

Request for Concept Notes

Building Awareness for Compliance and Sustainability in the Textile and Apparel Industry in the Eastern Partnership Region

1. Background

RECONOMY is an inclusive and green economic development program of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), implemented by the HELVETAS Swiss Development Organization. In partnership with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), HELVETAS Swiss Development Organization is leading a regional inclusive and green economic development program, RECONOMY, in 11 countries in Eastern Partnership (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova), and the Western Balkans (Kosovo, North Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina). The main phase for the Eastern Partnership region runs from January 2023 to December 2026.

RECONOMY Program is implementing the “Circular Business Models and Resource Efficiency for Competitiveness and Growth in the Textile and Apparel (T&A) Industry” Project in the EaP Region. The project focuses on Circular Business Models and Resource Efficiency of the T&A Industry, aiming to enhance the wage and self-employment of women and young people, including the most disadvantaged and excluded ones, through improved competitiveness and growth of the sector. This goal will be achieved through:

- (i) Enhanced growth and green/sustainable job creation by the private sector in the T&A industry in the EaP region (Georgia, Armenia, Moldova, and Ukraine),
- (ii) Improved access to green job opportunities and services in the T&A Industry in EaP region,
- (iii) Improved green/sustainable skills of women and young people, including the most disadvantaged and excluded ones.

The design of the project is built on the learnings from the pilots implemented during the inception phase, as well as the general market systems analysis and sector selection exercise that took place during the inception phase.

In the framework of this project, the foundational phase involved the execution of a comprehensive Market System Analysis (MSA). Through this analysis, we have gained a holistic understanding of the T&A market system, including its key components, the various stakeholders involved, and the intricate interactions within the ecosystem. This knowledge has enabled us to pinpoint specific problems and bottlenecks that hinder the sector's growth and sustainability.

One of the central challenges identified during the analysis is deeply rooted within the Eastern Partnership (EaP) textile and apparel sector. This challenge stems from a profound lack of awareness and understanding that permeates the industry, manifesting in two interconnected dimensions:

Manufacturers' Transition to Sustainability and Compliance: For textile and apparel manufacturers, the path toward adopting sustainable practices and circular business models is far from straightforward. The complexities of sustainable production remain obscured, impeding progress. Concurrently, the

manufacturers face the formidable challenge of aligning with and adhering to the stringent sustainability standards mandated by the European Union (EU) and the United States (US) markets. Achieving this alignment is not solely a matter of ethical responsibility but a vital economic imperative, as non-compliance could jeopardize their existence.

Consumer Awareness and Empowerment: The identified deficiency in consumer education and awareness regarding sustainable textile and apparel consumption within EaP countries is a direct result of the industry and market players lacking the skills to effectively promote sustainable production among consumers. Consequently, this deficit in skills and promotion efforts has contributed to a low demand for sustainable production in the Textile and apparel sector. Many consumers remain uninformed about the intricate web of environmental and economic consequences tied to their purchasing choices within the industry. This lack of awareness significantly impedes their ability to make informed and conscientious decisions when acquiring textile and apparel products.

The interplay of consumer and manufacturer challenges creates a multifaceted conundrum within the EaP textile and apparel sector, affecting not only the industry but also the broader socio-economic landscape of EaP countries.

The urgency of this challenge is underscored by the potential dire consequences for manufacturers failing to comply with EU and US market standards. Ineffectual adoption of sustainable practices and non-compliance could force manufacturers into a precarious position, necessitating the shuttering of their operations or substantial reductions in production capacity. Thus, obtaining eco-certifications and aligning with international standards transcends mere ethical responsibility; it becomes an economic imperative vital for maintaining viable trading relationships and safeguarding inclusive job opportunities in the textile and apparel sector.

In summary, the central challenge is intricate and systemic, demanding comprehensive solutions. It intertwines consumer education, sustainable business practices, international compliance, and economic resilience. Addressing this challenge goes beyond aspiration. It is imperative that seeks to reshape the very dynamics of the EaP textile and apparel sector, aligning it with global imperatives such as eco-consciousness, economic resilience, and the preservation and enhancement of job opportunities in an ever-evolving global landscape.

2. Objective

RECONOMY seeks Concept Notes that propose innovative initiatives that can transform the sector into a model of sustainability, responsible production, and consumer-driven demand. This transformation will not only benefit the industry but also contribute to the broader socio-economic development of EaP countries. Specifically, the objective is to catalyse transformative change within the Eastern Partnership (EaP) textile and apparel sector by addressing the deeply rooted challenges identified in both manufacturers' transition to sustainability and compliance, as well as promoting gender equality, inclusion, consumer awareness and empowerment.

Through these innovative initiatives, we aim to:

Enhance Sustainable Practices and Compliance among Textile Companies: We expect textile and apparel companies in EaP countries to acquire a comprehensive understanding of sustainable production methods and circular business models. We seek to empower these companies to make a just transition towards

sustainable practices that not only align with international standards but also promote eco-consciousness as an integral part of their business strategy. As a result, textile companies should be better prepared to trade in new markets, meet the stringent sustainability standards mandated by the European Union (EU) and the United States (US), and secure their economic viability.

Empower and Educate Consumers: We anticipate a significant improvement in consumer awareness and education regarding sustainable textile and apparel consumption in EaP countries incorporating gender and social inclusion principles. Textile companies are expected to play an active role in promoting sustainable products and practices to consumers while ensuring that these efforts are inclusive and stereotypes-free. As consumers become more informed about the environmental and economic impacts of their purchasing choices, they should be empowered to make conscientious decisions, driving increased demand for sustainable production in the textile and apparel sector.

Foster a Holistic Approach: We aim to foster a holistic approach that integrates consumer education, sustainable business practices, international compliance, and economic resilience within the EaP textile and apparel sector through a gender and inclusion lens. We expect stakeholders, including governments, industry associations, and civil society, to collaborate effectively to address this multifaceted challenge while prioritizing gender equality and social inclusion. The solutions proposed should recognize the interconnectedness of these dimensions and seek to create a sustainable and resilient ecosystem within the sector that leaves no one behind.

Safeguard Job Opportunities and Economic Resilience: We emphasize the importance of aligning with international standards and obtaining eco-certifications not just as an ethical responsibility but as an economic imperative. We expect that addressing this challenge will help safeguard job opportunities within the textile and apparel sector in EaP countries. By enhancing the sector's resilience and competitiveness, we aim to protect existing jobs and create new inclusive employment opportunities in an ever-evolving global landscape.

In summary, through collective efforts, we aspire to create a sustainable and prosperous future for the industry, ensuring its alignment with global imperatives while preserving and enhancing job opportunities in the region.

3. Procurement Process

This solicitation is the first step of a competitive two-step process.

Step One: The applicants shall submit a Concept Note, where the proposed innovative initiative should comply with the goals outlined in section 2. Objective.

The applicants are allowed to submit **only 1 (one) Concept Note**. RECONOMY shall review the Concept Notes submitted by applicants and will assess them based on evaluation criteria and the other provisions set out in this Request. The Concept Notes shall be short-listed, and the RECONOMY Program will select a maximum of 5 (five) concept notes.

Step Two: RECONOMY will invite selected applicants to expand their concept notes into a project (business model, sustainability, outreach, etc.).

4. Eligibility for Participation

4.1 Eligible Applicants

Participation is open to all companies, organizations, firms, and institutions **with proven experience in Textile and Apparel and/or Awareness Raising** that are legal entities registered according to the legislation in force, in at least one of the EaP countries: Georgia, Armenia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

4.2 Exclusion Criteria from Participation

Applicants shall be excluded from taking part in the procurement procedure if they and/or their individual owners meet at least one of the **Exclusion Criteria** described in Annex 1.

5. Instructions on Concept Notes

5.1 Content and Form of the Concept Notes:

Applicants should submit a Concept Note based on the form provided by RECONOMY. Please fill out the **Concept Note Form – Textile and Apparel** enclosed in this Request. Applicants must fill out all sections of the form.

5.2 Duration of the activities' implementation:

Applicants should submit Concept Notes with activities that do not exceed a 12-month time frame for their implementation.

5.3 Funding limits:

RECONOMY Program will provide financial support of up to 30,000 CHF per Concept Note, which should be used only for the implementation of activities. The rest of the other costs (rent, salaries, utilities, etc.) should be provided by the applicant's own resources.

5.4 Language of the Concept Notes: ENGLISH

6. Application Procedure

6.1 Selection Criteria:

The eligible applicants meeting the following criteria are invited to submit a Concept Note:

- Experience of at least 3 years in Textile and Apparel and/or Awareness Raising,
- Experience with other partners in implementing projects and /or various initiatives is desirable,
- Organizational, financial, and professional capacities to implement the innovative initiative.

6.2 Submission of Concept Notes

Concept Notes should be delivered in **pdf format** to the email: reconomyprocurement@helvetas.org, with the subject line "Awareness Raising in TA - RECONOMY Program", by **3 November 2023**.

7. Evaluation

Concept Notes shall be evaluated on the basis of their completeness, compliance, and responsiveness to the objective and other provisions of this Request. Shortlisted applicants may be invited for an interview where certain aspects of their submitted Concept Notes may be discussed prior to confirmation of being selected for the second step of the procurement process.

7.1 Awarding Criteria

Concept Notes will be evaluated based on the **Best price – Quality ratio** criteria as follows:

- A. Quality of Concept Note - 70%
- B: Financial offer – 30%

7.2 Evaluation Criteria

A. Quality of Concept Note Criteria		Max Points (70)
A1. The innovativeness of the initiative		
A1.1	Degree of innovation	15
A1.2	The impact on the industry sector (number of companies or people reached)	15
A1.3	Sustainability vision	15
A2. Implementation of initiative		
A2.1	Clarity, planning approach, expected results	15
A3. Organizational and professional capacities to implement the initiative		
A3.1	Experience and Qualification of the team assigned to the implementation	5
A3.2	Proven experience in implementing various initiatives with other partners	3
A3.3	Demonstrated track record of successfully integrating gender and social inclusion principle	2
B. Financial Offer Criteria		Max Points (30)
B.1	Feasibility of the implementation cost of the initiative	10
B.2	The rates of implementation cost are well aligned with the regional/national market rates	10
B.3	Financial capacity of the applicant and matching funds provision	10

Shortlisted Concept Notes will be selected based on the total score attained.

To be shortlisted the Concept Notes should pass the minimum score of 50% of the quality score of 70 points. The Concept Notes that do not pass the minimum quality score are not considered eligible for further consideration, and their financial offers will not be evaluated.

8. Confidentiality

RECONOMY acknowledges that the information received from Applicants under this Request for Concept Notes may be of a confidential nature. RECONOMY shall use the same degree of care with Applicant's confidential information as it uses to protect its own confidential information.

9. Further Information

Any clarifications or questions regarding this Request for Concept Notes shall be sent to the email address reconomyprocurement@helvetas.org no later than 7 working days before the closing date.

The applicants can expect to receive information about the decision on their expressions of interest by **20 November 2023**.