

# TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR)

## *Survey and Assessment on the Operation of Child Protection Service Delivery Networks for Children in Special Circumstances and Those at Risk of Entering Special Circumstances in Ho Chi Minh City*

### Introduction

This document outlines the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the research study titled 'Survey and Assessment on the Operation of Child Protection Service Delivery Networks for Children in Special Circumstances and Those at Risk of Entering Special Circumstances in Ho Chi Minh City'. The objective of the study is to provide a comprehensive overview and in-depth analysis of the current status of child support service models in Ho Chi Minh City following recent administrative mergers (post-merger HCMC). Based on these findings, specific proposals and recommendations will be formulated to progressively enhance the quality of service delivery, ultimately safeguarding the legal rights and best interests of children in general, and those in special circumstances in particular.

The research centers on four primary pillars:

- **Current Situation of Children in Special Circumstances and Those at Risk:** Analyzing the characteristics, specific needs, and level of access to child protection services (both emergency and long-term) for vulnerable groups of children across HCMC.
- **Status of the Child Protection Service Delivery Network:** Mapping out the types of services, their geographical distribution, and the overall structural coverage of the service delivery system in post-merger HCMC.
- **Operational Effectiveness of Child Rights Protection Facilities:** Evaluating the performance of both public and non-public service providers across key dimensions, including relevance, accessibility, and factors affecting service quality.
- **Solutions to Enhance Service Delivery Efficiency:** Proposing specific, actionable solutions to optimize the efficacy and sustainability of service provision within social protection facilities and at the community level.

Based on the empirical evidence generated, the research team will deliver concrete recommendations to HACR and relevant government line agencies, departments, and sectors to support the development of action plans aimed at improving the realization of children's fundamental rights in HCMC.

### 1. Background

In recent years, the protection, care, and education of children—particularly those in special circumstances or at risk of entering them—have consistently received significant strategic attention from all government levels and sectors. The 2016 Law on Children, along with an array of national

child-focused policies, programs, and action plans, has established a robust legal framework and policy foundation ensuring the practical realization of children's rights.

Ho Chi Minh City is a special tier-1 municipality characterized by rapid urbanization, significant migration patterns, and accelerating socio-economic growth. Consequently, the volume of children living in special circumstances or remaining highly vulnerable to social risks accounts for a substantial proportion. The complexity of the local landscape, coupled with highly volatile population shifts and deep-seated social issues—such as street-connected children, domestic violence, child labor, sexual abuse, and child trafficking—places increasingly rigorous demands on the child protection apparatus.

HCMC has historically established and piloted multiple models, services, and support programs for children through local government networks, social organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Nevertheless, the operational effectiveness of child protection service delivery—spanning early access, professional intervention, long-term support, and social reintegration—continues to face structural limitations. These constraints stem primarily from limited resources, disjointed cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms, capacity gaps within the workforce, and a misalignment between available services and the actual, evolving needs of children.

Against this backdrop, executing a comprehensive survey and systemic evaluation of child protection service delivery for these specific target groups in HCMC is highly imperative, particularly in the post-merger phase. The study's findings will generate concrete, empirical evidence to serve as a baseline for proposing strategic solutions, enhancing the quality of the child protection system, and contributing to a safe, healthy, and child-friendly environment for every child.

## **2. Research Objectives and Scope**

- Objective 1: To assess the current situation of children in special circumstances and those at risk across HCMC, including their specific demographic characteristics, needs, and access levels to emergency and long-term child protection services (with a primary focus on children currently or previously receiving support within the service network).
- Objective 2: To map and analyze the structural status of the child protection service delivery network in HCMC, examining service categories, spatial distribution, and overall coverage vs. actual demand.
- Objective 3: To evaluate the operational performance and efficacy of public and non-public child protection facilities, focusing on dimensions of relevance, accessibility, and underlying systemic factors influencing quality.
- Objective 4: To formulate actionable solutions and policy recommendations aimed at maximizing the quality, efficiency, and sustainability of service provision both within centralized social welfare institutions and at the community level.

## **3. Research Questions**

### **Pillar 1: Situation of Children in Special Circumstances and At-Risk Groups**

- Q1: Who are the primary groups of children currently in special circumstances or at risk in HCMC, and what are their specific profiles and support needs?

- Q2: What specific individual, family, and environmental factors drive or exacerbate the risk of children falling into special circumstances within the city?
- Q3: What is the current level of access that these vulnerable groups have to emergency and long-term child protection services?

### **Pillar 2: Status of the Service Delivery Network (Systemic Structure)**

- Q4: What types and models of child protection services are currently being operationalized across HCMC?
- Q5: How is the child protection network spatially distributed, and what is its capacity coverage compared to the actual demand in the field?

### **Pillar 3: Operational Effectiveness of Facilities (Systemic Operation)**

- Q6: How is the operational performance of public and non-public child protection service facilities currently manifested and measured?
- Q7: How are the actual accessibility and service quality at these facilities evaluated by the beneficiaries and stakeholders?
- Q8: Which key factors (e.g., funding, human resources, institutional coordination, professional technical competencies) heavily influence the delivery quality of these facilities?

### **Pillar 4: Systemic Gaps and Solutions**

- Q9: What are the primary unaddressed needs and structural gaps within HCMC's child protection service delivery system today?
- Q10: What specific strategic and operational solutions should be proposed to elevate the efficacy, synergy, and sustainability of the system?

## **4. Research Methodology**

The study employs a mixed-methods research design, blending quantitative and qualitative approaches alongside rigorous secondary data analysis. This ensures a comprehensive, multi-dimensional assessment of local realities, service efficacy, and community needs.

The research architecture adheres to three overarching guiding principles:

- **Mixed-Methods Synergy:** Combining structured quantitative surveys with qualitative in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) to ensure data triangulation and high validity.
- **Child-Centered Approach:** Ensuring children's voices, agency, and lived experiences are actively captured using age-appropriate, ethically sound data collection instruments.
- **Gender-Sensitive and Inclusive Lens:** Disaggregating and analyzing data through lenses of gender, ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic variance to capture marginalized sub-groups.

### **Quantitative Method**

- **Structured Questionnaire Surveys:** Conducted directly with children in special circumstances and at-risk children to assemble a robust database regarding their socio-demographic traits, immediate needs, and service touchpoints.

- **Sampling Strategy:** Utilizing a stratified random sampling methodology across diverse geographical districts and specific vulnerable sub-categories (e.g., children with disabilities, low-income households, early child laborers, and those highly vulnerable to abuse).
- **Sampling Principles:** Assuring robust representation across urban/suburban zones, gender balance, age groups, and varied living conditions.

### **Qualitative Method**

- **In-Depth Interviews (IDIs):** Targeted at children, parents/primary caregivers, state management officials (DOLISA, local authorities), civil society representatives, and child protection technical experts.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Executed separately with cohorts of children, caregivers, and administrative staff from public and non-public social protection centers.
- **Field Observations:** Conducted at selected service delivery facilities to map real-world operational workflows, environment safety, and interaction dynamics.

### **Secondary Data Analysis**

Systematic review, synthesis, and meta-analysis of administrative data, statistical yearbooks, internal progress reports, and legal/policy literature provided by state line agencies, social organizations, and active service providers.

## **5. Data Sources and Disaggregation**

All primary data harvested throughout this research must be fully disaggregated by gender, age, disability status, geographical location, and specific vulnerability type.

The consultant/research team is strictly required to fully comply with Save the Children International's (SCI) mandatory policies throughout the lifecycle of the consultancy. This includes: Child Safeguarding Policy; Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA); Anti-Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying Policies; and strict Data Protection and Confidentiality protocols.

## **6. Research Ethics**

- **Meaningful Child Participation:** Children must be empowered to participate in the research process safely and meaningfully as active agents, rather than passive respondents. Opportunities include involving youth in defining criteria, validating preliminary findings, or contributing to self-assessments. All engagement must strictly align with the 9 Basic Requirements for Meaningful and Ethical Child Participation.
- **Inclusivity and Non-Discrimination:** Explicit measures must be enacted to guarantee that children from diverse ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds—along with children with disabilities or those facing severe social marginalization—have equitable access to participate safely.
- **Core Ethical Values:** The research process must unconditionally respect and embed the following pillars:
- **Protection:** Enforcing the highest standards of behavioral conduct toward children and vulnerable adults.

- Sensitivity: Demonstrating continuous awareness regarding children's rights, gender dynamics, social inclusion, and local cultural contexts.
- Transparency: Maximizing appropriate information disclosure and open communication with all active stakeholders.
- Confidentiality and Data Privacy: Deploying strict tokenization, anonymity, and secure storage to safeguard participant identities and eliminate exposure to risk.
- Public Access: Ensuring findings are made accessible to the public, provided no overriding protection risks exist.
- Broad Engagement: Encouraging extensive stakeholder and community consultation throughout the study.
- Credibility and Independence: Ensuring empirical methodologies are insulated from bias so that findings and conclusions are accurate, verifiable, and robust.

#### Operational Ethical Requirements:

- Data collection methodologies must be explicitly tailored to be child-friendly, age-appropriate, and gender-sensitive.
- All interviews and group sessions must occur in physically and psychologically safe, creative environments where children feel validated.
- A formal Risk Assessment matrix must be compiled beforehand to explicitly cover risks linked to child or adult participation.
- A clear referral/response pathway must be established to handle any child protection or safety disclosure issues immediately.
- Informed Consent (from guardians) and Informed Assent (from children) must be formally documented prior to any data collection activity.
- The research team is required to complete and clear a formal Research Ethics Review Application. SCI and HACR will facilitate this administrative clearance pathway.

## 7. Deliverables and Expected Outputs

All final outputs must directly map to and satisfy the 4 primary research objectives, encompassing:

- Comprehensive Final Research Report: A highly structured, exhaustive technical document detailed as follows: Section 1 (per Obj 1): In-depth situational analysis of target children in HCMC (profiles, needs, access metrics); Section 2 (per Obj 2): Structural mapping and distribution analysis of the service delivery network; Section 3 (per Obj 3): Operational performance, quality factors, and relevance assessment of public and non-public centers; Section 4 (per Obj 4): Systemic gap analysis coupled with long-term sustainability solutions.
- Executive Summary Report: A concise, highly polished brief highlighting critical breakthroughs, macro network coverage statistics, cross-cutting facility performance metrics, and key policy takeaways.
- Policy Brief & Actionable Recommendations: A brief, strategic document curated directly for HACR leadership and state policymakers focusing on high-priority intervention pathways, legal/regulatory gaps, and scalable operational models.
- Anonymized Dataset & Toolkits: Cleaned, structured, and completely anonymized raw quantitative datasets along with comprehensive qualitative master matrices. This must include the final toolkit suite (questionnaires, IDI protocols, FGD guides, field notation sheets).

- Results Presentation Materials: Professional, high-impact presentation slide decks (PowerPoint) designed for dissemination workshops, high-level policy consultations, and stakeholder briefings.

## 8. Implementation Timeline

No.	Activity / Deliverable	Timeline	Responsible Team
1	Finalize the selection process for the expert/consultant team	July 15, 2026	HACR
2	Align on content/methodology, finalize and sign the consultancy contract	July 20, 2026	HACR & Consultant Team
3	Execute research fieldwork and analysis (finalize tools, data collection, raw analysis, drafting report)	July 22 – Sept 25, 2026	Consultant Team
4	Deliver Final Research Report incorporating feedback from stakeholder draft consultations	September 30, 2026	Consultant Team

## 9. Key Technical Considerations and Guidelines

The consultant team must formally submit a comprehensive Inception Report matching the designated template, which must detail:

- Refined research objectives, scope, and primary research sub-questions.
- Granular methodology description, detailing design matrix, data collection mechanism, field sampling strategy, data sources, and a robust research matrix tying tools to core questions.
- Detailed data analysis and reporting framework (including coding schemes for qualitative data).
- Explicit research caveats, assumptions, and systemic limitations.
- Comprehensive Risk Assessment and mitigation matrix.
- Operational ethical plan, including explicit protocols for acquiring informed consent/assent.
- Stakeholder and child communication/engagement plan.
- Detailed master work plan, assigning clear responsibilities and hard timelines.
- Resource/logistics requirements.
- Draft data collection tools structurally mapped to the research matrix.

Upon formal review and acceptance of the Inception Report, any future tactical or strategic deviations from the agreed methodology must be formally requested in writing and approved by the Research Manager/Steering Committee.

### Ethical Clearance and Documentation:

- The consultant must finalize the comprehensive Ethical Review Dossier, submit it, and actively address any feedback raised by the review board. This includes clearly mapping field protocols (participant recruitment, secure data storage/encryption, absolute anonymity, and consent architectures), detailing safety precautions when interacting with children and highly vulnerable cohorts, and attaching localized informed consent/assent forms.

### **Final Data Collection Instruments:**

- Formally verified quantitative and qualitative field tools, alongside established automated data entry architectures and field quality control mechanisms.

### **Draft and Final Research Report Structure:**

- The draft and final reports (conforming to the designated project template) must structurally embed: Executive Summary; Background & Context; Research Focus, Scope, and Limitations; Methodological Overview and Triangulation Matrix; Comprehensive Empirical Findings and Data Analysis; Methodological Caveats or Field Challenges; Strategic Conclusions outlining systemic implications; Actionable Policy/Operational Recommendations; and Technical Appendices (including full data tables and reference lists).

### **Data and Analysis Handover:**

- The consultancy concludes with the secure handover of all fully cleaned raw datasets, encrypted databases, annotated transcripts, and fully coded qualitative analytical outputs.

*Note: This implementation plan and its structural deliverables may be dynamically adjusted subject to formal written alignment and mutual agreement between the HACR Project Management Board and the selected Consultant Team.*