

Terms of Reference for a study of Childhoods work to strengthen protection for children with disabilities

1. Background and rationale

Child sexual abuse and exploitation is a global problem affecting the lives of millions of children. Even though no child is immune against potential child sexual abuse and violence, there are some groups of children that are at higher risk.

Children with disabilities is a diverse group, but also an invisible group too easy to find for the perpetrators who seek out children who have extra difficulty understanding, defending themselves and expressing what has happened to them. Children with disabilities are twice as likely to be sexually abused as other children. For children with intellectual disabilities or neurodisabilities, the risk is even higher. Few report actual or suspected sexual abuse incidents. Testimonies rarely lead to convictions. Silence and ignorance of the problem mean that perpetrators are less likely to be detected and punished, a situation they deliberately use. Despite this, this is a group that is often forgotten in the fight against sexual abuse. Today, there are no systematic efforts to protect this group from sexual abuse.

There are several reasons why children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable – they live more isolated lives than other children, are often excluded, and they are more dependent on adults and often alone with them for longer periods of time. They are often seen as asexual and as such conversations about relationships, sex and consent are absent, which results in them not understanding if they have been harmed or they themselves unintentional harm other children. They can also be more outgoing and take more risks, which can increase the risk of being abused.

Sexual abuse combined with a flawed system can feel overwhelming for already overburdened families of a child with disability. Today, there is a lack of support for families to cope with everyday life, and they must fight for the child's basic rights such as health and education. Family members can also be perpetrators. Guilt and shame take over the ability to seek help. There is concern among families that the people and activities which their child engages with or participates in are not safe. Among adults who work closely with children with disabilities, there is great frustration over the lack of resources and concrete tools such as training, action plans and safety procedures. This means that many professionals and volunteers do not know how to respond to suspected and actual sexual abuse with the right support, information, protection and secure evidence in case of crime. There are fantastic enthusiasts and professionals and

volunteers who have the skills and carry out great initiatives, but unfortunately these initiatives do not reach the masses.

Ignorance and structural passivity contribute to too little investment in systematic prevention and response to abuse. The disability rights community is not able to push the issue. The children's rights community faces major challenges in including and adapting interventions for children with disabilities.

Childhood has for several years initiated and funded initiatives to strengthen protection and reduce the risk of sexual abuse among children with disabilities. Our assessment is that the efforts we have made together in recent years are pioneering work that may be of interest for the wider field. The time is now ripe to analyse and document the challenges and lessons learned from these projects.

An overall strategy has been to get more disability rights organizations to integrate a protection perspective in their activities, and to increase knowledge of the special needs and risks of children with disabilities among child rights organizations and make them more inclusive. The projects have in various ways enabled the integration of child protection and disability perspectives and closer cooperation between disability rights organizations and child rights organizations and authorities.

The projects relevant for this study are implemented in the following countries: Cambodia, Sweden, Thailand and Ukraine. See list of projects in appendix 1.

Even though the projects are implemented in different parts of the world, where knowledge of disability rights and interventions for children with disabilities differ significantly, there seem to be similar challenges shared in all geographies. For example, stigma, shame and discrimination is constantly present for children with disabilities and their families, communication about sex, consent and sexual abuse is for many people awkward and uncomfortable to talk about, and cultural beliefs and religions further adds to this.

Communication with children with disabilities often requires adaptation and can be costly. There is a resistance from disability organizations to also include protection aspects they feel they need to focus on ensuring livelihood for caregivers, medical and rehabilitation assistance, education; no time or energy to also address abuse, exploitation, neglect and violence.

Child rights organizations do not consider themselves as having the competence to work with children with disabilities and their families and actively refer them to disability organizations without even trying. Both parties struggle with long term

funding for their interventions. The strategies chosen by our project partners to overcome these obstacles are relevant to document and disseminate further.

2. Specific Objectives of the Study and Questions

The study should focus on the following overarching research questions:

- Have the Childhood-funded projects increased protection for children with disabilities? If so, in what way?
- Are there lessons learned from collaborations between disability- sector and the child protection sector that other could benefit from? In what way?
- Have the projects contributed to potential learnings in terms of new insights and understanding of special vulnerabilities and protection needs to among children with disabilities as well as opportunities and solutions to address them.
- Are there specific gaps or barriers particularly noticed or experienced in the projects?

Other questions to be explored are the following.

- What changes have the projects resulted in for children?
- What are the experiences and feedback from the children, caregivers, staff involved in the interventions, authorities? How is that feedback gathered in the projects?
- Have the collaborative projects led to changes within the organizations (e.g. new perspectives, knowledge, approaches, use of language about sexual abuse of children, on disability)
- To what extent have the projects openly addressed the risks of child sexual abuse?
- Have concrete preventive activities taken place? Which ones?
- Are there challenges encountered with addressing child sexual abuse within the group? (Challenges within the team, within the partnership, with external stakeholders such as government authorities, other civil society organizations, beneficiaries, caregivers?)
 - o If so, are there good examples of strategies on how to overcome those challenges?
- Recommendations for this work moving forward. Feedback for improvement.

The analysis should be presented in the context the different projects operate in and include relevant observations regarding how the external context acts as a barrier or enabler, and how the projects adapt or influence the external context.

The results from the study will be used to inform future grant-making and communication from World Childhood Foundation. We also aim to present the findings to other international foundations and partners with the purpose of increasing the number of stakeholders integrating a child protection and disability-rights perspective in their work. The ambition is that the study will provide a valuable contribution to global learnings about how to strengthen the inclusion of children with disabilities in child protection systems and how to strengthen child protection perspectives within disability rights organizations.

3. Scope and methodology

The study should document and analyse experiences from projects mentioned in appendix 1.

Suitable approach and methodology are to be proposed as part of the presented tender. We anticipate a combination of desk-research (project proposals, reports and other documentation related to the projects) complemented by information gathered in surveys, interviews, and case studies among other potential participatory methodologies.

The mission can be carried out remotely. Interviews and case studies may be carried out by local teams. We do not anticipate international travel as part of the budget.

4. Required Expertise and Qualifications

Desired profile of the study team or individual

- a relevant academic degree and/or practical experience that includes qualitative interviews and quantitative analysis
- experience of, and understanding for, working in a development context and/or experience of, and understanding for, working with children with disabilities
- a good understanding of global child protection and child safeguarding
- a good ability to express yourself in writing to clearly and structurally document the results of the assignment.

5. Expected Deliverables and Duration of the Work

The final report should be submitted not later than May 15, 2025

The report should be written in English

An inception report with a detailed methodology and implementation plan should be submitted within two weeks after the agreement is signed.

The final report should not exceed 30 pages, including an executive summary

The report should include an overarching analysis of the findings in relation to the research questions, illustrated by quotations and case studies from the project partners. It should also include a brief context of how working with disability rights differs in the various countries and how that affects the possibility to work with the protection of children with disabilities. The report should include a list of recommendations and lessons learned.

6. Budget

The budget should cover costs for team member salaries, expenses and per diem as well as travel expenses, costs for translators as well as data processing. The budget does not include costs for printing or dissemination of the final report. The bids should be submitted in USD or SEK.

Payment can be made in 2-3 tranches with the final tranche being submitted after the full report is delivered.

7. Exclusivity and rights

World Childhood Foundation shall retain ownership of the report and related material and shall be free to determine how the material is presented and communicated after completion of the assignment. Any changes to the design of the assignment or report must be approved by Childhood. During the course of the assignment, any findings and conclusions shall not be shared with stakeholders outside of Childhood.

8. The proposal should include the following:

The study will be made in close collaboration with Childhood with clear milestones for reporting, feedback and final approval- to be developed in partnership with the consultant.

Tenders must be received no later than 15 November 2024. Tenders will be considered on a rolling basis.

The application must contain:

- A brief description of the applicant and why you are interested in this project.
- Overall approach and project plan for the assignment including
 - Proposed methodology and analytical approach for the assignment.
 - Estimated total time for the mission, with key phases and milestones
 - Cost proposal with specified fee and possible expenses for the assignment, excluding VAT.
- 2 work samples of similar assignments carried out with the associated description of the assignment.

- 2 references with contact information

Applications and questions about the assignment can be sent by e-mail to: AK Fagerlund ak.fagerlund@childhood.org World Childhood Foundation

APPENDIX 1: Childhood-funded projects enhancing protection for children with disabilities

Cambodia

Develop prevention, protection and rehabilitation services for children with disabilities with Damnok Toek

- Grant period: 5/6 years (ongoing)
- Childhood investment: 268 863 USD
- Project Objective: Develop a model of family-like alternative care arrangements, outreach services and day-care activities to enhance the development, protection and wellbeing of children and avoid abandonment and placement into lifelong residential care.

Protecting and raising the voice of children with communication disabilities, Organisation to Improve Communication and swallowing therapy services in Cambodia

- Grant period: 2/3 years (ongoing)
- Childhood investment: 130 000 USD
- Project objective: Equip the Cambodian child protection sector with knowledge and resources to competently include children with communication difficulties or non-verbal communicators within their reporting and responding systems (and protect these children from abuse).

GROW 2021–22, Children In Families

- Grant period: 6/6 years (concluded)
- Childhood investment: 339 829 USD
- Project objective: Increase the number of vulnerable children in loving families while in the medium term aiming to strengthen the standard of care to children and families, including the ABLE program for children with disabilities.

Special Education Child Protection, Epic Arts Cambodia

- Grant period: 6/6 years (concluded)
- Childhood investment: 225 959 USD
- Project objective: Strengthen the capacity of Epic Arts Cambodia to prevent and respond to child protection concerns and violations against children with disabilities and establish and sustain a child protection network in Kampot.

Strengthening Child Protection for Children with Disabilities, Safe Haven

- Grant period: 6/6 years (concluded)
- Childhood investment: 356 875 USD

- Project objective: Support families and professionals, and strengthen systems in Cambodia to enhance the protection, care, rehabilitation, development, participation and wellbeing of children with disabilities.

South Africa

Waves for Change + Sharing and scaling Childfriendly mental health, Waves for Change

- Grant period: 5/5 years (concluded) + 4/6 years (ongoing)
- Childhood investment: 348 745 USD
- Project objective: Improve the mental and emotional well-being of 200 young people living in impoverished and violent communities through after-school Surf Therapy programmes, including pioneering specialised surf & autism projects and scale up of the Surf Therapy Program through other actors.

Thailand

Family strengthening for disabled children and their families, Christian Care Foundation for Children with Disabilities

- Grant period: 2/6 years (ongoing)
- Childhood investment: 97 200 USD
- Project objective: Overall improvement of care and support children with disabilities and the prevention of placement into institutional care in four provinces in central Thailand.

Ukraine

Prevention of sexual abuse among children with intellectual disabilities in Odessa + Child Protection in Emergencies + Support for children with disabilities and mental illness during the war in Ukraine, Healthy Society

- Grant period: 2/6 years (ongoing)
- Childhood investment: 215 865 USD
- Project objective: Prevent sexual abuse of children with intellectual disabilities and ensure protective measures and improved wellbeing of children with disabilities and their families affected by the war in Ukraine.