

**Terms of Reference
For Institutional Consultancy**

Page | 1

<i>Title:</i>	<i>Provision of technical support to Government of Tajikistan to develop National ECD Multisectoral Strategy and costed action plan</i>
<i>Consultancy Mode:</i>	National ☐ International ☒
<i>Type of Contract:</i>	Institutional
<i>Mode of Selection:</i>	Competitive ☒ Single Source ☐
<i>Location</i>	Tajikistan
<i>Duration of Contract:</i>	August 2026 – October 2026

1. Background

Globally, Tajikistan is among the top 25 % of the fastest growing populations, with 1 out of 3 Tajiks under 15 years of age and 17 % of the population between 0 and 6 years old. These years, from conception to the start of primary school, have a profound effect on brain development, physical and mental health and well-being, ability to learn in school and soft skills for interacting with others – and to develop in adults who will be the next generation building the futures of their communities, their countries, and the planet.

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is critical for the country's human capital and long-term economic growth; according to the World Bank's Human Capital Index children still face significant developmental challenges, as a child born today is expected to reach only about 50% of their full productive potential due to gaps in health, nutrition, and education services. Tajikistan's HCI score of 0.50 is significantly lower than average for the region, reflecting that much more can be done to support children achieve their full potential¹.

Scientific evidence shows that ECD is an equalizer and addresses intergenerational cycle of poverty and deprivation. Early Childhood Development is a priority in the global transformative agenda 2030. Enabling young children to achieve their full developmental potential is a human right and an essential requisite for sustainable development.

In Tajikistan, while progress has been made, key indicators highlight persistent vulnerabilities: around 13% of children under five are stunted, only a small proportion receive a minimally adequate diet, and nearly one-third of children live in poverty. Access to early learning remains particularly limited, with only about 20-30 % of children aged 3–6 enrolled in early childhood education, leaving the majority without opportunities for school readiness, especially in rural areas.

¹ Advancing Early Childhood Development in Tajikistan study, WB, 2022

National Situation Analysis on ECI had identified that out of 1.8 million children aged 0-7 years old approximately 421,723 children require Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) services to ensure their optimal development and school -readiness. Moreover, access to early identification and early childhood interventions services are limited and fragmented, lacking systematic coordination across health, education and social protection systems. Therefore, a well-coordinated national ECI system should be linked to broader ECD services and will be essential to improve developmental outcomes, enhance school readiness and ensure inclusion of all children, especially those with disabilities or developmental risks.

Tajikistan has pledged to various global commitments and international conventions including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015-2030) with ECD articulated in SDG 4.2- target 4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.2.3) which is about universal access to high-quality care in early childhood and pre-primary education with the experience of early stimulation. ECD also relates to SDG 3.2-Health, 2.2- Nutrition, 16.2 -child protection. The Frameworks on the Rights of Children such as the CRC, CRPD, Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016-2030), Global Partnership for Education (GPE), Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN), "Survive, Thrive, Transform"(Every Woman Every Child, 2015); Early Moments Matter (2017) give an overview of the global ECD momentum. The global ECD momentum has been further strengthened by the Nurturing Care Framework, (2018) and the WHO guidelines on Improving Early Childhood Development, (2020) with a strong focus on children 0-3 years of age. These landmark strategic frameworks present both opportunities and challenges in policy setting to ensure that children not only survive but thrive and transform health and human potential.

Given the critical importance of enabling children to make the best start in life, the Government of Tajikistan is highly committed to ensure that children are reaching their potential and are developmentally on track. The National ECD Council established in 2022 serves as a coordinating body to oversee ECD agenda in Tajikistan. ECD is mentioned in sectoral policy documents, specifically, National Health Strategy 2030 and National Strategy for Education Development (NSED) 2021–2030 in Tajikistan.

However, the absence of an integrated National ECD Policy document, is one of the identified gaps preventing a holistic Nurturing Care for ECD service provision to benefit children during the most critical window for child development. Considering this, Ministry of Health Social Protection of Population of Tajikistan has initiated the development of a National Multisectoral ECD Programme and costed action plan.

2. Purpose and specific objectives

This consultancy is intended to assist the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population and UNICEF Tajikistan in the development of a comprehensive National Multisectoral Early Childhood Development Programme and costed action plan for the period of 2026 – 2030.

The institutional consultancy in particular will focus on:

- 1 Conduct a comprehensive situational analysis of ECD (0-7 years), including the first and second 1,000 days.
- 2 Facilitate multi-sectoral stakeholder consultations to build consensus on priorities and interventions.

- 3 Develop a costed National Multisectoral ECD Programme (2026 -2030) with a results framework (indicators, baselines, targets).
- 4 Provide operational guidelines for the National ECD Council, clearly defining roles, coordination and accountability.

3. Scope of the review (Description of the assignment)

The institutional consultancy is desired to undertake the tasks below (minimum) to deliver the assignment.

Page | 3

Key Tasks	Specific tasks	Deliverables
Task 1 Situational Review	1.1. Conduct a desk review of existing documentation and preparation for the inception report. 1.2. Conduct initial consultations with key stakeholders (ministries, service providers and families) 1.3. Undertake an in-depth analysis of the current situation of ECD, identifying current existing nurturing care interventions to identify gaps and priorities. 1.4. Presentation of the situational review to the Technical Working Group established by MOHSP to generate consensus on priority recommendations and outline the key priorities and interventions. 1.5. Provide final situational review report on desk review including priority recommendations and an outline of key priorities and interventions.	1.1 Inception Report documenting (light) background and context, as well as methodology and workplan. 1.2. Detailed Situational Review based on desk research and initial consultations
Task 2 Draft National Multisectoral Early Childhood Development Programme and costed Action Plan.	2.1. Develop 1 st Draft key priorities and interventions including Results Framework and Action Plan based on the discussions and recommendations provided by TWG and aligned with the Nurturing Care Framework and UNICEF ECD Programme Guidelines. 2.2. Conduct discussion workshop of the 1 st Draft with intersectoral TWG members. 2.3. Develop 2 nd Draft based on the review/feedback from the TWG. 2.4. Share with TWG for the final feedback and conduct validation workshop. 2.5. Finalize the National Multisectoral Early Childhood Development Programme and costed Action Plan	2.1. Draft National Multisectoral Early Childhood Development Programme and costed Action Plan. 2.2 Finalised National Multisectoral Early Childhood Development Programme and costed Action Plan with inputs incorporated.
Task 3 Develop comprehensive operational guidelines for the National ECD Council ensuring these align with international best	3.1. Conduct a needs assessment to understand the specific operational requirements of the ECD Council and gather input from key stakeholders. 3.2. Develop strategic learning sessions plan for Council members and key stakeholders to align priorities, roles, and responsibilities, integrating gender equity as a core principle of ECD governance and practice. 3.3. Submit comprehensive operational guidelines for the National ECD Council (governance structure, functions, membership, operational modalities),	3.1. Developed comprehensive operational guidelines for the National ECD Council ensuring these align with international best practices and the specific needs of the

practices and the specific needs of the Tajikistan context, promoting gender equity in ECD.	ensuring these align with international best practices and the specific needs of the Tajikistan context, promoting gender equity in ECD.	Tajikistan context, promoting gender equity in ECD.
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4. Methodology

The methodology of support required from international partner hired under this contract, will be mostly virtual however physical presence/one trip of 5 days (including travel days) might be required for the meeting with the national stakeholders and local partners, including the Intersectoral Technical Working Group. The virtual technical support will span over the entire duration of the data collection phase, starting from designing of tools to analysis of data. This support shall mainly consist of weekly virtual calls and need based one on one or team to team discussions.

The methodology should include: desk review analysis, stakeholder mapping, data collection tools (interview guides, consultations formats), analysis framework and ensure integration of gender -transformative and equity lens.

In terms of process, the contractor is required to work closely with UNICEF Health and Nutrition Team, and a locally hired consultant during inception, planning, execution, and reporting of the assignment. To this end, the institutional consultancy team may be required to present and endorse the work with an Integrated Technical Working Group which will review, and clear methodology, tools and products developed for further endorsement.

UNICEF Tajikistan Office team will be responsible for the logistics to organize interviews, validation workshop and translation services.

The consultancy shall ensure that all analyses, methodologies, and outputs are grounded in principles of equity, inclusion, and human rights. Specifically:

- **Gender-disaggregated analysis:** All data collection, analysis, and reporting must be disaggregated by sex and, where possible, age and location, to identify gender-specific disparities and inform targeted interventions.
- **Inclusion of children with disabilities:** The consultancy shall explicitly assess the needs, barriers, and service gaps affecting children with disabilities, ensuring that the proposed programme incorporates inclusive and accessible ECD interventions aligned with international standards.
- **Equity focus:** Particular attention shall be given to vulnerable and marginalized populations, including children in rural areas, low-income households, and underserved communities, to ensure that the programme addresses inequities in access to quality ECD services.
- **Alignment with the Nurturing Care Framework:** All recommendations and programme components shall be aligned with the five components of the Nurturing Care Framework (good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, opportunities for early learning, and security and safety), ensuring a holistic and multisectoral approach to early childhood development.

The consultancy shall proactively identify, assess, and manage risks that may affect the quality, timeliness, or integrity of the assignment. This includes operational, contextual, and stakeholder-related risks (e.g., limited data availability, delays in stakeholder engagement, or logistical

constraints). The consultant is expected to propose practical mitigation measures, ensure continuity of work under changing circumstances, and promptly inform UNICEF of any emerging risks along with recommended corrective actions.

5. Ethical considerations

The review will be guided by UNEG Ethical Guidelines² and UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards³. Should children be involved in the data collection or otherwise, ethical clearance should be sought by the review team. The common guiding principles will be used to ensure ethical safety during the review process:

Confidentiality: All data collected shall be securely stored (password-protected and access-restricted) and anonymized during analysis and reporting to ensure that no individual participants can be identified.

Informed consent: Written or verbal informed consent shall be obtained from all participants prior to data collection, with clear explanation of the purpose, voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any time; for children, consent must be obtained from parents or legal guardians.

Risk mitigation: The consultancy shall identify and proactively manage any potential risks, particularly when discussing sensitive topics, ensuring that participation does not cause harm or distress and that appropriate referral mechanisms are in place if needed.

Ethics approval: Where primary data collection involves human participants—especially children—appropriate ethical clearance shall be obtained from relevant institutional or national ethics review bodies prior to commencing the study.

6. Work plan

The detailed workplan and technical proposal to be provided by the potential contractor/institutional consultancy and finalized after the consultations with the UNICEF multi-disciplinary ECD/ECE and PME teams.

7. Deliverables and payment schedule

Payments against all deliverables are conditioned to acceptance of the respective deliverables, that adhered to minimum quality standards defined by UNICEF, TWG. In general, following schedule for achievement of deliverables and related payment will be followed.

Deliverables	Timeframe	Payment schedule
Situational Review: provide workplan and methodology, inception report. 1.2 Inception Report documenting (light) background and context, as well as methodology and workplan. 1.2. Detailed Situational Review based on desk research and initial consultations	August 17 – September 4, 2026	30%

² <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/102>

³ UNICEF PROCEDURE FOR ETHICAL STANDARDS IN RESEARCH, EVALUATION, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS, April 2015

Draft National Multisectoral Early Childhood Development Programme and costed Action Plan.		
2.1. Draft National Multisectoral Early Childhood Development Programme and costed Action Plan.	September 7 – October 5, 2026	40%
2.2 Finalised National Multisectoral Early Childhood Development Programme and costed Action Plan with workshop inputs incorporated.		
Developed comprehensive operational guidelines for the National ECD Council ensuring these align with international best practices and the specific needs of the Tajikistan context, promoting gender equity in ECD.	October 6 – October 30, 2026	30%
Total		100%

UNICEF reserves the right to withhold all or a portion of payment if performance is unsatisfactory, if work/output is incomplete, not delivered, or for failure to meet deadlines.

8. Management and supervision

The institution will work closely with the Intersectoral Technical Working Group, to be constituted from relevant departments and including representatives of all relative ministries. It however will directly report to UNICEF Tajikistan ECD Officer in UNICEF for final acceptance/clearance of all deliverables and invoices.

9. Reporting requirements

The institution is expected to provide inception report that includes:

- Mission report (including methodology, workplan, stakeholder mapping);
- Situational analysis report;
- Draft National Multisectoral Early Childhood Development Programme and costed Action Plan;
- Final National Multisectoral Early Childhood Development Programme and costed Action Plan;
- Operational guidelines for the National ECD Council;
- Final consultancy report.

10. Qualification requirements/specialised knowledge/experience required to complete the task

The international consultancy team is preferable composed of an international expert and at least one national expert.

The international experts and a national expert shall have the following qualifications:

- Demonstrated capacity of institution members to manage and implement the requested activities listed in ToR: Team Leader to have than 10 years of experience; ECD Expert

having more than 8 years of experience; Costing expert having more than 5 years of experience.

- Evidence of previous capacity to source/ provide sufficient qualified, competent international and nationally based staff to develop national policy documents in ECD
- Experience of and demonstrated understanding of system strengthening, ECD, ECI and parenting approaches.
- Evidence on qualified and competent technical staff that will be involved in the assignment. Advanced university degree (PhD) in Early Childhood Development, Early Childhood Intervention, Special Education, Psychology, Rehabilitation, Public Health, or a related field.
- At least 8-10 years of technical staff's experience in ECD/ECI/ Parenting areas that will be engaged in the assignment
- Have ability to work with multi-disciplinary team and establish harmonious and effective working relationships.
- Demonstrated capacity to work with the UN system, with institutional counterparts and community-based organizations, preferably in ECD/ECI/Parenting research in low and middle and/or income countries and/or humanitarian situations.
- Familiarity with local social and cultural context and previous work with experts in ECD/ECI/Parenting in Tajikistan.

Page | 7

Request for submission

Technical proposals should provide sufficient information to demonstrate compliance with the requirements set out in these terms of reference. Technical proposals should include as a minimum the following:

1. Institutional Profile, Services and Expertise
2. Executive summary covering key features of the proposal and the value bidders will bring to UNICEF
3. Introduction of the technical proposal
4. Detailed approach to and methodology including proposed methodology, indicators, data collection methods, data analysis framework, reporting outline, ethical considerations, and clear gender transformative approach in the methodology.
4. Corporate technical team members relevant experience including previous Early Childhood Development or Early Childhood Intervention works undertaken, duration, geographic location, thematic area.
5. Technical team members three recent samples of work undertaken. Names and contact information of at least three clients should be provided for reference. Key personnel credentials
6. Quality assurance mechanisms, either in-house or outsourced that ensure that the development of a comprehensive National Multisectoral Early Childhood Development Programme and costed action plan for the period of 2026 – 2030, meet quality and ethical requirements.
7. Appendix (CVs for key staff, letters of commitment, etc.)

Evaluation process and methods

The evaluation methodology is based on a highest combined score (based on the 80% technical offer and 20% price weight distribution).

Each interested institution is requested to submit in a one page brief a proposed approach for such assignment along with a copy of the organization profile, the proposed technical team curriculum vitae, expected budget as well as a sample of previous work undertaken in the last two years.

After the opening, each proposal will be assessed first on its technical merits and subsequently on its financial value price. The proposal with the best overall value, composed of technical merit and price, will be recommended for approval. UNICEF will set up an evaluation panel composed of technical and procurement staff and their conclusions will be forwarded to the internal UNICEF Contracts Review Committee or other relevant approving authority. The evaluation panel will first evaluate each response for compliance with the requirements of this Terms of Reference. Responses deemed not to meet all of the mandatory requirements will be considered non-compliant and rejected at this stage without further consideration. Failure to comply with any of the terms and conditions contained in these Terms of Reference, including provision of all required information, may result in a response or proposal being disqualified from further consideration.

The overall weighting between technical and price evaluation will be based on the predefined criteria. The technical component will account for 80% of the total points allocated and the financial component (commercial evaluation) will account for 20% of the total points allocated.

Technical evaluation:

The proposals will be evaluated against the following technical criteria:

Item	Technical Criteria/Qualifications	Max. Points
1	Understanding of the Assignment and Technical Approach	15
1.1	Demonstrates a clear understanding of the assignment objectives, scope, deliverables, and national context. Proposal presents a logical and feasible approach to developing the National Multisectoral ECD Programme and Costed Action Plan.	
2	Institutional Experience and Capacity	15
2.1	Demonstrated institutional experience in developing national ECD/ECI/Parenting policies, strategies or programmes; experience in system strengthening; evidence of successful implementation of similar assignments; demonstrated ability to mobilize qualified international and national experts; experience working with UN agencies, governments and development partners, particularly in LMICs and humanitarian settings.	
3	Qualifications and Experience of the Proposed Team	20
3.1	Qualifications and relevant experience of proposed experts, including: • Team Leader (minimum 10 years' experience) • ECD Expert (minimum 8 years' experience) • Costing Expert (minimum 5 years' experience) • Advanced degree (PhD preferred) in relevant field • Experience in ECD/ECI/Parenting, system strengthening, multidisciplinary work, and policy development. • Complementarity of the proposed team and clarity of roles and responsibilities.	
4	Country Experience and Contextual Knowledge	5
4.1	Demonstrated understanding of Tajikistan's social and cultural context; previous experience in Tajikistan or Central Asia; collaboration with national institutions and experts; familiarity with local ECD/ECI/Parenting systems and multisectoral coordination mechanisms.	
5	Methodology and Work Plan	20
5.1	Quality and appropriateness of the proposed methodology, including research design, stakeholder consultations, data collection methods, analytical framework, costing methodology, reporting approach, ethical considerations, gender-transformative approach, and realistic work plan/timeline.	

6	Quality Assurance and References	5
6.1	Adequacy of internal quality assurance mechanisms; quality of previous work samples; relevance of references and client feedback; evidence of delivering high-quality policy and research products on time	
	Total Technical Score	80

Commented [BA1]: Total of above gives 70 points

Only Proposers obtaining a minimum of 56 points in Technical Criteria evaluation will be considered for the Financial Evaluation.

Commercial evaluation:

The price/cost of each of the technically compliant proposals shall be considered only after evaluation of the above technical criteria. A maximum 20 point assigned to the financial proposal will be allocated to the lowest financial proposal. All other price proposals will receive scores in inverse proportion according to the following formula:

Score for price proposal A = (Maximum score for price proposal * Price of lowest priced proposal)/Price of proposal A.

As a result of the financial evaluation, the points of each proposal will be taken into further consideration in the final evaluation.

The bidders should ensure that all pricing information is provided in accordance with the following:

- The currency of the proposal shall be in USD for international companies and in Tajik Somoni for the local Proposers and invoicing must be in the same currency.
- All prices/rates quoted must be exclusive of all taxes as UNICEF is a tax-exempt organization

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Any request for information or question should be forwarded to dushanbe@unicef.org