

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Research Firm to Undertake a Mid-Term Evaluation of the Project

1. General information

Assignment name	Provision of Mid-Term Evaluation services for the EU4Innovation East project
Beneficiary	Expertise France – EU4Innovation East project
Country	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine
Duration	4 months

2. Context and justification of the need

EU4Innovation East is a regional project enhancing the competitiveness of the startup ecosystems in five Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. At its core is a comprehensive strategy to foster high-performance incubators, expand funding and market opportunities, strengthen community ties and amplify the visibility of EaP startups. Through strategic co-financing, capacity building, regulatory support, and a commitment to gender equality, EU4Innovation East promotes an inclusive and sustainable innovation landscape. By amplifying regional achievements and deepening cross-border connections, the project lays the groundwork for impactful growth.

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

Title:	EU4Innovation East – Support to Digital innovation in the Eastern Partnership region
Geographic scope:	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine
Duration:	54 months, i.e. 4.5 years (04/2024 - 10/2028)
Financed by:	• EU Commission: 21.000.000,00€ • France: 2.120.000,00€, earmarked for Ukraine
Implementing Agency:	Expertise France (EF)
Overall objective:	Contribute to strengthen the competitiveness and maturity of the private sector in innovation in EaP countries through valuable collaborations with European partners

Pillars' description:

Pillar 1 – Supporting early-stage funding

Pillar 2 - Backing high added-value segments and high-performance incubation

Pillar 3 - Strengthening community ties

Pillar 4 – Promoting EaP startups and advancing the development of EU partnerships

Pillar 5 - WiFi4MD: Public Digital Infrastructure for Inclusive Innovation Ecosystems in Moldova

Justification of the need - EU4Innovation East is a regional project aiming to strengthen the competitiveness and maturity of the EaP startup ecosystem. An independent mid-term evaluation is therefore essential to generate evidence that will inform and strengthen the project's implementation going forward. In accordance with the Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) plan and Description of Action (DoA), Expertise France MEAL procedure, the project is required to carry out an independent mid-term evaluation.

This evaluation is a milestone to ensure the project's accountability to the funder (European Union) and the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, Ministry of Economics, Finance and Industrial and Digital Sovereignty of France, the implementing agency (Expertise France), and the project beneficiaries.

The primary users of this mid-term evaluation are the European Union, as the principal funder of EU4Innovation East, which will use the findings to assess the project's accountability, value for money, and progress towards delivering the expected results and impact, and to inform future funding decisions and regional programming priorities. Expertise France, as the primary implementing agency, will use the evaluation findings to assess overall project performance, inform adaptive management decisions, and strengthen implementation strategies for the remainder of the project period. The project management team will similarly draw on the findings and recommendations to refine operational strategies, address implementation bottlenecks, and enhance the quality and effectiveness of project activities for the remaining project period. Finally, partners engaged in the project will use the evaluation to strengthen coordination, align strategies, and enhance their contribution to the project's objectives.

Scope of the evaluation- the midterm evaluation covers all activities since the start of the project in April 2024 in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The evaluation will assess the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and potential impact of the project across its four core pillars: support to early-stage funding creation; backing of added-value segments and high-performance incubation; support to community initiatives and legal alignment; and international promotion of Eastern Partnership (EaP) startups and the development of EU partnerships. End beneficiaries are government institutional partners, startup support organizations and startups and young entrepreneurs.

The project aims to achieve the following results:

Component	Specific objectives
Pillar 1 – Supporting early-stage funding	Specific Objective 1: Startups in the East Neighborhood have greater access to local funding in the pre-seed stage (fundraising, vouchers, etc.), including startups founded or co-founded by women
Pillar 2 - Backing high added-value segments and high-performance incubation	
Pillar 3 - Strengthening community ties	Specific Objective 2: The EaP ecosystems are structured and strengthened, creating a business

	environment more conducive to innovation development
Pillar 4 – Promoting EaP startups and advancing the development of EU partnerships	Specific Objective 3: The EaP ecosystems are connected with European investors, generating foreign investments for startups
Cofi FR Specific support from France for the reconstruction of Ukraine	Specific Objective 4: Ukrainian startup ecosystem improves its support to local startups
Pillar 5 - WiFi4MD: Public Digital Infrastructure for Inclusive Innovation Ecosystems in Moldova	Specific Objective 5: Improved access to free, reliable public internet services in Moldovan cities, contributing to digital inclusion and territorial cohesion

The evaluation should take into account several cross-cutting principles: Gender in accordance with the [Expertise France Gender Strategy](#) and project's Gender Strategy and by positioning gender as a cross-cutting area throughout the evaluation. Integrating a consolidated gender approach and measures across all stages of the evaluation process: methodological approach (sampling, evaluation questions), data collection (always disaggregated by sex and age as far as possible), analysis of data (always disaggregated by sex and age as far as possible, integration of gender dynamics in contextual analyses), recommendations taking into account gender-related experiences, etc. In the context of Ukraine, the evaluation will additionally capture information on vulnerable groups, including veterans and war-affected populations. The evaluation will adopt a participatory approach, actively engaging key stakeholders- through interviews, focus group discussions, and validation workshops at key stages of the evaluation process. Ethics: the evaluation must comply with the principles and commitments of the [Expertise France Ethics Charter](#). The evaluation will assess the project's contribution to promotion of environmental sustainability with particular attention to the project's support to startups in GreenTech vertical.

3. Objectives

3.1. General objective

The overall objective of this evaluation is to improve current and future project interventions. In order to achieve this, a mid-term report will be drawn up with the following specific objectives:

3.2. Specific objectives

1. **Produce a comprehensive and independent analysis of the performance of the project**, with particular attention to its intermediate results, in comparison to the objectives initially set; and its trajectory towards achieving its intended impact
2. **Learning.** Identify lessons learned and best practices to inform adaptive management for the remainder of the project, and to support the scale-up and replication of successful approaches in other Expertise France interventions. In doing so, the evaluation shall produce a knowledge product capturing EU4Innovation East's contribution to advancing startup ecosystems across Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, demonstrating value for money for the European Union.
3. **Provide recommendations** for improving implementation- including adjustments to indicators, targets, and the Theory of Change- understanding that the project team and stakeholders will use the findings to enhance decision-making and refine strategies

3.3 Evaluation criteria and questions

The evaluation will use the criteria set out by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in its publication [Better Criteria for Better Evaluation – Definitions and Principles for Use](#). They should be reviewed by the evaluator during the inception phase of the evaluation, in order to propose a final version in the inception report.

Evaluation criteria	General evaluation questions	Examples of specific evaluation questions ¹
Relevance and coherence	To what extent does the project address the needs and constraints of the targeted actors? To what extent is the project internally coherent? To what extent is the project coherent with other initiatives in the sector/region?	- To what extent does the project address the innovation and startup ecosystem challenges identified in the Country Diagnostics? - To what extent does the project remain relevant to the current priorities and agendas of ecosystem players — including government agencies, innovation bodies, startup support organizations, and private sector actors — across the five target countries?
Effectiveness	Is the intervention achieving its objectives?	- Are startups gaining better access to local funding in pre-seed and seed stage? - Are the EaP ecosystems starting to be more structured and strengthened? - Is there evidence of an improved connection between EaP ecosystems and European funders? Are startups attracting foreign investments? - Is there evidence Ukrainian startup ecosystem improving its support to local startups?
Efficiency	Are resources being used in an optimal way?	- How is budget allocated to reach outputs? - To what extent have project inputs — including grant tranches, technical expertise, man/days, services— been converted into outputs? - What is the EU leverage ratio — to what extent has EU funding catalyzed additional sponsorships and / or co-financing contracts, and what results have these generated?
Orientation towards impact	What difference the intervention is expected to make and how?	- What are the areas of causal impact? - What are the top-level effects of the project on government actors, private sector, startup support organizations, youth, academia and startups? - What are the lessons learned and good practices of the project at the midpoint? - What are the long-term changes that the project is expected to produce if it stays on this trajectory?
Cross-cutting	-Gender equality -Green Innovation	- To what extent are gender and green innovation considered in project activities, particularly in the selection of startups for support?

¹ The questionnaire should be elaborated by the evaluator



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	-Communication and visibility	- To what extent the project ensures compliance with EU visibility and communication requirements across its outputs, events, and communications materials - How effectively the project communicates its results and EU funding contribution to relevant stakeholders
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4. Description of the assignment

Governance and the collaboration process- consultants are expected to work in close collaboration with EF (including with the Project Manager and the MEAL Manager) and to collaborate with the ad hoc Evaluation Committee set up for this mid-term evaluation.

4.1. Evaluation methodology

The evaluator shall design and implement a mixed-methods methodology integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches, with data triangulation applied throughout to ensure the validity, reliability, and credibility of findings. While the evaluator retains flexibility in the design of the methodology, the following approaches are required and shall be explicitly incorporated in the methodology:

i. Contribution Analysis The evaluation shall apply a contribution analysis approach to build a credible, evidence-based contribution pathway on mid-term. The analysis will trace the causal chain from project activities to outputs and to early outcomes, test the validity of the Theory of Change assumptions, and identify enabling and constraining factors. Findings will directly inform recommendations and strengthening the project's pathways to impact for the remainder of the project period.

ii. Qualitative Approach — Key Informant Interviews The evaluation shall conduct in-depth Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with a representative and purposively selected range of stakeholders, including the project management team, Expertise France, European Union representatives, government agencies, national innovation bodies, partner organizations, startup support organisations, and direct project beneficiaries across the three target countries. KIIs shall be complemented by focus group discussions where appropriate, and all data shall be disaggregated by sex, age, and country.

iii. Qualitative — Success Case Method (SCM) The evaluation shall identify and document a number of success cases across the project's supported startups and startup support organizations in Armenia, Moldova, and Ukraine, examining the conditions and project interventions that enabled them. This will be done in the form of Survey or Focus Group Discussions.

iv. Quantitative Approach — Quasi-Experimental Design The evaluation shall design and apply an impact measurement framework for the Pillar 1 funding mechanism, using a quasi-experimental design to assess its effectiveness and causal contribution to startup development. The framework shall compare characteristics and outcomes between startups selected for funding and those that applied but were not selected, controlling for selection bias where possible. Sample testing shall be drawn from Pillar 1 funding mechanism applications across the three target countries.

v. Knowledge Product for Learning The evaluation shall produce a knowledge product capturing EU4Innovation East's contribution to advancing startup ecosystems across Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. The knowledge product shall synthesize key findings, good practices, and lessons learned in an accessible and visually engaging format, suitable for dissemination to a broad audience including development practitioners, policymakers, donors, and the wider innovation community. The knowledge product shall demonstrate the project's value for money for the European Union and its potential for scale-up and replication in other Expertise France interventions.

4.2. Planned activities

The evaluation process will be implemented through the following phases in 2026:

Evaluation Phases	Implementation period
1. Inception phase - Inception Report (evaluation matrix, methodology, work plan, desk review, preliminary interviews with project team, data collection plan)	Month 1 from T0

2. Primary data collection phase - field missions (conduct interviews, carry out surveys, transmit datasets to the project, interim report)	Month 2 from T0
3. Data analysis and reporting phase - draft Evaluation Report (data analysis, findings and preliminary recommendations) +Knowledge Product	Month 3 from T0
4. Final reporting phase -validation Workshop / Presentation of Findings	Month 4 from T0
5. Final reporting phase -final Evaluation Report with integrated feedback	Month 4 from T0

1. Inception phase

The inception phase will include:

- An online kick-off meeting with the Project Management Unit (PMU) and the evaluator. The purpose of the meeting is to come to a clear and shared understanding of the evaluation. The identified limitations will be discussed, and mitigation measures will be set out. Finally, the evaluation plan and process will be presented and approved. Initial interviews will be conducted if deemed necessary by PMU.
- A desk research report, for which EU4IE will share the following data:
 - o Description of Action (DoA)
 - o Annual progress reports
 - o Country diagnostics and action plans
 - o Project monitoring data (Planning, monitoring and reporting tool)
 - o Learning data
 - o MEAL Strategy
 - o Knowledge Management (KM) Strategy
 - o Other relevant document (regulatory reviews, studies, etc.)

Based on the information collected and initial interviews conducted (first exchange with the team), an inception report will be drafted and submitted to Expertise France for validation.

2. Primary data collection phase (face-to-face in the implementing countries and online):

- The lead evaluator shall conduct in-country missions to Armenia, Moldova, and Ukraine² to meet stakeholders in person, and carry out key informant interviews. Each in-country mission shall be carried out with a country-based subject matter expert-national evaluator, to ensure contextual depth and local knowledge.

² Based on the assessment of the security situation

- The qualitative and quantitative collection methods designed by the evaluator to be used with all project beneficiaries
- Interim report and an interim meeting between the evaluation team and the evaluation steering group

3. Analysis and reporting phase

The analysis and reporting phase will include:

- Data analysis by triangulating primary, secondary, quantitative and qualitative data. Analysis should be disaggregated by sex, and if possible, by age, vulnerability status, vertical of startup;
- The analytical framework used;
- The evaluator to write the draft report before participating in the validation workshop. Draft report to be submitted to Expertise France for review, and quality assessment in accordance with an evaluation grid. Particular attention will be paid to the objectivity, balance and detail of any assertions made and their evidence base, as well how operational and tangible the recommendations are. The evaluation grid will be discussed with the evaluator to decide if any improvements are necessary. Produce knowledge product.
- Evaluation to conduct three validation workshops (one per country) online

4. Final reporting phase

Evaluator to incorporate feedback and produce the final report taking into account information from the validation workshops.

4.3. Anticipated deliverables and descriptions

Evaluation Phases and Deliverables	Implementation period	Deadline for the deliverable
D1 – Inception Report (desk review, preliminary interviews with project team, evaluation matrix, methodology, data collection plan, workplan)	Month 1 from T0	Within ten (10) working days after one (1) month from T0
D2 – Primary Data Collection and field missions report (conduct interviews, carry out surveys, transmit datasets to the project, interim report)	Month 2 from T0	Within fourteen (14) working days after two (2) months from T0
D3 – Draft Evaluation Report (data analysis, findings and preliminary recommendations) +Knowledge Product	Month 3 from T0	Within twenty (20) working days after three (3) months from T0
D4 – Validation Workshop report / Presentation of Findings	Month 4 from T0	Within three (3) working days after the validation of the draft report

D5 – Final Evaluation Report with integrated feedback	Month 4 from T0	Within three (3) working days after four (4) months from T0
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Deliverables	Main content	# pages max.
Deliverable #1 – Inception report	- Preliminary Document Review — a summary of key findings from the desk review of project documents, highlighting issues and questions to explore during the evaluation - Preliminary interviews with project team - Evaluation Matrix — a refined evaluation framework with a selection, prioritization, reformulation of evaluative questions, ensuring full coverage of the evaluation's objectives and the OECD/DAC criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and orientation towards impact) - Methodology — a detailed description of the evaluation methodology, including the mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, the rationale for their selection, the proposed sampling approach, and a transparent identification and discussion of the anticipated limitations of the evaluation - Data Collection Plan — the overall data collection strategy, the final tools to be used during the evaluation (interview guides, focus group discussion guides, survey questionnaires, and observation checklists, developed in line with the evaluation matrix and cross-cutting principles), and the proposed list of people and organizations to interview - Work Plan — a finalized work plan presenting all tasks, a clear description of each evaluation team member's roles, including the lead evaluator milestones, deliverables, and timelines from inception to final report, including planned data collection missions across Armenia, Moldova, and Ukraine	15 pages + annexes
Deliverable #2 – Primary Data Collection and field missions	- Raw Primary Data — all quantitative and qualitative primary data collected during the evaluation, submitted to the project in raw, unprocessed format - Cleaned and Processed Data — all quantitative and qualitative primary data cleaned, organized, and processed, submitted to the project in a structured format - Field Visit Notes — written records of observations, key points, and insights from each field visit and data collection mission - Interim report (in the lighter format of a slideshow) - is submitted at the end of the data collection phase to summarize the findings gathered using each of the data collection tools deployed by the evaluation team. The document will serve as the basis for an interim meeting between the evaluation team and the evaluation steering group aiming at sharing a common understanding of the collected data; jointly sketching the main lines of the cross-analysis; identifying gaps in data collection that may require additional remote follow-up.	

Deliverable #3 - Draft Evaluation Report (V1) +Knowledge Product	- Draft evaluation report shall include: - Executive Summary — a concise two-page summary of the evaluation's conclusions and recommendations, written for a non-technical audience - Methodology Overview — a transparent account of the evaluation methodology as implemented - Answers to the Evaluation Questions - Good Practices and Lessons Learned — including the Knowledge Product - Recommendations	40 pages + annexes
Deliverable # 4 Three Validation workshops to Stakeholders (online) in Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine	During the workshops, EF will challenge the preliminary conclusions—ensuring they are sufficiently supported by evidence and identifying any analytical gaps. The evaluators' wording will be refined to reach a collectively agreed formulation of the final conclusions, after which the recommendations will be co-developed. The PowerPoint Presentation shall include: - Preliminary conclusions - Good Practices and Lessons Learned — including the Knowledge Product - Summary of the Work — an overview of the evaluation work carried out - Summary of Interviews — a consolidated account of the interviews conducted - Data Reliability and Scope Analysis — an assessment of the reliability and scope of the data collected - Recommendations	
Deliverable # 5 Final Evaluation Report (V2)	- Finalized Report — all sections from the Draft Report (V1), revised and finalized based on comments from stakeholders, the EU, and Expertise France - Updated PowerPoint Presentation - Comments and Revisions Matrix — documenting all comments received, how each was addressed and integrated, and a clear justification where a comment was not incorporated	

4.4. Coordination

EU4IE MEAL manager will be the service provider's contact person for Expertise France.

5. Place, duration and terms of performance

- 1) Start and end dates: The duration of the assignment is **4 months from the contract notification date (T0)**.
- 2) Schedule/program:

The evaluation process will take place from September to December 2026, in line with the indicative schedule below.

Activity	Place	Period (indicative)	Duration (man/days)
Deliverable 1 Inception report	Online	Month 1 from T0	10
Deliverable 2 Primary Data Collection and field missions report	Online	Month 2 from T0	14 (including 10 days for field missions)
Deliverable 3 Draft Evaluation Report (V1) + Knowledge Product	Online/Offline	Month 3 from T0	20
Deliverable 4 Validation workshops (3x)	Online	Month 4 from T0	3
Deliverable 5 Final Evaluation Report (V2)	Online	Month 4 from T0	3
			TOTAL: 50 (man/days)

6. Qualifications and experience

The contracted firm should have a proven history in successfully providing similar services, as following:

6.1 Organizational Capacity

- Be a legally registered research, consulting, or evaluation firm with a demonstrated experience conducting evaluations, evidenced by a portfolio of completed evaluation assignments;
- Demonstrate financial and operational capacity to manage and deliver a regional, multi-country evaluation assignment;
- Have experience working with European Union-funded projects and familiarity with EU reporting and OECD/DAC evaluation standards.

6.2 Technical Expertise

- Demonstrated experience in conducting evaluations of development projects, preferably in the areas of innovation, entrepreneurship, or private sector development
- Experience in learning — demonstrated experience designing and facilitating learning processes within evaluations (e.g. lessons learned, knowledge products, learning workshops)
- Strong knowledge of Theory of Change, results-based management frameworks, and evaluation methodologies including both qualitative and quantitative approaches
- Familiarity with startup ecosystems, innovation policy, and private sector development in Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, as well as relevant EU policies and programmes related to innovation, will be a distinct advantage

6.3 Geographic Experience

- Proven experience conducting multi-country evaluations
- Demonstrated ability to manage multi-country data collection, including remote and in-person methods

6.4 Team Composition

The firm must propose a qualified evaluation team comprising at minimum:

Team Leader/Lead Evaluator — Advanced degree (Masters or PhD) in evaluation, social sciences, development studies, economics, or a related field, with a minimum of 10 years of relevant experience in project evaluation.

National Subject Matter Experts for each country — Minimum of 5 years of experience in data collection, SMEs/startups' analytics. In-depth knowledge of the Eastern Partnership region, its innovation landscape, and startup ecosystems with a knowledge of languages spoken in the region (Armenian, Romanian and Ukrainian)

6.5 Independence and Impartiality

The research firm and its proposed team members must be independent and have no prior or existing relationship with EU4Innovation East project.

7. Application documents

The application and tender documents as well as all correspondence and documents relating to this consultation must be written in English.

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 applicant organization, including its relevant credentials, track record, and previous experience that demonstrate its suitability for the assignment,
 - quality assurance: must include a quality assurance and control framework in their bid for the entire evaluation process. This framework will be discussed and validated during the inception meeting. Detailed timetable
 - Curriculum vitae (CVs) of the expert(s) proposed for the implementation of the activities, highlighting their qualifications, thematic expertise, experience in angel investment and prior relevant engagements.
- A detailed financial offer, including:
 - A breakdown of costs presented as a unit price schedule.
 - The schedule should indicate the price per man-day, provide an estimate of the total number of days required to complete the assignment, cover all services and deliverables under the contract, and be consistent with the expected level of effort (approximately 60–80 man-days).
 - The financial offer must also include all associated costs, such as travel, accommodation, venue rental, catering, materials, and any other expenses necessary for the successful implementation of the assignment.

- 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.

All submissions should be made electronically

Deadline for submission: **September 18, 2026**

The period of validity of the tenders submitted is fixed at 90 calendar days from the deadline for submission of tenders.

8. 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 70 points.

- The quality of work and range of projects reflected in the company's portfolio [20 points];
- Demonstrated experience in carrying out experimental and or /quasi-experimental evaluations [20 points];
- Professional qualifications of the team experts participating in the project, evaluated according to their CVs. [20 points];
- Experience in working with international organizations, on similar assignments [5 points];
- Capacity to deliver the expected results on a timeline compatible with the set deadlines [5 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.