

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Individual consultant

Identification of the profile of children, adolescents and youth who are out-of-school, at risk of dropping out or of leaving the school early and of the bottlenecks for school participation, improving data collection to ensure monitoring of the situation, revision of the instructions, guidelines and policy documents on children out of school and proposal of activities to reduce the rate of early school leaving.

Timeline: September 2020 – January 2021

1. BACKGROUND

At global level, about 258 million children and youth are out of school for the school year that ended in 2018. The total included 59 million children of primary school age, 62 million of lower secondary school age and 138 million of upper secondary age¹.

Despite sizeable reductions over the past 10 years, out-of-school children (OOSC) face deep structural inequalities and disparities linked to income-poverty, exposure to child labour, conflict and natural disasters, residence area, geographic sub-national regions, gender, HIV and AIDS, disability, ethnicity, language, religion, and caste that represent major barriers to schooling and put even those countries able to improve access to and completion of education at risk of not achieving the targets set by the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

The COVID-19 pandemic amplifies this risk as it has so far had an unprecedented impact on all levels of education and learning around the world. In April 2020 the 193 country-wide closures affected 1,578,333,700 learners at pre-primary, primary, lower-secondary, and upper-secondary levels of education, which constitutes 90.1% of total enrolled learners. For many students the academic year finished in early March'20.² The immediate and long-term consequences of the pandemic on education are yet to be factually assessed, however, it already clear that the COVID-19 pandemic raised several potential risks related to continuity of learning after the crisis, including the risk of high absenteeism, drop-out and early leaving of the education system.

In promoting the reform of the education sector, the Republic of Moldova has made efforts to bring all children to school. In 2013-2014, guided by the UNICEF Regional Office for

¹ <http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/out-school-children-and-youth>

² <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

CEECIS and based on the Conceptual and Methodological Framework (CMF)³ for the **Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children** launched by UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) in 2010, a study was undertaken on the profile of children out of school in Moldova. Based on the study findings, in 2015, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova approved the guidelines and a plan of action on prevention and addressing school drop-out and absenteeism⁴. The guidelines came with definitions of school drop-out, absenteeism, children at risk of drop-out and stipulate the responsibilities of schools and local education authorities regarding the collection of data on drop-out and absenteeism and development of individual and institutional plans for preventing and addressing school drop-out and absenteeism.

However, in 2018/2019 school year, in Moldova, 10% of primary school age children and 15% of lower secondary school age children were out of school. Only 60% of adolescent of 16-18 years old are enrolled in non-compulsory upper secondary level education.⁵ The PISA 2018 report for Moldova shows that the results of 15 year-old students could be improved if the absenteeism rate is reduced.⁶

The Government of the Republic of Moldova Action Plan for 2020-2023 (approved by Government Decision No 636 of 11.12.2019), set an objective under the Education Chapter: 7.1. Reduce the rate of early dropout rate from education by conducting an analysis in order to adjust the normative framework.⁷ This objective is in line with the results framework of the Joint Government of the Republic of Moldova and UNICEF Country Programme Document for 2018-2022. Concrete activities for the realisation of the above-mentioned objective are included in the Joint Rolling Work Plan for 2020-2021 signed between the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research and UNICEF.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic the issues of children out-of-school, dropout and absenteeism need even more attention than before.

Under the circumstances as countries strive to reopen schools after COVID-19 pandemic in the short and medium term and achieve universal primary and secondary education by 2030 in the long term, it is important to be able to better identify who the children, adolescents and youth out of school or are at risk of dropping out are, where they live and the barriers they face so that the right policies are developed to ensure they participate in education.

³ The CMF introduces a new model for analyzing the problem of OOSC through "Five Dimensions of Exclusion (5DE)" that capture excluded children from pre-primary to lower secondary school age and across a wide range and multiple layers of disparities and various degrees of exposure to education. It also supports a more systematic linkage and leveraging between three main components: 1) **Profiles** of excluded children capturing the complexity of the problem of OOSC in terms of magnitude, inequalities and multiple disparities around the Five Dimensions of Exclusion; 2) **Barriers and bottlenecks** to clarify the dynamic and causal processes related to the Five Dimensions of Exclusion; 3) **Policies and strategies** to address the barriers and bottlenecks related to the Five Dimensions of Exclusion within education and beyond (looking at social protection systems).

⁴ https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/ordin559_din_12.06.2015_prevenirea_abandon_scolar.pdf

⁵ https://statistica.gov.md/public/files/publicatii_electronice/Educatia/Educatie_2019.pdf; p.14

⁶ http://aee.edu.md/sites/default/files/raport_pisa2018.pdf

⁷ https://gov.md/sites/default/files/document/attachments/pag_2020-2023_eng_0.pdf

2. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the consultancy is to support the Government of the Republic of Moldova in reducing the rate of early dropout rate from education and the number of out-of-school children, by:

- improving the statistical information, analysis and monitoring regarding out-of-school children and early school leavers;
- identifying bottlenecks and analyzing existing interventions related to enhanced school participation;
- informing policies and strategies for accelerating and up-scaling enrolment and sustaining attendance rates and continuation of studies for the excluded and marginalized.

Objectives and key tasks

More specifically the consultancy aims at providing technical guidance and support to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research (MECR) of the Republic of Moldova and the National Bureau of Statistics for the identification and development of the profiles of children, adolescents and youth who are out-of-school, do not engage beyond compulsory education, or are at risk of dropping out or of leaving the school early that reflect the multiple deprivations and disparities they face in relation to education. Additionally, the consultancy will result in recommendations of mechanisms for monitoring the situation in the area, revision of the instructions, guidelines and policy documents and proposal of activities on reduction of the rate of early school leaving. More specifically, the selected consultant will pursue the following objectives and tasks:

1. Carry out an analysis of official education statistics of NBS and administrative data from MECR/EMIS to improve data collection on OOSC, absenteeism, drop-out and early school leaving. Identify data gaps and make recommendations for improved monitoring of out-of-school children.
2. Carry out an analysis and develop the profile of children and adolescents who have high rates of absenteeism, dropout, are at risk of school dropout, leave the education system early and do not enroll beyond compulsory education (beyond grade IX). Describe the main reasons for their exclusion from education.
3. Identify bottlenecks and analyse the existing interventions related to enhanced school participation in Moldova.
4. Describe the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on school attendance and out-of-school numbers and document measures that the country has implemented to ensure that teaching and learning are not interrupted while schools are closed because of the pandemic.
5. Revise the guidelines, normative framework, instruction and activities on prevention and addressing early school leaving, absenteeism and drop-out in general education.
6. Development of a plan of action to address the issue of OOSC, absenteeism, school drop-out and early school leaving, including data collection and monitoring of the situation to ensure the data are regularly collected and disaggregated by sex, age, area etc.)

3. ACTIVITIES AND TASKS

- Review the mechanism for collection of data and identify areas for improving data collection on OOSC, absenteeism, drop-out and early school leaving.
- Provide recommendations for the development of a monitoring system based on an improved data gathering process that is regular, transparent and follows the same methodology for children and adolescents out of school and those at risk of non-returning to school, dropping out or of leaving school early with definitions, indicators – that will cover a wide range of dropout predictors, including non-engagement in distance or blended learning, mental health and psychosocial support risks, protection risks and overall socio-emotional risks due to the COVID-19 crisis – and benchmarks in line with international, mainly European standards, and contextualized to the country situation.
- Provide technical assistance for measuring selected indicators of students' school drop-out and early school leaving.
- Based on the existing methodological frameworks, research and on the country context and situation, develop a methodology, collect the data and draft data analysis report that profiles the OOSC in Moldova and supports MECR to identify priority groups of children and adolescents who miss school, drop-out of school or are at risk of dropping out or of early school leaving.
- Develop a methodology at the school and community levels for the identification of children at risk of non-returning to school after the COVID-19 pandemic or summer vacation or of dropping out of school and out of school children and adolescents.
- Develop an 'early warning system' based on the best international practices contextualized to the country situation.
- Propose a few low-cost, sustainable school and community-based interventions for children at risk of drop-out or early school leaving (based on the analyses of international, mainly European good practices) in order to reduce drop-out and early school leaving.
- Support the government's efforts to develop an Action Plan to reduce the numbers of OOSC, drop-out and early school leaving.

*While the tasks listed are the primary tasks, the consultant is expected to also assist with other related tasks, even if not stated explicitly on this list.

4. WORKING ARRANGEMENTS AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

All activities and deliverables undertaken by the consultant shall be discussed and planned in consultation with UNICEF and will only be executed following approval from UNICEF. The consultant is expected to deliver each component of the work-plan electronically (in Word format) in **English and Romanian**. At each stage, deliverables shall be sent to UNICEF Education Specialist by email. The consultant will closely collaborate with MECR and other relevant state and non-state institutions and coordination groups.

5. ACTIVITIES, DELIVERABLES AND TIMELINE

	Activity	Deliverable	Estimated timeframe*
1.	Prepare inception report with workplan for the assignment	Inception report including Workplan consulted and agreed with UNICEF	3 working days – by mid-September 2020
2.	<p>Carry out an analysis on the profile of children and adolescents who have high rates of absenteeism, dropout, are at risk of school drop and early school leaving.</p> <p>Identify bottlenecks and analyse the existing interventions related to enhanced school participation in Moldova.</p> <p>Describe the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on school attendance and out-of-school numbers and document measures that the country has implemented to ensure that teaching and learning are not interrupted while schools are closed because of the pandemic.</p>	<p>Methodology for research on profiles of OOSC, including definitions of OOSC, drop-out, risk of drop-out, early school leaving etc.</p> <p>Report on the profile of children and adolescents out of school, who are at risk of drop-out or drop-out and those who leave the school early including bottlenecks for their participation and recommendations for improved collection, flow and monitoring of data on children out of school, at risk of dropout, those who drop-out or leave school early.</p>	<p>3 working days – by end September 2020</p> <p>15 working days – by mid-October 2020</p>
3.	Carry out an analysis of official education statistics of NBS and administrative data from MECR/EMIS to improve data collection on OOSC, absenteeism, drop-out and early school leaving and address existing discrepancies	<p>Methodology of the analysis, including key indicators, data collection tools, instruments and informational flows</p> <p>Report on the analysis of official education statistics of NBS and administrative data from MECR/EMIS and recommendations to improve data collection on OOSC, absenteeism, drop-out and early school leaving and address existing discrepancies</p>	<p>4 working days – by end October 2020</p> <p>10 working days – by mid November 2020</p>
4.	Develop guidelines, revise the normative framework, the MECR	Methodology at the school, community and national levels for the identification of children at risk of non-returning to school	10 working days – by end

	instructions and activities on prevention and addressing early school leaving, absenteeism and drop-out in general education.	after the COVID-19 pandemic or summer vacation, out of school children and adolescents, early school leavers and those at risk of dropping out of school Revised MECR instruction on prevention and addressing early school leaving, absenteeism and drop-out in general education Model of an 'early warning system'	November 2020 3 working days – by mid December 2020 3 working days – by mid-December 2020
5.	Develop actions for measuring and addressing the issue of OOSC and early school leavers	Methodology and guidance on how to assess dropouts in schools with identification of groups dropping out, as well as the barriers that prevent them from attending, returning to school or transitioning at the next level Proposal of low-cost, sustainable school and community-based interventions for children at risk of drop-out or early school leaving in order to reduce drop-out and early school leaving Draft of an improved monitoring system for children and adolescents out of school and those at risk of non-returning to school, dropping out or of leaving school early with definitions, indicators and benchmarks	3 working days – by end December 2020 2 working days – by end December 2020 5 working days – by mid January 2021
6.	Develop Action Plan to address the issue of OOSC, absenteeism, school drop-out and early school leaving	Final draft Action plan to address the issue of OOSC, absenteeism, school drop-out and early school leaving, including monitoring and data component	10 working days – by end January 2021
Total number of working days			71

** Exact deadlines will be mutually agreed upon contract signature*

6. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR EVALUATION OF RESULTS

The performance of work will be evaluated based on the following indicators:

- Completion of tasks specified in ToR;
- Compliance with the established deadlines for submission of deliverables;
- Demonstration of high standards of work and professionalism in working relations with UNICEF, with national counterparts.

7. QUALIFICATIONS OF CONSULTANT

- Advanced degree in relevant field, preferably education or social sciences.
- Minimum 8 years of professional experience at the national or international level in relevant field, preferably in the education sector.
- Proven experience in the area of OOSC is a requirement.
- Strong background in education policy and systems development, monitoring and evaluation, education statistics, 2-3 peer-reviewed publications an asset.
- Experience to work with central and local authorities in the field of education, child protection and other relevant fields as well as with relevant CSOs and with the schools.
- Excellent analytical and report writing skills.
- Excellent command of English, Romanian both oral and written.
- Experience with UNICEF or other UN Agencies will be an asset.

8. CONTENT OF TECHNICAL PROPOSAL TO BE SUBMITTED

- Description of the candidate's relevant experience with similar type of assignments (max 300 words);
- Proposed approach and methodology (max 1500 words), including:
 - a) Timeline and milestones;
 - b) Risk and mitigation measures;

Annex:

- Short Sample or links to related work previously conducted by the consultant;
- CV.

9. CONTENT OF FINANCIAL PROPOSAL TO BE SUBMITTED

The applicant should fill in the Financial Offer Template and specify the all-inclusive consultancy fee, in MDL, per day of work, requested for the tasks described in the Terms of Reference.

Other expenses directly related to the ToR deliverables, which must be included in the financial offer as well are:

- logistics linked to meetings organization, as required by the Deliverables Table.
- local transportation costs.

The final selection will be based on the principle of "best value for money" i.e. achieving desired outcome at lowest possible fee.

If not provided by the ToR, UNICEF will not reimburse costs not directly related to the assignment. This contract does not allow payment of off-hours, medical insurance, taxes, and sick leave.

UNICEF reserves the right to withhold all or a portion of payment if performance is unsatisfactory, if work/output is incomplete, not delivered or for failure to meet deadlines.

10. EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

The candidate is expected to reflect in the submission the qualifications, knowledge and experience related to the requirements listed above. Technical evaluation will be performed through a desk review of applications, evaluation of technical proposals, and if necessary, may be supplemented by an interview.

The selection process is aimed at selecting the applicant who obtains the highest cumulative score (technical evaluation + financial offer evaluation points) following “best value for money” principle.

11. PAYMENT SCHEDULE

The payment will be processed in four tranches, in accordance to the below schedule. All deliverables must be submitted on time and to the satisfaction of UNICEF Moldova.

Deliverable (delivered according to the timeline agreed upon with UNICEF)	Proportion of payment
Inception Report (deliverable under Activity 1)	15%
Deliverables under Activity 2	30%
Deliverables under Activities 3 & 4	40%
Deliverables under Activity 5	15%

*UNICEF reserves the right to withhold payment or partial payment for deliverables that are of poor quality or that do not meet the deadline stated in the contract.

*If deliverables are submitted before the end of the contract payment will be processed.

12. DEFINITION OF SUPERVISORY ARRANGEMENTS

The consultant will be supervised by the Education Specialist of UNICEF Moldova. The specialist will work in close collaboration with MECR and other state and non-state institutions, and relevant coordination groups as required by the quality realisation of the assignment. Payments will be rendered upon successful completion of each task, as per the schedule outlined above.

13. WORK LOCATION AND OFFICIAL TRAVEL INVOLVED

The work will require local travel in mutually agreed locations including in Chisinau. The consultant is expected to cover costs, arrange and schedule such visits, including transportation. The UNICEF office will facilitate introductions to key informants.

Travel costs not actually occurred due to travel mission cancellation, delays, contract modification or termination are subject to deduction from final contract amount.

In case of travel restrictions due to measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, the consultant will be responsible for conducting the work in the online space, giving due considerations to

the needed arrangements and limitations. The consultant is accountable for the quality of the work and full delivery of the assignment within the agreed timeframe and at no extra cost to UNICEF, other than the amount specified in the consultant's contract. Any datasets compiled by the consultant will be submitted to UNICEF. The Consultant will be in regular communication with UNICEF staff and incorporate feedback from UNICEF in the deliverables. Additional fifteen working days following the final deliverable due date will be added to the contract period for UNICEF to complete all required revisions and administrative procedures, as needed.

14. SUPPORT PROVIDED BY UNICEF

UNICEF will regularly communicate with the consultant, and provide feedback, guidance and necessary support to achieve objectives of the work, as well as remain aware of any upcoming issues related to the performance and quality of work. UNICEF will provide an initial package of relevant documents and an initial list of relevant experts and counterparts to work with.

15. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Contractor will ensure that the process is in line with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Ethical Guidelines⁸. The Contractor should be sensitive to beliefs, manners and customs and act with integrity and honesty while interacting with stakeholders and beneficiaries. Furthermore, the Contractor should protect the anonymity and confidentiality of individual information. All participants should be informed about the context and purpose of the Assessment, as well as about the confidentiality of the information shared. The Contractor is allowed to use documents and information provided only for the tasks related to these terms of reference

As per the DHR PROCEDURE ON CONSULTANTS AND INDIVIDUAL CONTRACTORS, together with the Notification letter, the contractor will be sent the link on Agora containing UNICEF policies on Prohibiting and Combatting Fraud and Corruption; Prohibition of discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment and abuse of authority and other relevant policies for their information and acknowledgment. The selected candidate must complete the applicable mandatory online courses on UNICEF's learning platform prior to signature of contract. All certificates should be presented as part of the contract.

⁸ UNEG Guidelines <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/102>