

Request for Proposals (RFP)

RFP Number: StartupCityCahul-2021-012
Issuance Date: 01.02.2021
Deadline for Offers: 30.03.2021, 12:00 pm Chisinau time
Description: **Consultancy services for conducting an assessment on innovation in the Cahul Region, development of an innovation road map and innovation strategy for the Cahul Region**
For: Eu4Moldova Startup City Cahul Project
Funded By: European Union (EU) through Sweden
Issued by: National Association of ICT Companies (ATIC)
ATIC Point of Contact: llivadari@ict.md, Liuba Livadari, Procurement Manager
candronic@startupcitycahul.md, Corina Andronic, Deputy Director

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND INSTRUCTIONS TO OFFERORS

1.1 Acronyms and Definitions

ATIC	National Association of ICT Companies
Donor	Organization that finances the implemented project/program
EU	European Union
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IT	Information Technology
Project	Project implemented by ATIC
STEM	Science Technology, Engineering and Math
ToR	Terms of Reference
VAT	Value Added Tax

1.2 Introduction:

THE MOLDOVAN ASSOCIATION OF ICT COMPANIES (“ATIC”) is looking for an eligible and competent consulting company to provide the services described in Annex 1 – Terms of Reference to this RFP.

1.3 Offer Deadline and Submission Protocol:

Offers must be submitted not later than **12:00 pm, Chisinau time, on March 30, 2021** electronically and/or in hard copy to the ATIC office:

Electronic Submission: Any email offers must be sent to the following address:
to: llivadari@ict.md, Liuba Livadari, Procurement Manager

cc: candronic@startupcitycahul.md, Corina Andronic, Deputy Director

Offers must be submitted in two (2) separate .pdf format files:

- 1) Technical Volume (Forms A-E and other mandatory documents required by this solicitation documents).
- 2) Financial Proposal (should be password-protected). ATIC will request the password if the proposal is deemed technically compliant. Any submission of the financial proposal that is not password-protected will be disqualified. Also, any submission of the financial proposal together with the password will be disqualified.

Hard Copy Submission: Any hard copy offers must be stamped and signed by the offeror's authorized representative and delivered to the following address:

In attention of Liuba Livadari
Procurement Manager
Moldova ICT Excellence Center Project
Str. Studentilor 9/11, Chisinau, Moldova.

Each offeror must submit its proposal in two separate packages: Technical Proposal and the Cost Proposal. The following number of copies is required in each submission:

1. Technical and Cost Proposal: Three (3) original hardcopies and one (1) electronic copy on CD of each proposal, per the instructions below.
2. All offers and related documents must be enclosed in sealed envelopes with the name and address of the offeror and the RFP number ("RFP # StartupCityCahul-2021-007) clearly marked on the outside. The Technical Proposal and the Cost Proposal must be submitted in different envelopes. If the technical proposal is split into various envelopes due to the size of a proposal, offerors must ensure that each envelope is sealed and clearly marked with the information described above.

Please refer the RFP number in any response to this RFP.

Offers received after the specified time and date will be considered late and will NOT be reviewed by ATIC.

1.4 Questions and Requests for Clarifications:

Questions regarding the technical or administrative requirements of this RFP may be submitted no later than **15:00, Chisinau time on March 23, 2021, by email to llivadari@ict.md and candronic@startupcitycahul.md**. Questions must be submitted in writing; phone calls will not be accepted. Questions and requests for clarification—and the responses thereto—that ATIC believes may be of interest to other offerors will be circulated to all RFP recipients who have indicated an interest in bidding.

Only the written answers issued by ATIC will be considered official and carry weight in the RFP process and subsequent evaluation. Any verbal information received from employees of ATIC or any other entity should not be considered as an official response to any questions regarding this RFP.

1.5 Technical and Cost Volume

1.5.1 Technical Volume

The Technical Volume should describe in detail the offeror's proposed plan for providing the services and commodities described in the specifications found in Annex 1. It should demonstrate a clear understanding of the work to be undertaken and the responsibilities of all parties involved. The plan should include details on equipment, personnel, and subcontractors that the offeror will make available to carry out the required activities. The plan should also provide details on the anticipated delivery schedule, including an estimated completion date.

At a minimum, the Technical Volume must contain the documents required in the Annex 1 - Terms of Reference: FORMS A-E and other required documents

Subcontracting arrangements:

If the execution of work to be performed by the offeror requires the hiring of subcontractors, the proposal must clearly identify the subcontractor(s), contact information of subcontractor(s), and the work they will perform. ATIC will not refuse a proposal based upon the use of subcontractors; however, ATIC retains the right to approve or reject the specific subcontractors selected.

All electronic copies of documents in the Technical Volume must be in PDF, Microsoft Word or Microsoft Excel format.

The information contained in the Technical Volume should not contain any cost- or price-related information.

1.5.2 Cost Volume

Taking into consideration the complexity of the work, the cost proposal is used to determine which proposals represent the best value and serves as a basis of negotiation before award of a subcontract.

It should offer a clear understanding upon the amount of work, different types of activities (if applicable), but offer a fixed price for the assignment taking into account all details.

The cost proposal shall also include a budget narrative that explains the basis for the estimate of every cost element or line item. Supporting information must be provided in sufficient detail to allow for a complete analysis of each cost element or line item. ATIC reserves the right to request additional cost information if the evaluation committee has concerns of the reasonableness, realism, or completeness of an offeror's proposed cost.

The agreement under which this procurement is financed does not permit the financing of any taxes, VAT, tariffs, duties, or other levies imposed by any laws in effect in the Cooperating Country. No such Cooperating Country taxes, charges, tariffs, duties or levies will be paid under an order resulting from this RFP.

CURRENCY OF PROPOSAL: Financial offers must be presented in MDL only. No other currencies accepted.

FORMAT OF FINANCIAL PROPOSAL: In formulating its financial proposal, the offeror should be guided by the *FORM F – Financial Offer*.

PARTIAL QUOTES: not allowed.

1.6 Validity Period

Offers must remain valid for at least 90 calendar days after the RFP deadline.

1.7 Eligibility of Offerors

By submitting an offer in response to this RFP, the offeror certifies that it and its principal officers are not debarred, suspended, or otherwise considered ineligible for an award. ATIC will not award a contract to any firm that is debarred, suspended, or considered to be ineligible.

As per EU procurement rules, a subcontractor is eligible if:

- it is not included in the EU Sanctions List or are subject to EU Restrictive Measures provided at www.sanctionsn1ap.eu and all its employees, consultants, suppliers and contractors involved in fulfilment of this Agreement or implementation of any part of the Project are not included in the EU Sanctions List or are subject to EU Restrictive Measures and none part of the Fee is made available to, or for the benefit of, persons, groups and entities designated under the EU Sanctions List or subject to EU Restrictive Measures. The Provider shall cooperate with the Beneficiary in this respect and promptly inform the Beneficiary if it reveals that any recipient of such funds falls under EU Sanctions List / EU Restrictive Measures.
- it does not support activities that contribute to money laundering, terrorism financing, tax avoidance, tax fraud or tax evasion;
- it refrains from corruption and other irregularities and requires all its employees, consultants, suppliers and contractors involved in fulfilment of this Agreement or implementation of any part of the Project to refrain from any such corruption and other irregularities. Corruption and other irregularities refer to all kinds of: (1) corruption, including bribery, nepotism, illegal gratuities or other form of abuse of trust, power and position for improper gain; (2) misappropriation of cash, inventory and all other kinds of assets; (3) financial and non-financial fraudulent statements; (4) all other use of Project/Core Activities funds which is not in accordance with the work plan and Budget approved under SIDA-ATIC Agreement. The Provider shall cooperate with the Beneficiary in this respect and promptly inform the Beneficiary of any indication of corruption and other irregularities and investigate the presence of corruption and other irregularities and take action, including legal actions, against persons suspected of corruption and other irregularities;
- it takes all necessary precautions to avoid any conflicts of interest in all matters related to fulfilment of this Agreement or implementation of any part of the Project and ensures its employees, consultants, suppliers and contractors are not placed in a situation which could give rise to conflict of interest. A conflict of interest shall be deemed to arise where the impartial and objective exercise of the functions of any person fulfilling the Agreement and/or implementing of any part of the Project is compromised.

1.8 Evaluation and Basis for Award

One or multiple awards will be made to the offeror whose proposal is determined to be responsive to this solicitation document, meets the eligibility criteria stated in this RFP, meets the technical, management/personnel, and corporate capability requirements, and is determined to represent the best value to ATIC. Best value will be decided using the tradeoff process. That means that each proposal will be evaluated and scored against the evaluation criteria and evaluation sub-criteria, which are stated in Annex 1. If technical scores of several proposers reaching or exceeding the minimum pass score are determined to be equal or nearly equal, cost will become the determining factor.

ATIC may award the contract to a higher priced offeror if a determination is made that the higher technical score of that offeror merits the additional cost/price.

The rating of each proposal will be defined based on the accumulated technical and financial scoring, considering the technical and financial scores. The priority will be given to highest technical scored offers, in the limits of the available budget.

Please refer to Annex 1 for the evaluation criteria and sub-criteria.

1.9 Negotiations

Best and final price quotations are requested from all offerors. It is anticipated that awards will be made solely on the basis of these original quotations. However, ATIC reserves the right to conduct negotiations and/or request clarifications prior to awarding a subcontract.

1.10 Terms and Conditions of Subcontract

This is a Request for Proposals only. Issuance of this RFP does not in any way obligate ATIC or the Donor to award a subcontract, nor does it commit ATIC or Donor to pay for costs incurred in the preparation and submission of a proposal.

This solicitation is subject to the Draft Order Terms and Conditions detailed in Section 2. Any resultant award will be governed by these terms and conditions. ATIC reserves the right to make revisions to the content, order, and numbering of the provisions in the actual subcontract document prior to execution by ATIC and the selected awardee. Issuance of a subcontract award is subject to availability of sufficient funds.

SECTION 2. BACKGROUND, SCOPE OF WORK, DELIVERABLES AND DELIVERABLE SCHEDULE

2.1 Specifications

Please refer to Annex 1 – Terms of Reference for details on the required services.

2.2 Delivery Requirements

The delivery location for the described services in this RFP is ATIC office 9/11, Studentilor, Chisinau, Moldova, MD-2045. As part of its response to this RFP, each offeror is expected to provide an estimate (in calendar days) of the delivery and execution timeframe (after receipt of order). The delivery estimate presented in an offer in response to this RFP must be upheld in the performance of any resulting contract.

The delivery estimate presented in any offers in response to this RFP must be honest, accurate, and upheld in the performance of any resulting subcontract or order.

SECTION 3. DRAFT ORDER TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Per Section 1.11 of this RFP, in the event of a subcontract award resulting from an offer submitted in response to this RFP, the following terms and conditions will apply:

1. All commodities, if applicable, delivered under this subcontract must be transferable to Donor, or another entity in the Cooperating Country designated by ATIC.

2. Delivery Terms

A. Delivery terms to be guided by the expected timeframes mention in the ToR – Annex 1. The Subcontractor shall deliver the deliverables as set forth to the delivery locations.

B. *Time is of the essence.* By executing this subcontract, the Subcontractor confirms that it accepts that the delivery schedule stated herein is reasonable and will comply with the delivery schedule.

C. *Customs clearance.* The Subcontractor shall clear any international shipments through customs and deliver them to the appropriate location(s) specified in Article 5. ATIC is

responsible for providing the Subcontractor with the necessary documentation required by Moldovan customs officials for duty-free customs clearance (if applicable).

D. Consignee address. For any international shipments requiring customs clearance in Moldova, the following consignee address shall be used on each shipment to facilitate duty-free and tax-free customs clearance (if applicable).

3. Payment and financial obligations

3.1 Subcontract Price

The Subcontractor shall complete all work (including furnishing all labor, material, commodities, equipment, and services) required under this subcontract for the fixed price indicated in the offer. This price shall include all equipment, commodities, shipping costs, licenses, permits, administration costs, labor costs, materials, overhead, profit, and all other costs.

The Subcontractor will be paid the installment amounts listed under the column named "Payment Amount" only upon successful completion and acceptance by ATIC of all corresponding deliverables listed in the column named "Corresponding Deliverable Name."

3.2 Payment Terms

ATIC will pay the total price through a series of installment payments, after Subcontractor's completion of the corresponding deliverables and ATIC acceptance thereof. The Subcontractor may submit invoices for deliverables that have been accepted and approved by the authorized ATIC representative. ATIC will pay the Subcontractor's invoice within fifteen (15) working days after the following conditions have been fulfilled:

- a) the Subcontractor has delivered a proper original and correct invoice,
- b) ATIC has signed the Acceptance Certificate (certifying the delivery of services by the Contractor in conformity with the contract requirements and their acceptance by ATIC,

Payment will be made in MDL (in case of international applicants, payment will be made in USD or EU based on the location of the company providing services), paid via wire transfer to the account specified in the Subcontractor's invoice. Payment of unpaid balances will be made upon completion and final acceptance of all works and deliverables by ATIC. Any invoices for services rendered and deliverables submitted—but not accepted by ATIC—will not be paid until the Subcontractor makes sufficient revisions to the deliverables such that ATIC may approve the deliverables and thus the invoice.

3.3 Invoice Requirements

The Subcontractor shall present an invoice to ATIC only for services and/or commodities that have been accepted by ATIC. The invoice must be an original invoice, submitted to:

ATIC
Attention: Accountant Office
National Association of ICT Companies

To constitute a proper invoice, the Subcontractor's invoice must include the following information and/or attached documentation. This information will assist ATIC in making timely payments to the Subcontractor:

1. Subcontractor legal name, subcontract number, invoice date, and invoice number.

2. Deliverable(s) number, description of approved deliverable(s), and corresponding value, installment number.
3. Bank account information to which payment shall be sent.

3.4 Cooperating Country Fees, Taxes, and Duties

This subcontract is entered into by ATIC on behalf of the Project (s) mentioned above, an official program of the mentioned Donors in the Republic of Moldova.

As such, this subcontract is free and exempt from any taxes, VAT, tariffs, duties, or other levies imposed by the laws in effect in Republic of Moldova. The Subcontractor shall not pay any host country taxes, VAT, tariffs, duties, levies, etc. from which this Donor programs are exempt. In the event that any exempt charges are paid by the Subcontractor, they will not be reimbursed to the Subcontractor by ATIC. The Subcontractor shall immediately notify ATIC if any such taxes are assessed against the Subcontractor or its subcontractors/suppliers at any tier.

The Subcontractor is responsible for payment of all applicable taxes, as prescribed under the applicable laws, associated with wages/salaries/compensation for services rendered by individuals employed by the Subcontractor and who are directed to work as required under this Subcontract. The Subcontractor is liable for payment of all applicable taxes associated with revenues (profit), and other such taxes, fees, or dues for which Subcontractor is normally responsible as a result of operating its business.

3.5 Set-Off Clause

ATIC reserves the right of set-off against amounts payable to Subcontractor under this subcontract or any other agreement in the amount of any claim or refunds ATIC may have against the Subcontractor.

4. GROUNDS FOR DISQUALIFICATION:

A firm may be excluded from the evaluation and the award of a contract, who:

- a) is bankrupt or is being wound up, whose affairs are being administered by court, who has entered into an arrangement with creditors, who has suspended business activities or who is subject of an injunction against running business by court;
- b) is the subject of proceedings for a declaration of bankruptcy, for an order for compulsory winding up or administration by court, or for an arrangement with creditors or of any other similar proceedings;
- c) has been convicted of an offence concerning his professional conduct by a court;
- d) has been found guilty of grave professional misconduct; or
- e) has not fulfilled obligations relating to payments of taxes or social security contributions.

Economic resources provided by the EU under this Project shall not be made available to, or for the benefit of, third parties - whether entities, individuals or groups of individuals - designated by the EU as subject to restrictive measures in the lists provided at www.sanctionsmap.eu ("EU Restrictive Measures").

5. Anti-Kickback

- a) Definitions:
 - *Kickback*, as used herein, means any money, fee, commission, credit, gift, gratuity, thing of value, or compensation of any kind, which is provided, directly or indirectly, to

ATIC, Project or any of its employees, the Subcontractor or Subcontractor employees, or vendors in any way related to the performance or subsequent activities of this subcontract, for the purpose of improperly obtaining or rewarding favorable treatment in connection with this subcontract.

- *Person*, as used in this article, means a corporation, partnership, business association of any kind, trust, joint-stock company, or individual.
- *Subcontractor employee*, as used in this article, means any officer, partner, employee, or agent of the Subcontractor.

b) The Subcontractor and its employees, whether directly or indirectly engaged in the performance of this subcontract, agree to abide legal provisions which prohibit any person from providing or attempting to provide any kickback; soliciting, accepting, or attempting to accept any kickback; or including, directly or indirectly, the amount of any kickback in the contract price charged by the Subcontractor to ATIC.

When the Subcontractor has reasonable grounds to believe that a violation described in paragraph (b) of this provision may have occurred, the Subcontractor shall promptly report in writing the possible violation. Such reports shall be made to ATIC, who shall forward the report to the Donor, as required.

The Subcontractor agrees to cooperate fully with any relevant Moldovan/EU Agency investigating a possible violation described in paragraph (b) of this article.

ATIC may offset the amount of the kickback against any monies owed by ATIC under this fixed price subcontract or order the monies withheld from future payments due the Subcontractor.

The Subcontractor agrees to include the substance of this article in any contract it may issue under this subcontract.

6. Terrorist Financing Prohibition

The Subcontractor (including its employees, consultants, and agents) by entering into this subcontract certifies that it does not engage, support or finance individuals and/or organizations associated with terrorism.

7. Compliance with Applicable Laws and Standards

The Subcontractor shall perform all work, and comply in all respects, with applicable laws, ordinances, codes, regulations, and other authoritative rules of Sweden, European Union and Moldova and its political subdivisions and with the standards of relevant licensing boards and professional associations. The Subcontractor shall also comply with the applicable EU and Sweden regulations governing this subcontract, which are incorporated by reference into this subcontract, Clauses Incorporated by Reference.

8. Indemnity and Subcontractor Waiver of Benefits

A. The Subcontractor waives any additional benefits and agrees to indemnify and save harmless ATIC, Donor, their officers, directors, agents, and employees from and against any and all claims and liability, loss, expenses, suits, damages, judgments, demands, and costs (including reasonable legal and professional fees and expenses) arising out of:

(1) the acts or omissions of Subcontractor, its employees, officers, directors, agents or its subcontractors;

(2) injury or death to persons, including officers, directors, employees, agents and subcontractors of Subcontractor, or loss of or damage to property, or fines and penalties which may result, in whole or in part, by reason of the buying, selling, distribution, or use of any of the goods or services purchased or provided under this Subcontract except to the extent that such damage is due to the negligence of ATIC;

(3) the infringement or violation of any patent, copyright, trademark, service mark, trade secret, or other proprietary interest of any third party resulting from ATIC use, distribution, sale, sublicensing, or possession of the goods (including software and all forms of written materials) or services purchased or provided, as authorized hereunder, or from the use or possession of said goods or services by ATIC, Donor, as authorized hereunder; or false claims submitted by Subcontractor or its subcontractors under this Subcontract or as a result of a Subcontractor misrepresentation of fact or fraud by Subcontractor.

B. Subcontractor shall defend and settle at its sole expense all suits or proceedings arising out of the foregoing, provided that Subcontractor has notice or is given prompt written notice of such claim or suit and, further, that Subcontractor shall be given necessary information, reasonable assistance and the authority to defend such claim or suit. Subcontractor shall not settle, compromise or discharge any pending or threatened suit, claim or litigation, arising out of, based upon, or in any way related to the subject matter of this subcontract and to which ATIC is or may reasonably be expected to be a party, unless and until Subcontractor has obtained a written agreement, approved by ATIC (which shall not be unreasonably withheld) and executed by each party to such proposed settlement, compromise or discharge, releasing ATIC from any and all liability.

C. If any of the goods or services provided by Subcontractor hereunder, including without limitation software and all forms of written materials, become the subject of a claim of infringement or violation of a third party's intellectual property, privacy and/or proprietary rights, Subcontractor shall, at its own expense, use its best efforts—

(1) to procure for ATIC the right to continue use and, if authorized under this Subcontract, distribution of the infringing goods or services or,

(2) to modify the goods or services to make them non-infringing, or to replace them with equivalent, non-infringing counterparts.

If none of the above-mentioned can be successfully implemented, then Subcontractor shall refund to ATIC all monies paid to the Subcontractor for the infringing goods and services.

9. Intellectual Property Rights

The ownership of all copyright and other intellectual property rights in respect of any data compilations, research, spreadsheets, graphs, reports, diagrams, designs, work products, software, or any other documents, developed in connection with this subcontract will exclusively vest in or remain with ATIC, which shall have all proprietary rights therein, notwithstanding that the Subcontractor or its employees may be the author of the intellectual property. All documents relating to the intellectual property or otherwise connected with this fixed price subcontract, the services, or duties must be returned or delivered to ATIC at the time of the expiration or termination of the subcontract. The Subcontractor agrees not to publish or make use of any of the intellectual property, or documents relating thereto, without the prior written approval of ATIC and proper attribution.

10. Modifications

Modifications to the terms and conditions of this subcontract, including any modification to the scope of work, may only be made by written agreement between authorized personnel of both Parties. Each Party shall give due notice and consideration to any proposals for modification made by the other Party.

11. Changes

According to ATIC procurement procedures, ATIC may at any time, by written order, and without notice to the sureties, if any, make changes within the general scope of this subcontract in the services to be performed.

If any such change(s) causes an increase or a decrease in the cost, or the time required for the performance, or any part of the work under the subcontract, an equitable adjustment shall be made in the subcontract price or delivery schedule, or both, and the subcontract shall be modified in writing accordingly. Any claim by the Subcontractor for adjustment under this subcontract must be asserted within 30 (thirty) days from the date of receipt by the Subcontractor of the modification or change.

15. Assignment and Delegation

This subcontract may not be assigned or delegated, in whole or in part, by the Subcontractor without the written consent of ATIC. Absent such written consent, any assignment is void.

16. Termination

ATIC reserves the unilateral right to terminate this fixed price subcontract at any time, paying for all deliverables completed at the time of termination and a pro-rata share of any deliverable in progress.

In the event that the Subcontractor fails to make progress so as to endanger performance of this fixed price subcontract, or is unable to fulfill the terms of this fixed price subcontract by the completion date, the Subcontractor shall notify ATIC forthwith and ATIC shall have the right to summary termination of this fixed price subcontract upon written notice to the Subcontractor.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Consultancy services for conducting an assessment on innovation in the Cahul Region, development of an innovation road map and innovation strategy for the Cahul Region

Background:

The Government of Sweden has entered into a delegated agreement with the European Delegation in June 2020 for the implementation of Startup City Cahul Project aiming to develop a regional ICT Innovation centre for the Cahul region. The award is further implemented under a grant agreement with National Association of ICT Companies in line with the Annual Action Programme 2019 in favour of the Republic of Moldova and its Action entitled 'EU4Moldova: Startup City Cahul', based on the Commission Decision ENI/2019/042-243.

The overall objective of the Action is to harness and strengthen the potential of the digital economy and enhance regional competitiveness, its business and its investment environment. The specific objectives are:

- Foster partnerships for innovation and entrepreneurship between the private sector, public sector and educational institutions in the region of Cahul.
- Promote technology, problem solving and creative solutions in learning and make STEM topics (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) more attractive for women and men, girls and boys.
- Facilitate the emergence of start-ups in innovative sectors, build their capacity and investment readiness.

The Action is aligned to the Eastern Partnership priorities, the revised Association Agenda and the objectives of the 2017-2020 Single Support Framework (SSF) for Moldova and Chapter 18 of the European Union – Moldova Association Agreement. It will also support the implementation of the Eastern Partnership's '20 Deliverables for 2020', as they relate to economic development. The proposed activities will support the implementation of the priorities identified in the European Joint Development Cooperation Strategy (Joint Programming Document) and the National Strategy for enhancing IT industry competitiveness 'Digital Moldova 2020'.

PROJECT RESULTS:

1. IT Excellence Center developed in Cahul with:

- min 1500 m2,
- 4 services created,
- 137 programs and activities

2. STEM Education encouraged:

- 200 schools connected to Tekwill in Every School Initiatives
- Min 50,000 beneficiaries
- Min 500 teachers skills improved in Digital Education
- Min 6 curricula updated
- Min 1000 people with new or better opportunities

3. Seed Fund Creation:

- 20 Startups supported
- Min 15 non IT initiatives supported
- Min 2600 beneficiaries from Entrepreneurial Education
- Min 24 Entrepreneurial events

Relevance to Cahul Region:

The EU support is expected to provide a key support to ICT sector development in the Cahul micro region, with some activities having a national coverage. This is in line with the national strategies to promote economic development nationwide through ICT sector development.

Introduction

Technology and innovation can play a significant role for the economic development of the Cahul region. The interventions planned through the EU4Moldova: Startup City Cahul in the region can play also the role of host and promoter of innovation.

By exposing the innovation potential is expected to generate innovation adoption and fostering. The capacity and competency of human resources will increase along with the ability to adopt the introduced innovation.

In 2020, ATIC has performed a feasibility study to assess the potential of the Cahul region towards creating an ICT Excellence Center as part of the attraction point for Cahul.

Some key findings from the study are:

- Export sales of IT products and services from Moldova have been quickly growing in the last five years being driven by an increasing demand on the global markets. Tax benefits, provided to Moldovan IT companies through the Law on Information Technology Parks, facilitated legalization of freelance teams and attracted the investments in the sector.
- At the same time, IT companies in the country report an increasing shortage of skills which restricts their further growth and inflates the wages on the labour market. Insufficient number of university graduates with ICT diplomas and emigration of IT professionals became a serious threat to the development of high-tech industry in Moldova.
- Moldovan IT sector remains Chisinau centric. There are only several companies in the regions of the country including two active enterprises in Cahul and one solo IT company in Leova. The IT companies in Cahul are small and can't generate sufficient demand for IT professionals in the region.
- There is a basic academic infrastructure to educate IT professionals in Cahul. There is a College in the town offering 4-year undergraduate programme and University which provides 3-year bachelor and 2-year master programmes in IT. The demand for the university and college programmes in the region is not big because many young people leave for studies to Chisinau or abroad. Local university and also college have difficulties recruiting the enrollees.
- The University in Cahul is isolated from the IT business in Chisinau and actually focus on professional formation of the teachers of informatics for the secondary schools. Less than 30% of the graduates from this school work in IT business. The improvement of the focus and quality of regional IT education programmes represents a challenge and also may become one of the growth drivers in the skills supply for ICT sector in Moldova.
- College ICT education in Moldova does not satisfy the needs of IT companies and the managers of software development business do not hire college graduates. The best college students continue the studies at the universities and Iulia Hasdeu College follows this pattern.
- The bottleneck of the engineering education in Moldova and in the region of South-West is weak level of STEM studies at the gymnasiums and lyceums. The number of lyceum students choosing real profile classes is small. Children have weak math background and try to enrol in business and law study programmes. Many talented children emigrate for studies abroad.
- Last years there were several supplementary education initiatives including robotics classes launched in Moldova. In Cahul seven secondary school offer robotic classes and six more 13 schools

in the neighbouring districts have robotic sets. The courses in robotics motivate children to study mathematics, physics and informatics and also help them to understand better these subjects. However, their penetration is small at the moment especially in the regions of Moldova.

- Moldova as a country would be able to increase the number of engineering and ICT students and IT professionals on the market if improves the quality of secondary education and increases the proportion of children choosing real profile classes at the lyceums. Other area for improvement is college ICT education programmes.
- The South-West region of Moldova has significant development potential. If well prepared in STEM subjects, the graduated from regional secondary schools are able to generate the demand for university level IT studies at the national universities in Chisinau and also at the university in Cahul.
- Regional ICT Excellence Centre to be launched in Cahul may fill in education quality gap providing support to the secondary schools, the college and the university as well as to supplementary education services. They may also facilitate the development of IT and high-tech start-ups providing trainings and assistance to the local teams.
- Education and training programmes developed by Tekwill should be localized to reflect the specifics of the South-West region of Moldova. First of all, the prices of the services should be reduced considering lower purchasing power in the region. If this is not possible some simple and inexpensive services should be designed and offered on the regional market.
- New services are recommended to be developed and included in Tekwill portfolio in Chisinau and in the regions of Moldova. In particular these are career orientation activities designed for gymnasium and lyceum students and weekend STEM school. ATIC may also initiate and carry out the revision of the curricular of college ICT programmes and support the programme for strengthening teaching capacities of regional universities.
- Regional authorities in Cahul, the university and college management are ready to support the development of ICT Excellence Centres in the region. There may be some financial support provided. At the same time, management capacity of the local teams should be developed as well as general customer focused approach.
- There are a number of sites for the new construction of ICT Excellence Centre in Cahul offered by local authorities. There are also abandoned buildings which may be renovated. There are no ready buildings in Cahul to be used for the project and major overhaul of the existing building and even new constructions are expected.
- The main threat for the project is negative demographic development trend in the region and in Moldova. The emigration reduces the number of young people and the number of working professionals so that local economy in Cahul already suffers from skills and labour shortage.
- The development of ICT Excellence Centre in Cahul may facilitate emigration of young people. Having good education and skills in IT the graduates from local university and college may leave Cahul if find no attractive works in the region.
- To avoid or reduce emigration there should be a programme designed for the region to facilitate the development of local start-ups and attract the investments of Chisinau-based IT companies in Cahul.

A full study is provided in Annex 2.

Scope and objectives of the assignment:

The scope of the study is to perform an assessment of innovation potential in the region, compile an innovation road map for the Cahul Region as well as develop an innovation strategy of the region.

The study will serve as inputs for Region/rayon investments strategy and as basis for policy making in the process of promoting economic development of the region, investment attraction for IT.

Assessment results will serve for the implementation of the EU4Moldova: Startup City Cahul, (especially for the entrepreneurship interventions), will provide inputs for Region/rayon investments strategy and policy making in the process of promoting economic development of the region, investment attraction for IT.

During the assessment the contractors should assess/study/research and document the following elements:

- Map contents (subjects and domain) of the innovation in the region (current performance)
- List of existing initiatives in the area of economic development and related to technologies and innovations, including public, donor, private or any other
- Map existing projects and areas of expertise aiming to increase/adopt ICT in the region
- Perform analysis of the main economic indicators related to main business focus, key industries, etc
- Perform analysis of digitization indicators
- List of existing digital services and projects aiming to improve the digital context of the region (if any)
- Perform an analysis of the capacity and need for digitization of public/private and/or other related services/industries
- Identify innovation potential (in the region) and possibilities/ ways to implement innovations by listing specific descriptions, target audience, necessary input from the legal/fiscal/regulatory/decision making/financial or other aspects aligned with targets for the profile growth of the region
- Track the entities/groups of the business (stakeholders) with potential to apply, foster or take over innovation
- Compile clear proposals divided by areas of interventions and develop a model innovation potential of the region (Innovation Roadmap for the Region)

Methodology:

The assignment should be cared on applying the following methodological tools:

- Desk study of existing documentation (Cahul town/city, rayon and neighbor rayons development strategies, studies and reports on economic development)
- Stakeholders survey and questioners/interviews (including field trips in the region)
- Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the collected info
- Statistical data analysis
- Development partners discussions
- Overview of the national legal and regulatory framework (local regulations, if applicable)

Deliverables:

#	Deliverables	Timeframe (tentative based on our estimation, but could be adjusted during the process)
1	Inception report (developed based on the existing documents and covering desk review projects and indicatives implemented in the region, assessment	

	methodology, draft questioners, List of the stakeholders identified to be interviewed	By June 1, 2021
2	Interim report (map of the stakeholders applying innovation and stakeholders with potential to apply, foster or take over innovation, analysis of the main economic indicators related to key business focus, analysis of digitization indicators, map of existing digital services and projects)	
3	Final report and Innovation Roadmap (innovation potential and options for innovation implementation, business (stakeholders) with potential to apply, foster or take over innovation), innovation strategy of the region.	
4.	Presentation of the deliverables for partners and stakeholders	By >>>>>2021

Minimum Qualifications:

- Minimum five years of relevant experience (conducting research related to entrepreneurship, economic development, technologies and innovations)
- Experience coordinating the design and delivery of high-quality research reports
- Data analysis skills (qualitative & quantitative)
- Demonstrated ability to collaborate and coordinate activities with diverse (from different areas) stakeholders
- Expertise and knowledge of the national and regional context.

The assessment requires knowledge of the local context and local language(s). Nonresident companies should consider partnerships with local companies.

Mandatory Documents to be Submitted

Companies are invited to submit their offers for the delivery of the assignment including the below mentioned mandatory documents:

1. Technical Offer:

- Application form (FORM A)
- Letter of Transmittal (see FORM B)
- Offeror's Summary Sheet (see FORM C)
- Certification Regarding Responsibility Matters (see FORM D)
- Evidence Regarding Responsibility Matters (see FORM E)
- Copy of official registration and business license if applicable
- Company's / organization's profile with a focus on information regarding similar experience in conducting research related to entrepreneurship (list of assignments with reference contacts), economic development, technologies and innovations, experience with donor organizations.
- Concept regarding the implementation of the assignment requested in the ToR – Annex 1, including timeframe.
- Information about Key Consultants: (CVs) to be assigned, indicating the years of experience in the required area

- Past performance information – 2 relevant reference letters from the last 3 years

2. Cost Offer (FORM F)

Other info:

Duty station/Location: The assignment requires field work in Cahul region.

Duty Station Contractor's assigned staff may work remotely and provide the required deliverables in electronic form. Travel to Cahul is required under the presentation of certain deliverables. Travel costs shall be covered by the Contractor and shall be included in the financial offer.

Duration of the assessment: to be provided by the bidder in the offer (schedule of the assignment)

Expected Start Date: Up on signing of contract

Evaluation Method

Submitted proposals will be evaluated against the evaluation criteria and subcriteria described below.

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation Sub-criteria	Maximum points
Technical Evaluation		60 pts
1.	Relevance of the proposed services and approach to the assignment:	15 pts Relevant, well structured, sufficient details – 15 pts Well defined and structured description of services – 10 pts Brief and general description – 5 pts
2.	Past performance information. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Company's similar experience in conducting research related to entrepreneurship, economic development, technologies and innovations or other relevant are. - Similar contracts in conducting research related to entrepreneurship, economic development, technologies and innovations 	20 pts 5 years of experience – 10 pts; less than 5 years – 5pts 2 similar contracts – 10 pts: 1 contract – 5 pts
3.	Experience with donor organizations/implementation units	Up to 5 pts; Availability of experience - 5 pts; no experience – 0 pts
4.	Timeframe	20 pts
	Overall cost proposal provided. <i>minimum offer - 40 pts;</i> <i>Evaluated offer pts = (lowest offer \$ x 40pts)/evaluated offer</i>	40 points
Total Points – Technical and Cost Approach		100 points

Minimum pass score – 70% of the technical score (42 pts). Offers that will not reach the minimum pass score will not be considered for the financial evaluation (financial offers will not be opened).

This RFP applies the combined scoring method considering the technical and financial scoring described in the table above and will award the contract to the highest scored offer as per the ATIC procedures.

Award

ATIC will award a contract to one eligible, qualified and highest scored company, selected based on the evaluation process described in the RFQ and Annex 1.

**Feasibility study to assess the potential of the Cahul region towards creating an ICT
Excellence Center as part of the attraction point for Cahul (2020)**

(added as a separate document)