UNICEF Moldova

**Terms of Reference**

**National Individual Consultancy for the development of the educational ICT standards**

**Location:** Home-based

**Duration and timeline:** **20 working days (October 2023 – November 2023)**

1. **Background**

The Republic of Moldova embraces an education policy that is consistent with the European and international education policy, that responds to the current issues and needs of the education system and its beneficiaries. The documents underpinning the strategic development of the education system are proof of the high regard of the Government of the Republic of Moldova to shifting focuses on education in favour of quality and sustainability.

The Education Sector Analysis was performed in 2019 and informed the preparation of the education strategy, including a detailed problem analysis and efficiency of the sector. To ensure the continuous and sustained access to education for all children and in line with Moldovan authorities' efforts to achieve the objectives of SDG4, the Ministry of Education and Research (MER) in cooperation with UNICEF, as Grant Agent and Coordinating Agency for Education Sector Programme Implementation Grant (ESPIG) under the partnership with Global Partnership for Education (GPE), has developed a new long-term Development Strategy “Education 2030“(DS). The DS explores the education sector within the international, regional, and national context and sets out the education policy of the Government of the Republic of Moldova and the strategic directions of actions required for solving the identified issues.

According to the [Development Strategy “Education 2030“](https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=136600&lang=ro)one of the issues that the education system is facing is related to the inefficient application of ICT in education and lack of functional management in the process of education digitalization. Over recent years, more actions have been taken aimed at enhancing digital literacy competences of teachers and pupils/students. The extent to which digital skills are used in the teaching-learning-assessment process and the insufficient capacity to effectively use the latest generations of interactive multimedia educational software are still a problem. Surveys reveal that around 79% of teachers believe that the use of ICT contributes to increasing the level of development of pupils’ skills and around 70% of these point out the importance of ICT in improving learning outcomes. At the same time, around 40% of teachers show a reserved attitude towards the impact of information technologies, which signals a significant delay in digitalizing education.

According to the [‘Social and Economic Impact Assessment of the COVID-19 Pandemic on vulnerable Groups and Economic Sectors in the Republic of Moldova’](https://www.undp.org/moldova/publications/social-and-economic-impact-assessment-covid-19-republic-moldova) report[[1]](#footnote-2), the pre-existing vulnerabilities of the Moldovan education system were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, concluding specifically for education that the most socially disadvantaged children had difficulties in accessing remote education. The access to on-line education of children with disabilities was limited where no accessibility provisions were available, the Roma were at risk of being left behind given poverty levels, lack of access to IT equipment and potential discrimination. Remote learning remained a challenge for about 16,000 students and 3,000 teachers who did not have access to ICT technology (laptop, tablet, or access to internet). The consequences of the pandemic and the move to alternative online learning were potentially very damaging. The report also indicated that despite Government and donor efforts, there is still a baseline disparity in availability of information technology equipment, with 75% of the children and youth in the vulnerable sample not having enough devices, and 50% not being connected to the internet.

Due to poor access to the internet, insufficient financial resources allocated for digitalizing the education sector and their inappropriate use, the availability of ICT in education institutions remains low, hampering the implementation of computer-assisted training and digital education management.

Failure to prioritize digitalization in policy documents, insufficiency of mechanisms for implementing ICT standards, lack of mechanisms for assessing and certifying digital competences, lack of a systemic vision on the equipment and assistive technologies, focused efforts of ongoing in-service training on digital literacy and less on digital pedagogy led to specific consequences and risks that should be addressed. Building inclusive and open ecosystems means a strong interconnection between the policy framework, inclusive digital infrastructure, capacity building and awareness raising. These are interconnected challenges that should be embedded into the general process of digital transformation, with a focus on including the children who are at risk of digital exclusion. In addition to addressing the challenges mentioned, it is crucial to recognize the importance of building 21st-century skills among students in Moldova. In this digital age, students need to develop competences such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy to learn and succeed in life. These skills enable students to adapt to changing environments, become active participants in the digital society, and contribute effectively to the economy.

One of the objectives of the new education strategy is to facilitate the digital transformation of the education sector. To achieve this important goal, UNICEF supported MER to secure funding through the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Multiplier Fund for 2022-2025.

Based on the above, UNICEF Moldova is seeking to engage an individual consultancy to support the MER with the development of theeducational ICT standards.

1. **Purpose of the consultancy**

The purpose of this consultancy is to develop theeducational ICT standards in alignment with the Development Strategy “Education 2030” and other relevant documents. The final document related to the educational ICT standards will function as guidance for effectively implementing digital transformation of the education sector, future ICT procurement processes, ethernet setup in educational institutions and other related processes.

1. **Objectives of the consultancy**

The objective of the consultancy is to provide qualified technical assistance to MER and UNICEF in development of the educational ICT standards.

1. Details of how the work should be delivered

Thedocument on educational ICT standards (equipment, connectivity and network system) will be an updated version of the Ministry of Education and Research Order no. 489/2019 and will comply with the Development Strategy “Education 2030”.

Theeducational ICT standards will include, but not be limited to:

1. *ICT standards for equipment:*

Development of essential/minimum hardware specifications for educational ICT equipment. The consultant will develop a comprehensive document that outlines the minimum requirements necessary for various types of equipment commonly used in educational settings. This will define minimum aspects such as the required processing power, memory capacity, storage capabilities, and display quality. By defining these specifications, the document will provide educational institutions with a clear understanding of the baseline hardware requirements needed to effectively facilitate teaching and learning activities. Moreover, the consultant is encouraged to introduce innovative examples of class equipment that extend beyond conventional choices.

1. *Connectivity and network system standards:*

Development of the comprehensive connectivity and network system standards recommended for educational institutions. The document will encompass various critical aspects of network infrastructure. It will define specifications for local area network (LAN) design, addressing optimal equipment placement and configuration. Additionally, standards for internet connectivity will be set to guarantee high-speed and dependable access, catering to the demands of modern learning environments.

Given the increasing importance of wireless networks, the consultant will also provide clear guidelines and recommendations for creating secure and extensive wireless coverage.

*Note:* The generated information will serve as a foundation for strategizing and equipping educational institutions and diverse facilities like Tech Lab, STEAM lab, Multimedia lab, etc.

It is important to note that the above list is not exhaustive, and the educational ICT standards for the education sector in Moldova may include additional areas of focus based on the specific needs and priorities of the country's education system.

The educational ICT standards will also be based on the analysis of the current trends and thoughtful hypotheses for overcoming financial, technical, and administrative constraints to effective elaboration and implementation.

The educational ICT standards document will be based on national and international best practices and information drawn from: (a) best endowment experiences at national level, (b) detailed discussions and consultations with relevant stakeholders and c) international best practices.

In-depth discussions will be held with various stakeholders, relevant MER departments, UNICEF, Center of ICT in Education (CICTE) and other relevant actors.

The incumbent will also ensure integration of gender equality and PSEA considerations, including safe and ethical protocols, into the development of the educational CT standards.

The consultant will work closely with MER and UNICEF, consulting MER at all stages, seeking inputs through discussions and document writing activities. Also, the UNICEF will provide technical assistance.

1. Deliverables and delivery dates

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| **NO.** | **Tasks** | **Deliverable** | **Timeline\*** |
| 1. | Conduct desk review of documentation on digitalization of the education sector in Moldova, including international best practices and policies applied, available national studies, evaluations and reports, and data from relevant ministries and agencies.  Conduct focus group discussions with MER departments, UNICEF, and other relevant actors. | Desk review report containing main findings and recommendations for development of the document on national educational ICT standards | 3 working days |
| 2. | Develop a comprehensive document on national educational ICT standards (*ICT standards for equipment* *and connectivity and network system standards*) and submit to MER/UNICEF and stakeholders for review and comments | - Draft document on educational ICT standards with all comments from UNICEF, MER and other stakeholders addressed  - PPT on the draft developed documents, including the vision, key strategic directions, objectives, financial, human, and other resources considerations etc.  - Consultation conducted | 14 working days |
| 3. | Final document on educational ICT standards (in Romanian) | ICT standards developed | 3 working days |
|  | **Total:** | | 20 working days |

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

All the materials for the consultation/validation meetings, including the drafts of PPTs, hand-outs and other materials will be presented for endorsement to UNICEF and MER at least one week prior to the meeting in Romanian.

1. Reporting requirements

All activities and deliverables undertaken by the consultancy shall be discussed and planned in consultation with UNICEF and MER. The consultant is expected to deliver each component of the workplan electronically (in Word format) in Romanian and/or in English. At each stage, the deliverable shall be sent to the UNICEF Moldova Project Officer by email, with the Education Officer and Education Specialist in copy.

Regular governance calls will be scheduled to track the progress, provide feedback and other necessary support so to achieve objectives of the consultancy, as well as remain aware of any upcoming issues related to the institutional consultant’s performance and quality of work.

1. 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
* Quality of work
* Demonstration of high standards in cooperation and communication with UNICEF and counterparts
* Contractor must guarantee timely delivery of products and be flexible enough to adjust to UNICEF needs and expectations

1. Qualifications and experience

* University degree in ICT, digital education, business and administration, economy, or other relevant studies
* Minimum 3 years of working experience in the relevant field
* Proven experience in collecting and analyzing data, development of the technical specifications
* Experience in conducting desk reviews and research, including qualitative studies and baseline assessments, evaluations will be an asset
* Demonstrated work experience in the education sector with national/international institutions/organizations is a strong asset
* Ability to review documents, collect and analyze information and ensure quality of final deliverables in Romanian and/or English
* Previous work with UNICEF or other UN agencies is an asset

1. **Content of technical proposal**

* Relevant experience with similar type of assignments (max 300 words)
* In addition, please provide your *Curriculum Vitae*.

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1. **Content of financial proposal**

The applicant should fill in the Financial Offer Template and specify an all-inclusive fee to complete the tasks/deliverables described in the Terms of Reference in MDL.

Other expenses directly related to the ToR assignments and deliverables such as: (translation/interpretation costs, local transportation etc.) may be included in the financial offer unless specified that UNICEF will cover them separately (see paragraph 14 and 15 below).

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 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.

1. **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 maximum number of points to be allocated for the technical evaluation component is 70.

The total amount of points to be allocated for the price component is 30. The maximum number of points (30) will be allotted to the lowest price proposal of a technically qualified offer. Points for other offers will be calculated as Points (x) = (lowest offer/ offer x) \* 30.

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.

1. **Payment schedule**

The payment will be linked to the following deliverables upon satisfactory completion and acceptance by UNICEF:

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| --- | --- |
| **Deliverable**  **(Delivered according to the timeline agreed upon with UNICEF)** | **Proportion of payment** |
| Deliverable 1 & 2 | 70% |
| Deliverable 3 | 30% |

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

1. Definition of supervisory arrangements

The specialist will work under the oversight of Project Officer of UNICEF Moldova. Payments will be rendered upon successful completion of each task, as per the schedule outlined above. 

1. Work location and official travel involved

The work will require local travel to conduct in-person visits and interviews with the different government authorities, as per their availability. The consultant is expected to cover costs, arrange, and schedule such visits, including transportation. The UNICEF office will facilitate introductions to key informants.

1. **Support provided by UNICEF**

UNICEF will regularly communicate with the specialist and provide feedback and guidance and necessary support so 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 available research, and an initial list of relevant experts and counterparts to work with. UNICEF will also request relevant data – as agreed upon with the consultant – from relevant government counterparts.

1. **Child Safeguarding**

Is this project/assignment considered as “[Elevated Risk Role](https://unicef.sharepoint.com/sites/DHR-ChildSafeguarding/DocumentLibrary1/Guidance%20on%20Identifying%20Elevated%20Risk%20Roles_finalversion.pdf?CT=1590792470221&OR=ItemsView)” from a child safeguarding perspective?

   YES     NO       If YES, check all that apply:

1. **Ethical considerations**

The Contractor will ensure that the process is in line with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Ethical Guidelines1. 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 [UNICEF](https://unicef.sharepoint.com/sites/portals/RF/Regulatory%20Framework%20Library/DHR%20Procedure%20on%20Consultants%20-%20DHR_PROCEDURE_2018_005.pdf) procedure on Individual Consultants, together with the Notification letter, the contractor will be sent the [link on UNICEF’s learning platform, Agora](https://agora.unicef.org/course/view.php?id=15620), 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.

1. **Other considerations**

Individuals engaged under an individual consultancy will not be considered “staff members” under the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations and UNICEF’s policies and procedures and will not be entitled to benefits provided therein (such as leave entitlements and medical insurance coverage). Their conditions of service will be governed by their contract and the General Conditions of Contracts for the Services of Individual Consultants. Individual Consultants are responsible for determining their tax liabilities and for the payment of any taxes and/or duties, in accordance with local or other applicable laws.

The selected candidate is solely responsible to ensure that the visa (if applicable) and health insurance required to perform the duties of the contract are valid for the entire period of the contract.

Selected candidates are subject to confirmation of fully vaccinated status against SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) with a World Health Organization (WHO)-endorsed vaccine, which must be met prior to taking up the assignment. It does not apply to consultants who will work remotely and are not expected to work on or visit UNICEF premises, programme delivery locations, or directly interact with communities UNICEF works with, nor to travel to perform functions for UNICEF for the duration of their consultancy contracts.

UNICEF offers reasonable accommodation for consultants with disabilities. This may include, for example, accessible software, travel assistance for missions or personal attendants. We encourage you to disclose your disability during your application in case you need reasonable accommodation during the selection process and afterwards in your assignment.

1. <https://www.md.undp.org/content/moldova/en/home/library/inclusive_growth/social-and-economic-impact-assessment-of-covid-19-in-the-republi.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)