

TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR) FOR INSTITUTIONAL CONTRACTORS

International/national institutional consultancy to conduct research on knowledge, attitudes and practices in relation to early childhood development in Montenegro

1. Background and Context

Early childhood development is the continuous process of acquiring skills and abilities from conception to the age of school entry across the domains of cognition, language, motor, social and emotional development which help individuals to think, solve problems, communicate, express emotions and form relationships. It is also considered the foundation of health, learning, productivity, well-being and the foundation for future human capital formation¹. Globally, almost half of all children under the age of 5 years are at risk of not realizing their developmental potential², as a result of the risks of poverty and poor nutrition and a lack of access to basic services and early learning opportunities. Juxtaposed against these challenges is the invaluable evidence gained from advances in biological and behavioral sciences that show that a child's development can be protected and promoted through simple actions and interventions in the earliest years of their life.

Montenegro is an upper-middle-income economy and a candidate for accession to the European Union (EU). However, many inequalities remain, and child wellbeing is compromised by insufficient recognition of the importance of early child development. 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 infants are exclusively breastfed within the first 6 months³, while 45% of children up to 5 years do not receive the minimum acceptable diet in order to reach optimal development⁴. These poor nutrition practices contribute 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)⁵.
- 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 under 20% in 2022⁶.
- 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.
- 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 members⁷. Children aged 3-9 are most affected, where four in ten are subjected to any physical punishment.
- Slightly less than one third of children in Montenegro (30.5%) live in income-poor households; worryingly 45.5% of children 0-17 are at risk of poverty or social exclusion⁸.

¹ Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, 'In Brief, The Science of Early Childhood Development', accessed 1 June 2017. Also see Garcia, Jorge Luis, et al., 'The Life-cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program', Human Capital and Economic Opportunity Global Working Group, Working Paper 2, Chicago, December 2016, pp. 016–035.

² The Lancet, 2016. These data have been estimated using globally comparable metrics in low-and middle-income countries

³ MONSTAT and UNICEF, 2018 MICS, 2019.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ WUENIC data from July 2022.

⁷ MONSTAT and UNICEF, 2018 MICS, 2019.

- 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 particularly affected, representing close to 50% of children in residential care⁹

In partnership with the Government of Montenegro and the support of the European Union, UNICEF Montenegro is implementing the Action “EU and UNICEF for Early Childhood Development in Montenegro” (2020-2023). Its overall objective is that young children (0-6), including children with disabilities, have improved health and development in order to reach their full human potential. Its Specific objective is that young children and their parents/caregivers benefit from quality, equitable, mutually reinforcing systems of health, education, social and child protection in Montenegro by the end of the implementation period.

Two years into Action implementation, progress has been made in meeting most of the expected results. Preschool enrolment has been on the rise. A vast majority of children accessing services supported by the Action have benefitted from improved nurturing care provided by their parents. The number of caregivers benefitting from services supported through this Action to provide nurturing care to their children has exceeded the targets. Another expected result of the Action has been to raise awareness of the importance of child development at national level, in order to positively influence behaviours and stimulate demand for quality ECD services. Various channels and platforms were used with the aim to achieve this, including public events, training events, mass media including social media, and finally, an innovative digital solution, the free mobile parenting app *Bebbo* for parents of children 0 to 6. To be able to measure achievement of this result, baseline data were collected by conducting a Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices (KAP) survey with caregivers in 2021, and an end line KAP is to be conducted in early 2023.

A Consultancy (research) Agency is required to conduct the endline KAP survey.

2. Objectives, Purpose & Expected Results

The purpose of the consultancy is to assess effectiveness of Action-related communication activities aimed at raising awareness of ECD, positively influencing behaviours and stimulating demand for quality ECD services.

The objectives of the consultancy are:

- To provide technical assistance in the design and implementation of a quantitative endline (evaluation) KAP survey in relation to ECD in Montenegro.
- To complement the above KAP survey by diving deeper into the mobile parenting app *Bebbo*, in order to better understand and improve app uptake using qualitative research methods (focus groups).

3. Description of the Assignment

The quantitative survey should provide detailed information on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the general public in general, and parents in particular, in relation to different aspects of ECD and the use of ECD services. The survey questionnaire should be comparable to the [baseline survey](#) to measure

⁸ MONSTAT, “Survey on Income and Living Conditions“, 2021.

⁹ UNICEF CPD 2023-2027

progress, and can include additional questions that are not to be compared with the previous survey, but rather, serve to set new baselines for future assessments, reflecting the latest developments in the field (in consultation with UNICEF). The length of one interview should 20 minutes hence the size of the questionnaire should be conceptualised accordingly. The KAP survey should be conducted on a nationally representative sample of mothers/primary caregivers of children younger than 6 years. The findings of the research should enable disaggregation, at minimum, by mother/other caregiver, urban/rural areas, north/centre/south of Montenegro, etc. and should be discussed further with UNICEF.

The complementary deep dive should relate to the update of the Bebbi app by conducting two focus groups:

- Caregivers who have downloaded and are using the app,
- Caregivers who have heard about the app but have not downloaded the app, or downloaded but then deleted the app/are not using the app.

The Consultancy Agency will ensure that the research process is in line with the [UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, and Data Collection and Analysis](#). Special measures should be put in place to ensure that the assessment process is ethical and that participants in the survey process can freely express their opinion. The sources of information will be protected, and known only to the contracted Consultancy Agency. The Consultancy Agency has to ensure that it is clear to all subjects that their participation in the assessment is voluntary. All participants should be informed or advised of the context and purpose of the assessment, as well as the privacy and confidentiality of discussions.

Consultants are required to clearly identify any potential ethical issue, as well as the processes for ethical review and oversight of the research/data collection process in their proposal. To ensure quality and accountability in the evidence generation process, especially when it involves children, UNICEF Country Office in Montenegro established an independent Ethical Review Committee in 2016, which reviews and approves research methodologies and final research reports, before their publication. The committee is multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral in composition. UNICEF Montenegro will submit the detailed research methodology as well as the research results (slide decks/research reports) to the aforementioned Ethical Review Committee for clearance.

4. Deliverables, timelines, and payment schedule

Deliverables	Tentative timeline	Schedule of Payment
First draft of the methodology incl. Questionnaire and Focus Group/Interview protocols	6 February 2023	30%
Final draft of the methodology incl. Questionnaire and Focus Group/Interview protocols based on received feedback and comments from the Ethical Review Board	20 February 2023	
Complete data set (data tables) and a draft slide deck in English <u>or</u> Montenegrin (as per agreement between UNICEF and the Consultancy Agency) on the results of the quantitative survey and draft report on Bebbi submitted to UNICEF	20 March 2023	70%
Final slide decks and report (as above) in English <u>and</u> Montenegrin based on feedback received by UNICEF	10 April 2023	

5. Travel

No travel is required. The research should be conducted remotely (CATI for KAP survey and online focus groups).

6. Management and Organisation

- **Management:** The consultancy will be supervised by Early Childhood Development Officer, in consultation with Communications team and Social and Behavioural Change 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 1 February 2023.

7. Qualification Requirements

UNICEF is seeking proposals from experienced research institute, consultancy research agency university department and research centre with experience of working in and on Montenegro or South East Europe, experience in ECD, and with focus on social policy, social statistics or similar.

The team leader must:

- Hold a Master/PhD in social sciences;
- Have extensive work experience in the production of similar studies including for different international agencies (especially UN);
- Have outstanding skills in statistical analysis;
- Have a very good knowledge of participatory research;
- Have excellent analytical and writing skills in English and local language;
- Familiarity with UNICEF's mandate and goals is desirable;
- Cultural sensitivity.

The research team must:

- Have members with University Degrees in social sciences;
- Have a member who is an expert in early childhood development;
- Have a member who is a professional methodologist;
- Have relevant work experience in the production of similar studies including for different international agencies (especially UN), in the field of social development;
- Have very good skills in statistical analysis;
- Have very good analytical and writing skills in English and local language;
- Familiarity with UNICEF's mandate and goals is desirable;
- Cultural sensitivity.

8. Application procedure

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

i. **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 (i.e. KAPs, particularly related to Early Childhood Development, focus groups)
- b) Title/designation of each team member (national and/or international) including their CVs;
- c) Description of the methodology and technical approach with a tentative work plan and timeframe in line with the ToRs;
- d) Supplier Profile Form.
- e) LRPS Form signed.

ii. **Financial Proposal (Budget) including:**

- a) Fee rate per research component included in the Technical Proposal.
- b) Other costs if applicable.

The 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	12
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	20
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)

- 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.

9. Remarks

- UNICEF Montenegro Office holds copyrights for all reports. The documents (including raw materials, etc.) may not be reproduced, distributed or published without the written permission from UNICEF.
- All personal data should be accessible to team members, but no one else. The consultants need to set up secure systems (a) to ensure that other staff within their institutions cannot access their data via the shared staff drives, and (b) to ensure secure data transfer between institutions. Cloud based storage with limited sharing rights could be considered in this instance. Different personal data files need to be link-able, they need to be held separately so that they can only be linked purposely, by researchers who are authorised to do so. There is also a need to ensure that data cannot be removed from secure systems in ways that might compromise data security.
- UNICEF Montenegro Office will share with the selected consultants all the relevant materials it has and provide required expertise.
- UNICEF Montenegro Office will review and provide feedback on reports prepared by consultants.
- All information from produced reports cannot be shared with the media without the written approval of UNICEF Montenegro Office.