

Background

Through the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) funding, People 1st International have been engaged in a cross-regional intervention to provide businesses with the HR skills required to effectively manage their business.

The EBRD emphasises economic inclusion for development, measuring how economic institutions and education systems provide equal opportunities. Businesses face barriers when employing youth due to high unemployment and education gaps, impacting transitions to work. SMEs struggle to attract skilled labour, worsening workforce challenges.

The Skills in Business Programme aims to address these issues by enhancing SMEs' capacity to recruit and retain skilled young workers through work-based learning.

The project promotes a previous phase of work where People 1st International and EBRD developed an SME Human Resource Competency Framework, comprising 15 standards linked to specific outcomes and KPIs and provided training to local HR consultants across 8 countries to equip them with the tools and know-how to support local small businesses to increase the effectiveness of HR management in line with international best practice.

Skills in Business Standards



Recruitment and Retention	1. Developing Strategies	2. Competency Frameworks	3. People Policies	4. Employability Programmes	5. Market Insights
	6. Recruitment and Selection	7. Inclusion	8. Retention	9. Performance Management	10. Leavers
Work-based Learning	11. Induction	12. Career planning	13. Learning Needs	14. Learning Approaches	15. Measuring Impact

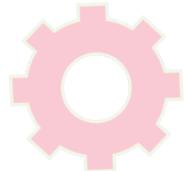


IUVAS, Moldova

IUVAS S.R.L. is a leading fashion retailer in Moldova, operating 39 stores and employing approximately 300 people, 93.7% of whom are women. Despite its strong retail presence, the company faced increasing workforce pressures driven by Moldova's shrinking labour pool, high youth migration, and rising turnover (27.45% in 2024). Only 8.7% of employees were under age 30, limiting future talent development.

Internally, IUVAS had no formal HR strategies, policies, job descriptions, induction processes, or performance management systems. Recruitment and onboarding were largely informal, and roles and career pathways lacked clarity. Training was inconsistent, decision-making was centralised, and store managers had limited autonomy.

These combined challenges highlighted the need to build a modern, structured HR function capable of supporting sustainable business growth and improving employee attraction, development, and retention.



Skills in Business solution

Through the EBRD's Skills in Business (SiB) programme, People 1st International worked closely with IUVAS and the assigned local consultant to strengthen the company's HR infrastructure and establish modern, sustainable people-management systems.

The intervention aimed to transition IUVAS from reactive, informal HR practices to a strategic, structured and future-focused HR function by:

- Developing a clear HR strategy aligned with business goals.
- Creating competency-based job descriptions and organisational structures.
- Establishing formalised people policies covering the full employee lifecycle.
- Introducing a structured performance appraisal system.
- Designing a complete induction & onboarding framework.
- Building capability in measuring HR effectiveness using SMART goals and KPIs.

From the SiB consultancy framework, six standards were selected as the most relevant to IUVAS's challenges. These were: Developing Strategies, Competency Frameworks, People Policies, Performance Management, Induction and Measuring Impact. Together, they provided the structured methodology guiding the intervention.



Outcome / Impact

The Skills in Business intervention provided IUVAS with a structured set of HR systems that have transformed the way the business approaches people management.

- **Clear HR direction and roadmap:** A full HR strategy and supporting recruitment, retention and training plans now guide eight priority areas through to 2027, giving the company a clear roadmap for workforce development.
- **Defined roles and capability expectations:** A revised organisation chart, standardised job descriptions and a competency framework (core, technical and behavioural) now define expectations across all roles.
- **Consistent people policies:** Thirteen core HR policies were introduced, covering recruitment, onboarding, performance, conduct, equality and data protection - supported by a rollout plan and new commitments to gender equality and anti-harassment.
- **Structured performance management:** A performance management framework with tailored templates for different role types is in place, with a full appraisal cycle scheduled.
- **Improved induction experience:** A complete induction and onboarding package, including 25 practical tools, will support new starters from pre-boarding through their first 90 days.
- **Measuring HR progress:** SMART goals and HR KPIs now enable IUVAS to track the impact of its new systems and make evidence-based decisions.

Early indicators show strong momentum:

- Youth hiring increased from 24% pre-project to 43.24% during the intervention.
- A preliminary youth retention rate of 70.59% was recorded between February and July 2025.
- Internal promotion pathways were drafted for implementation by November 2025.

Since project closure, IUVAS has continued implementing the frameworks developed through the programme. The appointment of a dedicated HR Manager has accelerated progress, improved coordination and provided a vital point of ownership for all HR reforms. As a result, the business is now far better positioned to sustain long-term workforce development and continue improving employment outcomes.

Testimonial



"Participating in the Skills in Business project, supported by the EBRD and guided by People 1st International, has been an extremely valuable experience for IUVAS.

With the guidance of our local consultant, Svetlana, we gained clarity on how strategic HR can directly impact business performance. Together, we developed a set of realistic and actionable HR goals, built action plans for five standards, and laid the foundation for hiring a professional HR specialist.

The consultants' deep expertise and structured approach were instrumental throughout the project. We now feel better prepared to grow our team and lead with purpose."

Iurie Vasiliu, Owner, IUVAS





About People 1st International

People 1st International has been providing world-class skills solutions for over 50 years. Our expertise is trusted by organisations globally and is proven to:

- Increase staff retention
- Maximise the potential of the workforce
- Increase productivity and competitiveness
- Create effective people strategies
- Build a strong commitment to vocational lifelong skills



For more information,
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