

Terms of reference (ToR) for the procurement of services below the EU threshold

CONFIDENTIAL

**Strategic Expert for Regional Media Integration and Innovation -
“Western Balkans Media Hub”**

**Project number:
G-011901-04**

**Tender number
10020145**

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0. List of abbreviations

AG	Commissioning party
AN	Contractor
AVB	General Terms and Conditions of Contract for supplying services and work
FK	Expert
FKT	Expert days
KZFK	Short-term expert
ToRs	Terms of reference

1. Context

A multi-donor action “#SustanMedia: Support to Media Freedom and Pluralism in the Western Balkans” jointly co-financed by the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH with technical support by DW Akademie.

The Project contributes to the overall objective of “Strengthening participatory democracies and the EU approximation process in the Western Balkans by building capacity of independent professional media outlets; and by stimulating an enabling financial environment for civil society and pluralistic media” through the specific objective of “Enhancing capacities of professional independent media outlets to better adapt to the changing media environment”. The Programme is aiming to achieve the following objectives:

1. Strengthened capacities of media organizations to improve economic performance.
2. Improved capacities of media organizations for quality reporting.
3. Enhanced local and regional exchange and cooperation between media actors, technology companies and innovative business actors.

Citizens across the Western Balkans (WB6) require access to high-quality, reliable information to make informed decisions that strengthen resilient democratic societies. Beyond national borders, the WB6 region possesses significant potential as a unified media market due to its shared linguistic and cultural parameters. Integrating this ecosystem into the EU Single Market provides the essential framework for economic sustainability, allowing media actors to achieve the scale necessary for long-term viability and independence within the broader European landscape.

To capitalize on these opportunities, a regional initiative “Western Balkans Media Hub” will be launched under the SustainMedia program (funded by the EU and BMZ, implemented by GIZ in cooperation with DW Akademie). This initiative explores the creation of a collaborative platform designed to consolidate regional actors, optimize business operations, and leverage technology to meet the demands of modern digital audiences and robust democratic discourse. The initiative should build on the existing efforts of several media actors to form alliances and foster collaboration, with a strong focus on joint growth and development. Rather than creating entirely new structures, it should strengthen and expand existing informal networks.

2. Tasks to be performed by the contractor

The contractor will be responsible for conducting the following:

Work package 1:

- **Stakeholder Mapping and Market Validation:**
 - Identify and evaluate current and past collaboration initiatives among media partners and assess their approaches and the applicability of their ideas.

- Conducting a rapid assessment of audience needs and market gaps to ensure a market-driven approach.

Identifying and engaging further potential regional media partners, tech innovators, business actors, and other key stakeholders. Deliverable: **Inception and Validation Report** - Summary of existing initiatives, stakeholders mapping (list of potential media organizations capable, willing and aspiring to be part of this Regional Hub) and market/audience needs assessment.

Work Package 2:

- **Defining Regional Cooperation Models and Platform Functions:**
 - Designing mechanisms for cooperation, such as shared content exchanges and joint editorial co-productions on topics of regional relevance (content/product development).
 - Creating strategies for a unified approach toward regional and international advertisers to maximize revenue potential (commercial positioning).
 - Developing a framework for the platform to serve as a collective voice for improved market conditions and media freedoms (strategic advocacy).
 - Define the platforms/mediums to be established (i.e. Western Balkans News Platform), for joint news publishing, and other concrete tools/platforms/hubs/apps, etc. that will enable the joint production and publication of content.

Deliverable: **Functional Cooperation Guide** - A comprehensive document defining core platform functions and products (content exchange, joint newsroom, ad-sales strategy, and advocacy).

Work package 3:

- **Business Model Development and Scalability:**
 - Testing diverse revenue streams (membership, B2B, etc.) and developing a scalability framework to attract private investment and strategic partnerships beyond initial funding.

Deliverable: **Scalability Evaluation** - Comparative analysis of revenue streams and assessment of investment readiness.

Work package 4:

- **Regional Platform Setup and Governance:**
 - Designing an operational setup and governance framework that ensures equitable participation and regional co-ownership.

Deliverable: **Strategic Implementation Plan** - An actionable roadmap, including the proposed governance and ownership models.

Work package 5:

- **Capacity Building and Networking:**
 - Mapping potentials for regional capacity building and integrating young journalists and professionals into the ecosystem.
 - Identifying opportunities for networking with regional and international media and media-adjacent organizations.

Deliverables: **Capacity Building and Networking Assessment** - A document outlining identified opportunities and potential frameworks for regional fellowships and networking initiatives; **Progress Reports** - regular updates on the progress of the initiative

All the above will be designed and developed in close collaboration with the media partners targeted and interested in being part of the Western Balkan Regional Hub, to ensure full compatibility with these media partners' aspirations and strategic goals.

Certain milestones, as laid out in the table below, are to be achieved during the contract term:

Milestones/process steps/partial services	Deadline/place/person responsible
Inception and Validation Report	Month 1-2/
Functional Cooperation Guide	Month 2-4/
Scalability Evaluation	Month 4-6/
Strategic Implementation Plan	Month 6-8/
Capacity Building and Networking Assessment	Month 8-20/
Regular updates (reports)	Month 2-24

Period of assignment: from **July 27, 2026, until August 1, 2028**.

3. Concept

In the tender, the tenderer is required to show *how* the objectives defined in Chapter 2 (Tasks to be performed) are to be achieved, if applicable under consideration of further method-related requirements (technical-methodological concept). In addition, the tenderer must describe the project management system for service provision.

Note: The numbers in parentheses correspond to the lines of the technical assessment grid.

Technical-methodological concept

Strategy (1.1): The tenderer is required to consider the tasks to be performed with reference to the objectives of the services put out to tender (see Chapter 1 Context) (1.1.1). Following this, the tenderer presents and justifies the explicit strategy with which it intends to provide the services for which it is responsible (see Chapter 2 Tasks to be performed) (1.1.2).

The tenderer is required to present the actors relevant for the services for which it is responsible and describe the **cooperation (1.2)** with them.

The tenderer is required to present and explain its approach to **steering** the measures with the project partners (1.3.1) and its contribution to the **results-based monitoring system (1.3.2)**.

The tenderer is required to describe the key **processes** for the services for which it is responsible and create an **operational plan** or schedule (1.4.1) that describes how the services according to Chapter 2 (Tasks to be performed by the contractor) are to be provided. In particular, the tenderer is required to describe the necessary work steps and, if applicable, take account of the milestones and **contributions** of other actors (partner contributions) in accordance with Chapter 2 (Tasks to be performed) (1.4.2).

The tenderer is required to describe its contribution to knowledge management for the partner (1.5.1) and GIZ and to promote scaling-up effects (1.5.2) under **learning and innovation**.

Project management of the contractor (1.6)

The tenderer is required to explain its approach for coordination with the GIZ project. In particular, the project management requirements specified in Chapter 2 (Tasks to be performed by the contractor) must be explained in detail.

The tenderer is required to draw up a **personnel assignment plan** with explanatory notes that lists all the experts proposed in the tender; the plan includes information on assignment dates (duration and expert days) and locations of the individual members of the team complete with the allocation of work steps as set out in the schedule.

4. Personnel concept

The tenderer is required to provide personnel who are suited to filling the positions described, on the basis of their CVs (see Chapter 7), the range of tasks involved and the required qualifications.

The below specified qualifications represent the requirements to reach the maximum number of points in the technical assessment.

Key expert 1

Tasks of key expert 1

1. Stakeholder Mapping and Market Validation:

- Identify and evaluate current and past collaboration initiatives among media partners and assess their approaches and the applicability of their ideas.
- Conducting a rapid assessment of audience needs and market gaps to ensure a market-driven approach.
- Identifying and engaging further potential regional media partners, tech innovators, business actors, and other key stakeholders.

2. Defining Regional Cooperation Models and Platform Functions:

- Designing mechanisms for cooperation, such as shared content exchanges and joint editorial co-productions on topics of regional relevance (content/product development).
- Creating strategies for a unified approach toward regional and international advertisers to maximize revenue potential (commercial positioning).
- Developing a framework for the platform to serve as a collective voice for improved market conditions and media freedoms (strategic advocacy).
- Define the platforms/mediums to be established (i.e. Western Balkans News Platform), for joint news publishing, and other concrete tools/platforms/hubs/apps, etc. that will enable the joint production and publication of content.

3. Business Model Development and Scalability:

- Testing diverse revenue streams (membership, B2B, etc.) and developing a scalability framework to attract private investment and strategic partnerships beyond initial funding.

4. Regional Platform Setup and Governance:

- Designing an operational setup and governance framework that ensures equitable participation and regional co-ownership.

5. Capacity Building and Networking:

- Mapping potentials for regional capacity building and integrating young journalists and professionals into the ecosystem.
- Identifying opportunities for networking with regional and international media and media-adjacent organizations.

Qualifications of key expert 1

- Education/training (2.2.1): Degree from social/organizational field (journalism, communications, management, or other relevant)
- Language (2.2.2): C2 in English language (4 out of max. 10 points), C2 in Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian languages (2 points for Bosnian, 2 points for Croatian, 2 points for Serbian, total 6 out of max. 10 points)
- General professional experience (2.2.3): 10 years of experience in project management, capacity building, digital transformation, or media business development.
- Specific professional experience (2.2.4): Three reference projects in designing governance models for multi-stakeholder platforms or regional initiatives.
- Regional experience (2.2.6): Five reference projects concerning the Western Balkans media landscape, opportunities through the Common Regional Market (CRM) for the initiative and the potential towards EU Single Market integration
- Development Cooperation (DC) experience (2.2.7): Seven years of experience in developing sustainable revenue models and preparing projects for private or strategic investment.

Soft skills of Key expert 1

In addition to their specialist qualifications, the following qualifications are required of team members:

- Team skills
- Initiative
- Communication skills
- Socio-cultural skills
- Efficient, partner- and client-focused working methods
- Interdisciplinary thinking

5. Costing requirements

Assignment of personnel and travel expenses

Per diem allowances are reimbursed as a lump sum up to the maximum amounts permissible under tax law for each country as set out in the country table in the circular from the German Federal Ministry of Finance on travel expense remuneration (downloadable from the [German Federal Ministry of Finance – tax treatment of travel expenses and allowances for international business travel as of 1 January 2026 \(GERMAN ONLY\)](#)).

Accommodation allowances are reimbursed as detailed in the specification of inputs below.

With special justification, additional Accommodation costs up to a reasonable amount can be reimbursed against evidence.

All business travel must be agreed in advance by the officer responsible for the project

Sustainability aspects for travel

GIZ has undertaken an obligation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (CO₂ emissions) caused by travel. When preparing your tender, please incorporate options for reducing emissions, such as selecting the lowest-emission booking class (economy) and using means

of transport, airlines and flight routes with a higher CO₂ efficiency. For short distances, travel by train (second class) or e-mobility should be the preferred option.

CO₂ emissions caused by air travel must be offset. GIZ specifies a budget for this, through which the carbon offsets can be settled against evidence.

There are many different providers in the market for emissions certificates, and they have different climate impact ambitions. The [Home page - Stiftung Allianz für Entwicklung und Klima](#) has published a [guide](#) - GIZ recommends using the standards specified there.

Specification of inputs

Fee days	Number of experts	Number of days per expert	Total	Comments
Designation of key expert 1	1	80	80	Thereoff 50 in home country and 30 in country of assignment
Travel expenses	Quantity	Number per expert	Total	Comments
Per-diem allowance in country of assignment	12	27,00	324,00	Accounts for 6 trips per annum, 12 trips total across 2 years.
Overnight allowance in country of assignment	12			<p>Overnight stays abroad:</p> <p>Accounts for 6 trips per annum, 12 trips total across 2 years</p> <p>Note: Under the BMF travel expense regulations, overnight allowances not exceeding 100% of the lump sum amounts can be submitted for reimbursement against evidence (100 % = 97 EUR). Up to 75% of the maximum rates specified in the travel expense regulations can be submitted for reimbursement on a lump-sum basis.</p> <p>Please indicate in the price schedule whether your offer is on a lump-sum basis or against evidence.</p>

Transport	Quantity	Price in EUR	Total in EUR	Comments
International flights <i>roundtrips</i> Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, North Macedonia, Kosovo	12	To be calculated by the bidder		Travel to and from the place of service delivery. Accounts for 6 trips per annum, 12 trips total across 2 years
CO₂ compensation for air travel	24	70,00	1.680,00	A fixed budget of EUR 1.680,00 is earmarked for settling carbon offsets against evidence. Accounts for 6 trips per annum, 12 roundtrips total across 2 years
Travel expenses (train, car) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Car (taxi, airport shuttle) 	12	To be calculated by the bidder		Travel within the country of assignment, transfer to/from airport etc. Accounts for 6 trips per annum, 12 trips total across 2 years
Other costs	Number	Price in EUR	Total in EUR	Comments
Flexible remuneration	1	6.000,00	6.000,00	A budget of EUR 6.000,00 is foreseen for flexible remuneration. Please incorporate this budget into the price schedule. Use of the flexible remuneration item requires prior written approval from GIZ.

6. Inputs of GIZ or other actors.

GIZ and/or other actors are expected to make the following available:

- *In special cases*, workstations on GIZ premises
- Transportation on site with own project vehicle
- Logistics for meetings/consultations

7. Requirements on the format of the tender

The structure of the tender must correspond to the structure of the ToR. In particular, the detailed structure of the concept (Chapter 3) should be organised in accordance with the positively weighted criteria in the assessment grid (not with zero). The tender must be legible (font size 11 or larger) and clearly formulated. It must be drawn up in English (language).

The complete tender must not exceed 10 pages (excluding CVs). If one of the maximum page lengths is exceeded, the content appearing after the cut-off point will not be included in the assessment. External content (e.g. links to websites) will also not be considered.

The CVs of the personnel proposed in accordance with Chapter 4 of the ToRs must be submitted using the format specified in the terms and conditions for application. The CVs shall not exceed 4 pages each. They must clearly show the position and job the proposed person held in the reference project and for how long. The CVs can also be submitted in English (language).

Please calculate your financial tender based exactly on the parameters specified in Chapter 5 Quantitative requirements. The contractor is not contractually entitled to use up the days, trips, workshops or budgets in full. The number of days, trips and workshops and the budgets will be contractually agreed as maximum limits. The specifications for pricing are defined in the price schedule.