

REQUEST FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST (CONSULTING SERVICES – INDIVIDUAL CONSULTANTS)

ROMANIA

Romania Secondary Education Project

Loan Agreement No 8481-RO

Assignment Title: **Technical Assistance for Implementation and supervision under the component 2**

Reference No.: C 2/3

The *Government of Romania (GoR)* has received financing from the World Bank toward the cost of the *Romania Secondary Education Project*, and intends to apply part of the proceeds for consulting services.

The consulting services (“the Services”) include **Technical Assistance for Implementation and supervision under the component 2** for an average of 300 days within a maximum of 27 months between October 2020 and December 2022. The Terms of Reference for **Technical Assistance for Implementation and supervision under the component 2** are annexed to this Request for Expressions of Interest.

The *Ministry of Education and Research / Unit for the Management of Externally Financed Projects* now invites eligible consultants (“Consultants”) to indicate their interest in providing the Services. Interested Consultants should provide information demonstrating that they have the required qualifications and relevant experience to perform the Services.

Three (3) individual consultants will be selected in accordance with the selection of individual consultants method set out in the Consultant Guidelines. **Firms are not allowed to propose individual consultants.**

Qualification for the Technical Assistance for Implementation and supervision under the component 2

The minimum competencies required from the Consultant are the following:

- Master’s degree or other postgraduate studies, preferably in economics or engineering fields;
- At least 5 years of experience in education or education management at university level, proving a good understanding of Romanian higher education system;
- At least 5 years of experience and knowledge related to project design and implementation, or project proposals evaluation;
- Proven experience in projects or grants monitoring will be an advantage, as well as specific training courses in the field of projects management or monitoring;
- Previous experience with grants under World Bank-financed projects will be an advantage;

The attention of interested Consultants is drawn to paragraph 1.9 of the World Bank's "Guidelines: Selection and Employment of Consultants under IBRD Loans and IDA Credits and Grants by World Bank Borrowers" dated January 2011 (revised July 2014). ("Consultant Guidelines"), setting forth the World Bank's policy on conflict of interest. In addition, please refer to the following specific information on conflict of interest related to this assignment:

Bank policy requires that consultants provide professional, objective, and impartial advice and at all times hold the client's interests paramount, without any consideration for future work, and that in providing advice they avoid conflicts with other assignments and their own corporate interests. Consultants shall not be hired for any assignment that would be in conflict with their prior or current obligations to other clients, or that may place them in a position of being unable to carry out the assignment in the best interest of the Borrower. Without limitation on the generality of the foregoing, consultants shall not be hired under the circumstances set forth below:

(a) Conflict between consulting activities and procurement of goods, works, or non-consulting services (i.e., services other than consulting services covered by these Guidelines): A firm that has been engaged by the Borrower to provide goods, works, or non-consulting services for a project, or any affiliate that directly or indirectly controls, is controlled by, or is under common control with that firm, shall be disqualified from providing consulting services resulting from or directly related to those goods, works, or non-consulting services. Conversely, a firm hired to provide consulting services for the preparation (before Loan effectiveness) or implementation of a project, or any affiliate that directly or indirectly controls, is controlled by, or is under common control with that firm, shall be disqualified from subsequently providing goods, works, or services (other than consulting services covered by these Guidelines) resulting from or directly related to the consulting services for such preparation or implementation. This provision does not apply to the various firms (consultants, contractors, or suppliers) which together are performing the Contractor's obligations under a turnkey or design and build contract.

(b) Conflict among consulting assignments: Neither consultants (including their personnel and sub-consultants), nor any affiliate that directly or indirectly controls, is controlled by, or is under common control with that firm, shall be hired for any assignment that, by its nature, may be in conflict with another assignment of the consultants. As an example, consultants assisting a client in the privatization of public assets shall neither purchase, nor advise purchasers of, such assets. Similarly, consultants hired to prepare Terms of Reference (TOR) for an assignment shall not be hired for the assignment in question.

(c) Relationship with Borrower's staff: Consultants (including their experts and other personnel, and sub-consultants) that have a close business or family relationship with a professional staff of the Borrower (or of the project implementing agency, or of a recipient of a part of the loan) who are directly or indirectly involved in any part of: (i) the preparation of the TOR for the assignment, (ii) the selection process for the contract, or (iii) the supervision of such contract may not be awarded a contract, unless the conflict stemming from this relationship has been resolved in a manner acceptable to the Bank throughout the selection process and the execution of the contract.

(d) A consultant shall submit only one proposal, either individually or as a joint venture partner in another proposal. If a consultant, including a joint venture partner, submits or participates in more than one proposal, all such proposals shall be disqualified. This does not, however, preclude a consulting firm to participate as a sub-consultant, or an individual to

participate as a team member, in more than one proposal when circumstances justify and if permitted by the RFP (Request for Proposal).

Further information can be obtained at the address below during office hours **8:00 A.M. – 4:00 P.M.**

Expressions of interest and CVs must be delivered in a written form to the address below (in person, or by mail, or by fax, or by e-mail) by **October 14, 2020, at 2 P.M local time.** To validate the information presented in the CV, the candidate will attach all supporting documents, necessary to prove at least the minimum qualifications that are mandatory (study diplomas, proofs for the professional experience, list of papers and/or copies after the cover and the content of relevant scientific works, recommendations, training diplomas etc.).

Ministry of Education and Research – Unit for the Management of Externally Financed Projects

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Romania
Ministry of Education and Research
Romania Secondary Education Project
Loan Agreement N° 8481-RO

**Terms of Reference for Technical Assistance for
Implementation and supervision under the component 2**

1. Background

On April 17, 2015, the Government of Romania (GoR) and the World Bank (WB) signed the Loan Agreement N° 8481-RO on the implementation of the **Romania Secondary Education Project** (hereinafter referred to as **the ROSE Project**). The ROSE Project was declared effective on October 14, 2015 and will be implemented by the Ministry of Education and Research (MoER) until November 2022, through the Unit for the Management of Externally Financed Projects (UMEFP). The ROSE Project Development Objectives (PDO) are to improve the transition from upper secondary into tertiary education and increase the retention in the first year of tertiary education in project-supported education institutions. It is structured in three components, as described below.

Component 1 – School-based and Systemic Interventions. This component finances supply-side interventions at the school and system levels to address the academic and personal factors hindering Romanian students from transitioning from upper secondary to tertiary education, including dropping out, declining to take the Baccalaureate, or scoring a low mark on the Baccalaureate.

Sub-component 1.1 – School-based Interventions. This sub-component supports the transition of students from upper secondary into tertiary education using a decentralized approach based on non-competitive grants to low-performing public high schools. The criteria for selection of eligible high schools combine the following rates: Baccalaureate passing rate and upper secondary graduation rate. Grants will be awarded to public high schools for a 3 or 4-year period to allow sufficient time for implementing activities aimed at supporting students from Grade 9 through Grade 12. At the end of the Project, it is estimated that approximately 80 percent of Romanian public high schools would benefit from this sub-component.

Sub-component 1.2 – Systemic Interventions. This sub-component finances: (i) revision of the upper secondary education curriculum; (ii) in person and/or virtual training of teachers and school directors on adapting the curriculum to the needs and abilities of targeted students, applying student-centered methods and using digital technologies for teaching-learning assessment; (iii) improving teaching conditions within teacher training institutions through provision of goods; (iv) revising and updating Grade 8 and Baccalaureate exam banks of items and associated training, including the strengthening of the institutional capacity of the National Center for Policy and Evaluation in Education (NCPEE); (v) improving the information technologies platforms used for learning assessments and exams of upper secondary education school students through the provision of goods; (vi) development and implementation of a Grade 10 learning assessment, to be administered at the end of the compulsory education cycle; (vii) development of digital teaching and learning materials; (viii) development and implementation of campaigns to raise student and teacher awareness, including, when applicable, for Roma students; (ix) strengthening of MoER's capacity to support informational communications of educational institutions for online learning, and use educational information to monitor upper secondary education and the

transition of students into tertiary education, including by providing goods; (x) supporting the participation of Romanian students at international assessments through financing of associated costs including management, administration, participation fees; and (xi) improving the teaching-learning conditions in the high schools units eligible to receive grants by providing goods, including digital devices and hygiene/sanitation supplies to prevent COVID-19 contagion and increase the education system resilience.

Component 2 – University-Level Interventions and Bridge Programs. This component supports activities designed to address the needs of students who are at risk of dropping out of faculties in the first year of study in tertiary education. It finances **four types of grants schemes: one non-competitive and three competitive – student support, learning centers and summer bridge programs.** These four grants schemes are targeted to public universities that serve at risk students, with the aim of increasing retention and efficiency. Approximately 85 percent of Romanian public faculties would benefit from this component.

This Component will also finance all the technical assistance required for establishing a quality assurance mechanism for the Universities Grants Scheme along all the steps in the cycle, including: (i) evaluation of grant proposals; and (ii) monitoring of fiduciary and other pedagogical aspects during the implementation of the approved grants.

Non-competitive grants, as well as *student support grants*, aim at encouraging eligible public faculties to implement remedial programs, tutoring, counseling, guidance and support services, coaching services, workshops in specific areas, and awareness raising campaigns targeted to at-risk student to achieve the specific Project Development Objectives. The implementation period of these grants is for 2 or 3 years.

Summer bridge programs competitive grants aim at supporting tertiary-level summer activities, such as, but not limited to campus-based courses, for public high school students, with a special focus on students at-risk/coming from disadvantaged groups. The summer bridge courses and activities are implemented during summer breaks and last between two to three weeks. These grants are offered for 25 high school students per year, per delivery, and are funding students' subsistence costs, in academic campus or similar, and related activities-delivery expenses. These courses are providing students an early and low-consequence university experience ("university knowledge"), developing familiarity of the context and initiating early skills development relevant to success in tertiary education. The students may also participate in workshops, study visits, sport competitions, visits to museums, art displays etc., activities specifically related to the university life and the faculties' fields of study. The universities can develop and implement dissemination activities, in order to attract and select the students for the summer bridge courses and/or for enhance links between universities and high schools.

Learning centers, also funded under the competitive grant scheme, aim at increasing the academic and social support mechanisms available to at-risk students. Each learning center would be designed based on the main factors contributing to student under-achievement and dropout from the earliest years of university, including under-preparation in upper secondary education, underdeveloped study skills, limited exposure to new academic subjects, and lack of familiarity with pedagogical norms (class size, duration, homework levels, and the like) at the university level. These centers would be

fully-realized learning spaces, for directed support and self-learning, with furniture (including desks, tables for collaborative work, chairs and bookshelves) and technical equipment, such as computers, interactive white boards, and teaching/learning software (e.g. for language instruction, mathematics, writing, and other core skills, as well as for remedial support and assessment). The learning centers would require full-time administrative staff, paid or volunteer tutors and support staff, and would benefit from the contributions of professors or experts who would be compensated for supplementary work through the Project.

Eligible categories of expenditures, for all grant schemes, could include: training, consulting services, non-consulting services, works, goods and incremental operating costs (including the management of the grant). The specific eligible categories of expenditures for each grant scheme, as well as eligible activities are defined in the Universities Grants Manual, which will also inform the participating tertiary education institutions about the steps to prepare and present proposal for all grant schemes, as well as the evaluation criteria and processes envisioned to approve or reject proposals. Furthermore, it will describe the implementation process for approved proposals, procurement procedures and disbursement of funds and collection of supporting physical and financial implementation progress information.

The specific objectives, activities, rules and requirements of the project, according to the Loan Agreement between the Romanian Government and the World Bank, are established in the Universities Grants Manual, that comprises three sections:

- A. The Application Guideline;
- B. The Evaluation Guideline;
- C. The Implementation Guideline.

Currently, **393 sub-projects** are in implementation or in the final reporting phase under the universities grants schemes, as follows:

Type of grant	Number of grants				Total allocation (EURO)
	Round I	Round II	Round III	TOTAL	
<i>Non-competitive grants</i>	60	141	-	201	21.063.039,00
<i>Student Support</i>	-	-	49	49	6.787.298,36
<i>Bridge programs</i>	20	39	46	105	11.184.111,79
<i>Learning centers</i>	13	12	13	38	8.599.865,59
TOTAL	93	192	108	393	47.635.692,90

The period of implementation for projects submitted under round I is 2017 – 2020, for round II 2018 – 2021, respectively for round III 2020 – 2022.

The Implementation Guidelines is facilitating consistent understanding of the implementation process of projects financed under the Universities Grants Scheme (UGS) and has the objective to get Grant Beneficiaries acquainted with the basic requirements, rules and recommendations for project implementation. The Guidelines lays down the manner of performance of procurement and contract management, financial planning, operating amendments to the grant agreement, making payments, financial and accounting management, technical and financial reporting,

monitoring activities and results, determination of the environmental impact etc., and, for this purpose, it provides templates/forms for the documents and reports to be prepared by the Beneficiaries.

Monitoring implementation of grants under UGS consists in providing supervision for the project's implementation, which process focuses on certain aspects, such as: application of the provisions of the Grant Agreement and those of the Implementation Guide, the use of resources, attainment of the objectives and proposed indicators, actual impact of the project's activities against the planned impact thereof, problems that can occur etc., as well as ensuring compliance with the applicable legal framework.

A consulting joint venture has been hired by UMEFP to ensure monitoring services for all the grants financed under the ROSE Project.

The most important tasks of the monitoring joint venture are:

- guide and assist the assigned grant teams in the implementation process,
- undertake monitoring visits of the universities assigned at least once per semester for each subproject, to make on-site verifications and reality checks,
- verify and, in case no major gaps or discrepancies are found, endorse the procurement documents elaborated by the sub-project team,
- check the regular reports received from the assigned universities for consistency with the Grant Agreement, alongside with the *on-site verification* for the progress reports,
- review and, in case no major gaps or discrepancies are found, endorse the request for release of the grant tranches,
- review and, if acceptable according to the approved regulations, endorse/ approve the contractual modifications requested by the beneficiaries etc.
- prepare and submit periodical or on-demand technical and fiduciary reports regarding the progress of activities and results under the universities grants schemes, highlighting any “red flags” in terms of grants implementation.

Having in mind the responsibilities established in the Loan Agreement and the Project operational Manual regarding monitoring of grants financed under the University Grants Schemes, UMEFP's staff further checks all the documents prepared by the grantees and endorsed by the monitoring joint venture, to make sure that the principles, procedures and requirements of the Operational Manual, Procurement Guidelines, Consulting Services Guidelines and Anticorruption Guidelines, as well as those included in the University Grants Manual, are observed.

Furthermore, UMEFP staff undertakes monitoring of the progress of activities through monitoring visits and direct verifications of the documents and reports prepared by the grantees.

Based on the verifications performed by the consulting company, as well as on the verifications and monitoring visits performed by its own staff, UMEFP has the ultimate responsibility of approving all:

- Contractual amendments;
- Reports, that includes justifications of how the funds received have been spent;

- Release new financing tranches.

Having in mind that the number of projects under implementation in the University Grants Scheme is currently the maximum and the ROSE Project has reached a peak of activities, UMEFP needs assistance to perform the above-mentioned verification and revision activities and to address any delay related to processing and validation of reports and requests for further funding of grants.

Component 3 – Project Management, Monitoring and Evaluation. This component finances day-to-day project management activities, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) activities, project audits, as well as incremental operational and staffing costs of the MoER's UMEFP. This component also finances other activities such as the carrying out of: (i) surveys concerning high school students attending bridge programs; (ii) an impact evaluation of the high school grants program to assess improvements in student outcomes and school management processes.

2. Objective

The objective of this assignment is to provide support to MoER's UMEFP *in the implementation and supervision of the component 2*, that will be performed according to the methodology described in the Universities Grants Manual, to speed-up verification of documents and release of funds to the grantees.

3. Scope of Services

To achieve the objective of this assignment, the Consultant is expected to undertake the following activities:

A. Learning tasks:

- Review the ROSE Project documents including the Project Appraisal Document, Loan Agreement No 8481-RO, Project Operations Manual and the Subsidiary Agreement signed between MoER and the Ministry of Public Finance (MoPF).
- Review the Universities Grants Manual.

B. Meet the core ROSE Project Management Unit, especially the Project Director, the Technical Coordinator, the University Grant Scheme Officers, the Disbursement Specialist and the Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist.

C. Perform direct monitoring activities of specific grants financed by the University Grants Schemes, at UMEFP's request, and *check if the verifications performed by the monitoring company (joint venture) are consistent with the Universities Grants Manual and the relevant national and Bank's regulations*, through activities such as:

- *Undertake monitoring visits at the universities*, to make on-site verifications and reality checks, give support to the sub-project team, and report on the findings to the UMEFP.

During the visits, the consultant will mainly check:

- *If the activities are taking place according the description* provided within the application form, by joining such activities, discussing with the persons involved and members of the target group.
 - *If the goods bought within the grants* are respecting the description provided in the application form and the specifications in the acquisition documentation, and are used for the purposes declared in the application form;
 - *If the documents provided within the reports are corresponding with the original ones and are consistent with the evidences provided by the beneficiary; and are kept in proper conditions;*
 - *The perception of project teams on the quality of services provided by the monitoring technical assistance company.*
- *Verify and, in case no major gaps or discrepancies are found, approve* the procurement plan, in cases where the verifications couldn't be performed by the monitoring company for different reasons;
 - *Verify and, in case no major gaps or discrepancies are found, endorse, ex-ante and ex-post,* procurement documents elaborated by the sub-project teams, in cases where the verifications couldn't be performed by the monitoring company for different reasons;
 - *Verify and endorse the contractual amendments* submitted by the grant teams, in cases where the verifications couldn't be performed by the monitoring company for different reasons;
 - *Verify and approve the regular grants reports, for consistency with the Grant Agreement,* in cases where the verifications couldn't be performed by the monitoring company for different reasons;

The regular check will focus on the implementation status of the sub-project and the beneficiary's compliance with the technical, economic, financial, procurement, management, environmental and social standards, practices and procedures, satisfactory to the World Bank in accordance with the *Universities Grants Manual*, based on supporting documents provided by the Beneficiary and the monitors. More specifically, the reports will be checked, to make sure that:

- The activities are being implemented, procurement procedures are observed, and expenses are incurred according to the Grant Agreement and the Universities Grants Manual, as well as the national legislation;
- The supporting expenditure documentation are complying with existing regulations and are corresponding with the reality in the field;
- The universities carry out the procurement of goods, minor civil works (if required) and non-consulting services as well as the selection and recruitment of consultants respecting the grant Procurement Plan and the provisions of the Universities Grants Manual;
- *Review and, in case no major gaps or discrepancies are found, endorse the request for release of the grant tranches,* submitted along with the progress report, if acceptable according to the provisions of the rules in the Grant Agreement.

- *Check and certify on behalf of UMEFP if the previous verifications performed by the monitoring company (joint venture), regarding contractual amendments, procurement documents, including the procurement plans, as well as the regular reports submitted by the sub-project teams, are consistent with the Universities Grants Manual and the relevant national and Bank's regulations.*
 - *If any inconsistencies are found, the consultant will follow-up with the sub-project teams, the monitoring company, respectively with the UMEFP, to address the shortcomings observed and revise the respective documents and practices, if needed.*
- D. *Propose to UMEFP approval of the documents submitted by the universities grantees which they have checked and endorsed, following the activities included in point C.*
- E. *Report periodically on their activity and findings.*
- F. *Communicate proactively and regularly with UMEFP staff.*

4. Deliverables

As a result of the services described above, the Consultant shall deliver **activity reports** describing all activities performed for one grant, regularly within 3 months or at the request of UMEFP, including approvals / endorsements as stated in the present TORs.

The template of the report will be provided by the UMEFP. More specifically, the report should be analytical in nature (both quantitative and qualitative), structured around issues and related findings learnt, and should include conclusions and recommendations, when applicable. All reports will be elaborated in Romanian.

5. Qualification

The minimum competencies required from the Consultant are the following:

- Master's degree or other postgraduate studies, preferably in economics or engineering fields;
- At least 5 years of experience in education or education management at university level, proving a good understanding of Romanian higher education system;
- At least 5 years of experience and knowledge related to project design and implementation, or project proposals evaluation;
- Proven experience in projects or grants monitoring will be an advantage, as well as specific training courses in the field of projects management or monitoring;
- Previous experience with grants under World Bank-financed projects will be an advantage.

6. Other Relevant Terms

Period of the Assignment. The assignment is planned for an average of 300 days within a maximum of 27 months between October 2020 and December 2022, with the possibility to be extended based on a positive assessment of the performance of the Consultant, if needed.

It is expected that 3 individual consultants will be selected as the result of this tender. The specific tasks allocated to/ projects to be monitored by each consultant will be established by the technical coordinator of the UMEFP, who will make sure to avoid any overlapping.
The expected duration of specific monitoring activities being presented in table below.

Activity/Type of project	No. of hours per type of project		
	Bridge Programs	Non – competitive / Student support	Learning Center
<i>Prepare and realize a monitoring and support visit</i>	16	16	16
<i>Verify and approve a procurement plan</i>	2	2	2
<i>Verify and approve procurement documents (per procedure)</i>	2	2	4
<i>Check a regular report and approve the request for release of the grant tranche</i>	8	8	8
<i>Check and endorse a Contractual Amendment of the Grant agreement</i>	2	2	2

Location of Assignment. The Consultant will be located in his/her office. He/ She will also participate in regular meetings with the UMEFP staff, at the UMEFP office or as required by the UMEFP.

Reporting. The Consultant should report to the Project Director / Technical coordinator. The Consultant should work closely with the Technical coordinator, Higher education specialist and Grants Coordinator and Officer.

Confidentiality. The Consultant shall not at any time communicate to any person or entity any confidential information acquired in the course of the proposed assignment.

Proprietary Rights. All documentation compiled or prepared by the Consultant for the MoER during the proposed assignment shall be confidential and become and remain the absolute property of the MoER. The Consultant shall, not later than upon termination or expiration of the Contract to be prepared for the proposed assignment, deliver all such documentation to the MoER.