

Terms of Reference

Rapid assessment consultant

Background

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kosovo institutions began to restrict freedom of movement during March of 2020, which burdened the health system in the continuous provision of essential services. Routine immunization was among the essential health services that was affected immediately due to the lockdown measures introduced. The pressing need to shift health system resources to the fight against COVID-19 resulted in the temporary suspension of the regular immunization services during the period March-April 2020. In response to the situation, UNICEF Kosovo provided support to the Ministry of Health and the National Institute of Public Health to establish temporary immunization tents and continue the provision of regular vaccination as per the national calendar. Nevertheless, the temporary disruption of the immunization services, coupled with the fear of infection with SARS-CoV-2 virus and the overall low awareness of parents from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities on the importance of vaccination has increased the number of children with incomplete vaccination records among the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. The decline in coverage is of grave importance considering the already low immunization coverage rate of children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, standing at 38 percent based on the Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey data 2019-2020, compared to 73 percent for children in the general population.

With the aim to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the disruption of immunization services by supporting health facilities on provision of immunization services and support catch up vaccination for children, Balkan Sunflowers Kosovo (BSFK) is implementing a project funded by the UNICEF Office in Kosovo in 6 target municipalities, including Fushe Kosova, Ferizaj, Lipjan, Shtime, Obiliq, Gjilan, Gračanica, Podujeva, Peja, Klina, Istog, Prizren, and Mitrovica. The project also aims to raise awareness among the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities on the importance of adhering to the regular vaccination calendar. The implementation cycle of the project implemented by BSFK in 6 municipalities, and by Bethany Christian Services in Gjakove and Dragash municipalities included the phases of identification of children with missed immunization sessions through door-to-door field work using a designated questionnaire, capacity building of field volunteers as well as health professionals for organization and implementation of catch-up immunization sessions, and awareness raising and outreach activities. In addition, BSFK has developed a database with data on children who need to be immunized based on the fieldwork data gathered by volunteers. The database is shared and confirmed with immunization health professionals in the respective health facilities, which are assisted by BSFK in organizing the facility-based and field catch-up immunization sessions for children. Among several activities, the project also foresees the realization of one rapid assessment study for the catch-up immunization programme implemented in 15 target municipalities

Purpose

The purpose of this independent engagement is to conduct a monitoring assessment of benefits of the catch-up vaccination programme in 15 target municipalities (Fushe Kosova, Ferizaj, Lipjan, Shtime, Obiliq, Gjilan, Gračanica, Podujeva, Peja, Klina, Istog, Prizren, Mitrovica, Gjakove, and Dragash) in relation to targeted Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children. The monitoring assessment aims to provide an analysis of factors leading to disruption of regular immunization due to COVID-19 pandemic and the reach the children, particularly from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, through the catch-up vaccination campaign, as well as deliver recommendations to close immunization gaps among the most marginalized children. In this regard, the consultant shall collect, compile and analyze routine and supplementary immunization coverage and monitoring data from the project activities, including relevant information for the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on regular immunization programme; identify gaps at immunization service-provision level during COVID-19 pandemic; gather perceptions of health workers and of the target population on disruption of immunization services and benefits of catch-up vaccination; provide specific recommendations to the healthcare institutions and national institutions regarding programmatic considerations for implementing catch-up vaccinations as a continuous outreach component of routine immunization programme.

Detailed tasks include:

- Analysis and provision of data on scope of impact of COVID-19 pandemic on disruption of regular immunization programme for children in Kosovo;
- Analysis of the catch-up immunization campaign and its reach to children from Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian children in 15 targeted municipalities;
- Analysis of all the legal framework and national and local strategies regulating immunization services, as well as relevant project documentation including the project goal and reports and other relevant documentation produced during project implementation (i.e. database for identification of children with incomplete vaccination records, questionnaires, review of communication with health professionals, etc.)
- Interviews with project management and implementation staff and volunteers, immunization professionals at health facilities in 15 target municipalities and at the National Institute of Public Health, parents of children reached through catch-up vaccination sessions, and other identified stakeholders;
- Gathering and analysis of perceptions of immunization health professionals providing immunization services during COVID-19 and their understanding of implications of catch-up vaccination during the outbreak, and the recovery phase;
- Identification of key gaps and challenges to perform catch-up vaccination session as a component of the ongoing and disrupted routine vaccination programme.
- Provision of specific recommendations for implementing catch-up vaccinations as a continuous outreach component of routine immunization programme.
- Ensuring the project promotes gender equality, with an emphasis on gender disaggregation, gender disparity identification and gender mainstreaming.

- Submission of draft and final monitoring assessment report with key findings, conclusions and recommendations.

METHODOLOGY

This rapid assessment aim to collect data and generate information from all the municipalities involved in the project through desk review, field visits and interviews. The main reason for assessment is to evaluate the project against its objectives as it develops and progresses. The following means and tools should be used to evaluate the project:

I. Desk Research

- Project proposal
- Logical Framework
- Progress Reports
- Other project documents
- Governmental policy documents and reports of other international and national organisations
- Internet search

II. Interviews

- Project management, field staff
- Volunteers
- Government representatives
- Health institutions
- Community members
- Donors

Upon selection, the consultant shall review and finalize the proposed methodology in collaboration with BSFK and in accordance with UNICEF approval. A validation workshop shall be organized in order to confirm and collect involved stakeholders' feedback upon drafting of the stocktaking findings and recommendations.

All data collection and fieldwork should be conducted in adherence to COVID-19 prevention and protection measures, including application of virtual interviews and focus group discussions.

Qualifications of the consultant:

- At least 3 years of proven experience in monitoring and evaluation or research projects in the area of public health
- Knowledge of the public health system and best practices at international level as well as Kosovo context, including engagements involving national and local health sector policies/ strategies;
- Knowledge related to the actual Kosovo context pertaining to immunization of children of all communities in Kosovo;
- A good understanding of key challenges that Kosovo minority groups face with regards to regular access to essential health and immunization services;
- Ability to produce well-written reports, in a plain and approachable text,

- demonstrating excellent analytical and communication skills;
- Excellent command of English (written/spoken) and Albanian language;
- Knowledge of Serbian language will be an asset;
- Experience with the United Nations system, particularly UNICEF, would be an asset;
- Applicants must be willing and able to travel to project locations.

The assignment is foreseen to start on 10 March 2021 and be completed by 31 March 2021.

Candidates must submit, in English, the following documents:

- Detailed Curriculum Vitae;
- A financial offer that should list itemized details of costs associated with the evaluation and should express all proposed costs in Euro.
- A technical offer that will notably present a preliminary draft of the evaluation design including the methodology/tools to be used; a proposed implementation plan (including number of days per main activity); an outline of the consultant's recent experience on a similar undertaking.

Required documents have to be submitted via email: applications@balkansunflowers.org

The deadline for the submission of the documents is 8 March 2021, 14:00.