

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Consultancy to support UNICEF Bulgaria CO in development of a platform in support of children with disabilities and special needs

Estimated start date: 01.11.2020

Estimated end date: 15.10.2021

Reporting to: Education Officer, UNICEF Bulgaria

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

UNICEF Bulgaria is in the third year of implementation of the Country Programme for the period 2018-2022. The overall goal of the country partnership is to support Bulgaria 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. It also places special emphasis on strengthening Bulgaria's contribution to global efforts for advancing child rights through developing innovative approaches, leveraging resources and expertise, and facilitating horizontal cooperation and sharing of Bulgaria's knowledge and experience with other countries.

Despite the efforts of the Government and the Ministry of Education and Science in the past years to provide inclusive education for every child, children with disabilities and special needs continue to be among the most excluded from quality early learning and support. While remote learning strategies are applied to ensure continued learning for all children within the COVID-19 outbreak, some groups of vulnerable children, including those with disabilities, are not able to access these opportunities. This may be due to various reasons such as lack of access to internet or required equipment or simply because the remote learning modalities are not adapted to their specific needs. Estimations from the Regional Inclusive Education Support Centers show that during the period of distance learning around 80% (or about 6,900 children with special needs) are currently supported by resource teachers and other specialists from the Regional Inclusive Education Support Centers. This means that one in five children with disabilities, and in some regions the share is higher, does not receive additional support. Even more, UNICEF rapid assessment on the impact of COVID-19 on education reveals that only 63% of specialists have worked with children with disabilities during the state of emergency on a regular basis. Of those who continued supporting children with disabilities share that 61% share that they worked with half of the children they normally support or even fewer. Almost 62% of specialists share they need support to adapt the methods of working in a situation of distance learning; 37% need support to work with platforms and online content and another 30% need video resources to work easier. The provision of additional support and the collaboration between the professionals working with the child and the family is yet another challenge. In the situation of closure of schools, it was even more

challenging as it required a very strict coordination between the family, the resource teacher or other specialist working with the child, and the mainstream teacher of the child.

To address the above challenges UNICEF, the Ministry of Education and Science and the Regional Inclusive Education Support Centers initiated a project that will support children with disabilities and special need by developing an online platform that will provide video content tailored for the needs of children with disabilities and special needs and would allow improved collaboration among professionals but also with the family.

The platform will include the following elements:

- Online resources

The online interactive platform will include different resources and methodological tools – in the form of videos, guidelines, handouts – for the implementation of learning activities appropriate for children with disabilities and special needs. The resources will be developed by professionals – psychologists, speech therapists, special teachers and experienced mainstream teachers, based on good practices, and will be validated by an expert team, established within the MoES. Some resources will be adapted, and some developed locally.

All resources will be developed and tailored to meet the specific needs of children – will include sign-language, will foster development of alternative and augmentative communication by introducing symbol systems, will use appropriate font and font size, etc. The platform will allow a quick search for materials by subject, age of children, type of material, and other relevant filters.

- Improved collaboration of support team around the child

The platform will allow different specialists who are supporting the child, incl. his/ her mainstream teachers and parents, to exchange information, instructions and educational tasks more regularly and in a more structured way so that they follow the same goal. The individual education plan of each child with additional needs can be created in the platform through a collaborative process which the platform will facilitate. Each specialist will be able to provide input and follow the input of other professionals working with the child. This will improve the overall support process towards the concept of “one child – one team – one plan”.

- Training tools for specialists

The platform will also include training tools for teachers and specialists such as webinars and other training tools. The platform will provide information via calendar about upcoming trainings related to inclusive education and children with disabilities and will include an option a specialist to request a particular training or other kind of peer support. The platform will allow for scheduling these events and the actual events will be conducted through the variety of available options such as skype, zoom, teams and others.

- Live chat and online consultations

The platform will include an option for live chat and online consultations by specialists to other specialists, incl. teachers as well as parents and children. The live chat will be incorporated within the platform and the online consultations will be scheduled via the platform but will be conducted through other appropriate tools, mentioned above.

- Useful contacts information

The platform will have a section on useful contacts information by regions, developed in an interactive way (map, pop-ups, etc.), presenting the contacts of specialists in the region, incl. in kindergartens, schools, social services. This would facilitate the contact between specialists and families and children who need support.

II. OVERALL OBJECTIVE AND TASKS OF THE ASSIGNMENT

UNICEF is looking for a consultant to provide technical expertise and to support UNICEF in coordination and monitoring the development of the platform.

The specific tasks of the assignment include:

1. Support the coordination of the project for development of platform in support of children with disabilities by reviewing work deliverables and reporting to UNICEF Education Officer and ICT Associate;
2. Provide technical expertise to UNICEF to strengthen the monitoring over the project deliverables as per the [ToR for the technical requirements of the platform](#).
3. Report to UNICEF Education Officer and ICT Associate for any technical issues related to the development of the platform making sure that the requirements of UNICEF and the national partners – Ministry of Education and Science and the implementing partner – the Regional Inclusive Education Support Center Sofia are reflected and addressed in the deliverables expected by the company developing the platform;
4. Prepare regular status reports on weekly basis during the first three months of the project and after that on a two-weeks basis;
5. Support the process of testing of the platform by fulfilling test scenarios and collaborating with the actors involved to address pending issues with a special focus on the [accessibility standards that are required for children and people with disabilities](#);
6. Collaborate with the IT focal point at the Regional Inclusive Education Support Center for collecting feedback from the users (specialists, teachers, parents and the national admins) and providing recommendation for addressing those and improving the process.

III. Expected deliverables and timeframe.

- Regular status reports for the implementation of project activities which include overall status of implementation, collected feedback from all stakeholders, recommendations for improving the overall implementation;
- Ongoing support for the monitoring and effective coordination of the project activities;
- Others, related to the project implementation requested by UNICEF.

IV. Remuneration and total estimated cost for completion of the work assignment.

The remuneration will be based upon a negotiated hourly or daily (8 hours per day) consultancy fee for a maximum of 80 hours per month (or 10 days per month). UNICEF consultancy contracts are signed for no more than 11.5 months with an option for renewal upon continuation of project activities and satisfactory performance of the consultant.

V. Qualifications or specialized knowledge/expertise required.

The consultant needs to have the following competencies/qualification:

- Proven experience in the area of web platforms and applications design and development;
- Extensive knowledge of the latest web technologies;
- Team management experience, incl. in coordination or management of similar projects;
- Self-driven and result oriented personality;
- Excellent communication skills;
- Excellent analytical skills;
- Ability to work under tight deadlines;
- Excellent command of English language;
- Knowledge of system security requirements;
- Knowledge of web accessibility standards.

VI. Monitoring and Evaluation.

The selected consultant will work under the direct supervision of the UNICEF Education Officer in close collaboration with UNICEF ICT Associate.

Performance indicators

The performance will be evaluated against the following criteria: timeliness, responsibility, initiative, communication, and quality of the products delivered.

UNICEF recourse in the case of unsatisfactory performance

In case of unsatisfactory performance, the contract will be terminated by notification letter sent 5 days prior to termination.