

TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR) FOR INSTITUTIONAL CONTRACTORS

International Institutional Consultancy to support the Ministry of Health of Montenegro to develop an Operational Plan for scaling up family centered early intervention model

Background and Context

The early childhood years are foundational for the development of all human beings and shape the trajectory of life. This is a period particularly important for children who are at risk of or experience developmental difficulties. Evidence shows that adequate support during these years, when brain development is very intensive and neural plasticity is greater, can help children with developmental difficulties improve levels of functioning and achieve their innate potential. It can also help prevent or ameliorate the impact of environmental risk factors, including extreme poverty, neglect and violence, that are known to adversely affect child development and increase the likelihood for developmental difficulties. In the longer run, early support can significantly improve quality of life of the child and his/her family and promote inclusion.

During the past decades, globally, efforts have intensified to strengthen and expand support to children with developmental difficulties and their families/caregivers. Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) systems and services have emerged as an important policy area to promote the development of infants and young children who are at risk of or are experiencing developmental difficulties and support the realization of their rights in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. There has been a significant shift in the understanding on how child development during the first years of life can be enhanced, which also informed a change in the philosophy and principles of ECI practice. Consequently, contemporary ECI practice builds on the understanding that family interaction patterns are critical for child outcomes, making services more family-centered rather than child-centered, aiming to provide parents and other significant adults in the child's life (like early years teachers, other caregivers) with skills, knowledge and confidence necessary for meeting the needs of the child and for providing everyday opportunities that promote learning and development.

According to the [Situation Analysis of Early Childhood Intervention in Montenegro in 2022](#) (ECI SitAn), ECI services in Montenegro are medical model based or evolving from the medical model towards contemporary ECI service provision, but **no contemporary ECI services are found at present**. The ECI system is fragmented and sector-based, and no national ECI Strategic Plan, ECI Guidelines and Procedures, or ECI Service or Personnel Standards have been adopted. These policy documents are essential to establishing a countrywide ECI system, to ensure high-quality ECI services for all children and families who need them. As a result, there are issues with ECI service equity, workforce development, certification and accreditation, quality assurance and accountability. The cross-sectoral Early Childhood Development Strategy 2023-2027, however, provides a multisectoral ECD coordination mechanism, which sets the foundation for planning the future expansion of a national ECI system.

Montenegro has recently started working on developing universal child developmental monitoring and a registry, as many children with delays and disabilities being identified late. Substantial disparities also exist regarding service location, ethnicity, family income and types of ECI services. The 2022 Situation Analysis estimated that 10% to 15% children from 0 to 6 years require ECI services annually but less than half receive it. The study concludes that Montenegro needs a countrywide ECI system, universal developmental screening and referrals, a child tracking system, and to expand and improve the existing service providers, ensuring support to families in underserved municipalities and populations, especially Albanian, Roma and Egyptian families.

The Ministry of Health, with an intersectoral working group, developed and adopted a national Early Childhood Development Strategy 2023-2027 and set up a multisectoral ECD coordination body, which sets the foundation for planning the future expansion of a national ECI system. The Strategy itself identifies strengthening ECI in

Montenegro as a priority and includes a number of measures and actions to initiate the reform. Furthermore, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation and Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography, during 2023 and 2024 UNICEF supported the piloting of contemporary, transdisciplinary, family-centered, routine-based early intervention in two municipalities as demonstration sites, Bijelo Polje and Kotor, while some institutions in Podgorica (particularly Resource centre “Podgorica”) also undertook the training and piloted some elements of the approach. The sites have been generating valuable learning based on which future scaling up can be based. The piloting has included mapping of local services and resources, training on child developmental monitoring and piloting of an internationally renowned developmental screening instrument, training on contemporary early intervention and implementation of contemporary early intervention under professional supervision. Furthermore, draft ECI Guidelines were created and submitted to the Ministry of Health for adoption as guideline of recommended clinical practice.

UNICEF Country Office in Montenegro is seeking an international institute/agency/organization gathering ECI experts who will provide technical assistance to the Ministry of Health of Montenegro and the national ECD coordination mechanism, to scale up family centered early intervention model based on learning from current pilots, so as to inform the Early Childhood Development Strategy 2023-2027 and its corresponding Action Plans and other existing governmental policies and plans.

2. Objectives, Purpose & Expected Results

The purpose of this assignment is to enable families and children in Montenegro to benefit from timely and quality support for optimal early development by enhancing ECI policy making in Montenegro in line with international standards and best practice.

The objectives of this assignment are:

1. To provide technical support to the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography and the national ECD coordination mechanism to strengthen the Montenegrin strategic framework regarding further development, scaling up and rolling out of the family centered early intervention model. This technical assistance should take stock of learning from current pilots. The deliverables should inform the Early Childhood Development Strategy 2023-2027 and its corresponding Action Plans and other existing governmental policies and plans.
2. To support UNICEF in advocacy to build consensus and leverage broad support of policy makers and practitioners for scaling up contemporary, transdisciplinary, family-centered, routine-based early intervention in Montenegro.

3. Description of the Assignment

The following tasks are expected to be completed:

1. Desk review of the implementation of the Early Childhood Development Strategy 2023-2027, operational plans in the health, education and social welfare sectors as well as studies, research and reports on ECI in general and, in particular the piloting of contemporary, transdisciplinary, family-centered, routine-based early intervention in demonstration sites;
2. Analysis of existing challenges within the implementation of the strategy and identification of priority areas for improving ECI provision in the system through consultations with members of the national ECD coordination mechanism;
3. Collection and analysis of relevant data on the implementation of the contemporary, transdisciplinary, family-centered, routine-based early intervention model through collaboration with relevant institutions included in the pilot (primary health care centres, preschools, relevant social and child protection

institutions). This should include considerations such as the role and work processes of individual institutions in ECI provision today and in the future (resource centres, kindergartens, day care centres, centres for social work and health centres) and their intersectoral collaboration. This should also include collecting and analyzing data on the cost of provision of contemporary, transdisciplinary, family-centered, routine-based early intervention model (both existing and missing resources). Data collection tools should be shared with UNICEF at least two weeks prior to data collection;

4. Developing a costed roadmap for the strengthening and scaling up the family oriented early intervention model through consultations with policy makers, service managers, practitioners and parents involved in ECI as well as other allied professionals such as home visiting nurses, preschool teachers etc;
5. Propose activities including monitoring, evaluation and reporting activities and required budget for their implementation, which can be incorporated into the Early Childhood Development Strategy 2023-2027 Action Plans and other existing inter sectoral and sectoral operation plans;
6. Present the key findings and recommendations at a national conference to be held in autumn 2025 (date to be confirmed) about family support in order to build national consensus and support to the contemporary, transdisciplinary, family-centered, routine-based early intervention agenda;
7. Present ECI principles, ECI SitAn, key findings and recommendations from this consultancy engagement at the thematic session for the Parliamentary Committees for Human Rights and Freedoms and Labor, Health and Social Welfare in order to leverage support for ECI system strengthening;
8. Develop a final mission report for UNICEF Montenegro with recommendations for the next steps and future activities for supporting a national ECI system.

4. Deliverables, timelines, and payment schedule

Deliverables	Tentative deadlines	Tentative payment schedule
1. Desk review of the implementation of the Early Childhood Development Strategy 2023-2027 and operational plans in the health, education and social welfare sectors as well as studies, research and reports on ECI in general and, in particular the piloting of contemporary, transdisciplinary, family-centered, routine-based early intervention in demonstration sites.	5 June 2025	
2. Analysis of existing challenges within the implementation of the strategy and identification of priority areas for improving ECI provision in the system.	15 June 2025	
3. Collection and analysis of relevant data on the implementation of contemporary, transdisciplinary, family-centered, routine-based early intervention model through collaboration with relevant institutions included in the pilot (primary health care centres, preschools, relevant social and child protection institutions).	30 June 2025	
4. Developing a costed roadmap for strengthening and scaling up the family oriented early intervention model through consultations with policy makers, service managers, practitioners and parents.	25 July 2025	
		60%

5. Propose activities including monitoring, evaluation and reporting activities, and required budget for their implementation, which can be incorporated into the Early Childhood Development Strategy 2023-2027 Action Plans and other existing inter sectoral and sectoral operation plans.	30 August 2025	40%
6. Presentation of ECI principles, ECI SitAn, key findings and recommendations from this consultancy engagement at the thematic session for the Parliamentary Committees for Human Rights and Freedoms and Labor, Health and Social Welfare	Tentatively by 30 October 2025	
7. Presentation of key findings and recommendations at a national conference to be held in autumn 2025 about family support.	Tentatively by 30 October 2025	
8. Create a Final Consultancy Report to UNICEF Montenegro	10 November 2025	

Final deliverables should be prepared in either English or Montenegrin language. UNICEF Office in Montenegro will secure translation as needed. The engaged international institute/agency/organization should have at least one team member fluent in local language to support other team members with translation of supporting documentation which is not available in English and to communicate with national partners during consultations and data collection.

5. Travel

- Some tasks require presence in Montenegro while some meetings can be held online using experts' own online platform subscriptions.
- During the application process, the Technical and Financial proposals should outline required travel (duration and number of trips).
- Travel costs will be calculated based on economy class travel, regardless of the length of travel. Costs for accommodation, meals and incidentals shall not exceed applicable daily subsistence allowance (DSA) rates, as promulgated by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC).
- The international team should arrange their own travel and accommodation.

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.
- Recourse: UNICEF reserves the right to withhold all or a portion of payment if performance is unsatisfactory, if work/outputs is incomplete, not delivered or for failure to meet deadlines.
- Schedule: This assignment will commence on 26 May 2025.

7. Qualification Requirements

The Consultancy Agency team should consist of qualified experts who possess and demonstrate the following qualifications and competencies:

- Team members should hold (preferably advanced) university degrees in child development, paediatrics, psychology, pedagogy, special pedagogy, early intervention, social policy or a related technical field.
- Team members should have solid work experience in ECD (Early Childhood Development) and Early Childhood Intervention (ECI), the key expert should have at least than 10 years of work experience in ECD and ECI including a minimum of 5 years of experience in conducting policy assessments, developing analytical reports, operational plans and policy recommendations.
- Proven experience in quantitative and qualitative data analysis and report preparation is mandatory.
- Between the team members, excellent knowledge of social service systems, health and education systems, and development agendas.
- At least one team member fluent in both English and local language.
- Familiarity with the social context in Montenegro in particular in regard to children with developmental delays and disabilities is considered as a strong asset.
- Work experience with UN is considered as a strong asset.

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 at least;
- b) Title/designation of each team member including their CVs, clearly outlining how each of the team members fulfils the above requirements and role of each team member for the fulfilment of above tasks. One team member should be assigned as a team lead to facilitate communication with UNICEF. At least one team member should be fluent in local language as well as English to support other team members with translation of supporting documentation which is not available in English and to communicate with national partners during consultations and data collection;
- c) Description of the methodology and technical approach with a tentative work plan with the number of working days and timeframe in line with the ToRs;
- d) LRPS Form signed.

ii. **Price Proposal (Budget) including**

- a. Daily fee rate for each team member based on the number of working days included in the Technical Proposal.
- b. Estimated travel costs both international and in country travel. 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).
- c. 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	3
2	Company and Key Personnel	
2.1	• Range and depth of organizational experience with similar assignment	12
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	20
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	• Methodology and technical approach outline	15
4.2	• Tentative work plan	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.