Terms of Reference (ToR) for

# External Evaluation

of the Project

Enhancing critical thinking and media literacy skills of young people in the Balkans through digital learning based on intercultural tolerance

## Introduction

The Association for Democratic Initiatives (ADI) is implementing the project: Enhancing critical thinking and media literacy skills of young people in the Balkans through digital learning based on intercultural tolerance. The project is funded by the Erasmus+ program, specifically the Virtual Exchanges component.

In addition to ADI, the project involves three partners from the region of Southeast Europe, Creative Thinking and Development (CreThiDev) from Greece, the Institute for Romani Culture in Albania (IRCA), and Univerzum College from Kosovo.

The project is looking to engage an independent external evaluator (organization or individual) who will conduct an objective mid-term and final evaluation of the project.

The overall objective of the project is to enhance critical thinking and media literacy skills of young people through a process of mutual digital learning and debate based on acceptance of differences and promoting tolerance.

The specific objectives of the project are:

Specific Objective 1. To produce high quality training programs for non-formal online education, of relevance to the regional context and country realities and to disseminate it broadly to youth and other CSOs.

Specific Objective 2. To promote digital exchange and debate between young people in the region and hence contribute to intercultural cooperation.

The project will develop **youth worker training programs for non-formal education with young people from the target countries** aims to produce high quality educational materials adapted to the culture and context of young people from the target countries. These educational materials consist of one training program on critical thinking, one training program on media literacy and one guide on intercultural dialogue. In doing so, it seeks to raise the capacity of youth workers,

youth CSOs and other CSOs for delivering non-formal education to youth from the target countries in the areas of media literacy (in particular digital media literacy) and critical thinking, as well as intercultural dialogue.

**Second, the project will organize the delivery of training programs with young people** includes organization of 30 regional digital events (workshops and debates) with youth, where the developed training programs and guide developed in WP2 will be delivered. These digital events seek to enhance the critical thinking and media literacy skills of youth, as well as their intercultural understanding through an interactive process of mutual learning and exchange based on respect of difference. The events will involve a total of at least 360 young people from the 4 partner countries.

**Finally, the project will organize broad dissemination and multiplication of project results** includes organising the dissemination of project results. The dissemination campaign will be based online, since all project results are in e-format as well. All project partners will develop dedicated sections on their web pages to disseminate the project outputs. Project partner will also use their social media channels (Facebook pages, YouTube etc.) for dissemination of project outputs.

Project Rationale

The information technology has made possible the viral spread of news globally. The advantages of having access to information from all over the globe with a single click are undoubtedly self-evident, but this quick and easy access to information has not come without a cost. One of the downsides of the proliferation of online media (digital news portals, etc.) and the social media has been the **exponentially increased capability for the spread of factually incorrect information, popularly known as fake news**.
While it is true that traditional media can also engage in the spread of fake news, online social media networks could be particularly dangerous in this regard as they allow immediate sharing and multiplication globally. Thus fake news produced in any part of the world, provided it is sensational enough, can spread across the globe in less than 1 hour online, reaching hundreds and millions of people. The potential for abuse for such uncontrolled power is enormous. Just like in other parts of Europe, on the Balkans, anti-democratic forces, authoritarian and populist regimes, as well as far-right and extremist movements have been among the first to realize the "benefit" of the spread of fake news. The most recent example of this is the still ongoing battle with news falsification related to the Covid19 pandemic, where Balkan countries became a fertile ground for conspiracy theories and propaganda on the part of anti-vax movements.
A concerning phenomenon requiring particular attention regarding **fake news on the Balkans** is the fact that they **oftentimes tend to be spiced up with strong xenophobic sentiments, nationalism, discrimination and/or hate speech against a certain ethnic/religious minority group or nation**. Years after the end of the Yugoslav wars and the disintegration of Yugoslavia,

social and political instability, inter-ethnic tensions, nationalist movements and a sense of belonging strongly based on nationality and/or ethnicity remain highly pronounced.

These kinds of **discriminatory/nationalist fake news can especially affect youth on the Balkans**, in particular if the **content is online**. This is so because young people have less general, and in particular, political life experience and **can be more easily impressed on with information which is inaccurate or false**, and also, because the usage of **digital tools and online social media is the highest among young people** compared to other demographic groups. At the same time, Balkan youth remains highly vulnerable to mobilization and radicalization, which fake news incite when exploiting ethnic issues. The falsified digital content is often consumed quickly and in an uncritical manner. Thus, an urgent need to increase media literacy, especially digital media literacy, and critical thinking skills among young people on the Balkans emerges, which is what the project aims to address. In doing so, the project will place a particular focus on enhancing intercultural tolerance among youth from the target countries, in light of the fact that disinformation campaigns in the region frequently revolve around xenophobia and discrimination against a perceived cultural/ethnic "other", thereby further fueling existing inter-ethnic/cultural/national tensions.

The project intends to achieve this by developing training programs on media literacy and critical thinking, as well as a guide on intercultural dialogue, aiming to raise the capacities of youth workers to deliver non-formal education to youth in these areas. In addition, the project intends to organize 30 regional digital events targeting young people from Albania, N.Macedonia, Greece and Kosovo, where the developed training programs and guide will be used, so as to promote learning on these topics through digital exchange and debate between young people and hence contribute to intercultural cooperation.

## Tasks

The evaluator will conduct the following tasks:

First, support the process for developing a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework of the project. The evaluator will take part in discussions and meetings on the development of this framework and support the partners in developing additional indicators and defining data collection processes.

Second, the evaluator will conduct a mid-term evaluation of the project. The evaluation will be qualitative and will be based on the standard OECD-DAC criteria. For the purpose of the mid-term evaluation the evaluator will review project records and documents, and conduct at least 20 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, including partner, staff, beneficiaries, and other key informants (KIs).

Third, the evaluator will conduct a final evaluation of the project. The evaluation will be qualitative and will be based on the standard OECD-DAC criteria. For the purpose of the final evaluation the evaluator will review project records and documents, and conduct at least 20 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, including partner, staff, beneficiaries, and other key informants (KIs).

The evaluator will adhere to the following guidance, as specified in the project proposal:

The evaluator will be involved in developing the overall monitoring and evaluation system in coordination with the project partners. The evaluator will take part in design of indicators, baseline values, data collection methods (qualitative method predominantly).

To produce the evaluation report, the consultant will rely mainly on qualitative data, including a review of relevant project documents, as well as qualitative interviews with a minimum of 20 stakeholders (beneficiaries and project staff).

The evaluator will in particular take into account the following guidance:

The interactive nature of the regional digital workshops and regional digital debates to be organized by the project will allow obtaining feedback from youth participants during the events and incorporating this feedback in upcoming digital events.

In terms of quality assurance of the developed educational materials for youth workers, it should be noted that they will also be **evaluated by youth workers, youth CSO activists and experts**, at least 80% of which are to rate the materials' quality as high (levels: low, medium, high). The evaluator will review these documents.

Furthermore, the digital workshops and debates will be **rated by the youth participants, via satisfaction surveys**. It is expected that at least 70% of beneficiaries rate these digital events as high (levels: low, medium, high). The evaluator will review the survey results.

The project has already defined a number of key indicator in the proposal phase. The evaluator will take into account these key indicators and s/he will help the project team develop additional indicators.

The key indicators are the following:

Specific Objective 1. To produce high quality training programs for non-formal online education, of relevance to the regional context and country realities and to disseminate it broadly to youth and other CSOs.

Indicators for Specific Objective 1.

| Indicator | Baseline | Target |
|---|---|---|
| Training programs (critical thinking, media literacy) and guide | N/A | At least 80% of at least 20 raters (experts, youth workers, young people) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (intercultural dialogue) quality (rating by experts, youth workers, young people) | | rate quality as <u>high</u> (levels: low, medium, high) |
| No. of CSOs in the region supplied with the training materials in English + national language | N/A | At least 200 |
| No. of youth, activists and CSOs in the region reached and informed via the project dissemination effort | N/A | At least 8.000 |

<u>Specific Objective 2.</u> To promote digital exchange and debate between young people in the region and hence contribute to intercultural cooperation.

| Indicator | Baseline | Target |
|---|---|---|
| No. of regional digital workshops on media literacy | N/A | At least 12 |
| No. of regional digital workshops on critical thinking | N/A | At least 12 |
| No. of intercultural digital debates | N/A | At least 6 |
| No. of young people in workshops and debates | N/A | At least 12 per workshop |
| No. of young people in debates | N/A | At least 12 per debate |
| Beneficiary satisfaction with virtual exchange program (training and debates) | N/A | At least 70% of beneficiaries rate the programs <u>high</u> (levels: low, medium, high) |

**Deliverables**

- Midterm evaluation report
- Final evaluation report

**Required Skills and Qualifications of the Expert (or Team)**

Both organizations (legal entities) and individuals (natural persons) can apply.

The offeror will provide at least 1 key expert, with the following skills and qualifications:

*General*

University degree in social sciences. An advanced degree would be an asset.

At least 5 years of experience in social research.

Excellent knowledge of English languages.

*Specific*

Has conducted (individually or as part of a team) at least 3 project evaluations in the past 5 years.

**Budget**

The total budget for the assignment is **9.000 Euros** inclusive of researcher fees, travel, accommodation, and all other costs and taxes.

**Selection Criterion:**

Best value for money

**How to apply:**

Please send:

Cover letter explaining how you meet the criteria.

CV/s of the key expert (or team).

Research portfolio of the organization (if the offeror is a legal entity),

to ersan@adi.org.mk , with the subject line:  External evaluation of project Enhancing critical thinking and media literacy skills of young people in the Balkans through digital learning based on intercultural tolerance

 by  **9 May 2023**, the latest.