

## TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR) FOR INSTITUTIONAL CONTRACTORS

### **International Institutional Consultancy for Technical Assistance to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography to Conduct a Deep-Dive Analysis for the European Child Guarantee Operationalization in Montenegro**

#### **1. Background and Context**

Child poverty and social exclusion are the most pressing concerns nowadays and are recognized as obstacles to sustainable social and economic development. Evidence from studies has shown that the lack of financial resources results in lower cognitive development and school achievement, and problematic development of social and behavioural skills in children. Globally, children are more likely to live in poverty than adults, as household income is not distributed equally among household members, and a child living in poverty is also more likely to grow into an adult living in poverty.

The European Child Guarantee, adopted by the EU in 2021, is a transformative initiative aimed at tackling child poverty and social exclusion across the European Union. EU Member States are required to develop National Action Plans (NAPs) that outline theory of change, targeted strategies and accelerated measures, with defined budgets and timelines, to ensure that the most disadvantaged children and those at risk have access to essential services and social inclusion programs. The European Child Guarantee emphasizes the need for integrated services and targeted action to ensure no child is left behind, with a specific call for Roma inclusion. National Roma Action Plans should be built on a rights-based approach, leveraging EU laws, policies, and funding.

The review of EU Child Guarantee Action Plans reveals that Roma children are consistently identified as one of the most vulnerable groups, facing several common challenges and responses, such as high levels of child poverty and multidimensional deprivation, low enrolment in early childhood education due to cost, discrimination, high dropout rates, school segregation, limited support services, inadequate inclusion measures; low coverage of immunization, maternal and child healthcare, and lack of preventive services; overcrowded, substandard living conditions with limited access to utilities; persistent antigypsyism, stereotyping, and exclusion in both public and institutional settings.

As part of its efforts toward this goal, the European Union has mandated the United Nations Children's Fund's Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (ECARO) with the verification of the feasibility of the Child Guarantee in elected EU Member States. To do so, UNICEF ECARO supported the implementation of concrete programmes in the four implementation countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece and Italy) and three policy countries (Lithuania, Spain, and Germany). UNICEF leadership in driving national policy reforms is being used to make Roma an explicit priority, by promoting integrated, inclusive policy responses that address structural barriers facing Roma children and families.

Montenegro is a candidate country to the EU with a clear set of criteria to implement contained in three negotiation chapters with the EU. At the same time, Montenegro has a high trend of child poverty and social exclusion, particularly among the most vulnerable groups such as children with disabilities and developmental delays, all children living in or at risk of poverty, Roma children, children in alternative care, and children living in precarious family situations. Roma and Egyptian children are particularly marginalized, facing multiple deprivations due to poverty and discrimination. Roma children have high school dropout rates, enter early marriages and experience limited access to essential services. Children with disabilities often lack adequate medical and psychological care. Migrant and refugee children face barriers to education and healthcare, increasing their risk of exploitation. Victims of abuse, trafficking, and sexual exploitation often remain unidentified, due to shame and stigma, which prevents their access to adequate system support. Institutionalized children, particularly those with disabilities, are vulnerable to neglect and abuse, which highlights the need for a more effective shift toward family- and community-based care and stronger social and child protection support.

The percentage of children aged 1-14 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers is high (66% of children), percentage of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Montenegro is

higher than the average number in the European Union by 14 percentage points (stands at over 27%, ranking 5th in the European continent), the coverage for the first dose of measles, mumps and rubella fell from 90% in 2010 to 24% in 2024 (currently the lowest in the European continent). Breastfeeding rates also remain low: only 24% of newborns were breastfed within the first hour after birth and just 20% were exclusively breastfed for six months.

The pre-school enrolment for 3–6-year-old children is currently standing at 79.6%, with only 22.7% of Roma children enrolled and just 291 attending (155 boys and 136 girls) preschool, out of a total 1,091. The number of children with disabilities in preschools increased by 27%, with a total of 204 children enrolled, while for primary education the number increased by 15% to a total of 1,335 children. However, enrolment of Roma children declined, by 7% in primary schools and 16% in secondary schools. The major issues affecting the education system relate to quality -almost 60% of students do not reach basic literacy levels. In addition, children affected by poverty are six to eight times less likely to attend preschool education.

In Montenegro, the need for the following reforms has been defined by the cross-sectoral and sectoral strategic documents adopted by the Government of Montenegro, and aligned with the EU accession priorities and benchmarks:

- 1: Strengthening child rights policy framework and monitoring mechanisms, with a focus on multidimensional child poverty and social exclusion;
- 2: Supporting deinstitutionalization, in particular of children without adequate parental care and strengthening support to biological families, community-based care and foster care system, including independent living support to youth leaving institutional care;
- 3: Strengthening integrated social and child protection, parenting and family support services that enable prevention of family-child separation, violence and exploitation through early identification, referral and provision of services in accordance with the child's best interest;
- 4: Supporting integrated and coordinated early childhood intervention services that timely and adequately address developmental needs of children (aged 0-18) who are at risk, have developmental delays or disabilities, enabling their individual living;
- 5: Strengthening quality and inclusive preschool and primary education for all children.

UNICEF Montenegro is currently implementing the Country Programme Document for the period 2023-2027, with the overall goal to support the Government of Montenegro in its efforts to enable all children and adolescents in the country, including the most disadvantaged, to enjoy their rights and develop to their full potential in an inclusive and protective society. UNICEF supported the Government of Montenegro in developing of the strategic documents: the Strategy on Social and Child Protection System Development (2025-2028), the first ever Strategy on Deinstitutionalization (2025-2028), the Strategy on Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence (2025-2029), the Strategy on Early Childhood Development (2023-2027), as well as the Education Strategy (2025-2035) .

UNICEF provided extensive support to the Government in the abovementioned strategic reforms and is currently working with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography on drafting of the new Law on Social and Child Protection. Long-term expertise in strengthening the social and child protection systems enables UNICEF to be well positioned to address the needs of vulnerable children and families and support authorities to build a comprehensive continuum of support and protection services, many of them being provided in non-residential care settings. Our vision is in line with the European Commission's recommendations on integrated social and child protection systems.

In addition, UNICEF Montenegro collaborates closely with the national and local authorities, civil society organizations, children and young people, and with its convening power, will be able to bring them together to jointly design and implement services and interventions that reduce the effects of poverty and social exclusion on children in need of support and protection.

## 2. Objectives, Purpose & Expected Results

**The objective of this ToR** is to support the Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography and other line ministries such as the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Dialogue, Ministry of Sports and Youth, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Finance and Council on Child Rights, to:

Draft a Deep-Dive Analysis of data, policies, programmes, services, budgets, and mechanisms addressing access to essential services with the aim of curbing child poverty and social exclusion, in a child focused and gender sensitive manner, to inform the development of the European Child Guarantee National Action Plan, with a Theory of Change.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography in coordination with all relevant sectors and institutions will lead the process of developing the Deep-Dive Analysis. MSWFCD will establish an Intersectoral Technical Working Group (IWG) which will serve as the main intersectoral structure to support, provide inputs and proactively engage in the process.

The Government of Montenegro undertook the commitment, with the adopted Government's Annual Plan for 2025 to develop and adopt the National Action Plan for ECG. The lead Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography is currently in the process of establishing the Intersectoral Working Group (IWG) composed of all relevant sectors that will start working on the development of a National Action Plan for ECG, to ensure an open and continuous dialogue during each step in the process. In addition, the Government of Montenegro has appointed a National coordinator for ECG.

UNICEF Montenegro will support the Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography and the IWG in drafting a Deep-Dive Policy Analysis, which will inform the process of the ECG National AP development. UNICEF will conduct a comprehensive policy, whose findings will inform the development and improvement of targeted actions, close policy gaps, and generate recommendations to be reflected in the draft ECG National Action Plan (ECG NAP).

Such an analysis will follow the principles expressed in the new Strategy on Social and Child Protection System Development 2025-2028 and Strategy on Deinstitutionalisation 2025-2028, and EU Child Guarantee best practices from EU countries supported by UNICEF. The EU Child Guarantee (ECG) model will serve as an accelerator of the ongoing reforms through an intersectoral approach and in collaboration with the local governments and civil society organizations specialized in child rights.

## 3. Description of the Assignment

The expected key results of this Assignment are to:

- 1) Provide an extensive overview of the international and regional child rights instruments, standards and available literature regarding child poverty, adversity and social exclusion.
- 2) Provide a comprehensive and evidence-based analysis, comprised of mapping of children at risk, available range of services, systemic obstacles and budgetary challenges, as well as ways in which national and subnational policies, programs, systems, budget and mechanisms have either contributed to or detracted from success the efforts to address child poverty and social exclusion.
- 3) Identify bottlenecks and opportunities to achieving a sustained reduction of poverty and social exclusion and models for inclusion of children in need in the areas of social and child care services, nutrition and health, early child development, education, adolescents participation that will be the focus of the Child Guarantee, including through the identification of effective and evidence-based and gender sensitive services, interventions, and/or mechanisms of support, along with the development of clear CG Theory of Change.
- 4) Provide specific recommendations for enhancing national and subnational policies, programs and service accessibility and delivery regarding adversity, child poverty and social exclusion issues in the form of a clearly structured message for decision makers.

The main outputs of this consultancy will be consulted and endorsed by the IWG and presented to the key Ministries involved, the Prime Minister's Cabinet and the national Council for Child Rights.

UNICEF is seeking an institutional consultancy/team of experts to support the Government of Montenegro to undertake the Deep-Dive Analysis for the European Child Guarantee Operationalization in Montenegro. Deep dives are analyses of data, policies, programs, services, budgets, and mechanisms addressing adversity, child poverty, social exclusion, access and delivery of services. This analysis will focus on country-level interventions and enabling factors related to the social exclusion of children regarding access to the policy areas that are the focus of the CG. The analysis will examine the enabling environment for the reduction of social exclusion in Montenegro, to generate knowledge not only on what does and does not work, but also on what determines the success of interventions and policies and propose solutions to address both the policy and practice level. This work is, thus, envisioned as the key input to help shape ECG Action Plan.

### 3. KEY DELIVERABLES AND INDICATIVE TIMEFRAME

The company/team of experts will be expected to produce the following deliverables and tasks:

#### **Deliverable 1:** Literature desk review

- (i) Conduct desk review of available literature and documents, international and national instruments and standards, that bring together any previous analyses on child rights, including child poverty, adversity, social exclusion, child protection and other sectors relevant for Montenegro. Important to ensure a structured approach to whether the existing reports, research, and other relevant papers address gender issues in poverty and analyses of the socio-economic background of the families living in poverty; gender lens of adversity and social exclusion (focus on understanding how societal norms related to gender contribute to exclusions, such as the lack of access to education, healthcare, employment, etc.)
- (ii) Presentation of the key insights obtained through the Desk literature review for the members of the IWG on Child Guarantee for Montenegro, as well as other relevant stakeholders identified.

**Note:** The desk review will be complemented with the key informant interviews and/or focus groups (e.g. representatives from the key ministries - the MSWFCD, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Dialogue, Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Sports and Youth, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Finance, and other line ministries, Council on Child Rights, Council on Child Rights, the Ombudsperson, nongovernmental organizations, academia, National Statistical Agency – Monstat). In this process, UNICEF's and national ethical procedures for data/information collection should be fully and consistently applied.

Actor: Company/organization

Completion Date: Mid-November 2025

#### **Deliverable 2:** Prepare and finalize the Deep-Dive Analysis

Produce a policy-oriented Deep-Dive Analysis that recommends the key target groups of children, specific and with gender lens, integrated throughout the document policies, programmes, range of services, mechanisms, and coordination structures relevant to feed the Child Guarantee AP, designed to contribute to reducing poverty and social exclusion of vulnerable children. The Analysis should focus on the following main areas: a) identification and mapping of categories and profiles of children potentially to be addressed through the ECG, identification of the existing services (in the indicative areas of ECG); b) proposal of a systemic approach and entry points that would ensure that vulnerable children have effective access to basic services, the most disadvantaged ones receive targeted and specialized services, and that these services are gender-responsive, appropriate and acceptable to children and their caregivers and are provided in a non-stigmatizing and non-discriminatory modality, c) proposal on the development of Theory of Change, to be able to track and evaluate the outcomes of the National AP implementation (the template of the report will be agreed with UNICEF).

- (i) Map out the categories and profiles alongside with the estimated number of children at risk or living in poverty and facing social exclusion, pointing out certain subgroups of children that need to be prioritized due to their vulnerabilities.
- (ii) Map out and cluster the existing services intended for the different groups of vulnerable children encompassed by the European Child Guarantee, per beneficiary group, coverage (universal, targeted, highly specialized) and type of access (e.g. free or subsidized price).
- (iii) Identify bottlenecks and gaps (including barriers for access to the key social and child protection services, health, education, gaps in the types of services available, inadequate budget allocation and execution and deficiencies in institutional coordination and cross-sectoral approach) for achieving sustained reduction of child poverty and social exclusion for identified potential target groups.
- (iv) Validate findings and recommendations with stakeholders (e.g. at a stakeholder workshop).
- (v) Discuss the pre-liminary findings/results of the Analysis and the policy recommendations by the key national stakeholders, at the meeting organized jointly by UNICEF and the Ministry of SWFCD and IWG.
- (vi) Prepare the Deep-Dive draft analysis focused on the agreed priority areas (e.g. ECEC, healthcare, education, housing, nutrition, and education related activities) that would be assessed as critical in consultation with MSWFC and UNICEF to specifically address child poverty issues and social exclusion in all sectors.
- (vii) Presentation of the drafted Deep-Dive Analysis for MSWFC. Reflection of comments/suggestions. Follow up presentation to the Intersectoral Working Group (IWG).
- (viii) Finalize the comprehensive Deep Dive Analysis that addresses all the areas identified and contains policy recommendations for the National Action Plan that arise from the Analysis.
- (ix) Draft policy brief that summarizes all the findings and recommendations from the Analysis in a jargon free, easy to read language for further utilization of policy and decision-makers – max 5 pages.
- (x) In coordination with MSWFC, organize a meeting with the key governmental (national and subnational) and CSO stakeholders to discuss the findings/results of the Analysis and the policy recommendations.

Actor: Company/organization

Completion Date: End of December 2025

*The implementation of the consultancy tasks will follow the methodology and workplan as agreed with UNICEF and in agreement with the MSWFC upon the contract start.*

*The consultancy company is expected to create the joint calendar of activities that will be used for organizing and monitoring the monthly technical coordination between UNICEF, MSWFC and EU TA teams.*

#### 4. Deliverables, timelines, and payment schedule

Deliverables	Timeline	Schedule of Payment
Literature review with recommendations completed	Mid-November 2025	
Deep-Dive Analysis finalized	End of December 2025	
<b>Payment: Upon submission of all Deliverables</b>		<b>100%</b>

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.

## 5. Travel

Travel to Montenegro in duration of 10 days in total is expected for the consultations with the relevant stakeholders, as follows:

- Presentation of the Draft literature review – 2 days (1 mission)
  - Consultations on Deep-Dive Analysis (incl. key informant interviews and focus groups) – 6 days (2 missions, 3 days each)
  - Presentation of the Final Deep-Dive Analysis – 2 days (1 mission)
- for the Intersectoral Working Group (IWG) on Child Guarantee, MSWFCD, other line ministries and relevant stakeholders

At least four (4) travel missions to Montenegro are expected in duration of 10 days in total and all travel expenses are to be stated separately in the financial offer.

### **Important:**

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).

## 6. Management and Organisation

Management: The consultancy company will be supervised by the UNICEF Child Protection Officer, in coordination with the Social Policy Officer. The focal point in the Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography will be consulted regularly for feedback on the consultant's work performance. All deliverables need to be validated by UNICEF and MSWFCD.

Organization: International institutional consultancy, meeting the requirements below.

Schedule: The assignment will commence from October 2025 until the end of December 2025.

## 7. Qualification Requirements

The Consultant(s) is/are expected to have the following qualifications/specialized knowledge/experience required to complete the task:

The institution/company will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- A deep understanding of the context, policy, indicators and process for social inclusion, child poverty reduction, health and nutrition, education, social and child protection, decentralization, and gender issues in Montenegro at the national and local levels in Montenegro.
- Demonstrated knowledge of and experience in influencing national and local efforts to address adversity, child poverty and social exclusion in Montenegro.
- The quality of the research team (suggestions for team composition below).
  - Proven experience in conducting similar analyses (including stakeholder consultations) and producing Theories of Change and evidence-based policy analysis with clear recommendations and monitoring framework.
  - Expertise in child rights
  - Expertise in social and child protection/benefits and services
  - Expertise in health care/MCH/health policy
  - Expertise in education and early child education and care (ECEC)

- Expertise in nutrition (e.g. for pre-school and school-age children)
- Expertise in legal frameworks, data, evidence generation and monitoring.
- Proven experience in a successful project and team management.
- Professional links/partnerships with relevant national and local authorities.
- The ability to be flexible and result-oriented and deliver results within tight deadlines.
- Previous engagement with and demonstrated understanding of the EU Child Guarantee development process will be an advantage.

The team of experts should reflect the following key areas of expertise:

- **Team leader**

Master's Degree, with a minimum of 10 years of technical/operational experience in relevant subject areas and a demonstrated ability to influence planning, design, and implementation of programming to reduce child poverty and social exclusion at national and local levels.

- **Researchers and Key Experts**

Master's degree, with a minimum of 5 years of relevant experience in social and child protection, preschool education and early childhood education and care; nutrition and health; housing; statistics, public finance, legal frameworks; a track record of high-quality research and analysis on access to essential services in these key areas.

If the selected team is international, it shall include at least one relevant expert competent in Montenegrin language. The composition of the team should preferably be gender balanced. It is preferred that a team consists of up to four competent experts.

## 8. Application procedure

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

- i. ***Technical Proposal including:***
  - a) Portfolio of the organization/institution/agency with examples of previous work on similar projects in the last 5 years, including a recent piece of work as those described in the ToR;
  - b) Title/designation of each team member including their CVs;
  - c) Detailed description of the methodology and technical approach;
  - d) Tentative work plan with the number of days and timeframe in line with the above deadlines for deliverables;
  - e) LRPS Form signed;
  - f) 3 Reference contacts from other clients.
- i. ***Financial 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 as well as any other cost (such as travel), as applicable.  
The financial proposal shall indicate the budget estimated in EUR.

## 9. Evaluation

### 1) Technical components (total of 70 points)

ITEM	TECHNICAL EVALUATION CRITERIA	MAX OBTAINABLE POINTS
<b>1</b>	<b>Overall Response</b>	
1.1	• Completeness of response	10
1.2	• Overall concord between TOR/needs and proposal	8
<b>2</b>	<b>Company and Key Personne</b>	
2.1	• Range and depth of organizational experience with similar projects	8
2.2	• Samples of previous work	6
2.3	• Number of customers, size of projects, number of staff per project	3
2.4	• Client references	5
2.5	• Key personnel: relevant experience and qualifications of the proposed team for the assignment	8
2.6	• 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
2.7	• Gender component: At least 1 female in the management structure or ownership of the company	2
2.8	• Workplace policies on disabilities	2
<b>3</b>	<b>Proposed Methodology and Approach</b>	
3.1	• Methods used - compatibility with UNICEF rules and procedures	8
3.2	• Project management, monitoring and quality assurance process	7
<b>TOTAL TECHNICAL SCORE</b>		<b>70</b>

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

### 2) Financial component (total of 30 points)<sup>[1]</sup>

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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.

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