

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Consultant for Global Evidence Review, Child-Centred Evaluation Framework on Communication Blackouts

CONTRACT MODALITY Individual Consultancy

DUTY STATION Digital Impact Division, Digital Empowerment in Emergencies
Valencia, Spain & Remote without travel

DURATION OF CONTRACT 3 months

Purpose of Assignment

Communication blackouts are increasingly associated with conflict, political instability, disasters, infrastructure damage, electricity or fuel constraints, technical failures and deliberate restrictions. These events can affect mobile services and internet access used by children, caregivers, service providers and humanitarian organizations.

Available literature describes wider civilian, economic, human-rights and humanitarian consequences. UNICEF is specifically interested in the implications for outcomes for children, the continuity and quality of child-critical services, and UNICEF and wider humanitarian operations.

UNICEF is therefore seeking a consultant to undertake a global landscape and evidence review and develop a child-centred evaluation framework and practical package for subsequent application with Country Offices. The assignment is intentionally evidence-first: it should not presume that every communication blackout causes a measurable child-level effect, but should determine what is known, whether and how effects can be credibly assessed, and where further country-level research is justified.

The assignment is intended to generate three connected results: a defensible global picture of communication blackouts and restrictions; an evidence-based narrative that UNICEF can use in donor engagement, conferences and policy discussions; and a practical, fundable model for country-level research and action.

The consultancy will support UNICEF to answer:

- What is known about the scale, nature, causes and geographic distribution of communication blackouts and restrictions globally?
- What does available evidence show about their direct, indirect and cascading effects on children, child-critical services and humanitarian operations?
- How strong is the evidence, what can UNICEF confidently communicate, and where do important gaps remain?
- What indicators, data sources and analytical methods can Country Offices use to assess effects in different contexts?
- What practical preparedness, mitigation, operational and policy options could UNICEF and its partners pursue?
- How should UNICEF structure and resource subsequent country-level work, including the selection and design of two pilots?

Scope of Work

The consultant will undertake the following activities:

1. Typology and conceptual framing

- Define and categorize the main types and causes of communication blackouts relevant to children and humanitarian action, including deliberate restrictions and disruptions caused by infrastructure, power, disasters or technical failures.
- Clarify the unit of analysis, terminology, geographic and temporal boundaries, and distinctions between full, partial, localized, intermittent and service-specific disruptions.

2. Global evidence review, blackout landscape and assessment

- Map available information on communication blackouts and restrictions, including their location, type, cause, duration, scale, and affected services, and identify recurring patterns, trends, geographic concentrations and contexts of heightened risk.
- Review evidence on direct, indirect and cascading effects on children, families, child-critical services and humanitarian operations.
- Assess the quality, strength, limitations and geographic coverage of the evidence, clearly distinguishing established findings, stakeholder-reported effects, plausible pathways and evidence gaps.
- Identify robust statistics UNICEF can responsibly cite and develop four to six documented case studies, where evidence permits. Each major claim should be traceable to its source, context, methodology, limitations and level of confidence.

3. Stakeholder consultations and practice-based evidence

- Develop a focused stakeholder map and consultation plan covering selected UNICEF Country Offices, Regional Offices and relevant headquarters functions, together with key external researchers, humanitarian organizations, incident-monitoring organizations, technical experts, civil-society actors and data holders.
- Conduct approximately 20–25 semi-structured interviews or small-group consultations to identify operational experience, available data, documented examples, perceived effects, mitigation measures, evidence gaps and potential partners.
- Distinguish stakeholder perspectives from independently documented evidence and identify areas of convergence, disagreement and uncertainty.
- Produce a concise consultation synthesis and partnership map identifying relevant expertise, datasets and potential roles in subsequent country-level work.

4. Child-centred evaluation framework and methodology

- Develop a child-centred theory of harm explaining the direct, indirect and cascading pathways through which communication blackouts may affect children, child-critical services and humanitarian operations.
- Examine how effects may differ by context and among different groups of children, considering vulnerability, exclusion, inequity, alternative explanations and possible mitigation measures.
- Develop a practical evaluation framework with research questions, indicators, quantitative and qualitative data sources, analytical methods and approaches to attribution or contribution.
- Ensure the methodology can be adapted across countries, types of disruption, operating environments

and levels of data availability and research capacity.

- Produce a clear, presentation-ready visual of the theory of harm for use with Country Offices, donors and external audiences.

5. Country pilot and programme design package

- Develop a practical toolkit that Country Offices can use to assess communication blackouts, including research questions, indicators, data-collection tools, analytical guidance, ethical considerations and stakeholder-engagement tools.
- Develop transparent criteria and a scoring approach for selecting two pilot countries.
- Propose a menu of preparedness, mitigation, operational and policy options that UNICEF and its partners could pursue before, during and after communication blackouts.
- Develop a results chain and preliminary results framework connecting proposed activities to intended outcomes for children, child-critical services and humanitarian operations.
- Prepare a draft TOR and three indicative options for subsequent work: a minimum viable pilot, a two-country pilot and a potential expanded approach. For each, specify the scope, timeframe, partnerships, risks, cost categories and prospects for sustainability and scale.

6. Strategic recommendations, investment case and external engagement package

- Recommend whether and how UNICEF should proceed with country-level work, based on the evidence, feasibility, potential value and relevance to policy and practice.
- Define where UNICEF can credibly lead, contribute, convene, advocate, generate evidence or support country-level preparedness and programming, distinguishing its role from those of governments, regulators, telecommunications providers, technical agencies, digital-rights organizations and other humanitarian actors.
- Present implementation and investment options, including indicative resource requirements and the principal ethical, operational, methodological, political and reputational risks.
- Develop an evidence-based narrative that UNICEF can use for programme design, donor engagement, conferences and policy discussions, with all major claims traceable to their sources and appropriately qualified.

Work Assignments Overview	Deliverables/Outputs	Delivery deadline (in weeks/months) and input days to complete the deliverable
1. Inception	Inception Report: Confirmed methodology, evidence-review protocol, analytical framework, stakeholder map, consultation plan, workplan, quality-assurance approach, and ethical considerations.	22 December, 2026 5 days
2. Evidence review	Global Landscape and Evidence Review: Global incident and evidence map; typology; available data on location, cause, duration, scale and affected services; analysis of effects on children, child-critical services and humanitarian operations; evidence-quality assessment; robust statistics; four to six case studies where evidence permits; and a clear identification of evidence gaps and limitations.	5 January, 2026 10 Days
3. Consultation and evidence synthesis	Consultation and Evidence Synthesis: Synthesis of findings from approximately 20–25 internal and external interviews or consultations, including operational examples, relevant datasets, areas of convergence and disagreement, evidence gaps, potential partners and a stakeholder and partnership map.	19 January, 2027 10 Days
4. Evaluation and Country Office package	Child-Centred Evaluation and Country Office Package, comprising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A theory of harm and presentation-ready visual; - Evaluation questions, indicators, data sources, analytical methods, and an adaptable CO assessment toolkit; - Country-selection criteria, intervention options, results chain, preliminary results framework, draft pilot TOR, and three indicative implementation and investment options. 	12 February, 2027 10 Days
5. Final research and external engagement package	Final Research and External Engagement Package: Final report and executive summary; strategic recommendations; two-page evidence brief; donor-facing investment narrative; conference-ready presentation; short and extended speaking points; frequently asked questions; four to six case studies where evidence permits; and a sourced evidence and claims bank distinguishing established findings, reported experience, plausible risks and unresolved assumptions.	22 February 2027 2 days

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.
- The selected candidate is solely responsible for ensuring that the health insurance (and visa if applicable) required to perform the duties of the contract are valid for the entire period of the contract. Selected candidates are subject to confirmation of fully-vaccinated status against SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19) with a World Health Organization (WHO)-endorsed vaccine, which must be met prior to taking up the assignment. It does not apply to consultants who will work remotely and are not expected to work on or visit UNICEF premises, programme delivery locations or directly interact with communities UNICEF works with, nor to travel to perform functions for UNICEF for the duration of their consultancy contracts.
- 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: An advanced university degree in evaluation, social research, public policy, international development, humanitarian studies, child rights, communications, information and communication technology, data science, economics, public health, social sciences or another closely related field.

A first-level university degree combined with two additional years of relevant professional experience may be accepted in lieu of an advanced university degree.

Work Experience: At least eight years of professional experience in research, evaluation, evidence synthesis or programme design in humanitarian or development contexts.

- Demonstrated experience conducting evidence reviews, assessing evidence quality and synthesizing quantitative and qualitative findings.
- Experience developing theories of change or harm, evaluation frameworks, indicators, mixed-methods methodologies and data-collection tools.
- Experience designing country-level research, pilots or programmes, including results frameworks, implementation options and indicative resource requirements.
- Experience conducting consultations with diverse institutional, technical and operational stakeholders.
- Demonstrated ability to translate complex evidence into strategic recommendations, donor-facing

materials,
investment propositions and senior-level presentations

Skills: Strong qualitative and quantitative research, analytical and evidence-assessment skills.

- Ability to assess causality, evidence strength, uncertainty and alternative explanations in complex environments.
- Knowledge of child-centred research, ethics, safeguarding and responsible stakeholder engagement.
- Strong programme-design capabilities, including results frameworks, implementation options and indicative budgets.
- Excellent writing, synthesis, consultation, facilitation, presentation and data-visualization skills.
- Ability to communicate complex findings accurately and compellingly to Country Offices, donors, senior leaders and external audiences.

Language Requirements: Fluency in written and spoken English is required.

- Knowledge of another United Nations language is an asset.

Desirables: Experience with UNICEF, another UN agency or a humanitarian organization.

- Knowledge of communication blackouts, internet restrictions, telecommunications disruptions, digital rights or infrastructure resilience.
- Familiarity with organizations and datasets that monitor communication disruptions.
- Experience developing multi-country research, donor propositions or public-facing products on sensitive issues