



‘The European Union can be a place where ambition turns into reality. Where great companies don’t just start, they scale.’

— Valdis Dombrovskis, European commissioner for economy and productivity, implementation and simplification, at the Scaling Europe Summit 2026

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Spotlight on Europe’s Startup Ecosystem: Competitiveness Built for and by Founders



Tomas Okmanas



Ann Mettler



Alexander Glätzle



Sten Tamkivi

Startups and scaleups have become essential to Europe’s competitiveness. After a decade of consistent growth, they now generate 15% of the European Union’s gross domestic product (GDP), with the number of companies tripling and investment rising fivefold. The European Commission is matching the momentum with an ambitious agenda, from the 28th regime proposal to the simplification agenda and the new scaleup Europe fund. But what still needs to change for European startups and scale-ups to further thrive? One year after its first edition, the Lisbon Council put the spotlight again on the entrepreneurs who have shaped and continue to shape Europe’s startup ecosystem at the [Scaling Europe Summit 2026: Competitiveness Built for and by Founders](#). At the heart of the Summit was a one-of-a-kind conversation bringing together leading founders, including Alexander Glätzle, co-founder and CEO of planq; Tomas Okmanas, co-founder and co-CEO of Nord Security and Tesonet; and

Sten Tamkivi, co-founder and partner at Plural. Joining them was Ann Mettler, board member of the European Innovation Council, for a frank discussion on how Europe can turn scale-up success stories into a shared engine for growth rather than rare exceptions. Opening the session, Valdis Dombrovskis, European commissioner for economy

and productivity, implementation and simplification, set out his vision for Europe’s future, acknowledging both the progress achieved and the work that lies ahead. If Europe is serious about becoming the best place to start and scale a company, the answer cannot simply be to let it be, but to make it happen. [Watch the Summit in Full](#). As the 28th regime proposal shows, digital-native compliance is essential to reduce administrative burden for startups. As part of the European Distributed Data Infrastructure for Energy (EDDIE) project, the Lisbon Council released *Better Environmental Protection, Less Reporting Burden: How a Digital Compliance Scale-Up Initiative Can Lower Compliance Costs for Companies and Increase the Effectiveness of Regulations*, a new policy brief exploring how regulatory technology can lower compliance costs and deliver the greatest benefits to small and medium-sized enterprises as well as startups. [Read Better Environmental Protection, Less Reporting Burden](#).

‘Evicting children from social media shifts platforms into compliance mode, forsaking the need to design digital products and services that are genuinely accountable to children and adults alike.’

— **Amanda Third**, co-director of the Young and Resilient Research Centre at Western Sydney University, faculty associate at the Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, at **To Ban or Not To Ban: What Scientific Evidence and Practice Teach Us on Kids and Social Media**

To Ban or Not to Ban: Social Media and Kids



Amanda Third



Leslie Miller



Jutta Croll



Martin Harris Hess

The special panel on child safety online delivered its final recommendations to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. Now, Europe must turn them into action. After Australia’s under-16 social media ban, will Europe follow? Since March 2026, the Lisbon Council’s [Evidence Hub on Social Media Ban](#) has provided an open platform for data and policy insights to understand the impact of teen social media bans. The Lisbon Council also convened the [High-Level Working Lunch on ‘To Ban or Not To Ban: What Scientific Evidence and Practice Teach Us on Kids and Social Media.’](#)

Joining from Australia, Professor Amanda Third, co-director of the Young and Resilient Research Centre at Western Sydney University, explored alternatives to blanket bans. She was joined by Leslie Miller, vice president of public policy at YouTube; Jutta Croll, chairwoman of Digital Opportunities Foundation; and Martin Harris Hess, head of sector for protection of minors online, directorate-general

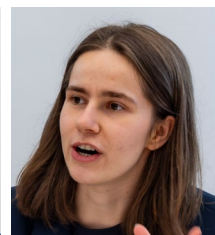
for communications networks, content and technology, European Commission, among others. Yet, one defining principle of policymaking was still missing: nothing about them, without them. To put young people at the centre, the Lisbon Council convened the [High-Level Roundtable on ‘The Web Young People Want: Building a Digital Future on Agency, Not Anxiety.’](#) where Gabriele Battimelli, Italian youth ambassador with the Better Internet for Kids (BIK) Network; Tobiáš Bruno Galia, member of the Czech Council of Children and Youth and of the Youth Advisory Board to President von der Leyen; and Martina Tóthová, member of the Youth Council of Slovakia and of the Youth Advisory Board to President von der Leyen, shared their experiences. [Subscribe to the Hub.](#)



Gabriele Battimelli



Tobiáš Bruno Galia

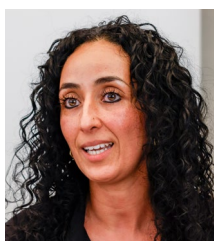


Martina Tóthová

Innovation Wears Data: Europe’s Untapped Data Opportunity



Werner Stengg



Gadiza Saaidi



Daniel Knapp

Back in 2016, European policymakers promised that strong data regulation would turn privacy into a competitive edge for Europe. For years, that promise never materialised. Today, a new generation of technological solutions is showing otherwise. Powered by retailers’ first-party data, retail media accounts now for 20% of the market. To explore how these solutions work, the Lisbon Council convened the [High-Level Roundtable on ‘Beyond the Privacy-Competitiveness Paradox: Scaling European First-Party Data Economy.’](#) Werner Stengg, member of the cabinet of Executive Vice-President and European Commissioner Henna Virkkunen, keynoted. Among other presenters were Daniel Knapp, chief economist at IAB Europe; Alberto Ferrari,

CEO, Sabbiarelli; and Gadiza Saaidi, retail media lead at Unilever. Elsewhere, privacy-enhancing technologies are proving to be far more than a compliance tool. At the [High-Level Working Lunch on ‘Privacy-Enhancing Technologies in Digital Advertising,’](#) the Lisbon Council launched *Privacy-Enhancing Technologies: The Time Is Now*, a blog exploring their potential. Bjoern Juretzki, head of unit, data policy and innovation, directorate-general for communications networks, content and technology, European Commission, and Isabelle Vereecken, head of unit, European Data Protection Board, took part. [Read Privacy Enhancing Technologies: The Time is Now.](#)



Alberto Ferrari



Isabelle Vereecken



Bjoern Juretzki

Beyond the Headlines: Projects, Research and Delivery

The Lisbon Council continues its active participation in more than 25 leading research consortia on topics ranging from digital government to crisis management. The goal is not only to produce cutting-edge, policy-relevant outcomes. It is to forge collaborations, bringing talents from across borders together. A team of more than 30 researchers is involved, helping reach, build and develop projects in 14 European countries.

Recent milestones include:

Sovereignty and Smart Policymaking: The Making of Europe's Competitive Edge



David Eaves



Leontina Sandu

To deliver digital sovereignty, Europe should focus on building wildly attractive services propositions that drive demand and adoption. Deep-diving on this, the Lisbon Council convened the [High-Level Roundtable on 'Sovereignty in Practice: A New Path for Europe's Digital Success.'](#) During the session, held in partnership with the European Distributed Data Infrastructure for Energy (EDDIE) project, Professor David Eaves, co-deputy director of the Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose at University College London, outlined a vision for Europe's digital autonomy rooted in

stronger institutional capacity and technological excellence: a vision that he took to the Eurogroup just one month later for a conversation on technological sovereignty. Leontina Sandu, director for digital enablers and innovation, directorate-general for digital services, European Commission, also joined the roundtable.

Why Climate Action Matters for Cities and Why Cities Matter for Climate Action



Robert Habeck



Belinda Tato

There is no secure and competitive Europe without sustainability. And there can be no lasting sustainability without cities, where Europe's policies are put to the test against the everyday realities of housing, energy and mobility. To explore how to turn ambition into action, the Lisbon Council convened the [2026 Sustainable Cities Summit on 'Squaring the Green Circle: Climate Action, Economic Urgency, Urban Reality.'](#) Robert Habeck, former vice-chancellor and federal minister for economic affairs and climate action of Germany; and Belinda Tato, professor at the

Harvard Graduate School of Design and co-founder of ecosistema urbano, took part. Drawing on the on-the-ground experience of a diverse portfolio of Horizon Europe projects, the Lisbon Council is partnering with the **Smart City Expo World Congress (SCEWC)**, the world's leading forum for cities and smart urban innovation. As part of the exhibition, several projects will present their latest innovations, including Systemic Integration of Transformative Technical and Nature-based Solutions to Improve Climate Neutrality of European Cities and Regions and Tackle Climate Change (URBREATH), BLOSSOM, Urban-Flow, EXPEDITE, BRICKS, and Evidence-Driven Air Quality Improvement (EDIAQI). For more, visit: <https://www.smartcityexpo.com/>

SMARTCITY
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FUTURAL: The Lisbon Council Launches Two Smart Solutions for Innovation



As part of the Empowering the Future through Innovative Smart Solutions for Rural Areas (FUTURAL) initiative, the Lisbon Council developed two smart solutions bringing digital participation to rural communities, where such tools remain rare. By co-creating with local partners and choosing to adapt and

expand upon open-source foundations, developers prioritised responsiveness to needs, reliability, low-cost operation and ease of replication. One smart solution was developed for Kythera, Greece, applying crowdsourced reporting to a fresh use case to engage residents and tourists in the upkeep of hiking trails. The other solution gives inhabitants of Jonava, Lithuania, a direct channel to report local issues to the responsible department, strengthening the link between rural communities and their administrations. The Lisbon Council showcased the tools at the 2026 European Union Rural Innovation Forum, in the presence of Guoda Burokienė, vice-minister for the economy and innovation of Lithuania. For more, visit: <https://futural-project.eu/>

'I would like to congratulate the Lisbon Council. You are doing a great job for our future and for all of Europe. You are the invisible glue that keeps Europe together through connections, and that is important for setting a precedent for the future.'

— Emil Boc, mayor of Cluj-Napoca and former prime minister of Romania, at the **Scaling Sustainability in a Tougher Climate: What Europe's Cities Have Learned and What Comes Next**

News and Outreach



Building on the Lisbon Council's leadership at the intersection of technology and societal challenges, Director of Strategy Katarzyna Szkuta and Policy Analyst Giulia Grandin spoke at the **Think Tank Experts Roundtable on 'Protecting and Empowering Children in the Online World,'** convened by the European Commission's in-house advisory service and think tank I.D.E.A. for experts to exchange with the co-chairs of the special panel advising the President of the European Commission on child safety online and potential

age restrictions for social media. Elsewhere, Katarzyna Szkuta moderated the **High-Level Working Breakfast on 'Protecting the European Gender Architecture: Next MFF. Walking the Gender Talk,'** co-hosted by Gender 5+. She was joined by Dr Elisabeth Klatzer, a renowned expert in gender budgeting, as well as Alice Bah Kuhnke, member of the European Parliament (Greens - Sweden) and Ana Carla Pereira, director, equality and non-discrimination, directorate-general for justice and consumers, European Commission, among others. The Lisbon Council also took part in **Science 2030**, a role-playing strategy workshop simulating AI for science futures convened by Google DeepMind and the UK Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA).

Upcoming

Born to Scale: A High-Level Roundtable on the Potential of the App Economy



Aura Salla

A new generation of digital entrepreneurs is reshaping Europe's innovation landscape by building scalable businesses that combine local roots with global ambition. How can Europe better support these innovators beyond its established digital hubs? To explore this question, the Lisbon Council convenes

the High-Level Roundtable on 'Born to Scale: How the App Economy Drives Business, Competitiveness and Regional Growth.' Aura Salla, member of the European Parliament (EPP - Finland), will join Leonard Mehlig, founder of structured app; and Frederik Riedel, founder of one sec app, to discuss how Europe can empower entrepreneurs to access markets, scale their businesses and strengthen Europe's competitiveness.

The Real 2026 World Cup: The Quantum Match

The Lisbon Council convenes a new high-level roundtable dedicated to quantum. How can Europe translate its scientific excellence into global quantum leadership? What will it take to build a competitive quantum ecosystem, and what could that mean for Europe's strategic autonomy? Ester De Nicolás, developer relations lead at NVIDIA

Quantum, will fly to Brussels for a one-of-a-kind discussion on the evidence, opportunity and the challenges ahead to answer this and more important questions.



Ester De Nicolás

Starflight: A Deep Dive on Europe's Fight for Talent



Enrico Letta dubbed it the "freedom to stay." Today, Europe is expanding that vision into a broader fight for talent: one creating the conditions for talent not only to stay, but also move to and scale across the continent. As the European

Union advances initiatives such as its talent pool and the union of skills to attract and retain talent, the Lisbon Council convenes the High-Level Roundtable on 'The Right to Grow.' The discussion will explore the next steps for Europe's digital sovereignty and competitiveness by building a truly integrated single market for talent, innovation and opportunity.

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