

TERMS OF REFERENCE

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| Job Title: | National consultant to provide analytical support for the establishment of a Youth-centered Skills Observatory and Experimentation Lab |
| Type of Contract: | IC (Individual contract) |
| Duty Station: | Chisinau, Moldova and home based |
| Expected workload: | by deliverables |
| Duration: | November 2016 – March 2017 |

BACKGROUND

Unemployment is one of the most pressing socio-economic issues in the Republic of Moldova. The national labor market is a complex system that is witnessing dramatic challenges, related to a low number of vacancies compared to the existing demand in jobs on the market, significant skills mismatch, low labor productivity, regional disparities, discriminatory practices faced by many vulnerable groups etc. Public employment service modernization is slow and available public resources are too scarce and often spent inefficiently. Against such a background, the Government of the Republic of Moldova, with the support of UNDP Moldova and other development partners, is drafting the new Employment Strategy that is trying to put employment on top of the national development agenda. At the same time, pilot projects and policy experiments could support incremental progress in implementing this new strategy, by helping to identify cost-efficient solutions through a rigorous impact assessment, and upscaling/replicating the most successful ones.

The unemployment rate fluctuated over the last years and increased in 2015 to 4.9%, compared to 3.9% (2014). In 2015, the distribution of economically active population and employed population by sex was rather balanced: 50.5% for men and 49.5% for women for active population and 50.2% for men and 49.8% for women for employed persons. Overall, activity and employment rates for men was slightly higher compared to women, i.e. 45,1% and 42,3%, compared to same indicators for women – 39,9% and 38,4% respectively.

In Moldova, unemployment is a widespread phenomenon for youth aged 15-24 y. In 2015 the unemployment and employment rates for youth stood at 12.8% and 18.2% respectively. This is partly explained by the lack of skills, opportunities and resources that youth have to enter labor market, or an amalgam of all three aspects. The core barriers for youth to enter labor market are: lack of skills (about 40% of respondents), lack of

opportunities (app. 30%) and lack of resources (about 30%), based on the analysis of the micronarratives collected from youth in the period November 2015 – March 2016. Usually employers require at least some work experience (at least one year) and this impedes many recent graduates to enter labor market, under the conditions when internship programs or employment guarantee schemes are almost inexistent and not promoted. Low wages also discourage youth to apply to existent jobs on labor market and encourage them to migrate for work abroad. Employment and unemployment rates for women aged 15-24 y.o. were 15.5% and 13.5% (2015). Unemployment rate for this specific group is rising.

NEETs group (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) is rather large, accounting for about 30.8% (2015) in the total youth population. Women in NEETs prevail and the problem is due to lack of flexible arrangements in potential work places, household obligations (i.e. non-paid work, lack of facilities and daycare services, lack of opportunities and, in some reported cases, lack of resources to access public employment promotion and career orientation services.

The mismatch in skills, both due to a gap between supply and demand, and to underutilization of existing skills, is one important impediment for youth employment. Coupled with low wages for entry-level positions and discriminatory practices (young women in particular), this causes youth exclusion and other social issues.

In such context, UNDP is continuing the collection of the micronarratives on unemployment to gather small data on the perceptions of unemployed in order to better analyze the current situation on the labor market and propose low-cost and safe-to-fail experiments and solutions to reverse the current trend. Micronarratives are essentially a new method of collecting and analyzing small data and perceptions of individuals of different demographic backgrounds. Collected data is then analyzed with an open source application to identify patterns, trends and non-statistical correlations.

The Observatory is intended to be more than the traditional research and projections unit. It will include the data collection and analysis functionality, coupled with an experimentation component. The main challenges that arise from the research efforts will be consulted with key stakeholders and solutions generated and transformed into policy experiments. If an experiment proves efficient and brings positive effects on the employability of youth, UNDP and main stakeholders will further mobilize resources for up-scale.

The piloting of a skills observatory focused on youth can help local and central authorities to improve the quality of the services, streamline youth employability, learn how to experiment and achieve better requests with the austere current and projected budget. It will analyse available evidence and data, as well as identify new ways of collecting information about current needs on the job market, to inform and support a policy dialogue between authorities, the private sector and civil society, and deliver innovative solutions to the skills mismatch and youth unemployment problems. Located initially within the UNDP premises and being subject to relocation to the most suitable local counterpart, it will rely on regional best practices and become a participatory analytic and experimentation facility that would draw a real, gender-disaggregated picture of skills mismatch and underutilization.

The Observatory will serve as an entry point for social innovation through low cost experimentation: a venue for experimenting with innovative safe-to-fail solutions to tackle mismatch and misalignment and connecting the private sector to solving the issue. The effort is scalable both in terms of extension to other target groups (e.g. elderly, etc.), and serving as a model for sustained, evidence-based dialogue involving state bodies, public, private sector and academia in other areas. The observatory fits in the targets set in the National Employment Strategy of Moldova (2016-2020), National Development Strategy Moldova 2020 and is a direct contribution to the achievement of the SDGs, in particular 8 and 10, UNDP Strategic Plan, Youth Strategy, etc.

The observatory relies on best practices in the region, like Macedonia, Turkey and similar, with the focus that fits the complexity of the local labour market.

Gender aspects are embedded into the concept of the observatory, as gender-disaggregated data will be used for the development of the analytical papers and experiments, with at least 15% of the budget allocated to address gender concerns. Young women and men will be engaged in the co-design of the interventions via an online platform and through the collection and analysis of micronarratives, etc.

Micronarratives will be collected based on the already available experience of running the first such experiment in the period November 2015 – March 2016. To run micronarratives, UNDP will crowdsource from youth interested to participate. The anticipated cost of collecting micronarratives is low to very low; time needed to collect sufficiently big micronarratives set is up to 3-4 months per iteration of consolidated effort.

A Randomized Controlled Trial will be conducted on policy interventions to support the skilled unemployed, youth in particular, to measure the impact of the experiments on challenges such as speed-to-market, overall employability and similar. The design of the RCT will be performed by the project with external support of a specialized think-tank or team of individual experts. The RCT will be conducted in partnership with the National Employment Service and its territorial antennae.

Management arrangements. The observatory will be coordinated by the Project manager, one officer, at least two national teams of experts (could be external consultants, PhD or Master students, or similar) covering data collection/analysis and experimentation, volunteers and support staff. Specific TORs will be developed by the coordinator. It is envisaged that the observatory and experimentation unit will involve as many experienced volunteers, experts and local practitioners representing main stakeholders as possible, thus raising the chances for learning and knowledge sharing among key stakeholders. Local PhD students and practitioners conducting research in the field of skills, youth unemployment and employment promotion will be invited to apply on a competitive basis and then selected for specific research initiatives. An Advisory Board will be established, involving all interested stakeholders and will represent the instrument through which all partners will have equal chances to contribute and learn. Key stakeholders to be involved are private sector companies, local academia, independent think-tanks, associations, line ministries, relevant public agencies, and youth and diaspora organizations and similar. The Board will also decide on the up-scaling or transformation of the observatory, depending on the results achieved in the first 12 months, available resources, partnerships and policies.

SCOPE OF WORK AND EXPECTED OUTPUT

UNDP is looking for a local consultant with solid experience in policy analysis and development in the field of labor market and employment of various vulnerable groups of population, in particular youth. The scope of the assignment is to support the Skills Observatory and Experimentation Lab with the analysis of the available dataset created by the project through collection of the micronarratives, analysis of the micronarratives, development of the list of possible experiments and solutions for youth employment and consultation of the proposed solutions with key stakeholders. The analysis of the small data, coupled with analysis of the available statistical data and recent studies, will permit to frame the analytical context in which the Observatory will operate and coordinate the experimentation. Such analysis will be presented in the first position paper on youth unemployment and employment promotion implementable solutions, widely consulted with relevant stakeholders and presented as a study case on the occasion of the first Advisory Board of the observatory, convening all relevant stakeholders, donors, private sector companies, local academia and think-tanks.

The specific objectives of the assignment are:

1. Provide analysis of the current database of micronarratives/small data in the context of the current legislative framework in the field of youth employment and of the available official statistics in youth unemployment/employment
2. Develop the first position paper on youth unemployment and employment promotion with clear mentioning of possible and implementable experiments and solutions that could be generated after the thorough analysis of the dataset and analysis of the statistical data
3. Consult the solutions with the key national stakeholders, aiming at prioritizing the proposed experiments and solutions, within a national workshop on youth employment promotion
4. Support with the creation and running of the first Advisory Board of the Youth-skilled Observatory and experimentation Lab, aiming at the creation of a robust consultative mechanism for the project to consult the content of the future analytical work, experiments and employment promotion solutions

To achieve these specific objectives, the consultant will:

1. Get access and analyze the current dynamic set of micronarratives, develop specific research questions and provide analysis along possible research questions, coupled with analysis of the available statistical and administrative data. The analysis will be part of the first national position paper on youth skills and employment promotion. It will also include specific experiments and implementable solutions to support youth employment, as well as concrete policy recommendations that would either led to other possible experiments/solutions in the future or ease the implementation of the already proposed ones.
2. Organize a national validation workshop to discuss the proposed experiments and implementable solutions and update the Position paper accordingly;
3. Support the project with the establishment and organization of the extended Advisory Board for the Youth-centered skills observatory and experimentation lab; such Board shall consist of representatives of key stakeholders, including local academia, private sector, line ministries, NGOs and local think-tanks, relevant donors and similar. In this respect, consultant will draft the list of invitees, draft and consult the terms of references for the members of the Advisory Board, will collect feedback from the prospective members of the advisory board on the proposed terms of references, including frequency of the meetings, etc.

KEY EXPECTED DELIVERABLES

Specific deliverables to be provided by the consultant:

| Deliverable(s) | Deadline |
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| 1. Provide analysis of the micronarratives database and of the available statistical data on youth un/employment and develop draft of the Position paper on youth un/employment | By 30 November 2016 |
| 2. Develop the list of possible and implementable experiments and practical small-scale experiments for youth employment | By 30 November 2016 |

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| 3. Organize the national workshop on youth skills and employment promotion and consult the experiments/solutions proposed in the Position paper | By mid-December 2016 |
| 4. Support the organization of the first Advisory Board of the Youth-centered skills observatory and experimentation lab | By March 2017 |

ORGANIZATIONAL SETTING

The Service provider will work under the direct supervision of the UNDP Project Manager. Technical assistance and logistical support to the consultant will be provided in the framework of the UNDP Policy analysis, Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Employment Promotion Projects Implementing Unit (PIU) of UNDP Moldova.

UNDP will provide all the needed support in terms of local partnerships and access to relevant databases.

SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE REQUIRED

Academic Qualification

- Advanced degree (PhD or Master Degree) in Development/Labor Economics, Statistics, Sociology, Social Assistance or other relevant fields;

Experience

- At least 5 years of relevant policy analysis and research experience in the field of labor market, youth employment, proved by relevant research paper and other analytical products

Competencies

- In-depth knowledge of the national labor market in the Republic of Moldova or EU systems is a strong advantage;
- Knowledge of the regional conditions on the labor markets, dynamics of unemployment, employment promotion measures is a strong advantage;
- Strong analytical, drafting and training skills;
- Demonstrated interpersonal and diplomatic skills;
- Proven commitment to the core values of the United Nations, in particular, respecting differences of culture, gender, religion, ethnicity, nationality, language, age, HIV status, disability, and sexual orientation, or other status.

Language requirements

- Fluency in English is mandatory. Knowledge of Russian and/or Romanian is an advantage.

UNDP Moldova is committed to workforce diversity. Women, persons with disabilities, Roma and other ethnic or religious minorities, persons living with HIV, as well as refugees and other non-citizens legally entitled to work in the Republic of Moldova, are equally encouraged to apply.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Contractor's performance will be evaluated against timeliness, responsibility, initiative, communication, accuracy, and overall quality of the delivered services/goods.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Payments will be disbursed in instalments, upon submission and approval of deliverables, and certification by UNDP Moldova Project Manager that the services have been satisfactorily performed.