

## Terms of Reference

<i>Title:</i>	<i>National Micronutrient Survey in Tajikistan 2024</i>
<i>Consultancy Mode:</i>	<i>National</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>International</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Type of Contract:</i>	<i>Consultant</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Individual Contractor</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Institutional</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Mode of Selection:</i>	<i>Competitive</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Single Source</i> <input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Location</i>	<i>Dushanbe, Tajikistan</i>
<i>Duration of Contract:</i>	<i>16 months (April 2024 – July 2025)</i>

### 1. Background

Tajikistan is grappling with the triple burden of malnutrition. Approximately one in five (18 per cent) children under five years are stunted, while 6 per cent of them are wasted.<sup>1</sup> More than one in two children under five years are identified with iron deficiency with 42 per cent of them anaemic, while over one in three of them are vitamin A deficient.<sup>2</sup> Women of reproductive age (15-49 years) face high rates of anaemia (41 per cent) and vitamin A deficiency (47 per cent), while 7 per cent and 37 per cent of them are thin and overweight/obese, respectively.<sup>3</sup> Importantly, while the current prevalence of overweight among children under five is low (3 per cent), young children who are stunted or wasted and gain weight rapidly in the first two years are more likely to become obese and suffer from non-communicable diseases later in life.

Poor diets and care practices are major determinants of malnutrition. Only 36 per cent of mothers in Tajikistan breastfeed their children exclusively for the first six months. Almost half of mothers start giving their children complementary food too early between four and six months. Only 9 per cent of young children receive minimum acceptable diets in terms of food diversity and meal frequency.<sup>4</sup> Lack of knowledge and awareness about age-appropriate, adequate, diverse and nutritious diets result in poor infant and young child feeding practices and dietary patterns.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, suboptimal management of childhood illnesses, lack of quality, equitable nutrition services and counselling, inadequate access to safe and clean water, and poor hygiene and sanitation practices collectively further impede improvements to nutrition outcomes for children.

There is a dearth of data and information about the nutritional status of vulnerable population groups and their practices that affect their nutrition in Tajikistan. The latest nationally representative data on the nutritional and micronutrient status of children under five years and women of reproductive age and their feeding/eating and other relevant practices come from the Tajikistan Demographic and Health Survey in 2017 and the National Nutrition Survey in Tajikistan in 2016. The most recent Demographic and Health Survey was conducted in 2023 (data collection completed and analysis results will be available late 2024/early 2025). While the target population groups of past large-scale household surveys in Tajikistan, including the Demographic and Health Survey in 2023 have mostly been children under five years and women of reproductive age (15-29 years), there is no nationally representative data on the nutritional and micronutrient status of school-age children (5-9 years) and young adolescents (10-14 years) and their nutrition-related practices. Additionally, anaemia has been a persistent challenge in Tajikistan without solid evidence of improvement over the years. It is well known that the aetiology of anaemia can be attributed to nutritional or non-nutritional factors, and iron deficiency explains only

<sup>1</sup> Tajikistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017.

<sup>2</sup> National Nutrition Survey in Tajikistan 2016.

<sup>3</sup> National Nutrition Survey in Tajikistan 2016 and Tajikistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Tajikistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Formative research on infant and young child feeding 2016.

about half of anaemia cases. While supplementation with supplements containing iron has been promoted in Tajikistan for young children and pregnant and lactating women in Tajikistan to prevent anaemia, no analysis has been conducted to understand the risk factors of anaemia in the country.

Against this backdrop, UNICEF is planning to support the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of the Republic of Tajikistan to conduct a national micronutrient survey to determine the nutritional and micronutrient status of girl and boy children 0-14 years, assess their eating, feeding and childcare practices and identify the risk factors of anaemia in Tajikistan. This will be a nationally owned survey, and the updated official data from the survey will fill the identified knowledge gaps and guide evidence-based decision-making and programme design to improve the nutritional status of children 0-14 years. The survey results will be disseminated widely to the national and international stakeholders and audiences and will be available publicly through UNICEF and others platforms. Thus, UNICEF is seeking technical assistance from an international institution to support the survey.

## 2. Purpose

The primary purpose of the survey is as follows:

- Assess the nutritional and micronutrient status of children between 0-14 years old in Tajikistan through a nationally and regionally representative survey.

The specific objectives of the survey include the following:

- Fill the knowledge gaps in nutrition through collection of anthropometric data from children between 0-14 years to determine the prevalence of stunting, wasting/thinness and overweight and obesity;
- Collect information on infant and young child feeding, childcare practices, eating and physical activity patterns, as well as other general socioeconomic characteristics; and,
- Determine the nutritional and non-nutritional risk factors of anaemia among children 0-14 years through serum analysis of at minimum hemoglobin, iron status (ferritin and serum transferrin receptor), vitamins A, folate, vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, inflammation (c-reactive protein), thalassemia, and intestinal worm infestation.

## 3. Scope of work (Description of the assignment)

The proposed consultancy aims to assist the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population in conducting a national micronutrient survey in 2024, and the selected international institution is expected to provide technical assistance in managing the whole survey steps and processes in general and provide the following technical assistance in particular:

- Development of the survey protocol with clear methodologies, including plan for data collection and analysis, data collection instruments and survey manuals, and the entire work plan with timeframe in consultations with UNICEF, MoHSPP and other partners;
- Development of a list of equipment and supplies required for the survey based on the finally agreed indicators of interest and in-country laboratory capacity;
- Training of a survey team, who will be engaged in data collection, and supervision guidance of pre-test and overall data collection and laboratory analysis of serum samples;
- Data analysis and report writing; and,
- Development of manuscripts for knowledge dissemination beyond the national stakeholders.

The target groups for this survey include the following:

- 1) Young children between 0-4.9 years
- 2) School-age children between 5-9.9 years
- 3) Young adolescents between 10-14.9 years

It should be noted that the final specific scope and objectives of the survey will be determined in consultation between the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population, UNICEF and the selected international institution based on required sample sizes and available budget. Moreover, a local research institute (most likely an entity of the substructure of the Ministry of Health) will be engaged for data collection, and the serum sample analysis will be done by the National Reference Laboratory of the Republic of Tajikistan. The National Reference Laboratory is currently enrolled in the CDC's Performance Verification Program for serum micronutrients.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. Specific objectives:

The contracted international institution will be responsible for the tasks as stipulated below:

1. Facilitate the implementation of all preparatory activities and development of necessary documents for conducting a survey. This will include the development of the survey protocol with sample size, sampling framework and other sampling procedures and the survey methodology, the development of questionnaires and other data collection instruments and the survey manuals, plans for the entire survey management, creating a list of equipment and supplies, and the entire work plan with timeframe. Before finalization, pilot-testing of the data collection instruments will be done.
2. Assist a local research institute in selection of interviewers and supervisors. Prepare and facilitate the training of interviewers and supervisors on data collection. Provide guidance to the National Reference Lab on the collection of blood in the field and on the serum micronutrient analysis.
3. Supervise data collection, data entry and cleaning, biological sample collection and analyses for quality assurance. Share complete datasets with UNICEF.
4. Conduct data analysis, synthesis of the results, and report writing with full engagement of UNICEF based on the scope, purpose and objectives of the survey agreed in the beginning.
5. Share a draft with UNICEF for review and feedback. Supplemental analysis based on feedback from UNICEF and MoHSPP should be conducted and final report should be produced incorporating all the comments and feedback.
6. Serve as a resource person during the survey launch.

Throughout the process, the selected international institution will work closely with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population and the local research institute with a view to building their institutional capacity to enable the independent undertaking of a similar survey in future.

For quality assurance and ensuring the full national ownership of the study process and results, a steering committee composed of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population officials/experts, laboratory managers and UNICEF staff in charge of nutrition and monitoring and evaluation will be established to provide oversight of the study, validate the findings and recommendations, and disseminate them to wider stakeholders.

#### 5. Deliverables and payment schedule

№	Deliverables	Deadline	Payment Schedule
	Inception Report elaborating refined methodology, approach detailed timeline for consultations, data collection, analysis methods and presentation and dissemination plans.		40%

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/dls/nbb\\_micronutrient\\_performance.html](https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/dls/nbb_micronutrient_performance.html)

1	Development and finalization of survey questionnaires and instruments pre-tested and a list of equipment and supplies required for the survey	31 July 2024	
2	Development of a survey protocol for submission to the ethics approval committee	31 July 2024	
3	Organization of training of the survey team (agenda, training materials, training manual, field work manual, laboratory manual, and actual facilitation)	16 September - 27 September 2024	
4	Provision of supervision and guidance during field data collection	30 September - 15 November 2024	
5	Data management and analysis (including supervision and guidance for data entry and laboratory analysis)	18 November 2024 - 31 January 2025	
6	Writing and submission of a set of reports in final versions: 1. A high-level summary report with easy-to-read language 2. A full technical report 3. PowerPoint presentation deck with key findings and recommendations	29 March 2025	40%
7	Serving as a resource person during a validation workshop and a survey launch event	30 May 2025	
8	Submission of all datasets, cleaned, in electronic format	29 March 2025	
9	Submission of two manuscripts to peer reviewed international journals (specific topics of the manuscripts to be determined later in consultation with UNICEF and government)	30 June 2025	20%

UNICEF reserves the right to withhold all or a portion of payment if performance is unsatisfactory, if work/output is incomplete, not delivered, or for failure to meet deadlines.

## 6. Methodology

The 2024 national micronutrient survey will be a cross-sectional survey using a nationally-representative sample of children 0-14 years. Detailed methodology, including sample size and sampling framework and sampling procedure, should be proposed by the selected institution and will be agreed upon in consultation with UNICEF, the local research institute and the National Reference Laboratory, taking into consideration the 2020 census data, key indicator(s) of interest, precision and available budget. Briefly, an appropriate sampling procedure (e.g. a two-stage sampling) will be used

to select households for interview and sample collection based on probability proportional to the size of the clusters. Data will be collected from all five geographical areas – Khatlon Oblast, Rayons of Republic Subordination, Sughd Oblast, Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, and Dushanbe. Respondents will be interviewed on infant and young child feeding practices (based on global guidance) and dietary diversity among women for school-age children and young adolescents (based on global guidance), and anthropometry (weight and height/length) will be measured for the target population groups. Venous blood specimens will be collected for further analysis in Dushanbe for selected biomarkers by the National Reference Laboratory. Biomarker selection will be done in close consultation with relevant stakeholders, but the selected candidate should ensure to address the purpose/objectives of the survey when proposing biomarkers selection.

## 7. Ethical considerations

The review will be guided by UNEG Ethical Guidelines<sup>7</sup> and UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards<sup>8</sup>. Should children be involved in the data collection or otherwise, ethical clearance should be sought by the review team. The common guiding principles will be used to ensure ethical safety during the review process:

- Privacy and confidentiality
- Informed consent
- Harm and benefits
- Conflict of interest

The reviewers will explain to the participants the purpose and use of the review; they will also make it explicitly clear to the participants that their participation is voluntary, and they can withdraw at any moment. Throughout the process, the reviewers should be sensitive to beliefs, manners and customs and act with integrity and honesty in their relationships with all stakeholders.

## 8. Management and supervision

The selected international institution will report to Nutrition Specialist/Nutrition Officer of UNICEF Tajikistan, under the overall supervision of Chief of Health and Nutrition of UNICEF Tajikistan. The international institution should work collaboratively and communicate clearly primarily with UNICEF and with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and the local research institute as necessary. This includes:

- Working in a collaborative, respectful, and sensitive manner with survey participants;
- Maintaining clear, ongoing communication with UNICEF team throughout the survey;
- Participating in regular team meetings with the key stakeholders.

The performance evaluation shall be completed based on the timely submission of the deliverables, accuracy and quality of the deliverables.

## 9. Reporting requirements

The consultant should provide following list of documents:

- Survey protocol along with ethical consideration, survey methodology, sampling framework and sample size and other key aspects of the survey;
- Questionnaire modules for each topic of interview;
- Training agenda and training, fieldwork and laboratory manuals;

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/102>

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF PROCEDURE FOR ETHICAL STANDARDS IN RESEARCH, EVALUATION, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS, April 2015

- All datasets, cleaned, in electronic format;
- A summary report on the key findings of the survey;
- A full technical report of the survey;
- PowerPoint presentation deck with key findings and recommendations for a validation workshop and a dissemination/launching event;
- Manuscripts targeted for international peer-reviewed journals.

## **10. Qualification requirements/specialised knowledge/experience required to complete the task**

All the interested international institutions with prior experience in conducting a large-scale household nutrition survey, particularly micronutrient status survey, are invited to submit technical and financial proposals.

- Extensive experience (at least 8 years) in the administration of large nutrition related household surveys;
- The team members should be fluent in spoken and written English. Knowledge of Russian/Tajik will be an added advantage;
- Excellent reporting and presentation skills. Must be familiar with Statistical Packages and all relevant computer applications in general;
- Have core staff and affiliates with appropriate educational and professional qualifications, such as in the field of nutrition, epidemiology, public health, hematology, statistics, and other related fields;
- Have a system and procedures for safeguarding including data protection;
- Have a mechanism to ensure ethical practice and code of conduct, particularly in relation to surveys requiring direct contact with target populations.

## **11. Qualification requirements/specialised knowledge/experience of the Team Leader required to complete the task**

The Team Leader will provide technical leadership on the survey design, methodology, and analysis, as well as overall management of the survey deliverables including the preparation of the inception report, draft and final reports. He/she will also be responsible for liaising with UNICEF.

Team Leader should possess

- Hold at least a post-graduate degree in Public Health, Nutrition, Food Science and other relevant fields;
- Minimum of 8 years of experience in designing and implementing quantitative large-scale surveys, monitoring and evaluation, and impact assessments, preferably in the field of public health and nutrition;
- -At least 5 years of proven experience in Laboratory research on Micro-nutrient deficiencies;
- Proven experience in leading research teams for similar work for at least 5 years;
- Experience writing and producing high-level reports and presentations for international donors and governments;
- Knowledge of UNICEF 's financial and technical reporting requirements;
- Excellent oral and written communication skills in English, knowledge of Tajik or Russian is an asset;

## **12. Qualification requirements/specialised knowledge/experience of the key Team members required to complete the task**

The Team should have the following key team members: Survey Coordinator, Data Coordinator, Laboratory Coordinator, Field work support team coordinator, who will provide technical leadership on the survey implementation, supervision, quality control and ensuring overall success of the activity. He/she will also be responsible for liaising with UNICEF and Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population at the field level.

- Hold at preferably a post-graduate degree in nutrition, epidemiology, public health, hematology, statistics, and other related fields;
- Minimum of 5 years of experience in implementing quantitative large-scale surveys, monitoring and evaluation, and impact assessments, preferably in the field of public health and nutrition;
- At least 5 years of proven experience in Laboratory research on Micro-nutrient deficiencies;
- At least 5 years of proven experience in leading local research teams for similar work;
- At least 5 years of experience in training local field teams on data and bio sample collection, laboratory testing;
- Knowledge of UNICEF 's financial and technical reporting requirements;
- Excellent oral and written communication skills in English, knowledge of Tajik or Russian is an asset;

#### Request for submission

- A technical proposal with proposed methodology/approach to managing the project, showing understanding of tasks and work plan (no price information should be contained in the technical proposal);
- A copy of the organization profile;
- The proposed technical team curriculum vitae (CV);
- A sample of previous work undertaken in the last four years;
- Financial proposal (separate envelope).

### 13. Evaluation process and methods

The evaluation methodology is based on a highest combined score (based on the 70% technical offer and 30% price weight distribution).

Each interested institution is requested to submit in a proposed approach for such assignment along with a copy of the organization profile, the proposed technical team curriculum vitae, expected budget as well as a sample of previous work undertaken in the last four years.

After the opening, each proposal will be assessed first on its technical merits and subsequently on its financial value price. The proposal with the best overall value, composed of technical merit and price, will be recommended for approval. UNICEF will set up an evaluation panel composed of technical and procurement staff from UNICEF, and their conclusions will be forwarded to the internal UNICEF Contracts Review Committee or other relevant approving authority. The evaluation panel will first evaluate each response for compliance with the requirements of this Terms of Reference. Responses deemed not to meet all of the mandatory requirements will be considered non-compliant and rejected at this stage without further consideration. Failure to comply with any of the terms and conditions contained in these Terms of Reference, including provision of all required information, may result in a response or proposal being disqualified from further consideration.

The overall weighting between technical and price evaluation will be based on the predefined criteria. The technical component will account for 70% of the total points allocated and the financial component (commercial evaluation) will account for 30% of the total points allocated.

#### Technical evaluation:

The proposals will be evaluated against the following technical criteria:

Item	Technical Criteria/Qualifications	Max. Points
1	Overall Response	5
1.1	Completeness of the proposal and responsiveness to the ToR (5 pts)	

2	Capability and Key Personnel	<b>30</b>
2.1	Relevant experience of the institution and Team leader should have at least 8 years of extensive experience in designing and administering large-scale nutrition surveys <b>(5 pts)</b>	
2.2	Minimum qualification of key experts mentioned in the team composition (5 pts)	
2.3	Two samples of previous relevant work completed by the firm in the last four years. Must be familiar with Statistical Package and all relevant computer applications in general <b>(10 pts)</b>	
2.4	The proposed team members should have appropriate educational and professional qualifications, such as in the field of nutrition, epidemiology, public health, hematology, statistics, and other related fields <b>(10 pts)</b>	
3	Proposed Methodology and Approach	<b>35</b>
3.1	Quality and adequacy of the proposed methodology, detailed timeline, consultations, data collection, analysis methods and presentation and dissemination plans. The proposal should detail the proposed approaches based on the TOR requirements <b>(25 pts)</b>	
3.2	Assessment of key considerations relevant to the research, quality assurance mechanism of the institution, ethical concerns, potential risks and threats, and proposed mitigation plans <b>(10 pts)</b>	
	Total Technical Score	<b>70</b>

Only Proposers obtaining a minimum of 59 points in Technical Criteria evaluation will be considered for the Financial Evaluation.

**Commercial evaluation:**

The price/cost of each of the technically compliant proposals shall be considered only after evaluation of the above technical criteria. A maximum 30 point assigned to the financial proposal will be allocated to the lowest financial proposal. All other price proposals will receive scores in inverse proportion according to the following formula:

Score for price proposal A = (Maximum score for price proposal \* Price of lowest priced proposal)/Price of proposal A.

As a result of the financial evaluation, the points of each proposal will be taken into further consideration in the final evaluation.

The bidders should ensure that all pricing information is provided in accordance with the following:

- a) The currency of the proposal shall be in USD for international companies and invoicing must be in the same currency.
- b) All prices/rates quoted must be exclusive of all taxes as UNICEF is a tax-exempt organization.

**REQUEST FOR INFORMATION**

Any request for information or question should be forwarded to [dushanbe@unicef.org](mailto:dushanbe@unicef.org)