

CALL FOR PROJECT PROPOSALS

- “Towards Meeting the Sustainable Development Goals in Serbia: Job Quality and Economic Structure, How are They Linked?” -

Introduction

The Center for Advanced Economic Studies (CEVES) is an independent think-and-do-tank devoted to advancing Serbia’s economic recovery, democratic consolidation, and convergence with the European Union through evidence-based policy advocacy, and by mobilizing stakeholders and the public to engage in institution-building, and civic or development project initiatives. *CEVES* announces the launch of a research initiative that is part of a wider program that CEVES aims to undertake – developing advocacy program for the process of nationalization¹ and accomplishing of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), under the UN 2030 SDG Agenda. This initiative has become possible due to funding granted by the *PERFORM (Performing and Responsive Social Sciences)* for the specific purpose of furthering the CEVES research agenda. PERFORM is a project supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation and the University of Freiburg, aimed at improving the contribution of social science research to socio-economic and political processes of change in Western Balkan countries.

Background and Motivation

Serbia’s economic growth is finally showing patterns of a gradual export-led recovery. However, there is little analysis that can help researchers and policymakers assess the extent to which this growth may contribute to human development. Human development ought to be the goal of economic policies, with the quality of employment being one of its central points. Quality employment is manifested through fair working conditions, social protection, and social and motivational factors that affect the wellbeing of employees and their personal development opportunities.

The motivation of this research grant is to contribute to a body of knowledge that can help improve Serbia’s policies directed to accomplishing the SDGs. The research should identify what characteristics/aspects of the evolving economic structure have a tendency to enhance human development, rather than economic growth per se. The answer/ structure, has to be rooted in Serbia’s actual economic circumstances and potential, i.e. its comparative advantages and disadvantages. We depart from the premise that human development cannot get too far without sustained economic growth, and this, in turn, in Serbia’s circumstances, requires that it be export lead i.e. rooted in international competitiveness.

Clearly, a mapping of the extent to which each economic sector shows competitive advantages, segmented by relevant firm characteristics, contributes to quality employment (or not) is beyond the scope of any single study. However, we narrow this selection down in several steps. First, we depart from the fact that Serbia’s government has chosen to focus its industrial policy in the forthcoming period on four industries that show a competitive

¹ The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 Agenda is defined by its universal nature. The process of nationalization of SDGs imply creating ownership at the national level – adjusting them to their own particular circumstances and needs, their integration into the national strategic framework, and the establishment of a system of reporting and assessing the progress in achieving each relevant goal.

performance. Furthermore, we take note of the fact that government policies are particularly directed at domestic small and medium enterprises (SMEs) through horizontal measures, and to large investments, usually foreign direct investments, through subsidies. Finally, we allow the researchers to make certain choices about research design.

Research Question

CEVES invites applications from research organizations (think tanks, research institutes) registered in Serbia, and informal groups of researchers from Serbia/Western Balkan countries for proposals on conducting policy relevant research on the impact of economic growth on human development in Serbia by specifically focusing on quality of employment. Quality of employment refers to the definition of decent work² with additional focus on wellbeing and job satisfaction of employees and their prospects to improve their skills and knowledge which ultimately impact on their work results³.

The research proposal shall address the following question:

What key factors/characteristics of companies/their practices in the selected industries are responsible for a strong record of offering high-quality employment, and in which circumstances do these characteristics play a greater or lesser role?

Purpose of the research

The purpose of the exercise is to uncover characteristics and circumstances that could in the future be particularly nourished or particularly discouraged by industrial policies, in order to promote quality employment in these sectors.

The research needs to determine a list of characteristics likely to positively or negatively affect the quality of employment offered by companies. These characteristics may include attributes such as industry, size and type of ownership, type of technology or market circumstances, but the research should seek to uncover the reasons—circumstances, agent motivations, and likely chains of causality that lead to the observed outcomes.

Hence, the research shall place particular importance on the study of additional characteristics and circumstances that may contribute to quality job generation within each of the studied sectors.

We believe that the complexity of the research question requires a multidisciplinary team of researchers.

² As per the International Labor Organization definition: *‘Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men’*

³ The quality of employment framework developed under the lead of UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) represents a neutral and comprehensive approach to assess quality of employment in its multiple facets. It defines 68 indicators on seven dimensions that address employment quality from the perspective of the employed person. The seven dimensions are: i) safety and ethics of employment; ii) income and benefits from employment, iii) working time and work-life balance; iv) security of employment and social protection; v) social dialogue; vi) skills development and training; and vii) employment-related relations and work motivation.

CEVES' study on *Real Sector Performance and Competitiveness in Serbia, Some Stylized Facts and Open Questions*,⁴ shows that firms' access to factors, including labor, as well as the firms' capacity to utilize them, is strongly affected by industry type, size and ownership type. While it is not necessarily clear that either one of the characteristics is likely to create more or less quality employment, it is clear that they provide very different environments in which other additional characteristics – some associated with the mentioned characteristics and others not – are likely to determine to a greater or lesser extent the quality of employment. The additional company characteristics may be specific to an industry, size or type of ownership, or may be independent of them.

Enterprises to be included in the Research

The targeted sectors are determined by the set of industries targeted by industrial policy: (1) food and beverages; (2) wood and furniture; (3) machines and electrical equipment; and (4) plastic and rubber products. Companies within them are further distinguished by the characteristics of size⁵ and ownership⁶ as these are closely correlated with type of policy instrument. Furthermore, the coverage of companies within the four industries is further narrowed down to domestically owned SMEs and large foreign owned companies— a total of eight distinct segments⁷.

Finally, CEVES encourages methodological approaches that will minimize the extent to which factors associated with the inherent unsustainability of a business intervene in the analysis. The goal of the research is to understand causality patterns underlying quality employment in companies whose characteristics are also associated with a likelihood of sustainability and competitiveness. One approach would be to focus solely on exporter companies—as a record of several years of successful exports are a strong indicator of competitiveness, but other approaches may be proposed by the applicant.

The research will be conducted on only two types of industries: one resource intensive and one technology intensive, among the four previously defined. The awardee shall select the industries during the inception phase of the project.

Sampling of companies will be critical. CEVES will make available a database of companies in selected sectors. The database covers the list of all companies operating in selected industries and their attributed characteristics: industry of registration, ownership, market orientation (exporters/non-exporters), date of establishment, time series (2005-2016) of revenues, size, products and values exported (until 2015), as well as some additional

⁴ <http://ceves.org.rs/research/publications/>

⁵ *Size* refers to the classification of enterprises based on the number of employees: SMEs (less than 250 employees) and large enterprises (250 and more employees).

⁶ *Ownership* refers to the dominant share of ownership. Domestically owned enterprise is the one where domestic investors have more than 50% of ownership; while foreign owned enterprise is the one where foreign investors have more than 50% of ownership.

⁷ Resource intensive segments:

- *Segment 1*: domestically owned, SMEs, producers of food and beverages;
- *Segment 2*: foreign owned, large enterprises, producers of food and beverages;
- *Segment 3*: domestically owned, SMEs, producers of wood and furniture;
- *Segment 4*: foreign owned, large enterprises, producers of wood and furniture;

Technology intensive segments:

- *Segment 5*: domestically owned, SMEs, producers of machines, electrical and electronical equipment;
- *Segment 6*: foreign owned, large enterprises, producers of machines, electrical and electronical equipment;
- *Segment 7*: domestically owned, SMEs, producers of plastic and rubber products;
- *Segment 8*: foreign owned, large enterprises, producers of plastic and rubber products;

information. The actual drawing of the companies will be conducted by CEVES, while the awardee remains responsible for the sampling methodology and criteria.

Expected Results

The research will produce a report identifying the key characteristics/factors affecting the quality of employment offered by companies in the selected industry segments in Serbia, the circumstances and behavioural drivers – in other words, the reasons for this association – and some indicative sense of the order of magnitude of observed effects/associations. A causality link will be provided.

Research Methodology

The research shall largely consist of field research, prepared and argued based on a strong command of the relevant literature and existing empirical studies in Serbia. It will consist of a pilot phase during which the exact methodology – and particularly the exact company segmentation and characteristics to be explored, and the exact metrics for quality employment will be determined. However, the successful applicant will determine during the application phase the overall methodology (tools of field research) they plan to undertake, whereby the association of the relevant company characteristics/circumstances with the quality of labor will be identified (e.g. case studies, structured interviews, semi-structured interview, survey of a larger sample of companies).

Both the pilot and final instruments will be consulted with CEVES.

The successful application will propose a methodology that states how the research will be conducted, what are the perceived obstacles and how they will be resolved. The following are the necessary aspects of the methodology: it should reflect proposed key characteristics of the quality of labor that will be defined/measured for the purposes of the research; it should state some indicative criteria for selection/segmentation of firms/interviewees; it should indicate the preferred research tools and it should propose the strategy to minimize the risk of underreporting of illegal and informal labor practices.

While the final metrics for quality employment will be determined during the research, applicants should include the approach they plan to use in the proposals. This should aim to capture an informative yet manageable range of quality dimensions appropriate to Serbia's labor market and the SDG context. and allow for the comparison/ranking of the quality of different kinds of employment.

Another anticipated key challenge of the research methodology refers to the data collection and the ability of researchers to obtain truthful descriptions of labor conditions. Hence, the methodology proposed in the application should state how it will address the likely inclination of informants to understate the extent of informal, illegal and possibly other undesirable practices. Innovative and interdisciplinary approaches are strongly encouraged.

Eligibility

The Call is open to informal groups of researchers from Serbia/Western Balkan countries and for research organizations (think tanks, research institutes) registered in Serbia.

Multidisciplinary teams are required, including economic expertise, other social science expertise related to fields such as sociology, anthropology and/or psychology, and technical/industrial expertise.

Applications are limited to one application per group/organization.

Time Frame of the Assignment

The research project shall be implemented in the period from 1 June 2018 – 15 September 2018 (total duration 3,5 months).

Budget

CEVES/PERFORM intends to award one project up to 25,000 EUR, in funding to be allocated over the period of the assignment.

Application Process

Application will be selected based on the evaluation criteria laid out in the next chapter **Selection Process**. Application should consist of four divided parts, and need to be sent as separate files with following instructions:

Part 1. Cover letter: with researcher's/organization information including: project title; name of researchers/organization; start and end dates; total budget figure/daily fee; contact information; list of team members. Cover letter should be signed by Team Leader.

Part 2 Project proposal:

- A narrative outline of your understanding of the context, the purpose of the research and a brief discussion of the research question.
- Research methodology that you propose to use, as well as a first list of research instruments that you propose to use. Also include the methodology of how you will analyse the data from your field research.
- How will you assure the quality of your research through the methodology you use?
- A ranked list of features for quality employment that you want to include in your field research.
- A time line for the research project.
- Risks and obstacles that you expect in the field research, and how you will address them.
- An outline of your actual approach to the research.

***NOTE:** For the purpose of selection process, please take into account that the name of the group of researchers or organization must not be mentioned anywhere in Project proposal file. The Selection Committee will first evaluate Project proposal, and only if this proposal is highly evaluated, will consider other parts of the Application.

Part 3. Composition of the team offered: CVs of researchers in Europass⁸ format including list of relevant consultancies, research projects and publications

***NOTE:** Please sent all CVs in one ZIP file.

Part 4. Budget: that includes costs of researchers and assistants, travel costs, other costs.

⁸ <https://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/hr/documents/curriculum-vitae>

Submitting the documents / Deadline

Please submit your application in English language electronically to the following email address: office@ceves.org.rs The email subject line shall contain the reference to this Call for Project Proposals.

All Applications in response to this Call shall consist of all above mentioned parts.

The deadline for submission of Applications is Friday, 25 May 2018 by noon CET.

Selection Process

Applications will be selected by an independent Selection Committee composed of distinguished researchers with multidisciplinary experience. Applications will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Project proposal/Methodology - 40% of the scoring;
- CV and experience of researcher(s) - 20% of the scoring;
- Relevant experience of team members in similar assignments – 20 % of the scoring.
- Value for money – 20 % of the scoring.

The selection will be conducted in two stages. In the first stage, the Selection Committee will evaluate the proposed methodologies independently from other parts of the application. Therefore, it is important that the file with the Project Proposal/Methodology does not mention the names of the researchers or organization or any other information that facilitates researcher identification. The evaluation will be based only on the proposed substance of project proposal/Methodology. In the second stage, the Selection Committee will evaluate other parts of the Application. Note that the Selection Committee reserves the right to request additional information from the short-listed applicants.

Requests for clarification

Any request for clarification of this Call for Proposals must be sent in writing by e-mail, to the e-mail address office@ceves.org.rs, by 11 May 2018 the latest. CEVES will post the response, including an explanation of the query without identifying the source of inquiry on its website (www.ceves.org.rs) within 24 hours of the receipt of the query.