Call for Tenders: Technology Partner for ETI Access to Remedy Project

Background

ETI has worked with companies for many years to address modern slavery risks in their supply chains, with a strong focus on migrant workers, who are particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Migrant workers can be among the most vulnerable of all workers. Many are in debt bondage due to high recruitment fees paid to secure their jobs; have had their passports or ID documents confiscated; cannot resign from their work without penalty or payment and legally are unable to change employer in cases of rights violations; are subject to unlawful and involuntary deductions from their salaries; experience poor workplace health and safety conditions; work excessively long hours without adequate rest time, causing potential harm to their health and wellbeing; are not paid minimum wages or overtime rates in accordance with local labour laws; and are housed in poor and overcrowded conditions.

They often do not speak the local language, may not know their rights, and often will be too fearful of losing their job or being repatriated to report grievances or concerns at work. They are in a situation where they simply don't know who to trust, and they can't risk antagonising their employer, particularly if they are in debt bondage due to high recruitment fees and need to keep their job to pay off their debts.

This makes migrant workers highly vulnerable to modern slavery and other forms of labour exploitation. The workers may not be allowed to join a representative workers' committee or trade union. Even where workers can join, they are often fearful of the repercussions. In some cases, the local union may not have the capacity to organise temporary migrant workers who speak different languages. Most often, company operational grievance policies and procedures are not fit for purpose. They are often geared to local permanent workers, they may be communicated to workers in a language that migrant workers don't speak, or sometimes managed by a third party that migrant workers don't trust. As a result, they are often not used.

The most effective grievance systems are often the simplest and most direct – in which workers can collectively communicate directly with their employers and resolve their concerns and grievances as and where they arise. A key aim of the programme is to promote this approach.

ETI Access to Remedy Programme

Over the past year, ETI has responded to concerns raised by its member companies, the media and NGO reports highlighting the situation of migrant workers in Malaysia being denied their rights and working in exploitative working conditions.

This project, supported by the UK government, is intended to support migrant workers in Malaysia who are vulnerable to modern slavery risks. It aims to improve the working and living conditions of migrant workers, increase trust and dialogue between migrants and their employers, and support migrants to raise grievances and obtain remedy where they have suffered abuses.

The programme has two key objectives:

Firstly, to pilot a technology tool / platform that will support workers to find safe and trusted ways to raise grievances without compromising their jobs or making them more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The technology platform will be developed in consultation with workers themselves to respond to their own stated needs, and in collaboration with trade unions and migrant worker organisations in Malaysia to ensure it reflects their needs and is accessible to them. It may help migrant workers to communicate with one another, seek advice, get information on their rights and who to contact for support. It will build on the tech tools they already use and will be piloted by migrant workers in a number of factories in Malaysia.

The second objective is to consult with companies, brands, trade unions, NGOs and workers themselves on a commonly agreed set of Principles on Access to Remedy for Migrant Workers that brands, suppliers and local manufacturers could sign up to and be held accountable for applying in practice.

Objectives

ETI is seeking a partner organisation with relevant technical expertise to design, develop and support in piloting a technology platform as described above. The design of the platform should draw on and respond to data obtained from a baseline research study being conducted with workers and management in participating factories in Malaysia (as well as any other relevant research findings).

The Technology Platform

ETI is currently conducting a piece of baseline research to understand workers' needs, which will shape the design of the platform. However, based on work to date and a review of similar technology initiatives elsewhere, ETI anticipates that the platform will most likely need to have the following broad functions:

- Provide information on labour rights for migrant workers in Malaysia
- Provide information on practical aspects of migrating to Malaysia for work, including information on recruitment practices, risks, what to expect and useful tips
- Provide contact details for relevant local worker organisations, unions, NGOs, national embassies or other agreed contact points that may be able to provide support to migrant workers
- Allow workers to anonymously report an issue in the workplace (to be determined whether this is through a third party or directly with their employer)

- Allow workers to communicate directly with one another (other migrant workers speaking the same language either in the same or other factories) to offer mutual advice and support or to organise so as to collectively raise issues with their employer
- Available in the native languages of participating groups of migrant workers

A key aspect of the technology platform will be that it should to the extent possible be worker-owned (I.e. not a management tool). Workers should be able to trust the platform knowing that any information they submit through it will be entirely confidential and anonymous.

More detailed information on the platform's functionality will become available towards mid-March 2020 once the baseline research is complete and the data is analysed. Data collection is currently ongoing.

Proposals
ETI invites interested parties to submit a proposal for the design, build and piloting of a platform that could fulfil the above functions.

Timeline
The design phase of the platform should begin in March 2020, and the platform should be ready for piloting by the end of May 2020.

Budget
The maximum available budget for this work is approximately **GBP £35k**.

Considerations
Given the available time and budget ETI does not expect that it will be possible to build a completely new technology platform. Instead, we anticipate that, together with our selected partner, we will adapt an existing platform as necessary.

ETI therefore invites prospective partners with experience of designing and developing technology in this space to submit proposals outlining how any existing technology they have developed might be able to be adapted to fulfil the above functionality.

The eventual platform will need to be accessible to workers in at least the following languages: Bahasa Malaysia, Nepali, Bangladeshi & Vietnamese. Provision will need to be included for translation between those languages and English at relevant points in the platform functionality.

Proposals
Proposals should be 3-5 pages (with annexes as necessary) and should comprise:

- A short outline of any existing technology the organisation has developed
- An indication of where that existing technology does or does not align with the proposed functionality noted above
- A proposal for how the existing technology could be adapted as necessary to meet the proposed functionality
  - Including, if appropriate, links to or alignment with any existing technology workers may already use (I.e. applications such as WhatsApp or Facebook – not other technology developed specifically for workers)
- A timeline and estimated budget for the design and development process
- An overview of the organisation's technical and subject-matter expertise and experience
- CV's with biographies for key organisation staff

Methodology

ETI will provide data from the baseline research study, which will be the main point of departure for the design of the platform. We expect the contractor to draw on other relevant research findings that they may be familiar with, but we are not including a specific literature review as a separate piece of work within this contract.

We also expect the contractor to conduct a small number of interviews: with ETI project staff, with ETI's local delivery partner in Malaysia, and with other relevant stakeholders to be agreed. These interviews should augment the baseline research data to further inform the platform design.

Competencies, skills and experience

- Strong technical expertise and experience
- Deep knowledge of labour rights issues – with particular familiarity with migrant workers issues and the labour rights context in Malaysia
- Preferably experience of operating in Malaysia (an office presence in Malaysia or the region would be helpful)
- Preferably ability to communicate fluently in Bahasa Malaysian
- Capacity for high quality written work targeting different groups of stakeholders relevant to ethical trade, including corporate representatives, governments and human rights practitioners

Duration and timing of contract

The contract is to begin from **01/03/2020**. The completed platform should be ready for piloting by **31/05/2020**.

Fees

To be agreed – please submit a budget with your proposal.

Submission of Proposals

Proposals for this work should be sent to owain.johnstone@eti.org.uk by close of business on **21/02/2020.**

You are strongly encouraged to contact ETI before submitting a proposal for an initial discussion.

ETI intends to appoint a partner by **28/2/2020**.

Management and reporting

This project will be managed by Owain Johnstone, Modern Slavery Advisor (owain.johnstone@eti.org.uk).