

**TERMS OF REFERENCE****Consultant on Alternative and Augmentative Communication /AAC/  
To support the implementation of pilot project on EU Child Guarantee in Bulgaria**

**Start date:** 1 March 2021  
**End Date:** 10 February 2022  
**Reporting to:** UNICEF Education Officer

**I. BACKGROUND**

Communication is an important part of the full development of each person. It has different degrees of efficiency. The more effective the communication process, the more complete the development. The process of communication or interaction with others can be facilitated by various methods and means. Conditionally, the types of communication can be divided into verbal and nonverbal.

In Art. 2 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that communication includes all languages (spoken and symbolic), Braille, visual representation of text, tactile communication, as well as any complementary means, means and forms of communication.

Augmentative and alternative communication is offered in order to facilitate functional communication between two or more people in which the verbal communication channel is insufficiently effective. Over the past 20 years, there has been a serious focus on introducing policies and practices that provide meaningful communication opportunities for each person in view of their capabilities and needs.

**The situation in Bulgaria**

- Around 10,000 children with disabilities and special needs are estimated to be out of school and more than 4,000 continue to be educated separately from their peers – in special schools, special groups within mainstream kindergartens or Centres for Special Educational Support.
- For those who do enroll, they are less likely to benefit from learning or complete primary or secondary education as for many of them no tools for functional communication with others have been introduced in order to fully participate in the education process, particularly children who cannot use verbal speech.
- Latest data from MoES for 2019/2020 shows that the total number of children with disabilities and special needs in kindergartens and schools are over 25,000. For the majority or around 15000 of them (those with multiple disability, cerebral palsy, sensory disabilities, autistic spectrum disorder) communication with others is seriously challenged. Some children have additional difficulties due to different disability – autistic spectrum disorder, intellectual disabilities and language speech disorders, physical and sensor disabilities. These challenges affect their participation in learning, incl. in the process of needs assessment which is the basis for planning of adequate additional support.

- Although AAC and AT means are widely used in the developed European countries, USA, Australia, Japan, etc. and are fully or partly funded by the social system, this is not the case in Bulgaria. Only about 10% of the special education teachers in Bulgaria use low-tech AAC and less than 3% use Speech Generating Devices (SDG) and AT and less than 5% use them in their practice. Concerning the high-tech AT, about 70% of the teachers report no knowledge and only 10% use it. The main barrier to the adoption of AT is the lack of knowledge and adequate training of the professionals working with people with disabilities.
- The Ministry of Education and Science in Bulgaria is investing in assistive technologies in kindergartens and schools through the “Education for tomorrow” project fostering digitalization of education and national programme “Ensuring contemporary educational environment” with a dedicated budget of 1.6 million BGN for equipping 38 centers with assistive technologies. Yet, very few educational institutions, particularly Centers for special educational support benefitted from these opportunities. Obvious reasons for this are the lack of awareness and appropriate training on what is AAC, who can benefit from these tools and technologies and how they are implemented in practice.

## II. UNICEF ROLE

UNICEF Bulgaria is in the fourth 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. One of the key priorities is promoting national policies and strengthening national capacities for provision of quality and inclusive pre-school and school education, especially the most vulnerable ones.

UNICEF work in Bulgaria has focused on supporting the Government to develop, test and scale-up innovative models and approaches for improving the living conditions and increasing access and use of integrated services targeted at the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families and children. In the area of education, the focus is on access to quality inclusive education for children with disabilities and special needs and on strengthening the capacities of education professionals to provide inclusive education.

Building on the evidence, experience and lessons learned generated by UNICEF work with the Government and other partners, the Country Office will support the testing of the EU Child Guarantee, which aims at ending child poverty for all children in Europe, through the implementation of a 2-year pilot project. The third project component “Inclusive pre-school education” aims to ensure access to quality inclusive pre-school education services for children with disabilities and learning difficulties in three districts – Burgas, Sliven and Stara Zagora.

### **Pilot project for testing EU Child Guarantee in Bulgaria**

The pilot project is funded by the European Commission and its overall objective is to support the development and implementation of innovative approaches and services to ensure inclusion and access to services of children with disabilities and developmental difficulties, and children in precarious family situations (including children living in poor and extremely poor households and Roma children) starting from birth through transition to school. It will apply an integrated strategy, which aims to improve community outreach, family engagement, quality and inclusiveness of mainstream services and strengthening of targeted services that address the specific needs of

children with disabilities and developmental difficulties, children in precarious family situations and their families.

For the achievement of this objective, the pilot project will work with the Government, regional and local authorities, health, education, child protection and social assistance services, NGOs, academic institutions and other stakeholders for the implementation of the following four components:

**Component 1:** Home visiting for provision of individualized support to caregivers for strengthening their capacities for nurturing care for children (0-3 years) with an enhanced focus on families in precarious situations and caregivers of children with disabilities;

**Component 2:** Development and introduction of a system approach to early childhood intervention, with a specific focus on children aged 0-3 with disabilities and developmental difficulties and their caregivers;

**Component 3:** Provision of quality inclusive pre-school education services for children with disabilities and learning difficulties;

**Component 4:** Provision of outreach child and family-centered preventive and support services for children in precarious family situations and their families.

The project will be implemented in 10 pilot municipalities on the territory of three districts - Burgas, Sliven and Stara Zagora.

### III. OVERALL OBJECTIVE OF THE ASSIGNMENT

The AAC Consultant will support the implementation of the following key project activities under Component 3:

- Strengthening the capacities of 30 kindergartens for the provision of quality inclusive pre-school education in the districts of Burgas, Sliven and Stara Zagora with a focus on non-verbal children and introduction of alternative and augmentative communication;
- Enhancing the capacities of the Regional Centers for Supporting the Process of Inclusive Education and other relevant stakeholders at municipal and regional level for supporting the provision of inclusive pre-school education services in three districts – Burgas, Sliven and Stara Zagora with a focus on non-verbal children and introduction of alternative and augmentative communication.

### IV. SPECIFIC TASKS

The consultant will be responsible for the following:

- Support the design and the analysis of the results of a needs assessment that targets teachers and aims to assess their knowledge, practices and attitudes with respect to alternative and augmentative communication;
- Support and coordinate the implementation of the above needs assessment by developing a questionnaire, support the data gathering and analysis in collaboration with other staff involved in the coordination of the training programme for kindergartens under the project;

- Support the adaptation of UNICEF ECARO training package on alternative and augmentative communication;
- Support the process of customization of global open-source symbol sets and the development of symbol sets for Bulgaria;
- Support the delivery of online or face-to-face training sessions on alternative and augmentative communication, based on UNICEF training package, for professionals working with children, primarily from the Regional centers for supporting the process of inclusive education;
- Support UNICEF's public awareness and advocacy activities aiming to promote inclusive early education in kindergartens, as well as in communication and visibility activities with a focus on alternative and augmentative communication.
- Participate in relevant meetings, workshops, seminars as needed;
- Others as agreed with UNICEF office.

#### V. TIMEFRAME AND DURATION OF THE ASSIGNMENT

It is expected that the assignment will take place in the period **1 March 2021 – 10 February 2022**.

#### VI. OFFICIAL TRAVEL

The consultancy will involve in-country travel (circumstances allowing) to the districts of Burgas, Sliven and Stara Zagora and to the pilot municipalities.

In addition, a lump sum will be paid for in-country travel which includes travel cost, accommodation and DSA to the amount of 60 BGN for in-country travel without overnight and 120 BGN for in-country travel with overnight.

#### VII. REMUNERATION AND INCURRED COST

The consultant will receive a negotiated remuneration based on daily fee offer. Payments will be made based on satisfactorily provision of services and submission of a timesheet on a monthly basis.

#### VIII. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The AAC Consultant will work under the direct supervision of UNICEF Education Officer and in close coordination with Early Childhood Education Expert who is part of the Project Management Unit, established by UNICEF to support the implementation of the Child Guarantee.

##### *Performance indicators*

The performance will be evaluated against the following criteria: successful completion of the planned activities and outputs within the required/agreed timeframe; ability to work independently and also as part of a team; organizational and planning skills, building consensus among the partners, 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 10 days prior to termination.

#### IX. REQUIRED EDUCATION, EXPERIENCE AND COMPETENCIES

- Advanced university degree in one or more of the following fields: psychology, special education, pre-school education, speech therapy, etc.
- Sound expertise and professional experience in the area of inclusive education with a focus on alternative and augmentative communication for children with disabilities and special needs;
- Extensive knowledge on availability and application of symbol systems, symbol sets, board builders and other alternative and augmentative communication tools for children with disabilities and special needs;
- Professional experience in design and provision of trainings for teachers and specialists on inclusive education, incl. on alternative and augmentative communication;
- Good command of Internet browsers and web-based tools such as web-based trainings.
- Excellent management, organizational and communication skills;
- Ability to work under pressure; good negotiation and presentation skills; pro-activity and strong orientation towards results;
- Ability to manage partnerships across diversity of stakeholders;
- Respect for cultural diversity and human rights;
- Excellent oral and written command of Bulgarian and English.

Prepared by: *Maria Yankova*  
Maria Yankova, Education Officer

Approved by: *Sanja Saranovic*  
Sanja Saranovic, Deputy Representative

*Date: 27 January 2021*