

SWEET & SALTY ACCELERATOR IGKK AI

Summary report 2026

001 **Introduction**



002 **Program Objective**

003 **The Program in Numbers**

004 **Why Sweet & Salty AI?**

005 **A Startup's Journey Through the Program**

006 **AI Sandbox in Practice**

006 **Startup Spotlight**

014 **Program Results and Impact**

015 **The Program's Impact on the Region**

016 **Key Findings for the Next Year**

017 **Participants' Feedback**

018 **What Startups Have Said About Us**

019 **Conclusion and Acknowledgments**

Introduction

We are pleased to present the final summary report of the **Sweet & Salty AI 2026** acceleration program, which was implemented as a specialized support program for startups focused on **artificial intelligence** and technological innovation in the Košice Region. The program's goal was to support promising AI startups in the early stages of development through **intensive mentoring, expert workshops, and hands-on training**.

The Sweet & Salty AI 2026 program was created by combining two successful initiatives of the Košice Region Innovation Center—the **Sweet & Salty** acceleration program and the **AI Sandbox** program. Thanks to this collaboration, a unique format was created that combined all the key elements of startup acceleration with the opportunity to practically test and validate AI solutions in a real-world environment.

The program ran from **March 1 to May 12, 2026**. It kicked off with a **two-day bootcamp in Prague**, organized in collaboration with **Unicorn Attacks** and led by **Vit Šubert, CEO of Unicorn Attacks**. During the bootcamp, the startups completed a series of intensive workshops focused on startup strategy, finance, legal aspects of business, value proposition development, sales, fundraising, marketing, and pitching. Participants also gained a wealth of practical experience and valuable insights from experts in the startup and investment communities.

A total of **32 startups** applied to the program, from which an expert committee selected **8 teams** for the acceleration phase itself. Over the following weeks, the startups participated in a series of specialized workshops, individual consultations, and mentoring sessions focused on product development, market validation, business model creation, investor readiness, and growth strategies. The program also included testing AI solutions within organizations of the Košice Self-Governing Region as well as in companies, giving the startups the opportunity to verify the functionality and benefits of their products under real-world conditions. Ultimately, **7 startups** advanced to the **final event**.

The acceleration program was implemented under the auspices of the Košice Region Innovation Center (ICKK) in collaboration with external mentors, experts, and partners from the technology and startup ecosystem.

This report summarizes the program's progress, its main activities, the outcomes and findings achieved, as well as the extent to which the set goals were met. It also serves as a basis for the further development of support for AI startups and future acceleration initiatives in the region.



Program Objective



The main goal of the Sweet & Salty AI 2026 acceleration program was to support the development of innovative startups in the Košice Region and prepare them for the next phase of their business, particularly for entering the investment phase and bringing their solutions to market.

The program was designed for startups that were at least in the MVP phase and focused on their systematic development through individual mentoring, professional activities, and work toward clearly defined milestones.

The program also aimed to motivate startups to pursue long-term business development in the Košice Region, support the creation of new job opportunities, and contribute to **strengthening the region's innovation ecosystem**. The program was funded as part of the OP Slovakia project and implemented under the auspices of the Košice Region Innovation Center.

32

REGISTERED
STARTUPS

7

FINALIST

10K €

FINANCIAL
PRIZE

The Program in Numbers

32

Registered
startups

8

Selected
Startups

7

Finalists

3

Month

11

Workshops

8

Mentors

5

Organizations involved
in sandbox testing

5

Pilot
Validations



Why SWEET & SALTY AI?

Sweet & Salty + AI Sandbox Collaboration

Sweet & Salty AI is now in its fourth year as an accelerator organized by the Košice Region Innovation Center (ICKK). The program is not just an accelerator, but an ecosystem where startups not only grow but also validate their AI solutions in a real-world environment—which is precisely what the AI Sandbox, a component of the program described below, is designed for. The combination of intensive training, mentoring, and direct connections with organizations in the Košice Region creates a unique opportunity for both startups and the region.

Why It's Not Enough for a Startup to Just Educate

Workshops and mentoring are essential, but training alone is not enough. Startups need the opportunity to test their solutions in real-world conditions and gather initial data and feedback. That is precisely why the AI Sandbox is part of the program—a space for piloting AI solutions in collaboration with partners from the Košice Self-Governing Region, the corporate sector, and smaller companies.

The Need for Validation in a Real-World Environment

Theoretical knowledge isn't enough—investors, customers, and partners want to see proof. AI Sandbox enables startups to move from concept to initial pilot validation, which significantly boosts their credibility and chances of success after the program.



A Startup's Journey Through the Program

Bootcamp Unicorn Attacks

The first phase of the program took the form of a two-day intensive boot camp in Prague, organized in collaboration with Unicorn Attacks. The startups participated in workshops covering key areas of startup development, such as: Startup Strategy, Finance, Legal Considerations, Value Proposition, Sales, Marketing, Fundraising, and Pitching.

Acceleration Phase

The ten-week acceleration phase formed the core of the program. Each week, the startups participated in online workshops and one-on-one consultations with mentors. The program also included a public speaking course and a dry run before the finals, which prepared the startups for their final presentation, as well as networking events, which the startups themselves viewed as one of the program's greatest added values.

- **Regular weekly workshops**
- **Individual mentoring for each startup**
- **One-on-one consultations tailored to your needs**
- **A public speaking course and a dry run before Demo Day**
- **Networking events with other startups and program partners**

AI Sandbox

AI Sandbox was a unique feature of the program—an opportunity for startups to test their AI solutions in the real-world environments of KSK local government organizations, corporations, and small businesses.

- **Validation of AI Solutions in a Real-World Environment**
- **Pilot Deployment**
- **Testing with Real Data and Users**

Demo Day

- The final Demo Day was the highlight of the program. The accelerator's finale took place during Innovation & Tech Week, where seven startups presented the results of their work to a panel of expert judges made up of investors.
- **Presentations by all finalists**
- **Feedback from the jury and the audience**

AUDIENCE CHOICE AWARD WINNER: CURIPET

DEMO DAY WINNER: CURIPET



AI Sandbox in Practice



Participating Organizations

Organizations representing three sectors participated in the pilot phase of the AI Sandbox: the KSK local government, the corporate sector, and small businesses. The organizations were not assigned at random—we selected them specifically for each startup based on the focus of its solution and target audience, so that testing would take place in an environment that most closely matched its real-world market. The goal was to create a diverse environment in which startups could test their solutions on different types of customers and use cases.

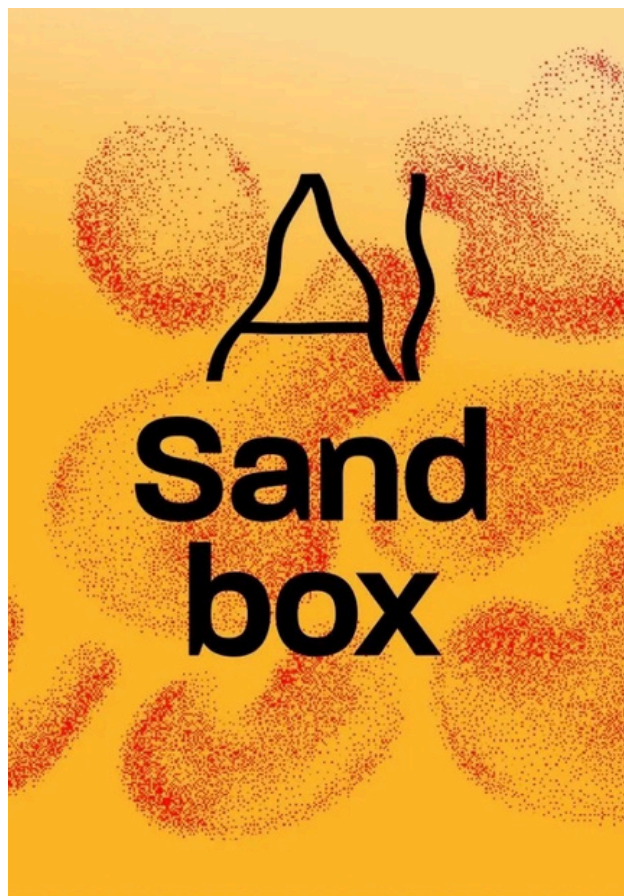
What problems did the startups solve?

As part of the sandbox, the startups worked to identify specific problems faced by partner organizations, for which they designed and tested AI solutions. These primarily involved the areas of process automation, data analysis, service personalization, and the efficiency of internal operations.

Testing Status

Testing within the AI Sandbox is currently ongoing and will be completed in July 2026. This is because verifying AI solutions in a real-world environment requires a longer period of time—only then is it possible to obtain relevant and reliable results.

A separate report will be prepared for each startup upon completion of the testing phase. Each report will include the perspectives of technical experts, legal professionals, and the organization that tested the solution and provided structured feedback. The results of each pilot will thus be documented comprehensively and transparently.



Startup Spotlight

Curipet

PROBLEM ADDRESSED:

Veterinary teams are overwhelmed even before they begin providing care. A high volume of calls, manual triage, and chaotic appointment management lead to wasted time, lost revenue, and clinical risks. 96% of veterinary clinics are microbusinesses without the capacity for a professional front desk.

AI TECHNOLOGY:

An AI platform for automated intake, triage, and communication with pet owners—24/7, via the web, phone, voice bot, and messaging. The system collects medical history, assesses urgency, and schedules appointments without the need for a human receptionist.



Curipet



Startup Spotlight

Gifly

PROBLEM ADDRESSED:

Creating a short professional video is expensive, time-consuming, and accessible only to those with a production budget. Individuals and small businesses lack the tools for quick, personalized video production.

AI TECHNOLOGY:

An AI platform for quickly creating short, personalized videos. It automates the script, visuals, and content generation—a professional video in just a few minutes. The business model is based on recurring micro-purchases.



Startup Spotlight

Creatake

PROBLEM ADDRESSED:

Up to 80% of web projects fail during the handoff between the designer and the developer. Existing no-code and AI tools do not meet the requirements of professionals for premium web solutions.

AI TECHNOLOGY:

The first platform where designers, developers, and AI work together to create modern, custom websites in a single shared environment—from Figma design to a fully functional website, with no additional handoffs. Up to 10 times faster and 70% cheaper than the traditional process.

Creatake



Startup Spotlight

Kudosky

PROBLEM ADDRESSED:

67% of employees are disengaged, costing companies 402 billion euros annually. Managers make decisions based on annual surveys containing data that is 6 to 12 months old.

AI TECHNOLOGY:

A platform for real-time employee engagement and recognition. It combines microfeedback, peer recognition, and an AI HR agent that identifies risks to team engagement and suggests specific actions for managers.



Startup Spotlight

Flixup

PROBLEM ADDRESSED:

By 2030, the career paths of 375 million professionals will be affected by AI. Mid-level managers lack the tools to effectively navigate the era of AI disruption and rapidly obsolescent skills.

AI TECHNOLOGY:

An AI platform for career transformation — “AI Career GPS.” It identifies career gaps, suggests personalized learning paths directly linked to real job opportunities, and guides users through the entire transformation process.

Flixup



Startup Spotlight

Brainlocatio

PROBLEM ADDRESSED:

Companies are unable to provide high-quality, customized retraining programs. Standard learning platforms do not take into account the user's individual needs or current cognitive capacity.

AI TECHNOLOGY:

A platform for fast and effective reskilling that combines personalized learning with an AI mentor and biometric feedback. The system monitors the user's focus and mental capacity in real time and adapts the content accordingly. It focuses on key skills for 2030—AI and Big Data.

brainlocatio.
powered by Brainia Assistant



Startup Spotlight

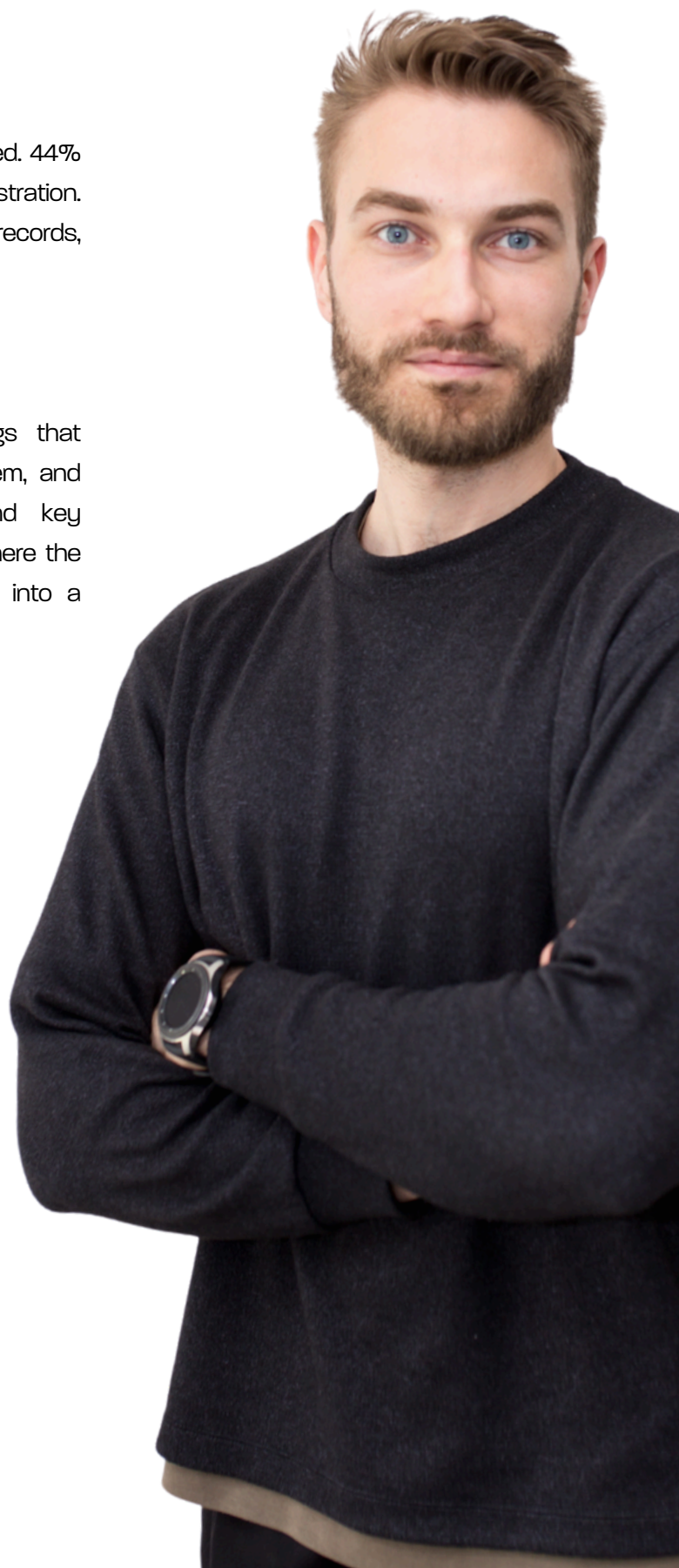
Jurnie

PROBLEM ADDRESSED:

30% of action items from meetings are never completed. 44% of recruiters' time is consumed by interview administration. Meetings end, but the work continues—without clear records, tasks, or accountability.

AI TECHNOLOGY:

An AI assistant for online and in-person meetings that automatically captures conversations, transcribes them, and generates accurate summaries, action items, and key takeaways. It's launching in the recruitment sector, where the problem is most acute. It transforms conversations into a shared team memory.



Program Results and Impact



The Sweet & Salty AI 2026 Acceleration Program has had a demonstrable positive impact on the development of the supported startups, as well as on the broader innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem of the Košice Region. The program's impact is particularly evident at the qualitative level—in the progress the startups have made in product development, business model refinement, investment readiness, and their ability to present their solutions.

Impact on Startups

Startups participating in the Sweet & Salty AI 2026 program are actively contributing to the development of the regional innovation ecosystem. Through their entrepreneurial activities, they are helping to create new jobs, develop innovative solutions, and generate new business opportunities.

In addition, by facilitating networking and connections among startups, mentors, and partner organizations, the program helps build a regional startup hub in Košice—contributing not only to the individual successes of startups but also to long-term ties and collaboration within the region.

During the program, the startups made significant progress on their projects in the following areas:

- **Investment Readiness** — Each startup developed an investment pitch deck and gave presentations that received expert feedback.
- **Business Model** — Workshops and one-on-one mentoring helped the startups refine and validate their business models.
- **Strategic Direction** — Working with mentors enabled the startups to identify key priorities and focus on areas with the highest growth potential.

The Program's Impact on the Region



A unique feature of the Sweet & Salty AI 2026 program is the AI Sandbox—a direct connection between startups and organizations in the Košice Self-Governing Region, the corporate sector, and small businesses. This model creates value for both sides: startups gain the opportunity to test their solutions in a real-world environment, while partner organizations gain their first experience with the practical deployment of AI tools.

The program contributes to:

- **testing AI solutions in the public sector and commercial environments,**
- **strengthening collaboration between the startup ecosystem and established organizations in the region,**
- **building trust in AI technologies among organizations in the Košice Region.**

The positive impact of the Sweet & Salty AI 2026 program can also be seen in a broader regional context. The program has strengthened the Košice Region's position as a hub for AI innovation in Slovakia and has contributed to the further development of the startup ecosystem in the region.

Startups participating in the ICKK ecosystem continue to benefit even after the program ends:

- **access to information about startup and innovation events,**
- **invitations to activities and events organized by the Košice Region Innovation Center,**
- **the opportunity to participate in international events,**
- **the opportunity to consult with startup consultants about business challenges,**
- **connections to investors and international partners.**

The results achieved by the program are in line with the objectives of the Slovakia Operational Program, as part of the project "Innovation Center of the Košice Region" (project code 401101A846).

Key Findings for the Next Year



What Worked

- **Unicorn Attacks Bootcamp** — An intensive two-day bootcamp in Prague with a renowned partner (Unicorn Attacks) was rated very positively by participants. It fostered strong group dynamics and laid a solid foundation for the next phases.
- **Mentoring** — The individualized approach and the assignment of mentors with real-world experience were among the most valuable aspects of the program. Startups appreciate the specific feedback tailored to their situation.
- **AI Sandbox** — The very concept of the sandbox—real-world testing of AI solutions within KSK organizations—is attractive to startups and sets Sweet & Salty AI apart from standard accelerators.

What We Want to Expand

- **More regional Organizations** — Involving a larger number of local government organizations will enable startups to secure more pilot opportunities and B2G references, which are highly valuable for future projects
- **More international partners** — Collaboration with international accelerators, funds, and ecosystem partners will open doors to foreign markets for startups.
- **Czechoslovak cooperation** based on positive experience with Unicorn Attacks



Participant Feedback



After the Sweet & Salty AI 2026 program concluded, an evaluation survey was conducted among the participants. All 7 startups took part in the survey, and ratings were given on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 = highest rating).

Top 5 highest-rated program activities:



- Prague Bootcamp
- Mentoring
- AI Sandbox
- Rhetoric Course
- Demo Day

Top 5 highest-rated workshops:



- Rhetoric Course
- Go-to-Market
- Investment Planning
- Key Metrics
- Financial Planning



Overall Results

- **Overall program rating:** 4.38 / 5
- **ICKK team rating:** 5.00 / 5
- **Percentage of participants who would recommend the program:** 100%

What Startups Have Said About Us

"Keep up the good work; it adds a lot of value."



**"Great organization!
It's awesome that something like this is happening—please keep it up."**

"Excellent collaboration, practical ideas that gave us food for thought and helped us adjust the business model of our startup."



"You have exceeded my expectations regarding your accelerator, and we look forward to continuing our collaboration."

Conclusion and Acknowledgments

The Sweet & Salty AI 2026 Acceleration Program confirmed the importance of systematic support for startups as one of the key tools for developing and building a regional innovation ecosystem. The combination of an intensive bootcamp, expert mentoring, tailored workshops, and a unique AI Sandbox created an environment that enabled startups to make real progress toward investment readiness and market entry.

This marks the program's fourth year as an accelerator, and its quality continues to improve each year—expanding both its reach to the target audience and public engagement in topics related to startups and innovation. At the same time, the program has fulfilled its strategic goal of supporting the development of an innovation ecosystem in the Košice Region, helping to retain startups in the region, and creating new jobs. Through targeted communication and the program's public outputs, it has also succeeded in systematically raising the general public's awareness of startups, innovation, and artificial intelligence, thereby strengthening societal perception of innovative activities and interest in the development of a knowledge-based economy in eastern Slovakia. The program's results, as well as the positive feedback from participants, confirm that the Sweet & Salty AI accelerator program is a stable and sustainable tool for building an innovation ecosystem in the region.

Special thanks go to the Košice Self-Governing Region for its long-term support of innovation, for fostering a startup and innovation environment in the region, and for creating the conditions necessary for the creation and implementation of programs that have a real impact on the development of the regional ecosystem.

We would also like to thank the partner organizations that participated in the AI Sandbox and enabled startups to test their solutions in a real-world environment. Their openness to innovation and willingness to collaborate with the startup ecosystem are essential prerequisites for the development of AI innovations in the Košice Region.

We thank all the mentors, instructors, experts, and program partners who, through their experience, know-how, and personal dedication, have significantly contributed to the quality of the program and the development of the participating startups. Last but not least, we would like to thank the startups themselves and their founders for their proactive approach, openness to learning, and determination to grow their businesses in the Košice Region.

Sweet & Salty AI 2026 laid a solid foundation for the further development of the acceleration program and confirmed that targeted support initiatives have the potential to deliver long-term value not only for startups but also for building the entire regional innovation ecosystem.



SWEET & SALTY ACCELERATOR AI

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