

Terms of Reference (ToR)

For

Design and delivery of a training programme on “Enhancing EU Market Readiness of Albanian Innovative Start-ups and MSMEs”

Under

Challenge Fund, EU4Innovation 2023-2026 Project

Tirana, Albania
September 2026

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND SCOPE OF SERVICE

1. Background

Partners Albania for Change and Development (PA) is an Albanian NGO, established in 2001. PA's mission consists of the support of civil society and the facilitation of inter-sector cooperation to strengthen democratic institutions and advance economic development in Albania. PA is a member of Partners Global, a network of 19 independent organizations in Europe, the Americas, Africa, and the Middle East, working for peaceful and democratic change.

PA has built its operations in four key programmatic areas, namely:

- 1. Enabling Environment and Sustainable Development of CSOs**, contributing to the empowerment of civil society actors and civic engagement through *capacity building* programmes, *monitoring and advocacy* for an enabling legal and practical environment for CSOs operation, and *financial support* for the sector.
- 2. Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation**, developing and supporting the ecosystem of entrepreneurship and social enterprises (SEs) through research, advocacy, financial support mechanisms, expertise, and networking opportunities.
- 3. Philanthropic Activity and Support Infrastructure**, developing and promoting philanthropic activity in the country through research, advocacy actions for an enabling environment, awareness raising, and promotion activities on the economic and social value of philanthropy.
- 4. Transparent and Accountable Participatory Governance** contributing to the development and growth of civil society practitioners and public administration officials in their efforts to build strong institutions, manage open and transparent processes, and overcome corruption.

PA has vast experience in designing and managing EU-funded projects and sub-granting schemes in the frame of EU projects. Since 2012, PA has implemented **more than 20 projects funded by the EU**. The organization also works for the **development of Social Enterprises** (SEs) and start-ups, generating social impact through a) research; b) advocacy; c) education and public awareness; and d) financial support to 3rd parties.

Since June 2023, Partners Albania is the Cooperation Partner of SIDA for the implementation of the Challenge Fund, under the framework of the EU4Innovation Phase II, 2023-2026.

The Multi Donor Action EU4Innovation Phase II, 2023-2026 is jointly co-financed by the EU, the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and Sida and implemented by GIZ and Embassy of Sweden in Tirana. The aim of the Challenge Fund is to improve and diversify finance opportunities for Albanian start-ups and MSMEs, with innovative solutions (e.g., products, services, business models, processes) and (ii) start-ups with prominent tech content with the potential for global expansion and rapid growth.

Within the framework of the Challenge Fund, Albanian innovative start-ups and MSMEs will be eligible to participate in structured capacity-building activities aimed at strengthening their competitiveness,

innovation capacity, and readiness for access to EU and international markets.

As Albania progresses through the EU accession process, enterprises are increasingly expected to understand and respond to EU regulatory requirements, applicable standards, and market conditions relevant to access to the EU Single Market. While the start-up and SME ecosystem demonstrates considerable potential for innovation and growth, many enterprises face challenges in meeting EU market requirements and compliance expectations. Findings from Challenge Fund assessments highlight gaps in awareness, exposure, and practical understanding of EU compliance obligations, market regulations, and business practices, underscoring the need for targeted capacity-building support to strengthen competitiveness and market readiness.

To address these needs, Partners Albania will engage a qualified **International Service Provider** to **design and deliver a structured training programme entitled “Enhancing EU Market Readiness of Albanian Innovative Start-ups and MSMEs.”** The programme will equip participating enterprises with practical knowledge, skills, and tools to better understand EU market requirements, strengthen compliance preparedness, and improve their ability to access and compete within the EU Single Market.

2. Objective of the ToR

The main objective of these Terms of Reference (ToR) is to engage a qualified and experienced **International Service Provider to design and deliver a tailored training programme entitled “Enhancing EU Market Readiness of Albanian Innovative Start-ups and MSMEs”.**

The training programme aims to strengthen the capacity of participating Albanian start-ups and MSMEs to understand, assess, and respond to the regulatory, technical, market, and business requirements applicable to accessing the EU Single Market. The programme shall provide participants with practical knowledge, tools, and guidance to identify relevant EU requirements, assess their level of preparedness, address compliance and market-readiness gaps, and strengthen their capacity to enter and compete in EU markets.

The programme shall cover eight thematic areas relevant to EU market readiness. The Service Provider shall develop the content and structure of each thematic area in line with the objectives of the assignment and the relevant EU requirements, standards, market conditions, and business practices applicable to innovative start-ups and MSMEs seeking to access the EU Single Market. The training shall follow a practical and application-oriented approach, incorporating relevant examples, practical exercises, case studies, templates, and other supporting tools as appropriate.

The eight thematic areas are:

- EU accession process and implications for businesses
- EU Single Market: regulatory requirements, standards, and compliance relevant to market access, including EU laws on taxation, IP, consumer rights, and e-commerce, navigating VAT, invoicing, customs, and tariffs for cross-border trade.
- Digital business compliance, including GDPR and data protection requirements
- EU market entry strategies, export readiness, and internationalisation pathways
- Business adaptation and competitiveness in EU markets

- Innovation and digital transformation for business growth
- EU Green Deal, environmental standards, and sustainable business practices
- EU funding ecosystem, partnership development, and networking opportunities.

The training programme shall cover the eight thematic areas specified in these Terms of Reference and shall comprise four onsite, full-day training workshops, with five training hours allocated to each workshop. The Service Provider shall determine the distribution, sequencing, and allocation of the eight thematic areas across the four workshops, based on its professional assessment of the subject matter, learning objectives, and requirements of the assignment. The proposed structure shall ensure comprehensive coverage of all eight thematic areas and provide sufficient time for the presentation of key concepts, practical exercises, case studies, discussion, and application of the knowledge and tools provided.

The training shall be delivered exclusively in an onsite format, with approximately 30–40 participants per training group. The Service Provider shall propose a detailed training structure, agenda, and methodology demonstrating how the eight thematic areas will be effectively covered within the four workshops and how the programme will maintain a practical and application-oriented approach. The Service Provider shall propose a team of experts with qualifications and professional experience relevant to the scope of the assignment and the eight thematic areas specified in these Terms of Reference. The technical proposal shall identify the proposed experts, their respective roles and responsibilities, and the allocation of thematic areas and training sessions among the proposed experts. CVs shall be submitted for all proposed experts, demonstrating their qualifications and relevant professional experience. The Service Provider shall also submit a company profile demonstrating relevant organisational experience in areas related to the assignment.

An individual expert may be assigned to deliver one or more thematic areas. The proposed team composition shall be appropriate to the scope of the assignment and shall collectively demonstrate the expertise necessary to **effectively design and deliver the training programme across all eight thematic areas**.

Partners Albania will be responsible for participants' coordination and registration, as well as for providing the venue required for the delivery of the onsite training workshops in Tirana. All costs associated with the organisation and implementation of the onsite training workshops in Tirana, including the venue and participant-related arrangements, shall be covered by Partners Albania and shall not be included in the Service Provider's financial offer. Costs related to the participation of the proposed experts in the onsite training workshops in Tirana, including **travel, accommodation, and meals**, shall be covered by Partners Albania and shall not be included in the Service Provider's financial offer. Each training session will target approximately **30-40** participants. The participants attending each session may differ, as the training programme will allow for participation in specific thematic sessions based on participants' interests, needs, and the relevance of the topics addressed.

The working languages of the assignment shall be **English**.

The assignment shall be implemented from the date of contract signature, within the period **October - November 2026**.

3. Duties and Responsibilities

The **Service Provider** shall be responsible for the following duties and responsibilities:

- Design and develop a structured training programme covering the eight thematic areas specified in these Terms of Reference, including the training methodology, learning objectives, detailed agenda, and distribution and sequencing of the thematic areas across the four onsite training workshops.
- Develop a customized training manual/package for each of the eight thematic areas, including relevant EU requirements, standards, market conditions, practical guidance, examples, case studies, exercises, tools, templates, and other supporting content, as appropriate. The manual/package shall include professional graphic design, layout, and formatting and shall be provided in English in both final and editable formats.
- Develop training materials and participant handouts for each of the eight thematic areas, including presentations, practical exercises, case studies, tools, templates, and other materials required to support the delivery and practical application of the training.
- Deliver four onsite full-day training workshops in Tirana, with five training hours allocated to each workshop and approximately 30–40 participants per training group, using interactive and practical adult-learning methodologies.
- Provide qualified experts for the preparation and delivery of the training programme, ensuring that the proposed team collectively provides the expertise required to effectively cover all eight thematic areas.
- Prepare and submit one final report summarizing the activities implemented, training sessions delivered, outputs produced, results achieved, lessons learned, and recommendations for future capacity-building activities.

4. Main deliverables

The service provider shall submit the following deliverables:

1. **Training Programme and Agenda** covering the eight thematic areas and their distribution across the four onsite workshops.
2. **Customized Training Manual, Materials and Handouts** covering the eight thematic areas, including professional content development, presentations, practical exercises, case studies, templates, and other supporting materials, with professional graphic design, layout, and formatting.
3. **Delivery of Four Full-day Onsite Training Workshops in Tirana**, with five training hours per workshop and approximately 30–40 participants per group.
4. **Final Report** summarizing the activities implemented, training outcomes, evaluation results, lessons learned, and recommendations.

Deliverables schedule:

Period	Deliverable
Week 1, after signing of contract- October 2026	Training Programme and Agenda covering the eight thematic areas and their distribution across the four onsite workshops
Weeks 2 - 3, October - November 2026	Customized Training Manual, Materials and

	Handouts covering the eight thematic areas, including professional content development, presentations, practical exercises, case studies, templates, and other supporting materials, with professional graphic design, layout, and formatting.
Weeks 4 - 5, November 2026	Delivery of Four Full-day Onsite Training Workshops in Tirana, with five training hours per workshop and approximately 30–40 participants per group
By 30 November 2026	Final Report summarizing the activities implemented, training outcomes, evaluation results, lessons learned, and recommendations.

5. Experience and qualifications

- The Service Provider shall have a minimum of 7 years of professional experience in translating EU legislation and regulatory requirements into practical guidance for SMEs and businesses seeking to enter EU markets, designing training curricula/modules and delivering training programmes, using interactive and practice-oriented learning methodologies for adult learners in relevant thematic area for start-ups, SMEs, or entrepreneurs;
- Minimum 20 years of combined professional experience among the proposed experts in designing training curricula/modules, delivering interactive training programs, and/or providing advisory or capacity-building services in areas relevant to the assignment, including EU market readiness, entrepreneurship development, MSME support, business internationalisation, and regulatory compliance. The combined experience shall be calculated based on the relevant professional experience of the proposed experts, as demonstrated through their submitted profiles.
- The proposed team of experts must include experts with current and demonstrable knowledge of the legal, regulatory and practical requirements applicable to businesses seeking to enter the EU market, as applicable to their area of expertise related to this assignment;
- Proven ability to plan, coordinate, and deliver assignments within agreed timelines and quality standards.
- The proposed experts shall have excellent communication, facilitation, and presentation skills, with proficiency in written and spoken English.
- Experience delivering similar assignments in the Western Balkans, EU candidate countries, or comparable contexts will be considered an advantage.
- Experience working with business support organisations, innovation ecosystems, incubators, accelerators, or entrepreneurship support structures will be considered an advantage.

6. Timeline of the assignment

The assignment shall be implemented from the date of contract signature and completed no later than **30 November 2026**, within the overall implementation period of October - November 2026. The Service

Provider shall ensure the availability of the proposed experts throughout the agreed implementation period. They must be independent and free from conflicts of interest in the responsibilities they take on.

7. Contracting Authority

The service provider will work in close cooperation with Partners Albania for Change and Development, to which they will directly report the implementation of the task. All final products, training materials, and editable source files developed specifically under this assignment shall become the property of the Contracting Authority upon completion of the assignment and/or payment for the respective deliverables.

8. Submission of the documents

The deadline for submitting the application is **07.10.2026 at 16:00 hrs.**

Application documents must be in English and sent via e-mail to the following address:

partners@partnersalbania.org

Partners Albania for Change and Development embraces diversity in its hiring, welcoming individuals of all religions, ethnicities, genders, and orientations to apply.