



The Asia Foundation

Terms of Reference

Consultants to conduct a cybersecurity ecosystem mapping and policy analysis for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and household-based businesses in Vietnam

April 2025

BACKGROUND

Vietnam is undergoing rapid digital transformation, with government policies emphasizing digitalization as a key pillar for economic and social development. Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) increasingly rely on digital tools for growth, especially post-COVID-19. However, as digital adoption rises, so do cybersecurity risks. According to the Vietnam National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), in 2023, Vietnam recorded 13,900 cyber-attacks, a 9.5% increase from 2022. The Department of Information Security reported a 64.78% increase in online fraud in the first half of 2023 compared to the same period and a 37.82% increase compared to the last six months of 2022.

Despite the alarming statistics, cybersecurity awareness among Vietnamese businesses remains inconsistent and limited. Many businesses do not prioritize cybersecurity due to a lack of awareness and resources, leaving them vulnerable to cyber threats. In 2022, the Centre for Cyber Security Research and Innovation (CCSRI) found that 13% of SMEs considered staff awareness of information security unimportant, while 44% acknowledged its importance. This highlights a significant gap in the understanding and prioritization of cybersecurity measures among MSMEs. Furthermore, there is a lack of support for MSMEs in Vietnam regarding cybersecurity awareness and incident response. This gap in support and knowledge hinders their ability to effectively manage and mitigate cybersecurity risks, ultimately impacting their growth and resilience in the digital economy.

Investing in cybersecurity is not just a necessity but a strategic enabler for the digital resilience of MSMEs in Vietnam. As the role of MSMEs in economic growth and digital transformation expands, these businesses urgently need robust protections on digital trade platforms to thrive. Unfortunately, current cybersecurity policies lack clear implementation strategies, leaving businesses vulnerable to cyber threats. Additionally, there is a lack of collaboration among relevant stakeholders, such as the government, service providers, and academia, in creating a more secure and supportive environment for MSMEs. A comprehensive ecosystem mapping and policy analysis is needed to identify these gaps and provide actionable insights, helping MSMEs improve their capacity as well as enhancing the ecosystem supporting MSMEs to adapt, stay cyber-safe, and develop in the digital economy.

In response to above-mentioned issues, The Asia Foundation seeks a qualified consultant team to conduct an ecosystem mapping and policy assessment on cybersecurity for MSMEs and

household-based businesses in Vietnam, with more focus on those owned/led by women. This initiative is under the APAC Cybersecurity Fund (ACF) program, funded by Google.org and executed by The Asia Foundation in 12 countries within the Asia and the Pacific region, including Vietnam. The Program aims to strengthen the region's cybersecurity ecosystem by equipping micro and small businesses, nonprofits, and social enterprises with skills to navigate the Internet safely and confidently. Entrepreneurs skilled at identifying and mitigating cyberattacks will bolster the region's digital economy growth. The project, through training, works to improve the targeted sectors' awareness and knowledge of basic cyber hygiene. In Vietnam, the overall goal of the project is to support development and growth of small and growing businesses (SGBs)¹, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)², nonprofits and social enterprises (SEs)³, with more priority given to women-led/owned ones, to effectively leverage digital economy in the country.

OBJECTIVE OF THIS CONSULTANCY

The general objective of the consultancy is to conduct an ecosystem mapping and policy analysis that supports MSMEs and household-based enterprises, with more focus on those owned/led by women, in addressing their cybersecurity challenges and thriving in the digital economy. This assignment focuses on aligning policy discussions and actions with the needs of MSMEs and household-based businesses while ensuring relevance to broader economic and digital resilience goals.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research areas and questions include:

- 1) **Key Stakeholders & Ecosystem:** Who are the key stakeholders (e.g., government agencies, private sector industry, social organizations, the academia, service providers, financial institutions/fintech players) involved in cybersecurity support for MSMEs and household-based businesses in Vietnam? What are the relationships or interdependencies between them?
- 2) **Cybersecurity Challenges:** What are the biggest cybersecurity challenges faced by MSMEs and household-based enterprises in Vietnam? How do these challenges differ for women-owned/led businesses and vary across different business sectors?
- 3) **Policy & Regulatory Environment:** What government policies and national strategies on cybersecurity currently exist to support MSMEs and household-based businesses in Vietnam? What are the gaps or areas for improvement in policy implementation and enforcement? Are there emerging policy initiatives that could enhance MSME cybersecurity in the next 3-5 years?

¹ Small and growing businesses (SGBs): household-based, registered or unregistered, mainly from rural and remote low-income groups and various sectors (agriculture, fishery, trade, handicraft, services...)

² Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs): registered enterprises, from 10 employees, mostly members of Business associations/clubs, diversified in sectors.

³ Social enterprises and non-profits: mostly registered start-ups and young enterprises

- 4) **Role of Private Sector:** How does the private sector support MSMEs and household-based businesses in cybersecurity (e.g., tools, services, training) in Vietnam? What gaps exist in this support?
- 5) **Role of social organizations and academia:** What role does social organizations (e.g., business associations, professional social organizations/associations) and the academia play in cybersecurity awareness and capacity building for these target groups? Are there any community-led cybersecurity initiatives focused on MSMEs and household-based businesses?
- 6) **Regional & International Collaboration:** What lessons or best practices from other countries could be adapted to Vietnam's context? What opportunities exist for regional collaboration to enhance MSME cybersecurity?
- 7) **Capacity Building & Skilling:** What training or skilling initiatives exist for MSMEs and household-based businesses on cybersecurity? How can they be better supported in terms of cybersecurity upskilling?
- 8) **Financial & Technical Support:** Are MSMEs and household-based businesses able to access affordable cybersecurity tools and services? What technical assistance (e.g., helplines, advisory services) is available to them?
- 9) **Measurement & Impact:** What mechanisms exist for these target groups to provide feedback on cybersecurity challenges? Are there benchmarks or case studies demonstrating successful cybersecurity adoption among them?

SCOPE OF WORK

The Asia Foundation is seeking a team of highly-qualified consultants to design and conduct a comprehensive study, addressing the above research questions. The Consultants will be responsible for executing the following key tasks:

- 1) **Desk research of cybersecurity landscape and gaps**
 - Analyze the cybersecurity policy landscape within Vietnam, identifying key policies, frameworks, and gaps relevant to MSMEs and household-based businesses in Vietnam, with a focus on those owned/led by women. This will involve reviewing relevant literature, national strategies, regulatory documents, and best practices from other jurisdictions.
- 2) **Ecosystem Mapping of MSME support**
 - Conduct a thorough mapping of the cybersecurity support ecosystem for MSMEs and household-based businesses in Vietnam, with a particular focus on those owned/led by women. This mapping should encompass existing stakeholders, structures, initiatives, and resources, while analyzing the relationships and interactions among stakeholders to understand their roles, influence, and contributions to the overall cybersecurity framework and capability strengthening for these target groups.
 - Identify and document gaps and areas for improvement, as well as potential opportunities for collaboration and enhancement.

3) Country-level policy analysis and report

- Conduct interviews with key informants to gather additional insights that may not be captured through the desk research. This will help in understanding the practical implications of existing policies and identifying gaps.
- Explore policy implications and propose actions and recommendations to address gaps and foster a supportive environment for MSMEs and household-based businesses in Vietnam.
- Develop the content for a policy brief that incorporates key study findings and recommendations.

4) Presentation and/or validation of the study findings

- Provide a debriefing or/and make a presentation of the study findings at a stakeholder workshop/dialogue, upon the request of The Asia Foundation.

METHODOLOGY

The Consultants will develop detailed methodologies, which will be agreed upon by the Foundation for the approved proposal outline in the Expected Deliverables. The study is expected to employ mixed-method approach to ensure a comprehensive analysis that addresses the above study questions. The following approaches and tools are suggested:

- **Desk review:** Conduct a review of existing literature, policies, national strategies and other relevant documents related to the topic;
- **Stakeholder interviews:** Carry out in-depth interviews and/or focus group discussions with key informants and stakeholders (e.g., government officials, private sector representatives, social organizations, academia, target MSMEs and household-based businesses) to gain deeper insights into specific issues or gaps identified during desk research. The number of interviews and a list of interviewed informants/stakeholders will be discussed and agreed upon with the Foundation later.
- **Case studies and comparative analysis:** Identify and analyze case studies and best practices of successful cybersecurity initiatives in Vietnam. Benchmark these against best practices from similar contexts to identify opportunities and formulate recommendations.
- **Stakeholder roundtable/workshop:** The timing of the stakeholder roundtable/workshop will be proposed by the research team, depending on whether it should be organized before or after the finalization of the study report. The purpose of the event could be either to validate findings and gather additional inputs from stakeholders or to disseminate the findings and the report. This event will be organized by a local institution/organization appointed by the Foundation.

The Asia Foundation

#5 floor, Lakeside Green building, 33 Truc Bach,
Hanoi, Vietnam

www.asiafoundation.org

TASK SCHEDULE AND EXPECTED DELIVERABLES

This Consultancy is scheduled from April – November 2025. The total time allocated for the assignment is up to 60-70 days. The Consultancy is expected to produce the following main deliverables:

Tasks	Expected deliverables/outputs	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Sep-25	Oct-25	Nov-25
Signing of the contract with the consultant team	Contract with a consultant team signed	Last week of April							
Finalization and agreement on the detailed proposal	Inception report: including research plan, detailed methodology, timeline, and tentative Report outline (<i>either in English or Vietnamese</i>)		1st – 2nd week of May						
Desk research, including collection of secondary information/data and ecosystem mapping	Draft of the desk research and ecosystem mapping report: Provide a comprehensive literature review of available documents and policies related to the study (<i>in English</i>)		3rd week of May – 1st week of June						
Conduct stakeholder interviews	Interviews with relevant stakeholders conducted: all databases of the study, including summary of the interviews/focus group discussions, to The Asia Foundation (<i>in Vietnamese</i>)			2nd – last week of June					
Development of policy analysis research report	Draft of the policy analysis research report: Present a comprehensive analysis, policy recommendations, and actionable insights (<i>in English</i>)				1st – last week of July				
Consolidation and finalization of the country-level report and development of a policy brief	Draft of the consolidated country-level research report: consolidate from two above reports including ecosystem mapping and policy research reports (<i>in English</i>) Draft of the policy brief developed: Develop content for a concise policy brief for policymakers, summarizing key findings and recommendations (<i>in English</i>)					1st – Last week of August			

The Asia Foundation

#5 floor, Lakeside Green building, 33 Truc Bach,
Hanoi, Vietnam

www.asiafoundation.org

Tasks	Expected deliverables/outputs	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25	Jul-25	Aug-25	Sep-25	Oct-25	Nov-25
Finalization of the country-level report and the policy brief	The country-level research report finalized and formatted (<i>in both English and Vietnamese</i>) The policy brief finalized and formatted (<i>in both English and Vietnamese</i>)								
Presentation on the study findings at the stakeholder roundtable/workshop	Study findings presented/validated at the stakeholder roundtable/workshop: <i>*Timing of the stakeholder roundtable can be changed either before or after finalization of the study report</i>								

SCHEDULE OF PAYMENT

Payment will be realized based on days worked. The consultant fee is negotiable and will be based on the qualifications of the Consultants and the Foundation's cost norm. The total man days thus will be adjusted accordingly to the consultant fee and availability of the total budget for this assignment. Payments will be made in installments based upon satisfactory completion of the agreed deliverables.

QUALIFICATIONS/REQUIREMENTS

Given the scope of work mentioned above, an interdisciplinary research team should be established, comprising at least one expert on cybersecurity. The specific qualifications required are as follows:

- Master's or Ph.D. in economics, public policy, business administration, social sciences, development studies, computer science, or a related field;
- Minimum of 12-15 years of proven experience in conducting related research, with a preference for experience in high-quality review and analysis of legal documents and policies;
- At least 10 years of hands-on experience in cybersecurity, with a proven track record (for the Cybersecurity expert);
- Knowledge and experience in working with or supporting MSMEs, particularly those owned/led by women, would be an advantage;
- Previous experience in working within a multidisciplinary research team and engaging with policymakers is preferred;
- Strong communication and presentation skills;
- Excellent report writing skills in English;
- Commitment to meeting deadlines.

APPLICATION SUBMISSION

Interested institutions/consultant teams are requested to submit a 2 to 3-page expression of interest (EOI) in English together with CVs of team members. The EOI should clearly describe the candidates' understanding of the tasks, outline your approach, organizational/personal profile, skills and experiences relevant to the tasks as well as proposed quotation/budget.

Note that during the selection process, The Asia Foundation may ask the short-listed candidates to submit their previous work as one of the considerations for making the final selection decision.

Please submit via email to:

Ms. Tran Giang Linh – Associate Program Specialist

Email: linh.tran@asiafoundation.org

Title: [Cybersecurity & MSMEs ecosystem mapping and policy research](#)

Closing time for applications is **5.00 PM (Hanoi time, GMT+7) on April 18, 2025.** Please note that only short-listed candidates will be contacted for interview.