Research Consultant

Terms of Reference

RIGHT TO CHILDHOOD

Protect Children.
Strengthen Families.

Research consultancy at Right to Childhood

1.) What is the purpose?

Right to Childhood is seeking short-term consultancy support to build on work initiated by our Research Manager (now on maternity leave) to develop a research agenda on preventing and responding to child-family separation in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

The purpose of the consultancy is to:

- Develop a clear, prioritised research agenda that identifies where Right to Childhood can make a distinctive and useful contribution to evidence on preventing and responding to child-family separation in LMICs.
- Identify how our future research could strengthen the wider sector evidence base and generate credible evidence for policy and influencing.
- Translate the research agenda into one or two feasible research concepts that Right to Childhood can further pursue in 2027.
- Support Right to Childhood to work in a participatory way with internal colleagues, implementing partners, young people, parents and caregivers and external experts to develop the agenda.

The consultancy is intended to turn existing research work into a practical, prioritised agenda and a small number of feasible research concepts that Right to Childhood can take forward beyond the consultancy.

2.) About our organisation and transition

Right to Childhood is a UK-based international charity helping children in crisis around the world. Childhood should be a time of joy, growth and discovery. But there are millions of children globally who are separated from their families, growing up without the care, safety and stability they need. We believe all children have a right to feel loved, safe and supported. Children need secure and loving relationships. They need families who can care for them, even during times of immense pressure and hardship. They need communities that look out for them and systems that can step in before families reach crisis.

Right to Childhood exists to help make this possible. For more than 50 years, we have worked closely with local partners to keep families together, protect children who have been separated from their families, and speak up with children. Together, we defend childhood so every child can thrive with the safety, care and respect they deserve.

We are undergoing a transition process, having recently left the SOS Children's Villages International Federation and rebranded from SOS Children's Villages UK to Right to Childhood.

Our new identity gives us a stronger, more confident voice to champion children and families, build partnerships and inspire action. It reflects our ambition to reach more children, strengthen more families and create lasting change.

This is an exciting time to support Right to Childhood on its path to helping more children grow up with the care, protection and opportunities they need, and to shape a focused research agenda that reflects our renewed identity, mission and ambition.

3.) Scope of work

The consultant will work across Right to Childhood and implementing partners, applying research and child separation subject matter expertise to develop the research agenda.

This work will be overseen by Right to Childhood's Head of Programmes, and the consultant will also work closely with the Senior Advocacy Manager and Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Manager.

Workstream 1: Produce a clear and prioritised research agenda

The consultant will:

- Revisit the existing evidence review and related materials, to confirm identify of the evidence gaps and opportunities for Right to Childhood.
- Work with a targeted group of stakeholders — including Right to Childhood, supporting implementing partners to work with young people with lived experience, parents and carers, and external subject matter experts — to test and refine possible research priorities.
- Work with a small academic advisory group and relevant Right to Childhood colleagues to agree a manageable number of final research priorities.
- The consultancy should build on work already completed, rather than reopen earlier scoping. The consultant will be expected to use existing materials efficiently and focus their time on producing high-quality, useful outputs.

Workstream 2: Develop research concepts for future work

The consultant will:

- Develop one or two short research concepts emerging from the agreed research agenda, keeping options open where further partner or funder input is needed.
- Set out the proposed research question, rationale, relevance to Right to Childhood's programme strategy, indicative methodology, potential partners and key risks or dependencies.
- Identify how participatory and ethical research approaches could be embedded in any subsequent study.

Workstream 3: Produce practical recommendations for implementation

The consultant will:

- Summarise what is already in place, including existing evidence, stakeholder relationships, partner inputs and internal capabilities that can support delivery of the research agenda.
- Recommend how Right to Childhood should take the research agenda forward after the consultancy, including suggested roles, decision points and next steps.
- Provide a concise internal summary suitable for senior review and internal briefing.
- Engage and share internally with colleagues during the consultancy and be prepared to support relevant external comms, in line with deliverables and workload.

4.) Deliverables

The consultant is expected to produce:

- A concise inception note confirming the approach, proposed stakeholder engagement and use of existing materials.
- A final draft of the Evidence Review with summary.
- A written research agenda setting out priority research themes, rationale, intended users and uses, potential contribution to systems change and the wider sector evidence base, and implications for Right to Childhood's programme strategy and influencing priorities.
- One or two short research concept notes that could be developed further for fundraising, partnership development or commissioning.
- A brief implementation note summarising what is already in place, what further decisions are needed, and recommended next steps for taking the agenda forward.
- A short summary paper for senior review.
- All outputs should be practical, concise and focused on implementation.

5.) Ethics and safeguarding

This consultancy will involve consultations – in the form of online interviews and focus group discussions – with a range of stakeholders internal and external to Right to Childhood. This will include young people with lived experience of separation and implementing partner staff. The consultant will be expected to carry out these consultations in line with high ethical standards, including but not limited to: informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, safeguarding, non-discrimination, and sensitivity and trauma-informed approaches.

For those engaging directly with young people with lived experience, a safeguarding risk assessment will need to be completed and approved by Right to Childhood's Safeguarding and Compliance Manager.

Any consultants undertaking direct contact with children or young people will need to demonstrate that they hold appropriate enhanced DBS checks (or equivalent) or are willing to obtain these prior to undertaking such work.

6.) Data protection

The consultant will be expected to agree to work in line with Right to Childhood data protection policies and procedures.

7.) Duration and level of effort

Draft timeline (indicative):

The timeline below is indicative; following appointment, Right to Childhood will agree a realistic workplan and milestones for each workstream with the consultant.

- Appointed late November 2026
- Main body of work November – March 2027

8.) Fees and budget

Right to Childhood has not set a fixed budget for this assignment. Applicants are invited to propose a costed approach that represents value for money and is proportionate to the scope set out in these Terms of Reference.

- A clear cost breakdown by workstream (Workstreams 1–3), including indicative days/hours and day rates (or fixed fees) for each.
- Any assumptions underpinning the pricing (e.g., number of workshops/meetings, number of review rounds, stakeholder engagement approach).
- Any anticipated expenses (and whether they are included or billed separately) and confirmation of VAT status (if applicable).
- Proposed payment schedule linked to deliverables.

9.) Proposal requirements

Interested consultants/consultancies should submit a proposal that clearly sets out their approach and demonstrates how they will deliver the scope and deliverables described above.

- **Understanding of the assignment** and any key risks, dependencies or assumptions.
- **Proposed approach and methodology**, including how you will engage staff and young people ethically and safely.
- **Workplan and timeline**, including key activities and milestones across November 2026-March 2027, and your earliest start date/availability.
- **Resourcing:** who will deliver the work (named consultant(s) where possible), roles, and indicative time input per workstream.
- **Cost proposal** as set out above in Section 8 (including a cost breakdown by workstream).
- **Relevant experience**, with brief examples of similar assignments delivered.
- **Quality assurance**: approach to drafting, consultation and incorporating feedback; how you will ensure outputs are practical and usable.
- **Safeguarding and data protection:** confirmation that you have appropriate policies/practices in place and will comply with Right to Childhood requirements, including confirmation that any consultants undertaking direct contact with children or young people hold appropriate enhanced DBS checks (or equivalent), or are willing to obtain these prior to undertaking such work.

- **References:** details for at least two referees for comparable work (we may contact referees ahead of an appointment being made).

Proposals should be concise (suggested maximum 4 A4 pages, excluding CVs) and submitted as a PDF.

10.) Consultant profile

Proposals will be assessed against the criteria below.

Essential

- Significant experience in conceptualising, designing and managing research studies and initiatives in the international child protection sector and/or international development sector.
- Strong experience in analysing and synthesising insights from multiple sources into clear and compelling research findings and outputs.
- Excellent project management skills, particularly of research studies, and including the ability to manage inputs from multiple stakeholders.
- Demonstrable thematic expertise in international child protection, ideally on the prevention of child-family separation and/or the protection and care of separated children.
- Ability to deliver high-quality written research products to deadline.
- Excellent team working skills and a natural ability to develop strong working relationships with a range of stakeholders.
- A demonstrable commitment to research ethics and ensuring the ethical inclusion of children's, young people's, and communities' voices in research outputs.
- Technical knowledge of data protection standards and protocols and the ability to work to such standards throughout the consultancy.
- Master's degree or equivalent work experience in social research, international development, children's rights and development, or related subject.

Desirable

- Experience of developing research agendas for organisations.

11.) Submission process

Please submit proposals by 9am Monday 2nd November 2026 to Sarah Jane Dowling at **sj.dowling@righttochildhood.org.uk** with the subject line: **Research Consultant – Proposal.** We anticipate shortlisting and interviews (online) on 10th and 11th November, with appointment expected by 20th November.

12.) Selection criteria

- Demonstrated understanding of the assignment and quality of proposed approach/methodology.
- Relevant experience and capability of the proposed consultant(s), including international development experience.
- Feasibility of proposed workplan, timeline and availability.
- Quality assurance and safeguarding/ethical approach.
- Value for money.

13.) Governance and reporting

The consultant will:

- Report to a named internal lead
- Work closely with a small internal working group, including colleagues from advocacy and programmes
- Provide regular check-ins to ensure alignment with organisational priorities
- Right to Childhood will retain ownership of all outputs produced through the consultancy.

14.) Out of scope

The consultancy will not:

- Act as a full-time Research Manager
- Draft full research proposals.
- Take ongoing responsibility for the delivery of research activities beyond the consultancy

Any additional activity beyond the agreed scope would be subject to further discussion and approval.

15.) Longer-term sustainability

A key objective of this consultancy is to enable Right to Childhood to continue building internal research capacity over time. The outputs from this work are intended to support the organisation on its journey to be led by evidence and to identify priority areas in research that sit within our mission and strategy.

16.) Consultancy Status

This is intended to be an independent consultancy engagement focused on the delivery of the outputs set out in these Terms of Reference. The consultant will ordinarily determine how the services are delivered within the agreed scope, timescales and organisational requirements.

The appointment is subject to an appropriate employment status/IR35 assessment before the engagement commences, and the contractual and practical working arrangements must remain consistent with that assessment.

Right to Work and Location: The consultancy is open to applicants based in the UK or overseas, subject to the requirements of the engagement. Where the consultant is based in the UK and/or will undertake work in the UK, they will be required to provide any information and evidence necessary to demonstrate their right to work in the UK, where required by applicable legislation. Where the consultant will undertake the services from outside the UK, any applicable legal, tax, or other requirements relating to their location will be considered in light of IR35 rules before the engagement is confirmed.

Applications from the Global South are encouraged.