

TERMS OF REFERENCE

to organize one pre-acceleration program and one acceleration program for women-led startups

Duty Station:	Moldova
Languages required:	Romanian, English and Russian
<i>(date when the organization is expected to start)</i>	
Expected duration of the assignment:	7 months
Contract Type:	Professional Services Contract
Project:	00098990 (Women Economic Empowerment)

Background

UN Women, grounded in the vision of equality enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, works for the elimination of discrimination against women and girls; the empowerment of women; and the achievement of equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of development, human rights, humanitarian action and peace and security.

Through its programmes and projects, UN Women is providing technical assistance to national partners (governmental and non-governmental), including private sector, in the implementation of existing international and national commitments to women's rights and gender equality, it facilitates networking and exchange of good practices and advocates for women's rights and gender equality in all areas of life.

The work of UN Women in the Republic of Moldova is guided by its [Country Strategic Note for 2018-2022](#), aligned with [the Republic of Moldova–United Nations Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development 2018–2022](#), [the Global Strategic Plan of UN Women for 2018-2021](#), the National Strategy on Gender Equality for 2017-2021 (NSGE), and aims to contribute to the gender-responsive implementation of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

The overarching vision of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) is inclusive and sustainable growth with its promise to leave no one behind. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, target 5.5. calls to “ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of the decision-making in political, economic and public life”. Gender equality is mainstreamed throughout the SDGs, including SDG 8 “Decent Work and Economic Growth”. Gender equality by 2030 requires urgent action to eliminate the many root causes of discrimination that still curtail women’s rights in private and public spheres. At its core, the economic empowerment of women depends on the quantity and quality of paid employment, the provision or absence of public services, the amount of unpaid care work borne by women, as well as coverage or lack thereof under core social and labor protections.

The [UN Women Strategy for Moldova 2018-2022](#) focuses on three main areas where gender equality gaps are still present: 1) strengthening women’s participation in politics and decision making, 2) advancing the economic empowerment of women and 3) preventing and combating violence against women and girls. To achieve progress under these areas, UN Women works with variety of national and international partners and as part of different national and regional initiatives.

Rationale

Women and girls’ economic empowerment is one of the three priority areas of UN Women in its SN 2018-2022. Women’s access to income, through decent education, employment opportunities and social security are a foundation for women’s economic empowerment. Access to personal income can help boost women’s self-esteem and bargaining power at home and within communities and reduce the likelihood that they will be exposed or will remain in abusive relationships. Women’s access to income produces broader benefits as women tend to reinvest a large proportion of their earnings in children’s education and health.

According to the latest data from the National Bureau of Statistics of Moldova, about 33.9% of all enterprises were owned or managed by women, a share that is 6.4 p.p. higher than in 2009. Out of all women entrepreneurs, only 2.8% manage businesses in the ICT sector. This sector is more populated by young entrepreneurs, compared

to other economic sectors. About 36% of companies in ICT are managed by people up to 35 years old and another 32% - by people aged 35-45 years.

A larger share of women-owned firms is a single person enterprise or a micro-business, that generates lower revenues and is smaller in size than those owned by men. Most women are still pursuing business activities on the side as they continue to do majority of the household chores. Women are also often the primary caregivers taking care of the children and elderly. The nature of businesses that women are involved in are also different from those of men, so their need for financing and the corresponding credit cycles are different.

Women bring unique attributes and strengths to the business world. In the same time women need skills, motivational role models and availability of modern tools to develop and scale their businesses (from idea to a revenue generating company). In this regards, UN Women Moldova dedicates its efforts to a much-needed involvement of women in business, specifically women from the most vulnerable sub-groups.

In 2020-2021, UN Women Moldova organized three editions of the **Pre-Acceleration Program for Women** aimed at supporting girls and women to become successful entrepreneurs. During 6 weeks of intensive training and hands-on mentoring program, women and girls were exposed to practical information on how to launch a business. Overall, 85 women and girls from Moldova, urban and rural areas, including those living abroad, were supported to develop their business ideas, validate their product, build market positioning, and scale the existing business ventures. They learned about business development and identified ways to become digitally centers companies, thus improving the business scalability and defensibility. Each acceleration program was organized online and concluded with a Demo-day at which participants pitch their business ideas to investors and industry experts.

The mentioned Pre-Acceleration Programs for Women had a positive impact on women in rural areas at two levels:

- Business: by developing new businesses, increasing sales and profits, contributing to employment, accessing new markets, improving business model and boosting innovation, etc.
- Social: by increasing participants' self-confidence and decision-making abilities, improving women resilience to stress and failure, building trust and support among women-peers, creating new friendships.

Scope of Work

UN Women's objective for the current call is to support women and girls, especially from the underrepresented groups, to launch and grow digitally centred businesses in Moldova. To do so, UN Women Moldova will contract an organization/company or a consortium of organizations/companies (hereinafter "the contractor") that will be responsible for the implementation of the two consecutive blocks of activities:

- I. **Organization of online startup pre-acceleration program for at least 30 women and girls.** This will include:
 - 1.1. Development of concept and curricula of pre-acceleration program
 - 1.2. Deliver training sessions and mentoring support on various relevant business topics.
 - 1.3. Deliver 1 training session on gender equality and business/workplace.
 - 1.4. Develop the concept and organize a final Demo-day with participants pitching their business ideas to the private investors and industry experts.

Participants of the pre-acceleration program should be women and girls from Moldova, preferably from underserved groups, with an entrepreneurial idea that they want to test into a business. **At least 50% of the selected participants** should be the representatives of the underserved and vulnerable groups: minority women, expectant and nursing mothers, single mothers, returned migrant workers, women caring for more than three children, elderly women, women from rural regions and conflict zone, women with disability or affected by HIV, ex-detainees, as well as gender-based violence survivors in the shelters, representatives of the LGBT+ etc.

- II. **Organization of a 3-month long start-up acceleration program for 15 women and girls,** including:
 - a. Development of concept and curricula of acceleration program.
 - b. Selection process of at least 15 participants.
 - c. Deliver weekly training and at mentoring sessions on various relevant business building topics.
 - d. Develop and deliver a voucher support tool to cover up to 30.000 MDL of costs of service or equipment for eligible start-ups. At least 10 start-ups are expected to be supported.

- e. Develop the concept and Organize a final Demo-day with participants pitching their businesses to the private investors and investors and industry experts.

Participants of the acceleration program should be women and girls from Moldova, preferably from underserved groups, who graduated one of the four pre-acceleration programs previously organized by the UN Women and have already a running business with sales that they need help to scale.

Communication and Visibility: The contractor must ensure a wide project visibility including active social media and press coverage. The contractor will describe in detail in its technical offer in which way the project will be promoted. The communication plan should include:

- Constant communication and regular posts on the Facebook page of the programme (at least three posts/week). The contractor will be responsible for the content creation for the posts, both text and images/video. The instruments for communication should be suggested by the contractor in the communication plan.
- The contractor should ensure that the most important 10 posts reach at least 50 000 users each.
- One summarizing video of the programme, up to 5 minutes, with subtitles in Russian/Romanian and English
- Participants' pitches must be pre-recorded in video format (45 pitches of 3 minutes each).
- Social media cards, for Facebook and Twitter, for the participants in the programme.
- Good media relations, with at least 3 press-releases to be largely disseminated to the press.
- The demo-day events (online/offline/hybrid) should not be longer than 1h each. The concept and format of the event will be developed by the contractor.

Contractor will enlist the women-led businesses - participants of the program in the web-based catalogue, developed by UN Women, aiming to promote women-led start-ups and support B2B matching.

Additionally, the contractor will ensure the transfer of the existing catalogue to a new platform/domain, independent from any potentially existing contractor's platforms. The contractor should pay the hosting fee and ownership rights will be delegated to UN Women.

The contractor is free to add any other communication activity to the plan, however the above-mentioned activities are compulsory.

Expected outputs / deliverables

- Detailed plan of the project including detailed description of visibility activities (including communication plan).
- Pre-acceleration program curriculum (agenda that includes speakers and mentors, schedule, and other details).
- Selection criteria for the pre-acceleration program and selection form.
- Presentation of 30 selected start-ups. (at least 30 women and girls to be selected following democratic application process)
- Pre-acceleration program with at least 30 participants, trainers and mentors involved. Report on the results achieved by the pre-accelerated start-ups and on mentors' involvement. (Intermediate report will be based on the questionnaire on quality of the program filled in the participants and mentors).
- Pre-acceleration Demo Day agenda and concept of the event. (The concept must include the visibility actions).
- Pitch decks delivered during the Demo Day and video file of the event. (It is expected to be a public event with at least 50 participants).
- Selection criteria for the acceleration program. Acceleration program curriculum. Presentation of 15 selected start-ups. (at least 15 women-led businesses, preferably former participants of the pre-acceleration programs are expected to participate)
- Guidelines on voucher support tool application. (Detailed description of the selection process and contracting, as well as monitoring and evaluation of the voucher contracts)
- Report on the results of the voucher support tool. (With description of the use of money and return on investments)
- Acceleration Demo Day agenda and concept of the event. (The concept must include the visibility actions).

- Pitch decks delivered during the Demo Day and video file of the event. (It is expected to be a public event with at least 50 participants).
- Report on visibility activities with recommendations for improvement.
- Final report on the program (narrative and financial) with chapter on recommendations for the follow-up activities.

Methodology

The contractor is expected to provide its own methodology to carry out the tasks described above, including, but not limiting to:

- Engage key resources, experienced entrepreneurs, mentors, advisors, industry experts and other stakeholders that can bring added value to the pre-acceleration program and advisory support.
- Consider the best practices and, at the same time, rely on its own acumen and practical experience of incubating / accelerating startups.
- Prioritize participation of women and girls from underrepresented groups women migrants, women from rural areas, etc. and women-led ventures that were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 crises, focusing, if possible, on digitally centered start-ups.
- Apply innovative instruments and tailor-made approach to help women significantly advance as entrepreneurs.
- Consider synergies with existing startup incubation and acceleration programs and maintain proactive relation with organizations offering business development support that can be of interest to the beneficiaries of the program.
- Complete the web-based catalogue on women-led startups with incoming participants. Ensure promotion of the catalogue for public use.
- Build synergies and communication with private investors and grant-giving institutions that can leverage additional funds to help the selected ventures grow.
- Ensure the application of women economic empowerment principles (WEPs) in selecting the mentors and advisors and deliver at least one session on gender equality and WEPs for the startups. UN Women will provide noded educational resources.
- Use resources of the e-learning platform (virtual start-up academy) developed by UN Women to streamline the learning process within the pre-accelerator and the accelerator. Where possible, the contractor is expected to improve the platform by adding relevant information on it.

Timeframe and payments

No	Deliverables	Tentative timeframe
1.	Detailed plan of the project including detailed description of visibility activities. Pre-acceleration curriculum.	11 April, 2022
2.	Selection criteria for pre-acceleration program and selection form.	
3.	Presentation 30 selected start-ups.	25 April, 2022
4.	Pre-acceleration Demo Day agenda and even concept.	25 May, 2022
5.	Report on the results achieved by the pre-accelerated start-ups and on mentors' involvement.	25 June, 2022
6.	Pitch decks delivered during the Demo Day and video registry of the event.	
7.	Selection criteria for acceleration program. Acceleration program curriculum.	
8.	Presentation of 15 selected start-ups.	15 July, 2022
9.	Guidelines on voucher support tool application.	25 July, 2022
10.	Acceleration Demo Day agenda and concept of the event.	1 October, 2022
11.	Pitch decks delivered during the Demo Day.	30 October 2022
12.	Media coverage report.	
13.	Report on visibility activities with recommendations for improvement.	
14.	Final report on the program (narrative and financial) with chapter on recommendations for the follow-up activities.	

All the deliverables should be agreed with UN Women and be provided in English, in hard and electronic formats.

Management arrangements

The contractor will work under direct supervision of the UN Women responsible staff. The Contractor is expected to provide highly qualified consultants, mentors/ advisors, and trainers for this assignment, with appropriate skills and expertise. The format of the project organization is expected to reflect requirements derived from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Duration of the assignment

The project is expected to commence in March 2022 and finish by the end of October 2022 according to the indicative timeframe presented in the table above.

Performance evaluation

The Contractor's performances will be evaluated against such criteria as: timeliness, responsibility, initiative, communication, accuracy, and quality of the service and products delivered.

Financial arrangements

Payment will be disbursed in three instalments, upon submission and approval of the corresponding milestones, certified by the UN Women designated personnel that the activities have been satisfactorily performed.

Requirements to the Contractor:

1. Officially registered legal entity (or a group of legal entities) with full capacity to act.
2. At least 2 years of work experience in organizing events, developing and delivery various types of trainings, coaching, mentoring and capacity building programs for start-ups. References and/or examples of previous programs done by the contractor (or for example feedbacks from participants) must be provided.
3. Proven experience with promoting and advancing women from underserved groups will be considered an advantage.
4. Previous proven work experience with international organizations, particularly UN Agencies will be considered an advantage.
5. Full acceptance of the Contract General Terms and Conditions.

Requirements to the task team of the Contractor.

The organization of the task team is of ultimate importance. The task team shall include one team leader and several qualified team members. The required experience of the project team shall be explicitly described in their CVs and shall include the following requirements:

Team Leader (Project Coordinator)

1. Completed university degree, preferably in economics, management, business administration or related, relevant for this assignment.
2. Minimum 3 years of proven experience in developing and delivery various types of trainings and capacity building programs.
3. Minimum 2 years of proven good managerial and leadership skills, abilities to plan, coordinate and implement multiple tasks.
4. Expertise in women's empowerment would be considered an asset.
5. Fluency in Romanian and working knowledge of Russian and English.

The Team Leader (Project Coordinator) will oversee the project coordination and fulfillment of administrative tasks of the project and will be responsible for contracting and informing UN Women regarding all aspects related to the execution of the Contract. She/he shall provide UN Women Moldova with frequent updates on the progress of the assignment and other relevant aspects of the work. The Team Leader will be responsible for the content and quality of all the deliverables and will ensure that they are aligned with objectives set for this contract and relevant to the overall assignment.

Trainers / mentors (at least three):

1. Completed university degree, preferably in economics, management, business administration or related, relevant for this assignment.
2. Minimum 2 years of proven experience in training and /or mentoring / coaching start-ups and potential entrepreneurs, on topics related to the above assignment.
3. Experience in working with all-women groups and sensitivity on gender-related issues would be considered an asset.
4. Fluency in Romanian and working knowledge of Russian.

Communication expert:

1. Completed university degree, preferably in marketing, communication or related, relevant for this assignment.
2. Minimum 2 years of proven experience in communication, preferably in donor funded projects.
3. Experience in working with all-women groups and sensitivity on gender-related issues would be considered an asset.
4. Fluency in Romanian and working knowledge of Russian.