APPLICANT'S GUIDELINES

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST
CREATION OF A YOUTH-CENTERED SKILLS OBSERVATORY AND EXPERIMENTATION LAB
WITH THE SUPPORT FROM CATALYTIC FACILITY OF ISTANBUL REGIONAL HUB AND UNDP MOLDOVA

> *These guidelines describe the rules and procedures that will guide the submission, selection and implementation of project under this EOI, financed from Catalytic Fund of UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub and implemented by the UNDP Moldova.*

FEBRUARY, 2017

A. BACKGROUND

Youth unemployment is one of the major problems of the labor market in Moldova. Out of the total registered unemployed in 2015, 55% are aged 15-34. Youth aged 15-24 accounted for > 22% (2015) of the total unemployed. A joint UNDP/Cognitive Edge analysis of micronarrative data (supported by external surveys) reveals that the main cause is their **lack of skills** (40%), mostly due to the education system not responding to job market needs as students receive knowledge and skills of poor quality/irrelevance.

The mismatch in skills, both due to a gap between supply and demand, and to underutilization of existing skills, is one important impediment for youth employment. Coupled with low wages for entry-level positions and discriminatory practices (young women in particular), this causes youth exclusion and other social issues. Currently, government institutions lack a proper mechanism to analyze the evolution of the skills required on the labor market, and to support the experimentation of safe-to-fail and low-cost policy solutions. The lack of analytical capacities hinders reform and policy formulation/implementation, and reduces the efficiency of interventions to advance employment. A lack of a gender-responsive, rural-urban and skilled/unskilled perspective on the mismatch also reduces possibilities to design policies tailored to needs of young women and men.

The piloting of a **skills observatory focused on youth** is an experiment in itself that UNDP wants to conduct in partnership with local relevant stakeholders and interested parties, to provide tangible results and better inform the authorities and development partners on how the complexity of the labor market can be used to support youth employment. The recently approved National Employment Strategy (2016-2020) mentions the need to establish skills observatories. The Government, ETF and other partners met several times discussing potential scenarios for the establishment of such an observatory already; however, no actor yet has been able to commit resources for such an endeavour. The results of this work will further support the work of the government and development partners in developing capacities for labor market analysis and evidence-based policy making.

Policy impact evaluation is another missing element of the puzzle. In particular, public services are not taking into account the needs of the skilled youth in search for jobs that face problems of skills mismatch, deficiencies in connecting to private sector, discriminatory practices and similar. Real-time data, collected fast and qualitatively from youth can describe the real picture. Micronarratives proved already as an efficient and innovative way to both collect data about the labor market, as well as about the experiences of job seekers. UNDP started to conduct a Randomized Controlled Trial in unemployed, including youth and other groups to analyze the potential positive impact of the slightly improved public services using the model of soft-skills development successfully piloted by UNDP in 5 distinct locations in Moldova back in 2013.

In the above mentioned context, UNDP Projects Implementing Unit announces an Expression of Interest for a project that will create and run a youth skills observatory to be implemented starting **March 2017,** and which will cover two inter-linked components of the observatory, i.e. the analytical and experimentation components.

B. IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAME AND PROJECTS SIZE

The **expected duration of work is 10 months** with continuation of the project without further involvement of UNDP Moldova. The Observatory shall start its operations not later than **March 2017.** The Applicant will ensure the operations of the Observatory for another at least two years, up until end of 2019.

The maximum amount the applicants can request under their project proposals will not exceed **50,000 USD**.

C. ELIGIBILITY AND QUALIFICATION OF ORGANIZATION

The Qualifications of the Successful Contractor are the following:

- Be a registered local university, research institution or think-tank with outstanding reputation;
- Be directly responsible for the development and management of the project and not to act through intermediaries; Demonstrate capacity to implement all activities envisaged under the respective project;
- Be able to ensure that Observatory runs for at least another 2 years from the termination of the current project period;
- Individual experts should be able to prove that they possess the needed experience and motivation to conduct research on the envisaged areas of interest for the Observatory, actively learn in the process, share their knowledge with Employment Service and other stakeholders, widely disseminate the analytical results to the wider audiences;
- The Applicant should be able to provide a financial contribution of the project towards the establishment of the Observatory from its own resources, including possible in-kind contribution;
- The Applicant's staff should be ready and open to actively participate to all capacity building activities of the project, including prospective ETF and other trainings.
- The Applicant is respects and promotes principles of equal opportunities and results for both men and women.

Organizations are not eligible to apply and to receive financing if they:

- Do not correspond to the above mentioned criteria;
- Were found liable for serious professional or financial mismanagement, proven by such evidence as recognized by UNDP Moldova;

- Are a for-profit and/or a state-owned legal entity;
- Have a history of failing to comply with contractual obligations arising from previous arrangements with donor organizations.

Together with the Application Form, the applicant should submit a statement under their own responsibility that none of the above non-eligibility criteria applies to them (see. Application Form – "Applicant's Statement").

D. PROJECTS IMPLEMENTATION AREAS

Project proposals that envisage the establishment and running of a youth-oriented Skills Observatory and experimentation lab are welcome to apply. Strongly recommended directions of how the Observatory should operate are listed below:

A) Implement at least two inter-linked components of the observatory, i.e. the analytical and experimentation components

1. As part of the first component, the Observatory shall develop and launch **3 annual position papers** analyzing the key trends in skills mismatch and underutilization and other related areas, including employment opportunities, availability of resources and other (including at least 1 on gender-related issues), One position paper shall be based on the analysis of the micronarratives;
2. Also as part of the first component, develop **one analytical paper condensing the panorama of skills** and possible short-term projections at the end of the first year;
3. As part of the second component, develop, implement and monitor **4 policy experiments,** preferably co-developed via micronarratives collection and joint analysis and initiated to innovatively solve key challenges in skills mismatch and underutilization, including at least 2 focused on issues faced by young women; experiments shall be generated on the basis of the collected and analyzed evidence; UNDP will provide more information and methodological support with the micronarratives implementation;
4. Consolidate the National Employment Agency (NEA)'s and/or other stakeholders' capacities of analysis, monitoring and evaluation: deliver at least 3 workshops on data collection, analysis and experimentation, involve at least 1 NEA staff member in the design of future experiments and experimentation, as well as in monitoring and evaluation activities; other interested counterparts are also directly participating to the Observatory's activities and gathering knowledge;

B) Data sources and analysis

The key data and data sources to be used by the Observatory to produce the analytical products span from the official statistics to micronarratives collected from end-users. In particular:

- *Micronarratives* – The Observatory will regularly collect micronarratives from unemployed and private sector companies; collected micronarratives will be analyzed using the open SenseMaker software that UNDP Project will make available to the Observatory. The UNDP Project will also provide analytical guidance on the use of the software. The software integrates decision support, research, and monitoring and knowledge management and represents a first example of distributed ethnography toolkit for analysis. The first set of data from youth unemployed was collected in the period March 2016 - November 2016, and will constitute the baseline data against which future activities will be evaluated/analyzed.
- *Primary and secondary data* – data of the National Employment Service that is collected from the private sector, data from NBS (LFS, HBS and other surveys), other databases. The Observatory will cooperate with other development partners, including in particular ETF, ILO, and WB for exchange of information and available data and databases.

- Micronarratives and analysis of other data will be used to produce user-friendly position papers for youth. At least four such papers will be produced, as mentioned above, in areas such as youth skills mismatch and underutilization, discriminatory practices in the context of youth employment, wages and wage gap, gender-specific labor market challenges, internships and apprenticeships, skills projections for youth, youth self-employment, informal work, soft skills for the future, etc. **Position papers will help develop and pilot specific experiments**.

C) Experimentation

Evidence-supported experimentation is a good way to support policy making addressing youth employability. Experiments would be drafted based on the analysis of available data, micronarratives, and consultations with partners. Experiments shall be implementable in up to 12 months and end with concrete recommendations for upscale. Furthermore, experiments shall be coupled with some monitoring and evaluation toolkit, so that the Observatory staff can report on the impact of the experiment onto the employability, speed and quality of employment of youth. Possible experiments and areas of experimentation will include:

- Sourcing possible innovative solutions to youth unemployment or under-employment directly from private sector companies, NGOs, LPAs, associations or youth groups through a possible launching of a **MICS** (Moldova Innovation Challenge Scheme); best sourced solutions can be the basis of an experiment. If yielding positive results, project might suggest up-scale with support from project partners. Experiments of this type could be co-financed by UNDP.
- The Observatory, UNDP and other stakeholders partner with Public Employment Service in the **re-design of the way public major job fairs** are organized (re-design of data collection and analysis mechanism, innovative engagement with private sector companies, increased speed of matching demand and supply, soft-skills development ateliers, interview simulation exercises with potential applicants on spot, or similar)
- Experimentation with self-employment of skilled youth as a parallel track to employment which can be a good option for youth, particularly in rural areas.
- Implementation of quick internship projects with the private sector -- sporadic examples in IT and banking sectors proved quite successful. Further experimentation, analysis of collected data and all cumulated insights can help and inform up-scaling efforts.
- Experimentation with the local academia in quick collection of data from about-to-graduate students on what jobs they are searching for, if interested in internships, fulltime or part-time jobs, sectors, etc.

D) Promotion, communication and visibility

Develop and implement a communication plan related to the observatory. The Observatory shall communicate on the major milestones achieved and the findings that are relevant for the promotion of youth employability and piloted solutions for the skills mismatch issues. Communication tools to be used are press releases, TV and/or radio talk shows, interviews with staff and/or beneficiaries, success stories from representatives of actors involved in the activities, round tables, etc.

E) Other

The project proposal should contain a range of **clearly defined and connected activities** that will lead to specific outcomes during a defined time frame. If applicants have secured a part of the requested funding from other sources, they should include this information in the application form.

A recommended action plan is presented below. Applicants to this Expression of interest are encouraged to develop a vision of how the Observatory will operate and

what it will provide to the end-beneficiaries. Below are presented possible deliverables and proposed deadlines.

Targets	Deadlines
1. Detailed concept of the Observatory, including detailed methodology, work plan, sustainability plan, monitoring and evaluation, visibility action plan	Mid-March 2017
2. Running observatory, with core staff on board and work plan for 2017 approved by UNDP	Starting end of March 2017
3. 3 position papers developed, consulted with relevant stakeholders and widely disseminated	By July 2017
4. 1 position paper consolidating the skills panorama for youth in Moldova developed, consulted with relevant stakeholders, and widely disseminated	By December 2017
5. Develop detailed concepts for the 4 planned experiments and consult/approve with UNDP their content and implementation plans	By end of April 2017
6. Up to 4 experiments to support youth employability in Moldova implemented, lessons learned duly documented and results of such experimentation work publicly shared with all key stakeholders	By end December 2017

The proposal must also show whether or to what extent this project is based upon or **complements other initiatives** implemented by the applicant or others in the same area, as well as ways for preventing the duplication of activities. It should explain whether the project and/or specific experiments will lead to **scalability** in other areas and/or organizations.

All project proposals should also include a **Sustainability Plan**, which would clearly stipulate how the sustainability of the respective Youth Skills Observatory will be ensured for at least the following 2 years after the project ends, up until end of 2019, and contain a specific distribution of responsibilities among Observatory staff and involved partners, as well as an official commitment to maintain the respective Observatory running.

E. APPLICATION PROCEDURES

The organizations that are interested in applying for this Expression of Interest should submit a package of documents, which include the Application Form and the documents demonstrating the legal status of the applicant, the qualifications of the persons who will be involved in running the observatory and in conducting the analytical products, as well as any other information to demonstrate the experience and the ability of the applicant to implement the project. For more details, please, refer to point "F" below.

The Application Form must include enough detailed data, in particular with respect to the means of achieving the results of the project, the benefits that it will bring and the way in which it will contribute to goals designated in this Competition.

PROJECT BUDGET

- The budget of the project, as part of the application form, should be in US dollars;

- The budget should contain clear information about the ways the funds will be spent and a detailed breakdown of eligible expenses;
- The budget should be realistic and cost-efficient;
- The budget must correspond to the activity plan as it is described in the project proposal;
- The planned costs in the budget should be presented based on a VAT of 0%, as the implementing Project is a registered technical assistance project, and thus is VAT exempt.

Eligible expenses include:

- Expenses for the key staff of the Observatory;
- Expenses for up to 4 consulted and agreed experiments;
- Expenses for trainings and/or workshops. The applicant shall consider organizing the events with minimum costs, e.g. covering minimum handout needs (sharing/displaying electronic version of materials is recommended), coffee breaks, refreshment and meals that are strictly necessary and in line with the purposes of the Observatory; conference facilities – in-kind contribution desired;
- Expenses for visibility and communication activities. Costly products such as printing or outdoor publicity is discouraged;
- Interpretation and translation costs, if needed;
- Travel costs for experience sharing, in line with the purpose of the Observatory;
- ***Expenses for purchase of equipment can only be included in the budget if they are necessary for the purposes of efficient project implementation; as a general rule, such expenses should be avoided;***
- Administrative expenses related to Observatory running shall not exceed 20% of the total budget. Remuneration for the administrative staff of the Observatory, communications, supplies, postal and banking services are eligible administrative expenses. Remuneration of key non-administrative staff and external experts are not considered administrative expenses;
- Other expenses that are necessary for efficient implementation of the project.

NOTE: In the budget of the project proposal, the applicant should indicate their own contribution and the contribution of the partners, if any. In kind contributions are not actual costs and cannot be considered as co-financing from the partner for project implementation. In kind contributions (premises, equipment, vehicles, etc.) of the organization or partner of the project implementation are to be indicated in the Application Form.

Ineligible expenses are:

- rental and maintenance of the observatory spaces;
- expenses incurred before the contract has been signed (including expenses related to project submission);
- fines and penalties;
- activities already financially covered by another grant programme/ other persons providing financial support;
- individual educational programs;
- administrative expenses of the applicant;
- exchange rate losses.

F. THE APPLICATION PACKAGE SHOULD CONTAIN THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS:

- **Application Form** (which will include the requested budget and activities timeline), filled in Russian, Romanian or English. Handwritten Application Forms will not be accepted;
- **Copy of the registration certificate** to prove that the partners are registered legal entities;
- **Copy of the Statute** of the organizations;
- **CVs** of key interested internal and/or external staff, including PhD or master students, volunteers, academic staff and similar; (compiled in the same format for the whole team);
- **A brief overview of the activities of the applicant** (including analytic materials and researches to be developed; tentative experiments to be implemented; materials/information/events for visibility and public information purpose: newspaper articles, audio-/video clips, photo reports from events, etc.);
- **Other relevant materials** to increase credibility of the Applicant for the donor and to complement the Project justification.

The **Application Form** and **Applicant's Guidelines** are posted on the UNDP in Moldova website (http://www.undp.md/tenders/index.shtml). These documents can also be received by sending a request to Mr. Dumitru Vasilescu, Project Manager, at the following e-mail: dumitru.vasilescu@undp.org.

Deadline for submission of proposals: February 27, 2017, 16:00 (Moldova local time).

Note: A pre-bidding conference will take place on **Wednesday, 14 February 2017, at 14:00** in the 3rd floor Conference Room of the **Le Roi Business Center (29, Sfatul Tarii Str., Chisinau).**

The documents can be sent either by mail at: tenders-Moldova@undp.org titled as "**LED/Skills Observatory"**, or by post, or delivered physically in a sealed envelope (marked **"LED/Skills Observatory")** to the following address: **UNDP Moldova, 131, 31 August 1989 str., MD-2012, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova.**
Attention: Registry Office/Procurement

Applications sent by fax will be rejected. Incomplete applications shall not be examined. Applications sent by mail should not exceed 5 MB in size. Applications larger than 5 MB should be split into several messages and each message subject should indicate "part *x* of *y*" besides the marking mentioned in the announcement and the solicitation documents. All electronic submissions are confirmed by an automatic reply from tenders-Moldova@undp.org. If you do not receive a confirmation by email, please, contact UNDP Moldova Registry Office by phone +373-22-220045. Offers received after the deadline shall be rejected.

For additional information on the application process, please contact Mr. Dumitru Vasilescu, Project Manager, either by phone at: (+373) 022-839-911 or by e-mail at: dumitru.vasilescu@undp.org.

G. SELECTION AND EVALUATION PROCEDURES:

Upon expiration of the deadline, a two-stage evaluation process of project proposals will take place:

Stage I: verification of administrative compliance and eligibility of applicants – exclusion stage. We will verify whether the Application Form is duly filled in, the package is complete, the project is a joint one, includes confidence building content and the stated criteria are met.

This stage is carried out by UNDP Projects Implementing Unit Team.

Stage II: evaluation of applications.

This stage is carried out by an Evaluation Committee, which consists of representatives of UNDP and key national stakeholders. The project that receives the highest total number of points will be recommended for final approval by the Project Board. Points will be awarded based on the extent to which the project proposals respond to the stated objectives and priorities of the grant programme.

H. EVALUATION CRITERIA OF THE PROJECT PROPOSALS

I. Relevance of the project:

- project's contribution to achieving the goals and objectives of the Observatory;
- identification of the problem and quality of justification;
- significance of the project for the real needs of youth in job-seeking and other direct beneficiaries;
- originality, innovation, openness to experimentation;
- Project's sustainability and perspectives of development of the applicant organization (*benefits resulting from project implementation are able to exist independently over a long period of time after the end of project's financing*).

II. Methodology of project implementation:

- correspondence of the proposed activities to the aims, objectives and expected results;
- feasibility of the action plan (*proposed activities are realistic and feasible, taking into account impact of the working environment in the field, as well as the ability of the applicant to manage the project*);
- monitoring and evaluation methods;
- project's impact on local level/regional level;
- partnership establishment and degree of partners' involvement in the activities;
- Degree of involvement and participation of the target group/direct beneficiaries in project implementation.

III. Capacity of the applicant:

- Competence and experience of the organization in the area stipulated by the project;
- Degree of expertise of the team that will implement the project (experts, coordinators, PhD or master students, volunteers, academic staff, etc.).
- Readiness/availability of the physical resources for the implementation of the planned activities (premises, equipment, etc.).

IV. Project Budget:

- Justification of project expenses;
- Applicant's contribution.

Annexes:
1. Competition Announcement
2. Application Form (in Word Format)