

TERMS OF REFERENCE
Children & Digital Technology
Individual Consultant
22 September 2020 – 26 March 2021 (6 months)

1. Background

Digital technology is a key driver of change that underpins the realisation of several Sustainable Development Goals.¹ Access to digital technology can be an important enabler for the development of skills that young people need to achieve learning objectives and to prepare them for an increasingly digitalised economy. Digital technology can provide access to health or educational services, or information on topics that are important for young people but may be considered taboo in their societies. At the same time, internet access may compound existing risks to children that, unless managed, could undermine their well-being.

For the past five years, UNICEF's Office of Research – Innocenti has collected data from all around the world on children's use of digital technology. These data have helped to strengthen the global evidence base on children's internet use and supported UNICEF's advocacy, programming and policy development.

Along with various partners, UNICEF Innocenti has led or supported the development and implementation of several nationally representative, comparative cross-national household surveys with children and parents, focusing on the nature of their internet use and online experiences. These projects include:

- **Global Kids Online:** baseline evidence on children's online experiences, implemented in 18 countries to date, primarily in countries outside of Europe.
- **The Disrupting Harm project:** new evidence on technology-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse, implemented in 14 countries in Eastern & Southern Africa and Southeast Asia during 2020.
- **Children's use of digital technologies during COVID-19:** evidence to understand children's experiences with technology during COVID-19 lockdowns. This project is conducted in collaboration with the European Commission's Joint Research Centre and academics in 10 countries in Europe.

In summary, UNICEF Innocenti has access to unique data on children's online risks and opportunities from over 40 countries and more than 50,000 children and their parents. As our global evidence base continues to grow, there is a need to analyze and use these data to inform policies and interventions aimed at improving children's lives and well-being.

The first stage of turning this evidence into action requires an extensive and systematic analysis of the various datasets produced from our research. The main purpose is to determine how the risks and opportunities children experience online impact their lives and well-being, as this will help determine which issues are most pressing for UNICEF and partners to address.

¹ See http://unsdsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/ICTSDG_InterimReport_FINAL6_WEB.pdf.

2. Objective(s)

There is a need for a quantitative research consultant with the skills to analyze, synthesize and present cross-nationally comparative data on the online risks and opportunities associated with a range of well-being outcomes.

The consultant will analyze several large datasets to determine which online risks and opportunities **a)** are most/least common for children, **b)** seem to have the greatest influence on aspects of children's lives and well-being.

The primary objective of the analysis is to identify the most impactful risks and opportunities children experience online, which UNICEF and partners can work to address in the future.

The secondary objective is to transform the findings from the data analysis into a set of design considerations that will be used when developing interventions aimed at improving children's lives and well-being.

The expected output of this consultancy is a technical report covering two main objectives:

1. A framework illustrating how online and offline experiences impact children's well-being: This framework will be developed by analyzing the available datasets and showing how children's online and offline experiences are associated with various well-being indicators.

2. A needs assessment & context analysis to support the design of interventions: The findings will identify areas where an intervention might be needed to improve children's well-being in a digital environment (a 'needs assessment'), either to mitigate a prevalent risk or help children take advantage of an opportunity. This needs assessment will guide UNICEF Innocenti in determining which issues to prioritize for the design of future interventions.

The needs assessment should be complemented by a context analysis, which describes the online and offline circumstances that influence children's digital engagement and their experience of particular risks and opportunities. The context analysis is intended to inform the "Where, What, Who and When" during the conceptualization and design of an intervention. It should provide information on background factors that predict or influence the digital risks and opportunities identified during the needs assessment (e.g., access modalities, devices, family support, common online activities, existing vulnerabilities). The outcomes of the context analysis can suggest the content, modality and medium used for an intervention, highlight safety concerns that may arise as a result, or find ways to incorporate social interactions or cultural norms that may amplify or undermine the effectiveness of the intervention.

The consultant is expected to lead development of the framework and data analysis plan, as well as conduct all data analysis. The full scope of the framework (mentioned under #1 above) and technical report will be developed together with the Children & Digital Technology team at UNICEF Innocenti.

3. Specific activities to be completed to achieve the objectives:

1. **Conduct data analysis:** using primary data from 40+ countries (split across 3-4 datasets), identify the most impactful online risks and opportunities for well-being outcomes for children (outcomes to be defined, but could be educational, well-being, mental health, fostering creativity, social connectedness, resilience).
2. **Develop framework:** using the findings from the data analysis (complemented by existing evidence reviews), develop a framework illustrating how online and offline experiences influence well-being outcomes.
3. **Agenda-setting and design considerations:** work with the team at UNICEF Innocenti to develop a future agenda for key interventions. Develop a set of design considerations based on the needs assessment and context analysis to inform the design and implementation of interventions that aim to mitigate risks or improve opportunities for children.

4. Specific outputs with delivery dates

1. Data analysis plan agreed with supervisor (October 8th)
2. Analysis of key risks and opportunities finalized (February 15th)
3. Framework delivered and technical report finalized (March 26th)

5. Qualifications and/or special knowledge/experience required and desirable for undertaking the assignment:

- Advanced university degree in a relevant discipline with considerable research focus. PhD would be considered an asset. Background in child development/well-being, and/or design experience (e.g., Human-Computer Interaction/Interaction design/Instructional design) is considered an asset.
- Documented experience conducting empirical research, especially analysis of household survey data (descriptive and inferential statistics; complex statistical modelling an asset).
 - Experience analyzing cross-national data would be considered an asset.
 - Experience working with data on child-related topics, including data from EU Kids Online/Global Kids Online, would be considered an asset.
- A solid understanding of what constitutes high-quality, reliable evidence in the field of children and digital technology, as well as a good grasp of common methodological/conceptual shortcomings.
- Strong writing and communication skills, including proven ability to develop and summarize complex data and research in materials suitable for different audiences, including non-academic (e.g., publications in high-quality journals, reports, policy briefs, blogs).
- Fluency in English (writing and speaking).
- Responsive and able to work within a dynamic team in a multi-cultural environment.
- Demonstrated experience of delivering complex projects in a timely fashion.
- Commitment to UNICEF principles and mandate.

6. Duration of the consultancy

The assignment will be carried out over 6 months, from 22 September 2020 until 26 March 2020.

7. Supervision and work arrangements

The consultant will report to the Research Specialist (Digital) who leads the research programme on Children & Digital Technology at UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti. The consultancy will take place remotely with the possibility of travel to meetings if circumstances allow.