Annex I – Description of the Action

NDICI-GEO-NEAR/2024/458-019

GUARDIAN

- Georgia's Unified Action for Resisting Disinformation, Interference and Adversarial Networks

[Number & title of lot]	Lot 4: to counter disinformation and foreign interference and manipulation (FIMI)
Title of the action:	GUARDIAN - Georgia's Unified Action for Resisting Disinformation, Interference and Adversarial Networks
Name of the lead applicant	Civil Society Foundation (CSF) [Formerly Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF)]
Nationality of the lead applicant[1]	Georgia

Dossier No	

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[1] An organisation's statutes must show that it was established under the national law of the country concerned and that the head office is located in an eligible country. Any organisation established in a different country cannot be considered an eligible local organisation. See the footnotes to the guidelines for the call.

1   General information

Reference of the call for proposals	EuropeAid/180155/DD/ACT/GE
[Lot number you are applying to:]	Lot 4
Number of the proposal	NDICI-GEO-NEAR/2024/180155-4/3
Name of the lead applicant	Civil Society Foundation (CSF) [Formerly Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF)]
Title of the action	GUARDIAN - Georgia's Unified Action for Resisting Disinformation, Interference and Adversarial Networks
Location of the action	Georgia
Duration of the action	24 months

2   The action

2.1.   Description of the action

2.1.1.   Description (max 13 pages)

Georgia is yet again at a historical crossroad as people of Georgia have to defend the country's European future on a daily basis. Georgia finds itself in unique yet precarious circumstances. On the one hand, the country has never been closer to its declared foreign policy objective of the European Union (EU) membership than now, since the European Council's decision in December 2023 granted Georgia a candidate status for the EU membership and, if progress on relevant nine steps is achieved, it could move forward with opening the accession negotiations in the footsteps of Ukraine and Moldova. On the other hand, the country's progress on European integration is under threat by initiating legislation that is not in line with Georgia's European aspirations and widely criticized by the EU institutions. Russia's hybrid warfare, which includes strategic use of FIMI, aims to undermine Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration, erode the country's democracy and its institutions, sow discord, disorient and intimidate the Georgian society. While absolute majority of Georgian citizens remain steadfast in their support, as Georgia edged closer to its eventual EU membership, the Kremlin hybrid operations have also intensified creating dangerous volatility in the country. Given that FIMI, disinformation and propaganda operations have been potent instruments to undermine Georgian society's resilience on its path to the European integration, this Action responding to specific objective to counter disinformation, foreign influence and manipulation (FIMI) is highly relevant and timely for Georgia.

Civil society has long been the defender of the democratic values, human rights and good governance in Georgia, including through steadfast support from the EU. Civil society has been at the forefront of efforts to build societal resilience to FIMI and disinformation as well. The applicant organizations boast some of the most impressive track record of championing democracy, good governance and human rights in Georgia, and have also been pioneers in terms of monitoring, documenting, debunking, fact-checking disinformation, advocating for effective counter-disinformation measures both at the state policy level, as well as with the tech industry. The applicants, some of them being members of the Information Integrity Coalition, and some having supported civil society's strategic communications work and effective resilience campaigns, are prominent pillars of the defender community in Georgia and uniquely positioned to lead such an initiative. By joining forces together, the applicants are in a strong position to contribute to

the global objective of this call for proposals: to support civil society in strengthening and promoting good governance, democratic values and human rights in Georgia.

The **overall objective** of the Action is to counter disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) in Georgia through the whole of society approach and audience-centric effective strategic communications, whereas the **specific objectives** are:

1. Expanding shared knowledge of foreign interference and manipulation, by developing a FIMI toolbox, building robust evidence base, and deepening insights into audience vulnerabilities.
2. Strengthening the whole-of-society response to disinformation through building multi-stakeholder partnerships and empowering CSOs, fact-checkers, media, investigative journalists, academia, researchers, monitors, etc.
3. Building societal resilience to disinformation and propaganda through strategic communications, rapid response, and long-term audience centric communication campaigns.

To summarize, the Action sets out to carry out cluster of activities, which thematically correspond to each objective as follows: 1) **monitoring, research, and learning**; 2) **building multi-stakeholder partnership**; and 3) **strategic communications**.

Through the different activities under each objective, the Action aims to work with various sets of **target groups**. First and inner layer of target groups represent the wider defender community in Georgia. This includes practitioners of FIMI and disinformation, researchers, monitors, fact-checkers, CSOs, Information Integrity Coalition (IIC), media and investigative journalists. The Applicant organizations themselves are part of and at the heart of this defender community. While some of the applicants have been the pioneers of fighting disinformation and FIMI, defender community in Georgia is growing and there are many actors who contribute to this field. However, there is still lack of coordination, cooperation and sharing resources among this community, which often leads to duplication of work, unnecessary competition and subpar outcomes. The creation of the IIC (of which both GGSA and ISFED are members of) and USAID supported Information Integrity Program (where CRRC Georgia is a consortium partner) have laid foundation to increased cooperation and synergies, however more work needs to be done to bring together methodologies, approaches, as well as sharing of data and resources among the defender community to move from competition to coordination and cooperation. This need and constraint will be addressed through developing a FIMI toolbox and common framework including a joint repository to collect and organize data about FIMI incidents. The coordination of monitoring, research and learning across key players of the defender community will create a solid, coherent and consistent evidence base thereby amplifying and strengthening the target groups within the defender community. By extension, these findings and data will then be also shared with the policymakers in Georgia and at the EU level creating robust basis for policy response and decision-making. This way, the Action will build on the work of other initiatives, including the above-mentioned Information Integrity Program, with Horizon Europe project DE-CONSPIRATOR as well as the EU-funded initiatives supporting democracy, civil society development and European integration.

Second layer of the target groups are relevant state authorities at the national and local level, representatives of the Strategic Communications units at various ministries, National Security Council, Information Centre on NATO and EU, Central Election Commission (CEC), Communications Commission (ComCom), as well as above mentioned defender community, civil society more broadly, including grassroots organizations, activists, private sector, creative industry, tech community, individual influencers, and content creators, where possible. The Applicants have a strong conviction to work with this diverse target group primarily under the objective 2 with the overarching aim to build multi-stakeholder partnerships in order to counter disinformation and FIMI in Georgia. The Applicants believe that strong cooperation, coordination and partnership across various sectors is a recipe of success for strengthening societal resilience towards disinformation and FIMI. However, at the same time, the Applicants recognize the difficulties of engaging some actors within this layer of target groups given unique challenges in Georgia and accompanying constraints. Recent developments have shown dramatic increase of anti-Western rhetoric and false accusations towards Georgia's strategic partners from the EU and the United States about their allegedly negative role in Georgia. These narratives replicate and amplify some of the FIMI, disinformation and propaganda narratives pushed by Kremlin for over a decade in Georgia, but also Ukraine and elsewhere. Recent re-introduction of the Russian-style bill on the so-called "transparency of the foreign

influence" has further strained relationship between the civil society as a whole and the authorities. (Please refer to the risks within the section 2.1.4) These circumstances, along with earlier track record of the Government's strategic communications unit being implicated in engagement within the coordinated inauthentic activities on Facebook, create significant constraints to effectively work with and engage some of the key institutions and agencies across executive or legislative level. Nevertheless, the Applicants operate under the assumption that there will be willingness from all sides for a meaningful engagement in good faith with the incentive to contribute to implementing the nine steps defined by the EU as important prerequisites for Georgia's progress on EU accession. However, even if such meaningful cooperation in good faith is unattainable, the Applicant organizations will still remain committed to working towards a whole-of-society response to FIMI and disinformation by engaging academia, grassroots organizations from regions, activists, private sector representatives and creative industry, tech community, influencers and content creators. There are already examples of these type of cross-sectoral cooperation in fight against disinformation and propaganda in Georgia, including by GGSA, ISFED, as well as Strategic Communications Team under CSF. While working on building cross-sectoral partnerships and whole-of-society response, the Applicants will ensure partnership with EU-supported, USAID-supported or other similar initiatives, including through engaging grassroots organizations and other existing partners of various such programs. Recent developments show that while some of these target groups might have lacked knowledge of FIMI challenges in Georgia, their awareness about harmful effects of disinformation and propaganda is growing and citizens feel it is their patriotic duty to counter such harmful information operations. Engaging with these target groups will provide unique opportunities for building capacity, cross-sectoral learnings, adopting and cross-pollination of new approaches, and in the long run, increasing resilience through whole-of-society response.

Lastly, under objective 3, this Action's target audience is a broader Georgian public, specifically, vulnerable audiences, usually defined as segments of society most affected by disinformation, whose positions on key policy and societal issues can be swayed in different direction, thereby a key "battlefield" for disinformation actors, among them grassroots and marginalized communities across various regions of Georgia. Exact demographics and profile of audiences to be determined based on continuous research, as well as available data and earlier research (i.e. CRRC Georgia's research conducted for USAID Information Integrity Program). Winning the hearts and minds of this target group is a main objective of FIMI actors, therefore, it is important that the defender community uses audience-centric approaches and designs effective strategic communications campaigns in order to de-bunk, pre-bunk, offer positive alternative narratives, strengthen the pro-European, pro-democracy sentiment among Georgian public and therefore, strengthen resilience against disinformation and FIMI.

In terms of final beneficiaries, this Action will benefit, first and foremost, the Georgian society through increased resilience, whole-of-society partnership, enhanced understanding of the threats and guardrails to disinformation. Besides, the action's final beneficiaries are the practitioners, FIMI and disinformation experts, researchers, as well as the broader civil society, national and regional media, academia, etc. who will benefit from more robust methodological framework and evidence base, as well as increased capacities, and potential partnerships. Government of Georgia and its various agencies, Parliament of Georgia and individual legislators will benefit from tapping into the resources of a motivated defender community that provides great opportunities for synergies, whole-of-society engagement, and knowledge sharing. Finally, EU institutions, including EEAS, East StratCom Task Force, EP, diplomatic community, and international organizations operating in Georgia will also benefit from this Action through gaining access to a robust, methodologically sound monitoring, research and learning data, as well as expanded partnerships with a cross-sectoral defender community.

The Action is designed as a 24-month (2-year) intervention that will be built around a similar annual cycle each year. Activities under each objective are described below indicating relevant outputs.

Objective 1 – Monitoring, Research and Learning (*Expanding shared knowledge of foreign interference and manipulation, by developing a FIMI toolbox, building robust evidence base, and deepening insights into audience vulnerabilities.*)

Activity 1.1 – Development of a FIMI toolbox and a joint repository – *led by* GGSA *, with the support from ISFED and CSF*. Development of a FIMI toolbox for a systematized mapping of FIMI, including a joint repository to accumulate and organize data according to ABCDE (Actors, Behaviour, Content,

Degree, Effect) framework and detailing Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures (TTP) of FIMI/disinformation threat actors.

The FIMI toolbox will encompass instruments grouped in four main dimensions – situational awareness, resilience building, regulatory actions, and state external actions. To this end, GGSA will examine policy frameworks and existing capacities at national and municipality levels in Georgia as well as study detection and resilience-building measures employed by non-state actors of the defender community. On the other hand, GGSA will study existing policy solutions at the EU level as well as at member state levels. These observations will be used to develop a FIMI toolbox that will provide a comprehensive set of instruments available for the defender community and adjusted to Georgian context and needs.

The part of the toolbox responsible for increasing situation analysis of FIMI will specifically employ the DISARM framework, which is a taxonomy of FIMI TTPs and operationalises the "B" in the ABCDE framework. It will be used to help stakeholders gain a clear shared understanding of FIMI/disinformation incidents and to immediately identify defensive and mitigation actions available to them.

If malign actors carrying out FIMI operations deem a specific incident as successful, they are more than likely to reuse the same methods. When a specific incident will be analysed within the DISARM framework and divided into four separate stages – planning, preparing, executing, and assessing – it will allow the Georgian defender community to detect and disrupt the next incident in the early stages of the process, effectively decreasing vulnerabilities and increasing collective resilience.

As the framework sets out best practices for fighting against FIMI/disinformation through sharing data and analysis, as well as informing effective countermeasures, this Action will contribute to establishing a more collaborative and community-driven approach, which will strengthen the currently lacking collective efforts within the Georgian defender community in this regard. The consortium (CSF, ISFED, GGSA) will initially start employing the DISARM framework and then share the knowledge with wider groups, such as the IIC and other actors included in the quarterly stakeholder and regular sectoral meetings, eventually leading to the establishment of the framework throughout the wider defender community.

This Action will use the STIX (Structured Threat Information Expression) format for encoding FIMI incidents making it easier to share data with wider stakeholders, including the EU, and contribute to the networked collaboration at scale.

This Action also includes establishing **a joint monitoring repository** among the implementing partners, allowing them to accumulate and organise FIMI/disinformation data points, share and analyse trends of anti-EU disinformation. It will also help stakeholders within this Action synergise and coordinate their efforts and jointly filter and evaluate data to determine which incidents should be analysed within the DISARM framework.

FIMI toolbox will also detail instruments for resilience building, such as fact-checking, strategic communications, capacity building of the defender community, etc. These instruments, along with other proactive measures, will aim to create a proactive strategy, which will be in action and at the disposal of relevant stakeholders before a FIMI incident takes place, resulting in the limitation of the attack surface of FIMI operations.

FIMI toolbox will include instruments for regulatory actions to disrupt and limit FIMI/disinformation operations. The toolbox within the instruments will be used to detect and address information manipulation in Georgia, and provide policy recommendations to maximize the safeguarding of the information space. This Action will also seek to further the understanding of EU regulatory policy solutions in Georgia, and identify countermeasures relevant to Georgia's FIMI/disinformation challenges.

The toolbox will incorporate instruments for state external actions to address FIMI/disinformation operations that take place within the country on an international level by activating relevant diplomatic responses, for example, by informing partner countries and requesting support or taking appropriate actions against the states sponsoring FIMI/disinformation operations.

The consortium will create synergy with DE-CONSPIRATOR, a Horizon Europe project, by exchanging knowledge, analysis, and methodologies of FIMI detection and countermeasures. The knowledge sharing and synergy facilitated between these actors will also ultimately contribute to developing a draft FIMI

toolbox tailored specifically for the Georgian context. After the consortium completes the FIMI toolbox and response framework drafts, it will hold consultations with other members of the DE-CONSPIRATOR project to utilize already accumulated expertise within the field and identify additional areas where the two projects can synergize. Subsequently, the consortium will consult with relevant teams within the EEAS to further enrich the FIMI toolbox and response framework drafts and ensure the integration of existing EU knowledge and methods.

Activity 1.2 – Continuous social media monitoring – *led by ISFED*

ISFED will carry out a continuous social media monitoring of disinformation and threat actors on Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, TikTok, Twitter to systematically assess information environment, identify emerging anti-Western propaganda and narratives, uncover coordinated inauthentic behaviour and mitigate the spread of manipulated content. ISFED has been one of the pioneers of social media monitoring in the context of elections and political processes in Georgia and in the wider region, and has contributed to EU guide for Civil Society on Monitoring Social Media during Elections.

The scope of ISFED's social media monitoring will consist of the following components:
1. Tracking social media accounts and activities of political actors, public institutions and key media.
2. Monitoring anonymous pages, groups, and political entities.
3. Observation of pages and groups propagating divisive anti-Western narratives and disinformation.

ISFED will collect, aggregate, classify, and analyze publicly posted content from social media platforms using advanced monitoring tools, including a highly advanced proprietary tool Fact-a-lyzer, developed by NDI specifically for and in accordance to ISFED's monitoring methodology. As part of its monitoring strategy, the ISFED social media team will use exolyt - a TikTok tool and popster – a Telegram tool Furthermore, ISFED will utilize its platform, www.disinfoobserver.ge, to identify and verify Facebook pages involved in discrediting campaigns and disseminating disinformation. The platform currently contains information about over 500 pages that have been engaged in various disinformation, propaganda and FIMI operations in Georgia.

ISFED will conduct qualitative research and contextual overviews. The weekly findings of monitoring will be internally shared with the consortium members and relevant working group to discuss emerging trends, response mechanisms and provide the Strategic Communications Team with hard evidence of ongoing information operations on social media.

Activity 1.3 – Continuous media monitoring – *led by* GGSA

GGSA will carry out continuous media monitoring of select TV and online outlets affiliated with pro-Kremlin radical groups as well as screening of Russian information channels. This will involve monitoring of these media sources both in terms of their content, as well as their activities across various social media channels. GGSA monitors eight online websites that disseminate Kremlin narratives in the Georgian information space (such as GeWorld, Saqinform, Sputnik Georgia), as well as two pro-Kremlin broadcasts – Alt Info and Sezoni TV, which cover platforms such as YouTube, Vkontakte and Telegram. GGSA monitors Meta's platforms with a specific tool created for fact-checkers within Meta's Third-Party Fact-Checking Program. It identifies disinformation recognized by algorithms, such as similarity detection, and feedback from Meta's community. GGSA also utilises Meta's Content Library, a new tool to monitor Facebook pages and public groups that have been flagged as disinformation spreaders, including Facebook pages of pro-Kremlin outlets in Georgia. Apart from Georgian disinformation sources, these tools give GGSA access to content originating from Russian state media outlets and Russian language accounts on Meta's platforms in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Georgia. GGSA also monitors online media platforms that either operate in or actively disseminate information about Georgia's occupied territories (Sputnik Абхазия (Sputnik Abkhazia), de facto state press agency Apsnypress, ApsnyHabar, telegram channels D News Абхазия (D News Abkhazia), Абхазский Портал (Abkhazian Portal), сапа цхинвал (Sapa Tskhinval), etc.). Apart from Meta's platforms, 32 pro-Kremlin Telegram channels are monitored, which have been observed to be either directly linked to Kremlin propagandists, or act anonymously and in a coordinated manner when spreading disinformation.

In addition, the CSF/Strategic Communications Team will monitor the key Georgian TV media (Imedi TV, Rustavi 2, POSTV, TV Pirveli, Formula, Mtavari Arkhi) to observe the key narratives and developments.

Monitoring of these mainstream channels will help the Team identify whether emerging disinformation trends have permeated Georgian TV outlets, as well as understand what are the framings and narratives used about key ongoing issues across the top mainstream TV outlets. In addition, this monitoring provides estimates of approximate reach of mainstream TV narratives by observing their reach through social media and their official ratings.

Findings from both GGSA monitoring and StratCom monitoring together with ISFED's social media monitoring will be shared weekly for continuous emerging trend monitoring (see below).

Activity 1.4 – Regular research – *carried out by CRRC Georgia*

CRRC will conduct Regular **surveys and focus groups** to understand audience vulnerabilities, gain insight into how FIMI, disinformation and propaganda narratives land with the public, and identify the most affected segments of the population.

To measure and track trends in disinformation exposure and anti-Western attitudes, identify key targeted topics, evaluate trust in various institutions and actors, and get insights in other relevant areas, the research team will conduct phone surveys, on average, every other month, with a total of 12 surveys.

The surveys will be conducted using the computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) method. Each survey will target 1,200 respondents, forming a representative sample of the Georgian population across the nation, including the capital city, urban, and rural settlements.

At least for two of these surveys (at least one per year), CRRC-Georgia will prepare concise key findings reports and infographics in both Georgian and English. These reports and datasets will be shared directly with key project stakeholders and partners, and made publicly available on the Caucasus Barometer website. This website features an online data analysis tool (ODA) that allows visitors to independently conduct basic statistics, calculate frequencies, and generate cross-tabulations.

The remaining up to 10 CATI surveys throughout the project (five per year) will address ongoing developments or specific needs identified by project partners and key stakeholders. These surveys will track audience vulnerabilities, assess whether specific disinformation and propaganda narratives resonate with the public, and identify the most affected segments of the population.

In addition to phone surveys, the CRRC's research team will conduct focus group discussions every six months to gain a richer and more nuanced understanding of the underlying reasons behind anti-Western attitudes and how they are shaped by historical narratives, cultural perceptions, and socio-economic concerns. Integrating message testing into these discussions will farther equip the project team and its partners with valuable insights for developing more impactful public communications.

The study will involve four waves of focus group discussions, each encompassing 5 focus groups with residents of Tbilisi and representatives of urban and rural settlements of Eastern and Western Georgia. Focus group reports will be shared with stakeholders and partners.

Activity 1.5 – Continuous analysis of emerging trends – *led by Strategic Communications Team under CSF, with the support from ISFED and GGSA.*

To ensure effective information sharing and rapid alert system, a working group will be created that will convene weekly online or in-person to share key monitoring data, exchange research findings and compare learnings. The members of the working group, consisting of StratCom Team representative, ISFED, GGSA and CSF representatives, will discuss key weekly findings from social media monitoring, media monitoring and any other relevant trends. The working group will maintain online communication on an ongoing basis to flag any urgent developments, information threats or other potential FIMI incidents. This format will be a flexible internal mechanism of coordination, real time exchange of information and rapid alert, allowing quick mobilization and identification of relevant responses. This sharing of information and analysis of emerging trends will form the basis of the StratCom Team's work and allow them to take informed decisions when designing strategic communication campaigns (please see below).

Activity 1.6 – Developing the response framework

Continuous learning and developing of the response framework is directly linked to the FIMI toolbox. The response framework will detail a workflow from risk assessment to designing and activating the FIMI

toolbox instruments and the evaluation of their effects, allowing to effectively connect analysis to action. After analysing FIMI/disinformation incidents, the response framework developed within this Action will act as a menu of various types of responses to be implemented at any stage in the lifecycle of a FIMI incident. This will give the defender community an opportunity to tackle incidents at an early stage and during their occurrence. The response framework will help practitioners determine which response is the most adequate for a specific incident, when the relevant responses should be activated, who is best suited to implement countermeasures, and how countermeasures can be deployed. It will be a guide to how defenders can prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from FIMI attacks while continuously improving their security in future attacks.

The response framework developed within this Action will aim to systematize and organize joint responsive actions of the Georgian defender community to FIMI incidents for the first time in Georgia. It will include pre-incident, mid-incident, and post-incident countermeasures. The pre-incident countermeasures will have long-term objectives to build societal resilience and better prepare the defender community for future attacks, for example, through identifying vulnerabilities based on past threats. Mid-incident countermeasures will aim to contain the incident from spreading further and mitigate its malign influence. These types of countermeasures may include risk assessment, mapping the information space, and detecting behavioural patterns by utilising the DISARM framework. Post-incident countermeasures will intend to recover, analyse the specifics of the incidents, and better prepare for future attacks to improve deterrence.

Activity 1.7 – Annual FIMI reports and quarterly monitoring reports – *by* GGSA *and ISFED*

The Action will produce two types of reports as the outputs under the Objective 1. Annual FIMI report and quarterly social media monitoring reports will provide systematized and regular assessment of the state of FIMI and disinformation efforts in Georgia, providing public with robust analysis, evidence base as well as recommendations.

A total of 8 social media monitoring reports will be created and published by ISFED, with 4 reports scheduled for the first year and an additional 4 in the second year of the project. The design and structure of these reports will be precisely developed in alignment with the FIMI toolbox. These reports will provide public with regular consistent and comparable data on disinformation and FIMI, its actors, narratives, tactics, behaviours, and trends. These reports will also provide basis for evidence-based discussion in quarterly stakeholder meetings (see below). Publishing of the report will be accompanied with relevant media presentation, PR and social media promotion efforts.

Building on their work on FIMI toolbox, GGSA will develop annual FIMI reports (two in total), which will provide a more analytical overview of the FIMI and disinformation environment in Georgia over the annual reporting period. This report will look through a more long-term perspective to summarize, classify and analyse FIMI incidents, draw out overarching learnings, identify trends, assess response strategies and their effectiveness. These reports will be similar to EEAS FIMI reports and will closely follow its structure and framework. All partners will review and contribute to the annual FIMI reports as these might include conclusions and findings from ISFED's social media monitoring reports, CRRC Georgia's survey reports, as well as analysis of strategic communications efforts, such as message framing, campaigns, etc.

Both types of reports will mainstream crosscutting issues and assess impact of FIMI or disinformation campaigns on democracy and good governance, human rights, gender equality, LGBTQI communities, women, and youth.

The reports will be actively disseminated across the defender community and will provide opportunities for engagement of partners from across researchers, fact-checkers, IIC, media, investigative journalists, as well as the policy makers and relevant experts both in Georgia and EU institutions.

Objective 1 Outputs: FIMI toolbox, a joint repository of FIMI and TTPs, annual FIMI reports, 8 quarterly social media monitoring reports, response framework, 12 quantitative and 4 qualitative research results with at least 2 published key research finding reports.

Objective 2 - Building multi-stakeholder partnership (*Strengthening the whole-of-society response to disinformation through building multi-stakeholder partnerships and empowering CSOs, fact-checkers, media, investigative journalists, academia, researchers, monitors, etc.*)

Activity 2.1 – Multi-stakeholder platform and quarterly stakeholder meetings *– led by ISFED with the support of all partners*

ISFED will facilitate establishment of a multi-stakeholder platform, engaging civil society organizations, relevant government authorities, academia, international experts, media representatives, the creative industry, and private companies. This initiative aims to promote a whole-of-society approach in addressing challenges associated with disinformation. Notably, such a platform currently does not exist in Georgia and will be instrumental in building a cross-sectoral understanding of FIMI, its threats, ongoing developments, response strategies, possible policy solutions, etc.

Stakeholder meetings will be held quarterly to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experience across sectors. During these sessions, ISFED will present its updates from monitoring findings based on quarterly reports summarizing key disinformation narratives, anti-Western rhetoric, and the broader FIMI context.

There will be approximately 25 representatives from various sectors attending the one-day meetings in Tbilisi.

Activity 2.2 – Regular sectoral meetings *– led by CSF*

To empower CSOs, grassroots organizations, media, investigative journalists, academia, researchers, monitors, creative industry, and other partners, CSF will hold regular sectoral meetings for sharing analysis of the key threats, vulnerabilities, research insights, best practices, success stories and lessons learned. All applicant organization representatives will be actively engaged in these sectoral meetings, however CSF will organize them and StratCom Team members will lead such meetings. The sectoral meetings will serve the purpose of capacity building of CSOs, watchdog groups, grassroots organizations and activists, investigative media, academia, researchers, private sector, influencers and independent content creators and will be aimed at expanding the defender community by engaging them on a regular basis, expanding their understanding of FIMI and disinformation through sharing research and monitoring results, explaining key FIMI incidents, how and why it affects them, and equipping them with relevant strategies, messages, providing potential engagement opportunities. By appealing their patriotism and willingness to contribute to Georgia's resilience against malign Kremlin influence, the Applicants expect to slowly, over the course of the Action, build up the network of engaged and enthusiastic partners and allies across various sectors and regions, that will be a foundation for a more resilient society and whole-of-society response to disinformation, harmful propaganda and FIMI. A total of 16 sectoral meetings will take place (8 in each year) with at least four (two each year) held in regions. As a rule, two sectoral meetings will be held per quarter (one per month, except the months when a quarterly stakeholder meeting takes place). Sectoral meeting participants will have an opportunity to sign up for updates and indicate how they can engage and support a whole-of-society resilience building against disinformation and FIMI. They will then be regularly engaged through campaigns to help amplify the reach and to effectively utilize their resource where possible. As needed, ad hoc sectoral meetings can be arranged to bring together specific partners around a specific issue (i.e. if the engagement of influencers is needed to respond to a specific FIMI incident). The sectoral meetings will mostly take place at CSF office or the offices of ISFED in the regions across Georgia. We will work with other EU projects to facilitate synergies and engage their partners in regions, or across specific industries/sectors.

Activity 2.3 – Building awareness on EU regulatory policy solutions *– led by* GGSA *with the support from DE-CONSPIRATOR, and the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN).*

Building awareness on EU regulatory policy solutions such as Digital Services Act, AI Act, etc. and advocacy for policy harmonization with the EU frameworks – led by GGSA with the support from DE-CONSPIRATOR, and the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN).

Understanding of EU regulatory policy solutions against FIMI and disinformation is relatively low in Georgia, even among the core defender community. This Action will produce policy briefs on existing policy solutions at the EU (such as DSA, Code of Practice on Disinformation, AI Acts, Rapid Alert System, etc.) and Member state national levels. The sectoral meetings host discussions among the defender community on the relevance of different countermeasures to Georgia's FIMI/disinformation challenges. These discussions and feedback from the community will also be reflected in the FIMI toolbox and response framework.

Moreover, experts from EFCSN and DE-CONSPIRATOR will be invited to both sectoral meetings and the annual FIMI conference (see below), allowing the Georgian defender community to discuss EU regulatory policy solutions with people examining different EU countermeasures from academic, policy, and practical standpoints. Furthermore, this Action will synergize with stakeholders in the Western Balkans, where discussions on how to bring benefits of certain EU regulatory solutions are already ongoing. Through the annual FIMI conference or sectoral meetings, this Action will also host opportunities to coordinate with stakeholders in Ukraine and Moldova.

Activity 2.4 – Annual FIMI Conference – *led by ISFED together with CSF and* GGSA

ISFED, in cooperation with other consortium members, will organize an Annual FIMI conference, an initiative intended to bring together high-level stakeholders from Georgia and wider region, including Ukraine, Moldova, the Western Balkans, engaging EU institutions, and leading experts in the field of FIMI and disinformation. The annual FIMI conference will be an opportunity to bring the attention towards FIMI in Georgia, discuss key findings and learnings, unveil and present annual FIMI reports, share experience and discuss policy solutions, best practices, forge cross-border partnerships and apply learnings from across regions. The FIMI conference will serve as an opportunity to engage stakeholders from the government and authorities, such as the Parliament, relevant committees, representatives of the Strategic Communications units at various ministries, National Security Council, Information Centre on NATO and EU, Central Election Commission (CEC), Communications Commission (ComCom), etc. In addition, we expect representatives from EU institutions EEAS, East StratCom Task Force, EP, etc. The two-day conference will be a big highlight for the practitioners and defender community to discuss various ongoing challenges across different panels. The conference program will be tailored based on the most pressing and relevant issues each year (i.e. elections, specific milestones in EU integration process, etc.). The conference will also provide an opportunity to engage Georgian defender community into the policy and regulatory discussions that are ongoing in the EU to understand how Georgia can best align itself and prepare for harmonization of legislation and practices with the EU.

The conferences will boast a line-up of distinguished speakers renowned for their expertise, including approximately 10 international experts each year who will share their perspectives alongside Georgian specialists and international partners. An estimated audience of approximately 140 is expected. Along with main and breakout sessions, the conference may feature some side events and night owl sessions bringing together specific sectors and partners (i.e. tech industry and start-up community,) showcasing various innovations and success stories. The Applicants will seek to partner with private sector sponsors to support parts of the conferences and side events, bring exciting speakers and build on the momentum of the conference. Given the desired and anticipated level of engagement from the EU institutions, ISFED and partners will work closely with the EU Delegation in Georgia in the process of defining the conference program, agenda, high-level guests and keynote speakers, as well as potential build-ups and synergies with other EU initiatives.

Objective 2 Outputs: two annual FIMI conferences, 8 quarterly stakeholder meetings, at least 16 sectoral meetings, including at least 4 in regions, at least six policy briefs on EU regulatory policy solutions.

Objective 3 – Strategic Communications (*Building societal resilience to disinformation and propaganda through strategic communications, rapid response, and long-term audience centric communication campaigns.*)

Activity 3.1 – Coordination of the work of the Strategic Communications Team – *led by CSF*

To address key priorities of the call such as building societal resilience and raising awareness of the general public about FIMI, disinformation and related national security and hybrid threats, the Applicants propose employing strategic communications and audience centric campaigns. Strategic communications represent a key pillar of this Action when it comes to activities directed at the broader Georgian public, specifically, vulnerable audiences, usually defined as segments of society most affected by disinformation, whose positions on key policy and societal issues can be swayed in different direction, among them grassroots and marginalized communities across various regions of Georgia. The action is designed so that monitoring, research and learning findings informs the strategic communications, while building multi-stakeholder partnerships helps engage various sectors and network partners in delivering effective strategic communications to build societal resilience. For over a year such strategic communications approach has

been used by Georgian civil society in order to respond, resist and counter FIMI, Kremlin's information operations, anti-EU, and anti-democratic actions. Adopting the strategic communications approach has enabled CSOs to push back against the damaging Russian-style "foreign agent law" resulting in its withdrawal after mass protests in March 2023, and similar approach is employed again in 2024 after the re-introduction of the same draft law now guised under the veil of "transparency of foreign influence".

Being the natural convener of the Georgian civil society for decades, the CSF (formerly Open Society Georgia Foundation) has been supporting and facilitating the civil society coordination around strategic communications for over a year now since threats to Georgia's democracy and civil society have intensified.

Under the proposed Action, strategic communications work will be led by Strategic Communications Team, a group of experts and civil society representatives (consisting of communication experts, representatives of CSOs, creative industry, and researchers) which is responsible for analysing data obtained under objective 1, identifying meta narratives, detecting risks and potential impact on the society, suggesting pre-emptive narrative, framing message box, proposing rapid response action plan and campaign strategy. Strategic Communications Team (often referred to as StratCom Team, or StratCom), will be looking at the information environment on a daily basis, almost in the live format. ISFED's and GGSA' monitoring results and data will be shared with StratCom through the working group on continuous analysis of the emerging trends. These weekly reports, together with StratCom's own media monitoring of key narratives will provide StratCom with continuous almost real-time picture of the information environment in Georgia. Such data and its analysis provides opportunity to quickly identify emerging narratives, understand what is the underlying FIMI disinformation intent, and rapidly devise response strategy. Recognizing that the FIMI and disinformation is largely a "battle" for hearts and minds of regular citizens, especially those more vulnerable to disinformation, when designing awareness raising and resilience building, it is important to understand what are the vulnerabilities of the society, who are most susceptible to disinformation, what is their mind-set and how they view different issues though their prism. This helps us understand what are the best ways to talk to and address their vulnerabilities. This is where CRRC Georgia's research comes into play as StratCom will be working closely with CRRC to design questionnaires based on ongoing developments in the information environment and the survey results will be used to assess societal vulnerabilities, understand specific potent narratives as well as opportunities for effective communications. Focus groups and qualitative research will be used to gain further insight into specific audiences and test messages to identify what are the best ways to build their resilience to malign disinformation and propaganda and strengthen awareness of FIMI and its impact on Georgian society.

The StratCom Team consists of strategists, creative communications expert, disinformation researcher, the person responsible for CSO and network engagement. Depending on the emerging issues, StratCom will be supported by various experts, as needed on a freelance basis. StratCom's functions are to identify key information threats undermining societal resilience, devise both rapid response and long-term communication strategies to address those threats, develop message framework, oversee the creative execution and delivery of relevant campaigns. StratCom Team sits within the CSF and is supported by CSF infrastructure, however they are not CSF staff but individual experts engaged on a contractual basis. StratCom Team already has experience of working and coordinating with various other programs and initiatives such as USAID Information Integrity Program, USAID Civil Society Program, etc. This Action will help solidify and ensure sustainability of the StratCom Team's work in order to deliver effective, audience-centric communication campaigns.

Activity 3.2 – Creating a strategic messaging framework – *led by CSF with the support of other partners*

When it comes to Kremlin's anti-Western disinformation and FIMI, disinformation practitioners understand that the overarching meta narrative, as well as tactics and often messages used by propaganda actors are the same across various countries and different contexts. While propaganda actors are effective in localizing the messages to a specific context or geography, the overarching formulas and meta narratives often remain the same. Despite this, counter-disinformation actors often "reinvent the wheel" to come up with response strategies and often inadvertently walk-into the propaganda trap by repeating the same narratives when attempting to debunk or disprove those. Such operating model is demonstrating to be ineffective; therefore, it is important to respond to disinformation and propaganda through strategic messaging framework, and through preparing in advance for anticipated or most likely scenarios and disinformation narratives. The StratCom Team's ongoing work will include developing a messaging

framework and weekly messaging guidance for the defender community around the key disinformation and propaganda narratives identified through monitoring. Such messaging guidance provides easily understandable and actionable advice on what are the best ways to respond to ongoing disinformation and propaganda efforts, including Dos and Don'ts, what language to use, what to avoid, as well as any relevant supporting data or evidence to support each claim. The messaging guide will be shared proactively with wider civil society organizations that are in constant coordination with the CSF, including regional civil society and grassroots organizations, media partners, professional unions, etc.

Besides ongoing messaging guidance, the StratCom will develop a strategic messaging framework that is designed to address the underlying vulnerabilities and includes a robust fact and evidence-based database of messaging aimed for debunking/pre-bunking/reframing the propaganda narratives, sub-narratives, and messages. This messaging framework will be interlinked with the response framework above (activity 1.6), however if the response framework will be more of a retroactive mechanism documenting various responses to the already materialized FIMI incidents, the strategic messaging framework will be forward looking anticipating various potential scenarios and developing messaging, arguments and evidences in advance to be prepared for potential FIMI incidents and propaganda operations. This proactive and forward-looking work will allow the StratCom, and wider civil society to either pre-bunk some of the potential narratives, or be ready when they emerge and not be constantly one-step behind in responding to disinformation. The strategic messaging framework, which will be a living document, will over time, throughout the life-cycle of this Action turn into a very robust and in-depth document that includes well-researched, well-prepared messaging guidance for a broad array of potential scenarios and FIMI events. Together with the response framework, this tool will boost resilience of the Georgian civil society sector and defender community at large. Through the sectoral meetings (above), the StratCom Team will work with various sectoral partners to share with them the insights from the messaging framework and help them prepare for any anticipated disinformation and propaganda campaigns in advance, rather than after.

Activity 3.3 – Long-term and rapid-response strategic communication campaigns – *led by CSF*

The Action envisions carrying out two long-term and up to ten rapid response strategic communications campaigns to build resilience towards FIMI, disinformation and propaganda efforts, raise public awareness and push back against harmful narratives. The long-term strategic communication campaigns will address overarching and more deeply-rooted vulnerabilities, such as perceived gap between Georgian and European values within segments of the Georgian society or understanding the important milestones of the European integration process and creating public demand for continued commitment to democratic progress and relevant government action for advancing EU integration. While these areas represent some of the thematic priorities, given Georgia's highly volatile political landscape, areas for the long-term strategic communications campaigns will be defined at the launch of the Action. For each of the long-term campaigns the StratCom Team supported by wider CSF team will define the campaign strategy, key objectives, target audiences, and overarching creative direction. Creative companies will be engaged to carry out the long-term communication campaigns. A selected creative company will be responsible for developing the campaign creative concept and various executions under the guidance from a StratCom Team member responsible for creative direction. The StratCom will consult with the Applicant organizations, as well as a wider defender community of the civil society organizations, activists, media partners, as well as relevant authorities, where possible to ensure broad agreement on overarching campaign strategy; however, the creative decisions will be taken solely within the StratCom to safeguard efficiency and timely execution of the campaigns. The research from CRRC Georgia will inform the campaigns both in terms of vulnerabilities, target audiences, as well as potential messages and other insights. Once agreed with the campaign creative direction, a detailed campaign plan and production plan will be developed; the production and implementation will take place through the support of the third-party production suppliers, both individuals and companies. This process will be managed and overseen by CSF, which has a vast experience of implementing large-scale campaigns and advocacy on some of the most pressing policy issues in Georgia. Each campaign will also be followed by a robust evaluation, including through CRRC surveys, focus groups and other empirical evidence.

Along with the long-term strategic communication campaigns, the StratCom Team will also implement rapid-response campaigns in response to ongoing FIMI or disinformation events and new developments. These events, developments and emerging narratives will likely be already anticipated under the strategic

messaging framework (above). Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine or introduction (re-introduction) of the Russian-style "foreign agent" law in Georgia are some examples of ad-hoc developments where a rapid response strategic communications campaign would be necessary. These type of campaigns differ from the long-term campaigns in the sense that they aim to address an urgent and pressing issue that requires quick reaction and if unaddressed could significantly and rapidly undermine democracy, European integration or societal resilience. Therefore, in such cases, there is no time for a long-term campaign development. In such cases, a rapid response campaign creative development would take place within the StratCom Team with the direction of the strategists and creative communications expert. The StratCom Team will rapidly convene defender community, primarily CSOs and activist groups closely coordinated with the CSF, and upon consultation with the CSOs, decisions on the campaign objectives, its strategy, key audiences and overarching direction will be taken. The StratCom Team will then oversee the creative development, production and implementation of the rapid response campaign, informed through monitoring, research, as well as response framework and strategic messaging framework. The operational support will be provided by CSF team allowing swift mobilization of third-party production resource and freelancers to implement the campaigns. Similar to the long-term campaigns, when possible, the StratCom Team will engage with wide range of sectoral partners and authorities to ensure amplification and increased effectiveness of such campaigns. Rapid response campaigns will also be evaluated through a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods and empirical evidence.

Objective 3 Outputs: two long-term strategic communication campaigns, up to 10 rapid-response campaigns, strategic messaging framework, regular messaging guidance on ongoing disinformation and FIMI events.

Financial Support for Third Parties:

To support activities across all three objectives, this Action envisions a mechanism for Financial Support to Third Parties (FSTP), which will be organized as Action Grants, therefore awarded through competitive calls for proposals managed by CSF. The FSTP will be issued through two separate calls for proposal, one per year. A detailed Terms of Reference (ToR) will be outlined prior to the call for proposals. According to CSF procedures, proposals go through a two-stage review – first through the expert selection committee, and then through CSF Executive Board. A selection committee will consist of representatives of the Applicant organizations, with the option for the EU Delegation representative to be involved as well. The call for proposals will be publicly disseminated through website, social media, and relevant listing platforms. CSF will organize information sessions for potential applicants. The selection committee will follow the pre-determined criteria outlined below to evaluate proposals. Where appropriate, applicants may be asked to modify the budget or selected activities prior to the project being recommended to the Executive Board for approval. The third parties will not be required to show co-funding for these Action Grants.

(i) the overall objectives, the specific objective(s) and the outputs: The overall objective of the FSTP is to expand the defender community, broaden the actors engaged in countering FIMI and disinformation, and empower of CSOs, media, academia, think tanks and researchers in the process. Specific objectives are to:
- Expand and fill the gaps in understanding specific societal vulnerabilities or address lack of academic research in FIMI and its impact in Georgia;
- Develop innovative approaches for building resilience to disinformation in specific grassroots or vulnerable communities;
- Engage, encourage, strengthen and build capacities of new actors with a strong potential for developing innovative and impactful interventions.

The results will be six projects implemented by third party entities delivering interventions in line with the overall and specific objectives above and contributing to at least one of the objectives of this Action.

(ii) the different types of activities eligible for financial support:
- Research into specific societal vulnerabilities (i.e. weaponization of history, Soviet past, and identity);
- Developing innovative approaches in research, pre- or de-bunking (i.e. creation of innovative tools, hackathons, etc.);
- Building resilience in specific communities through bespoke targeted interventions (i.e. small campaigns, grassroots actions; media literacy initiatives);

- Working with academia on developing academic research on disinformation and FIMI (both from Russia and China);
- Supporting media interventions, content creation or regular recurring programming aimed at building resilience to disinformation;
- Supporting investigative journalism into disinformation actors and enablers of FIMI.

The specific priority activities for each call for proposals will be defined by the consortium partners based on gaps in understanding, key vulnerabilities or lack of interventions identified through research component and/or through gaps identified within the response framework.

Following activities **will not be eligible** under the FSTP: political campaigns or lobbying, debt payments, sponsorship of individuals (i.e. training, professional development, individual travel grants, etc.), expenses unrelated to project objectives.

(iii) the types of persons or categories of persons which may receive financial support Following entities will be eligible for FSTP:
- CSOs (including grassroots organizations, and regional organizations);
- Media (national or regional), investigative journalism groups;
- Academia (universities, research institutions);
- Think-tanks;
- Start-ups and tech companies.

(iv) the criteria for selecting these entities and giving the financial support: The selection criteria will be:
- Relevance of the action to the overall and specific objectives and priorities of the FSTP (30%);
- Coherence in design of the action and its feasibility (20%);
- Potential impact on the target audiences as defined by the project (10%);
- Innovation in implementation approach (10%);
- Cost effectiveness (20%);
- Applicant's capacity to deliver the action (10%).

(v) the criteria for determining the exact amount of financial support for each third entity: FSTP will need to adhere to strict accountability and oversight from the Grant Management Department of the CSF. At the application stage, the budget will be scrutinized for prudency and reasonable calculations of rates, and expenses (taking into consideration factors such as geographic locations of activities), requiring justifications where relevant (i.e. salary history). Upon the award, FSTP will be issued through tranches depending on the project duration. Releasing of each next tranche will be conditional to verifying the costs actually incurred and their eligibility as documented through relevant financial reports, transaction ledger and supporting documentation.

(vi) the maximum amount which may be given the maximum for the FSTP is 30 000 EUR, whereas the minimum amount will be 10 000 EUR. On average, a typical FSTP will be around 20 000 EUR per intervention. A total of 120 000 EUR is allocated in the budget for FSTP. We anticipate six organizations to receive FSTP.

CSF's over two-decade experience of grant making is a guarantee of a prudent and effective management and oversight of the FSTP. The recipients will be required to follow relevant narrative and financial reporting for the FSTP in the CSF format, in compliance with relevant EU regulations. Should any of the recipients require guidance and support in this process, CSF will provide consultations free-of-charge to the selected recipients on financial management, reporting and general requirements for implementing the Action grants.

To summarize, the Action's intervention logic is presented in the table below:

Objectives	Activities	Expected outputs	Outcomes	Impact	Risks and Assumptions

1) Expanding shared knowledge of foreign interference and manipulation, by developing a FIMI toolbox, building robust evidence base, and deepening insights into audience vulnerabilities.	1.1 Developing FIMI toolbox and joint repository 1.2 Social media monitoring 1.3 Media Monitoring 1.4 Regular research 1.5 Continuous analysis of emerging trends 1.6 developing response framework 1.7 Annual FIMI and quarterly social media monitoring reports	• FIMI toolbox • a joint repository of FIMI and TTPs • annual FIMI reports • 8 quarterly social media monitoring reports • response framework • 12 quantitative and 4 qualitative research results • at least 2 published key research finding reports	a) Standardized, systematized, and shared knowledge around FIMI and disinformation. b) In-depth understanding of the information environment through ongoing monitoring of FIMI/disinformation and research into audience vulnerabilities	Increased collaboration among the professional community and practitioners of disinformation/FIMI research. More coherent and robust understanding of threats and vulnerabilities through the lenses of FIMI toolbox and harmonized with the EU methodology.	Civil society and media can operate freely and without pressure and can carry out crucial monitoring and research activities. There are no regulatory or operational restrictions on EU funding to civil society actors.
2) Strengthening the whole-of-society response to disinformation through building multi-stakeholder partnerships and empowering CSOs, fact-checkers, media, investigative journalists, academia, researchers, monitors, etc.	2.1 Multi-stakeholder platform and quarterly stakeholder meetings 2.2 Regular sectoral meetings 2.3 Building awareness on EU regulatory policy solutions 2.4 Annual FIMI conference	• annual international FIMI conference • quarterly stakeholder meetings • regular (at least 16) sectoral meetings, including in regions (at least 4) • 6 policy briefs on EU regulatory policy solutions	c) Established multi-stakeholder partnerships between state and non-state actors, and various industries from civil society, media academia, private sector.	Institutional partnerships and the whole-of-society response to FIMI, disinformation and hybrid threats in Georgia. Increased understanding of EU regulatory and policy measures on FIMI. Strengthened cooperation between Georgian and EU stakeholders on FIMI.	Readiness of all actors to engage in good faith to address FIMI/disinformation and make meaningful progress on the first of the nine steps set out by the EU. Openness to collaboration and partnerships.
3) Building societal resilience to disinformation and propaganda through strategic communications, rapid response, and long-term audience centric communication campaigns.	3.1 Coordination of the StratCom Team work 3.2 Creation of strategic messaging framework 3.3 Long-term and rapid response strategic communication campaigns	• Up to 10 rapid response campaigns • 2 long-term campaigns • strategic messaging framework, • regular messaging guidance for civil society and partners on ongoing disinformation and FIMI events	d) Effective audience centric strategic communication that provide guardrails for decreasing impact of FIMI, disinformation and propaganda in Georgia.	Increased societal resilience and reduced vulnerabilities among key audiences.	Public support to Georgia's EU integration remains high. Georgia remains committed to its declared path of EU integration and there are no dramatic shifts in foreign policy.

2.1.2. Methodology (max 5 pages)

As described above, activities under this Action are mainly grouped within the three objectives. While these objectives and subsequent activities are inter-linked, the logic behind such grouping is that activities under **objective 1** provide evidence base and accumulate knowledge on FIMI and disinformation in Georgia through research, monitoring and learning; activities under **objective 2** serve to expand this knowledge and understanding across sectors through the engagement of state and non-state actors, expanding the defender community for a whole-of-society response; whereas activities under **objective 3** serve the purpose of

carrying out effective, audience-centric strategic communications in order to build societal resilience to FIMI, disinformation and propaganda. Four organizations have partnered to deliver this Action with Civil Society Foundation (CSF, formerly Open Society Georgia Foundation) as a lead applicant, and Caucasus Research Resource Center – Georgia (CRRC), Grass GOALS Support Association (GGSA) and International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) as co-applicants. These organizations represent some of the leading CSOs in Georgia and boast high reputation, in-depth understanding of their fields and reliable methodologies behind their work. By joining the forces, the Applicants are creating unique opportunity to kick-start a new phase in the efforts to counter disinformation and FIMI in Georgia and embarking on a journey of cooperation, cohesion and synergies instead of competition, divergence and duplication of efforts. Being a locally led consortium and not organized around an entity from abroad, this Action provides an opportunity to develop locally led solutions that can become a nucleus of a broader, authentic cross- sectoral network and multi-stakeholder partnership eventually leading to a true whole-of-society approach and cooperation.

While all four applicant organizations will contribute to across various activities, each activity has its lead organization, which is responsible for its implementation according to their experience and capacities.

> GGSA will lead the development of the FIMI toolbox and joint repository (1.1), develop annual FIMI reports (1.7), develop the response framework (1.6), conduct media monitoring of select online and TV outlets affiliated with pro-Kremlin radical groups as well as some Russian channels (1.3). GGSA will also be in charge of building awareness on EU regulatory and policy solutions regarding FIMI and related fields (2.3).

> ISFED will conduct continuous social media monitoring (1.2), prepare quarterly social media monitoring reports (1.7), facilitate multi-stakeholder platform and quarterly stakeholder meetings (2.1), and will be in charge of the Annual FIMI conference (2.4).

> CRRC Georgia has a bespoke role of carrying out regular quantitative and qualitative research - surveys and focus group discussions (1.4).

> CSF will take a lead on continuous analysis of emerging trends (1.5), holding regular sectoral meetings (2.2), coordination of the work of the Strategic Communications Team (3.1), creation of strategic messaging framework (3.2), and delivering long-term and rapid-response strategic communications campaigns (3.3). In addition, CSF will be in charge of the FSTP. Furthermore, as a lead applicant, CSF will coordinate monitoring, evaluation and learning, compliance, financial audit and other administrative functions necessary to ensure a successful implementation of the Action.

There will be two distinct thematic working groups consisting of the Applicant organization representatives – a FIMI working group; and emerging trends analysis working group. While the organizations may choose to be represented by the same individuals in these working groups, their mode of operation will be different from each other. The **FIMI working group** will be a working group for achieving common conceptual framework and will be focused on developing the FIMI toolbox, bringing synergies across methodologies to align the partners, but especially GGSA and ISFED closer to each other in terms of monitoring framework, terms, data sets and data recording practices, etc. The FIMI working group will convene more frequently in the first few months and then at least monthly. **The emerging trends working group** will be more dynamic through weekly meetings, and constant sharing of key findings, emerging narratives and rapid alerts regarding new disinformation and propaganda, as well as the actors, tactics and behaviours. The emerging trends analysis working group will be led by the disinformation expert from the StratCom Team.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning: To ensure seamless management and coordination of the Action, the Applicant organizations will hold bi-weekly meetings to discuss progress on ongoing activities, plan upcoming work, raise any red flags and maintain a clear understanding of the progress of the Action. Every quarter, there will be an in-depth quarterly reflections and learnings session attended by key core team members from across all four organizations. The quarterly sessions will be a sort-of wash-up session used to pause and reflect on the program as a whole, assess whether it is on track, what are some of the successes, what can be improved, what are the learnings that can be incorporated in the Action moving forward. The key learnings will be written up, shared and reviewed in the next quarter to make sure that the setbacks have been addressed. Such quarterly sessions will also provide an opportunity to discuss any adjustments

or clarifications for an upcoming quarter, and agree on deadlines of the key deliverables. Each organization will maintain a Gantt chart of their activities, which will be shared across to ensure that all partners have a clear understanding of upcoming milestones and key deadlines.

An external evaluation of the Action will take place close to the end of the second year. While interventions within the FIMI and disinformation field are usually incredibly difficult to measure and while it may require longer-term period to show impact, we believe the Action will be able to showcase credible success stories, and early impact through outcome harvesting and other relevant methods. External evaluator(s) will be selected based on a competitive call and a pre-determined terms of reference agreed between the consortium partners taking into account specifics of each work stream, and reviewed by the EU Delegation as well to ensure that the final product is both compliant with relevant regulations but also that it can serve the purpose of providing useful learnings to the Contracting Authority.

While this action is not a continuation of any previous action, key activities are building up on the experience of relevant organizations' previous work and incorporate already attained best practices and lessons learned. Therefore, by joining forces, each organization brings with it unique expertise, experience and success stories. CSF's recent experience of successfully coordinating StratCom Team's work as well as the successes of the strategic communications activities carried out by the StratCom Team inform the design of this Action and the StratCom Team structure and arrangement. ISFED's pioneering experience of social media monitoring in the context of elections and political processes and its robust methodology informs the choice of regular monitoring to identify weekly emerging trends, as well as quarterly comprehensive reports to create recurrent comparable data documenting disinformation and propaganda through social media across the year. CRRC Georgia's experience of conducting hundreds of rounds of quantitative and qualitative research in Georgia, and more specifically, their experience as part of the USAID Information Integrity Program, regularly studying the societal vulnerabilities in Georgia, provides basis for the research component of the Action. GGSA also incorporates into the program their learnings from both fact-checking and work on policy and frameworks together with various European partners.

The consortium will be supported by high-level international experts from the EU through The European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN), which is recognized by the EU as the entity upholding and promoting the highest standards of fact-checking and media literacy to combat misinformation for the public benefit. EFCSN is a signatory of the EU's Code of Practice Against Disinformation and, in this capacity, is actively engaged in the policy discussion at the EU level to push effective policies against disinformation and monitor how major digital platforms are fulfilling their commitments under the code.

As part of this Action, the Applicants seek to coordinate, build on, amplify, and expand on other similar initiatives with shared objectives. One such key initiative is the USAID Information Integrity Program that is set to conclude in 2025. As members of the IIC and working closely with the USAID program, GGSA and ISFED are uniquely positioned to ensure complementarity and continuity. The multi-stakeholder platform will also invite the USAID Information Integrity Program to ensure sharing of research data, learnings, and insights accumulated since its launch in 2020. Where there might be similar activities (i.e. communication campaigns), we will seek to avoid overlaps, align strategies, ensure synergies, where possible. Similarly, CSF is part of a KAS-led consortium implementing an EU project United for Georgia's European Way, which will allow complementary approaches, insights, and visibility, particularly when it comes to FSTP. This action will also create a synergy with Horizon Europe project DE-CONSPIRATOR, which GGSA is a part of. DE-CONSPIRATOR aims to build a FIMI event repository and a database of FIMI TTPs to provide a knowledge base for the defender community to better understand the strategies and methods used by FIMI actors. It also aims to provide a more integrated analysis of policy, regulatory and corporate countermeasures against FIMI. Rather than focusing on a single area of response, DE-CONSPIRATOR analyses all potential countermeasure domains against FIMI exploring their synergistic value and synchronicity limitations to offer better policy trajectories for decision-makers.

Communication and visibility: With strategic communications being a key pillar of this Action, it is of utmost importance to ensure strategic communication about the Action and the EU financial support. CSF's communications team will be in charge of overseeing overall compliance to all relevant EU guidelines, while each organization will ensure compliance within the activities implemented by them. A detailed Communication, Visibility and Branding plan will be created at the start of the Action and submitted to the EU Delegation for approval. All publicly published material (Annual FIMI reports, quarterly social media

monitoring reports, key research findings reports, policy briefs) will be branded with EU logo and disclaimer as per the guidelines governing use of EU emblem in the context of EU programmes. All events, such as the annual FIMI conference, quarterly stakeholder meetings, regular sectoral meetings, will also ensure EU visibility, including through banners, all communication materials, press statements, etc. using relevant templates and complying to branding guidelines. All of such materials will be shared for approval through EU Digitool in advance. In addition, a representative from the EU Delegation will be invited to all public events. The Communication, Visibility, and Branding Plan will discuss in detail visibility within the strategic communication campaigns. In some cases, derogation might be proposed for specific products within the campaigns. Each such case will be agreed in advance with the relevant EU authorities. Nevertheless, in no circumstance will the Action conceal or hide the EU financial support behind the campaigns and any interested party will be able to clearly attribute specific campaign or its products to the Action. All four organizations will clearly indicate the Action and relevant EU funding on their websites. When communicating about the project, the Action will follow the pre-approved guidelines ensuring strategic communication of the EU policies and political priorities. All agreements on FSTP will include relevant guidance and requirements for visibility of the EU support. These requirements will also be pre-agreed with the EU Delegation. CSF will maintain oversight that the FSTP recipients follow these visibility requirements and will provide support and guidance, as required. All FSTP recipients' communication materials will also be collected and supplied to the EU Delegation.

2.1.3. Indicative action plan for implementing the action (max 4 pages)

The action plan will be drawn up using the following format:

	Half-year 1						Half-year 2						
Activity/Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Implementing body
Activity 1.1 – Development of a FIMI toolbox and a joint repository	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	GGSA, with the support from ISFED and CSF
Activity 1.2 – Continuous social media monitoring	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	ISFED
Activity 1.3 – Continuous media monitoring	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	GGSA, as well as CSF (StratCom Team)
Activity 1.4 – Regular research (surveys)		X		X		X		X		X		X	CRRC Georgia
Activity 1.4 – Regular research (focus groups)					X				X				CRRC Georgia
Activity 1.5 – Continuous analysis of emerging trends	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	CSF (StratCom Team), ISFED, GGSA
Activity 1.6 – Developing the response framework				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		GGSA
Activity 1.7 – Annual FIMI report										X	X	X	GGSA, with the support from ISFED and CSF
Activity 1.7 –quarterly monitoring reports		X			X			X			X		ISFED
Activity 2.1 –quarterly stakeholder meetings			X			X			X			X	ISFED, with the support from CSF and GGSA
Activity 2.2 – Regular sectoral meetings	X	X		X	X		X	X		X	X		CSF
Activity 2.3 – Building awareness on EU regulatory policy solutions					X	X	X	X				X	GGSA
Activity 2.4 – Annual FIMI Conference												X	ISFED
Activity 3.1 – Coordination of the work of the Strategic Communications Team	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	CSF

Activity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Implementing body
Activity 3.2 – Creating a strategic messaging framework				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	CSF (StrarCom Team)
Activity 3.3 – Long-term and rapid-response strategic communication campaigns	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	CSF (StrarCom Team)
FSTP – Call for Proposals				X	X						X	X	CSF
Quarterly learning sessions				X			X			X			CSF, with the engagement of CRRC Georgia, GGSA, ISFED
Developing Communication, visibility and branding plan	X	X	X										CSF

Year 2													
	Half-year 1						Half-year 2						
Activity/Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Implementing body
Activity 1.1 – Development of a FIMI toolbox and a joint repository	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				GGSA, with the support from ISFED and CSF
Activity 1.2 – Continuous social media monitoring	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	ISFED
Activity 1.3 – Continuous media monitoring	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	GGSA, as well as CSF (StratCom Team)
Activity 1.4 – Regular research (surveys)	X		X		X		X		X		X		CRRC Georgia
Activity 1.4 – Regular research (focus groups)		X				X							CRRC Georgia
Activity 1.5 – Continuous analysis of emerging trends	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	CSF (StratCom Team), ISFED, GGSA
Activity 1.6 – Developing the response framework	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		GGSA
Activity 1.7 – Annual FIMI report									X	X	X		GGSA, with the support from ISFED and CSF

Activity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Responsible
Activity 1.7 –quarterly monitoring reports		X			X			X			X		ISFED
Activity 2.1 –quarterly stakeholder meetings			X			X			X			X	ISFED, with the support from CSF and GGSA
Activity 2.2 – Regular sectoral meetings	X	X		X	X		X	X		X	X		CSF
Activity 2.3 – Building awareness on EU regulatory policy solutions	X	X	X				X	X	X				GGSA
Activity 2.4 – Annual FIMI Conference												X	ISFED
Activity 3.1 – Coordination of the work of the Strategic Communications Team	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	CSF
Activity 3.2 – Creating a strategic messaging framework	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X				CSF (StrarCom Team)
Activity 3.3 – Long-term and rapid-response strategic communication campaigns	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	CSF (StrarCom Team)
Quarterly learning sessions	X			X			X			X			CSF, with the engagement of CRRC Georgia, GGSA, ISFED
External Evaluation									X	X	X	X	CSF

2.1.4. Sustainability of the action (max 3 pages)

Each of the activity streams under relevant objectives of this Action is designed to achieve specific **expected impact** towards relevant target audiences.

Objective 1:

key target audiences: practitioners of FIMI and disinformation, researchers, monitors, fact-checkers, CSOs, IIC, media and investigative journalists.

Expected impact (technical):

- Increased collaboration among the professional community and practitioners of disinformation/FIMI research.
- More coherent and robust understanding of threats and vulnerabilities through the lenses of FIMI toolbox and harmonized with the EU methodology.

This impact is achieved through standardized, systematized, and shared knowledge around FIMI and disinformation, as well as in-depth understanding of the information environment through ongoing monitoring of FIMI/disinformation and research into audience vulnerabilities among the defender community and key practitioners. Initially, developing the FIMI toolbox, the joint repository and response framework, as well as alignment across monitoring, research, and regular exchange of findings, emerging trends and narratives, will result in increased collaboration and cohesiveness, as well as improved understanding through common FIMI toolbox framework between the consortium partner organizations. Over the next year, upon publishing the FIMI report, engaging broader defender community through sectoral meetings and the first annual FIMI conference, the impact will gradually expand across wider circle of FIMI and disinformation practitioners. As all key CSOs within the defender community are united under IIC, GGSA and ISFED will engage them in the process early on by holding relevant consultations, presentation of the FIMI toolbox and the response framework.

Objective 2:

key target audiences: relevant state authorities at the national and local level, representatives of the Strategic Communications units at various ministries, National Security Council, Information Centre on NATO and EU, Central Election Commission (CEC), Communications Commission (ComCom), as well as civil society more broadly, including grassroots organizations, activists, private sector, creative industry, tech community, individual influencers or content creators.

Expected impact:

- Strengthened partnerships and the whole-of-society response to FIMI, disinformation and hybrid threats in Georgia. (institutional, sectoral)
- Increased understanding of EU regulatory and policy measures on FIMI. (policy level)
- Strengthened cooperation between Georgian and EU stakeholders on FIMI. (policy level)

Achieving this impact will be possible through established multi-stakeholder partnerships between state and non-state actors, and various industries from civil society, media academia, private sector as well as working with specific sectoral partners through regular sectoral meetings, engaging them in campaigns and identifying opportunities for collaboration.

Objective 3:

key target audiences: Georgian public, specifically, vulnerable audiences, usually defined as segments of society most affected by disinformation, among them grassroots and marginalized communities across various regions of Georgia.

Expected impact (social):

- Increased societal resilience and reduced vulnerabilities among key audiences.

Achieved through effective audience-centric strategic communication that provides guardrails for decreasing impact of FIMI, disinformation and propaganda in Georgia. This will likely be the strongest impact of the Action, and the one that can also be approximately measured through the regular surveys and qualitative research conducted within this Action.

However, achieving this impact is conditional on several important assumptions and therefore could be significantly undermined by potential risks. Below is a **risk analysis matrix** with anticipated contingency actions.

Risk description	Type of Risk	Likelihood	Mitigation
Russian-style "foreign agent" law is adopted creating regulatory obstacles to EU funding for civil society and media	Political	High	Georgian CSOs, including the Applicants have unequivocally declared that they will not register as being under the "influence of foreign power" under any circumstance, thereby subjecting them to fines and legal penalties, which could potentially lead to them halting operations and deregistration. Should this risk materialize, it will likely be impossible to implement this Action.
There is increased pressure on CSOs, media, and individual employees	Physical	Average	Recent developments in the country saw intimidation and terror, including physical violence on CSO offices and prominent representatives of civil society and media. In order to safeguard staff and safe working environment, the Applicants will plan for relevant safety protocols and procedures, as well as alternative mode of operations through online and remote work.
Cyber-attack or breach of digital security	Cyber	Average	The Applicant organizations will review and compare their digital safety protocols and procedures, latest up-to-date antivirus software will be required for those staff members who access the joint repository, monitoring findings, and other sensitive data. A training on cyber hygiene and digital security will be provided. Communication will be mandatory through secure channels, with secure file sharing.
Lack of political will by government authorities to engage with CSOs, hostile attitude towards CSO actors	Political	High	Should there be an agency or institution that demonstrates willingness of cooperation in good faith, the Action will engage with that entity and adjust plans accordingly. However, if meaningful cooperation is unattainable, the activities aimed at the whole-of-society response will continue by engaging academia, grassroots organizations from regions, activists, private sector representatives and creative industry, tech community, influencers and content creators
Resistance from the defender community to FIMI toolbox and response framework	Partner relations	Low	The Action will engage key defender community members, such as IIC, fact-checkers, monitors and researchers early on to explain the project rationale. While working on the FIMI toolbox, GGSA and other partners will consult and engage relevant CSOs and representatives of the defender community to ensure information sharing and feedback

The Action is one of the first locally-owned initiatives that brings together leading Georgian CSOs to work together on countering FIMI and disinformation by pooling together the disparate monitoring, research and learning, create common toolbox and frameworks, engage various sectors for strengthening whole of society response and building societal resilience through audience-centric strategic communication campaigns. This Action builds up on successful initiatives by each of the Applicant organizations and aims to create new synergies for more impactful results. Therefore, in a way, this Action itself is a way to ensure sustainability of efforts such as civil society-led strategic communications campaigns and general strategic communications approach led by CSF/StratCom Team, ISFED's social media monitoring, GGSA' fact-checking and policy work, as well as CRRC Georgia's high quality research into vulnerabilities to disinformation.

In terms of **sustainability** beyond the duration of this Action, there are number of important elements in terms of deliverables, outputs and results that ensure strong sustainability of the Action and its impact. First and foremost, the FIMI toolbox, joint repository and response framework, as well as the strategic messaging framework, policy briefs and reports are the products that represent the legacy of the Action and warrant its continuity. Especially the FIMI toolbox, response and strategic messaging frameworks are going to be tangible live instruments that can continue to be useful for partner organizations together or individually in their follow-on activities.

The **institutional sustainability** achieved through the Action, both in terms of FIMI working group and emerging trends working group, also have a potential to remain sustainable in a more self-organized voluntary manner allowing cooperation between standalone projects of the organizations. Capacity building of various sectoral partners strengthens their institutional sustainability and creates opportunities for them to continue engaging in efforts aimed at countering FIMI and disinformation, whereas the multi-stakeholder platform while maybe less likely to convene without an ongoing project, can still remain sustainable as a network maintaining working relationships and creating synergies between specific entities.

On the policy level, while at this stage, we do not anticipate any significant policy change, such as improved legislation, the policy briefs and awareness about potential policy solutions, including awareness on the EU policy conversation lays the foundation for continued policy conversation and could lead to sustainability in terms of policy interventions even after the completion of the Action.

One of the strongest sustained impact of the Action will be increased societal resilience to FIMI and disinformation operations as a result of audience-centric strategic communication campaigns, both long-term and rapid-response. While, naturally, the impact of each campaign will vary, overall campaigning effort will strengthen resilience within the specific vulnerable communities. In this case, the Action will be able to estimate the campaign impact through the regular research using surveys and focus groups. However, when discussing campaigns, it should also be mentioned that long-term behaviour change and resilience building requires effective campaigning for a more extended medium-term period and significantly more resources.

Maintaining such campaigns for a longer-term period, as well as continued monitoring, research, reporting and other activities, including FIMI conference would not be sustained without additional financial resources. Therefore, **financial sustainability** will require further fundraising efforts by the Applicant organizations. However, their experience of working together, locally owned solutions, lessons learned and results achieved will provide a strong basis and advantage for obtaining further resources to continue operations under similar modality. Potentially, financial sustainability could be achieved through attracting funding from other donors to continue and expand working as a consortium. Alternatively, experience obtained through this Action will allow the Applicant organizations to design and fundraise for their own interventions that build up on specific aspects or work streams within this project.

One of the ways that extends the outcomes of the Action is working with the policymakers and professional community within the EU and sharing learnings from the FIMI toolbox, and response framework. Furthermore, the Action will share summary of quarterly learnings with the EU stakeholders, as those lessons learned could be useful not only to adjust and refine the Action and its activities, but could potentially provide useful insights for the EU for future Actions in Georgia or other parts of the world.

CSF and the StratCom Team will regularly share key insights from research, monitoring, as well as learnings about the impact of FIMI incidents, disinformation operations, or strategic communications campaigns through regular coordination meetings that take place at CSF beyond this Action. Those learnings can then be applied to other similar interventions.