**GUIDELINE FOR APPLICANTS**

**GRANTS COMPETITION**

**to develop digital solutions to help combat hate speech and disinformation online**

IMPLEMENTED THROUGH THE PROJECT

„Building sustainable and inclusive peace, strengthening trust

and social cohesion on both sides of the Nistru River” (PBF)

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# **context**

According to the UN Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index (SCORE), overall social cohesion in the Republic of Moldova remains fragile. The situation worsened further with Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The war in Ukraine has fueled existing divisions within different groups of Moldova's population, not only between people living on the left bank of the Nistru river and those living on the right bank, but also between groups of people within the same community. The political convictions of the population on both sides of the Nistru river have generated an increasing flow of misinformation and hate speech, thus further weakening the fragile social cohesion in the country. This flow comes largely from the online environment and is artificially fed by disinformation.

Refugees from Ukraine have also become the target of hate speech and misinformation. The massive influx of refugees from Ukraine exerts a significant socio-economic pressure on the country and their limited opportunities to integrate into Moldovan society have created additional obstacles to achieving social cohesion.

Against the backdrop of rising regional and national political tensions, increasingly divided narratives, and growing hate speech, efforts to build trust and combat misinformation between both sides of the Nistru are now more important than ever.

By implementing the project "Building sustainable and inclusive peace, strengthening trust and social cohesion on both sides of the Nistru River", UNDP Moldova aims to strengthen existing relations between communities on the left and right banks of the Nistru River, as well as between specific groups in society.

# **the goal and objective of the project**

The project aims to strengthen interventions on divisive discourse and misinformation, thus contributing to reducing intercommunal tensions.

The objective of the project is to develop digital solutions to help combat hate speech and misinformation online.

This initiative aims to build up on the results within the "Nistru TruthBridge" hackathon, organized within the project "Building sustainable and inclusive peace, strengthening trust and social cohesion on both sides of the Nistru River". During the hackathon, 3 innovative concepts of digital tools aimed at preventing and combating disinformation and hate speech, as well as promoting verified and credible content online, were selected from the 11 participating teams.

Therefore, the project aims to identify organizations that would propose applicable and sustainable digital solutions to combat misinformation and hate speech online.

# **general conditions of the project**

The project will be implemented by offering 3 grants not to exceed 35,000 US dollars each. The project deadline is 31 January 2025. Grants will be awarded only to non-governmental organizations registered under the national legislation of the Republic of Moldova. Applicants may participate individually or in consortium of maximum two organizations. The applicants must have a bank account in MDL dedicated to this project. The grant will be disbursed in MDL at UNORE rate on date of payment. Applicants may come with proposals of various digital solutions. The types of digital solutions expected are the following, but not limited to:

1. **Browser extension -** browser extensions that help users identify and verify potentially false information or hate content while browsing**.**
2. **Artificial intelligence-based content moderation web platform -** platforms that use artificial intelligence to detect and flag hate speech or false information on social networks in real time.
3. **Mobile app for community reporting -** mobile apps that allow users to anonymously report incidents of hate speech and disinformation.
4. **Media education platform -** proposed educational solutions can be of different types: educational platforms, fun gamification learning systems, chatbots, etc.
5. **Verified news/fake news platform -** platforms that aggregate news from verified sources, provide tools to verify the authenticity of news or create a platform to collect fake news.
6. **Blockchain news verification system -** blockchain-based system for verifying the authenticity and provenance of news articles and social media posts.
7. **Model and/or reference data set for the detection of hate speech -** hate speech detection model and/or reference data sets for the detection of hate speech.

# **project eligibility criterias**

Applicants may submit their proposals, which involve the development of new digital solutions or the upgrading / extension of existing digital solutions with new functionalities.

Project proposals that meet the following criteria will be considered eligible:

1. Enable users to identify and combat hate speech and misinformation online.
2. Be applicable and sustainable after project completion.
3. Contain a plan of actions to be carried out during the implementation of the project.
4. Be complete in accordance with the requirements set out in Chapter VIII ”Application procedure.”

# **applicant requirements**

Only Applicants who meet the following criteria will be considered eligible:

1. The applicant must be a legal person registered under the national legislation of the Republic of Moldova.
2. The applicant must be a non-governmental organization.
3. A) The applicant has at least 3 years of experience in one of the following areas: media, public information on human rights, countering disinformation and hate speech, cyber security and information technologies.
**OR**
B) The applicant has in its portfolio digital solutions developed by itself or with the involvement of third parties.
**OR**
C) The applicant has institutional capacities to develop digital solutions or has the possibility to involve a third party.
4. The applicant has no politically exposed person among its founders.
5. The applicant has not been found responsible for serious financial or professional mismanagement demonstrated by evidence recognized by UNDP Moldova.
6. The applicant has, in the past, complied with its contractual obligations arising from previous agreements with donor organizations.

# **the budget**

1. The project proposal shall include a budget expressed in US dollars, with detailed information on each cost line, as per the model in Annex 3.
2. Cost estimates will cover the full project implementation duration of 4 months.
3. Cost estimates will be realistic and follow the action plan described in the project proposal.
4. The maximum budget limit is 35,000 US dollars.
5. The budget must be justifiable and optimized for cost-effectiveness.
6. All goods and services purchased will be included at the value excluding VAT.
7. The estimated costs must consider the level of effort of staff involvement as well as the cost-share from other programs and/or projects, if any.

**Eligible costs:**

1. Project administrative expenditure (administrative staff: project manager, accountant, project assistant, telecommunication services, rent and utilities, bank charges, etc.).
2. Expenditure for suppliers of services and goods, as needed (IT developers, IT experts, etc.).
3. Expenditure for the purchase of software products (licenses), subscriptions and applications needed to develop digital solutions and ensure their sustainability.
4. Expenses for the purchase of consumables and other materials necessary for the implementation of the project.
5. Other expenses, which are necessary for the effective implementation of the project, well justified.

**Non-eligible costs:**

1. Costs incurred before the signature of the grant agreement (including costs related to the submission of the project proposal).
2. Fines, penalties, and exchange rate losses.
3. Activities covered 100% by other programs/projects.
4. Individual sponsorship for attending workshops, seminars, conferences, or scholarships.
5. Current costs of the organization that are not related to the project objectives.
6. Expenditure on the purchase or production of alcoholic beverages, tobacco products, munitions, luxury goods and other goods prohibited under UN regulations, including those related to the organization of gambling.

# **project proposal evaluation criterias**

Project proposals will be selected based on an evaluation in accordance with the evaluation criteria set out below and a score will be assigned. The applicants, who will score the highest score, will be announced the winners.

Each sub-criterion will be scored from 1 to 10, where 10 will be the maximum score. Each criterion shall be given a weight in relation to the total evaluation score. Each sub-criterion shall be assigned a weight in relation to the score of the criterion of which it is part of.

The final score of the project proposal is the sum of the points assigned to the criteria considering the weight of each criterion in the final score.

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| **Evaluation criteria for project proposals:** | **Criteria description** | **Weight** |
| **1. Innovation of the proposed digital solution** | **20%** |
| 1.1. Originality and uniqueness:  | Assessment of the degree of innovation and novelty of the proposed solution. | 40% |
| 1.2. Using modern technologies | Evaluating the use of new and modern technologies in the proposed solution | 35% |
| 1.3. Developments and proposed improvements | Assessment of improvements over existing solutions on the market | 25% |
| **2. Scalability of the digital solution** | **10%** |
| 2.1. Potential for **expansion** in different contexts | Assess the solution's applicability in different contexts and regions. | 50% |
| 2.2. **Adaptability** to different regions and groups | Assess the flexibility of the solution to adapt to the needs of different groups of beneficiaries. | 50% |
| **3. Sustainability of the digital solution** | **15%** |
| 3.1. Existence of a detailed Maintenance and Support Plan | Evaluation of the plan for maintaining the solution after project completion. | 50% |
| 3.2. Long-term financial sustainability | Assessment of the capacity of the solution to be financially supported by other donors in the long term and the openness of the applicant to attract other funds for the maintenance and development of the proposed solution. | 30% |
| 3.3. Continuous involvement of the target group (users) | Evaluation of the level of user involvement in the use, functionality testing and development of the solution. | 20% |
| **3. Feasibility of the project**  | **10%** |
| 4.1. The existence of a well-thought-out technical plan | Evaluation of the quality and details of the technical plan of the project. Analysis whether the proposed technologies are suitable and available for implementation | 60% |
| 4.2. Legal and regulatory analysis | Assessment of the resources and expertise available to implement the project (if it does not contravene national law and complies with the provisions of the regulations on personal data protection) | 20% |
| 4.3. Risk analysis | Identify potential risks and assess their impact on the project. Develop mitigation plans to minimize the impact of risks | 20% |
| **5. Project beneficiaries** | **10%** |
| 5.1. Clarity of beneficiary description | Assess the clarity and detail of the beneficiaries of the solution | 50% |
| 5.2. Potential impact on different groups | Assessment of the potential of the solution to have a positive impact on different groups of beneficiaries | 50% |
| **6. Impact of the project** | **10%** |
| 6.1. Clear measurable results | Assessment of the clarity and measurability of the proposed results | 50% |
| 6.2. Potential number of people positively affected | Assess the number of people who will benefit from the positive changes brought about by the solution | 50% |
| **7. Project monitoring** | **5%** |
| 7.1. Impact monitoring and evaluation framework | Assess the existence of a clear framework for monitoring progress and evaluating the impact of the project | 50% |
| 7.2. Proposed specific monitoring indicators | Assessment of the existence of the proposed indicators for project monitoring | 25% |
| 7.3. Data collection method described | Evaluation of data collection method for project monitoring | 25% |
| **8. Organizational Capacity** | **20%** |
| 8.1. Commitment to the main objectives of the project | Assessment of the organization's commitment to preventing hate speech and disinformation | 15% |
| 8.2. Positive reputation in the community | Assess the organization's reputation in the community and available references | 10% |
| 8.3. Transparency | Assessment of the organization's transparency in its activities, including online presence and publication of information | 10% |
| 8.4. Collaboration with other organizations and IT experts | Assessment of the organization's capacity to collaborate with other entities and experts. | 15% |
| 8.5. Project management skills | Assessment of the organization's project management experience and team skills | 15% |
| 8.6. Own or contracted technical expertise | Evaluation of the technical experience of the organization or its collaborators. Assessment of the qualifications of the in-house or contracted technical team and its experience with the proposed technologies | 20% |
| 8.7. Availability of resources | Assessment of the availability of human resources and technical materials/infrastructure available for project implementation | 15% |
| **TOTAL:** | **100%** |

# **application procedure**

Interested organizations will submit a package of documents including:

1. Application form, signed by the representative of the Applicant or in case of consortium by the representatives of both partner organizations (Annex 1).
2. Project description according to the form (Annex 2).
3. The Budget, signed by the representative of the Applicant or representatives of the consortium (Annex 3).
4. A Copy of the Registration Certificate for the Applicant or Extract issued by Public Service Agency.
5. CVs of the persons (from the NGO and, where appropriate, external developers) who will be involved in the implementation of the project.
6. Declaration of availability of key persons to be involved in project implementation according to Annex 4.
7. Partnership agreement, in case of consortium.

The application form and annexes are posted on the UNDP Moldova website (<https://sc.undp.md/viewtenders2/>). These documents can also be obtained by sending a request to Marcel Blanuța at the following e-mail address: marcel.blanuta@undp.org.

The competition application file must be sent electronically by e-mail to marcel.blanuta@undp.org. The application deadline is **October 4th, 2024,** 16:30. Message subject should be: ”Digital solution development – Organization name”. The documents in the application file must be in PDF format, except for the budget which will be in .xlsx format (Excel).

Applications submitted by any other means will be rejected. Applications that are incomplete or submitted after the deadline will not be considered. Applications sent by e-mail must not exceed 20 MB. Applications larger than 20 MB will be split into multiple messages, and in the subject line of each message, in addition to "Digital solution development", the subject must indicate "part x from y - Organization Name". For example, if the file is to be submitted in three messages, then the first message will have the subject " Digital solution development – 1 from 3 - Organization name" and the last message " Digital solution development 3 from 3- Organization name".

Requests for clarification on the application can be sent to the following email address: marcel.blanuta@undp.org.

# **evaluation and selection procedure**

Projects will be evaluated by a project selection committee. The committee will evaluate the applications received in two stages:

**Stage I**: Checking the eligibility of the application. This stage involves but is not limited to: (a) verification that the eligibility of the project complies with the above-mentioned criteria; (b) complete submission of the application; (c) the veracity of the information provided in the application. Applications that are incomplete, erroneous or do not meet the eligibility criteria will be excluded from the competition. At the end a list will be drawn up of the organizations passing to the second stage and those eliminated will be announced

**Stage II**: Evaluation of project proposals from organizations that have passed Stage II. The evaluation will be carried out in accordance with the evaluation criteria mentioned above, awarding the appropriate score. The applicant with the highest score will be announced as the winner. At the end, the organizations in that phase will be informed about the decision of the evaluation committee.