

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Consultant for Conducting an Analysis of Trends in the Alternative Care System for Children

CONTRACT MODALITY Individual Consultancy

DUTY STATION Belgrade, Serbia & Home Based

DURATION OF CONTRACT 5.5 months

Purpose of Assignment

To provide technical support to the Ministry of Family Care and Demography and the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs in conducting a comprehensive analysis of trends in the alternative care system for children deprived of parental care in the Republic of Serbia.

The assignment aims to identify trends, needs and current challenges in the use of different forms of alternative care (including different forms of foster care, kinship care and residential care), as well as to assess outcomes for children, the quality and effectiveness of permanency planning for children, and the factors contributing to children's prolonged stays in alternative care.

The purpose of the analysis is to provide evidence and recommendations for improving alternative care and outcomes for children in alternative care.

Scope of Work

The consultant will work in close coordination with the Ministry of Family Care and Demography, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, and UNICEF in planning and conducting the analysis of trends in the alternative care system in the Republic of Serbia.

The assignment will focus on examining trends, challenges, and the quality of existing policies and practices in alternative care, with particular attention to permanency planning, outcomes for children deprived of parental care within the child protection system, and factors contributing to prolonged stays in alternative care.

The methodology will rely on three analytical frameworks:

1. Systems Dynamics Framework will be used to analyze the alternative care system as an interconnected system of actors, processes and care arrangements, focusing on how these elements communicate, interact and influence children's movement through the system towards a permanent solution. The analysis will examine the state of the system, including the availability and capacity of different care arrangements, the number of children in different forms of alternative care, duration of placements, changes in care arrangements, and the interconnections between these elements over time.
2. Bottleneck Analysis will be used to identify points in the child protection process where delays, constraints or other barriers occur. The analysis will cover key points including placement into alternative care, the selection and change of care arrangements, periodic review of the appropriateness of placements, permanency planning, preparation and support, exit from the system, and post-care support. For each identified bottleneck, the analysis will consider its underlying causes, the roles and responsibilities of relevant actors, available capacities and resources, and the implications for the child's subsequent pathway through the system.
3. Individual Case Pathway Analysis will reconstruct the pathway of individual children from placement into the

alternative care system, through different care arrangements and changes in placement, to exit and outcomes. The analysis will

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3. Individual Case Pathway Analysis will reconstruct the pathway of individual children from placement into the alternative care system, through different care arrangements and changes in placement, to exit and outcomes. The analysis will examine key decisions and measures, the sequence and timing of significant events, changes in the child's circumstances and needs, and factors that influence the outcomes of care. During the assignment, the consultant will:

- Develop a methodological framework for conducting trend analysis, including defining the sample, research instruments and analytical approach;
- Conduct a desk review of the relevant legal and strategic framework, existing research, analyses and reports, as well as international standards and practices in alternative care for children;
- Analyse the implementation of policies and procedures and existing practices in alternative care, including assessment processes, permanency planning and decision-making in the best interests of the child;
- Analyse available statistical data on children in alternative care, including trends in children's entry into the system, duration of stay, changes in care arrangements and outcomes for children (in coordination with the Ministry of Family Care and Demography);
- Conduct field research and collect data from representatives of the social welfare system, including professionals working in centres for social work, centres for family-based care and adoption, residential care institutions and other relevant stakeholders, as well as national-level decision-makers and children and youth in alternative care
- Prepare draft and final versions of the Analysis of Trends, including recommendations for improving policies and practices in alternative care in the Republic of Serbia, for the Ministry of Family Care and Demography and the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs. Prepare a draft and final version of a policy brief **for publication on the websites of the Ministries and UNICEF.**

Throughout the assignment, the consultant will maintain regular communication and coordination with the

relevant ministries and UNICEF and participate in consultative and working meetings organized as part of the analysis process.

The detailed work schedule will be agreed upon with the relevant ministries and UNICEF at the beginning of the assignment and adjusted as necessary during implementation.

The consultant will independently organize field visits for data collection, supported by a letter of endorsement from the Ministry of Family Care and Demography. All associated costs will be borne by the consultant and should be included in the consultancy fee.

Consultants are required to clearly identify in their written materials all potential ethical considerations, as well as the processes for ethical review and oversight of the research and data collection process. UNICEF Procedure on Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis. The methodology and final report will need to undergo review and approval by an ethical review board, subject to criteria that are determined through UNICEF's procedure on ethical standards. Prior to UNICEF's final approval, the report will undergo external quality assurance.

Work Assignments Overview	Deliverables/Outputs	Delivery deadline to complete the deliverable
Task 1 - Development of the methodological framework, analytical approach and research instruments for conducting the analysis of trends in alternative care	1.1 Develop a detailed methodological framework for analyzing trends in the alternative care system, including defining the objectives of the analysis, research questions, data sources, data collection and analysis methodology, and criteria for selecting the sample of centres for social work and other relevant stakeholders. 1.2 Develop research instruments for collecting quantitative and qualitative data, in line with the defined methodological framework and objectives of the analysis. The instruments should enable the collection of data on the experiences and practices of social welfare professionals in assessing and planning care for children deprived of parental care, challenges in permanency planning, and factors contributing to children's prolonged stays in alternative care, as well as identify gaps and areas for improvement in existing policies governing alternative care for children. Deliverables: - Draft methodology and analytical approach; - Developed data collection instruments.	11 December 2026
Task 2 - Collection and analysis of primary and secondary data	2.1 Conduct a desk review of the legal and strategic framework, existing research and reports, and international standards and	28 February 2027

	practices in alternative care for children, alongside an analysis of statistical and administrative data on children in alternative care, including data on children's entry into the system, duration of stay, changes in care arrangements and outcomes for children. 2.2 Organize and conduct field research. The field research is expected to include: obtaining additional administrative data with the support of the Ministry for Family Care and Demography; distribution of questionnaires to professionals working in a representative sample of centres for social work, centres for family-based care and adoption, and residential care institutions; at least five focus group discussions with professionals and practitioners working in the alternative care system, ensuring adequate regional representation; at least 2 focus group discussions with children and youth in alternative care to ensure that children's voices are heard and their views are taken into account., and at least ten in-depth interviews with decision-makers and other relevant stakeholders at the national level. 2.3 Analysis of at least five individual child pathways through the alternative care system, including decisions regarding their placement and changes in care arrangements, as well as	
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	reflections from professionals involved in their care, with full protection of privacy and confidentiality, anonymization of data, and measures to prevent the identification of children. Deliverable: - Systematized data and research materials.	
Task 3: Preparation of the Analysis of Trends in the Alternative Care System	3.1 Based on the data collected, prepare a draft report on the analysis of trends in the alternative care system, including recommendations for improving policies and practices. 3.2 Finalize the analysis of trends in the alternative care system in accordance with the comments and suggestions provided by the relevant ministries and UNICEF. Deliverables: - Draft Analysis of Trends in the Alternative Care System in the Republic of Serbia, including recommendations for improving policies and practices; - Final Analysis of Trends in the Alternative Care System in the Republic of Serbia, including recommendations for improving policies and practices. - Draft policy brief (3–5 pages) - Final policy brief (3–5 pages) for	31 April 2027

	publication on the websites of the Ministries and UNICEF.	
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Payment Schedule:

Payment will be made on submission and acceptance of deliverables. UNICEF reserves the right to withhold payment in case the deliverables submitted are not up to the required standard or in case of delays in submitting the deliverables on the part of the consultant.

Important Notes

- Individuals engaged under a consultancy or individual contract will not be considered “staff members” under the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations and UNICEF’s policies and procedures and will not be entitled to benefits provided therein (such as leave entitlements and medical insurance coverage). Their conditions of service will be governed by their contract and the General Conditions of Contracts for the Services of Consultants and Individual Contractors. Consultants and individual contractors are responsible for determining their tax liabilities and for the payment of any taxes and/or duties, in accordance with local or other applicable laws.
- Contracts are conditional upon the selected candidate's willingness to comply with any current or future vaccination requirements that may be established by UNICEF, where applicable. Failure to comply with applicable vaccination requirements, where required and without an approved medical exemption by UNICEF, may result in the withdrawal of the consultancy offer or termination of the contract in accordance with the General Terms and Conditions of Contract.
- UNICEF offers reasonable accommodation for consultants with disabilities. This may include, for example, accessible software, travel assistance for missions or personal attendants. We encourage you to disclose your disability during your application in case you need reasonable accommodation during the selection process and afterwards in your assignment.

QUALIFICATIONS / SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE / EXPERIENCE/ COMPETENCIES (CORE/TECHNICAL/FUNCTIONAL) / LANGUAGE SKILLS REQUIRED FOR THE ASSIGNMENT

Minimum requirements:

- **Education:**
 - Bachelor's degree in social sciences (social work, sociology or psychology).
- **Work Experience:**
 - At least 10 years of professional experience in child protection and alternative care, including experience in research and analysis of child protection systems;
 - Demonstrated experience in working and coordinating with ministries, centres for social work, centres for family-based care and adoption, residential care institutions and other stakeholders within the child protection system
- **Language Requirements:**
 - Fluency in Serbian and English, written and spoken

- **Knowledge/Expertise/Skills:**

- Excellent knowledge of the national alternative care system for children, as well as international standards and practices in the field of children's rights and alternative care;
- Advanced analytical, research and writing skills, demonstrated through the preparation of reports, publications and other relevant documents;
- Demonstrated experience in analyzing sectoral data, interpreting complex data and formulating clear, actionable recommendations for improving policies and practices.

- **Desirables:**

- Experience in deinstitutionalization, family strengthening and the development of family-based alternative care;
 - Experience working with UNICEF and/or other international organizations
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