**Development of digital portal for processing proposals and recommendations from SMEs**

**Terms of Reference**

1. **BACKGROUND**

The SME Finance and Development (SME F&D) group of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the “EBRD” or the “Bank”) supports economic transition by achieving enterprise change in viable micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and developing sustainable infrastructures of business advisory services in the countries of operations of the EBRD.

As part of the EBRD’s Strategic and Capital Framework (SCF 2021-25), the Bank is committed to using the digital transition as an enabler of transition in all the economies and sectors in which it invests. The EBRD is committed to embedding digital transformation into all of the Bank’s activities, ensuring that its systems and processes are adapted to take into account the opportunities offered, and challenges posed by digital transformation. Following Bank-wide approach, the SME F&D has set out to increase the number of SMEs reached via digital means as part of the group’s digital transformation efforts. Thus, Digital Outreach is currently at the forefront of the SME F&D efforts in all countries of operations.

The Investment Council under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic (IC) is part of a network of 11 Investment Councils operating with financial support from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) through its Investment Climate and Governance Initiative (ICGI). Established in December 2007, the Investment Council in Kyrgyzstan serves as a single sustainable platform for fostering constructive public-private dialogue focused on regulatory reform and economic policy initiatives. Since its inception in 2007, the Investment Council has contributed to the adoption and amendment of more than 160 laws aimed at improving the investment climate in the country. The successful public-private dialogue resulted in implementation of significant policy reforms aimed at creating favorable investment conditions as: optimizing the licensing and permit system, digitalizing public services (e-visa, e-notary, e-patent), developing creative economy and high technology park, tax system reforms.

Investment Council brings together senior government officials, representatives from the business community, and donors, fostering collaborative efforts aimed at advancing the nation's economic development.

As per Resolution No. 253, dated May 16, 2022, "On the Investment Council under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic," the operational functions of the IC are overseen by its Secretariat, which addresses coordination and communication challenges between the government and the private sector. The Secretariats coordinate the work of the Investment Council, facilitating the relationship between the government and the business community and providing expert economic and legal analysis and advice to support the work and deliberations of the Council.

The IC Secretariat strives to maintain active engagement and establish open communication with the business community to facilitate dialogue and collaborate on addressing priority investment climate constraints and policy reform initiatives.

Currently, the Investment Council unites more than 80 business associations. Despite the presence of numerous business associations, the Secretariat of the Council encounters a low level of proposal and recommendation submissions from these associations, attributed to the following potential reasons:

1. Insufficient awareness: Business associations and their members may be inadequately informed about the opportunities and mechanisms for interacting with the Investment Council due to objective reasons.
2. Complexity of procedures: The process of submitting and reviewing proposals may seem overly complex or unclear, discouraging business associations from submitting proposals.
3. Limited influence on decision-making: Business associations may feel that their proposals rarely lead to concrete changes in legislation or practice, reducing their interest in submitting proposals.
4. Limited access to information: The lack of convenient and accessible channels for obtaining and transmitting information between the business community and the Council may hinder effective interaction.

Moreover, business associations may face difficulties in preparing analytical documents on their issues due to the absence of experts and analysts in their team. Therefore, the lack of a systematic approach to the analysis and utilization of incoming proposals may reduce the motivation of the business community for active interaction with the Council.

To address these obstacles, simplification of the proposal submission procedures may be required through the development of an automated system or web portal for processing recommendations and proposals from business associations to the IC Secretariat.

Based on this, the SME F&D team in the Kyrgyz Republic plans to support implementation of the Digital platform (the “Digital platform”).

In this respect, the EBRD would like to attract a local consultant XXX (the “Consultant”) to re-design, develop and implement the Digital platform under the guidance of the SME F&D Kyrgyz Republic and the Investment Council teams by performing activities outlined below (Scope of services). The Digital Platform will be developed and launched throughout XX months in 2024-2025.

The Consultant will be chosen based on competitive selection and providing comprehensive proposal in response to call for applications. In addition, the Consultant will have relevant experience in ICT and digital space and has extensive experience in the sector.

1. **OBJЕCTIVES**

The overall objective of the Project is to support SMEs and local business associations in embarking on a digital transformation initiative. This project aims to support the IC Secretariat in development of a user-friendly and intuitive web-platform for business associations to submit recommendations and proposals, aimed at enhancing communication efficiency between the business community and the Secretariat, as well as ensurе transparent and prompt response to incoming suggestions and feedback.

The business community will benefit not only from a fast, open, and direct communication channel, but the web platform will also serve as a complex digital portal for:

* Informing businesses of new and proposed government reform priorities and proposed regulatory and legislative amendments;
* Seeking feedback from businesses on these proposals to help inform government policy making and regulatory and legislative amendments;
* Identifying new/emerging challenges to businesses and solicit recommendations for policy initiatives/reforms to help address them;

The web portal will be also accessible for all members of the IC, including the donor community and public institutions (ministries and agencies). Additionally, the application will enable participation of other stakeholders who are not members of the IC, such as civil society organisations, media etc. It's essential to integrate measurable goals for user engagement and satisfaction, as this is important for accurate evaluation the project's impact.

Expected results:

* An upgraded and enhanced IC Secretariat Digital platform;
* Expanded reach and engagement with businesses;
* At least 500 SME members have access to better business services;
* At least 100 SMEs use digital services to submit recommendations and feedback via the platform
* Increase SMEs' digital skills and knowledge, leading to measurable improvements in their adoption and effective use of digital tools and technologies.

1. **SCOPE OF WORK**

**Task 1: Digital Portal: Needs Assessment.**

The Consultant will identify and describe the **requirements** for the web portal to include – but not necessarily be limited to - the following functionalities:

1. Propose technical solution to integrate existing public-private dialogue processes *(i.e. Regional Investment Council, existing Working/ Consultative Groups under other Government agencies etc.)* with the current workflows, ensuring seamless processing and monitoring of recommendations and proposals.
2. Proposal registration module: Automatic reception and registration of proposals submitted by business associations through the web portal.
3. Status tracking and feedback system: Implementation of a mechanism allowing business associations to track the status of their proposals and receive feedback from the Council's Secretariat. This may include email notifications or through the web platform.
4. Automation of initial proposal processing: Implementation of AI technologies for analysing incoming proposals, categorizing them, prioritizing them, and automatically distributing them among responsible individuals in the Council's Secretariat.
5. Database module: Storage of all registered proposals and recommendations, their processing history, and status.
6. Analytics module: Tools for analysing incoming data, identifying trends, determining priority areas, evaluating the effectiveness of decisions made and integrating presentation features.
7. Collection of feedback on proposed government initiatives (draft normative acts exposed to public consultations) that could impact business activity.
8. Collection of alerts from the business community in real time about challenges faced when interacting with public authorities, through submission of feedback from businesses on e.g. experience of tax/labour inspections, obtaining licenses etc.
9. Notifying the business community about specific events, requests, etc.
10. Creating thematic chat fora where entrepreneurs can exchange experiences, opinions, etc.
11. Segregate access level for users:

* *Public Access* - enable view general content such as legislative and other government initiatives, public announcements, general statistics on proposals received and processed (the list could be enlarged during the project implementation).
* *Registered Access*: business-associations create an account or register with the portal gain access to additional features and content as submission of proposals and recommendations.
* *Standard Access*: government officials have access to a broader range of functionalities within the portal as review and provision of possible feedback to proposals.
* *Administrator Access:* The IC Secretariat holds complete control and authority over the web portal's functionalities and settings. This includes managing user accounts, fine-tuning system preferences, tailoring the portal's layout and design, conducting routine maintenance tasks, and ensuring robust security measures are in place.
* Scope for expanding the web portal to contain additional functionalities in the future, following consultation with and feedback from the business community.
* Compliance with regulatory framework: The system must comply with all applicable legislative and regulatory requirements of the Kyrgyz Republic, including data protection and information security.
* Analysis and advice on any legal requirements/issues related to the various IP ownership constraints around the software developed for/applied to the projects.

**Task 2: Digital Portal: Technical Requirements**

The Consultant will develop the Technical Requirements for system development for the Web Portal, based on the recommendations from Task 1. The Technical Requirements will address the following considerations:

* That the portal to be very accessible and user friendly.
* That subscribers from business associations will need to confirm/authenticate their identity to access the portal.
* That upon subscription, users will need to enter a set of data about their business (eg type of activity, size of business). This information will need to be stored and then self-populate any surveys etc the subscriber completes through the portal.
* The digital portal should be compatible with the existing information systems of the Investment Council Secretariat and other state enterprises.

**Task 3: Digital Portal: Design and Implementation of Web Portal**

The Consultant will design, develop and implement the web portal for the Digital Portal based on the Technical Requirements developed in Task 2. At this stage, the IT system should be tested by participants and any relevant feedback on its usability incorporated into its design and functionality.

**Task 4: Digital Portal: System Content Development**

The Consultant will propose and develop the structure and system content for the portal to enable its functionalities as described in Task 1, in consultation with the IC Secretariat and EBRD.

After completion of the project, the IC will take ownership of the portal and its Secretariat will be responsible for any information updates, system developments, and maintenance. However, for at least one year following the launch of the system, the consultant is obliged to provide technical maintenance and resolve any technical deficiencies encountered, as well as train relevant ICS staff on the maintenance of the portal.

The content of the portal will be developed and made available in Kyrgyz, Russian and English.

**Task 5: Digital Portal: Training, Maintenance, and Post-launch Support for Users**

Following the launch of the IT system (web portal), the Consultant will provide the following training:

* Comprehensive training sessions for IC Secretariat experts on the administration and use of the system, addressing specific needs and functionalities.
* Tailored training for the business community and other stakeholders, focusing on optimizing their utilization of the system to meet their requirements effectively.

At least four training sessions will be organized online, including two for the IC Secretariat and two for other users. Each session will have the capacity to accommodate more than 100 participants, ensuring widespread accessibility.

In addition to online training sessions, the consultant will develop comprehensive online guidelines and video tutorials. These resources will serve as valuable references for both system administrators and users, facilitating ease of use and proficiency.

Furthermore, following the launch of the web portal, the Consultant will extend post-launch support to ensure users' full comfort with the system. This includes:

Extending the post-launch support period to 12 months, providing ample time for users to familiarize themselves with the system and address any queries or difficulties.

Offering ongoing support options beyond the initial period, ensuring continuous assistance and guidance as needed.

Moreover, technical maintenance of the system will be provided throughout the 12-month duration, with the Consultant promptly resolving any technical errors or difficulties. Additionally, ICS staff will receive training on system maintenance and upkeep to ensure long-term sustainability and efficiency.

**Government Support**

The Secretariat of the Investment Council under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic is responsible for ensuring the effective and efficient day-to-day implementation of the Assignment, in close liaison with the EBRD and other relevant public institutions.

**Advisor profile**

The Consultant should be an IT Company with the ability to hire and provide all the necessary experts required to successfully deliver the Assignment. The Consultant should have a proven track record of working effectively with businesses and government authorities and have at least 5 years of project management expertise related to IT projects. In particular, the Consultant should have substantive experience of working on IT and systems development, especially in the design and implementation of web-based solutions for multiple stakeholders and massive use, including mobile applications. The Consultant should also have a strong track record in designing dynamic and user-friendly websites and web applications, ideally on behalf of governmental institutions/public services. The project team should consist of at least a team leader, an analyst, a programmer and a system administrator. Thе key personnel must have the required skills and qualifications to ensure the quality of work and the results of this assignment.

1. **IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS**

* The focal points for coordination and reporting with the EBRD’s project team. The Bank will closely review the progress and results of the activity of the Consultant.
* The Consultant shall report to the EBRD in English about their activities as well as to the IC Secretariat on any request for information. The IC Secretariat will delegate a representative to be the primary contact persons with specific responsibility for assisting the Consultant and co-ordinating activities and interaction with the stakeholders.
* All documentation related to the Project will remain property of the IC after completion of the Project. The Consultant shall not publish, use or dispose of this documentation without the written consent of the IC Secretariat and the EBRD.

1. **DELIVERABLES**

The Consultant will provide the following deliverables and indicators of achievement. Each deliverable will undergo evaluation by the client using a performance assessment form.

* **Initial needs assessment**: provision of the inception report **within 2 weeks of the start of assignment** outlining the proposed methodology, requirements, work plan, final results and deadlines for completing the assignment and the terms of reference describing the scope of work and technical requirements for the development of the digital portal.
* **Prototypes of the Platform** **interfaces** agreed and approved by the Secretariat shall be provided **within 12 weeks of the start of assignment**. The acceptance certificate of the beta version of the automated system for processing recommendations and proposals from business associations, agreed and approved by the Secretariat.
* **Training and guidelines/tutorial development**. The Consultant shall provide training on administration and use of the IT system to the IC Secretariat and users **within** **5 months of the start of the Assignment**. At least 4 training sessions should be organised online – two for IC Secretariat and two for other users, with capacity to host big number of participants. The consultant shall also provide on-line user-friendly written guidelines on the administration and use of the system and video tutorials in a self-explanatory and user-friendly format.
* **Progress updates**: The Consultant shall provide **monthly updates on the status of the Assignment** to the EBRD and the Investment Council Secretariat. The updates shall highlight progress made since the previous issuance. They shall also outline any issues, changes and/or delays encountered by the Consultant in completing the Assignment and proposed mitigating measures.
* **Phase 1 Project Completion Report**: within **6 months of the start of the Assignment**, the Consultant will submit to the IC Secretariat and the Bank a draft project completion report summarising achievements delivered during the Assignment and any challenges faced. The report should also include details of the IT system content and results of IT system testing, as the IT system should now be fully operational and ready to go-live. The Report should also explain how the Consultant will provide maintenance support for the system as well as train ICS staff on how to use and maintain the system for a 12-month period once the system goes live.
* **Final Project Completion Report: within 18 months of the start of the Assignment**, the Consultant will submit to the IC Secretariat and the Bank a draft project completion report summarising achievements delivered during the entire Assignment and any challenges faced. A final Project Completion Report reflecting any comments made on the draft by the ICS and/or EBRD must be submitted within two weeks of the end of the Assignment.

1. **TIMEFRAME**

The Assignment is expected to start in October 2024 for a duration of 6 months, with a further 12 months of system maintenance and training support provided thereafter.

1. **TENDER REQUIREMENTS**

Please refer to the attached annexes:

Annex 1: Requirements for the Consultant selection process

Annex 2: Technical proposal form

Annex 3: Financial proposal form