CONSULTANCY NOTICE - EXTENSION

(Open to national candidates)

Position Title: Consultant to conduct a feasibility Study on Virtual Migration Resources Center
Duty Station: Ha Noi, Viet Nam
Type of Appointment: Consultant
Estimated Start Date: As soon as possible
Closing Date: 5 PM, 06 February 2022
Reference code: VN2021/HN/026 (C)

1. BACKGROUND

The needs to communicate and address information gaps for migrant workers

The number of Vietnamese workers going abroad for work has been increasing steadily year on year. It is reported that more than 580,000 Vietnamese workers currently working abroad in more than 40 destinations worldwide through official channels and fixed terms contracts by 2021, including migrant women workers, searching for better employment opportunities and improved standards of living. According to the World Bank, Viet Nam is the second top receiver of remittances in the Asia-Pacific with remittances inflow at US$ 17 billion in 2019 accounting for 6.5 per cent of GDP. The actual number of international migrant workers could be higher since those recruited through informal network were not included.

While labour migration could generate benefits in terms of economic growth, welfare and human development, poorly managed, labour migration could bring a lot of risks, especially towards migrant workers who are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking, forced labour and modern slavery. As soon as the aspirant migrants begin information-hunting about overseas labour migration opportunities, they either could fall misinformed or ill-informed by self-interested intermediary groups or people or are not aware of what information to seek and from where. In many cases, potential international migrant workers do not know what skills are required in job placements abroad, how to migrate legally, how much it will cost to migrate or even where to seek such information. Many often do not get adequate information on the nature of jobs, rules and the customs of the country of destination, their rights and protection mechanisms etc.

How to address migrants’ information gaps and how to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration has been the focus of international development with Global Compact for Migration launched in 2018. As the UN Migration Agency, IOM has been supporting operationalization of Migrant Resource Centers (MRCs) globally and in Viet Nam, as a one-stop shop for relevant and accurate information and needs-based services for migrants in both source and host countries to (1) assist potential migrants to make informed decisions of labour migration and smoothly transit into a country of destination and to (2) address the special needs of migrant workers and create a better understanding of rights, responsibilities and protection

2 https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/migration-compact
instruments for both men and women workers and their families.

The needs to address MRCs sustainability and emerging challenges

In Viet Nam, the Migrant Resource Centers (MRCs) has been first introduced in Ha Noi a decade ago, in November 2011 with IOM financial and technical support, as a model to offer counselling services, information provision, procedures instruction, and other referral assistance to aspirant, current and returned migrants. Until 2021, seven (07) MRCs have operated in 07 cities and provinces of Viet Nam. The first MRC that was established in Hanoi with IOM support in 2011, continues its operations now under the ownership of DOLAB/MOLISA.

Over the years, MRCs have proven to be effective in providing information about safe and regular migration to migrants, especially when linked with the communication outreach network established and maintained by the Employment Service Centres (ESC). The current MRCs have been operational in conventional manner, providing counselling in-person mostly, complemented by hotline counselling in coordination with the local authorities. While proved its effectiveness and impact on aspirant and returned migrants, especially those looking for work overseas, the existing MRCs were not accessible to migrants who are currently working overseas and could not provide information or adequate services that they may be needing.

Such gaps became more apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, where the vulnerabilities of migrants, especially those who are currently working overseas were exposed\(^3\). Many faced with lots of challenges accessing adequate health and social information/services in the destination countries. Too many migrant workers were suspended with their contracts temporarily or permanently, and some of those whose contracts ended during the borders closure, became stranded overseas without access to social protection and health care, and without clear understanding of where and how they could obtain information and documentation to safely return home. Such cases showed again the great needs of virtual counselling, information about safe and regular migration, access to services and remedies, including rapidly changing health and travel requirements that differ by each destination country. In the meantime, the strict social distancing and the ban on transport network in Viet Nam also caused a lot of difficulties for aspirant, current and returned migrant workers to access services and have counselling with current MRCs system.

Many countries, including Viet Nam has been working on various solutions incorporating available information and communication technologies (ICT) to continue providing information and support to migrants in crisis such as global pandemic. Acknowledging the undeniable benefits of MRCs towards returned, current and aspirant migrant workers, this feasibility study on Virtual Migrant Resource Centers (VMRC) is to look at the needs and effective ways to expand or upgrade the current MRCs system, including provision of virtual counselling via ICT means, which could be more readily accessible to migrant workers at any point throughout their migrant journey and in any places.

2. VIRTUAL MIGRANT RESOURCE CENTER

Virtual Migrant Resource Centre (VMRC) aims to broaden the access of vulnerable migrants using available online platforms and ICT tools, to facilitate accurate information dissemination and to reach across borders and enable two-way communications in more direct and user-friendly manner. It could include government-owned online webpages and applications that are accessible via web or mobile or popular social media platforms that migrants frequent access and use. Ultimately, the concept of VMRC goes beyond the static website where services provider mainly provides one-way information on safe and regular migration and is slow in response to any query or feedback. It should go beyond the function to provide “trusted” or “verified” information only, but it should also enable two-way

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\(^3\) COVID-19 and Mobility, IOM [institutional_statement_covid19_03-20215.pdf](https://iom.int), March 2021
experience for migrants to interact with content and connect with a ‘live’ counselor through chat and call or report functions.

The benefits of VMRC could be profound and explored further through the study but it could include (1) acting as a repository of “verified” and trusted information and resources that can be accessed by migrants; (2) sustaining and broadening the access of vulnerable migrants both in country and outside Viet Nam to get information and counsel on safe and regular migration, even in crisis situation such as COVID-19 pandemic, and including access to professional and trained counselor; (3) tracking and following up on cases for emergency response, from both sides, the affected migrant workers and the managing agencies in country; (4) offering a platform for self-learning, self-improvement and frequent updates on changes and policies related to labour migration, including “live” events and learning opportunities hosted by MRC staff and provincial ESCs that traditionally are held in person; (5) feedback and report mechanism which could be linked and referred to social protection system that provide remedies to migrants; (6) connecting with and referring to service providers not only in Viet Nam but also in other countries to provide support and resolve the issues of language if no interpreters available in other countries for Vietnamese citizens etc., especially for irregular migrants and victims of trafficking; (7) sustaining better on optimized resources as one trained counsellor of current available MRCs could provide virtual counselling to multiple clients disregards of locations;

The feasibility study is expected to explore benefits of VMRC in comparison with related cost such as operation and maintenance, IT equipment and infrastructure, human resources minimum requirement etc. It shall also explore challenges or barriers related to such online platform, such as user (aspirant, current and returned migrant workers) access and digital skills needed. It should also include recommendations for key information to be made available through VMRC, built on lessons learnt from current MRC systems and untapped gaps.

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE FEASIBILITY STUDY

The objective of this feasibility study is to assess if the Virtual Migrant Resource Center, including virtual counselling services could be operationally, technically and financially successful towards strengthened MRC sustainability and continuity of the beneficial services to vulnerable migrants, in all situations, including global crisis such as COVID-19 and address current gaps in information access by migrants.

The study is also expected to strengthen the evidence base on the relevance, effectiveness and efficiencies of the MRCs implementation in Viet Nam so far in providing information, services and protection to vulnerable migrant workers throughout their migrant journey and pave a way for more comprehensive and timely assistance for Vietnamese migrants in vulnerable situations, including victims of trafficking and modern slavery who requiring protection and assistance outside the country.

4. SCOPE OF THE FEASIBILITY STUDY

IOM is seeking proposals from individual consultant or team of consultants to conduct the feasibility study on Virtual Migrant Resource Center (VMRC) and virtual counselling implementation in Viet Nam towards practical recommendations for viable model of MRCs in the context of constant changes, including crisis situations.

The feasibility study should focus on but not limit to the following key aspects:

- The benefits/advantages versus the disadvantages/challenges of virtual counselling and cost-benefit analysis for VMRC
- Technical, financial, operation, resource feasibility for VMRCs based on current MRCs system analysis and minimum requirements for functional and viable VMRC system
• Options for VMRCs development, and whether current MRC system that link to the existing Employment Service Centers under provincial DOLISAs could be expanded to include virtual counselling or evolve to VMRC.
• Business model and Roadmap for VMRC development and expansion, considering current changes in legislation and framework and vision of integrated service provision to migrant workers in Viet Nam.
• Risks and challenges towards successful and practical development of VMRC and virtual counselling, including user factor such as access to internet, devices and digital literacy.

The study on VMRC feasibility should be built on the review of current MRC system, considering:
• The achievements, gaps and challenges of current MRCs system versus the needs for information and services provided through MRCs by migrant workers.
• Profiles of MRCs service providers and users to analyze the needs and capacities for VMRCs.
• Assessment on current MRCs relevance, effectiveness and efficiencies, key lessons and recommendations that will enable better services and viable operation models of VMRCs.

The final analytical report should be produced in English and Vietnamese. The report should include executive summary (highlighting key results and policy implications), introduction, clear outline of methodology applied, findings, recommendations and conclusions, annotated bibliography, and annexes (if any).

5. METHODOLOGIES

The individual consultant/ team of consultants will propose methodology, which will be further updated in discussion with IOM after the selection process is completed. In general, it is expected that the applicant proposes an integrated approach with a combination of data collection and analysis tools to generate evidence to substantiate all findings.

It is expected that the proposed methodology includes, but not limited to the followings:

1) Mapping of currently available MRCs and virtual counselling services in Viet Nam, either state-owned or non-state organization operated that provide relevant services, especially for migrant workers;

2) Comparative review on the available MRCs and (virtual) counselling services, focusing on their target population groups (aspirant/returned/current migrant workers), outreach (how many users and based in which locations, if available) and the gaps in their scalability;

3) In-depth interviews with key informants (Key Informant Interview (KII)) such as government authorities (DOLAB, DOLISAs, etc.), civil society organizations (CSOs) in and outside the country (through migrant support network) and UN agencies including IOM, ILO who provide and support MRCs services/models in Viet Nam (current and past) and with the recruitment agencies and migrant workers who use MRCs and other similar counselling services;

4) Focus group discussions (FGD) or online survey with migrant workers and members of their families on the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiencies of the current MRCs and on virtual MRCs’ advantages and disadvantages, as well as their remaining needs that were not addressed by currently available services;
5) On-site visits to the current MRCs and ESCs to examine various feasibility and scalability aspects (subject to travel restrictions and other, to be confirmed during the process.)

The feasibility study should ensure that gender and disability considerations are mainstreamed into the study design and implementation.

6. DURATION & TIMELINE

The selected individual consultant/team of consultants will be responsible for planning and conducting necessary research as well as drafting the report and policy recommendations. Close consultation with IOM at every step is required. The development and implementation of the review is expected to commence in February 2022 and successfully complete all the tasks by the end of May 2022 with proposed following timeline:

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<tr>
<th>Key milestones</th>
<th>Timelines</th>
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<tr>
<td>Contracting between IOM and the selected service provider</td>
<td>February 2022</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finalization of research methodology, tools and detailed research timeline</td>
<td>February – March 2022</td>
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<td>Data collection and analysis</td>
<td>March - April 2022</td>
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<td>Report drafting and consultation</td>
<td>April - May 2022</td>
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<td>Submission of final analytical report</td>
<td>31 May 2022</td>
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7. DELIVERABLES & PAYMENT

Payment to the selected individual consultant/team of consultants will be tied to deliverables submitted to and approved by IOM as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deliverables in English and Vietnamese</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (1) Table of contents</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) Research methodology and tools and timelines</td>
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<td>(3) Mapping and comparative review of available MRC/counselling services</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 (3) Draft report for consultation</td>
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<td>(4) Final assessment report</td>
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MANAGEMENT, REPORTING, AND IOM SUPPORT

• The selected consultant(s) will be under over supervision by IOM Viet Nam Heads and Project Partnership and Reintegration Programme Officer while working closely and report directly to Labour Migration Programme Officer.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR EVALUATION RESULTS

• Satisfactory completion of tasks specified in the ToR based on supervisors’ performance evaluation
• Planning, organization, and timeliness for managing and delivering outputs
• Quality of research instruments and strategies developed, data and information collected and analyzed, and report and brief produced
• Satisfactory organization of consultation and validation meetings

8. REQUIRED QUALIFICATION AND EXPERIENCE

• Post-graduate/university degree, preferably in social sciences, with a specialization in (migration, international population studies, statistics) or equivalent training
• Required experience in research design and data analysis and a good command of data collection and interviewing techniques;
• Proven experience in conducting research on migration, business and human rights topics; Familiarity with the subject matter regarding international migrant workers in various sectors in Viet Nam and issues they face especially during COVID-19; services provided by MRCs and issues linked to information and counselling services to vulnerable migrants

• Thorough understanding of issues pertaining to international migration, human trafficking, forced labour and labour rights, reintegration and demonstrate good knowledge of the international migrant protection framework and international migration context of Viet Nam;

• Demonstrated experiences in carrying out similar assessment is a strong advantage

• Excellent time management skills and the ability to produce outputs as per agreed deadlines;

• Strong analytical, oral and written communication skills, and report writing skills in English and Vietnamese.

How to apply:
Completed applications, including cover letter (maximum one page), CV, copies of diplomas and certificates, samples or link to copies of previous assessment and/ or research work and technical and financial proposal for the review may be delivered to the IOM Mission Office in Hanoi at 304 Kim Ma, Ba Dinh District, Ha Noi or submitted electronically to hanoi@iom.int referring to this Consultancy Notice’s Position Title.

Applications are non-returnable and only short-listed candidates will be contacted.

Posting period: