

Request for Proposals

International Consultant to produce a Baseline Report on Ukrainian Preschools for 2025

Programme: “Polaris: Supporting Multilevel Governance in Ukraine”

About SALAR International & its engagement in Ukraine

SALAR International is a subsidiary of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), representing all 290 municipalities and 21 regions in Sweden. As the international branch of SALAR, we work globally to support local democracy and good governance in developing and transitioning countries. Our expertise covers areas such as capacity building in municipal management and service delivery, local and regional development planning, support for local government associations, decentralisation policies and European integration. Geographically, SALAR International’s projects cover countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, the Middle East and the Sub-Saharan Africa.

SALAR International has been engaged in Ukraine since 2014, providing support to Ukraine’s decentralisation process through three major initiatives focusing on building a robust multi-level governance system, increasing accessibility and quality of services at the local level, and enhancing international cooperation between municipalities from Ukraine and the EU. After the full-scale invasion, SALAR International has added crisis support to Ukrainian municipalities, providing them with material assistance.

Description of the context

SALAR International has finalised its current projects in Ukraine (DSP and Prosto), which were initiated before the full-scale invasion. To address the changing needs of Ukrainian municipalities and national actors during wartime, a new multi-level program has been initiated, to be financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

SALAR International has started up the programme during the summer of 2024, it is planned for four years, but activities are currently outlined for the first 24 months.

The new programme aims to work with both short and long-term focus on addressing the needs of the multi-level governance system in Ukraine and in parallel strengthen municipalities’ public service provision, as well as their direct engagement in the recovery and reconstruction process, in line with the requirements of EU accession.

The programme consists of two components: one focusing on policy and collaboration with national actors, and the other providing direct support to municipalities. It will encompass five thematic areas: Education, Fiscal Decentralisation and Budgeting, Administrative Service Provision, Locally-led Recovery, and International Municipal Cooperation. The programme will procure material support to address the crisis needs of municipalities and coordinate with other international actors to finance the implementation of recovery plans.

Organisational set up

The programme is a joint Swedish-Ukrainian initiative with management structures in both Stockholm and Kyiv. It encourages a flat organisational structure, meaning a high degree of autonomy and responsibility for involved experts, as well as strong local ownership among beneficiaries such as national stakeholders and Ukrainian municipalities.

It is expected that more than 50 people will be working full-time in Ukraine within various thematic teams as well as support units.

The programme has its office in Kyiv but will implement activities in all regions controlled by the Ukrainian government.

Role description and background for the assignment

Preschool education is the branch of Ukrainian education system which received least reflection and underwent least reform initiative since Ukraine gained independence in 1991. In 2024, for the first time in Ukrainian history, a dedicated position was created of Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) responsible for preschools. The new Deputy Minister is focused on planning and implementing reforms of the sector. This creates a need to tailored international technical assistance to help plan, design and implement the necessary reforms.

The Soviet regulations of preschools still prevail in Ukraine and remain largely unchanged, including high required staffing levels, excessive space requirements, obligation for putting children to sleep during the day (which requires also dedicated space and equipment), regulation of meals and laundry. For this reason preschools are very expensive to organize. This is offset to some degree by extremely low wages of preschool staff, determined in the official system of public salary payscale, calculated often below the minimum wage (and then required to increase up to the minimum wage), which leads to difficulty of attracting young, education teachers. Preschools are also largely seen as providers of care rather than as providers of education. Indeed, the state standard for preschool education is only now under development, initiated by the Deputy Minister.

A baseline report describing the current state of Ukrainian preschools and identifying their main weaknesses would be a useful contribution towards those preparations of required reforms. The report should also address the current level of financing of preschools, including review of per child expenditures. The following section formulates the terms of reference of the baseline report.

The baseline report should address the following topics:

1. Overall level of regulation and its main weaknesses.

With special focus on the overall role of preschools as defined in the legislation and on the rights and responsibilities of parents.

2. The preschool founder.

With special focus on who is the founder of preschools and what are founder's rights and responsibilities, especially regarding the financing of preschools and setting up of the local network of preschools.

3. Organization and management of preschool institutions, and their main challenges.

With special focus on technical, staffing, institutional, sanitary, and managerial requirements on preschools, and on the need for flexibility. International experience will be useful regarding the availability of different models of preschools, to be selected by the founder.

4. Enrollment and scholarization rates.

With special focus on recent trends, situation during the war, and on underserved communities and areas.

5. Financing of preschools.

With special focus on regional discrepancies, situation during the war, and recent evolution. Both total and per child expenditures should be reviewed. Comparison of Ukrainian and international share of national preschool expenditures in GDP would be useful.

6. The nature of state guarantees of preschool education in Ukraine.

With special focus on what the state officially guarantees and what it in fact delivers. Comparison with analogous guarantees in selected EU countries will be helpful.

Main responsibilities:

International Consultant will produce a Baseline Report on Ukrainian Preschools for 2025 in close contact with Local Consultant (Research Assistant) under supervision of Jan Herczyński, Senior Education Expert of Polaris program. Informational inputs on points 4 and 5 of the Report topics above will be provided by in-house consultants of Polaris Programme.

It is expected that the Baseline Report will not exceed 45 to 55 pages, counting without Annexes. The report will of course include tables and graphs.

International Consultant will engage in online presentation and dissemination activities of the Baseline Report (2-3 occasions under 2 hours each).

Qualifications:

- Degree in education, management or BA from an accredited European college or university;
- At least 10 years of experience in education, education finance and/or education management in one of the EU and/or OECD Member States;
- At least 5 years of experience in preschool education management in one of the EU and/or OECD Member States;
- Proven record of drafting targeted policy papers in education management and finance;
- Experience in design and implementation of innovative preschool education management policies;
- Expertise in change management strategy, mapping and describing change in complex systems;
- Very good communication, strong analytic, and observational skills;
- Ability to synthesize large amounts of relevant technical information into concise products;
- Fluent English.

Evaluation criteria:

The consultancy award will be based on factors such as proposal for execution of the advertised task, best value, consultant qualifications and past performance experience on activities with similar scope, interviews, and references.

Diversity and equal opportunities

SALAR International embraces diversity and respects human rights in all areas of its work. SALAR International strives to create a gender-equal and diverse working environment. Team members shall respect equal rights of individuals and strive to create an atmosphere where people's differences are accepted and valued. SALAR International supports working arrangements that enable personnel to combine work with family commitments.

Conditions

A consultancy contract will be signed between SALAR International and the expert which will outline the conditions for the position in detail. Please note this position is not an employment position, meaning that applicants must be established as consultants and will be liable to pay all relevant taxes and insurances.

A competitive consultancy fee will be negotiated with the successful candidate at the final stage of the selection process.

The assignment does not require travel to Ukraine.

Duration: The assignment should be carried out between November 11, 2024 and February 14, 2025.

Application: Send your application with max 3-page CV and max 2 page proposal for execution of the advertised task (outlining main methodological approaches, proposed structure, needs for statistical data items and expected fee level broken into the number of days) to ukraine@salarinternational.se. Please note "Consultant for a Baseline Report on Ukrainian Preschools" in the subject line. The interviews will be conducted on an ongoing basis. Only shortlisted applicants will receive a response by email when the recruitment has been finalized.

For any questions or clarifications, please contact: ukraine@salarinternational.se

Personal information provided by the applicant in the recruitment process will be handled by SALAR International.

Deadline for submission of applications: November 4, 2024.