

## DIGITAL RESKILLING FOR SMALL BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS: CASE STUDY FROM EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of digital upskilling in enhancing SMEs competitiveness in the Eastern Partnership countries, focusing on Moldova and Armenia. Based on 616 adult learner and 106 SME survey responses, the research highlights a major digital skills gap. While over 70% of SME respondents report difficulty hiring staff with practical digital competencies (digital marketing, digital content creation, graphic design, e-project management, digital learning, digital development and literacy), many adult learners indicate high motivation to get retraining and upgrade their skills. More than 60% of respondents prefer hybrid, practice-oriented programs with flexible formats and applied outcomes. This study draws on empirical findings from the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) project MEDIA, which implemented hybrid digital media courses tailored to these needs. The results support the effectiveness of such models in equipping adults with in-demand skills while supporting SME growth. The study calls for scalable, employer-aligned hybrid programs to address workforce challenges in the region.

**Keywords:** digital skills, digital upskilling, hybrid learning, SMEs competitiveness, Moldova, Armenia

### INTRODUCTION

In today's world, digitalization is no longer seen as a competitive advantage, but rather as a basic condition for survival, opening up both unprecedented opportunities and significant challenges for small and medium-sized enterprises around the world [1]. For the Eastern Partnership countries, such a transformation is particularly important, as these economies seek to integrate more deeply into the global digital market [2] [3].

Although the implementation of digital solutions and innovations is widely recognized as one of the key factors in economic growth and sustainability, companies in the studied region, especially in Moldova and Armenia, often face significant obstacles, related to the low level of digital skills of the workforce and the effective implementation of digital technologies. These challenges are the result of an outdated professional education model and limited company resources for self-transformation [4] [5]. *Recent data from the*