

TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR) FOR INSTITUTIONAL CONTRACTORS

International Institutional Consultancy to develop National Framework for the integration and coordination of family centered ECI in health, education and social and child protection systems

1. Background and Context

According to the Situation Analysis of Early Childhood Intervention in Montenegro (2022), an estimated 10–15% of children aged 0–6 require Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services annually, yet fewer than half currently receive them. The analysis also found that ECI services in Montenegro are still largely rooted in the traditional medical model, although some services are gradually transitioning toward more contemporary approaches. In addition, the current ECI system remains fragmented and organized along sectoral lines, with limited coordination across health, education, and social protection systems.

Recognizing the need for systemic reform, the National Early Childhood Development Strategy 2023–2027, together with the draft Operational Plan for Scaling Up Family-Centred Early Intervention in Montenegro (2026–2030) establish a strategic framework for developing a unified, nationwide ECI system. These policy documents envisage the development of ECI guidelines and procedures, a dedicated ECI law, and the gradual scale-up of a contemporary, transdisciplinary, family-centred ECI model. The new Healthcare Law (adopted in 2025) also contains some key provisions facilitating ECI reform and strengthening the role of the health system.

In this context, UNICEF, in partnership with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography, and support of the EU, supported the piloting of contemporary, transdisciplinary, family-centred, routine-based early intervention during 2023 and 2024. Demonstration sites were established in the municipalities of Bijelo Polje and Kotor, while several institutions in Podgorica (particularly the Resource Centre “Podgorica) participated in training and piloted elements of the approach. As part of this initiative, a training programme for early intervention professionals and a child development monitoring training programme were developed and accredited by national accreditation bodies. In addition, a guide for delivering family-centred early intervention services was prepared which has been endorsed by the Ministry of Health of Montenegro.

Building on the experience and lessons learned from the demonstration sites, the model has gradually expanded. In 2025, the approach was introduced in Berane following the training of the local intersectoral team. By the middle of February 2026, three additional local teams were trained in the municipalities of Bar, Cetinje, and Tivat, marking an important step toward national scale-up.

To further support the reform process and ensure sustainable capacity development, the UNICEF Country Office in Montenegro seeks to engage an international institute, agency, or organization bringing together international and national ECI experts to develop a National Framework for the integration and coordination of family centered ECI in health, education and social and child protection systems. Such a framework should define how services will be organized and delivered at different levels of the system. It should also clarify roles and responsibilities, mechanisms for effective coordination and collaboration between the sectors, workforce, infrastructure and equipment and financial requirements.

2. Purpose, Objectives & Expected Results

The **purpose** of the assignment is to assist the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, Ministry of Social Welfare, Family Care and Demography to scale up transdisciplinary, family

centered early intervention in the country by developing National Framework for the integration and coordination of family centered ECI services across all three sectors involved. Developing such a National framework will support the Government of Montenegro in ensuring that the expansion of early childhood intervention services is implemented in a systematic, coordinated and sustainable manner. It will also contribute to improving the accessibility, quality and continuity of support provided to children with developmental delays or disabilities and their families across the country.

The **objective** of this assignment is to define a clear framework that will guide the organization, coordination and delivery of services across all three sectors involved. It should also clarify the roles and responsibilities of institutions and professionals involved, as well as mechanisms for effective coordination and collaboration between the health, education and child protection sectors at national, regional and local level, taking into account the differing capacities of the municipalities. Furthermore, the framework should provide guidance on the workforce required for the effective implementation of family-centered early intervention services, including the number and profiles of professionals needed, workload distribution, recruitment approaches and mechanisms for ongoing professional development and supervision. In addition, it should outline the infrastructure and equipment requirements necessary for the delivery of quality services, as well as the financial implications and operational costs associated with scaling up the programme at the national level. Finally, by developing a complementary M&E framework, the local ECI teams as well as Government will be able to monitor the quality and timely implementation of ECI related activities across the health, education and child protection sectors.

Expected results are:

- Inception report prepared and validated, including a desk review of relevant analyses and policies, consultations with key stakeholders and a detailed methodology and workplan with timelines and key milestones for the assignment.
- Comprehensive proposal for the National Framework for transdisciplinary, family centered early intervention programme developed, including the proposed model for service delivery and intersectoral coordination across the health, education and child protection systems, as well as workforce planning (staff profiles and numbers), recruitment proposals, workload distribution, training needs and mechanisms for supervision and professional development;
- Implementation and financing parameters for the programme defined, including identified equipment and infrastructure needs and operational cost projections for the period 2026-2030 to support sustainable implementation and scale-up at the national level.
- Developed proposal for an M&E framework, including a structured tool for monitoring and supporting the timely implementation of ECI related activities across the health, education and child protection sectors. This will enable more effective oversight, evidence-based decision making and strategic planning on intersectoral level.

3. Description of the Assignment

The following tasks are expected to be completed:

- Preparation of the Inception Report, based on a desk review of available analyses and policy documents related to ECI and service provision in Montenegro including those currently in development such as the analysis of the legal framework and drafting of ECI procedures. This phase should include preliminary consultations with key stakeholders from the health, education and child protection sectors to validate the proposed approach and ensure alignment with existing systems. The Inception Report should also define the methodology for the assignment and include a detailed workplan with a timeline for the implementation of the tasks below, including key milestones and deliverables;

- To define the number and profiles of staff required for the implementation of a family centred early intervention programme at the national level, based on an assessment of the current workforce and identification of existing gaps across the health, education and child protection sectors. This should include an analysis of the competencies and professional profiles required to ensure effective multidisciplinary support to children with developmental delays or disabilities and their families and take into account the differing size of municipalities and differences in capacities and available resources (potential models include mobile teams and intermunicipal/sub-regional provision of some services);
- To develop a recruitment proposal to address identified staffing gaps within the health, education and child protection sectors, including recommendations for recruitment pathways, required qualifications, and possible institutional arrangements for engaging additional professionals where necessary;
- To develop workload estimates and the distribution of responsibilities among staff across the three sectors involved, ensuring clear roles and responsibilities, effective coordination between sectors and efficient delivery of services to children and families at different levels of the system;
- To identify training and capacity development needs for the staff involved and to propose approaches for strengthening the competencies of professionals engaged in ECI;
- To develop mechanisms for reflective supervision and professional and career development for team members across the three sectors, with the aim of supporting continuous professional learning, improving service quality and strengthening multidisciplinary and intersectoral collaboration;
- To identify an inventory of required equipment and infrastructure upgrade needs necessary for the sustainable and effective implementation of the programme at the national level, including potential upgrades to facilities;
- To refine operational cost projections for the period 2026-2030, including estimated costs related to staffing, training needs, equipment, infrastructure and service delivery, in order to support scaling up of the programme on national level based on initial costing work conducted in 2025;
- To develop a set of up to 15 core indicators and a proposal for an M&E framework as a tool to monitor and support the timely implementation of ECI related activities across the health, education and child protection systems, aligned with relevant guidelines, strategies and legislation on intersectoral level.
- Final consultancy report, not exceeding 5 pages.

The Contractor will maintain open and effective communication with UNICEF to address any concerns, provide progress updates and seek clarification on requirements.

Final deliverables should be prepared in English language and UNICEF will ensure translation into local language.

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

4. Deliverables, timelines, and payment schedule

Deliverables	Tentative timeline	Schedule of Payment
Inception Report, including a desk review of relevant analyses and policies, outcome of preliminary consultations with key stakeholders and a detailed methodology and workplan with timelines and key milestones for the assignment.	17 August 2026	50%
Proposal on workforce and service delivery component, including definition of the number and profiles of staff required, recruitment proposals to address staffing gaps, workload estimates and distribution of responsibilities across sectors,	15 October 2026	

identification of training needs and proposal of mechanisms for supervision and professional development.		
Proposal for resources and financing components, including identification of equipment and infrastructure needs and operational cost projections for the period 2026-2030.	2 November 2026	50%
Development of a set of up to 15 core indicators and proposal for an M&E framework as a tool to monitor and support the timely implementation of ECI related activities across the health, education and child protection systems, aligned with relevant guidelines, strategies and legislation at the national level.	30 November 2026	
Final consultancy report	10 December 2026	

5. Travel

- 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).
- Some meetings will be held online.
- 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 10 August 2026.

7. Qualification Requirements

The Contractor's team of international experts, including at least one national expert, is expected to have the following qualifications/ specialized knowledge/experience required to complete the task:

- Team lead with an advanced university degree in early intervention, ECD, public health, or another relevant technical field;
- Other team members with a university degree in early intervention, ECD, public health, or social sciences;
- Team lead with an extensive professional experience in the development and strengthening of early childhood intervention services;
- At least one team member with experience in budgeting and cost projections and at least one in workforce planning and service delivery organization;

- Experience of team members in intersectoral coordination and collaboration across health, education and social protection systems;
- At least one team member should be a national expert, with strong knowledge of the early childhood development system and related intersectoral policies in Montenegro, to provide additional technical support for the implementation of activities, collecting data from the field and liaising with stakeholders;
- Excellent command of both English language (both oral and written) and the local language between the team members;
- Strong communication and presentation skills;
- Strong analytical and report writing skills.

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:**

- Portfolio of the organisation/institution/agency with examples of previous work on similar projects and clients in the last 5 years,
- Title/designation of each team member, team leader and other roles, including their CVs;
- Description of the methodology and technical approach with a tentative work plan and timeframe in line with the ToRs and a breakdown of working days per each team member;
- LRPS Form signed.

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

- Daily fee rate per team member and total fees in line with the breakdown of working days in the Technical Proposal.
- Travel costs
- Other costs if applicable (e.g. translation etc.).

The financial proposal shall indicate budget estimated in EUR.

8. Evaluation

1) **Technical components** (total of 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	10
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	15
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
TOTAL TECHNICAL SCORE		70

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

2) Financial components (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.

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