

Terms of Reference
for the recruitment of an international consultant
to implement the research project:

***Tackling skills mismatch in Africa:
A methodological toolkit for assessing and anticipating skills needs***

Rationale

Empirical studies on skills mismatch are scarce in Africa owing mainly to the lack of adequate data. However, recent evidence shows that sub-Saharan Africa along with Southern Asia account for the regions most affected by qualification mismatch, which is to a large extent attributable to high incidences of under-qualification¹.

Uncovering the reasons behind persistent gaps between the skills demanded and those available is more complex than it appears. Drivers of skills mismatch are multiple and diverse, and can include limited wage employment opportunities and productive jobs, the crushing weight of the informal economy, the prominence of low quality employment, uncompetitive wages and poor recruitment practices. Besides, mega-trends also fuel skills mismatch as, for instance, demographic changes, globalisation and trade liberalization, technological evolution and climate change². Of course, the fact that skilled job creation does not keep pace with the increasing number of tertiary-educated youth entering the labour market clearly comes into play as well.

Yet, education and training systems struggle – not to say fail – to quickly align with fast-changing labour market needs triggered by interconnected economies constantly in motion. The relevance of skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment and decent work features prominently in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (target 4.4). Persistent skills gaps and shortages in Africa prompt heightened efforts towards skills development strategies tailored to labour market needs. In this context, assessing the current and future prospects on the labour market proves to be key for addressing the potential imbalance between the demand for and supply of skills.

The lack of proper and systematic skills needs assessment and anticipation mechanisms is a major hurdle in Africa's efforts to tackle the skills mismatch challenge. Investing in this domain as part of Labour Market Information Systems (LMIS) is thus of crucial importance. Against this backdrop, the research project aims to contribute to filling knowledge gaps and equipping African countries with the necessary tools for better assessing and anticipating skills needs to meet current and future labour demand.

¹ See ILO (2019) *Skills and jobs mismatches in low- and middle-income countries*, International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2019.

² *Ibid.*

Objectives

Building on current knowledge and best practices, the research project specifically aims to develop a holistic methodological toolkit offering comprehensive conceptual and analytical frameworks for skills needs assessment and anticipation. It can serve as a blueprint for countries in a perspective of strong economic growth and exacerbated youth employment problems. Ultimately, the methodological toolkit could lay the foundation for a series of country reviews on assessing and anticipating skills needs to tackle skills shortages and gaps. Such reviews are paramount in Africa since the continent critically lacks the evidence base to design effective demand-led skills strategies.

Intended as an evidence-based policy making tool, the research project will tailor the methodology to the specificities of the skills and labour markets in Africa. Moreover, it aims to adopt a pragmatic approach while making the most of available data, as well as pinpoint solutions on how to best filling prevailing data gaps, and collect primary data as necessary. Adopting a pragmatic approach entails developing a methodology implementable and sustainable in the context of current national capabilities in Africa. To assess its relevance and effectiveness, and to evidence areas for improvement, the research project further aims to empirically test the methodology in a number of pilot countries meeting data requirements and reflecting to the extent possible the diversity of the continent.

Work assignment

Under the supervision of IIEP-UNESCO Dakar, the international consultant will be in charge of implementing the four components of the research project: (1) desk review of methodologies for skills needs assessment and anticipation, (2) inventory of available data sources, (3) elaboration of the methodological toolkit, and (4) implementation of the methodological toolkit through country case studies.

1. Desk review of methodologies for skills needs assessment and anticipation

The first step of the research project consists in a thorough and sound stocktaking exercise of existing methodological frameworks worldwide to assess and anticipate skills needs. The idea is not to start from scratch but to build on the most comprehensive, relevant and proven methodologies that already exist in Africa and elsewhere.

To this end, the international consultant will proceed with a critical review of the methodologies inventoried, while taking into account the particular context of African countries. Most importantly, from the desk review we want to know what works or not and why, what best fits the complex realities of skills and labour markets in Africa, and what could be further improved to more effectively assess and anticipate skills needs in the continent. Hence, the importance of considering empirical methodologies that have already been implemented, especially in Africa.

2. Inventory of available data sources

Coming up with a comprehensive but realistic and implementable methodology entails knowing in the first place what data are available and can be used for skills needs assessment and anticipation. In parallel with the desk review, the international consultant will undertake an exhaustive inventory of

all the relevant data sources that exist and, for each of them, will document and discuss availability and quality issues in the Africa region.

Skills needs assessment and anticipation aim at assessing the current and future prospects on the labour market and the potential imbalance between the demand for and supply of skills. For a list of relevant data sources, see in particular CEDEFOP/ETF/ILO (2016)³.

After evidencing the availability, strengths and limitations of the relevant data sources identified in the African context, the inventory exercise will culminate in putting forward prevailing data gaps, potential solutions to overcome them and priorities for primary data collection.

3. Producing the methodological toolkit

Based on the outcomes of the previous exercises (desk review and data inventory), the international consultant will design a cutting-edge methodological toolkit for skills needs assessment and anticipation in Africa.

The methodology will be as comprehensive as possible and adopt a holistic approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods to capture each and every salient feature of skills supply mismatch with current and future labour demand. In addition, the methodology will make use, following an integrated approach, of all the available data sources worth exploiting, as previously identified in the inventory. While the ILO approach to skills needs assessment and anticipation⁴ provides a good basis to build on, our aim is to go beyond by developing a methodology tailored to the particular needs of African countries.

The methodology will cover the following dimensions: 1) data, 2) methods and tools, and 3) analysis and interpretation of results. Policy and institutional aspects are beyond the scope of the present research project.

Indicators

There is a wide range of complementary indicators that can serve our purpose to evidence any trends in skills supply, demand and mismatch in order to assess and anticipate skills needs. CEDEFOP/ETF/ILO (2016) proposes a list of key indicators that our methodology could eventually consider, among others.

Ultimately, the selection of indicators for the methodology must be motivated in terms of data availability and relevance in the context of African countries, as well as in terms of value-added (or comparative advantage) and complementarity with the other indicators retained.

Methods

Skills needs assessment

Skills needs assessment aims to inform on current skills needs and imbalances. The methodology will first address skills needs assessment using cutting-edge methods, before turning to forward-looking

³ CEDEFOP/ETF/ILO (2016) *Guide to Anticipating and Matching Skills and Jobs*, Volume 1: Using Labour Market Information, Compendium on Anticipation and Matching Skills.

⁴ See ILO (2015) "Guidance Note: Anticipating and matching skills and jobs".

approaches. This entails comprehensively documenting current skills supply and labour demand, as well as any skills imbalances, including skills shortages and gaps. See, for example, ILO (2018)⁵ for the measurement of qualification and skills mismatches. The international consultant will propose skills needs assessment methods that cover national, regional and sectoral levels.

Skills needs anticipation

Skills needs anticipation requires forward-looking approaches that, broadly speaking, encompass qualitative skills foresighting and quantitative skills forecasting⁶. The international consultant will propose, to the extent feasible, mixed methods combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches in a complementary way.

In short, the international consultant will propose the most suitable and pragmatic combination of methods given data and any other constraints, and based on the current state of knowledge and best practices identified in the desk review. As for the indicators, the selection of methods and tools for the methodology must be motivated in terms of data availability and relevance in the context of African countries, as well as in terms of value-added (or comparative advantage) and complementarity with the other methods and tools retained.

4. *Testing the methodological toolkit: Country case studies*

Unless we implement the methodology, it is hard to ascertain how effective and fit-for-purpose it is. For this reason, the international consultant will test empirically the methodology in two pilot countries, with the assistance of national consultants (one per country). This exercise will also allow for a reality-check on the availability and quality of data at the country level, and for fine-tuning of the methodology by evidencing areas for improvement. Country selection will ultimately depend on data availability. However, the project does not exclude undertaking small-scale primary data collection as necessary to complete the analyses.

Duration and deliverables

The international consultant will be recruited as soon as possible for a period of at least nine months extending to December 2021. She/he is expected to work remotely and deliver the following outputs, with eventual missions to Dakar and/or the pilot countries as necessary and if sanitary conditions allow:

- **Deliverable 1:** One background paper on *Best Methodological Practices for Assessing and Anticipating Skills Needs in Africa* based on the desk review.
- **Deliverable 2:** One background paper on *Data Availability for Assessing and Anticipating Skills Needs in Africa* based on the inventory.
- **Deliverable 3:** One comprehensive report on the *Methodological toolkit for Assessing and Anticipating Skills Needs in Africa* based on the previous background papers, and including

⁵ ILO (2018), “Measurement of qualifications and skills mismatches of persons in employment”, Room document 15, 20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians, Geneva, 10-19 October 2018.

⁶ For a detailed description of forward-looking approaches, see CEDEFOP/ETF/ILO (2016) *Guide to Anticipating and Matching Skills and Jobs*, Volume 2: Developing Skills Foresights, Scenarios and Forecasts.

chapters dedicated to data sources, indicators, methods and tools, and analysis and interpretation of results.

- **Deliverable 4 (with the assistance of national consultants):** Two national reports, one per pilot country, titled *Country Case study of [Name of Country]: Implementing the Methodological Toolkit for Assessing and Anticipating Skills Needs*. Implementation of skills foresighting methods are optional since they require in-country missions for proper interaction with key stakeholders and primary data collection.

Required qualifications

- Advanced university degree in education, economics, social sciences or related fields. A specialisation in development studies, labour economics or skills development would be an advantage. A PhD would also be an advantage.
- At least five years of work experience in undertaking research on skills mismatch issues, including assessment and anticipation of skills needs.
- Strong analytical skills, including handling complex datasets and statistical techniques.
- Prior experience in conducting international research projects and supervising national consultants in developing countries is highly desirable.
- Good knowledge of skills, employability and labour market issues in Africa is also highly desirable.
- Excellent English proficiency (written and oral).

Application process

Interested candidates must submit their application **before 3 March (midnight Dakar time)** with the following required information:

- An up-to-date CV stating details of educational qualifications, work experience, including prior experience of similar work.
- A brief proposal (2-3 pages) discussing the approach/methodology to undertake the assignment and the proposed fee.

Assessment

- Only applications providing the information requested will be considered.
- Evaluation of qualified applicants may include a competency-based interview.

Please submit your application by email to consultant.skills@iiep.unesco.org