

Terms of Reference

Contracting a Research Organization to undertake a participatory study of children's experiences and local opportunities - "Listening to Children, Shaping Communities"

Start Date: November 16, 2026

End Date: August 13, 2027

1. Background and rationale

UNICEF Georgia, within an EU-funded project, seeks to strengthen the evidence base on the local environments that enable every child to develop, participate and thrive. While a growing body of evidence exists on children's living conditions and well-being in Georgia, there remains a need for richer insights into children's everyday experiences of the places where they live. This includes understanding the opportunities available to them, the barriers they encounter, the relationships and informal supports they rely on, and the changes they believe would make their communities more inclusive and enabling. To address this evidence gap, UNICEF Georgia will undertake a qualitative, participatory study that explores how children and young people experience their local environments and how these experiences shape their well-being, development and future opportunities.

Methodologically, the study draws on UNICEF Innocenti's *Monitoring and Analyzing Child Poverty across Space* (MAPS) place-based approach, which centers children's perspectives to analyse how the interaction between local territorial conditions and well-being shapes children's lives, future trajectories and opportunities. The Georgia initiative will draw particularly on the qualitative component of the MAPS methodology while adapting it to the national context. A context-specific qualitative methodology and approach will be developed with technical support from UNICEF Innocenti. Innocenti will provide methodological guidance, support the development of research questions and tools, train the research team, guide the analytical framework and qualitative analysis, and provide technical quality assurance. The contracted research company will lead implementation in Georgia, including contextual review, recruitment, logistics, piloting, fieldwork, transcription, translation, data preparation, contribution to analysis, participatory follow-up discussions and preparation of the consolidated report.

For the purposes of this study, children's experiences will be explored across several interconnected dimensions of everyday life. These include educational opportunities and learning experiences; play, recreation, sport and cultural participation; family environment and social relationships; physical and psychosocial wellbeing; safety and protection; access to essential services; mobility and connectivity; community participation and voice; sense of belonging, inclusion and trust; and aspirations for the future. The study will examine both tangible characteristics of local environments, such as infrastructure, services, transport, public spaces and recreational facilities, and intangible characteristics, such as social cohesion, relationships, participation, social norms, trust and community support networks. While these dimensions provide an initial analytical framework, the study will remain open to identifying additional themes emerging from the perspectives of children and young people themselves.

The 2022 Child Welfare Survey, implemented by the National Statistics Office of Georgia with UNICEF support and reported in 2023, generated nationally representative evidence on child welfare, including material and social deprivation, access to education, health care and social assistance, nutrition, safety at home, functional difficulties and disability-related stigma. Its child- and household-level indicators have been essential for understanding how household resources and material conditions shape deprivation. Yet a household-focused survey cannot, by itself, explain how the wider community and local environment enable or constrain children's well-being, development and participation, or how these experiences differ across territorial settings.

Listening to Children, Shaping Communities will address this evidence gap through a qualitative, participatory study in three contrasting locations: Tbilisi, one other town and one rural area ("Temi"¹). By complementing existing quantitative evidence with children's perspectives, the study will generate a deeper understanding of how local environments influence children's everyday lives and opportunities. The initiative will examine children's and young people's lived experiences, identify tangible and intangible characteristics of local environments that support or limit their development, and translate the evidence into recommendations and locally relevant actions developed with young people and parents.

2. Purpose of the assignment

To contract a qualified research company, and under the methodological guidance of UNICEF Innocenti and the oversight of UNICEF Georgia, to design the operational details and implement *Listening to Children, Shaping Communities* as a rigorous, ethical and inclusive qualitative study that translates the perspectives of children, young people and parents into practical recommendations and action proposals for more enabling local environments.

3. Objectives

- Generate child-centred qualitative evidence on how local environments influence children's wellbeing, development, participation, opportunities and future aspirations.
- Understand children's and young people's experiences regarding education and learning, recreation and leisure, social relationships, family and community environment, wellbeing, safety, participation, access to services, mobility and future opportunities across three contrasting territorial settings (ie. a capital city, a town and Temi (group of rural villages)).
- Examine how tangible territorial characteristics (services, infrastructure, transport, public spaces and facilities) and intangible territorial characteristics (social cohesion, belonging, trust, participation, social support networks and community relationships) enable or constrain children's wellbeing and opportunities in different locations.
- Capture differences by age, location and relevant vulnerability or exclusion factors, while ensuring meaningful inclusion of children who may be missed through school-only recruitment.
- Validate findings with young people and parents and jointly define feasible actions for communities, municipalities and other local actors.

¹"Temi" (თემი, community) refers to a municipal administrative unit consisting of one large village or several smaller villages grouped under a common local administrative representative within a municipality. The term is most used in larger municipalities with multiple villages.

- Produce an evidence-based report, recommendations and accessible communication products for local and national dialogue.

4. Guiding principles

- Child-rights based and child-centered approach, grounded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Meaningful participation: children and young people are knowledge holders and partners, not only respondents.
- Inclusion and accessibility, with practical arrangements for children facing poverty, disability, geographic, linguistic, social or other barriers.
- Do no harm, safeguarding, voluntary participation, informed consent and assent, confidentiality and secure data management.
- Territorial sensitivity, recognizing that needs and opportunities differ across capital-city, other urban and rural settings.
- Methodological transparency and co-production with UNICEF Georgia and UNICEF Innocenti.
- Action orientation: findings must lead to prioritized, feasible and clearly owned local action proposals.

5. Indicative Dimensions of Inquiry

Dimension	Examples of Issues to Explore
Education and learning	Access, quality, aspirations, school environment, educational opportunities
Play, recreation and culture	Play spaces, sports, arts, extracurricular activities, leisure opportunities
Family and social relationships	Family support, friendships, peer relations, trusted adults
Health and wellbeing	Physical wellbeing, psychosocial wellbeing, access to services
Safety and protection	Safety at home, in public spaces and within the community
Mobility and connectivity	Transport, digital access, ability to move independently
Community participation	Voice, opportunities to participate, feeling heard
Inclusion and belonging	Identity, social cohesion, acceptance, connection to community
Aspirations and future opportunities	Educational, social and professional aspirations and future plans
Children's priorities for change	What children would like to improve in their communities

6. Contractual nature and ownership of deliverables

The selected organization and UNICEF acknowledge and agree that this arrangement is entirely commercial in nature. UNICEF purchases services and products from the Contractor, which will have an interest only in the receipt of funds from UNICEF for commercial purposes in exchange for the services and products provided.

UNICEF shall have, hold and retain full and exclusive ownership of all products created, developed or delivered pursuant to or resulting from the performance of this Contract, and shall bear full responsibility for their use and outcomes.

The Contractor shall perform the services independently and in accordance with the terms and conditions of this Contract.

7. Scope of work: actions to be undertaken

Action	Required tasks
Action 1. Plan and mobilize	Participate in a joint inception process with UNICEF Georgia and UNICEF Innocenti; prepare a nine-month operational workplan, staffing plan, coordination arrangements, risk register, quality assurance system and detailed budget; propose transparent criteria and feasibility information for selecting the second town and rural location.
Action 2. Review and contextualize	Review relevant Georgian evidence and policy documents, including municipal child-rights assessments and Child Welfare Survey findings; prepare concise profiles of the three locations covering demographics, services, public and social infrastructure, youth opportunities and contextual inequalities; map schools, services, youth structures, community organizations and other actors.
Action 3. Prepare, train and pilot	Nominate the complete field team; participate in UNICEF Innocenti-led methodological training and tools contextual adaptation; deliver local safeguarding and operational training; pilot all principal methods; document results; revise tools, timing, recruitment and logistics; submit a fieldwork-readiness package for approval.
Action 4. Co-design the qualitative approach	Contribute local knowledge to research questions and the study framework; translate UNICEF Innocenti's methodological guidance into an implementable qualitative-only protocol; adapt focus-group, interview, territorial mapping and postcard tools to Georgian contexts; prepare Georgian and other required language versions and field manuals. Submit the research material to the ethics review board for approval. Research tools should ensure adequate exploration of the agreed dimensions of inquiry, including education and learning, recreation and leisure, social relationships, wellbeing, safety, participation, access to services, mobility, belonging and aspirations, while remaining sufficiently open-ended to capture children's own priorities and perspectives.
Action 5. Recruit inclusively	Develop and implement a purposive sampling and recruitment plan for every participant group and location. The plan shall identify relevant vulnerability and exclusion factors in each selected location, including, as applicable, disability and accessibility, socioeconomic disadvantage, exclusion from formal education, minority-language status, displacement or mobility, gender and age, and geographic isolation. It shall explain how these factors will inform recruitment and specify practical measures to facilitate safe, accessible and meaningful participation.

Action	Required tasks
Action 6. Listen and document	Conduct all approved focus groups, interviews and postcard activities using child-friendly facilitation; complete session records, field notes and same-day debriefs; monitor sample balance and quality; report safeguarding concerns and methodological deviations immediately.
Action 7. Prepare and protect the evidence	Transcribe recordings verbatim; quality-check and anonymize transcripts; translate agreed materials into English; catalogue, code and digitize postcards while preserving visual and written content; maintain a traceable data inventory; transfer files securely in agreed formats.
Action 8. Analyse collaboratively	Participate in regular debriefs and UNICEF Innocenti-led qualitative analysis; apply the agreed codebook; contribute contextual interpretation, location summaries, cross-location matrices and checks of emerging findings; keep children's voices central while triangulating with adult and institutional perspectives.
Action 9. Discuss findings and shape action	After preliminary analysis, design and facilitate at least one discussion with young people and one with parents in each location; present findings accessibly; validate interpretation; prioritize issues; identify feasible actions, responsible actors, partnerships, enabling conditions and indicative next steps; document how feedback changes the analysis and recommendations.
Action 10. Report and communicate	Lead the drafting of the consolidated study report and integrate UNICEF Innocenti's methodological and analytical inputs. The report shall include, at minimum, an executive summary; methodology and limitations; participant and sample profile; ethical and safeguarding approach; findings organized by key theme; cross-location analysis; relevant differences among participant groups; conclusions and prioritized recommendations; participatory action proposals; and annexes containing the research tools and relevant methodological documentation. The indicative length, detailed structure and format of the report shall be agreed during the inception phase. Produce a short brief, three location factsheets, a presentation and a child-friendly feedback product; revise all products based on peer-review processes; and support agreed dissemination and policy dialogue.

8. Indicative qualitative study architecture

The final design will be agreed during inception following feasibility and ethical review. Bidders shall cost and demonstrate capacity to implement the following working scope in each location:

Participant group	Volume per location	Key parameters
Children aged 11-13	4 focus groups	In person; child-friendly territorial mapping and creative activities
Children aged 14-17	4 focus groups	In person; experiences, opportunities, barriers, relationships and aspirations
Young adults aged 18-21	8 individual interviews	In person preferred; online only if justified and approved. 4 currently living in the community; 4 having left the community.
Parents of children aged 0-5	5 individual interviews	Early childhood conditions, services, support and community opportunities
Key informants /community adults	10 individual interviews	Municipal actors, professionals, frontline service providers, daily contact actors and community perspectives
Children aged 6-10	At least 50 postcards	Drawings and/or short text; inclusive distribution and safe collection
Young people	At least 1 follow-up discussion	Validation, prioritization and action development
Parents	At least 1 follow-up discussion	Validation, prioritization and action development

Across three locations, the working scope equals 24 focus groups, up to 70 individual interviews, at least 150 postcards and at least 6 post-results discussions. These are planning figures and may be refined with written approval from UNICEF Georgia, based on UNICEF Innocenti advice and ethical and feasibility considerations.

9. Roles and coordination

Actor	Primary role
Research company	Operational lead in Georgia: contextual review, work planning, recruitment, logistics, translation/adaptation, piloting, fieldwork, transcription, coding, translation, data preparation, analysis contribution, participatory follow-up and consolidated reporting.
UNICEF Innocenti	Technical partner: methodological guidance; refinement of questions and qualitative design; technical development/review of tools; researcher training; analytical framework and coding guidance;

Actor	Primary role
	leadership in qualitative analysis; methodological quality assurance; technical inputs to findings and recommendations.
UNICEF Georgia	Commissioning and governance lead: alignment with the EU-funded project; oversight of both arrangements; coordination; institutional access; approval of sites, tools, sample and deliverables; policy relevance, dissemination and uptake.

The company will participate in regular coordination and milestone reviews with UNICEF Georgia and UNICEF Innocenti. Any material change to the approved locations, sample, tools, delivery mode, team or schedule requires prior written approval by UNICEF Georgia.

10. Deliverables, nine-month timeline and payment tranches

Payment tranche	Indicative period	Deliverables subject to UNICEF approval
Tranche 1: 30%	Months 1-2	1. Inception short report and nine-month workplan. The inception package should include a final overarching and subsidiary research questions; a matrix linking questions, participant groups and methods. 2. Context review and three draft location profiles. 3. Stakeholder map and site-selection note. 4. Draft sampling, recruitment, inclusion, safeguarding, data management and quality assurance plans.
Tranche 2: 40%	Months 3-6	5. Training and field-ready draft tools and translations for pilot. 6. Pilot completion report with approved revisions. 7. Completed qualitative fieldwork in three locations. 8. Quality-assured, anonymized transcript, translation, postcard and field-documentation package. 9. Sample completion and fieldwork quality report. 10. Contribution to debriefing, coding and preliminary analysis, including location summaries and analytical matrices.
Tranche 3: 30%	Months 7-9	11. Preliminary findings package and accessible materials for feedback. 12. At least six post-results discussions and participatory action package. 13. Draft and final consolidated study report, including revisions. 14. Executive summary, recommendations, three location briefs, presentation and child-friendly feedback product. 15. Final clean data/documentation archive and response-to-comments matrix.

Payment will be made after satisfactory completion and written acceptance of all deliverables listed under the relevant tranche. The detailed delivery dates will be finalized during inception without changing the overall nine-month duration. UNICEF may request revisions until deliverables meet the agreed quality standards.

11. Methodological and quality expectations

- Ensure coherence between research questions, participant groups, methods, field documentation and analysis.
- Use experienced qualitative researchers with demonstrated competence in research with children and adolescents.
- Conduct structured debriefs throughout fieldwork and respond promptly to emerging quality issues.
- Maintain comparability across the three locations while permitting justified contextual adaptation.
- Distinguish children's accounts, parent perspectives and institutional perspectives in reporting and avoid allowing adult voices to displace children's evidence.
- Document limitations, sample composition, deviations, analytical decisions and the basis for every recommendation.
- Use clear, respectful and non-stigmatizing language and produce decision-oriented, visually accessible deliverables in English and Georgian.

12. Child safeguarding, ethics and data protection

The research organization will plan and conduct the research in full compliance with the UNICEF Procedure on Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis², including seeking ethical review and obtaining approval for all sensitive evidence generation activities. The organization will be responsible for preparing all documentation required for ethical review, responding to comments from the ethics review mechanism and obtaining final ethical clearance prior to the commencement of data collection.

- Identify ethical issues and undertake formal ethical review. No data collection may begin before required clearance and UNICEF approval.
- Apply age-appropriate information, informed parental consent where applicable, child assent, voluntary participation and the right to withdraw.
- Establish an approved referral and incident-response pathway, train all field staff and immediately report safeguarding incidents or serious protocol deviations.
- Collect identifiable data only where strictly necessary and approved; separate contact information from research data; anonymize before analytical transfer.
- Develop and implement a data management plan defining authorized access, storage locations, encryption and secure transfer arrangements, retention periods, procedures and responsibilities for secure deletion or destruction, including after contract completion, and the separate treatment of consent forms, participant contact information and research data. Maintain an up-to-date data inventory and audit trail throughout the assignment.

² UNICEF Procedure on Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis. 2015

- Ensure accessible and safe participation, including reasonable accommodation, without tokenism, coercion or visible exclusion.
- Prevent deductive disclosure in location-level analysis and communication products.

13. Required organizational profile and team composition

- At least 7 years of institutional experience in qualitative social research, child/youth research, community studies, local governance or related fields.
- Demonstrated delivery of complex multi-site qualitative studies, including recruitment, fieldwork management, transcription, translation, analysis and reporting.
- Proven experience conducting ethical and participatory research with children and adolescents, including vulnerable or underserved groups.
- Strong knowledge of Georgia's municipal, social, education, youth and child-rights context and ability to work in both urban and rural settings.
- Demonstrated capacity to facilitate participatory validation and action-planning processes and produce high-quality analytical and communication products in Georgian and English.

Role	Minimum expectations
Team Leader / Principal Researcher	Advanced degree (at least Masters, or PhD) in social sciences or related field; at least 10 years of demonstrable experience in undertaking research with children; overall technical delivery, coordination, quality assurance and reporting.
Senior Qualitative Researcher(s)	Advanced degree (at least Masters, or PhD) in social sciences or related field. At least 5 years of demonstrable experience of qualitative research with children, and/or participatory research with children. Experience in design, supervision, coding, analysis and cross-location synthesis.
Child Participation and Safeguarding Specialist	Advanced degree (at least Masters, or PhD) in social sciences or related field. At least 5 years of demonstrable experience of child participatory research using child-friendly methods, ethics, safeguarding, consent/assent, inclusion and referral systems.
Moderators and Interviewers	Documented experience facilitating focus groups and interviews with children/adolescents and diverse adult groups.
Data, Transcription and Translation Lead	Secure qualitative data management, anonymization, transcription QA, Georgian-English translation and version control.
Local Field Coordinators	Recruitment, permissions, inclusive logistics, participant communication and contextual liaison in each site.

14. Budget and financial proposal

The budget for this assignment should include all costs related to the study: professional fees, all travel within Georgia, recruitment, safe venues, accessibility and reasonable accommodation, approved participant-related costs, printing and collection of postcards, recording, transcription, translation, data management, participatory discussions, reporting, communication products, and all other applicable costs.

The financial proposal must provide unit costs and quantities by method and location, personnel level of effort, travel and logistics, transcription and translation, follow-up discussions, deliverables and assumptions.

15. Suggested selection and evaluation criteria

Evaluation will use a 70:30 ratio between the technical and financial proposals. The technical proposal is worth 70 points. Only proposals achieving at least 70 per cent of the technical score, equivalent to 49 points, will proceed to financial evaluation. The financial proposal is worth 30 points and should include a detailed cost breakdown for all tasks and deliverables.

Criterion	Description	Points
Organizational experience	Comparable qualitative, child/youth, community and multi-site research experience; institutional capacity and references.	15
Proposed methodology	Demonstrated understanding of the assignment; quality and coherence of the proposed qualitative research design; approach to contextual review and site profiling; rationale for three-location comparison; appropriateness of proposed methods, sampling and analysis approach; feasibility, clarity and operationalization of the methodology.	15
Child participation, sampling, ethics and safeguarding	Meaningful and inclusive child participation; recruitment of underserved groups (Out-of-School and Vulnerable sampling); consent/assent; referral; accessibility; data protection and do-no-harm.	15
Team composition and level of effort	Qualifications and relevant experience of key experts; child-research competence; data/translation capacity; realistic allocation of inputs.	15
Workplan, coordination, quality and risk management	Realistic nine-month sequencing; coordination with UNICEF Georgia and UNICEF Innocenti; quality assurance; logistics; risk mitigation and timely delivery.	10
Technical proposal total		70

Financial score = $30 \times (\text{lowest evaluated price} / \text{price of the proposal being evaluated})$. The final score will be the sum of technical and financial scores, subject to UNICEF procurement rules and solicitation documents.

16. Application documents

- Organization profile and evidence of required experience.
- Technical proposal, methodology, sampling and recruitment approach, ethics and safeguarding plan, quality assurance, risks and nine-months workplan.
- Detailed financial proposal in local currency with unit costs and assumptions.
- Team structure, level of effort and CVs of proposed experts.
- Examples of at least two comparable assignments and client references.
- Organization's bank account information.

17. Expected final outputs

- A contextualized and documented qualitative methodology for *Listening to Children, Shaping Communities*.
- A complete, quality-assured qualitative evidence package covering three contrasting locations.
- Comparative findings on how community and local environment shape children's experiences, opportunities, development, participation and well-being.
- Prioritized recommendations for community, municipal and other relevant actors.
- Participatory action proposals developed with young people and parents in each location.
- A consolidated report, executive summary, three location briefs, presentation and child-friendly feedback product.

UNICEF will award the contract to the entity whose response meets the project goals effectively.

Funding Source: SC 240703 (EU CP/SP)

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