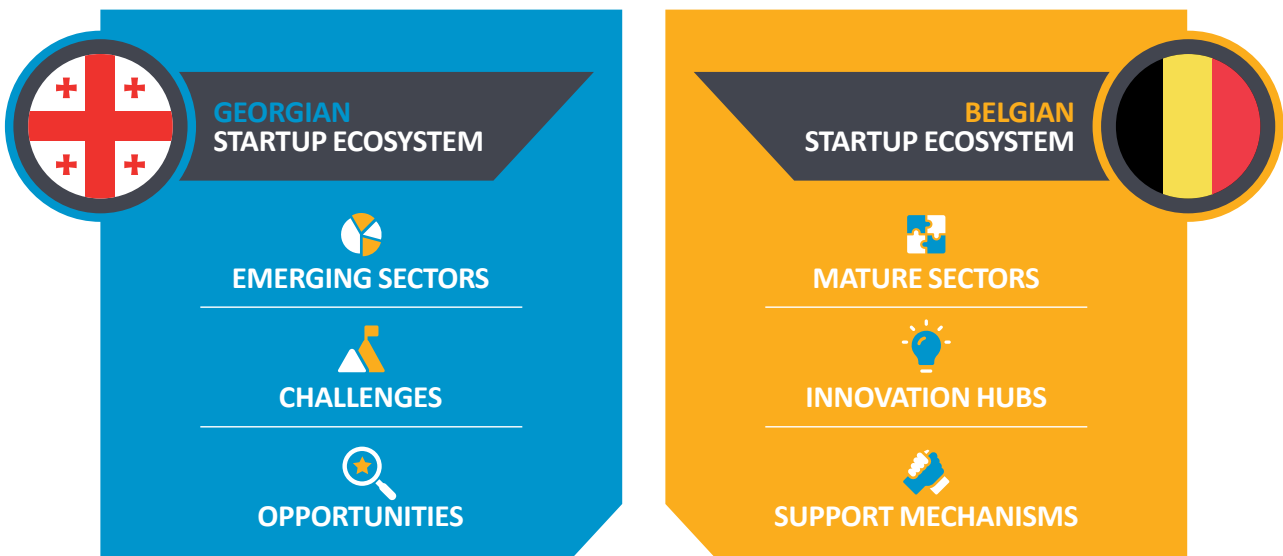
Use for the EMLINK Project

The stakeholder mapping report became a cornerstone of the EMLINK project, providing actionable insights for its implementation. It was used to:

- **Identify and engage relevant actors** for networking sessions, mentoring, and resource mobilisation.
- **Design tailored interventions**, such as training modules and study tours, to address specific gaps and opportunities in the entrepreneurial ecosystems of Belgium and Georgia.
- **Support the replication of the mobility model**, offering a blueprint for future programmes by showcasing the value of cross-border collaboration in entrepreneurship.

This comprehensive mapping process ensured that EMLINK’s activities were strategically targeted, effectively executed, and aligned with the broader goals of fostering bilateral cooperation and entrepreneurial mobility.

The Georgian and Belgian Ecosystems at a Glance





5.4 Needs Assessment

Development of Questionnaires to Identify Startup Needs

The needs assessment for the EMLINK project began with the creation of a structured questionnaire designed to capture comprehensive information about the startups. The questionnaire was developed to align with the project's objectives of fostering entrepreneurial mobility, innovation, and market expansion. It covered the key areas described in the table below.

Awareness of the Belgian Entrepreneurial Ecosystem	This section assessed the startups' familiarity with Belgium's market, opportunities, and regulatory frameworks.
Challenges and Barriers	Startups were asked to highlight obstacles they faced in funding, talent acquisition, product scalability, and internationalisation.
Expectations of the Programme	This included identifying topics and support areas that startups considered critical, such as investment opportunities, networking, or regulatory guidance.
Sector-specific Needs	Tailored questions addressed the unique requirements of startups in fields like FinTech, HealthTech, High-Tech, and Life Sciences.

The questionnaire featured both open-ended and close-ended questions, allowing for a mix of quantitative data and qualitative insights. It was distributed to selected startups ahead of the training sessions, ensuring the project team could tailor the curriculum to address needs effectively.

One-on-One Interviews and Analysis of Findings

Following the initial questionnaire, one-on-one interviews were conducted with each startup to delve deeper into their challenges, expectations, and strategic objectives. These interviews provided a more nuanced understanding of the startups' needs, enabling the project team to identify both common themes and unique challenges.

The interviews were structured around the following key areas:

- **Validation of questionnaire responses.** Clarifying and expanding upon the data gathered in the questionnaire.
- **Growth potential and readiness.** Assessing each startup's stage of development, market readiness, and capacity to scale internationally.
- **Targeted needs.** Exploring specific requirements, such as guidance on investments, EU regulatory compliance, and connections with Belgian accelerators.

The interviews demonstrated recurring themes, such as a lack of awareness about Belgium's entrepreneurial ecosystem, limited access to international networks, and a strong demand for mentorship in navigating EU regulations and funding opportunities. These findings informed the design of the compact acceleration course, ensuring it addressed both shared and individual challenges.

This two-pronged approach including questionnaires and interviews enabled the EMLINK project to customise its support to startups effectively, providing a solid foundation for their internationalisation efforts and ensuring alignment with the project's broader objectives.

6. Training and Capacity Building

Development of a Curriculum Tailored to Startups' Profiles

The curriculum for the EMLINK Compact Acceleration Course (CAC) was developed through a collaborative and data-driven process to address the specific needs of participating startups. The development relied on insights gathered from the stakeholder mapping, needs assessment questionnaires, and one-on-one interviews with entrepreneurs. These inputs helped shape the programme's focus areas, ensuring alignment with the startups' growth stages, market ambitions, and industry-specific requirements.

The curriculum design process involved multiple stages, including:

- 1. Needs Assessment Analysis.** As discussed above, feedback from startups highlighted key challenges, such as limited market access, gaps in business planning, and a need for mentorship in navigating regulatory environments.
- 2. Stakeholder Input.** Consultations with experts from Belgium and Georgia helped refine the curriculum's focus, ensuring it addressed both local ecosystem needs and internationalisation opportunities.
- 3. Interactive Development.** Draft modules were reviewed and adjusted based on feedback from engaged experts and project partners to ensure relevance and practicality.

The resulting curriculum combined theoretical frameworks with hands-on activities, offering a structured yet flexible learning path. Seven sessions were conducted in Georgia, equipping startups with foundational knowledge and skills, while the eighth session was held in Belgium and provided practical exposure to the Belgian entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Delivery of Eight Training Sessions

The table below provides an overview of the eight sessions, including their names and detailed descriptions of their content.

Session Name	Description
1. Introduction to the Belgian Entrepreneurial Ecosystem	This session provided an overview of Belgium's startup landscape, focusing on its key sectors, innovation hubs, and ecosystem stakeholders, such as accelerators, venture capitalists, and government agencies. Startups learned about Belgium's strategic advantages and explored opportunities for collaboration and market entry.
2. Business Proposition, Communication, and Networking	Participants refined their value propositions and communication strategies. The session covered the fundamentals of networking, building meaningful connections, and effectively presenting their business ideas to different audiences, including investors and potential partners.
3. Building the Business	Startups engaged in practical exercises to strengthen their business models, with a focus on scalability and investment readiness. Topics included financial planning, market analysis, and developing sustainable revenue streams. Participants also received guidance on preparing investor-ready pitch decks.
4. Advanced Communication Strategies	This session delved deeper into storytelling and tailored communication for different stakeholders. Participants developed targeted messages for investors, customers, and partners, learning to adapt their approaches based on audience expectations and cultural nuances.
5. Networking and Stakeholder Mapping	Participants learned to identify and prioritise key stakeholders in their industry. The session included practical exercises in stakeholder mapping, techniques for initiating contact, and strategies for building and maintaining professional relationships, both locally and internationally.
6. Legal and Regulatory Frameworks	This session provided a comprehensive overview of the legal and regulatory requirements in Belgium and the EU, including GDPR compliance, intellectual property rights, and industry-specific regulations. Case studies and expert insights helped startups understand the risks and responsibilities associated with entering foreign markets.
7. Investment Opportunities and Mentorship	Startups explored pathways to secure funding, including angel investments and venture capital. The session featured mock investment pitches and provided feedback from mentors. It also highlighted the role of mentorship in addressing challenges related to growth and scaling internationally.
8. Lessons Learned and Strategic Planning	The final session focused on reflecting on the entire programme, synthesising key takeaways, and developing action plans. Participants discussed strategies for leveraging their Belgian connections, sustaining partnerships, and accessing new funding opportunities while planning long-term internationalisation.

Implementation and Engagement

Each session was carefully facilitated by a team of local and international experts with extensive experience in entrepreneurship and innovation. Interactive workshops, group discussions, and role-playing exercises ensured high levels of engagement. Startups were encouraged to actively participate, share their experiences, and seek tailored advice.

The combination of theoretical and practical learning, along with exposure to Belgium's entrepreneurial ecosystem, equipped the startups with the skills and confidence needed to navigate international markets successfully. The structured delivery ensured that each session built upon the previous one, creating a comprehensive learning journey for participants.

7. Networking and Matchmaking Activities

Organisation of Networking Sessions

Networking and matchmaking activities were integral to the EMLINK project, enabling Georgian startups to connect with stakeholders within the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Belgium. The project organised a series of targeted group networking sessions and individual meetings designed to provide startups with insights into the innovation ecosystem and establish connections with potential collaborators, investors, and accelerators.

Networking events were structured to include:

- **General meetings**, sessions that introduced Georgian startups to key players across various sectors, such as innovation hubs, investment platforms, and public sector institutions.
- **The European Angel Investment Summit 2024**, the largest gathering of angel investors and startups in Europe. The event enabled participants to gain insights into European angel investment trends, startup funding opportunities, cross-border collaboration, and investor-startup partnerships. Furthermore, the event enabled startups to gain wider exposure and establish valuable contacts.
- **Sector-specific meetings**, tailored interactions designed to match the profiles of individual startups with stakeholders relevant to their industries, such as healthcare, sustainable technologies, and digital finance.

Key activities included visits to prominent innovation hubs and accelerators, where startups learned about best practices, operational strategies, and opportunities for collaboration. Participation in investment-focused events also provided startups with access to potential investors and an understanding of the local investment climate.

Stakeholder Mapping for Identifying Hubs, Incubators, and Innovation Centres

The stakeholder mapping process was critical in identifying relevant actors within Belgium's entrepreneurial ecosystem. The mapping exercise was informed by the project's objectives, focusing on incubators, accelerators, innovation hubs, and investors. This process included:

- **Identifying key hubs and accelerators** - institutions supporting innovation and entrepreneurship were prioritised for their contributions and relevance to the participating startups' industries.

- **Engaging with innovation centres** - these included sector-specific hubs in areas like healthcare, technology, and sustainable solutions, ensuring startups received tailored exposure to resources that matched their business needs.
- **Planning for diversity** - the mapping ensured a balanced mix of institutional, private, and academic stakeholders, providing startups with a comprehensive understanding of the ecosystem.

Efforts in Planning Meetings

The planning of meetings required substantial coordination by the experts to maximise the value of a 10-day visit to Belgium. The experts worked closely with Belgian stakeholders to schedule meetings that aligned with the startups' profiles and objectives. A combination of group and individual meetings ensured both broad exposure and targeted engagement.

Key planning considerations included:

- **Sector-specific alignment.** Meetings were tailored to ensure compatibility between Georgian startups' industries and the interests of the stakeholders, enabling meaningful discussions and potential partnerships.
- **Optimisation of time.** The itinerary was designed to cover multiple hubs and centres across regions within a constrained timeframe.
- **Flexibility for dynamic interaction.** While a pre-arranged schedule was followed, room was left for ad-hoc opportunities that arose during the visit, such as impromptu pitches or additional meetings.

The networking and matchmaking activities not only fostered meaningful connections but also equipped Georgian startups with a deeper understanding of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. These efforts were pivotal in creating pathways for future collaboration, investment, and internationalisation opportunities.

8. Study Tour to Belgium

Planning and Execution of the Study Tour

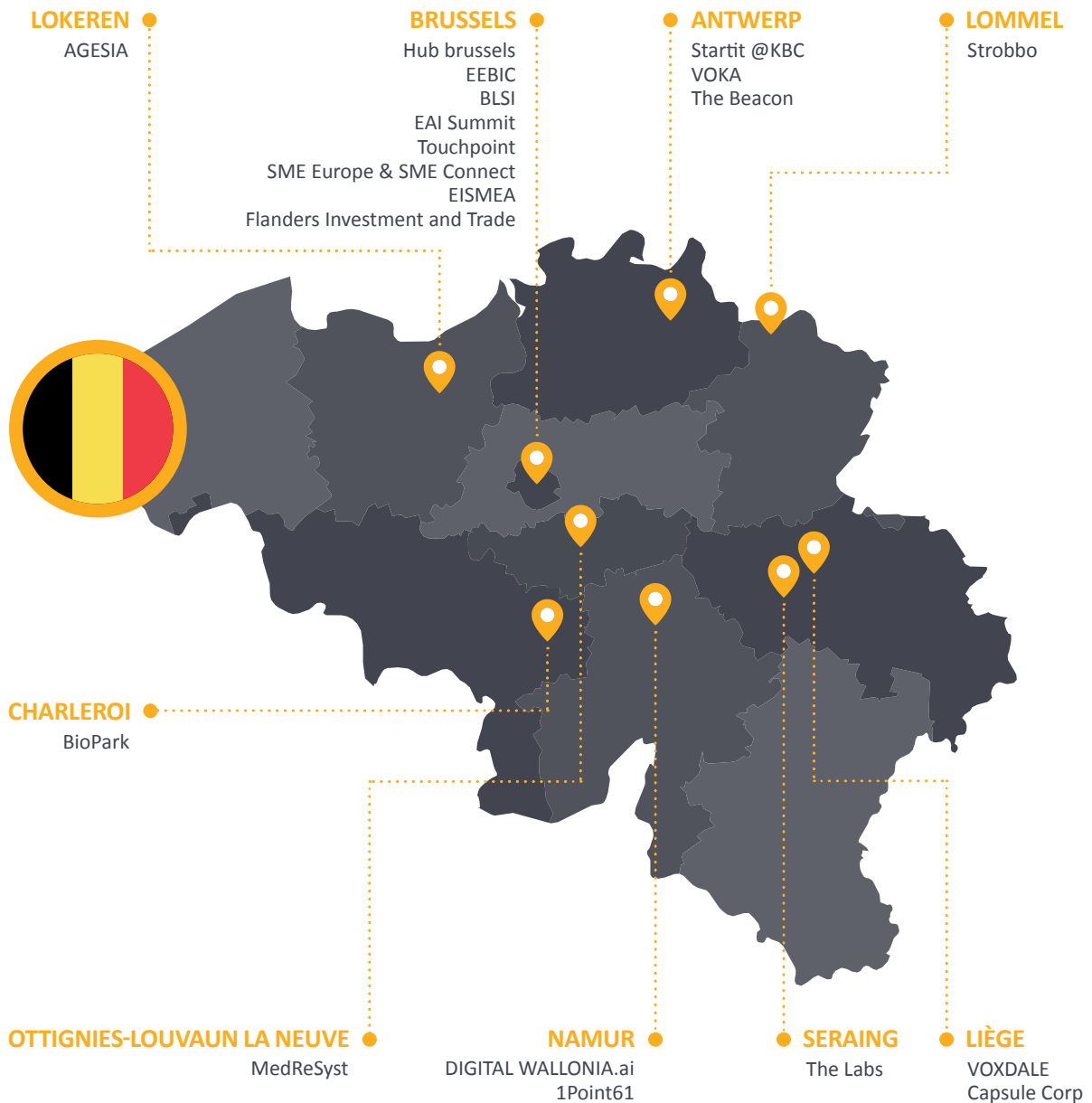
The study tour to Belgium was a pivotal component of the EMLINK project, designed to provide Georgian startups with firsthand exposure to Belgium’s entrepreneurial landscape. Meticulous planning ensured that the 10-day programme delivered maximum value through a combination of group activities, tailored one-on-one meetings, and participation in high-impact networking events. The study tour focused on enabling Georgian startups to understand Belgium’s market dynamics, regulatory frameworks, and innovation ecosystems while fostering connections with local stakeholders.

Key Activities

The study tour included several high-impact activities aimed at achieving the objectives of the EMLINK project:

Activity	Description
Meetings with Belgian Stakeholders	Startups participated in one-on-one and group meetings with a diverse range of stakeholders, including innovation hubs, investors, public authorities, and sector-specific experts. These meetings provided critical insights into Belgium’s business environment and offered practical advice on topics such as establishing a presence in the country, accessing funding, and forging partnerships.
Visits to Innovation Hubs and Incubators	Georgian startups visited key innovation hubs and incubators in Belgium to learn about their operational models and the resources they offer to startups. These visits included guided tours, presentations, and interactive discussions with managers and resident startups. Startups gained insights into support structures such as mentorship programmes, equity-free funding opportunities, and ecosystem-specific initiatives.
Participation in Matchmaking Events	Networking events were designed to facilitate interactions with potential investors, industry leaders, and peers. Startups attended sessions where they had opportunities to pitch their ideas, showcase their products, and initiate discussions on potential collaborations. These events were particularly impactful for startups looking to secure funding or establish strategic partnerships.
Workshops and Presentations	Dedicated sessions were held to provide practical guidance on navigating Belgium’s startup ecosystem. Topics covered included market entry strategies, compliance with EU regulations, and leveraging local resources for scaling internationally. Startups also participated in workshops focused on refining their pitch decks and developing sector-specific strategies.

The study tour was instrumental in fostering connections, enhancing the understanding of international markets, and providing Georgian startups with actionable insights and opportunities to scale their businesses. The lessons learned from this experience will inform the design of future programmes, ensuring they are even more impactful and relevant.



9. Insights Gained from the Project and Outcomes

The EMLINK project demonstrated the transformative potential of international collaboration in fostering startup growth. The study tour to Belgium provided Georgian startups with unparalleled insights into a mature entrepreneurial ecosystem, offering a blend of practical knowledge and strategic connections. Startups benefited significantly from exposure to Belgium’s innovation hubs, incubators, and accelerators, which showcased operational models and pathways for support tailored to early-stage ventures.

While the Belgian ecosystem presented ample opportunities, the startups also encountered challenges, such as navigating the country’s complex regulatory environment. This highlighted the importance of providing clear, practical guidance for startups entering international markets. Networking opportunities proved critical, emphasising the value of structured matchmaking events that enabled direct interactions with potential partners, investors, and stakeholders.

The project further demonstrated the importance of tailoring programmes to the specific needs of participants. A mix of general sessions and sector-focused engagements ensured that the startups could derive maximum value from the experience. However, feedback suggested that more intense, sector-specific itineraries might enhance outcomes in future initiatives.

Key Outcomes

The EMLINK project achieved significant milestones in strengthening the Georgian startup ecosystem and fostering bilateral cooperation between Belgium and Georgia:

Outcome	Description
Enhanced Entrepreneurial Capacities	Georgian startups developed a better understanding of internationalisation strategies, regulatory compliance, and market dynamics, positioning them for growth in the EU market.
Established Cross-Border Connections	Startups established meaningful relationships with Belgian stakeholders, including innovation hubs, accelerators, and investors, many of which are expected to result in long-term collaborations.
Sector-Specific Success	Startups in high-potential sectors, such as MedTech, secured promising leads for partnerships and investment, reinforcing the value of sector-focused programming.

Strengthened Ecosystem Understanding	Insights into the operational models of Belgian incubators and accelerators provided Georgian startups with frameworks that can inform ecosystem development efforts in Georgia.
Bilateral Collaboration	The programme strengthened economic and professional ties between Belgium and Georgia, showcasing the potential of temporary entrepreneurial mobility as a tool for bilateral engagement.

Efforts and Challenges in Execution

The execution of the study tour highlighted several key factors that contributed to its success and areas for improvement:

1. Coordination with Local Experts

Belgian experts played a pivotal role in curating a high-value schedule, leveraging their extensive networks to arrange relevant meetings and events. Their involvement ensured that the tour was both impactful and aligned with the specific needs of the startups.

2. Dynamic Scheduling

The programme's flexibility allowed it to adapt to last-minute changes, such as rescheduling meetings or accommodating emerging opportunities. This adaptability ensured that startups could make the most of their time in Belgium.

3. Balancing General and Specific Needs

The tour succeeded in blending general sessions, applicable to all participants, with tailored engagements focused on individual startups. However, feedback suggested that future initiatives could benefit from shorter, more intense trips with a narrower sectoral focus.

4. Navigating Regulatory Complexities

Startups identified Belgium's multilayered regulatory environment as a significant challenge, emphasising the need for clear and actionable guidance on establishing and operating businesses in the country.

5. Maximising Networking Opportunities

Structured matchmaking events were essential for connecting startups with potential partners and investors. These events reinforced the importance of preparing startups with targeted pitch training and tailored messaging to make the most of such opportunities.

The EMLINK project demonstrated the immense value of fostering entrepreneurial mobility and international collaboration. By equipping Georgian startups with the tools, knowledge, and networks needed to navigate the challenges of international markets, the project laid the foundation for sustained growth and bilateral cooperation. The lessons learned from this initiative will serve as a valuable guide for designing future programmes, ensuring even greater impact and alignment with participant needs.

10. Recommendations

The success of the EMLINK project underscores the importance of well-designed entrepreneurial mobility programmes in fostering innovation, creating cross-border opportunities, and enhancing migration management frameworks. Based on the lessons learned and insights gained, the following recommendations are proposed for sustaining and expanding similar acceleration programmes.

Sustaining and Expanding Entrepreneurial Mobility Programmes

1. Include Experienced Experts

The inclusion of experienced local and international experts is critical to the success of entrepreneurial mobility programmes. Experts with a deep understanding of startup ecosystems, sector-specific challenges, and cross-border collaboration can provide tailored guidance, leverage their networks for high-value engagements, and ensure alignment with programme objectives.

2. Foster Sector-Specific Focus

Future programmes should emphasise sector-specific approaches, aligning activities, matchmaking, and mentoring with the unique needs of startups in target industries. This ensures more impactful interactions and maximises the relevance of programme content.

3. Strengthen Tailored Support Mechanisms

Providing tailored support, such as individual mentorship, customised matchmaking, and one-on-one sessions, is essential for addressing the specific challenges startups face. Programmes should ensure a balance between generic and tailored activities to meet diverse needs effectively.

4. Enhance Networking Opportunities

Networking events should be structured to encourage meaningful interactions between participants and stakeholders. Incorporating activities such as pitch competitions, industry-specific workshops, and informal networking sessions can increase the value of these engagements.

5. Ensure Programme Flexibility

Entrepreneurial mobility programmes must be adaptable to accommodate dynamic changes, such as rescheduled meetings or emerging opportunities. Building flexibility into the programme schedule allows participants to maximise their experiences and outcomes.

6. Provide Practical Guidance for Market Entry

Startups often face challenges in navigating regulatory and operational complexities when entering foreign markets. Programmes should include sessions on practical aspects of market entry, such as entity establishment, compliance requirements, and access to local resources.

Leveraging Project Outcomes to Improve Migration Management Frameworks

Recommendation	Description
Integrate Entrepreneurial Mobility into Migration Policies	Migration management frameworks should formally recognise entrepreneurial mobility as a tool for economic development. This can involve creating pathways for temporary startup migration and facilitating collaborations between businesses in different countries.
Develop Cross-Border Ecosystem Linkages	Strengthening ties between startup ecosystems in origin and host countries can create sustained benefits. This includes fostering partnerships between innovation hubs, accelerators, and public institutions to streamline cross-border entrepreneurial activities.
Institutionalise Learnings and Best Practices	Capturing and disseminating lessons learned from mobility programmes like EMLINK ensures that future initiatives can build on proven strategies. Governments and implementing organisations should institutionalise these practices in migration management and economic development frameworks.
Support Follow-Up Activities	Sustained engagement with programme participants after the conclusion of the programme is vital for long-term success. Initiatives such as follow-up networking sessions, ongoing mentorship, and access to post-programme resources can ensure startups continue to benefit from the opportunities created.
Incorporate Monitoring and Evaluation Systems	Introducing robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks allows programmes to track outcomes, assess impact, and refine their approaches. This ensures that entrepreneurial mobility programmes remain effective and relevant to the evolving needs of participants.
Promote Bilateral and Multilateral Collaboration	Expanding partnerships beyond bilateral arrangements to include multilateral collaborations can enhance programme scalability and resource sharing. Regional and international networks of accelerators, investors, and policymakers can further support the mobility and success of startups.

These recommendations aim to create more impactful entrepreneurial mobility programmes, ensuring they not only support startups but also contribute to broader economic and migration policy goals. By leveraging the insights from EMLINK, future programmes can build sustainable models for fostering innovation and cross-border collaboration.

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