

UNICEF Moldova

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Individual Consultancy

to support the Independent Appraisal of the Education Sector Plan, Republic of Moldova

Duration and timeline: 20 working days (within the period of April - May 2021)

1. Introduction

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Research in the Republic of Moldova (hereafter Ministry of Education) is in the process of developing its long-term Education Sector Plan (ESP) including the long-term Education Strategy, 2021-2030 and the mid-term Programme and Action Plan, 2021-2025. This work is being conducted using an ESP Development Grant from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE).

As part of the development process, the ESP must be independently appraised prior to the finalization and endorsement of the plan. The external evaluation or independent appraisal of an ESP is a GPE requirement, for development partners to ensure the robustness and credibility of a Plan. An individual consultancy is required to carry out the independent appraisal of the ESP to assess them using the GPE/IIEP Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Appraisal.¹

ESPs present the policies and strategies for national education reform and are a powerful tool for coordinating partners and for mobilizing additional domestic and external resources. They have become a critical instrument for governments to signal to all potential investors that their education policies are credible, sustainable, and worthy of investment.

2. Background

The Republic of Moldova's (hereafter Moldova) socio-economic development has been affected by many factors, most recently by political instability and the global COVID-19 pandemic. These have negatively affected the policy development and implementation processes, prioritization of government actions, availability of resources, quality and quantity of service delivery in the social sectors.

As highlighted in Moldova's United Nations Common Country Analysis,² **the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 agenda has seen substantial progress on poverty reduction, decent work and economic growth, climate action and partnerships for development (SDGs 1, 8, 13 and 17). Progress towards improving nutrition, health and well-being, gender equality, sustainable energy, industry, innovation, infrastructure and sustainable cities (SDGs 2, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11) has been more modest.** Despite multiple efforts and financing across all social areas,³ **there has been less noticeable progress towards enhancement of the quality of education, and of water and sanitation. Better progress could also be made in the reduction of inequalities (particularly non-monetary inequalities), and much more can be done regarding ensuring more responsible production and consumption,** as well as life on the land. Peace, justice and strong institutions (SDGs 4, 6, 10, 12, 15 and 16) are particularly important areas for improvement, in order to maximize and accelerate efforts towards achievement of the SDGs.

¹ Available at <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/guidelines-education-sector-plan-appraisal>

² United Nations Common Country Analysis: Executive Summary, United Nations Moldova, 2020

³ According to Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data, in 2017–2018 social infrastructure received the highest amount of bilateral official development assistance (41%), followed by education (22%). The progress in these areas remains suboptimal.

Moldova is one of the poorest countries in Eastern Europe. Although inequality has decreased in the last few years, social transfers still make up a significant share of household incomes. Disadvantaged and vulnerable people, who are often left behind, are not sufficiently captured by official data, resulting in their potential exclusion in the development and implementation of policies and programmes.⁴

Moldova loses approximately 1.8% of its population annually. The demographic impact of outmigration on the resident population structure is multidimensional: a shrinking of the number of children, high emigration of the economically active population, rapid ageing, and depopulation of rural areas. Furthermore, Moldova faces a substantial brain drain, being in the top 10 countries within the European region in terms of skilled labour- force outmigration. By 2035, the population is likely to decrease reaching 2 million people, and every third person will be over 60 years of age.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, around 30% of labour migrants employed in the services sector abroad have considered returning to Moldova, leading to additional pressure on its labour market. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to be curbed as vaccination advances and the implementation of public health measures is enforced, former migration patterns are likely to be restored and maintained.

Education quality and accessibility

The education system has systemic and structural inefficiencies and imbalances that put Moldovan children behind their peers, not only in terms of access to educational facilities (notably for those with disabilities and special educational needs), but also in terms of the quality of education, which results in poor learning outcomes and suboptimal student achievement.

Children's school-readiness has substantially improved in recent years due to improved access to preschool education and enhanced learning outcomes, despite persisting inequalities.

The decline in the number of students in the last few decades led to the need to rethink the education network and financing. Despite some improvements, the school network infrastructure is obsolete and not adequately adapted to the needs of those with disabilities. Many rural schools are still not connected to sewerage and do not have well-equipped sanitary blocks (i.e. they are not accessible for children with disabilities, are located outside the building and are not safe for young girls in particular).

Moldova's performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) illustrates the quality challenges within the system. Most 15-year-old Moldovans lack basic skills required to participate effectively and productively in study, four out of every 10 15-year-olds cannot effectively summarize and systematize information, and 43% do not have minimum knowledge in science. Discrepancies in learning outcomes are often related to the ability of parents to pay for additional extra-school hours of tuition or other occupations/activities for children. Vulnerable children in rural areas, particularly Roma girls and girls with disabilities, are at high risk of dropping out of school. Suboptimal PISA performance is due to poor curricula and poor teaching quality.

Only two-thirds of teachers hold a pedagogical qualification. Teachers also have limited capacities to work with children with special educational needs, and teaching materials and specialized support for such children are insufficient.

⁴ United Nations Common Country Analysis: Executive Summary, United Nations Moldova, 2020

Lower quality of education in rural areas. According to the results of the 2018 PISA, approximately 56% of students in rural schools do not reach the minimum level of competence in science.⁵ This could be due to the unequal distribution of educational services within Moldova. In addition, the rate of early school dropout is 2.5 times higher for rural youth than for young people in cities.

Enrolment in the higher education sector has declined during the last decade. The biggest challenge relates to the internal financial inefficiency and quality of teaching in sector. Moldova's higher and vocational education and training (VET) education system does not meet labour market demands in terms of skills mix. In the past 10 years, overall enrolment in VET has declined by 20%. Enrolment in secondary VET has decreased from 24,270 students in 2008/09 to 14,700 students in 2019/2020. Considering the importance of academic preparation prior to higher education, to ensure enrolment and the retention of STEM college students it is critical to place an emphasis on STEM in primary and secondary schools.⁶

The persistence of high school dropout rates among Roma children, particularly among Roma girls, was one of the main concerns expressed by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committee in 2020.⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic has seriously affected the accessibility of early childhood education, disproportionately affecting children living in rural areas, households with low incomes, and women-headed households.

The pandemic has further **exacerbated the existing problems related to poor school infrastructure and teaching quality, and has exposed the fact that the education system does not have the tools and skills needed to provide quality education remotely**, due to the obsolete technical and material base of educational institutions (lack of ICT infrastructure and equipment, such as computers, interactive technologies, IT systems, and IT-related content), teachers' low level of general teaching skills, limited financial resources allocated to improving the infrastructure of primary and secondary education institutions, lack of elementary IT skills for online teaching, limited access of teachers to training programmes, and hence the low rate of using ICT in the teaching and learning process, as well as the lack of a coordination mechanism.

The lack of digital skills also has negative repercussions for the safety of children and youth online. While many actions have been undertaken to address this issue, the lack of a national strategy and coordination mechanism ensuring the sustainability of these actions, engaging all stakeholders in the implementation, remains a challenge.

The covid-19 pandemic has reduced the ability of the education system **to overcome the challenges of closing immediate gaps versus undertaking more strategic actions.** Outdated teaching methods lead to a mismatch between academic skills and real-world industry needs. This has implications for women, who are less likely to apply for hi-tech positions without practical experience and knowledge.

At the same time, the health and safety of the environment in which children are receiving their education is a critical component. This currently requires additional investment, in order to ensure infection prevention and control (IPC) measures (hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, clear administrative measures for distancing, isolation, pupil flow separation, mask wearing, etc.).

⁵ People's Advocate (2019) 'Report on the respect of human rights and freedoms in the Republic of Moldova'.

⁶ Research in Higher Education (2019) 'Student Faculty Interaction and Discrimination from Faculty in STEM: The Link with Retention'. Available at <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11162-019-09564-w>

⁷ CEDAW (2020) 'Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of the Republic of Moldova' (CEDAW/C/MDA/CO/6)

The above-mentioned shortcomings are a result of many factors: **insufficient efforts to continuously upgrade educational policies, the low return from the educational system in the real economy, the lack of finances for the social inclusion of all disadvantaged layers of the population, and the big brain drain that occurs after school graduation (due to the uncompetitive higher education system and lack of future opportunities)**⁸.

To cope with the above challenges, the MECR started to develop a long-term Education Sector Plan 2021-2030. The Education Sector Plan consists of a long-term Education Sector Strategy Education 2030 and a medium-term Programme for its implementation 2021-2025. It is based on the key findings and recommendations from the Education Sector Analysis (ESA) undertaken in 2019, a solid, nationally owned analysis of the challenges in delivering quality education in Moldova. The ESP determines a long-term vision, based on the ESA and linked to the National Development Strategy 'Moldova 2030', SDG nationalized agenda, EU Association Agreement priorities focusing on quality of teaching and teachers, education environment, learning outcomes and competencies aligned to the labour market and other international commitments of Moldova government in line with government's primary responsibility to ensure the right to education for all and the national legal provisions for compulsory education.

The development of the ESP is led by the Ministry of Education. Major processes include broad consultations at both national and sub-national levels with key stakeholders, Ministry of Finance (MoF), Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure (MEI), Local Public Authorities (LPA), including District Departments of Education (DDE), Academia, CSOs, parents' and teachers' associations, teachers Trade Unions and children, adolescents and youth. Key development partners, such as the World Bank (WB), the European Union (EU) and the UN Agencies in Moldova are also part of the consultative process that helps to establish the criteria and identify key priorities for the Education Sector in Moldova in line with SDG 4. Key partners in the process are children, adolescents and youth, as well as their parents, ensuring child focused development of the new ESP.

Capacity gaps of stakeholders participating in the process both at national (Ministry of Education) and local level (LPAs, parents, students) are assessed and relevant capacity building efforts are undertaken at the start with focus on strategic planning, sector relevant needs based participatory budgeting, analysis of effectiveness and efficiency of resource utilization and effective monitoring and reporting feeding into evidenced based planning and budgeting process.

UNICEF Moldova Country Office as the *Coordinating Agency/Grant Agent of education sector plan development grant* is charged, on behalf of the development partner group (DPG) with the undertaking of an independent appraisal.

3. Purpose of the consultancy

The purpose of the consultancy is to carry out an external independent appraisal and critical analysis of the draft Moldova Education Sector Plan, assess its soundness, based on the characteristics defined in the GPE/IIEP Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Appraisal⁹ and help development partners to ensure the robustness and credibility of the Plan and its M&E framework.

The consultancy is expected to be carried out within the period of April - May 2021.

⁸ United Nations Common Country Analysis: Executive Summary, United Nations Moldova, 2020

⁹ Available at <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/guidelines-education-sector-plan-appraisal>

4. Objectives of the consultancy:

- **Assess the quality of the education sector plan preparation process**, including:
 - Assessing the role of the Government, the Local Education Group, and other stakeholders' participation in the Plan preparation.
 - Identify potential areas of action that have not been sufficiently considered in the education sector plan.
 - Assess if issues of equity, learning and efficiency are soundly addressed.
- **Provide actionable recommendations regarding suggested improvements for i) the immediate term** (areas that can be addressed prior to its finalization and endorsement); **and ii) the medium term** (areas that can be addressed during plan implementation or subsequent reviews).

5. Methodology

The independent appraisal of the education sector plan should cover (in a coherent manner) the general questions and sub-questions outlined under the following five key criteria of the GPE/IIEP Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Appraisal. An overview is provided below but the Appraisal Guidelines should be read and consulted in full prior to undertaking the appraisal:

1. Leadership and participation:

- Has the plan preparation process been country-led, participatory, and transparent?
 - (i) Leadership and Ownership: To what extent is Government leadership and development partners' and key stakeholders support for Government ownership reflected in the education sector plan?
 - (ii) Participatory Process: What is the level of involvement among the local stakeholders and development partners in the plan preparation process?
 - (iii) Capacity Development: To what extent was plan preparation used as an opportunity to develop national capacities in education policy and planning?

2. Soundness and Relevance:

- Does the plan constitute a coherent set of strategies and actions addressing the key challenges of the education sector?
 - (i) Evidence-based education sector analysis: What empirical evidence was available and was it used effectively?
 - (ii) Relevance of Policies and Programs: Do the proposed priorities and programmes form a relevant response to the challenges?
 - (iii) Soundness of the financial framework: Is the financial framework adequate and credible?
 - (iv) Soundness of the action plan: Does the action plan provide a sound operational framework? For example, is the action plan easily cross-referenced with the financing framework? Does the action plan include costing for ESP activities?

3. Equity, Efficiency, and Learning in Basic Education:

- Are the key dimensions of equity, efficiency, and learning soundly addressed to increase sector performance?
 - (i) Robustness and relevance of the strategies: Do the proposed priorities and programs form a relevant response to the challenges?
 - (ii) Change strategies: Is the financial framework adequate and credible?
 - (iii) Results Framework: Does the action plan provide a sound operational framework?

4. Coherence:

- Does the plan constitute a consistent and coherent set of strategies and actions?
 - (i) Coherence among the strategies, programs, and interventions: Is there consistency between the various components of the ESP?
 - (ii) Comprehensive costing and aligned with the budget: How consistent are the scenario and the costing with other parts of the ESP?
 - (iii) Coherence of monitoring and evaluation indicators: Are the M&E indicators consistent with the policy priorities and the planned programs and activities?

5. Feasibility, Implementability, and Monitorability:

- Do the financing, implementation, and monitoring arrangements offer a good perspective for achievement?
 - (i) Financial feasibility: Is the financial plan adequate and realistic?
 - (ii) System capacity: Does the plan identify and address capacity constraints that would affect plan implementation?
 - (iii) Governance and Accountability: Are there strategies in place to improve and establish good governance practices and management accountability across the system?
 - (iv) Risks to implementation and mitigation of risks: Does the ESP design take into consideration possible risks and constraints in implementation?
 - (v) Robustness of the monitoring and evaluation framework: Does the M&E system provide robust indicators based on valid and reliable data to monitor the progress toward the achievement of outputs and outcomes described in the results framework? Are the reporting, feedback, and consultation mechanisms transparent and adequate to ensure mutual accountability of Government and relevant partners and stakeholders during implementation?

6. Deliverables and delivery dates

Key deliverables:

- a. Presentation of preliminary findings to the Local Education Group.
- b. Draft appraisal report shared with UNICEF Moldova CO, GPE Secretariat and Ministry of Education, Culture and Research.
- c. Final appraisal report that includes an executive summary.

The consultants' work should include:

- d. A desk review of key documents, including the following:
 - The previous and current draft Education Sector Plan and its Action Plan.
 - The previous and current Education Sector Analysis.
 - The current Simulation Model of the ESP.
 - The Medium-Term Expenditure Framework.
 - Learning Assessment Reports.
 - Education Statistics (NBS data and MECR/ EMIS).
 - Thematic studies, with a focus on equity, learning and efficiency.
 - The National Development Strategy Moldova 2030.
 - Reports on implementation of education sector reforms and other interventions that contributed to the implementation of the previous education sector plan or evaluation of various education projects.
 - The most recent joint sector review report, if available.
- e. On-line preparatory meetings with the Local Education Group and the Ministry of Education.
- f. On-line meetings and consultations with key partners and LEG members, including:
 - Government agencies at central level: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, etc.
 - Education authorities at sub-national levels

- Development Partners, including donors, international organizations, civil society organizations, teacher associations, students and parent teacher associations, school management committees, and private education providers.
- g. Presentation of preliminary findings to the LEG.
- h. Preparation of the Draft appraisal report.
- i. Preparation of the Final appraisal report.

Activities, deliverables, and timeline:

Activities	Deliverables*	Time frame**
<p>a) Undertake a desk review of key documents, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The previous and current draft Education Sector Plan and its Action Plan. - The previous and current Education Sector Analysis. - The current Simulation Models. - The Medium-Term Expenditure Framework. - Learning Assessment Reports. - Education Statistics. - Thematic studies, with a focus on equity, learning and efficiency. - The National Development Plan 2030. - Reports on implementation of education sector reforms and other interventions that contributed to the implementation of the previous education sector plan or evaluation of various education projects. - The most recent joint sector review report, if available. <p>b) Organize on-line meetings and consultations with key partners and LEG (Local Education Group) members, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government agencies at central level: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, etc. - Education authorities at sub-national levels. - Development Partners, including donors, international organizations, civil society organizations, teacher associations, students and parent teacher associations, school management committees, and private education providers. 	<p>Deliverable 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Presentation of preliminary findings from the desk review and consultations/meetings to the Local Education Group (LEG) -PPT developed and shared with UNICEF one day prior its presentation to LEG. 	<p>April - May 2021</p> <p>8 working days</p>
<p>- Preparation of the Draft appraisal report.</p>	<p>Deliverable 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Zero Draft appraisal report presented to UNICEF Moldova CO for comments - Draft appraisal report, incorporating UNICEF Moldova comments, shared with UNICEF Moldova CO, GPE Secretariat and Ministry of Education. 	<p>April - May 2021</p> <p>8 working days</p>
<p>- Preparation of the Final appraisal report based on received comments from UNICEF CO, GPE Secretariat and Ministry of Education.</p>	<p>Deliverable 3</p> <p>Final appraisal report that includes an executive summary *** presented to UNICEF CO.</p>	<p>May 2021</p> <p>4 working days</p>

*All deliverables should be presented in Romanian and English languages.

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

**** The executive summary will include a maximum of 5 to 10 pages.*

Notes:

- (1) The appraisal should be carried out by a consultant who has not contributed to the education sector plan's preparation.
- (2) Consultant(s) selected who have not undertaken the GPE IIEP training on the Fundamentals of Independent Appraisal of Education Sector Plans will need to complete the training successfully prior to undertaking the appraisal. The training takes approximately 15 hours to complete.

7. Qualifications and experience

- Experience of at least 10 years working within the education sector with experience working in developing country contexts.
- A Master's degree in education, social sciences, international development with (or equivalent).
- Experience of carrying out past independent appraisals or evaluations/assessments of education sector programs considered an advantage.
- Trained in the GPE-IIEP Guidelines on Education Sector Plan Appraisal.
- Ability to work collaboratively with counterparts in ministries and at the local/school levels.
- Proficient command of English language, excellent writing, analytical and synthesis skills.

8. Content of technical proposal

- CV
- 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.
 - c. Ethical considerations and how the consultant will address them.
 - d. Sample questionnaire: 2-3 interview questions per type of stakeholder.

Annex: Short Sample or links to related work previously conducted by the consultant

9. Content of financial proposal

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

Other expenses directly related to the ToR assignments and deliverables such as: (translation/interpretation costs etc.) may be included in the financial offer unless specified that UNICEF will cover them separately.

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.

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

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.

In case when a Moldovan national is selected, MDL will serve as contract currency, converted at the UN exchange rate applicable at contract signature date.

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.

11. Payment schedule

The payment will be done in three tranches, according to the following schedule. All deliverables must be delivered on time and to the satisfaction of UNICEF Moldova.

Deliverables (delivered according to the timeline agreed upon with UNICEF)	Proportion of payment
Presentation of preliminary findings to the Local Education Group (deliverable 1)	40%
Draft appraisal report shared with UNICEF Moldova CO, GPE Secretariat and MECR (deliverable 2)	40%
Final appraisal report that includes an executive summary (deliverable 3).	20%

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

12. Definition of supervisory arrangements

The specialist will be supervised by the UNICEF Education Specialist of UNICEF Moldova. 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 be undertaken on-line and will not require international and local travel.

14. Support provided by UNICEF

UNICEF will regularly communicate with the specialist, 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. Child Safeguarding

Is this project/assignment considered as "[Elevated Risk Role](#)" from a child safeguarding perspective?

YES NO If YES, check all that apply:

Direct contact role YES NO

If yes, please indicate the number of hours/months of direct interpersonal contact with children, or work in their immediately physical proximity, with limited supervision by a more senior member of personnel:

Child data role YES NO

If yes, please indicate the number of hours/months of manipulating or transmitting personal-identifiable information of children (name, national ID, location data, photos):

More information is available in the [Child Safeguarding SharePoint](#) and [Child Safeguarding FAQs and Updates](#)

16. Ethical considerations

The Contractor will ensure that the process is in line with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Ethical Guidelines¹⁰. 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 can use documents and information provided only for the tasks related to these terms of reference.

As per UNICEF DHR PROCEDURE ON CONTRACTORS 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.

¹⁰ UNEG Guidelines <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/102>