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EU4Digital: supporting digital economy and
society in the Eastern Partnership

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List of Acronyms & Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Definition
ADY	Azerbaijani Railways Association
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AM	Armenia
ASCO	Azerbaijan Caspian Shipping Company
AYNA	Azerbaijan Land Transport Agency
AZ	Azerbaijan
BCP	Border-crossing point
DESI	Digital Economy and Society Index
DG COMM	Directorate-General for Communication
DG CONNECT	Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
DG TAXUD	Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs Union
DREAM	Digital Restoration Ecosystem for Accountable Management
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EaPeReg	Eastern Partnership Electronic Communications Regulators Network
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EBSI	European Blockchain Services Infrastructure
EECC	European Electronic Communications Code
EEPO	Entrepreneurship and Export Promotion Office of Ukraine
eFTI	Electronic freight transport information
eID	Electronic identification
eIDAS	Electronic Identification, Authentication and Trust Services
EMR	Electronic Medical Record
EU	European Union
EU4Digital Facility, EU4Digital	EU4Digital: supporting digital economy and society in the Eastern Partnership – Phase II
GE	Georgia



Abbreviations	Definition
GIZ	German Development Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit)
HER	Electronic Health Record
IDDA	Innovation and Digital Development Agency
IRB EWG	Independence of Regulators and Broadband Development Expert Working Group
LoA	Level of Assurance
MD	Republic of Moldova
MoU	Memorandum of understanding
MRA	Mutual Recognition Agreement
MVP	Minimum viable product
NCP	National Contact Point
NCTS	New Computerised Transit System
NRA	National Regulatory Authority
ODA	Organisation for Entrepreneurship Development
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIM	Public Investment Management
REWG	Regional Expert Working Group
RRA	Regional Roaming Agreement
RSA	Regional Spectrum Agreement
SEED	Systematic Electronic Exchange of Data
SEWG	Spectrum Expert Working Group
SMB	Small and Medium Business
SMEs	Small and medium enterprises
UA	Ukraine
UEICT	Union of Employers of Information and Communication Technologies
VAT	Value Added Tax



Introduction

This report reflects the activities of the third reporting period of EU4Digital Facility Phase II (hereinafter EU4Digital): 1 July 2023 – 31 December 2023. The report summarises the outputs achieved under the six thematic streams during the reporting period, as well as introducing aims and objectives of the activities that will be initiated in the next reporting period. Also, it outlines the main political highlights.

Political Summary

EU4Digital: Supporting digital economy and society in the Eastern Partnership – Phase II (2022–2025), referred to as the **EU4Digital Facility**, focuses on enabling a stronger economy and stronger governance in the Eastern partner countries through digital transformation. This project is the core programme of the EU4Digital Initiative and builds on the first phase of the EU4Digital Facility (2019–2022).

The project's overall objective is to extend the benefits of the Digital Single Market to the EU's Eastern partner countries and promote the development of resilient digital economies and societies. Under the guidance of DG NEAR, the EU4Digital Facility works in close cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders, including the EU4Digital thematic networks, European Commission DGs and other EU institutions, as well as EU international partners such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, German Development Cooperation (GIZ), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and others.

Policy context

The EU's [Digital Decade](#) programme, represented through the [Digital Compass](#), provides a tangible plan to achieve digital transformation of the EU economy and society by 2030. Focusing on four key digital areas of skills, infrastructure, government and business, the compass sets the main goals of digitalisation, underpinned by the digital rights and principles established by the EU.

This is reflected in the EU's relations with its strategic partners under the European Neighbourhood Policy towards building better and more harmonised digital markets. In the Eastern Partnership (EaP), the current policy agenda and [top ten targets for 2025](#) were agreed between EU and Eastern partner country leaders in a [Joint Declaration](#) at the [EaP Summit](#) in December 2021. This includes five 'together for' areas including a **resilient digital transformation**, which the EU4Digital Initiative is actively working towards.

Building on the progress achieved through Phase I, Phase II of the EU4Digital Facility has been running since June 2022 to continue supporting the access, interoperability and transformation of the digital economy and society in the Eastern partner countries. The six thematic areas continue to support the three main EaP digital policy areas of digital infrastructure, eGovernance, and digital economy and innovation.

Political Highlights

During this reporting period, the second year of implementation commenced for EU4Digital Facility Phase II. While the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine posed certain challenges affecting Ukraine's involvement in some of the EU4Digital Facility's activities, Ukraine remained committed in participating in selected EU4Digital activities related to Telecom Rules, eCustoms, eTrade, Digital Skills and eTrust. Beyond these commitments, wider European aspirations for enlargement persisted and inevitably shaped the EU4Digital Facility's work in the EaP.

In June 2022, the European Commission had granted EU candidate country status to Moldova and Ukraine. By November 2023, the Commission further recommended EU accession status changes for Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. Subsequently, the **European Council opened EU accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova** in December 2023, marking a significant milestone for both nations, whose citizens have shown steadfast European conviction. Georgia was also granted **candidate country status**. President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen expressed the urgent need for EU enlargement, viewing it as a crucial investment in the stability, security, and prosperity of the continent, particularly in a world grappling with numerous crises.

To support these Eastern partner countries in their EU accession efforts, the EU4Digital Facility extended its contribution to digital transformation and market harmonisation. For example, one innovative activity within the Telecom Rules thematic area will be the provision of technical and legislative assistance to Moldova, ensuring its legislation aligns with EU law in the field of electronic communications. This initiative will be conducted in



close cooperation with the European Commission and representatives of the Republic of Moldova. The EU4Digital Facility remains committed to assisting Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia in their pursuit of EU accession. The initiation of accession negotiations and subsequent process holds the potential to usher in a new spectrum of activities for EU4Digital and extend the project's operational footprint in the region.

While political tensions and **conflict persist also between Azerbaijan and Armenia**, it's important to note that the overall work of the EU4Digital Facility's activities in the two countries remains predominantly unaffected. Despite the challenging backdrop, EU4Digital continues to forge ahead with its mission to support digital transformation and foster market harmonisation across all Eastern partner countries.

In this reporting period, the EU4Digital Facility continued its programme of activities to develop cross-border trade in the EaP region. Amongst many other activities, EU4Digital kicked off its **National Pavilion Account pilot activity**, an eCommerce accelerator initiative that aims to provide small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from participating countries with an opportunity to test their products in the EU market, increase cross-border sales, and potentially create a base for further project development in their respective countries. EU4Digital Facility also launched a **new eCustoms pilot activity** to address the export challenges of agricultural products at the border crossings between Ukraine, Moldova, and Romania. This innovative approach includes working with customs authorities and using pre-arrival data exchange mechanisms and acts as a significant step in improving trade fluidity of agricultural goods, emphasizing the vital role of digital solutions in streamlining border procedures.

Furthermore, EU4Digital Facility made significant **progress towards achieving a regional roaming agreement**. Connectivity, regional roaming and the digital transition were among topics discussed in the EaP ministerial meeting on 11 December 2023. This event brought together foreign ministers of EU countries and their counterparts from five of the six Eastern partner countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine). The event provided an opportunity to exchange views on the Eastern Partnership, take stock of its achievements and identify concrete recommendations for the future of the policy. Ministers expressed support for concrete deliverables for 2024, notably in the area of regional roaming, road safety and transport.

Project State of Play & Planning of Activities

This chapter covers the main EU4Digital Facility Phase II results achieved and activities' progress under the six thematic streams and the Communication stream during the reporting period (July 2023 – December 2023). Key highlights in the Eastern partner countries are provided under relevant thematic activities, where applicable. The report also introduces aims and objectives of the activities that will be initiated in the next reporting period. Additionally, the report provides planning for the upcoming six-month period under each stream.

Telecom Rules

State of play

Roaming agreements

In the past six months, EU4Digital continued to facilitate discussions to support the signing of the Regional Roaming Agreement (RRA) between the Eastern partner countries. During [the EaP ministerial meeting](#) that took place on 11 December, Ukraine expressed willingness to sign the RRA under a few confidential conditions; the leadership of the Regional Expert Working Group (REWG) is responsible for the further alignment of these conditions between Ukraine representatives and other members of the REWG. Based on the conclusions, EU4Digital will update the RRA text (if needed). It is important to note that EU4Digital will continue to support discussions between the Eastern partner countries regarding the signing of the agreement.

Furthermore, during the Eastern Partnership Electronic Communications Regulators Network (EaPeReg) plenary meeting on 29 November, potential activity on voice-call termination market analysis was endorsed by REWG members.



Country perspective

The table below presents the status of the Eastern partner countries' readiness to sign the RRA.

Country	Highlights
AM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AM has expressed commitment to sign the RRA.
AZ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AZ has expressed commitment to sign the RRA.
GE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GE has expressed commitment to sign the RRA.
MD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MD has expressed commitment to sign the RRA.
UA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UA expressed willingness to sign the RRA under several conditions that shall be further detailed by UA representatives.

5G private networks development

This activity will design roadmaps to support the advancement of 5G private networks development in the Eastern partner countries and ensure the timely implementation of the Regional Spectrum Agreement (RSA). During the reporting period, EU4Digital analysed EU best practices in 5G private network implementation. The report was presented to the Eastern partner country representatives at the Spectrum Expert Working Group (SEWG) meeting on 8 November.

In December, EU4Digital in cooperation with the relevant local stakeholders have initiated the analysis of current status and plans regarding implementation of standalone 5G private networks and allocation of relevant frequency bands in Eastern partner countries. After that, country-specific priorities and initiatives to be implemented for 5G private networks developments will be defined.

Regarding the RSA, the SEWG shared the updated RSA text for the Eastern partner country representatives' review; it is aimed to collect country representatives' feedback by March. The updated version of the agreement is expected to be signed by four countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova). Ukraine is unable to join the agreement at the current stage; however, their participation in the future is still expected.

Key outputs:

- EU best practice report on the 5G private networks development.

EU toolbox for 5G security

The objective of this activity is to develop guidelines for secure 5G networks in the Eastern partner countries, based on the EU toolbox for 5G security. At the current phase, EU4Digital is working jointly with relevant local stakeholders to assess the current status and plans regarding strengthening the 5G security in the Eastern partner countries.

To support the assessment, it was agreed to organise a workshop on the EU toolbox for 5G security for all relevant stakeholders in the Eastern partner countries in Q1 2024. Based on the questionnaire feedback and bilateral consultations with the Eastern partner country representatives, EU4Digital will define country-specific priorities and initiatives towards implementation of 5G security toolbox in Eastern partner countries.

Monitoring & promoting broadband access

This activity focuses on monitoring access to broadband connectivity and supports the monitoring of legislative developments in the field of regulatory governance. Based on the broadband access data collected for 2020, 2021 and 2022, EU4Digital drafted country-specific broadband access monitoring reports for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova that were presented during [the Independence of Regulators and Broadband Development Expert Working Group \(IRB EWG\) meeting](#) on 25–26 October.

Based on the country representatives' feedback and inputs collected regarding 2023, EU4Digital will prepare updated broadband access monitoring reports in Q2 2024. A broadband monitoring report will not be prepared for Ukraine due to its limited capacity to collect broadband access data. Additionally, to support the Eastern



partner countries with the 2023 data collection, EU4Digital will organise on-demand bilateral workshops with relevant market participants.

Also, in light of the latest European Electronic Communications Code (EECC), EU4Digital updated the monitoring framework for legislative developments in the field of regulatory governance. The updated framework was presented and discussed during the IRB EWG meeting. Based on the inputs provided by country representatives, a report on legislative developments in the field of regulatory governance will be prepared in Q1 2024.

Key outputs:

- Draft country-specific broadband monitoring reports for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova.
- Framework for monitoring legislative developments based on the EECC in the field of regulatory governance.

Broadband market analysis

The activity provides support for National Regulatory Authorities (NRA) to monitor and ensure competitiveness in the target electronic communications markets in the Eastern partner countries through a market analysis process. During the reporting period, EU4Digital supported Armenia and Azerbaijan country representatives with the data collection for the broadband market analysis. In November–December, EU4Digital analysed the broadband market analysis data submitted by Armenia. Due to discrepancies identified in the analysed data, EU4Digital will support Armenia country representatives in improving data quality.

Regarding broadband market analysis for Azerbaijan, country representatives reported delays in providing EU4Digital with required data due to challenges in collecting the data from several market participants. EU4Digital will continue to support Azerbaijan with data collection via on-demand bilateral workshops with NRA and market participants. Once all required data is received, EU4Digital will prepare country-specific market analysis reports for both Armenia and Azerbaijan assessing their broadband market conditions.

As reported previously, market analysis reports will not be prepared for Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Currently, there is a broadband market analysis ongoing in Georgia supported by another EU-funded project, while the Moldovan NRA is performing the analysis by their own means. It was agreed that EU4Digital will review and validate the market analysis results once the analyses are finalised, to incorporate the results into the regional EU4Digital market analysis report. Moreover, a market analysis exercise will not be carried out for Ukraine due to data collection constraints; however, results of previously completed market analysis in Ukraine will be incorporated into the regional report on broadband market analysis in Eastern partner countries.

Due to the above-mentioned scale-down of scope of the broadband market analysis activity, the Eastern partner country representatives expressed a need to conduct an additional market analysis of wholesale voice call termination in the Eastern partner countries instead. Following the EaPeReg's official request and Contracting Authority's approval, this additional task is included under the scope of the broadband market analysis activity; the task delivery will commence in February.

International connectivity

In August, EU4Digital submitted the report on a market assessment of high-speed connectivity needs in the South Caucasus region (i.e., Armenia and Georgia) for alignment with the Contracting Authority. The market assessment was performed with assistance of relevant stakeholders in Armenia and Georgia, for the connectivity to be accessed on an open-access basis by operators interested in other countries of the region and beyond. The report overviews the current telecommunications markets in terms of national and international connectivity as well as key social drivers for expanding high-speed connectivity (namely the research and education sector as well as rural / remote areas) and seeks to build a reference for further discussions with national stakeholders within the region and with international donors.

Key outputs:

- Report on market assessment of high-speed connectivity needs in the South Caucasus region.

Electronic communications legislation in Moldova

This activity is preparing the necessary legislation and providing technical assistance to ensure Moldova's alignment with the EU electronic communications regulatory framework. EU4Digital organised an activity kick-off meeting on 7 November with relevant Moldovan stakeholders. In December, the draft as-is situation



assessment of Moldova's existing international roaming regulatory framework was prepared and submitted for Moldova country representatives' review.

In January and February, EU4Digital will organise two bilateral workshops with relevant stakeholders, focusing on the EU roaming regulatory framework. Also, as a next step, EU4Digital will prepare drafts of the necessary roaming regulatory framework legislation to ensure the approximation of Moldova's national legislation to that of the EU. In parallel, EU4Digital prepared the approximation table that will support the comparison of the Moldovan and EU electronic communications regulatory frameworks.

Also, Moldova representatives expressed a need for EU4Digital to support the alignment of Moldova's national legislation with the requirements of the Directive 2014/61/EU concerning measures to reduce the cost of deploying high-speed electronic communication networks (also known as Broadband Cost Reduction Directive). The potential scope of the activity is being aligned with Moldovan national stakeholders and the Contracting Authority.

Key outputs:

- Draft as-is assessment of Moldova's roaming regulatory framework.

Electronic communications legislation in Georgia

This activity aims to review draft legislation that comprises the roaming regulatory framework of Georgia for the purpose of its approximation to the EU roaming regulatory framework. The activity is agreed to be initiated, subject to the Contracting Authority's approval. EU4Digital plans to formally commence work once the scope of the activity is aligned with relevant stakeholders in Georgia, as well as with the Contracting Authority.

Additionally, Georgia's representatives expressed interest for EU4Digital to support the approximation of the EECC to the Georgian legislative framework. Currently, there is on-going alignment of potential scope of the activity with Georgian national stakeholders and the Contracting Authority.

Planning for the upcoming six months

Roaming agreements — key objectives:

- Continue supporting bilateral discussions between Eastern partner countries regarding the RRA signing.

5G private networks development — key objectives:

- Conduct as-is assessment of country approach and status of implementation of regulations facilitating implementation of 5G private networks.
- Prepare country-specific roadmaps/guidelines for implementing development of 5G private networks in the Eastern partner countries.
- Provide support for the monitoring of RSA implementation.

EU toolbox for 5G security — key objectives:

- Conduct as-is assessment of country approach and status of implementation of regulations facilitating implementation of the EU toolbox for 5G security.
- Prepare country-specific roadmaps/guidelines for implementing development of 5G security in Eastern partner countries.

Monitoring & promoting broadband access — key objectives:

- Prepare country-specific broadband monitoring reports for 2023.
- Prepare a report on monitoring of legislative developments based on the EECC.

Broadband market analysis — key objectives:

- Prepare country-specific reports on broadband market analysis for Armenia and Azerbaijan.
- Prepare a regional broadband market analysis report.
- Report on voice call termination markets analysis in Eastern partner countries.

Electronic communications legislation in Moldova — key objectives:

- Draft necessary primary legislation documents for the approximation of the electronic communications regulatory framework to that of the EU.
- Prepare necessary secondary legislation to cover the international roaming regulatory framework.



eTrust and Cross-border Digital Services

State of play

Recognition of eID and trust services

The activity enables mutually-recognised and secure electronic identification and digital trust services through mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) between the Eastern partner countries. During the reporting period, EU4Digital has been developing the eTrust and eID (electronic identification) conceptual framework, which aims to define key principles and requirements for eID and trust services in the Eastern partner countries. It is planned to finalise the alignment of the eTrust and eID framework with the Eastern partner country stakeholders in January. The framework will serve as a foundation for developing drafts of MRAs.

In parallel, EU4Digital adapted the trust services self-assessment, established by the MRA Cookbook¹, to fit the Eastern partner country context. The self-assessment will enable the Eastern partner countries to identify alignments needed to achieve harmonisation with electronic identification, authentication and trust services (eIDAS) regulation and their national legal frameworks for trust services. Preliminary inputs from the Eastern partner countries are planned to be collected in February.

Additionally, EU4Digital is developing a self-assessment of eID means, based on the Level of Assurance (LoA) evaluation filled in by the Eastern partner countries for the cross-border authentication pilot activity. It is planned to share the eID self-assessments in the Eastern partner country review in February.

Key outputs:

- Trust services self-assessment for the Eastern partner countries.

Pilot eID

The activity assists the Eastern partner countries to pilot interoperable cross-border authentication. During the reporting period, EU4Digital facilitated the implementation of the cross-border authentication pilot solution with the selected pilot countries — Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova. The pilot countries aim to test the enablement of eID holders from one country to access the electronic services of another country using their existing eID means. Ukraine has expressed reservations about participating in the first pilot release due to limited resources; therefore, EU4Digital will keep open the possibility to involve Ukraine in later pilot phases.

In December, EU4Digital provided the cross-border authentication pilot technical memorandum to the Eastern partner countries. The memorandum defines common technical requirements for the piloting activities.

To support the pilot implementation, the eIDAS Node is being implemented by the Eastern partner countries' pilot teams. In December, Armenia and Georgia successfully completed the self-testing phase, while Moldova is in the final stages of technical pilot implementation. Due to changes in the pilot team, no progress has been reported by Azerbaijan. In January, it is planned to conduct testing activities between Armenia, Georgia and Moldova.

In parallel, EU4Digital continued to support the Eastern partner countries with preparing the LoA evaluation forms of the selected eID means. The self-assessment and peer reviews of LoA of selected eID means are important to ensure the security and authentication level requirements of the eServices that will be used in the pilot. The LoA self-assessment was completed by Armenia, Georgia and Moldova, while Azerbaijan country representatives informed about a delay in submitting a finalised LoA evaluation form due to changes of responsible stakeholders. In parallel, a peer review of Armenia, Georgia and Moldova LoA evaluation forms was initiated and is planned to be finalised in January.

Key outputs:

- Cross-border authentication pilot technical memorandum developed.
- Level of Assurance of selected eID means determined by Armenia, Georgia and Moldova.
- eIDAS Node infrastructure implemented by Armenia and Georgia.

¹ European Commission, 'Mutual recognition agreement Cookbook' (January 2021), [eIDAS Dashboard \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/eidas-portal/)

Country perspective

The table below summarises each Eastern partner country's cross-border authentication pilot progress.

Country	Highlights
AM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">eRequest portal (eService) and ID card (eID mean) connected to eIDAS Node infrastructure. LoA of Armenian ID card self-evaluated as high.
AZ	<ul style="list-style-type: none">eIDAS Node implementation to connect eResidency & mResidency (eService) and SIMA solution (eID mean) in progress. LoA self-evaluation of SIMA solution in progress.
GE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Residence permit eService and ID card (eID mean) connected to eIDAS Node infrastructure. LoA of Georgian ID card self-evaluated as high.
MD	<ul style="list-style-type: none">eIDAS Node implementation to connect test eService and Mpass authentication and access solution (eID mean) in progress. LoA of Moldovan mobile signature self-evaluated as high.
UA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Due to limited availability, Ukraine country representatives have expressed limitations to participate in the first release of the cross-border authentication pilot activities.

Data governance

The activity, commenced in October, aims to design a framework for a data governance strategy in line with EU and global best practices to provide recommendations for the Eastern partner countries. EU4Digital will develop a data governance strategy framework based on EU and global practices, assess the state of play in each of the Eastern partner countries and provide recommendations for national strategies in the area of data governance.

EU4Digital organised [an activity kick-off meeting with the country representatives on 6 December](#). EU4Digital then organised bilateral meetings with the designated Eastern partner country representatives to understand the current maturity in the area of data governance and collect relevant policy documents and initiatives related to the data governance topic. Based on relevant policy documents and other inputs provided by the Eastern partner country representatives, EU4Digital will identify key support areas for each Eastern partner country related to its national data governance. In parallel, EU4Digital initiated a best practice analysis and the development of the data governance framework. Further work will focus on finalising the data governance framework and assessing the state of play of the Eastern partner countries' national data governance direction.

Assessment of DREAM

The activity is not yet commenced during the reporting period and remains subject to Contracting Authority's approval. If approved, the activity will aim to support the building of confidence and trust in the Digital Restoration Ecosystem for Accountable Management (DREAM) platform by validating its integrated architecture with EU technical and cybersecurity standards, assessing Public Investment Management (PIM) processes supported by DREAM, and confirming the vision and roadmap for a digital PIM platform to achieve the target state. EU4Digital will develop a roadmap to close existing functional gaps with relevant EU technical and cybersecurity norms and standards and will validate a roadmap to digitalise Ukraine's PIM practices in line with established requirements and best practices. Optionally, EU4Digital may also perform penetration testing for the DREAM platform, to identify any exploitable vulnerabilities and weak spots in the system. The activity is expected to start in February, subject to Contracting Authority's approval of scope and timeline.

Planning for the upcoming six months

Recognition of eID and trust services — key objectives:

- Finalise eTrust and eID conceptual framework alignment with the Eastern partner countries.
- Collect Eastern partner countries' inputs for trust services self-assessments.
- Initiate mutual recognition agreements drafting.

Pilot eID — key objectives:

- Finalise technical implementation of cross-border authentication pilots.
- Initiate development of a final report and recommendations for further cross-border eID implementation.



Data governance — key objectives:

- Design a data governance strategy framework, based on selected EU and global practices.
- Conduct state-of-play assessments of national data governance practices and strategic directions, based on the data governance strategy framework.
- Initiate development of country-specific recommendations for national strategies in the area of data governance.

eTrade

State of play

Pilot cross-border eTrade solutions

The goal of this activity is to develop and pilot solutions, such as European Blockchain Services Infrastructure (EBSI), and develop and provide recommendations for full-scale implementation in Eastern partner countries, including technical, legal and organisational perspectives. This activity commenced in Q4 2023, with the first phase being to identify practical use cases where EBSI could be deployed in order to respond to the specific needs of the Eastern partner countries. The decision for continuation of the activity is subject to the results of these initial use case assessments.

eCustoms pilot

The activity aims to facilitate customs-to-customs data exchange and demonstrate improvement in the release time of empty trucks, as well as introducing more advanced customs risk-management processes in selected pilot countries using innovative systems, i.e., Systematic Electronic Exchange of Data (SEED). In July, EU4Digital held a [post-pilot](#) conference to wrap up the eCustoms pilot between Ukraine and Romania, which also discussed the pilot results and planned future steps. EU4Digital also presented recommendations on the required legal, organisational and technical adjustments to be made for full scale SEED solution implementation. However, a full recommendation package will be provided after finalisation of the eCustoms pilot expansion with Ukraine, Moldova and Romania in May.

EU4Digital agreed with DG NEAR to continue support for the customs administrations in the next cooperation stage of pilot expansion between Ukraine–Moldova–Romania. Based on the initial eCustoms pilot, EU4Digital confirmed with DG NEAR and DG TAXUD an extension of the eCustoms pilot featuring Ukraine–Moldova–Romania with extended scenarios for loaded trucks and for empty trucks data exchange, running from September to May — this is described in more detail in the eCustoms data-exchange pilot expansion section.

Key outputs:

- Prepared recommendations on the required legal, organisational and technical adjustments to be made for full scale SEED solution implementation.
- Aligned and initiated the extension of the eCustoms pilot geographically and data-wise.

eCustoms data exchange pilot expansion

The new eCustoms pilot expansion activity aims to extend piloting of cross-border eCustoms between the Eastern partner countries and the EU by providing proof of concept for a potential full-scale implementation. The activity is being carried out during September 2023 – August 2024 and includes eCustoms data-exchange scenarios related to goods crossing the following border-crossing points (BCPs): an extended scenario between Ukraine–Romania at the Porubne–Siret BCP, between Moldova–Romania at the Leuşeni–Albița BCP, and an extended scenario between Ukraine–Moldova–Romania at the southern BCPs of Reni–Giurgiulesti and Giurgiulesti–Galati.

During the reporting period, eCustoms data-exchange pilot expansion began on 27 September with a [kick-off session](#) among the customs administrations of Ukraine, Moldova and Romania. EU4Digital then held discussions in October–November regarding the pilot scenarios and data sets for pilots for eCustoms data exchange. Participating customs administrations selected a limited data scenario for loaded trucks and confirmed data elements for empty trucks data exchange.

In November, EU4Digital shared the draft version of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the participating customs administrations for alignment. Additionally, in December, EU4Digital shared a technical specifications document related to SEED/SEED+ services with customs administrations and facilitated IT-related discussions. Physical site visits will be implemented in May, and the actual pilot will be implemented



during 10 June – 12 July. In February, EU4Digital plans to share the New Computerised Transit System (NCTS) and SEED/SEED+ comparison analysis with DG NEAR and DG TAXUD and to finalise the SEED+ formalisation request with DG NEAR. Lastly, EU4Digital plans to sign the finalised MoU with the participating customs administrations by March.

Key outputs:

- eCustoms data exchange pilot expansion kick-off session.
- Confirmations received from customs administrations on selecting limited data set scenario — exchange of exit data from transit/export declarations; received confirmation regarding the pilot including whole border-crossing traffic and empty trucks data exchange.
- Confirmed the dates and duration of the pilot as well as physical site visit days.
- Shared the technical specifications document related to SEED/SEED+ services with customs administrations.
- Shared the draft MoU for alignment between Ukrainian, Romanian and Moldovan customs authorities.

Digital Transport Corridor (eFTI deployment)

The activity supports trade facilitation and harmonisation between the Eastern partner countries and EU countries by developing a roadmap on e-freight deployment in the selected Eastern partner countries. EU4Digital finalised the report on ‘Assessment of the European Union’s institutional and legal framework and best practice examples’ and organised a stakeholder awareness session to present report findings as well as most recent developments regarding regulation of electronic freight transport information (eFTI)² in July. In parallel, state-of-play analysis regarding eFTI exchange for selected Eastern partner countries (Ukraine, Moldova and Azerbaijan) continued over July–November.

EU4Digital assessed the current state of play by analysing logistics documents’ exchange environment — legal framework, technical solutions developed or under development, standards applied, level of digitalisation achieved, organisational structure, as well as commercial and strategic perspectives. EU4Digital presented the state-of-play findings to each selected country’s stakeholders over September–December 2023. EU4Digital is finalising state-of-play reports after additional inputs received from stakeholders during and after the validation sessions and will share the final reports with Ukraine’s, Azerbaijan’s, and Moldova’s stakeholders in beginning of 2024.

During the reporting period, EU4Digital also organised a site visit to Azerbaijan on 12–14 September, where key points around logistics sector digitalisation and possible directions for the eFTI exchange implementation roadmap were discussed. Work with Azerbaijan’s stakeholders continued during the rest of the year, focusing on assessing existing initiatives in the electronic logistics field and possible synergies with neighbouring regions. Lastly, after validating the state-of-play assessment findings with Ukrainian stakeholders, EU4Digital also initiated the eFTI deployment roadmap creation. In December, EU4Digital held workshops with Ukraine’s stakeholders on different eFTI ecosystem (eFTI gates, eFTI platforms) scenarios in Ukraine, including ownership models and implementation approaches.

On January 29-30, EU4Digital has participated in ‘Global Gateway Investors Forum for EU-Central Asia Transport Connectivity’ and shared experience on developments in Digital Transport Corridors activity as well as eCustoms pilots with the participants of the forum.

Key outputs:

- Report on assessment of the EU’s institutional and legal framework and best practice examples.
- Presented state-of-play assessment findings for Azerbaijan, Armenia and Moldova regarding their exchange ecosystem of logistics documents.

eCommerce accelerator

The activity aims to strengthen the integration of the EaP eCommerce ecosystem with EU networks and support the ultimate strategic direction of increasing EU and Eastern partner countries’ cross-border eCommerce. In order to strengthen cross-border eCommerce EU4Digital provided Eastern partner countries with individual recommendations, training and consultations at national and company level. The eCommerce Accelerator is structured into three tracks:

² Regulation (EU) 2020/1056 on electronic freight transport information: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/electronic-freight-transport-information.html>



- Track 1 eCommerce status re-evaluation. Assess legislation, standards and overall eCommerce ecosystem changes in EaP since 2020.
- Tracks 2 — National Pavilion Account pilot. Develop national pavilion accounts for selected pilot countries and support local SMEs to start selling on selected marketplaces.
- Track 3 — eCommerce consultations centre. Provide group training and individual consultations with the final goal being for SMEs to register on EU marketplaces, list products and start selling.

Under track 1 — In December, EU4Digital prepared and shared recommendation reports for validation with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine on eCommerce harmonisation with the EU. From January, EU4Digital will provide consultations to the countries, according to their eCommerce topic priorities.

EU4Digital also updated the [eCommerce Report: Analysis Report of the EU eCommerce Baseline in the Legal, Standard and eCommerce Ecosystem Areas](#), which was shared with the Eastern partner countries and published on EU4Digital website in September.

Under track 2 — EU4Digital made progress on the National Pavilion Account pilot, an activity to support SMEs to sell their products in the EU through a single national account on leading eCommerce marketplaces. In Armenia, the main stakeholder (Account Owner) is [BuyArmenian](#). Previously, [Made with Bravery](#) had been the Account Owner in Ukraine; however, their involvement in the pilot is currently suspended because Made with Bravery expressed a preference to register on the Zalando marketplace, but Zalando has halted all new vendor onboarding globally. Therefore, EU4Digital is exploring options with the Ukrainian Ministry of Digital Transformation for a replacement of the Account Owner.

During the reporting period, EU4Digital supported Buy Armenian in registering an account on Amazon EU; this account will function as the National Account. In parallel, questionnaires were distributed to SMEs in Armenia in order to select the final participants in the pilot. The selected SMEs, which in the context of the pilot are referred to as Product Owners, will provide the products to be sold via the National Account. Furthermore, EU4Digital established contact with the Armenian national postal operator [HayPost](#) to explore opportunities for synergy and support for the National Pavilion Account pilot.

Under track 3 — A second round of eCommerce consultations took place in October–December. Twenty-two companies were selected to be part of the programme — five from Armenia, six from Azerbaijan, one from Georgia, seven from Moldova and three from Ukraine. EU4Digital held five group training sessions throughout October–December. The following topics were covered: presentation of marketplaces; page creation, listing and placing; digital marketing; Artificial Intelligence (AI) in eCommerce; and customer support and reasons for brand and account blocking, taxes, customs procedures. In addition, 19 individual consultations were held — 16 online and three via email — 3 about Amazon, 12 about Etsy/eBay, 2 about legal and taxes, 1 about digital marketing and 1 about eCommerce strategy. Participants were interviewed in August; as a result, two articles went live on the EU4Digital website: [‘The personal touch: Ukrainian wood company polishes its eCommerce strategy’](#), and [‘Ukrainian doormats gaining European customers with EU4Digital and ITC support’](#).

Since EU4Digital has seen relatively low activity of Eastern partner countries’ SMEs, EU4Digital collected interview-based information about barriers to entry into the EU for the Eastern partner businesses. EU4Digital is planning to produce an assessment report in February.

Key outputs:

- eCommerce reports for each Eastern partner country with recommendations for eCommerce harmonisation with the EU.
- [eCommerce Report: Analysis Report of the EU eCommerce Baseline in the Legal, Standard and eCommerce Ecosystem Areas](#).
- Buy Armenian successfully registered the National Pavilion Account on the Amazon EU eCommerce marketplace.
- Selected Product Owners to participate in the pilot through distributed questionnaires.
- Five group training sessions on: presentation of the marketplace; page creation, listing and placing; digital marketing; AI in eCommerce and customer support; and reasons for brand and account blocking, taxes, customs procedures (16 October – 14 December).

eTrade stakeholders networking

In July, EU4Digital held an ‘EU Best Practices and Update on eFTI Progress in the EU’ awareness session, during which updates on eFTI Regulation development, the Regulation’s applicability for the Eastern partner



countries, as well as EU best practices in eFTI exchange were presented. The Regulation is being designed to establish a uniform legal framework and define the technical standards for digital freight information exchange. EU Member State authorities will be obliged to accept eFTI data in 2026. Therefore, Eastern partner countries that adapt to this ecosystem would not only benefit from increased transparency and efficiency in the transport industry, reduced costs and easier business-to-authority data exchange, but also would further increase their attractiveness as a preferred EU trade partner.

During EU4Digital's site visit to Azerbaijan in September, a session on raising the country's e-logistics capacity was held with key stakeholders: the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport, the State Customs Committee, the Coordinating Council on Transit Freight of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijan Caspian Shipping Company (ASCO), Azerbaijan Land Transport Agency (AYNA), and Azerbaijani Railways Association (ADY). During the session, EU4Digital discussed key points around digitalisation of transport and logistics information and possible directions for the eFTI implementation roadmap in Azerbaijan.

In the next period, a few events will be organised to increase awareness around topics related to eTrade activities; the awareness building session 'eFTI deployment roadmap' is planned to occur in February and an awareness building session regarding the cross-border eTrade solutions pilot planned for March.

Also, EU4Digital will organise a networking event during an EU event or conference to share information about existing solutions. Preliminarily, the event will be linked with the 3rd International Conference on Problems with Logistics, Management and Operation in the East–West Transport Corridor, planned on 15–17 May.

Key outputs:

- Awareness building session on EU Best Practices and Update on eFTI Progress in the EU.
- 'Raising e-logistics capacity in Azerbaijan' session (held during EU4Digital site visit to Azerbaijan).

Planning for the upcoming six months

Pilot cross-border eTrade solutions — key objectives:

- Define prospective use case for the pilot.
- Engage stakeholders in the Eastern partner countries for inputs to pilot use case.
- Onboard stakeholders and initiate pilot activities.

eCustoms data exchange pilot expansion — key objectives:

- Sign the Memorandum of Understanding between Ukrainian, Moldovan and Romanian Customs Administrations.
- Conduct the physical eCustoms pilots site visits, including Ukraine–Romania: Porubne–Siret BCP; Moldova–Romania: Leuşeni–Albița BCP; Ukraine–Moldova–Romania: Reni–Giurgiulești–Galați BCP.
- Conduct the eCustoms pilot between Ukrainian, Moldovan and Romanian Customs Administrations.
- Update recommendations on the required legal, organisational and technical adjustments to be made for full scale (SEED+) solution implementation, based on the earlier implemented eCustoms pilot between Ukraine–Romania.
- Hand over the tested solution to the participating authorities in the eCustoms pilot for further development, customisation and adaptation according to the needs of pilot countries.

Digital Transport Corridor — key objectives:

- Finalise the state-of-play assessment reports for Ukraine, Moldova and Azerbaijan.
- Design roadmaps for eFTI or eFTI-like system implementation in Ukraine, Moldova and Azerbaijan.

eCommerce accelerator — key objectives:

- Track 1 — eCommerce status re-evaluation:
 - Organise country consultations to validate the updated reports.
 - Publish the stakeholder-validated reports on EU4Digital website.
- Track 2 — National Pavilion Account Pilot:
 - Onboard Product Owners into the pilot activity.
 - Assist Buy Armenian with finalising its Amazon registration by completing Amazon verification requirements and performing Value Added Tax (VAT) registration.



- Support Buy Armenian and Product Owners with developing product listings and creating marketing campaigns.
- Once products are listed, monitor the sales process and advise as needed.
- Develop a recommendations report based on pilot outcomes.
- Track 3 — eCommerce consultations centre:
 - Develop a short assessment report on barriers to entry into EU marketplaces for Eastern partner countries' SMEs.

eTrade stakeholders networking — key objectives:

- Organise awareness building session 'eFTI deployment roadmap'.
- Organise awareness building session for the cross-border eTrade solutions pilot.
- Organise networking event during EU events/conferences to share information about existing solutions; the 3rd International Conference on Problems with Logistics, Management and Operation in the East-West Transport Corridor is the preliminary choice.

eHealth

State of play

eHealth strategic development

The activity supports the strategic development of Digital Health in the Eastern partner countries. In this reporting period, EU4Digital continued developing a manual to support use of the previously published 'Common Guidelines for eHealth Harmonisation and Interoperability' according to EU best practices, incorporating data obtained from the state-of-play analysis, as a comprehensive document. The manual to the guidelines will assist Eastern partner stakeholders in creating actionable eHealth strategies including blueprints for governance, financing, legislation, architecture and workforce models, as well as providing methodology to develop roadmaps and sub-strategies for digital health topics such as telehealth, cybersecurity and secondary use of health data.

During the reporting period, EU4Digital held five knowledge-sharing workshops with representatives from each Eastern partner country. Feedback on the workshop material was then collected via a questionnaire in which the Eastern partner country representatives highlighted the key areas of interest. The highlighted areas include eHealth governance and ecosystem development, main digital service cross-border collaboration and digital health plan adoption. The results of the questionnaire also showed that the countries require additional support for a deeper understanding of enterprise architecture and interoperability as well as digital health literacy and activism topics.

EU4Digital continued providing support to the Eastern partner countries in drafting their national eHealth strategies. Only Moldova had provided a current draft of its national eHealth strategy; EU4Digital provided recommendations and comments according to EU practices and Moldova's specific needs. Key insights included: address key high-level strategic direction topics (e.g., cybersecurity, digital health legislation and architecture and data usage strategy) which will develop into separate chapters in the national eHealth strategy. Additionally, EU4Digital suggested including an implementation plan, designed to transform the provided goals into specific actions and defined, measurable results. Finally, EU4Digital proposed reinforcing the Moldovan definitions of Electronic Health Record (EHR) and Electronic Medical Record (EMR). As other countries are still preparing or updating their current national eHealth strategies, they have not yet reached out to EU4Digital to provide insights on how they could be improved.

Key outputs:

- Draft manual for the 'Common Guidelines for eHealth Harmonisation and Interoperability'.

Pilot cross-border eHealth

EU4Digital cross-border eHealth service piloting aims to facilitate legal, technical and organisational changes in the Eastern partner countries. During the reporting period, EU4Digital conducted first-stage analysis of the Eastern partner countries' organisational capabilities, the feasibility and their technical readiness to implement one of the eHealth service pilot use-cases — Patient Summary or ePrescription. Additionally, EU4Digital identified potential pairings for cross-border eHealth data exchange with European Member States such as Estonia, Lithuania, or Greece.



To maintain engagement amongst Eastern partner country representatives in piloting ideation, EU4Digital facilitated network collaboration events through bi-weekly meetings. The sessions focused on an overview of technical specifications based on EU standards, required for a successful pilot activity, and supported the assembly of a possible technical team for each of the partner countries.

Starting from January, EU4Digital will start an in-depth second-stage analysis of how each Eastern partner country's national solutions meet the National Contact Point (NCP) requirements. The first-stage analysis currently remains the basis for the general perspective of Eastern partner country readiness. The second-stage analysis conducted by EU4Digital will assess Eastern partner countries' readiness to meet requirements for interoperability of cross-border pilot services. Depending on the results of the second-stage analysis, EU4Digital will select two to three pilot countries that best meet the standard EU functional requirements for service pilot implementation. The final decision about participating countries and the start of the cross-border eHealth pilot deployment stage is set for mid-February.

Key outputs:

- First-stage analysis performed and feasible Eastern partner countries for pilot implementation and potential pairings with European Member States identified.
- Data and functional scope identified in the Eastern partner countries for both service use-cases — ePrescription and Patient Summary.
- Teams in the Eastern partner countries arranged and mobilised to participate in piloting activities.

Country perspective

The table below summarises each Eastern partner country's preferences regarding the potential eHealth services piloting as well as current progress regarding improving their general national eHealth system.

Country	Highlights
AM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representatives from Armenia indicated Patient Summary as the preferred service for pilot implementation; however, it was noted that ePrescription could also be beneficial. Additionally, Armenia is taking considerable steps to improve their current national eHealth services and refine their electronic health record system according to EU standards.
AZ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representatives from Azerbaijan indicated Patient Summary as the preferred service for pilot implementation. Notably, they expressed a lack of interest in ePrescription due to the lack of functional readiness and no official legal status of the service in the country; Azerbaijan's current ePrescription service is not integrated into the country's electronic health record system — however, they expect to update the system in the future.
GE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representatives from Georgia indicated ePrescription as the preferred service for pilot implementation; however, it was noted that Patient Summary could also be beneficial. Additionally, Georgia is taking considerable steps to improve their current national eHealth services and refine their electronic health record system according to EU standards.
MD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representatives from Moldova indicated Patient Summary as the preferred service for pilot implementation; however, it was noted that ePrescription could also be beneficial. Nevertheless, Moldova lacks functional readiness and has no official legal status of the ePrescription service. Moldova's current service is not integrated into the country's electronic health record system; however, they expect to update the system in the near future.
UA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representatives from Ukraine indicated ePrescription as the preferred service for pilot implementation; however, it was noted that Patient Summary could also be considered. Additionally, Ukraine is taking minor steps to improve their current national eHealth services and refine their electronic health record system according to EU standards.

eHealth collaboration and communication

During the reporting period, EU4Digital held five separate workshop sessions with representatives from each Eastern partner country. The sessions involved relevant stakeholders and experts in diverse eHealth fields, including electronic health record management, eHealth digital services infrastructure establishment and healthcare interoperability resource supervision. The workshops focused on good practices and knowledge



sharing in developing eHealth strategies, as well as discussions related to different strategic building blocks of the 'Common Guidelines for eHealth Harmonisation and Interoperability'.

During the first workshop, on 28 September, EU4Digital provided best practice examples of regulatory environments, digital health legislation and national level strategic governance. The following workshop, on 13 October, covered topics such as strategic workforce framework components and best practice examples from the EU, and had a session dedicated to sharing about the legislation and workforce of the Eastern partner countries. In the 28 October workshop, EU4Digital covered enterprise architecture as well as the main cross-border and interoperability challenges when developing key digital health services. During the workshop held on 16 November, EU4Digital provided a detailed overview of financing models and economics of digital health, health plan adoption and health innovations. Finally, the cycle of workshops finished on 24 November, sharing knowledge about how to leverage public-private partnerships, health data literacy and activism, as well as digital health sub-strategy examples.

After finishing the workshop cycle, the Eastern partner representatives were asked to fill in a feedback questionnaire, which helped EU4Digital gain insight and learn valuable lessons that will be taken into account for future events. Based on the provided feedback, the participants from each Eastern partner country were satisfied with the overall organisation of these events and said what they learned in the workshops will help them face real-world eHealth challenges, either currently or in the future. The most useful and relevant topic covered by EU4Digital was insights on best practices regarding governance and eHealth ecosystem development, cross-border collaboration and digital plan adoption. EU4Digital then continued collaboration regarding preparatory steps for piloting activities via bi-weekly meetings with representatives from each Eastern partner country.

Key outputs:

- Five knowledge-sharing sessions with representatives from each Eastern partner country provided support in developing national eHealth strategies based on EU best practices.

Planning for the upcoming six months

eHealth strategic development — key objectives:

- Publish the manual for 'Common Guidelines for eHealth Harmonisation and Interoperability' with supplemental material and share with all Eastern partner countries.
- Provide on-demand support regarding National eHealth Strategy Development to the Eastern partner countries.

Pilot cross-border eHealth — key objectives:

- Oversee in-depth stage-two analysis performed by EU4Digital to finalise the selection of participating countries and the service for piloting.
- Launch and coordinate the pilot deployment stage of a selected service in two scenarios: Eastern partner country – EU; Eastern partner country - Eastern partner country. Eastern partner country together with a country from the EU and two separate Eastern partner countries with each other.

eHealth collaboration and communication — key objectives:

- Organise event to showcase the published manual for 'Common Guidelines for eHealth Harmonisation and Interoperability' to representatives from all Eastern partner countries.
- Organise piloting kick-off event to present the deployment roadmap and future eHealth service development activities.

ICT Innovation and Start-up Ecosystems

State of play

Networking of innovation players

The activity aims to build awareness around specific areas of innovation, related to digital technologies, to further harmonise and transfer relevant EU practices to the Eastern partner countries' stakeholders. During the reporting period, EU4Digital developed a concept for a networking event on digital innovation hubs on emerging and advanced technologies, planned for Q3-Q4 2024 in collaboration with German Development Agency (GIZ). Additionally, EU4Digital initiated preparations for the annual EU4Digital Start-up and Innovation Forum, which is prepared to take place in Q2-Q3 2024. This year the forum will focus on innovation clusters: the challenges,



strategic plans in support of clusters in a digital economy, capacity building of cluster management organisations.

Start-ups ecosystem development

The activity supports the development of the Eastern partner countries digital start-ups' ecosystem, focusing on start-up incubation and promotion of tools for data-driven decision making. During the reporting period, EU4Digital continued preparations for the potential regional start-up incubation programme 'EU4Innovation East', aimed to promote high-performance incubation in the region. Preparation included [two awareness-raising sessions](#), engaging more than 90 and 100 participants respectively. The events addressed the role of ecosystem builders, private sector involvement, and shared best practices both from Eastern partner countries and the EU. Also, five sessions were held to hand over report findings; EU4Digital introduced the start-up ecosystem and incubation report to stakeholders for feedback collection. Feedback from Eastern partner countries' stakeholders was incorporated into the final report, as well as formed into an annex and provided to DG NEAR and Expertise France for review. To conclude the preparation stage, EU4Digital submitted the ['Mapping and Diagnosis of the Start-up Ecosystem in the EaP'](#) final report and its internal-use annexes to DG NEAR. The need for an additional hand-over session and the level of support required by Expertise France on its mission in the EaP region will be determined.

Regarding the EaP Startups ecosystem platform, EU4Digital held meetings with national platform partners to discuss the user experience and any concerns about data quality as well as ongoing initiatives of each country to map the landscapes of ecosystems. Following the calls and evaluation of the platform's data quality and given its low attendance rate plus the launch of national ecosystem platforms with the technical partners in Azerbaijan (launched by Innovation and Digital Development Agency (IDDA)), Moldova (Startup Moldova negotiating the launch) and Ukraine (existing TechUkraine platform), EU4Digital initiated discussions to determine alternatives and the best course of action for the platform.

Key outputs:

- The final report ['Mapping and Diagnosis of the Start-up Ecosystem in the EaP'](#) .
- Regional online awareness session ['Boosting the start-up ecosystem. Importance of funding and promoting the activities of ecosystem builders'](#).
- Regional online awareness session ['Importance and benefits of supporting high-performance incubation'](#).
- Individual country on-site hand-over/consultation sessions with key ecosystem builders and wealth enablers to present report findings and collect feedback.
- National sessions with EaP Startups ecosystem platform partners on the platform usage experience.

Innovation clusters

The activity aims to develop a common framework and provide recommendations for the development of innovation clusters in Eastern partner countries. EU4Digital throughout this activity will conduct research on clusters in the Eastern partner countries and provide an overview of EU best practices for innovation cluster development. Analysis inputs of the EU best practices will be used to develop a common framework, which will provide the basis for assessing innovation clusters' state of play in the Eastern partner countries, and devising country-specific recommendations for further development of innovation facilities.

During the reporting period, EU4Digital initiated the activity. Research into clustering organisations within the EaP has begun, alongside a review of EU best practices for the development of innovation clusters. Additionally, EU4Digital had an alignment meeting with the [European Cluster Collaboration Platform](#) to discuss potential synergies and collaboration opportunities.

Planning for the upcoming six months

Networking of innovation players — key objectives:

- Organise Annual EU4Digital Start-up and Innovation Forum about digital innovation clusters.

Start-ups ecosystem development — key objectives:

- Determine alternative course of action for the EaP Startups ecosystem platform.

Innovation clusters — key objectives:



- Organise kick-off event to introduce the activity to key stakeholders.
- Define a list of relevant national stakeholders and potential cluster organisations in Eastern partner countries.
- Provide an overview of EU best practices for the development of innovation clusters.
- Develop a framework for innovation clusters development in the Eastern partner countries.
- Organise a regional session for managers of cluster and emerging cluster organisations.
- Benchmark innovation clusters in the Eastern partner countries and provide an overview of their state of play.
- Develop five detailed recommendations for the clusters' improvement for each Eastern partner country.

Digital Skills

State of play

EdTech learning platform pilot

The activity aims to set the basis to digitally empower one million EaP citizens and businesses by providing learning opportunities through a regional digital learning platform. To better distinguish and position the eLearning platform on the market, a rebranding of EdTech Hub took place, resulting in a new name, EU4Digital Academy, which better reflects the mission and offerings of the platform.

During the reporting period, EU4Digital developed the minimum viable product (MVP) course 'eCommerce in EU Marketplaces' for Ukrainian citizens, which is technically ready to launch in mid-January pending agreements with the [atingi](#) digital learning platform hosting the courses. The course provides general knowledge on eCommerce and a specific focus on three EU marketplaces: Amazon, eBay and Allegro. This course has versions in both English and Ukrainian languages. The course is uniquely tailored to address the needs of Ukrainian entrepreneurs through relevant learning content. The next MVP launch will occur in the Republic of Moldova, with country-specific course content prepared.

In parallel, EU4Digital mapped the content and developed the initial curricula for the remaining courses, 'Digital Marketing' and 'Digitalisation of Business'. However, the initial assumption that EdTech Hub courses would only reuse existing learning content has faced certain challenges in practice. This was seen in the eCommerce course, which had to be developed and tailored to the specifics of each Eastern partner country rather than reusing existing learning content. Currently, EU4Digital is evaluating the availability and practicality of existing learning content for these two remaining topics, as well as seeking opportunities with other global providers for readily deployable content and courses.

EU4Digital obtained several strategic partnerships for the development of EU4Digital Academy. EU4Digital established connection with the [Entrepreneurship and Export Promotion Office of Ukraine](#) (EEPO), a local coordinating partner to develop the programme in Ukraine. Furthermore, a collaboration with Ukrposhta, one of the main local providers of learning materials, was established in order to leverage its learning resource '[E-Export School](#)'. During preparation for the launch, EU4Digital maintained continuous contact with [atingi](#).

To ensure a successful launch, EU4Digital developed a comprehensive communication plan involving several different stakeholders, including EU4Digital's own channels, EU delegations, and local partners in each of the countries. Additionally, EU4Digital engaged several promotion partners in Ukraine ([uTrigg](#), EEPO and [Prometheus](#)) to ensure EU4Digital Academy's visibility and intended reach.

Key outputs:

- Developed course 'eCommerce in EU Marketplaces' for Ukraine, in English and Ukrainian languages.
- Established contact with the Local Coordinating Partner (EEPO), a content provider (Ukrposhta) and promotion partners (uTrigg and Prometheus) in Ukraine.
- Mapped content sources and developed initial curricula for courses 'Digital Marketing' and 'Digitalisation of Business'.

Country perspective

The table below summarises EU4Digital-established contacts with local coordinating partners (nominated by HDM Coordinators), local training providers and promotion partners in each Eastern partner country.



Country	Highlights
AM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local coordinating partner: Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Armenia, Ministry of High-Tech Industry of Armenia • Local training providers: Union of Employers of Information and Communication Technologies (UEICT), Business Support Center
AZ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local coordinating partner: The Small and Medium Business (SMB) Development Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan; Ministry of Digital Development and Transport of the Republic of Azerbaijan • Local training providers: The Small and Medium Business (SMB) Development Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan; ICT Labs
GE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local coordinating partner: EU4Digital established contact with 'Enterprise Georgia' who was initially appointed as a local coordinating partner. However, due to current incapacities, certain reservations about partnering were expressed; thus, EU4Digital is currently in contact with HDM coordinator to appoint another local coordinating partner.
MD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local coordinating partner: Organisation for Entrepreneurship Development (ODA)
UA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local coordinating partner: Entrepreneurship and Export Promotion Office (EEPO)

Women mentorship programme on ICT skills

EU4Digital concluded work on the activity in August, having finalised the 'Women's Mentorship in Tech Programmes in the Eastern partner countries: concept and action plan' and received approval of the result from the EU Delegation to Georgia and DG NEAR. The EU Delegation to Georgia is aligning the implementation programme with the selected partners. EU4Digital will evaluate demand for women mentorship programmes on ICT skills in other Eastern partner countries.

DESI Accelerator

The activity facilitates and supports the implementation of Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) in the Eastern partner countries by providing regional and national recommendations based on analysis of the current status of data collection, as well as tailored support and capacity building through experience-exchange seminars and training sessions. During December, EU4Digital finalised the first stage of the DESI Accelerator activity.

In June–July, EU4Digital monitored the current state of DESI indicator collection in the Eastern partner countries with the aim to identify the existing data collection methods, data sources and stakeholders involved in digital development indicator collection. To achieve this, EU4Digital designed, developed, and distributed a questionnaire to the country representatives involved in data collection. The filled-out questionnaires were further used to analyse the current status of Eastern partner country data collection and measurement methodology and its alignment with DESI data sources. In addition, desk research was carried out, which allowed identification of the existing data collection methods.

After finalising the as-is methodological research, EU4Digital validated the initial findings at both the country and regional levels during the [regional validation workshop on 24 November](#). During the event, EU4Digital presented the analysis of DESI implementation and discussed regional and national recommendations around the adoption of full DESI measurement.

All feedback received during validation sessions was incorporated into a report, in which EU4Digital provided the analysis of DESI use and respective recommendations on taking up full DESI in each Eastern partner country.

In order to prepare for the second stage of DESI Accelerator activity, EU4Digital developed support roadmap templates, aiming to identify strategic directions for technical support to be provided to the Eastern partner countries. EU4Digital distributed these support roadmaps to national stakeholders, to involve them in identifying the priority actions for year-long practical support.

Key outputs:

- [Recommendations on implementing DESI indicators in the Eastern partner countries.](#)



- [DESI Accelerator regional event](#) in November, presenting results of the first phase of DESI Accelerator.
- Support maps for identifying priorities for technical support from EU4Digital in the Eastern partner countries.

Planning for the upcoming six months

EdTech learning platform — key objectives:

- Launch the course ‘eCommerce in EU Marketplaces’ in remaining Eastern partner countries.
- Secure relevant existing learning content for the courses ‘Digital Marketing’ and ‘Digitalisation of Business’ in Eastern partner countries — based on the results, launch the courses.

DESI Accelerator — key objectives:

- Identify priority directions for technical support to be provided through DESI Accelerator to each Eastern partner country.
- Deliver technical support on DESI implementation to the Eastern partner countries, based on priorities identified by each country.

Communication

State of play

EU4Digital website

Following the launch of the revamped and restructured website with a refreshed visual identity in June, quality assurance and user experience improvements were a key focus throughout this reporting period. These included the revision and translation of explainer ‘e-cards’, enhanced visibility of and content in the website’s ‘library’, the integration of the [EU4Digital Twitter/X account](#) widgets, tweets and links on the homepage, and further alignment of the website with the overall visual identity and tone of voice.

. This period saw a slight increase in the number of users (38,488 vs. 38,123, with also a slightly increased share of 19% (7,257) returning users vs. 18% (6,964) in the previous reporting period) and over 75,888 total page views. The most viewed page was the EU Digital Strategy page with more than 6,300 views, followed by the website’s homepage with almost 4,500 views. The majority of users have English set as their primary browser language (43%), followed by Russian (21%), and their country of origin is Ukraine (15%), followed by Georgia (6%), Moldova (5%) and the rest.

Key outputs:

- Revised and translated explainer ‘e-cards’ for every thematic stream.
- Enhanced visibility of and content in the website’s ‘library’.
- Integration of the EU4Digital Twitter/X account widgets and embedding of tweets on the homepage.
- Improved alignment of the website with the visual identity.
- Overall quality assurance.

Content production and promotion

During this reporting period, the focus shifted towards strengthening content production for the restructured website. Between July—December, EU4Digital published 94 content items in English and 292 translations in local languages.

Next to regular content production, EU4Digital initiated its first media story, covering the success of the eCommerce consultation centre in Georgia. The story will be prepared and published in Georgian media in January.

Four editions of the EU4Digital newsletter (instead of two planned quarterly editions) were prepared and shared between September—December with over 3,200 subscribers. 2023 saw the average open rate for the EU4Digital newsletter reach a reassuring 36.3% — surpassing the rates of 2022 and all previous years³. This is a critical achievement, as it reflects the newsletter’s growing efficiency and impact.

Key outputs:



- 94 content items in English.
- 292 content items in national languages.
- Four EU4Digital newsletter editions.

Strategic interventions and visibility

In July, EU4Digital launched its approved Twitter/X account⁴ and, in the following months, focused on creating dedicated content and building the core follower base. Due to shifts in the social media landscape, corresponding user behaviours and DG COMM's restrictions in the use of paid advertisement, the @EU4Digital account is not likely to attract the number of followers initially envisaged in the strategy prepared in 2022. However, since the account launch, EU4Digital's performance with regard to social media mentions (277) and hashtag reach (2.8M) have visibly increased. In this context, the project will continue relying on organic growth and presence on the platform, which proved to be instrumental in engaging the project's stakeholders and delivering on communication objectives.

Using all communication channels available (website, newsletter, Twitter/X account, as well as the channels of EU Neighbours East, DG NEAR and other partners), EU4Digital conducted a total of 32 strategic interventions to enhance the initiative's visibility, out of which four presented event-centric support (EU4Digital stakeholder workshop, EU4Digital Digital Conference for the Eastern Partnership, EU4Digital Steering Committee Meeting, Digital Skills DESI Accelerator regional event). The two interventions dedicated to the Digital Conference takeaway campaigns were instrumental in surpassing 10,000 website conversions from social media throughout this reporting period and responsible for two peaks in hashtag reach. Notably, social media and editorial training sessions that were offered to the experts provided a critical boost to outreach efforts via the team's personal channels — 75 posts were registered on LinkedIn alone. With this, EU4Digital sees an opportunity to further increase its number of mentions: while EU4Digital's communication assets are already being picked up from @EU4Digital Twitter/X and posted to other channels, this spill-over effect can be potentially strengthened in the future.

Key outputs:

- Launch of EU4Digital X (formerly Twitter) account and its growth over the period.
- A total of 32 strategic interventions and 4 events supported.

Performance monitoring

During the reporting period, EU4Digital encoded the EU4Digital Facility Phase II logframe in OPSYS by adding planned results and relevant indicators. The logframe was submitted and approved by the Operational Manager from the Contracting Authority side.

During the reporting period no additional elements were integrated into the EU4Digital monitoring framework. In the coming period, EU4Digital will continue communication with the Contracting Authority in terms of new projects joining the Initiative and, if such cases occur, EU4Digital will assess the feasibility and added value of possible monitoring synergies. If a project is assessed as relevant to be integrated into the EU4Digital monitoring framework, EU4Digital will adjust the framework by adjusting the intervention logic and adding indicators where necessary.

During the reporting period, eight additional indicators were included in the EU4Digital Facility's logframe to monitor eCustoms data exchange pilot expansion activity (seven output indicators), and Innovation cluster (one output indicator) activity.

Key outputs:

- Encoded EU4Digital Facility Phase II intervention logic in OPSYS.
- Updated EU4Digital monitoring framework for the period July–December 2023.

Planning for the upcoming six months

EU4Digital website — key objectives:

- Perform regular maintenance of the EU4Digital website.
- Prepare bi-annual analytics report.

Content production and promotion — key objectives:

- Continue regular content production for the website.

⁴ Formal approval to launch the project's Twitter account was received on 28 June 2023.



- Develop stories with local media outlets in the region, where possible.
- Create and disseminate a minimum of two newsletters.

Strategic interventions and visibility — key objectives:

- Prepare strategic interventions to support the Facility's communication.
- Hold regular consultations with the streams and EU4Digital projects to collect content.

Performance monitoring — key objectives:

- Report on the results with bi-annual reports.



Key Events

Summary of past events

The following section presents multiple digital-related events that took place in the Eastern partner countries during the past six-month period (July 2023 – December 2023) in the six thematic areas. The events included both face-to-face and online meetings and workshops.

Past events
<p>Cross-cutting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Azerbaijan country visit (12–14 September). Pre-Steering Committee workshop (18 October, Brussels, Belgium). The Eastern Partnership Digital Conference (14 November) EU4Digital Steering Committee Meeting (15 November).
<p>Telecom Rules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roaming Expert Working Group meeting (25 July). Independence of Regulators and Broadband Development Expert Working Group meeting (25-26 October, Yerevan, Armenia). Approximation of Moldovan law to EU law activity kick-off session (7 November, Chisinau, Moldova). Spectrum Expert Working Group meeting (8 November). Roaming Expert Working Group meeting (20 November). Eastern Partnership Electronic Communications Regulators Network plenary meeting (29 November, Tbilisi, Georgia). Workshop on Azerbaijan telecommunications law, broadband market analysis and broadband development monitoring with the Information Communication Technologies Agency and Ministry of Digital Development and Transport (5 December, Baku, Azerbaijan).
<p>eTrust and Cross-border Digital Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> eTrust and Cross-border Digital Services activities' joint session with Eastern partner countries (16 November). Data governance strategies activity kick-off meeting (6 December). eTrust and Cross-border Digital Services activities' joint meeting with Eastern partner countries (14 December).
<p>eTrade</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> eCustoms post-pilot conference (7 July). National Pavilion Account Pilot: account owner kick-off session (11 July). Awareness building session EU Best Practices and Update on eFTI Progress in the EU (11 July). Digital Transport Corridors (eFTI) activity — Azerbaijan's state-of-play assessment results presentation/validation session (5 September). Digital Transport Corridors (eFTI) activity — Raising e-logistics capacity in Azerbaijan (14 September, Baku, Azerbaijan). eCustoms Ukraine–Moldova–Romania pilot kick-off session regarding empty trucks plus extended scenarios (27 September). Awareness-building session with Ukraine stakeholders on eFTI state-of-play assessment (13 October). Digital Transport Corridors (eFTI) activity — Ukraine's state-of-play assessment results presentation/validation session (13 October). 1st group training on Presentation of the marketplaces (16 October). 2nd group training on Page creation, listing and placing (26 October). 3rd group training on Digital marketing (9 November). 4th group training on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in eCommerce (23 November).



Past events
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductory eCustoms pilots session with representatives of phytosanitary authorities from Moldova and Romania (10 November). • Introductory eCustoms pilots session with representatives of phytosanitary authority from Ukraine (24 November). • Digital Transport Corridors (eFTI) activity — first workshop on eFTI implementation roadmap (gates and platforms) in Ukraine (27 November). • Digital Transport Corridors (eFTI) activity — second workshop on eFTI implementation roadmap (gates and platforms) in Ukraine (6 December). • 5th group training on customer support and reasons for brand and account blocking, taxes, customs procedures (14 December). • Digital Transport Corridors (eFTI) activity — Moldova’s state-of-play assessment results presentation/validation session (14 December).
<p>eHealth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eHealth Network awareness session—collaboration event to outline eHealth framework and its building blocks. Focused on governance and ecosystem development as well as enabling regulatory environment in the context of digital health (28 September). • eHealth workshop on good practices and knowledge sharing on developing eHealth strategies: focused on workforce management (13 October). • eHealth workshop on good practices and knowledge sharing on developing eHealth strategies: enterprise architecture and interoperability as well as cross-border collaboration between the Eastern partner countries (24 October). • eHealth workshop on good practices and knowledge sharing on developing eHealth strategies: financing models and operations as well as digital health innovations and adoption plan (16 November). • eHealth workshop on good practices and knowledge sharing on developing eHealth strategies: public–private partnerships, digital health sub-services and health data activism (24 November).
<p>ICT Innovation and Start-up Ecosystems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination meeting with ICT Innovation and Start-up Ecosystems Network regarding the promotion of EaP Startups ecosystem platform (10 July). • Incubation activity regional online awareness session: Importance of funding and promoting the activities of ecosystem builders (18 July). • Incubation activity individual country report hand-over/consultation sessions with the key ecosystem builders and the key wealth enablers (20–25 July). • Incubation activity regional online awareness session: Importance and benefits of supporting high-performance incubation (8 August). • National sessions with EaP Startups ecosystem platform partners on the experience of platform usage (7–8 September, 26 September).
<p>Digital Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation session to transfer know-how about implementing the women’s mentorship programme action plan with national stakeholders, based on need (18 August) • DESI Accelerator regional event to present the results of analysis on DESI indicators’ implementation in Eastern partner countries and collect feedback (24 November).



Events planned for the upcoming six months

The following section presents events planned in the upcoming six-month period (January 2024 – June 2024) in the six thematic areas. The calendar is indicative (both dates and countries); a confirmed plan of events will be provided every month together with monthly progress reports.

Upcoming events
<p>Telecom Rules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independence of Regulators and Broadband Development Expert Working Group meeting (April–May). Roaming Expert Working Group meeting (March–May). Spectrum Expert Working Group meeting (March–May). Eastern Partnership Electronic Communications Regulators Network plenary meeting (April–May).
<p>eTrust and Cross-border Digital Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> eTrust and Cross-border Digital Services activities' joint meeting with the Eastern partner countries (25 January).
<p>eTrade</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National consultation for eCommerce status re-evaluation validation with Ukraine stakeholders (24 January). National consultation for eCommerce status re-evaluation validation with Armenia stakeholders (25 January). National consultation for eCommerce status re-evaluation validation with Moldova stakeholders (30 January). National consultation for eCommerce status re-evaluation validation with Azerbaijan stakeholders (31 January). National consultation for eCommerce status re-evaluation validation with Georgia stakeholders (1 February). Digital Transport Corridor (eFTI deployment) workshops on eFTI implementation roadmap (gates and platforms) in Moldova (January–February). Digital Transport Corridor (eFTI deployment) workshops on eFTI implementation roadmap (gates and platforms) in Ukraine (January–February). Digital Transport Corridor (eFTI deployment) workshops on eFTI-like ecosystem implementation roadmap in Azerbaijan (January–February). eCustoms phytosanitary data-exchange kick-off session (9 February). Presentation of finalised roadmaps to implement eFTI or eFTI-like systems in Ukraine, Moldova, and Azerbaijan (February–March). Kick-off event for eTrade cross-border solutions pilot (date to be decided). eCustoms pre-pilot conference (May). eCustoms physical site visit (19–25 May, Porubne, Ukraine; Siret, Romania). eCustoms physical site visit (19–25 May, Leușeni, Moldova; Albița, Romania). eCustoms physical site visit (19–25 May, Reni, Ukraine; Giurgiulesti, Moldova; Galati, Romania). eCustoms pilot (10 June – 12 July, Porubne–Siret BCP, Leușeni–Albița BCP, Reni–Giurgiulesti and Giurgiulesti–Galati BCPs). eCustoms post-pilot conference (July).
<p>eHealth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness session event to showcase the updated guidelines to all representatives from Eastern partner countries (February). Piloting kick-off event to present the implementation roadmap and future eHealth service development activities (February).
<p>ICT Innovation and Start-up Ecosystems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovation clusters activity kick-off session (24 January). Regional session for managers of cluster and emerging cluster organisations (18 April).



Upcoming events

- Annual EU4Digital Start-up and Innovation Forum 2024: 'Digital innovation clusters in the Eastern Partnership: evolution and capacity building' (June/July).

Digital Skills

- National consultation sessions on DESI implementation for data collection institutions in Eastern partner countries (April-June).