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## EU4Digital Innovation Forum 2023

# ‘Digital upskilling of SMEs and start-ups in the Eastern Partnership region’

**Location:** Online

**When:** 9 March 2023, 10:00 - 13:00 (Brussels time)  
equivalent to:  
11:00 - 14:00 (Moldova, Ukraine)  
13:00 - 16:00 (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia)

**Language:** English

**Concept:** The 2023 EU4Digital Innovation Forum will bring together key policy makers and other experts who are engaged in supporting the digitalisation of SMEs and start-ups in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) region. It will provide a platform to share best practices and discuss challenges and ways forward for the digital upskilling of EaP businesses.

The first EU4Digital Innovation Forum was held on 27th of January 2022. The topic was ‘Innovative solutions for the development of start-up ecosystems in the Eastern Partnership’. The event culminated with the launch of the **Eastern Partnership Startups ecosystem** platform ([eapstartups.co](http://eapstartups.co)), which now supports the integration of the region’s start-up ecosystem into the EU Digital Single Market.

### Objectives of the event:

1. Increase awareness of EU policies in the area of digital skills for SMEs and start-ups as well as relevant programmes and initiatives implemented by the EU and international donors;
2. Present the forthcoming EdTech Hub educational programme for enhancement of digital competencies in the Eastern partner countries;
3. Facilitate discussions on potential international cooperation and future needs.

### Target audience in the EaP countries:

- Ministerial level representatives and agencies coordinating the development of the innovation ecosystem;
- Innovation and SME support agencies;
- IT associations and networks of SMEs with a focus on digital markets; innovation clusters;
- Key online digital skills platform operators.



## AGENDA

| Timing (CET)  | Topics and speakers  |
|---------------|--|
| 9:50 – 10:00  | Connection – the session will start at 10:00 sharp   |
| 10:00 – 10:10 | <b>OPENING</b><br>• <b>Nicholas Cendrowicz</b> , Deputy Head of Unit, DG NEAR C1, European Commission  |
| 10:10 – 10:20 | <b>WELCOMING NOTE:</b><br><b>EU strategy and policy agenda in support of SMEs’ digital skills</b><br>• <b>Anne Bajart</b> , Deputy Head of Unit, DG CNECT G2, European Commission  |
| 10:20 – 10:40 | <b>KEYNOTE SPEECH:</b><br><b>Using EdTech to scale digital upskilling</b><br>• <b>Riaz Shah</b> , Partner, Global Learning Leader, EY  |
| 10:40 – 11:30 | <b>PANEL:</b><br><b>Digital upskilling of SMEs and start-ups in the Eastern Partnership</b><br>• State of play in Eastern partner countries - existing solutions<br>• Discussion: challenges and needs for support for digital skills in the EaP<br><b>Panellists:</b><br>• <b>Haykuhi Gevorgyan</b> , Expert of the Knowledge-Based Economy, Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Armenia<br>• <b>Shahin Aliyev</b> , Advisor to CEO, Innovation and Digital Development Agency, Azerbaijan<br>• <b>Irakli Gabriadze</b> , Deputy Director, Enterprise Georgia<br>• <b>Rodica Crudu</b> , Deputy Director, Organisation for Development of Entrepreneurship, Republic of Moldova<br>• <b>Ihor Markevych</b> , CBDO at Ukrainian Startup Fund, Advisor on innovations to Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine. Horizon Europe Digital, Industry and Space Committee Observer, MC GRADE COST Member<br>• <b>Denys Blinda</b> , Head of the Department of Innovative Development and Access to Finance, the Entrepreneurship and Export Promotion Office   |
| 11:30 – 11:40 | <b>Q&amp;A session</b>   |
| 11:40 – 12:00 | <b>Forthcoming EdTech Hub platform: engineering for and with EaP stakeholders</b><br>• <b>Arturas Piliponis</b> , EU4Digital Facility Team Leader, Partner, EY   |
| 12:00 – 12:10 | <b>Q&amp;A session</b>   |
| 12:10 – 12:40 | <b>TOUR DE TABLE:</b><br><b>Other initiatives and strategic plans for digital upskilling of SMEs in the Eastern Partnership</b><br>• <b>Thibault Charlet</b> , Programme Manager, Digital Transition and Economic Development, Unit C1, DG NEAR, European Commission<br>• <b>Kristien Van den Eynde</b> , Human Capital Development Specialist and Country Liaison for Morocco, European Training Foundation<br>• <b>Niclas Ruffer</b> , Expert, GIZ; Project Director of the Project Digital Transformation of SMEs in Countries of the Eastern Partnership<br>• <b>Salomé Will</b> , Policy Analyst, Unit for Eastern Europe and South Caucasus of the Eurasia division, OECD Global Relations and Co-operation Directorate, OECD: OECD EU4Business: From Policies to Action in the Eastern Partnership<br>• <b>Francisco Moraes Leitao Campos</b> , Senior Economist, Finance, Competitiveness & Innovation Global Practice, World Bank<br>• <b>Livia Turcanu</b> , Technology Advisor, Moldova Future Technologies Activity, Funded by USAID and Sweden, USAID |
| 12:40 – 12:50 | <b>Q&amp;A session</b>   |
| 12:50 – 13:00 | <b>CLOSING REMARKS:</b><br>• DG NEAR, European Commission  |



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**Nicholas Cendrowicz**  
**Deputy Head of Unit, DG NEAR C1, European Commission**

Nicholas Cendrowicz is the deputy Head of Unit in DG NEAR.C1 of the European Commission – the unit dealing with Moldova and Georgia, but also some of the regional aspects of the Eastern Partnership. He has over 25 years of experience in the European Commission, mostly in foreign relations (particularly with enlargement and neighbourhood policy), as well as connectivity. He was previously the deputy Head of Unit for Regional Co-operation in the Western Balkans, overseeing the expansion of this policy to become a cornerstone of our relations with this region. He was also the head of the Centre for Thematic Expertise on connectivity, environment and regional development in DG NEAR.

Before this, Nicholas worked in the Serbia and also the Kosovo team in DG Enlargement, having joined from the Romania team when Romania and Bulgaria acceded to the EU. In 2008, he was instrumental in organising a donors conference for Kosovo that collected over €1,4 billion in pledges.

Nicholas is also a long-standing expert on energy policy, particularly energy having worked on this file in the Commission's Energy department. He was the EU facilitator for the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue on both energy and telecommunications matters.

Nicholas has a degree in politics from the University of Bristol and a further degree in political science from the Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Paris.



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**Anne Bajart**  
**Deputy Head of Unit, DG CNECT G2, European Commission**

Anne Bajart is Deputy Head of Unit of DG CONNECT.G2 Interactive Technologies, Digital for Culture and Education. She previously was Head of Sector in DG CONNECT A1.Robotics and Artificial Intelligence. She worked as a lecturer, researcher and project manager at the University of Liège (BE), at the École Polytechnique de Lausanne (CH) and at Philips Leuven (BE). She has expertise in computer science, robotics, artificial intelligence, systems control, digital signal processing, power electronics and speech recognition. Her main areas of interest today are digital transformation of society; digital upskilling and reskilling; human-machine interaction; extended reality; benchmarking and performance evaluation of systems; ethical, economical and societal aspects of technologies; and the dissemination, impact and awareness of science. Anne Bajart holds a PhD in Electrical Engineering.



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**Riaz Shah**  
Partner, Global Learning Leader, EY

Riaz Shah is EY's Global Learning Leader, leading efforts to prepare EY's 400,000 people for the future of work. This includes delivering 21 million hours of learning annually. This work has included the development of EY Badges and the unique EY Masters degrees, including a fully accredited EY Tech MBA available to all employees for free. He has 40 years' experience serving clients in both Assurance and Technology Consulting, and in various management roles including Assurance MP in London and COO of Markets. His education is from Bradford University UK (undergraduate), Harvard Business School (AMP180), Singularity University (EP17), and he is a Chartered Accountant. Riaz's interests are in technology, education and enterprise. Outside of EY, he is a Founder and Chair of The One Degree Academy, a free school in a disadvantaged area of London. He is also a Professor of Practice for Innovation & Leadership at Hult International Business School, and he coaches several startup CEOs. He was awarded an OBE for Services to Education by HM The King in the 2023 New Year's Honours List.



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**Haykuhi Gevorgyan, PhD**  
Expert of the Knowledge-Based Economy, Ministry of Economy  
of the Republic of Armenia

Dr. Haykuhi Gevorgyan has over 15 years management experience regarding development strategies and implementation in the fields of economy, education, labour market and career development. She is an author of more than a dozen scientific and research articles, and manuals devoted to the issues of lifelong learning and career guidance, labour market and professional education. She joined the team of the Ministry of Economy as an Expert in the Department of Knowledge-Based Economy in 2023. One of the main priorities of the department is development of the digital economy in Armenia, aimed at the digital transformation of the manufacturing and service sectors in the coming years.



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**Shahin Aliyev**  
Advisor to CEO, Innovation and Digital Development Agency,  
Azerbaijan

Shahin Aliyev has 15+ years of experience in the telecommunications sector. He started his career in Azercell telecom, where he stayed 14 years before moving to the public sector. He was head of national cybersecurity services (CERT.AZ) between 2021-2023. After re-establishment of the Innovation and Digital Development Agency (IDDA) he joined the IDDA team as Advisor to CEO.



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**Irakli Gabriadze**  
Deputy Director, Enterprise Georgia

Irakli Gabriadze has extensive experience of working in the public as well as private sector. From 2020 he has been serving as a deputy director at Enterprise Georgia. At the agency his portfolio includes different SME support mechanisms including interest rate co-financing, a credit guaranty scheme and micro grants programme. Irakli holds a PhD in Development Economics from Tbilisi State University.



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**Rodica Crudu**  
Deputy Director, Organisation for Development of Entrepreneurship,  
Republic of Moldova

Dr. Rodica Crudu has more than 18 years of experience in designing and delivering formal and informal educational programmes in the field of entrepreneurship and startup ecosystems, innovation management and international trade, both in Moldova and abroad. She holds a PhD in International Economic Relations as well as the title of Associate Professor and former Dean of the Faculty of International Economic Relations at the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova (ASEM). She has published more than 80 publications in the field of international economics, economy of innovation, entrepreneurship and European integration. She has outstanding experience in international cooperation, implementation of around 20 international projects, and evaluation of research, innovation and technology transfer projects.



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**Ihor Markevych**

**CBDO at Ukrainian Startup Fund, Advisor on innovations to Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine. Horizon Europe Digital, Industry and Space Committee Observer, MC GRADE COST Member**

Ihor is a strong advocate for the development of the Ukrainian startup ecosystem and has been instrumental in helping to create a vibrant startup community in Ukraine. He is the key expert of the biggest database of the Ukrainian tech ecosystem. Ihor is a frequent speaker at international conferences and events such as WebSummit, Rebuilt Ukraine, Berkley Summit, IT arena, etc.



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**Denys Blinda**

**Head of the Department of Innovative Development and Access to Finance, the Entrepreneurship and Export Promotion Office**

Over the last two years Denys is holding position of the Head of innovative development and access to finance of the State Institution “Entrepreneurship and Export Promotion Office” under the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. He is involved in activities such as ensuring the understanding and effectiveness of existing funding access programs for SMEs in Ukraine, establishing regular statistics and reporting, analysis of best practices as well as creation and implementation of financial programs required by the Ukrainian and International markets (including microgrants, grants, microcrediting, partial reimbursement, guarantee of collateral). He is also responsible for activities related to the support and development of the governmental website Diia Business in particular in fields of access to finance for Ukrainian small and medium enterprises, innovation and training programs as well as consulting programs provided by Ukrainian Government and International partners.



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**Arturas Piliponis**

**EU4Digital Facility Team Leader, Partner, EY**

Arturas Piliponis is a Consulting Partner at EY, leading EY digital services dedicated to the EU institutions. Arturas has more than 25 years of experience in managing complex eGov and digital transformation projects in government, public, and financial and telecommunication sectors. Over 16 years of his experience have been dedicated to providing assistance to national authorities in key areas of the digital economy and society in line with EU norms and best practices, including projects in the Eastern partner countries. His fields of expertise include strategy and organisation-wide business transformation, and IT-enabled transformations including programme and project management. As Team Leader of the EU4Digital Facility programme, Arturas directs the execution of its activities in the Eastern partner countries across six thematic areas, overseeing a team of international experts specialising in the digital domain. Arturas holds an MS in Finance from Kaunas University of Technology.



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**Thibault Charlet**

**Programme Manager, Digital Transition and Economic Development, Unit C1, DG NEAR, European Commission**



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**Kristien Van den Eynde**

**Human Capital Development Specialist and Country Liaison for Morocco, European Training Foundation**

Kristien Van den Eynde has been working in the European Training Foundation (ETF) for more than 15 years, specialising in entrepreneurship education and enterprise skills development. Before joining the ETF, she worked for the EU TEMPUS mobility programme and was a teacher at the Thomas More University in Belgium. She loves to work with youth and start-ups.



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**Niclas Ruffer**

**Expert, GIZ; Project Director of the Project Digital Transformation of SMEs in Countries of the Eastern Partnership**

Dr. Niclas Ruffer currently serves as Deputy Programme Director and Component Manager of the Programme EU4Business: SME Competitiveness and Internationalisation / Utilisation and Implementation of the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine in the field of trade in Ukraine, which is co-founded by the EU and the German government. From April 2023 he will take over the Project Digitalisation of SMEs in Eastern Partnership Countries, based in Georgia. Dr. Ruffer is a manager with a long track record of international cooperation, working in Australia, Japan, Poland, Ukraine and China, amongst others. He earned his doctorate at Mannheim University and served as a guest professor in Kobe, Ancona, Lyon, Poznan, Opole, and Krasnoyarsk. His thematic background lies in SME promotion, R&D and innovation promotion, regional and local economic development, entrepreneurship promotion, labour markets, and technology transfer.



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**Salomé Will**

**Policy Analyst, Unit for Eastern Europe and South Caucasus  
of the Eurasia division, OECD Global Relations and Co-operation  
Directorate, OECD: OECD|EU4Business: From Policies to Action  
in the Eastern Partnership**

Salomé Will is a Policy Analyst with the Unit for Eastern Europe and South Caucasus in the Eurasia division of the Global Relations and Cooperation Directorate of OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). She has working with the OECD for over three years, on topics related to competitiveness, private sector development, digitalisation, skills and SME policy reform. She is currently participating in a number of policy advisory projects, which combine analytical work, knowledge transfer, capacity building and public-private dialogue. She recently carried out a project on digital business skills development in Moldova. Prior to joining the OECD, she gained experience in the public and private sectors, including at the French Ministry of the Interior, the consulting firm Roland Berger, and the Council of Europe. She holds a Master's degree in Public Policy from Sciences Po Paris and a dual degree from Sciences Po Paris / University College London in European Social and Political Studies, with a focus on central and eastern European countries.



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**Francisco Moraes Leitao Campos**

**Senior Economist, Finance, Competitiveness & Innovation  
Global Practice, World Bank**

Francisco Campos is a Senior Economist for the World Bank's Finance, Competitiveness and Innovation Global Practice in Europe and Central Asia, based in Brussels. Francisco's main areas of interest are linked to firm-level productivity, research and innovation, digital and green competitiveness, entrepreneurship, trade, and gender. He leads private sector development projects and various advisories across Europe, and previously led over US\$ 1 billion of lending operations across Africa. His recent policy and research studies focus on digitalisation of SMEs, industry and firm level productivity, and firm capabilities. Prior to joining the World Bank, he held a variety of positions in investment promotion and investment management in Europe and Latin America.



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**Livia Turcanu**  
**Technology Advisor, Moldova Future Technologies Activity,**  
**Funded by USAID and Sweden, USAID**

Livia Turcanu is currently serving as the Technology Advisor for the Moldova Future Technologies Activity Project, financed by USAID and Sweden. This co-creates systemic interventions with Moldovan partners to transform selected sectors by applying new technologies, promoting innovation, and integrating with global markets. Previously, Livia focused her work for more than 8 years on the intersection of cutting-edge technologies and societal challenges impacting countries and local communities around the world. She graduated from the University of Maastricht in the Netherlands, with a Master's degree in Science, Technology and Society Studies.