

# Support for Independent Media in the Southern Neighbourhood

Specifications

## PART I – General information

### Background

Independent media in the Southern Neighbourhood faces significant systemic challenges that undermine and severely restrict sector capacities to effectively serve public interests, defend against authoritarian erosion of fundamental (media) freedoms, and counter polarising discourses and disinformation. Witnessing the largest decline in media freedom and ranked as the most difficult and dangerous region in the world for journalists (2019 World Press Freedom Index, RSF), critical voices are increasingly repressed through judicial and extrajudicial means.

The overall Southern Neighbourhood context makes independent media more essential than ever, but 3 closely inter-linked problems hinder the sector from fulfilling its primary role. 1) Dysfunctional media markets and investment regulations, combined with (re)current economic crises, mean authoritarian regimes have long co-opted state and private media via subsidies and politically driven distribution of advertising revenues, resulting in mainstream media reporting biased government narratives, or acting as mouthpieces. These dynamics severely constrain opportunities for the sector to secure core funding and financial stability, with large-scale repercussions; notably, editorial freedom, self-censorship. 2) Diverse populations in the region consequently have restricted access to the alternative sources of independent factual news and information they need to hold government duty-bearers to account, a situation that is compounded by significant sector capacity and resource deficits to produce and distribute quality public interest media content. While digital resources provide new opportunities for critical voices, they compete against well-funded propaganda channels of ruling political/economic elites, are easily manipulated by specific (self-serving) interests, and expose open users (especially women) to growing digital security risks. 3) These problems are exacerbated by inadequate regional infrastructure to exchange knowledge that can contribute to greater effectiveness and resilience, and better ensure that such knowledge remains in and benefits the region.

The overall objective is to support the pluralism, independence, and resilience of the independent public interest media sector in the Southern Neighbourhood by capacitating media outlets and independent journalists through strategically targeted tailor-made activities. The tender is a part of a larger programme, which is financed by the EU, supporting independent media outlet in the Southern Neighbourhood, namely Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, and Tunisia:

### Purpose

The purpose of the tender is to strengthen existing regional networks and build more effective operational capacities to convene communities of practice in the Southern Neighbourhood, better facilitate knowledge transfer, and share experience and good practice. Further, the aim is to foster collaborative opportunities for business development and content co-production, among independent media actors (all genders; early- mid-senior career; serving diverse populations) and across all sectors of the media industry.

## Target groups

Three primary target groups, including but not limited to IMS/FPU partners in 9 selected target countries in the Southern Neighbourhood, namely Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, and Tunisia:

- 1) Independent media sector (business developers, managers, editors, owners): a. independent media outlets with unique strategic value (in country/regional; established brand, some organisational capacity, publishing quality public interest media content); b. promising new/emerging independent media outlets (with extensive capacity building needs).
- 2) Journalists, emerging/ frontrunner digital content producers (all genders, early-mid career) committed to producing independent high-quality public interest media content.
- 3) Independent media networks facilitating knowledge exchange (communities of practice, peer support) and defending and promoting media independence and freedom of expression at regional, national and/or local levels.

## Subcontract activities

The tender is divided into three lots, and applicants can apply for one of them or all three in the same application. However, to benefit most from the potential synergy between the related lots, applicants addressing all three lots will be viewed in a positive light. The contract period for each of the three lots will be from the 2nd quarter of 2022 until 4th quarter 2026. The specific details will be stipulated in the contract.

Lot 1: Build regional networking secretariat consisting of key independent media outlets through e.g., support to operational costs, digital safety tools, tech software/mobile phone applications for media content, etc.  
Budget: 400.000 EUR

Lot 2: Organise and convene 3 Content Working Groups (political corruption, culture, gender), with participants (at least 50 journalists; all genders) drawn from at least 8 independent media outlets and meeting (in-person; online) at least 1–2 per year:  
Budget 400.000 EUR

Lot 3: Convene existing regional business development specialists and business development personnel from independent media outlets for ongoing consultations, joint revenue generating experiments and networking to share best practices  
Budget 657.500 EUR

All three actions must ensure adequate inclusion of diverse urban/rural audiences, especially under-served populations: Women, female/male youth, people of all genders, and marginalised groups.

## Part II – Technical specifications

Lot 1: Build a regional networking secretariat consisting of key independent media outlets through e.g., support to operational costs, digital safety tools, tech software/mobile phone applications for media content and publication, etc.

Background: There is broad agreement that regional networking and cooperation are vital for improving the capacities of independent media at the national level and establishing foundations for a regional framework to sustain the sector over the long run. Reflecting the ad hoc nature of existing initiatives, however, there are low levels of capacity and professionalism for effective regional networking, e.g., lack of strategy, long-term

goals, ambitions; lack of institutional bylaws, policies, and organisational structures. The Action will capitalise on opportunities for organisational capacity building to further develop existing initiatives.

Activities: Establish a regional networking secretariat that convenes independent media outlets operating out of one or more of the 9 target countries to facilitate establishment of common needs and development of a cross cutting strategy and long-term goals based on inputs from the independent media outlets.

Lot 2: Organise and convene 3 Content Working Groups (political corruption, culture, gender)

Background: Convening discussion and exchange of knowledge on key issues only happens on a sporadic basis, at both country and regional levels, with few locally organised communities of practice events or collaborative media co-productions. Specific areas of expertise are missing at country-level, as expressed by local partners, and therefore there is a need for regional forums consisting of journalists from independent media outlets in the region to address these gaps.

Activities: Three Content Working Groups comprised of representatives from at least 8 independent media outlets established and meet 1–2 times per year, online or in-person (total of about 50 journalists; all genders), and content production within the focus of each of the three content working groups (political corruption, culture, gender).

Lot 3: Business Lab to provide ongoing support and comprehensive business development services for independent media outlets.

Background: Core realisations among independent media leaders who are increasingly focused on business viability in the back end of their operations, alongside content production, derive from 2 principles: 1) The political economy of media orders the activation of parallel services that can fund content production, especially if the direct monetisation of content through a pay wall becomes restrictive due to economic and/or political constraints. 2) Readers and community support are key to the survival of independent media in politically restricted environments. Therefore, some media actors are starting to diversify their services, setting up membership programmes and pursuing other potential revenue sources. Building on these opportunities, the proposed Business Lab will convene business development and sustainability personnel to jointly experiment with creating additional layers of revenue generation.

Activities: A Business Lab is established and fully operational as a sustainable regional hub (with at least 3–5 media outlets) and convenes regularly to share knowledge, practices, and experience with income generation and business development.

## Part III – Eligibility, Selection and Award criteria

### Eligibility criteria

Participation in tender procedure is open on the same terms to all natural or legal persons and public entities in a European Union Member State and to all natural and legal persons and public entities of a third country which has concluded a specific public-procurement agreement with the European Union giving them access to the contract which is the subject of this invitation to tender and on the terms laid down by that agreement.

In order to ascertain the eligibility of tenderers, they must indicate in their tenders the country in which they have their registered office or in which they are domiciled. They must also submit the evidence of registration as a legal entity. Tenderers must adhere to the IMS Code of Ethics.

Groups of economic operators may submit a tender i.e., as consortium. Tenders from groups of economic operators must specify the role, qualifications and experience of each of the members of the group. The tender shall be submitted jointly by the economic operators, who shall also assume joint and several liability for the tender submission.

In the case of a group of economic operators, each member shall furnish proof of right of access to the contract (eligibility), as well as proof concerning compliance with the exclusion and selection criteria.

### **Selection criteria**

**Financial and economic capacity:** Tenderers shall have sufficient economic and financial resources to enable them to perform the contract in compliance with the contractual provisions, given the value and scope thereof. In respect of the contract, which is the subject of this invitation to tender, the Consortium furthermore requires tenderers to have a minimum financial and economic capacity, which will be assessed based on the following information:

- minimum yearly budget of 50.000 EUR for 2021.

**Organisational capacity:** As the action is based on local ownership tenderers must have an organisation strategically aimed at the Southern Neighbourhood e.g., strategy document and vision focused on the MENA region. In addition, tenderers are familiar with independent media landscape in the Southern Neighbourhood and the 9 target countries in particular and have a network of at least 4-5 media outlets to build on.

**Technical and professional capacity:** Tenderers must have sufficient technical and professional capacity to enable them to perform the contract in compliance with the contractual provisions, taking into account its value and scale. In respect of the contract which is the subject of this invitation to tender IMS requires tenderers to have the following technical and professional capacity:

- at least three years experience in services/deliveries similar to those describe under Part II Technical Specification, such as:
  - experience working with and facilitating work between media outlets, journalist, and academics in the region
- a team of staff in the field of programme management, among whom at least the project leader must have three years' proven experience in the field covered by the invitation to tender; the other members of the team must have at least one year experience.
- all staff is required to be fluent in English and Arabic.
- experience with budgeting and financial reporting

Depending on the nature, quantity or scale and purpose of the supplies, services or works to be provided, the technical and professional capacity of economic operators will be substantiated by the documents specified in the application form.

In the case of an application submitted by a group of a consortium evidence of the financial and economic capacity should be provided by each member of the consortium, while the other selection criteria will be checked on the basis of the consortium.

### **Award criteria**

The contract will be awarded to the tender offering the best price-quality ratio. To determine the tender offering the best price quality/ratio, tenders will be evaluated based on the following criteria and weights:

- PART I of the application: Methodology proposed (weight 40% - max 40 points) - the quality and relevance of the methodology proposed for fulfilling the outputs of the three lots (see application form)
- PART II of the application: Experience of the organisation (weight 40% - max 40 points) – the technical and professional merits of the staff and organisation and proven track record of similar activities to those stipulated in the tender material (see application form)
- Price criterion (weight 20% - max 20 points)

The assessors will award a maximum of 100 points for the three criteria.

## IMS (International Media Support)

IMS' support of public-interest journalism in conflict affected, fragile and transitional states has benefitted over 60 countries. With more than 500 national partnerships established, IMS's approach centres on three areas: participating in and building international and regional coalitions; linking local impact and knowledge from its country or regional programmes to global policy and standards development; and ensuring knowledge transfer and sustained local partner involvement in global discussions.