TERMS OF REFERENCE

Independent Verification Agency (IVA)

Actions to Strengthen Performance for Inclusive and Responsive Education (ASPIRE) Program

Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFEPT)

1. Background

Actions to Strengthen Performance for Inclusive and Responsive Education (ASPIRE) is an eight-year (2020–2028), USD 233 million World Bank-financed budgetary support operation implemented under the Program-for-Results (PforR) financing instrument.

Under the PforR modality, disbursements are linked to the achievement of predefined and verifiable results referred to as Disbursement-Linked Results (DLRs). Funds are released only upon independent verification that the agreed results have been achieved in accordance with the verification protocols specified in the Program Appraisal Document (PAD), Project Agreement, and Project Operational Manual (POM).

Through ASPIRE, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MoFEPT) provides annual performance-based grants to provincial governments to implement eligible activities in specified lagging districts, while also advancing broader federal and provincial education reforms. The Program introduces a structured incentive framework to encourage provinces to invest in the most disadvantaged geographical areas and to strengthen system-level reforms.

ASPIRE's short- and long-term interventions are designed to:

- Accelerate recovery and system strengthening following education disruptions caused by multiple crises;
- Expand equitable access to education;
- Improve quality of learning outcomes;
- Promote sector resilience;
- Strengthen federal–provincial coordination and education sector governance.

The Program's formal development objectives are to support the Government to:

- Respond to school disruptions caused by various crises;
- Expand access and improve education quality;

- Enhance sector resilience and management through improved coordination, with a focus on lagging districts.

The Program consists of four Results Areas:

Results Area 1: Response, Recovery, and Resilience
Results Area 2: Improved Learning Opportunities for Out-of-School and At-Risk Students
Results Area 3: Stronger Federal–Provincial Coordination and Management
Results Area 4: Performance-Based Transfer Mechanism through the Out-of-School Challenge Fund

The parent Program concluded in June 2025, under which twenty (20) DLRs linked to the disbursement of USD 200 million were achieved (refer to Annex A: Table of Achieved DLRs).

In July 2025, the Program was extended through Additional Financing (AF) of USD 33 million, of which USD 30 million is linked to the achievement of six (6) additional DLRs to be implemented during FY 2025–26 to FY 2027–28.

Disbursement under the Additional Financing remains strictly contingent upon independent verification of DLR achievement in accordance with agreed verification protocols.

The Program is managed by the Project Coordination Unit (PCU) within MoFEPT, which is responsible for coordination, implementation oversight, monitoring, fiduciary management, and reporting. As of the date of issuance of these Terms of Reference, the Program is in its sixth year of implementation, Year 1 under the Additional Financing phase.

To verify achievement of DLRs under the Additional Financing period, validate Program Development Objective (PDO) indicators, and assess compliance with fiduciary Program Action Plan (PAP) actions, MoFEPT intends to engage an Independent Verification Agency (IVA).

2. Purpose of the Assignment

MoFEPT seeks to engage a qualified Independent Verification Agency (IVA) to:

1. Verify achievement of six (6) DLRs for FY 2025–26, FY 2026–27, and FY 2027–28, in accordance with agreed verification protocols (table of DLRs and verification protocols placed as Annex B);

2. Calculate and verify the targets for Program Development Objective (PDO) Indicators 1 and 2 using pre-existing datasets. PDO Indicator 1 will be calculated and verified only for the final year of the program (FY2028). PDO Indicator 2 will be calculated and verified for FY2026 and FY2028. (PDO 1 and 2 indicators, targets and previous calculation methodology placed as Annex C, list of lagging districts under ASPIRE placed as Annex D);

3. Verify compliance with fiduciary actions under the Program Action Plan (PAP) for each respective fiscal year (pap fiduciary actions table placed as Annex E).

The IVA shall operate independently and shall not participate in implementation, advisory drafting of government systems, or decision-making functions.

3. Scope of Services

The IVA shall:

- Design and implement a verification methodology aligned with PAD verification protocols;
- Undertake primary data collection and field verification (where required) for DLR assessment;
- Validate administrative and independent third-party datasets used for PDO calculations and methodology;
- Conduct fiduciary compliance verification through documentary review and sample-based testing;
- Submit structured reports in accordance with the agreed schedule.

Verification activities shall include documentary review, system verification, interviews, sampling, and site visits, as required by the DLR verification protocols and fiduciary compliance requirements.

4. Description of Services

4.1 Verification of Disbursement-Linked Results (DLRs)

4.1.1 Methodology

The IVA shall prepare a detailed verification methodology, including:

- Sampling framework (statistically sound and risk-based where applicable);
- Field verification protocols;
- Data collection instruments;
- Interview guides;
- Data quality assurance procedures;
- Evidence triangulation methodology.

The methodology shall be submitted as part of the Inception Report and approved prior to field deployment.

Where inconsistencies arise, the PAD DLI Verification Protocol Table shall prevail.

4.1.2 Primary Verification Activities

The IVA shall, where required under each DLR protocol:

- Conduct site visits to federal, provincial, district, and school-level entities;
- Undertake structured interviews with officials and stakeholders;
- Review policy documents, administrative records, financial documentation, and system outputs;
- Verify functionality of digital systems where relevant;
- Cross-validate reported achievements against field evidence.

Sampling shall ensure adequate representation of lagging districts where applicable.

4.1.3 Determination of DLR Status

For each DLR, the IVA shall determine:

- Achieved
- Partially Achieved
- Not Achieved

Determinations must strictly adhere to protocol criteria and include documented justification.

4.2 Calculation and Verification of PDO Indicators 1 and 2

The IVA shall:

1. Develop PDO 1 and 2 target calculation methodology (consistent with methodology used earlier placed in Annex C) and share for review and endorsement of PCU/MoFEPT and World Bank
2. Obtain administrative and independent external sources datasets used for PDO calculations with facilitation of PCU/MoFEPT;
3. Assess dataset integrity across:
    - Accuracy

- Completeness
- Consistency
- Timeliness
- Reliability

4. Validate aggregation methods and district-level computations;
5. Apply the agreed methodology to compute PDO targets;
6. Document assumptions, caveats, and data limitations.

No primary data collection for calculation of PDO targets will be required by the IVA.

4.3 Fiduciary PAP Compliance Verification

For each respective fiscal year, the IVA shall assess compliance with fiduciary PAP actions through:

- Documentary review;
- Structured interviews with procurement and finance officials;
- System testing;
- Sample tracing of procurement transactions and works contracts;
- Review of financial records and reconciliation statements to confirm the receipt, transfer, and utilization of program funds in accordance with the prevailing rules and regulations;
- Field-based validation where necessary.

Compliance shall be categorized as:

- Compliant
- Partially Compliant
- Non-Compliant
- Not Applicable

The review shall include, at minimum:

(i) Annual Consolidated Procurement Plans

- Verification of preparation, approval, timeliness, and completeness;
- Confirmation of linkage between procurement plans and budget releases;

- Sample-based testing of procurement alignment.

(ii) Procurement Strategy for Student Learning Materials (if applicable)

- Verification of existence and formal approval;
- Assessment of inclusion of market review and needs analysis;
- Sample-based validation of operational use.

(iii) SOPs for Procurement and Contract Management

- Review for compliance with applicable procurement rules;
- Verification of dissemination and implementation;
- Sample tracing of contracts;
- Validation of monitoring mechanisms.

(iv) Annual Consolidated Compliance Review

- Verification that MoFEPT conducted the review;
- Assessment of comprehensiveness and provincial coverage;
- Review of corrective action follow-up.

(v) Financial Management and Fund Flow Compliance

- Verification of budget allocations and evidence of provincial matching grants, where applicable;
- Assessment of the timeliness of fund releases from the federal government to provinces;
- Verification of documentary evidence of fund transfers from provinces to the lagging districts if relevant;
- Review of cases involving lapsed funds, revalidation of funds, and delays in authorization by provincial finance departments;
- Sample-based review of expenditure documentation to confirm proper utilization of program funds;
- Assessment of financial reporting practices, including completeness and timeliness of relevant financial statements or reports.

5. Deliverables and Schedule

The IVA shall deliver the following:

1. Inception Report (Within Two Weeks of Contract Signing)

Including:

- Detailed verification methodology;
- Sampling framework;
- Data collection tools;
- Templates for:
    - DLR Verification Reports
    - PDO 1 and 2 Calculation Reports
    - Fiduciary PAP Compliance Reports

2. FY 2025–26 Deliverables

- **DLR Verification Report (FY 2025–26)** – First week of May 2026
- **PDO 2 Calculation and Verification Report (FY 2025–26)** – August 2026
- **Fiduciary PAP Compliance Report (FY 2025–26)** – October 2026

3. FY 2026–27 Deliverables

- **DLR Verification Report (FY 2026–27)** – First week of May 2027
- **Fiduciary PAP Compliance Report (FY 2026–27)** – October 2027

4. FY 2027–28 Deliverables

- **DLR Verification Report (FY 2027–28)** – First week of May 2028
- **PDO 1 and 2 Calculation and Verification Report (FY 2027–28)** – May 2028
- **Fiduciary PAP Compliance Report (FY 2027–28)** – May 2028
- **Project Closing Consolidated Verification Report** – June 2028

6. Other General Tasks and Responsibilities

In addition to the specific technical tasks described above, the Independent Verification Agency (IVA) shall undertake the following general responsibilities:

i. **Coordination and Communication**
Maintain regular and structured communication with the PCU–MoFEPT through in-person

meetings, audio conferences, video conferences, and written correspondence regarding all aspects of the verification methodology, data collection processes, fiduciary review procedures, audit trail requirements, reporting framework, and implementation progress.

ii. **Timely Responsiveness**
Provide timely written and verbal feedback on communications, assignments, and instructions issued by the PCU–MoFEPT, including clarifications, factual validation requests, and coordination matters necessary for effective execution of the assignment.

iii. **Submission of Methodological Documentation**
Provide the PCU–MoFEPT with copies of its detailed evaluation workflow, verification protocols, sampling strategy, and data collection methodology for review and record purposes, without compromising the independence of the verification process.

iv. **Escalation of Sensitive Issues**
Promptly inform and seek procedural guidance from the PCU–MoFEPT when encountering sensitive, material, or complex issues that may affect access to information, institutional coordination, security of field teams, or interpretation of verification protocols. Such consultation shall not compromise the IVA's independent professional judgment.

v. **Independence, Confidentiality, and Professional Standards**
Perform all services in accordance with recognized professional standards governing independent verification, audit integrity, and fiduciary review. The IVA shall maintain strict independence from Program implementation entities, ensure confidentiality of data and records accessed during the assignment, and comply with all applicable ethical and professional integrity requirements. Where uncertainty arises regarding procedural requirements, the IVA may seek clarification from the PCU–MoFEPT while maintaining independent decision-making authority over verification findings.

7. Reporting and Governance

The IVA shall report to the National Project Director (NPD), PCU–MoFEPT or a focal person nominated by the NPD.

MoFEPT shall facilitate access to documents, datasets, and stakeholders.

All reports shall be submitted in draft and finalized following incorporation of factual clarifications. Deliverable will be considered final once acceptable to PCU, MoFEPT and the World Bank.

8. Firm Eligibility and Experience Requirements

The firm must demonstrate:

- Minimum 10 years' experience in independent verification, audit, or results-based financing operations;
- Proven experience with World Bank PforR or DLI-based operations;
- Demonstrated experience conducting statistically sound sampling and field-based verification;
- Strong fiduciary systems assessment and procurement compliance experience;
- Demonstrated expertise in administrative data validation and statistical analysis;
- Experience in education sector performance evaluation;
- Experience operating within federal and multi-tier governance systems;
- Proven ability to triangulate documentary, financial, administrative, and field-based evidence.

9. Key Personnel

The proposed team shall include:

- Team Leader (minimum 12 years' experience in independent verification/PforR);
- Public Financial Management Specialist;
- Procurement Specialist;
- Education Sector Specialist (Foundational Learning/Assessment);
- Education Sector Specialist (EMIS);
- Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist;
- Data/Statistical Analyst;
- Field Verification Coordinator (as required).

Prior World Bank PforR experience is strongly preferred.

9. Procurement Method

Selection shall be conducted in accordance with the World Bank Procurement Regulations for IPF Borrowers (current edition).