



ACERWC
African Committee of Experts on
the Rights and Welfare of the Child

Comité Africain d'Experts sur les
Droits et le Bien-être de l'Enfant
Comitê Africano dos Direitos e
Bem-Estar da Crianças
اللجنة الأفريقية المعنية بحقوق الطفل ورفاهه



TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR)

CONSULTANCY FOR DEVELOPMENT OF GUIDELINES ON SAFE RETURN TO SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

RE-ADVERTISEMENT

November 2021

1. Background and Rationale

COVID-19 pandemic has had a massive impact on children's education globally as well as in Africa. According to a 2021 UNICEF report¹, in the period between March 11, 2020 and February 2, 2021, schools have been fully closed for an average of 95 instruction days globally, which represents approximately half the time intended for classroom instruction. The same report finds out that schools for more than 168 million children globally have been closed for almost a full year. While the majority of countries have fully opened schools (53 per cent) and almost a quarter of the world's countries have partially opened schools, 196 million students in 27 countries (13 per cent globally) have schools that were fully closed as of February 2, 2021. In Africa, the data is concerning with 16 per cent of countries in Eastern and Southern Africa and 13 percent of countries in West and Central Africa with full school closures as of February 2021.

COVID-19 pandemic led to nationwide closure of schools across all African countries, varying for periods between 3 weeks to indefinitely. Ethiopia (151) and Uganda (149) are among the top 20 countries with the highest number of days of full school closures (March 2020 – February 2021)². This prolonged school closure resulted in a large number of children to be out of school. Lack of appropriate alternative education system as well as lack of internet services in most African countries exacerbated the problem.

The impact of closure of schools is daunting on children as it goes beyond interruption of classes. With closure of schools the right to adequate food might be compromised, in countries where school feeding programs are available. The Continent also witnessed that closure of schools exposed children to sexual violence, abuse, domestic work and child labor, increased teenage pregnancies, child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). In addition, the digital learning platform which has been adopted by many countries following the outbreak of the pandemic exposes children to online sexual exploitation and abuse. School closures also risk reversing the trend toward higher school participation and better learning outcomes observed over the past two decades in the continent, and they can exacerbate already significant challenges, like the disengagement of children and youth from education³. The closure of schools also affected the psychosocial wellbeing of children and their right to play and interact with their peers. Children in vulnerable situations including children with disabilities, children in rural areas, and children living in economically disadvantaged environment were disproportionately affected by the restrictive measures undertaken on Education with a view to contain the transmission of the Covid-19.

¹ COVID-19 and School closures one year of education disruption <https://data.unicef.org/resources/one-year-of-covid-19-and-school-closures/>

² COVID-19 and School closures one year of education disruption

³ A snapshot of educational challenges and opportunities for recovery in Africa https://fr.unesco.org/sites/default/files/20210527a_snapshot.pdf

In recognition of the consequences of COVID-19 on the rights and welfare of children in Africa, and noting the unprecedented nature of the pandemic and the measures taken to curb its spread, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) has among other things, developed a guiding note for African Union Member States on measures to be taken to ensure respect for children's rights during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ACERWC in particular called upon Member States of the African Union, as the principal duty-bearers under the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, in collaboration with partner organizations, to uphold the right to education⁴ by ensuring that the impact of the pandemic is minimized on accessing, transitioning, and completing education; creating platforms to facilitate tailored learning activities at home for children; taking deliberate action to redeem the lost academic time; responding to the needs of children with disabilities; planning for reopening of schools, including by establishing mechanisms to ensure retention of all children and in particular children in vulnerable situations, such as girls at risk, children with disabilities, children affected by conflicts, children who belong to economically disadvantaged backgrounds and children living in rural areas.

Despite efforts by African governments to reopen schools, many children have not been able to go back to school due to lack of funds, COVID-19 related illnesses and death of caregivers, pregnancies, child marriage, joining the labor market and risk of exposure to Covid-19. Lack of Personal Protective Equipments including masks, sanitizers, water, and soap, and in some instances lack of enough facilities such as classrooms and/or desks to guarantee social distancing increase the risk of Covid-19 thereby discouraging children from resuming schools.

Following up on its recommendations to ensure every child's right to education during COVID-19 pandemic and existing challenges in re-opening of schools, the ACERWC during its 37th ordinary session, decided to develop guidelines and strategies to assist governments in ensuring safe return of children to school during the COVID-19 pandemic. To this effect, the ACERWC is collaborating with Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI), to develop Guidelines on safe return of children to school during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, the ACERWC is looking for a consultant or group of consultants to undertake this assignment.

2. Objective

The main objective of the consultancy is to develop guidelines to support Member States' actions to ensure safe return of children to school during the COVID-19 pandemic, which considers equity, resource implications, and feasibility. More specifically, the development of the Guidelines aims at:

- Identifying the main challenges in the process of reopening schools;
- Providing guidance on how to ensure that children who have been out of school and are involved in other activities including the labor market

⁴ Guiding Note on Children's Rights during COVID-19, ACERWC, April 8th, 2020.
<https://www.acerwc.africa/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Guiding-Note-on-Child-Protection-during-COVID-19-English-1.pdf>

- are targeted in the re-opening of schools using Child Rights Based Approach;
- Identifying measures to be undertaken by Member States and other stakeholders in making schools a safe place where the risk of exposure to COVID-19 is minimized; and
 - Providing guidelines for the Committee on how to integrate the issue of safe return to schools in its engagement with States and stakeholders.

3. Expected Outputs

The expected outputs of the assignment are

- i. Examine considerations for school operations, including openings, closures and re-openings and the measures already adopted as well as needed to minimize the risk to students and staff of COVID-19 in Africa Countries. This include documentation of good practices or case studies of Member States that have already opened/reopened schools during COVID-19 pandemic.
- ii. Outline general principles and key recommendations that can be tailored not only to schools but to specific school-related contexts, such as extracurricular activities based on status of COVID-19 transmission level and consideration for school operations.
- iii. Provide comprehensive, multi-layered measures to prevent introduction and spread of COVID-19 in educational settings taking into consideration the different education levels within the different age groups and peculiar needs of children in vulnerable situations, such as girls at risk, children with disabilities, children affected by conflicts, children who belong to economically disadvantaged backgrounds and children living in rural areas.

4. Scope of the Guidelines

- i. The guidelines are expected to represent all Member States of the African Union in the five regions. It should also cover educational settings for children under the age of 18 years.
- ii. The guidelines should provide information and analysis on the existing Member States guidelines on safe return of children to school during COVID-19 pandemic.

5. Methodology

- i. The guidelines are expected to use mixed methods approach (consultant/s can also propose and justify a more appropriate methodology which can be reviewed and accepted). The guidelines development is expected to mainly conduct desk research, such as reference to guidelines developed by International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO as well as relevant resources from AU Member states, INGOs, and CSOs on the required measures to protect children and support safe school operations during the pandemic.

- ii. The collection of primary data will be aided by a series of virtual meetings and workshops organized in collaboration with the Secretariat of the ACERWC and NANHRIs. The workshops with Member States in the five regions will be preceded by consultations with CSOs, UN Agencies, NHRIs and children's representatives from the specific region. Moreover, key informants' interview and focused group discussions will be used to collect and gather information. The data collection and analysis will include national guidance on the prevention and control of COVID-19 in schools; progress and challenges of remote learning to ensure students have continued access to educational materials and technologies (internet, radio, or television); Monitoring the impacts of school operations.

6. Assignment Timeline

This assignment is expected to take 30 days from signing of the contract to March 2022.

7. Deliverables

The Consultant/s assume the responsibility of developing the following documents:

- I. **Inception report** outlining the research teams' understanding of the assignment and the approach to be employed, including details of key issues to be included in the guidelines, and a list of any documentation, information and surveys required. The inception report will be discussed prior to the commencement of the assignment in an inception meeting.
- II. **Questionnaire, interview questions** and any other documents required to gather information from Member States and stakeholders.
- III. **Draft guidelines**, which will be subjected to a validation process in the form of a workshop convened by the ACERWC/NANHRI. The Consultants will be responsible for facilitating and being rapporteurs at the validation workshop.
- IV. **The final guidelines** incorporating all the feedback from validation/review workshop in accordance with the objectives and scope of the assignment mentioned above.

8. Proposal Evaluation Criteria

- The consultants shall comply with child protection and child safeguarding policies and principles. Where necessary the consultant will be required to undergo an ethical clearance. ACERWC and NANHRI are committed to ensuring that the rights of those participating in data collection or analysis are respected and protected. All applicants should include details in their proposal on how they will ensure ethics and child protection in the data collection process. Specifically, the consultant(s) shall explain how appropriate, safe, non-discriminatory participation of all stakeholders will be

ensured and how special attention will be paid to the needs of children and other vulnerable groups. The consultant(s) shall also explain how confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be guaranteed.

- The ACERWC in collaboration with NANHRI will evaluate the proposals and select a consulting firm based on the combination of the following factors:

A. Required Professional qualification and Experience

- The consultant/s should have advanced university degrees in law, human rights, children's rights, or related discipline.
- At least 10 years of traceable experience of working and/or conducting research, policy development and review in the field of children's rights and the right to education in African context;
- Excellent knowledge of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the work of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child;
- Demonstrated professional experience in the area of child protection and education in the African context;
- First-hand knowledge and experience of the cultural, social, economic and political context of Africa
- Work experience in the AU, UN, and other international organizations is desirable;
- Excellent analytical skills, using both qualitative and quantitative methods;
- Excellent and proven report writing skills;
- Ability to deliver quality product on time.
- Track record of successful completion of past assignments; and
- Willingness and flexibility specifically related to the probable effects of COVID-19 pandemic and work within the required deadline.

B. Fees and Remuneration

- Unless otherwise stated, prices are stated in USD and exclusive of all payable taxes.
- Full payment shall be made after the submission of the approved final guidelines as per the contract agreement.
- The professional fee for the consultancy will be covered by NANHRI.

C. Deliverables

- The developed guidelines and all confidential information must be submitted to the ACERWC and NANHRI.

9. Legal responsibility

- In case of any error or omission in the contracted work, it shall be the responsibility of the service provider to carry out the services to the satisfaction of the client.
- Quotations are not binding on NANHRI/ACERWC and a contract will only come into being when a written confirmation of the work order is issued.
- The copyrights and all other rights of the materials generated under the provisions of this consultancy will exclusively be vested with the ACERWC.

10. Submission of Proposal

All applicants should submit technical and financial proposals to NANHRI email address info@nanhri.org copy to dnguti@nanhri.org on or before 03 December 2021 CoB