TERMS OF REFERENCE AND TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

1. Evaluation Report and Vision to Align Ukrainian Startup Ecosystem with ESNA Standards for the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine and USF General information

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| **Assignment name** | Development of Policies for the Identification and Promotion of Leading Ukrainian Startups. Support for the startups promotion within the ESNA (European Startups Nations Alliance), through technical assistance. |
| **Beneficiary** | Expertise France – EU4Innovation East project |
| **Country** | Ukraine |
| **Duration** | August 1, 2025 – January 31, 2026 |

1. Context and justification of the need

The EU4Innovation East is a regional project aiming at enhancing the competitiveness of the startup ecosystem within 5 countries of the Eastern Partnership (EaP): Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. At the heart of the project is a strategy designed to nurture high-performance incubators, expand funding and market opportunities for startups, and provide tailored support to Ukraine’s emerging tech sector. Through strategic co-financing, skills development, regulatory assistance, and a strong commitment to gender inclusion, EU4Innovation East is laying the foundation for sustainable, long-term growth in the region, ensuring that innovation is both inclusive and impactful.

The EU4Innovation East project is funded by the European Union, co-funded by the French government and implemented by Expertise France.

Ukraine’s startup ecosystem is evolving rapidly, yet many promising ventures lack the requisite policies and regulatory frameworks for effective growth and international recognition. Through collaboration with the European Startup Nations Alliance (ESNA), Ukraine seeks to enhance its alignment with European Union (EU) standards and accelerate market accessibility and inclusivity for its leading startups. This assignment focuses on developing and promoting such policies under the guidance of relevant public bodies – including the Ukrainian Startup Fund (USF) and the Ministry of Digital Transformation (MDT) – with support from legal companies, think tanks, and both local and international experts. A key outcome will be the Evaluation Report and Vision to Align Ukrainian Startup Ecosystem with ESNA Standards with consequent production of at least 10 policy papers that facilitate ESNA standards adoption and drive forward Ukraine’s integration into Europe’s innovation landscape.

This TOR outlines the mandate for a consortium, composed of international and local experts, to deliver a phased approach to achieve these objectives.

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| Title: | Initiative “EU4Innovation East” – Support to Digital Innovation in the Eastern Partnership region |
| Geographic scope: | Multi-country Eastern Partner: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine |
| Duration: | • Duration: 54 months, i.e. 4.5 years (04/2024 - 10/2028) |
| Financed by: | • EU Commission: 20.000.000,00€  • France: 2.120.000,00€, earmarked for Ukraine |
| Implementing  Agency: | Expertise France (EF) |
| Overall objective: | Strengthen the competitiveness and maturity of the EaP startup ecosystem |
| Specific  Objectives: | **SO1:** Enhance early-stage funding access for EaP startups, especially those led or co-founded by women, by creating a new funding mechanism and improving incubation programs, including technology transfer initiatives.  **SO2:** Foster innovation development in EaP ecosystems by structuring and improving the business environment.    **SO3:** Amplify the visibility of EaP startups and strengthen connections with European investors, fostering both funding acquisition, market access, and increased local interest in the entrepreneurial journey.  **SO Ukraine:** Formulate a customized strategy for Ukraine, integrating French co-financing, to navigate and capitalize upon the distinctive challenges and opportunities encountered by the Ukrainian startup ecosystem during the ongoing reconstruction period. |
| Pillars description: | Pillar 1 – Early-stage funding  Pillar 2 - Backing high added-value segments and high-performance incubation  Pillar 3 - Strengthening Community ties  Pillar 4 - International Spotlight for EaP Startups Integrating European emblematic events |

1. Objectives

3.1. General objective

Ukraine is actively working towards aligning its startup ecosystem with European and global best practices to foster innovation, attract investment, and strengthen the competitiveness of Ukrainian startups. The **European Startup Nations Alliance (ESNA)** sets key standards that define startup-friendly policies, regulatory frameworks, and ecosystem enablers within the European Union. To accelerate Ukraine’s integration into these standards, an in-depth gap analysis is required to identify existing discrepancies and provide recommendations for alignment.

Therefore, the overarching objective of this assignment is to strengthen Ukraine’s capacity to align its regulatory framework with ESNA standards and incorporating data-driven insights into policy development. This will ensure a more supportive, inclusive, and competitive innovation environment that fully leverages EU-aligned frameworks.

3.2. Specific objectives

The service provider is to address the following specific objectives:

* **Assess and analyze** Ukraine’s current policies, regulatory framework, and ecosystem support mechanisms against ESNA standards;
* **Identify gaps and challenges** preventing full compliance with ESNA standards;
* **Provide recommendations** for regulatory, financial, and structural reforms to align with European startup-friendly policies;
* **Develop a roadmap** with actionable steps for implementing necessary changes.

1. Description of the assignment

4.1. Planned activities

4.1.1. Phase 1 – Market and Audience Research

* Review and analyze ESNA’s standards, criteria, and best practices from leading European startup nations;
* Examine Ukraine’s existing legal, regulatory, and policy frameworks that impact startups. Investigate the specific needs and challenges of Ukrainian startup founders;
* Compare Ukraine’s performance with other ESNA-compliant countries.

4.1.2. Phase 2 – Stakeholder Consultations

* Conduct interviews and roundtable discussions with key ecosystem players, including government representatives, startup founders, investors, accelerators, and industry associations;
* Engage with policymakers to understand current challenges and potential reform pathways.

4.1.3. Phase 3 – Gap Analysis & Findings Report

* Identify specific policy, financial, and operational gaps in Ukraine’s startup environment;
* Perform a detailed gap analysis to assess discrepancies between Ukraine’s current policies and ESNA/EU standards;
* Assess the impact of these gaps on Ukraine’s startup ecosystem development.

4.1.4. Phase 4 – Recommendations & Roadmap Development

* Provide set of data-driven recommendations to align Ukraine’s policies and practices with ESNA’s market accessibility standards and inclusivity principles;
* Outline short-term, mid-term, and long-term actions needed to bridge identified gaps;
* Propose a step-by-step implementation strategy, including key stakeholders responsible for execution;
* Propose strategic measures to harmonize startup-friendly regulations, ensuring closer integration with the EU innovation ecosystem;

4.1.5. Final Report & Presentation

* Deliver a comprehensive report summarizing findings, gaps, and recommendations;
* Present key insights and strategic recommendations to relevant government bodies and stakeholders.

4.2. Anticipated deliverables

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| **Deliverables** | **Due date** |
| Market & Audience Research Report | August 31, 2025 |
| Stakeholder Consultations | August 31,2025 |
| Gap Analysis Report on ESNA Standards & Policy Alignment & Findings Report | October 31, 2025 |
| Recommendations & Roadmap Development | November 31, 2025 |
| Final Report & Presentation | December 31, 2025 |
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4.3. Coordination

* Lead Agency: The service provider will be responsible for coordinating all activities in agreement with the EU4InnovationEast project.

1. Place, duration and terms of performance
2. Implementation period:

* Phase 1 (Market & Audience Research): August 1, 2025– August 31, 2025
* Phase 2 (Stakeholder Consultations): August 1, 2025– August 31, 2025
* Phase 3 (Gap Analysis of ESNA Standards & Findings Report): September 1, 2025– October 31, 2025
* Phase 4 (Recommendations & Roadmap Development): October 01, 2025– November 30, 2025
* Phase 5 (Final Report & Presentation) – December 1 , 2025 – December 31, 2025

1. Start date: August 1, 2025
2. End date: January 31, 2026
3. Effective duration of assignment: 6 months
4. Schedule/program: the provisional program for assignment implementation is as follows:

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| **Activity** | **Place** | **Period** |
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| Market & Audience Research - | Ukraine (On-site) | August 1, 2025– August 31, 2025 |
| Stakeholder Consultations | Ukraine | August 1, 2025– August 31, 2025 |
| ESNA Standards Adoption & Gap Analysis (Intl. Experts) & Findings Report | Remote & Ukraine | September 1, 2025– October 31, 2025 |
| Recommendations & Roadmap Development | Remote & Ukraine | October 01, 2025– November 30, 2025 |
| Final Report & Presentation | Ukraine | December 1 , 2025 – December 31, 2025 |

1. Qualifications and experience

Project Management: Demonstrated experience managing multi-phase, multi-stakeholder projects, particularly in the field of financial instruments and startup ecosystems.

Stakeholder Engagement: Excellent communication and facilitation skills to effectively manage stakeholder consultations, workshops, and coordination activities.

Analytical Skills: Strong analytical capabilities to conduct comprehensive feasibility studies, benchmark international practices, and provide actionable insights.

6.1. International Experts

* Proven track record of working with EU innovation standards and startup-friendly policy frameworks.
* Experience in conducting gap analyses and recommending policy alignments within emerging markets.
* Strong communication and facilitation skills to collaborate effectively with Ukrainian stakeholders.
* Familiarity with Eastern European or post-Soviet innovation ecosystems is a plus.

6.2. Local Experts

* Extensive knowledge of Ukraine’s startup ecosystem and its main challenges.
* Experience in conducting market research, surveys, and interviews.
* Strong analytical skills and proven capacity in policy drafting or strategy development.
* Familiarity with the goals and principles of ESNA or similar EU-aligned initiatives is preferred.

Additionally, the organization must exhibit robust project management capabilities, including a clear methodology for coordinating the activities of experts, ensuring seamless integration of international insights with local realities to achieve sustainable and impactful results.

The service provider is expressly prohibited from subcontracting or delegating any portion of this assignment to third parties without prior, written approval from the contracting authority. Any attempt to transfer or share the responsibilities of this contract, whether in whole or in part, will be considered a material breach of the agreement and may result in immediate termination, in addition to any remedies or damages as provided under applicable law.

1. Contribution to Communication and Visibility

* Ensure visibility of the EU4Innovation East project together with its donors and implementing entity (EU, French Republic, Expertise France and EU4Innovation East) and reference in all communications related to the assignment.
* Align with the EU4IE communication team on all the external communications related to the assignment.

1. Application documents

The application and tender documents as well as all correspondence and documents relating to this consultation must be written in English. Proposals can be submitted by individual stakeholders, groups of stakeholders sharing a common analytical need with the umbrella organization or as the consortium.

In support of their offer, candidates must submit a file consisting of the following documents:

* A proof of a legal identity form;
* The expression of interest form and its appendices, the declaration of honour on exclusion criteria and absence of conflict-of-interest template and the identification sheet of a third party;
* The draft contract, including the candidate's financial offer, duly completed, dated and signed;
* A technical offer comprising:
* a description of the methodology that will be used to carry out the activities,
* a detailed timetable,
* CVs of the experts designated for the implementation of the activities (specify);
* A breakdown of the financial tender presented in the form of a unit price schedule indicating the price in man-days and with an estimate of the number of days necessary to carry out the service and covering all the services owed under the contract;
* For any contract whose execution implies the movement of its personnel (or its subcontractor) in an orange or red zone (in accordance with the regional vigilance maps made available by the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (<https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/conseils-aux-voyageurs/>) the safety evaluation questionnaire completed.

The documents requested above are mandatory. If missing, the tender submitted will not be compliant and will therefore be rejected.

Deadline for submission: **July 15, 2025, 21:00 Kyiv TIME .**

The period of validity of the tenders submitted is fixed at 120 calendar days from the deadline for submission of tenders.

1. Evaluation and selection

Expertise France will first check the eligibility of the applications and their ability to provide the service. Finally, it will evaluate the offers according to the following criteria:

* Criterion 1: Technical value (70%)
* Criterion 2: Price (30%)

The technical value of submitted applications will be assessed based on the following evaluation criteria, with a total of 100 points.

* Global understanding of project and the mission to be performed [10 points];
* Relevance of the proposed approach and methodology including organizational methods [20 points];
* Professional qualifications of the team experts participating in the project, evaluated according to their CVs. [20 points];
* Demonstrated experience in developing similar projects, studies, researches and [10 points];
* Calendar : relevance and compliance with the set deadlines [10 points].

The applicants must achieve a minimum score of 70 percent in technical value in order to qualify for further consideration.

Expertise France may, if it deems necessary, open negotiations with all or some of the tenderers and will conclude the contract with the entity that submitted the best-rated tender in the light of these criteria.