PUBLIC CALL FOR IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS ENGAGEMENT IN CREATING DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM FOR ONLINE COMMUNITY OF YOUNG ENTERPRENEURS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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Ref#: IP-C_SEC_05_2022 - OSCE YDEAS PROJECT ON PROMOTING UPSKILLING AND A POSITIVE ECO-SYSTEM FOR INNOVATIVE AND DIGITAL START-UPPERS

To develop an online platform for the community of entrepreneurs, developers, innovators and young start-uppers from the Western Balkans to improve the accessibility of services to current and future start-uppers, foster connectivity, exchange of upskilling opportunities and business ideas, promote regional co-operation, socioeconomic development and reconciliation.

OSCE seeks to hire as an implementing partner to **provide professional capacity for establishing an interactive and friendly-user virtual platform that offers an enabling digital ecosystem for a constantly expanding community of innovative start-uppers**.

The costs to develop the virtual platform will be covered from the budget of the OSCE project "**YDEAS II**: **Y**oung **D**evelopers and **E**ntrepreneurs to **A**dvance **S**tart-ups" and will be transferred to the selected implementing partner under conditions stipulated in the implementing partner agreement and in line with the criteria described in the present Call.

The OSCE reserves the right to reject any or all applications received in response to this Public Call and to negotiate with any of the applicants in any manner deemed to be in the best interest of the OSCE.

1) **Background information**

One of the key consequences of COVID-19 pandemic is a significant boost towards the transformation of societies and economies from traditional to information-driven. Only by harnessing the full potential of emerging technologies will be possible to cope with the consequences of the pandemic and address the socioeconomic challenges triggered by this and similar crises, if any, in the future. To this end, it is essential to ensure the extensive participation of relevant stakeholders in this effort, particularly to prevent the digital marginalization of vulnerable groups.

Already fragile contexts – because of past conflicts and standing socio-political tensions - may be less equipped to adapt to a fast-paced, information-driven economic environment. According to the the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Regional Co-operation Council (RCC) persistent brain drain, skills' mismatch, weak intra-regional connectivity, lack of mobility and of entrepreneurial skills prevent the Western Balkans' economies from harnessing the ongoing digital transformation. At the same time, inspirational stories of successful entrepreneurs in the region suggest the emergence of a new generation, increasingly engaged in addressing pressing social and environmental challenges with an innovative entrepreneurial approach.

Widening socio-economic disparities between countries, social groups and individuals that embrace, harness, invest in the digital transition and those that do not, represents a security risk considering the urgent need to build back better after the pandemic. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) - the largest regional security arrangement under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter – considers bridging the digital gap a relevant factor contributing to economic stability and security. The multi-annual YDEAS project will allow focusing the Organization's efforts on the Western Balkans' region, with the intention to provide a platform to improve co-operation between local authorities, the private and the educational sectors, towards a regional eco-system for young social and green start-uppers. By promoting upskilling, networking and a regional ecosystem, the project will contribute to sustainable economic growth, reconciliation and stability and in the region.

In the framework of this project, the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) is looking for an Implementing Partner to develop a digital platform that can offer an interactive, needs-oriented and vibrant virtual eco-system for young start-uppers in the region and beyond. The virtual platform should allow **interaction within the regional community** of innovators, the **offer of support services** towards the establishment of a start-up – such as legal advice, technical guidance on business plans, and other technical services -, sharing and provision of **upskilling and training opportunities**, as well as **relevant information** about evolving normative frameworks, access to credit and access to markets, potentialities for joint ventures and other forms of cooperation, **exchange of ideas and mutual support** in terms of coaching, motivation, collaborative learning.

 2) Specific tasks of the implementing partners shall include:

Tentatively from October 2022 to June 2023, under the overall supervision of the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, the selected implementing partner shall engage in the project activities as follows:

Task no. 1: Assess needs of young start-uppers to tailor the technical features of the platform and the assistance services to meet the needs of the community of innovators. To this end, the IP will develop an online survey that will be distributed to the OCEEA database that includes a wide range of interlocutors, including start-uppers, university professors, students and participants in incubation and acceleration hubs in the region. Focus groups to assess the needs, carried out on the occasion of regional events organized by the OCEEA in the framework of the project, can complement the results of the online survey. **Timing:** This task should be completed preferably by the end of December 2022. **Expected deliverables**: needs' assessment report including the description of how the technical features of the platform should be set up to meet such needs, complemented by cost estimate, in English.

Task no. 2: In cooperation with OCEEA, map existing services already provided by public authorities as well as civil society organizations, including incubators and accelerators in the region, in different geographical and technical areas with the aim to harness the available offer of services and make the virtual platform a catalyser and collector of information and services. To this end, the IP will develop an online mapping exercise that will be disseminated through a wide range of interlocutors to assess availability of online, free services in line with the needs of the community of innovators. **Timing:** This task should be completed preferably by the end of December 2022. **Expected deliverables:** Mapping exercise report, including the description of how the technical features of the platform should be set up to allow the provision of online services, complemented by cost estimate, in English.

Task no. 3: Develop an online, virtual, friendly-user eco-system aligned with the needs of the community of innovators. To this end, the IP will be requested to develop a mock platform and test its technical features and potential services with a sample of actual and to-be start-uppers to assess the suitability of the platform, collect comments for possible revisions and modifications, and improve the features of the platform to act as a catalyzer and collector of information and services. In line with the feedbacks collected, the platform will be adjusted to the extent possible. For the first 24 months of its functioning, the platform will be primarily in English, unless feedbacks urge the need to resort to local languages in the Western Balkans. **Timing:** This task should be completed preferably by the end of March 2023. **Expected deliverables:** mock platform; report of feedbacks; final platform, in English unless differently agreed.

Task no. 4: In cooperation with OCEEA, provide training both online and in-person to the potential users of the platform, as well the community facilitators (2) who will act as animators and facilitators of the community of innovators. **Timing:** This task should be completed by the end of May 2023. **Expected deliverables**: 3 (three) one-day in-person training workshops in Belgrade, Tirana and Sarajevo; 6 (five) online, 4-hour training workshops in English, unless differently agreed.

Task no. 5: Provide the OCEEA with a detailed estimate for the maintenance of the platform, including technical costs and human resources costs, for a period of 24 months, starting from the launch/activation of the platform. **Timing:** This task should be completed preferably by the end of May 2023. **Expected deliverables**: Platform maintenance report in English

B) Provide narrative and financial reports

- The selected implementing partner shall provide the OSCE with the first Interim Narrative Report and First Interim Financial Reports no later than June 2023.The Second Interim Narrative Report and Second Interim Financial Reports required under Article 6.2(b) above shall be submitted no later than January 2024.
- The selected Implementing Partner shall provide the OSCE with a Final Financial Report and a Final Narrative Report no later than twenty (20) calendar days following the completion of the Project.
- The Interim and Final Narrative Reports shall provide:
  - A brief reiteration of the Project objectives;
  - A summary of the activities undertaken;
  - Information on the achievement of the objectives;
  - An evaluation of the Project, including any problems or successes encountered; and
  - The impact accomplished and/or expected.
- The Interim and Final Financial Reports shall provide information on the financial status, including income, expenditures and any unspent balance.
- All reports shall be submitted in English.
- All Financial Reports shall provide a summary of the expenditures separated into the following seven categories:

Category	Description
Staff costs	For the Implementing Partner's costs of its staff only
Consultants	For the Implementing Partner's costs of consultants directly hired by the IP
Travel	For the Implementing Partner's costs of travel

Accommodation and Meals	For the Implementing Partner's costs of hotels, accommodation, meals etc.
Other	For the Implementing Partner's costs of the IP's suppliers, assets and other items and services purchased by the IP

C) Participate to the project's events throughout its implementation

The selected implementing partner is expected to participate to the overall project's events and activities, including the final conference, coordination meetings and other events considered relevant to achieve the completion of the tasks envisaged in the this Call, including via online means.

3) Qualifications of the IP (mandatory requirements):

Each applicant organization:

1. Shall be a no-profit company, or a profit company that, according to its statute or its budgetary performance, re-invests more than 50% of its revenues in staff and Research & Development (R&D), with minimum 3 years of professional capacity in the establishment of virtual communities and platforms, including hybrid event, particularly in metaverse-like environments, and a proven collaboration with at least three major international organizations;
2. Shall be registered in one of the countries of the Western Balkans;
3. Shall provide electronically in English a brief description (technical proposal). The description should include a presentation of entities and individuals together with roles and areas of expertise involved in the implementation of the above tasks, including a budget estimates not exceeding EUR 20,000 (twenty thousand euros), an administrator responsible for the management of funds, contact details, as well as the technical capacity to carry out the above tasks.
4. Shall provide a multicultural ecosystem where diversity, mutual respect, peer support, gender-sensitivity are appreciated and encouraged;
5. Shall ensure the use of the English language of all personnel involved;
6. Shall ensure professionalism, transparency and accountability in managing funds provided by external entities.

Applicants will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. Experience in developing online platforms and communities, including in metaverse-like environments;
   – 40 out of 100 points

2. Quality, diversity and experience of the members of the company (please enclose CVs)

   - 20 out to 100 points

3. Records of transnational projects and partnerships, particularly those envisaging cooperation with international organizations and management of funds provided by external entities;

   - 20 out of 100 points

4. Quality of the description and cost-effectiveness of the budget to complete activities related to the tasks of the present Call

- 20 out of 100 points

4) **The project proposal should provide:**

Technical Proposal (no prices should be included to the Technical Proposal):
a) Supporting documentation, as requested under 6) below.

Financial Proposal:
a) The Financial Proposal shall cover all expenses to be incurred for performing the services as specified including, but not limited to the cost of the remuneration of the IP's personnel and all other compensations as well as other direct costs such as travel costs – if any - incurred by the IP for the purpose of performing the services; and shall show a detailed cost breakdown per price category;

b) progress payment(s) based on the specific tasks and suggested to be: a first instalment, equivalent to 40% upon signature of the IP; a second instalment of 40% upon approval of the interim narrative and interim financial report; final instalment after approval of the final narrative and final financial report.

As the OSCE is always interested in delivering products of the highest quality, the applicants are welcomed to present any suggestions or comments on how to improve the delivering of the awareness campaign.

5) **Entities eligible to apply:**

- No-profit or profit companies specialised in the provision of interactive digital services in a metaverse-like setting/environment, or profit companies that, by statute or budgetary performance, re-invest their revenues for the support of human resources/staff working in the company as well as research and development (R&D).

6) **Supporting documentation:**

Applicants shall provide information on their operational capacities as follows:

- Registration certificate (accreditation);
- Statute (in English) demonstrating the no-profit nature of the entity or the profit nature as described in no. 5);
- Documentation proving experience in developing on-line platforms for various communities, including in metaverse-like setting;
- A list of key personnel and their CVs who will be involved in the project ;
- Short description of projects/products at national and transnational level carried out in collaboration with external entities in the field of expertise – in particular international organizations - including level of financial resources received and managed;
- A budget estimate to carry out and complete task no. 1, 2,3, 4 and 5 of the present Call not exceeding EUR 20,000 (twenty thousand euros);
- Bank account details

7) How to apply and the procedures to follow:

The Public Call documents are available on request by e-mail to: ipcalls-at@osce.org.

The Public Call documents include:

- This document;

- Acknowledgement letter - ANNEX A. Upon receipt of this EOI, you are kindly requested to return the attached Acknowledgement Letter (Annex A) not later than **1 October 2022, 17:00 CET (Vienna time)** ipcalls-at@osce.org.

Applicants must apply in English. Hand-written applications will not be accepted.

Applications (Technical Proposal and Financial Proposal) must be delivered in *__separate,__ __password protected PDF files__* to ipcalls-at@osce.org **on or before 6 October 2022, 17:00 CET (Vienna time)**.

> **Any application submitted after the deadline at 6 October 2022, 17:00 CET (Vienna time) will be automatically rejected.**

Please address all your queries or questions in writing at the addresses given below up to 5 days before the submission deadline and kindly refrain from any telephone calls or personal visits.