

TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR) FOR INSTITUTIONAL CONTRACTORS

International Institutional Consultancy to support pilot municipalities in Montenegro in modelling family centred early childhood intervention

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 further strengthen capacity of professionals, especially in pilot locations to apply contemporary, transdisciplinary, family-centered, routine-based early intervention.

2. Objectives, Purpose & Expected Results

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

The objective of the assignment is to assist the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography and relevant institutions in pilot locations (primary health care centres, preschools, relevant social and child protection institutions) to model contemporary, transdisciplinary, family-centered, routine-based early intervention based on contemporary child developmental monitoring, and thus provide a basis for future scale up at national level.

3. Description of the Assignment

The following tasks are expected to be completed:

1. Desk review and preparation for the field mission (remotely).
2. Facilitating one-day horizontal supervision between the ECI teams in Podgorica and Bijelo Polje (1 day, face-to-face).
3. Capacitating ECI practitioners on child developmental monitoring to complement their ECI practice (1 day, face-to-face).
4. Developing, based on consultations with the two ECI teams, a plan of monthly supervisory meetings/coaching/mentoring support until the end of the year (open and thematic). Based on the plan, provision of monthly supervisory meetings/coaching/mentoring support until the end of the year to the teams in Podgorica and Bijelo Polje (except in August). Some supervisory meetings/coaching/mentoring should be held live and be combined with field visits to be able to support practitioners to apply best practice in their work with families. Short reports should be submitted to UNICEF after each such session as per template to be agreed (combination of face-to-face and remote work).
5. Conduct two-day ECI training of relevant ECI professionals in Podgorica and Bijelo Polje. Topics of interest should be decided based on consultations with the two ECI teams and needs identified during the supervision/coaching/mentoring visits/sessions, and may relate to effective teamwork, professional competencies, strategies for engaging with parents, support to professionals for self-care etc. Training venue will be provided by UNICEF.

6. Facilitate a two-hour debriefing meeting with the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation and Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography and relevant institutions in Podgorica and Bijelo Polje to take stock of progress achieved, share lessons learnt and plan for future scale up (face-to-face).
7. Prepare final consultancy report for UNICEF and the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation and Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography including actionable, and to the extent possible, costed recommendations for next steps in the process of introducing and scaling up contemporary early intervention models (remotely).

4. Deliverables, timelines, and payment schedule

Deliverables	Tentative deadlines	Tentative payment schedule
1. Horizontal supervision between the ECI teams in Podgorica and Bijelo Polje (face-to-face).	15 June 2025	40%
2. Training of ECI practitioners on child developmental monitoring to complement their ECI practice (face-to-face).	15 June 2025	
3. Monthly reports on supervision coaching/mentoring provided to UNICEF (remotely).	30 June 2025 31 July 2025	
4. Two-day ECI training of relevant professionals in Podgorica and Bijelo Polje (face to face).	31 October 2025	60%
5. Monthly reports on supervision/ coaching/mentoring provided to the teams in Podgorica and Bijelo Polje (remotely).	30 September 2025 31 October 2025 30 November 2025	
6. Debriefing meeting with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography and relevant institutions in Podgorica and Bijelo Polje to take stock of progress achieved, share lessons learnt and plan for future scale up (face-to-face or blended format).	5 December 2025	
7. Final consultancy report for UNICEF and the three ministries with recommendations.	10 December 2025	

Written deliverables should be submitted in Montenegrin language. UNICEF Office in Montenegro will secure interpretation services for the supervision/two-day training as/if needed.

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 ECD/ECI professionals with the following requirements:

- Team members should hold advanced university degrees in child development, paediatrics, psychology, pedagogy, special pedagogy, early intervention or a related technical field.
- Each of the team members should have at least five years of progressive professional experience in the field of contemporary ECI including training/mentoring other professionals to provide contemporary ECI. The lead expert should have relevant work experience in at least one more country other than one's own.
- At least one team member should have professional experience in providing training on child developmental monitoring.
- At least one team member should have work experience in the Western Balkans.
- Previous work experience with UN is a strong asset.
- Between the team members, excellent command of both spoken and written English or Montenegrin.

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;
- 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.