TERMS OF REFERENCE

Job Title:	Hydrobiology International Consultant
Duty station:	Home-based with one (1) mission to the Republic of Moldova of up to five (5) mission days
Project:	Supporting the Moldovan Authorities in the Sustainable Management of the Dniester River – Phase II (Dniester II)
Contract type:	Individual Contract (IC)
Contract Duration:	30 working days (July – October 2026)

1. BACKGROUND

Sustainable management of water resources, in accordance with the principles of integrated water resources management, represents a key priority for the Republic of Moldova. In the context of ongoing alignment of the national environmental framework with the requirements of the European Union (EU) acquis, national institutions continue to face a number of challenges related to outdated methodologies and regulatory instruments, limited institutional and technical capacities, and shortages of specialized expertise in the field of water resources management and ecological assessment.

The Dniester River is of strategic importance for the Republic of Moldova, covering approximately 70% of the country's water consumption needs and playing a critical role in ensuring environmental sustainability, water security, and socio-economic development. At the same time, the Dniester River represents one of the major transboundary river systems in the region, requiring coordinated and integrated management approaches between the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

Alongside ongoing transboundary cooperation efforts under the framework of the Dniester Commission, national environmental authorities are undertaking institutional and regulatory reforms aimed at strengthening integrated water resources management, improving monitoring and assessment systems, and aligning national practices with the requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD).

Within this context, the project "Supporting the Moldovan Authorities in the Sustainable Management of the Dniester River – Phase II (Dniester II)", implemented by UNDP Moldova with financial support from Sweden, supports the improvement of environmental conditions and ecological status within the Dniester River Basin District through strengthened water governance, enhanced institutional capacities, updated regulatory and methodological frameworks, and implementation of practical environmental measures identified under the Dniester Impact Study (2021).

Moldova currently applies a use-class based system for the assessment of surface water quality monitoring data under Government Decision No. 890/2013 on the approval of the Regulation on environmental quality requirements for surface waters, as amended by Government Decision No. 368/2024. While this system provides a national basis for surface water quality classification, it is not fully aligned with the principles and requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive, particularly with regard to ecological status and ecological

potential assessment based on biological quality elements, reference conditions, type-specific classification systems, and ecological quality ratios (EQRs).

At the same time, Government Decision No. 884/2024 on the approval of the Methodology for classification of ecological status and ecological potential of waters introduced the key principles, concepts, and methodological foundations necessary for the implementation of WFD-compliant ecological assessment approaches in the Republic of Moldova.

As part of these efforts, the Project seeks to strengthen national capacities for hydrobiological monitoring and ecological status assessment of surface water bodies in accordance with the principles and requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC), including the application and further development of ecological classification methodologies and biological assessment tools.

Particular attention is given to the assessment of biological quality elements, including benthic invertebrate fauna, phytoplankton, phytobenthos, macrophytes, and other hydrobiological components relevant for ecological status classification. Previous EU-supported initiatives contributed to the development of a Multi-Metric Index (MMI) for benthic invertebrate fauna in the Republic of Moldova. However, further technical refinement and institutional strengthening are required, particularly with regard to reference conditions, typology-specific assessment approaches, ecological quality ratios, interpretation of monitoring data, and practical application of ecological classification systems in routine monitoring and assessment activities.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE ASSIGNMENT

The objective of this assignment is to strengthen the Republic of Moldova's capacity to implement monitoring and assessment requirements for the ecological status and ecological potential of surface water bodies in accordance with the principles and requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD).

The assignment will support national institutions in enhancing the practical application and further development of hydrobiological monitoring and ecological classification methodologies, with particular focus on the application of the Multi-Metric Index (MMI) for benthic invertebrate fauna and the broader implementation of ecological status assessment approaches in line with Government Decision No. 884/2024 on the approval of the Methodology for classification of ecological status and ecological potential of waters.

The assignment will include the review of existing hydrobiological monitoring methodologies, available datasets, and current ecological classification approaches used in the Republic of Moldova, including assessment of their applicability, limitations, and alignment with WFD principles and requirements.

Particular attention shall be given to issues related to biological quality elements, reference conditions, typology-specific ecological assessment approaches, ecological quality ratios (EQRs), interpretation of hydrobiological monitoring data, and practical application of ecological classification systems within routine monitoring and assessment activities.

The assignment will also review the applicability and practical implementation challenges related to the existing Multi-Metric Index (MMI), including its current limitations concerning reference conditions, class boundaries, and type-specific assessment approaches.

The assignment will further support institutional capacity building through the preparation and delivery of a technical workshop focused on the implementation and further development of the MMI and ecological classification methodologies, as well as through awareness-raising and knowledge-sharing activities targeting a broader group of stakeholders involved in water resources management and environmental governance.

The assignment is expected to result in practical recommendations for:

- further development and application of hydrobiological assessment methodologies and ecological quality ratios (EQRs);
- strengthening hydrobiological monitoring and ecological status assessment systems;
- improving institutional understanding and application of WFD ecological classification principles;
- identifying potential areas for further refinement and enhancement of Government Decision No. 884/2024 and related methodological frameworks;
- improving the practical integration of ecological classification methodologies into routine surface water monitoring and assessment processes in the Republic of Moldova.

3. SCOPE OF WORK

The assignment is expected to support the strengthening of institutional and technical capacities for hydrobiological monitoring and ecological status assessment of surface water bodies in accordance with the requirements of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD), including the practical application and further development of ecological classification methodologies and biological assessment tools.

Throughout the assignment, the Consultant will conduct consultations with relevant stakeholders to ensure a common understanding of the implementation approach, technical requirements, and expected outputs of the assignment activities. The Consultant will be responsible for the preparation of agendas, presentations, technical materials, and supporting documentation for consultation meetings, workshops, and stakeholder information sessions.

The assignment shall be implemented based on available monitoring information, datasets, and documentation provided by beneficiary institutions. No additional field monitoring, sampling campaigns, or laboratory investigations are foreseen under this consultancy.

3.1 Review and analytical assessment (Deliverable 1)

The Consultant shall:

- Review existing hydrobiological monitoring methodologies, technical reports, and relevant regulatory and methodological documents related to ecological status assessment of surface water bodies in the Republic of Moldova;
- Review Government Decision No. 884/2024 on the approval of the Methodology for classification of ecological status and ecological potential of waters and assess its applicability for the implementation of WFD-compliant ecological assessment approaches;
- Review relevant provisions of Government Decision No. 890/2013, as amended, and assess existing surface water classification approaches in relation to WFD ecological assessment principles;
- Review existing approaches and methodologies related to the application of the Multi-Metric Index (MMI), ecological quality ratios (EQRs), reference conditions, and biological classification systems;

- Review available information related to biological quality elements, including benthic invertebrate fauna, phytoplankton, phytobenthos, macrophytes, and other relevant hydrobiological components used for ecological status assessment;
- Review available documentation and technical reports related to the development and testing of the existing MMI for benthic invertebrate fauna in the Republic of Moldova, including identified methodological limitations and practical implementation challenges;
- Identify methodological, technical, and operational gaps, constraints, and areas requiring further refinement or development;
- Prepare an analytical background document summarizing findings, observations, and recommendations relevant to the implementation of the assignment activities.

3.2 Review and screening of available monitoring datasets (Deliverable 1)

The Consultant shall:

- Review and screen available hydrobiological monitoring datasets and related information made available by beneficiary institutions;
- Assess the completeness, applicability, and limitations of available datasets for ecological status assessment and practical application of the MMI;
- Assess the suitability of available datasets for type-specific ecological assessment approaches, establishment of reference conditions, interpretation of ecological quality ratios (EQRs), and practical ecological classification exercises;
- Identify suitable datasets and practical examples for use during workshop exercises and technical discussions;
- Complement and structure datasets, where necessary, for training and demonstration purposes;
- Identify key technical challenges related to reference conditions, typology-specific assessment, data interpretation, and ecological classification.

3.3 Preparation of technical workshop and training materials (Deliverable 2)

The Consultant shall:

- Develop the technical concept, structure, and agenda of the workshop on implementation and further development of hydrobiological assessment methodologies and the MMI;
- Ensure that the workshop combines theoretical and practical sessions, with particular emphasis on hands-on exercises using available hydrobiological datasets and ecological classification examples;
- Prepare workshop and training materials, including presentations, technical notes, datasets for practical exercises, and supporting reference materials;
- Establish consultations with relevant national experts and institutions involved in the development and implementation of ecological classification methodologies and GD 884/2024;
- Prepare an annotated outline of workshop contents, methodology, expected outputs, and practical exercises;

- Tailor workshop materials and practical exercises to the needs of specialists involved in hydrobiological monitoring, ecological assessment, and water quality management activities;
- Define technical and organizational requirements necessary for the implementation of the workshop, including training facilities, interpretation requirements, and equipment needs.

3.4 Delivery of technical workshop and stakeholder engagement information session (Deliverable 3)

The Consultant shall:

- Deliver and facilitate a 1 (one) day in-person technical workshop for approximately 20 participants, focused on the implementation and further development of hydrobiological monitoring methodologies, MMI application, and ecological classification approaches;
- Deliver the workshop in a format combining technical presentations, facilitated discussions, and practical exercises related to hydrobiological data interpretation and ecological classification;
- Facilitate technical discussions and practical exercises related to ecological status assessment and interpretation of hydrobiological monitoring data;
- Conduct a stakeholder half-day in-person information session for approximately 20 participants, targeting a broader audience of decision-makers, representatives of institutions responsible for water resources management, ongoing projects, NGOs, scientific and academic institutions, and other relevant stakeholders. Prepare and deliver presentation materials tailored to both technical and non-technical audiences.

3.5 Recommendations and finalization (Deliverable 4)

The Consultant shall:

- Prepare a synthesis document summarizing key findings, lessons learned, technical conclusions, and recommendations resulting from the assignment;
- Formulate practical recommendations regarding:
    - further development and application of the MMI and ecological quality ratios (EQRs);
    - strengthening hydrobiological monitoring and ecological assessment systems;
    - improvement of institutional capacities related to WFD implementation;
    - potential refinement and enhancement of Government Decision No. 884/2024 and related methodological frameworks;
    - strengthening the practical integration of ecological classification methodologies into routine surface water monitoring and assessment activities;
    - potential approaches for improving typology-specific ecological assessment, reference conditions, and interpretation of ecological quality ratios in the Republic of Moldova;
- Present findings and recommendations to relevant institutions and stakeholders;

- Finalize all assignment outputs incorporating comments and feedback received from UNDP and beneficiary institutions.

4. DELIVERABLES

Deliverable	Description	Tentative Timeline	Estimated level of effort
Deliverable 1 – Analytical Review and Dataset Assessment Report	Analytical report including review of existing hydrobiological monitoring methodologies, relevant regulatory and methodological frameworks, assessment of available hydrobiological datasets, identification of methodological and technical gaps, and recommendations for the implementation of workshop and training activities. The report shall also include assessment of the applicability and limitations of available datasets for practical ecological classification exercises and WFD-compliant assessment approaches.	Week 6 after the contract signature	12 working days
Deliverable 2 – Workshop Programme and Training Materials	Technical workshop package including annotated workshop agenda, presentations, supporting technical materials, datasets for practical exercises, consultation summaries, and organizational requirements for implementation of the workshop and stakeholder information session. The workshop package shall include both theoretical and practical training materials related to hydrobiological monitoring, ecological classification systems, interpretation of hydrobiological monitoring data, ecological quality ratios (EQRs), reference conditions, and application of the Multi-Metric Index (MMI).	Week 10 after the contract signature	8 working days
Deliverable 3 – Report on the Technical Workshop and Stakeholder Information Session	Report summarizing implementation of the workshop and stakeholder information session, including key technical discussions, findings, practical recommendations, participant feedback, and other supporting documentation. The report shall also summarize key technical issues raised during practical exercises and stakeholder discussions related to ecological status assessment, WFD implementation challenges, ecological classification methodologies, and practical application of the MMI and EQRs.	Week 14 after the contract signature	6 working days
Deliverable 4 – Final Recommendations and Synthesis Report	Final synthesis report summarizing lessons learned, conclusions, and recommendations related to further development and application of the MMI, ecological quality ratios (EQRs), hydrobiological monitoring methodologies, ecological status assessment systems, and	Week 16 after contract signature	4 working days

	potential refinement of Government Decision No. 884/2024 and related methodological frameworks. The report shall include practical recommendations for strengthening routine ecological status assessment processes, improving typology-specific assessment approaches, interpretation of hydrobiological monitoring data, establishment of reference conditions, and strengthening institutional capacities related to WFD implementation in the Republic of Moldova.		

5. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

The Consultant will work under the direct supervision of the UNDP Dniester II Project Manager, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Environment, the Environmental Agency, the National Administration "Apele Moldovei", and other relevant beneficiary institutions involved in hydrobiological monitoring and ecological status assessment activities.

UNDP will facilitate coordination and communication with the beneficiary institutions and will support the organization of consultation meetings, the technical workshop, and the stakeholder information session, including venue arrangements, catering, translation, interpretation services and other related organizational expenses, as applicable. The Consultant will be responsible for the preparation and delivery of presentations, technical materials, workshop documentation, and supporting materials required for the implementation of assignment activities, in coordination with UNDP.

The beneficiary institutions will provide the Consultant with access to available hydrobiological monitoring information, datasets, regulatory and methodological documents, and other relevant technical materials necessary for implementation of the assignment activities.

The assignment shall be implemented based on existing monitoring information and datasets made available by beneficiary institutions. No additional field monitoring, sampling activities, or laboratory investigations are foreseen under this consultancy.

The Consultant shall follow the agreed work schedule and shall be accountable for the timely delivery of high-quality outputs to the UNDP Dniester II Project Manager, who will review and approve the deliverables in consultation with the beneficiary institutions.

Each deliverable shall be considered acceptable if it is complete, technically sound, consistent with the objectives and scope of the assignment, practical for use by beneficiary institutions, and adequately reflects comments and recommendations provided by UNDP and relevant stakeholders.

All documentation related to deliverables shall be provided in English in one (1) electronic copy, using standard software formats (Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.).

Prior to submission of final deliverables, the Consultant shall present and discuss draft outputs with UNDP and relevant stakeholders to ensure that the final products reflect consolidated comments, technical feedback, and agreed recommendations.

The Consultant shall ensure that all workshop materials, presentations, datasets used for practical exercises, and supporting technical documentation are prepared in an editable, user-friendly, and reusable format suitable for future institutional use and knowledge-sharing purposes (e.g. Word, PowerPoint, Excel).

All materials provided to the Consultant and all information generated under this consultancy shall be treated as confidential, both during and after completion of the assignment. Violation of confidentiality requirements may result in immediate termination of the contract.

6. FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

The financial proposal shall specify a total lump-sum amount for the assignment and include a proposed payment schedule linked to clearly defined and measurable deliverables (qualitative and quantitative), indicating whether payments are requested in instalments or upon completion of the assignment.

Payments under the Individual Contract will be output-based, i.e., contingent upon the satisfactory delivery and approval of the deliverables specified in these Terms of Reference.

The financial proposal shall be expressed as a lump-sum amount covering the professional fee only. The proposed amount shall include all professional fees, communications, local administrative costs, and any other costs required for the completion of the assignment, excluding duty travel costs.

Payments will be disbursed in instalments upon submission and acceptance of the respective deliverables and certification by the UNDP Dniester II Project Manager that the services have been satisfactorily performed in accordance with the Terms of Reference.

Each deliverable shall be reviewed by UNDP in consultation with the beneficiary institutions to ensure completeness, technical quality, consistency with the Terms of Reference, and incorporation of relevant comments and recommendations prior to approval and payment processing.

7. DUTY TRAVEL

All travel related to the assignment will be organized and covered directly by the Project through the UNall Travel Module, in accordance with the applicable UNDP Travel Standard Operating Procedures (SOP).

The assignment is expected to include up to one (1) mission to the Republic of Moldova, with an estimated duration of up to five (5) mission days. The exact timing and duration of the mission will be agreed upon in coordination with UNDP during contract implementation.

The mission is expected to support the delivery of the technical workshop, stakeholder consultations, and the stakeholder information session foreseen under the assignment.

The exact schedule, duration, and format of mission-related activities shall be determined in coordination with UNDP and beneficiary institutions, depending on the implementation progress and organizational requirements of the assignment.

8. QUALIFICATIONS AND SKILLS REQUIRED

Academic Qualifications

- Advanced university degree (Master's degree or equivalent) in Hydrobiology, Aquatic Ecology, Environmental Science, Environmental Engineering, Biology, Chemistry, Water Resources Management, or other relevant fields.

Professional Experience

- Minimum 10 years of progressively responsible professional experience in hydrobiological monitoring and assessment of surface water ecosystems, including benthic invertebrate fauna and other biological quality elements;
- Proven experience in the application and/or development of Water Framework Directive (WFD)-compliant methodologies for ecological status assessment of surface water bodies;
- Demonstrated experience in the development, application, testing, or interpretation of biological indices and ecological assessment tools, including Multi-Metric Indices (MMIs), Ecological Quality Ratios (EQRs), or similar assessment methodologies;
- Proven experience in hydrobiological data analysis, interpretation, and ecological classification of surface water bodies;
- Experience in preparing technical analyses, methodological reviews, technical recommendations, or guidance documents related to hydrobiological monitoring and ecological status assessment;
- Proven experience in designing and delivering technical workshops, trainings, or institutional capacity-building activities related to hydrobiology, ecological monitoring, or WFD implementation;
- Experience in reviewing environmental legislation, methodological frameworks, or technical guidance documents related to surface water ecological assessment will be considered an asset;
- Proven professional experience in EU Member States, EU accession countries, or Eastern Partnership countries on WFD-related assignments will be considered a strong asset;
- Previous professional experience in the Republic of Moldova and/or within the Dniester River Basin will be considered an advantage;
- Experience working within UNDP, EU-funded projects, international organizations, or transboundary water management initiatives will be considered an asset.

Skills and Competencies

- Strong knowledge of the EU Water Framework Directive and related guidance documents concerning ecological status assessment and biological quality elements;
- Strong technical knowledge of hydrobiological monitoring methodologies, including benthic invertebrate fauna assessment, ecological classification systems, reference conditions, and ecological quality ratios;
- Strong analytical and problem-solving skills, including the ability to interpret complex environmental datasets and formulate practical technical recommendations;
- Ability to translate complex technical and scientific concepts into practical guidance, presentations, and training materials tailored to different stakeholder groups;
- Strong communication, presentation, facilitation, and stakeholder engagement skills;
- Proven ability to prepare high-quality technical reports, workshop materials, presentations, and analytical documents;
- Ability to work independently, manage multiple tasks simultaneously, and deliver high-quality outputs within agreed timelines;
- Excellent command of English is required;
- Working knowledge of Romanian and/or Russian will be considered an advantage.

The United Nations in 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 particularly encouraged to apply.

9. DOCUMENTS TO BE INCLUDED WHEN SUBMITTING THE PROPOSALS

Interested individual consultants must submit the following documents/information to demonstrate their qualifications:

- Curriculum Vitae (CV), including information about past experience in similar assignments and contact details of at least three referees;
- Brief technical proposal describing the proposed methodology, approach to the assignment, and workplan;
- Offeror's Letter to UNDP confirming interest and availability for the Individual Contractor (IC) assignment, incorporating the financial proposal in Annex 2.

Upload the signed version of the filled-in Offeror's Letter to UNDP confirming interest and availability for the Individual Contractor (IC) assignment. Annex 2 to the Offeror's Letter, incorporating the Financial Proposal, shall be filled in mandatorily and shall include the detailed breakdown of costs supporting the proposed lump-sum financial offer.

Please ensure that there are no mathematical errors and that the amounts reflected in the Offeror's Letter to UNDP Confirming Interest and Availability match the amounts indicated in the system submission.

10. EVALUATION

Initially, individual consultants will be short-listed based on the following minimum qualification criteria:

- Advanced university degree (Master's degree or equivalent) in Hydrobiology, Aquatic Ecology, Environmental Science, Environmental Engineering, Biology, Chemistry, Water Resources Management, or other relevant fields;
- Minimum 10 years of relevant professional experience in hydrobiological monitoring and assessment of surface water ecosystems, including benthic invertebrate fauna and other biological quality elements.

The short-listed individual consultant will be further evaluated based on the following methodology:

Cumulative Analysis

The award of the contract shall be made to the individual consultant whose offer has been evaluated and determined as:

a) responsive / compliant / acceptable; and

b) having received the highest score out of a pre-determined set of weighted technical and financial criteria specific to the solicitation.

- Technical Criteria weight – 60% (300 points)
- Financial Criteria weight – 40% (200 points)

Only candidates obtaining a minimum of 210 points (70%) in the technical evaluation will be considered for the Financial Evaluation.

Technical Evaluation – Maximum 300 Points

A. Desk Review – 150 Points

Criteria	Scoring	Maximum Points
Advanced university degree (Master's degree or PhD) in Hydrobiology, Aquatic Ecology, Environmental Science, Environmental Engineering, Biology, Chemistry, Water Resources Management, or other relevant fields	Master's degree – 10 pts; PhD – 20 pts	20
Minimum 10 years of relevant professional experience in hydrobiological monitoring and assessment of surface water ecosystems, including benthic invertebrate fauna and other biological quality elements	10 years – 30 pts; each additional year – 5 pts, up to 50 pts	50
Proven experience in the application and/or development of WFD-compliant methodologies for ecological status assessment of surface water bodies	1 assignment – 15 pts; each additional assignment – 5 pts, up to 35 pts	35
Demonstrated experience in development, application, testing, or interpretation of biological indices and ecological assessment tools (e.g. MMI, EQR, biological classification systems)	1 assignment – 10 pts; each additional assignment – 5 pts, up to 25 pts	25
Proven experience in designing and delivering technical workshops, trainings, or capacity-building activities related to hydrobiology, ecological monitoring, or WFD implementation	1 assignment – 10 pts; each additional assignment – 5 pts, up to 20 pts	20
Subtotal Desk Review – 150 Points		

B. Interview – 150 Points

Only the first 5 applicants that have accumulated the highest technical score shall be invited to the interview.

Criteria	Scoring	Maximum Points
Demonstrated technical knowledge of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD), ecological status assessment principles, and hydrobiological monitoring methodologies	Limited – up to 20 pts; Good – up to 40 pts; Excellent – up to 50 pts	50
Demonstrated understanding of biological indices, ecological quality ratios (EQRs), reference conditions, and classification systems for surface water bodies	Limited – up to 10 pts; Good – up to 20 pts; Excellent – up to 30 pts	30
Analytical skills and ability to interpret hydrobiological datasets and formulate practical technical recommendations	Limited – up to 10 pts; Good – up to 20 pts; Excellent – up to 25 pts	25

Communication, presentation, facilitation, and training delivery skills	Limited – up to 5 pts; Good – up to 15 pts; Excellent – up to 25 pts	25
Fluency in English and ability to communicate complex technical concepts clearly; knowledge of Romanian and/or Russian will be considered an advantage	English language – up to 10 pts; Romanian language – up to 5 pts; Russian language – up to 5 pts	20
Subtotal Interview – 150 Points		

Financial Evaluation – Maximum 200 Points

Criteria	Maximum Points
Evaluation of submitted financial offers will be done based on the following formula: S = (Fmin / F) * 200 S – score received on financial evaluation Fmin – the lowest financial offer out of all the submitted offers qualified over the technical evaluation round F – financial offer under consideration	200

Winning Candidate

The award of the contract shall be made to the individual consultant whose offer has been evaluated and determined as responsive, compliant, and acceptable, and who has received the highest aggregated score based on the weighted technical and financial evaluation criteria.