

TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR) FOR INSTITUTIONAL CONTRACTORS

International Institutional Consultancy for support to Ministry of Health of Montenegro to draft a National Strategy on Early Childhood Development

1. Background and Context

After gaining sovereignty in 2006, Montenegro is on a steady path of Euro-Atlantic integration. European Union (EU) accession negotiations were opened in June 2012, while in June 2017 Montenegro became a member of NATO. EU accession process is one of the main drivers of reforms. In relation to child rights, Montenegro has signed and ratified several United Nations conventions that directly or indirectly refer to children, among which are the: Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). In 2016 the Government of Montenegro adopted the National Strategy on Sustainable Development (NSSD 2030), effectively incorporating the UN Agenda 2030 into Montenegrin policy goals. The UN agenda places Early Childhood Development (ECD) as a priority for the future. Specifically, SDG Target 4.2 states that by 2030 countries should “ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.”

Montenegro is an upper-middle-income country with a total population of 620,029 in 2011 (2011 Census). Children under the age of 18 numbered 145,126, or 23.4 per cent of the total population: 75,367 boys (51.9 per cent), 69,759 girls (48.1 per cent). According to the Human Development Report 2019, Montenegro ranked high for human development. However, data indicate that inequalities due to poverty and regional disparities remain as well. A 2020 Survey on income and living conditions (SILC, published in 2021) showed that 32.6 per cent of children aged 0-17 in Montenegro were at risk of poverty. Besides being disproportionately more affected by poverty compared to adults, exposure to poverty undermines children lifecycle development, especially for children under the age of 5. Poverty is known to negatively impacts children general wellbeing (ECD, nutrition, education, health, etc.) and limits access to necessary public services.

Child wellbeing in Montenegro is compromised by insufficient recognition of the importance of ECD. Underlying reasons include a broad spectrum of economic, social, cultural, as well as public policy challenges, all of which contribute to less than optimal parenting skills and limited preventative measures and opportunities that could enhance child development. Some key gaps in ECD are as follows:

- Only 20% of newborns are exclusively breastfed within the first 6 months, while 45% of children up to 5 years do not receive the minimum acceptable diet in order to reach optimal development. These poor nutrition practices lead to poor health outcomes including stunting (7%) and overweight (7%) in children under 5, with disadvantaged children being most affected (e.g. 21% of Roma children are stunted) (MICS 2018).
- Montenegro struggles with low immunization coverage, particularly for some vaccines. Coverage rate for the first dose of measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) decreased from 90% in 2010 to 24% in 2020 (JRF 2020).
- Around one quarter of 3 – 6 years old children in Montenegro are not enrolled in kindergarten and do not have the opportunity to receive quality education and systemic care when it is most needed (EMIS). Children who are most excluded are poor children and children from Roma and Egyptian settlements (MICS 2018).
- 66 percent of children aged 1–14 years are subjected to at least one form of psychological or physical punishment by their parents or other adult household members. Children aged 3-9 are most affected, where four in ten are subjected to any physical punishment (MICS 2018).
- Almost one third, i.e. 30.9% of the overall population and 38.6% of the child population are “at risk of poverty and social exclusion” (2020 SILC). The rate of severe material deprivation in the overall

population is 13.5%, for children it is 17.0%, while the rate of severe material deprivation among those living in Roma and Egyptian settlements is staggering 78% (MICS 2018).

- Children with disabilities remain one of the most socially excluded and deprived groups, especially if they are also affected by poverty. Children with disabilities are also over-represented in institutional care (an estimated 60% of children in institutional care are with disabilities). A situation analysis of Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) is being developed.

A series of policy briefs have been commissioned by UNICEF to map ECD services and analyse system bottlenecks, based on research papers developed for the high-level conference “Investing in the Early Years – Conference on Fiscal and Public Administration Imperatives for Early Childhood Development” held in 2019 in Podgorica. The briefs have been published on UNICEF Montenegro website (<https://www.unicef.org/montenegro/en/publications-and-surveys-0>).

For its 2022 workplan, the Government of Montenegro plans to adopt a national ECD Strategy, led by the Ministry of Health. The Strategy should reinforce country’s focus on building a comprehensive policy towards ensuring the best start in life for all children (from birth to school entry), and to address vulnerabilities and risks to survival and development of young children through cross-sectoral integration and multidisciplinary approaches. It should be based on the Nurturing Care Framework (<https://nurturing-care.org/>).

Specifically, the ECD Strategy should aim:

- to improve health outcomes for mothers and children from pregnancy to birth and in early childhood including mental health;
- to improve maternal nutrition, breastfeeding, complementary feeding, growth monitoring and promotion;
- to improve child developmental monitoring and screening;
- to develop and enhance early identification and support services for families and young children, including for families with children at risk for developmental delay and children with disabilities;
- to support parents of young children, to promote caregiver sensitivity and responsiveness;
- to support and counsel parents about opportunities for early learning, play and stimulation and good quality preschool education;
- to provide a clean and safe environment, prevention of violence, social protection and social services.

Rather than to duplicate, the Strategy should cross reference existing sectoral and multi-sectoral strategies, plans and programmes and complement them. The Strategy should take into account existing strategies, plans and policies relating to maternal and newborn health, immunization, nutrition, early and preschool childhood education, social and child protection including the Government’s multi sectoral Strategy for the Realization of the Rights of the Child 2019-2023.

The strategy should emphasise the need for strengthening coordination mechanisms and referrals at national and local levels to provide effective, efficient and quality services to young children and their families, as well as fora for sharing experiences/innovations, external advice, and oversight.

The ECD strategy should have clear linkages with SDG targets and indicators. Operationalization of the newly adopted ECD Strategy will include preparation of the Action Plan with specific activities, results, deliverables, and timeframes as well as development of the Monitoring & Evaluation Framework to measure both, progress and achievement of the Strategy results, and quality and continuity of integrated ECD services.

This activity is part of the Action “EU and UNICEF for Early Childhood Development in Montenegro”.

2. Objectives, Purpose & Expected Results

The purpose of this assignment is to support the Government of Montenegro to build a comprehensive policy towards ensuring the best start in life for all children (from birth to school entry), and to address vulnerabilities and risks to survival and development of young children through cross-sectoral integration and multidisciplinary approaches.

The objective of the consultancy is to support the Working Group to be established by the Ministry of Health to prepare the national Early Childhood Development Strategy ahead of its adoption envisaged for 2022. The document should follow the government instructions for preparing policy documents, notably the *Decree on the Methodology and Procedure for Strategy Paper Development, Alignment and Monitoring*. The strategy should be costed and include a monitoring and evaluation framework.

3. Description of the Assignment

The Consultancy Agency should engage two members at minimum, an *international* expert in ECD to provide ECD-specific knowledge and guidance on ECD and international developments in the field to members of the working group and to support and guide the national expert in his/her work, and a *national* expert with solid experience in supporting the development of policy documents with costed action plans and monitoring and evaluation frameworks. The national expert should facilitate work of the working group, solicit inputs from different members, consult the international expert as needed, incorporate inputs in multiple drafts, ensure cross referencing with existing documents ensuring synchronization of activities and indicators and avoiding duplication.

The following tasks are expected to be completed:

- Review background materials (policy briefs and studies, EU and UN recommendations), and existing policies in the area of ECD to ensure synergies and avoid duplication or inconsistencies.
- Present to members of the working group international developments in the field of ECD, facilitate a brainstorming session on Montenegro's ECD strategy and support the working group to identify key objectives of the strategy, followed by specific activities to reach those goals (i.e. a skeleton of the Strategy).
- Gather inputs to prepare a first draft text of the ECD strategy (including description of activities, costed action plan and monitoring and evaluation framework) for sharing with the working group for review and feedback.
- Prepare a second draft of the ECD strategy based on inputs from the working group and share with the working group.
- Prepare a slide deck about the Strategy to support the chair of the working group to present the draft document to the Council on the Rights of the Child Working Group on Early Childhood Development for their feedback and suggestions.
- Incorporate additional feedback (including from the Government Secretariat reviewing policy documents) and share with the Ministry of Health for the final adoption procedure.
- Participate in discussions, review inputs and make suggestions for improvement throughout the process.
- Once the Strategy is adopted prepare a summary policy document (approximately 5 pages long) outlining the strategy document.
- Provide a brief consultancy report with further recommendations.

The working group may convene through a series of meetings and/or in a multi-day workshop, which will be agreed on between the working group, the Ministry of Health and UNICEF. Inputs will also be collected from working group members through formal communication.

The Strategy is scheduled to be adopted in 2022. If so, all tasks related to Strategy development should be conducted before the end of the year. Summary policy document and a brief consultancy report should be developed upon Strategy adoption, in January 2023. A more detailed timeline is presented in the following section.

The international and national team members are expected to work for approximately 50 working days in total. Consultancy Agency should propose a breakdown of working days in their Technical Proposal with a clear justification.

Deliverables should be prepared in Montenegrin language. Only the final consultancy report can be prepared either in English or Montenegrin.

Only some desk review documents are available in English and the national team member is expected to provide (essential) translation to the international member as and when required.

The Consultancy Agency is expected to use their online platform subscription for participation of the international team member in meetings.

4. Deliverables, timelines, and payment schedule

Deliverables	Tentative timeline	Schedule of Payment
Desk review	16 September 2022	70%
Presentation on international developments in the field of ECD, brainstorming session on strategy to identify key objectives and specific activities	30 September 2022	
First draft of the strategy for review by working group	7 October 2022	
Second draft of the strategy based on review/feedback from the working group (a third draft may be required at a later date if inputs received after the second draft are substantial)	28 October 2022	
A slide deck about the Strategy	11 November 2022	30%
Final draft of the Strategy	25 November 2022	
A summary policy document outlining the ECD strategy	13 January 2023	
Brief consultancy report with recommendations	20 January 2023	

5. Travel

- The international team member of the Consultancy Agency is not required to travel but to attend meetings only when required online and to provide inputs to the national team member home-based.
- The national team member may be expected to travel within the country for meetings of the working group.

6. Management and Organisation

- Management: The consultancy will be supervised by Early Childhood Development Officer. The Consultancy Agency should communicate with the Early Childhood Development Officer on a regular basis and share all deliverables as they become available for review and potential feedback.
- Organization: International Institutional Consultancy is required, meeting the criteria described below.
- Schedule: This assignment will commence on 5 September 2022.

7. Qualification Requirements

The Consultancy Agency team should consist at minimum of an international expert and a national team member. The following are the minimum requirements:

Consultancy agency with a clear focus on child development or early childhood development.

International team member:

- Advanced university degree in ECD, Social Sciences or other a related technical field;
- Minimum 10 years of professional work experience in ECD in at least 3 countries, with a focus on strategic planning, integrated and multi-sectoral approaches, monitoring and evaluation;
- Familiarity with the Nurturing Care Framework and international trends in the field of ECD;
- Excellent interpersonal skills, experience in working with governments;
- Excellent communication skills;
- Excellent analytical skills;
- Excellent facilitation skills;
- Fluency in spoken and written English.

National team member:

- Advanced university degree in ECD, Social Sciences or other a related technical field;
- Minimum 5 years of professional work experience in ECD;
- Minimum 2 years of professional work in strategic planning, and development/monitoring of policies and action plans;
- Knowledge of result based monitoring;
- Familiarity with the Decree on the Methodology and Procedure for Strategy Paper Development, Alignment and Monitoring;
- Excellent interpersonal skills, experience in working with governments;
- Excellent communication skills;
- Excellent analytical skills;
- Excellent facilitation skills;
- Knowledge of both English and Montenegrin.

8. Application procedure

The potential contractors are expected to submit a proposal based on these Terms of Reference. The proposal should consist of:

- Technical Proposal including:**
 - a) Portfolio of the organisation/institution/agency with examples of previous work on similar projects and clients in the last 5 years
 - b) Title/designation of each team member (national and international) including their CVs;

- c) Description of the methodology and technical approach with a tentative work plan with the number of days and timeframe in line with the ToRs;
- d) Supplier Profile Form.
- e) LRPS Form signed.

- **Price Proposal (Budget) including**
- daily fee rate for each team member per deliverable as well as the total cost per professionals based on the number of working days included in the Technical Proposal.
- Estimated travel costs for national consultant. Daily subsistence allowance (DSA) will, where applicable, be paid up to a maximum of the official UN rate. (Reimbursement of travel costs / accommodation expenses will be based on actual expenses).
- Other costs if applicable.

The price, i.e. financial proposal shall indicate budget estimated in EUR.

8. Evaluation

1) Technical components (70 points)

ITEM	TECHNICAL EVALUATION CRITERIA	MAX OBTAINABLE POINTS
1	Overall Response - the understanding of the assignment by the proposer and the alignment of the proposal submitted with the ToR	
1.1	• Completeness of response	3
1.2	• Overall concord between TOR/needs and proposal	5
2	Company and Key Personnel	
2.1	• Range and depth of organizational experience with similar projects	8
2.2	• Samples of previous work, number of customers, size of projects	5
2.3	• Key personnel: relevant experience and qualifications of the proposed team for the assignment	22
3	Company policies	
3.1.	• Company policy on Child labor, Safeguarding and Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (articulate policies for the protection & safeguarding of children and prevention of PSEA)	3
3.2.	• Gender component: At least 1 female in the management structure or ownership of the company	2
3.3.	• Workplace policies on disabilities	2

4.	Proposed Methodology and Approach	
4.1	• Work plan	5
4.2	• Methodology	10
4.3	• Project management, monitoring and quality assurance process	5
TOTAL TECHNICAL SCORE		70

Minimum technical score: 70% of 70 points = 49 points

2) Financial component (total of 30 points)¹

- Technical proposal evaluation. Proposals passing the minimum technical pass score (49 points-70% of the maximum points obtainable for technical proposal) will continue into the Financial proposal evaluation.
- Financial proposal evaluation. The lowest price proposal will be awarded the full score assigned to the commercial proposal.
- Recommendation. The recommendation for award of contract will be based on best combination of technical and financial score.
- Final award and contracts. Based on verified nominations and final scores, contract negotiations could be initiated with one or more successful Proposers.
- The UNICEF evaluation team will select the Proposal which is of high quality, clear and meets the stated requirements and offers the best combination of technical and financial score.

¹ Financial offer will be reviewed only if Technical proposal meets minimum required quality standards.