

Terms of Reference (TOR)

to conduct a research on incorporation of childcare services into public service system

I. Background

According to the data released by the National Bureau of Statistics, the number of births in China has continued to decline, from 18.83 million in 2016 to 12 million in 2020 and 10.62 million in 2021, with an average annual decline of 1.7 million. The total fertility rate has remained below the replacement level, it dropped to 1.3 in 2020 and 1.15 in 2021. Low fertility rate has become a new challenge to China's population and development. In this context, the Chinese government began to gradually adjust its fertility policy. In 2016, China began to implement the "universal two-child" policy, in which each couple are allowed to have two children. In 2021, the State Council issued the "Decision on Optimizing Fertility Policies and Promoting Long-term Balanced Population Development", fully implementing a "three-child policy" and calling for the formulation of fertility supportive measures. In the same year, the State Council also issued "the Outline of Women's Development in China (2021-2030)" and "the Outline on the Development of Chinese Children (2021-2030)", clearly proposing to protect the basic rights and interests of women and children, improve fertility supportive measures for the "three-child policy", and take multiple measures to reduce the families' burden of childbearing, parenting and education, and create a supportive social environment for bearing, rearing and educating children.

Based on the above, UNFPA China takes supporting China to respond to low fertility rate as a priority issue in the current UNFPA-Government of China Country Programme. In 2021, UNFPA, together with The China Population and Development Research Center and the Institute of Population Research of Peking University, jointly launched the "Research on Fertility Supportive Policies from Life-cycle Perspectives " to analyze the causes and response experience of low fertility rate globally, as well as the causes of China's low fertility rate and the current supporting policies. A set of mutually supportive fertility support policies aiming at providing full life cycle support is proposed based on the analysis. Among them, inclusive and high-quality childcare services is one of the key measures of the fertility supportive policy/programme measures. Practical evidence from low fertility advanced countries that the lack of high-quality affordable child care services affect families, couples and individuals to take active fertility decision and hence affect their abilities to exercise their reproductive rights, while the increase in the supply of public childcare services can help empower them to do so, and in turn increase the fertility level, especially the high-quality and wide-coverage infant care services are considered part of the basis and premise considerations for families to make childbearing decisions.

In China, childcare services are an important part and a key supporting measure to respond to low fertility. Based on international experiences, incorporating childcare services into basic public services will help in ensuring the quality and accessibility of inclusive childcare services, reducing the childcare burden of families, increasing the willingness of couples and individuals to have children, and promoting fertility level. At present, childcare services are not considered part of the primary public services, and the national financial support for childcare services is limited. Considering China's current population situation, the urgency of developing childcare services, the current level of childcare service development and its future trends, the direction of future childcare service reform should be for the government to take the main responsibility of supplying childcare services and sharing the cost of institutional and family childcare services.

Building on the policy framework proposed in the "Research on Fertility Supportive Policies from Life-cycle Perspectives " in 2021, this study will focus on childcare services to complement the

gaps of fertility supportive policies/programmes, analyze the problems and challenges in the development and management of under 3 childcare services, research in detail the childcare experiences and practice in China and other countries, summarize the impact of childcare services on women's fertility desire and children's health, and come up with recommendations on the feasibility and way forward of incorporation childcare services into the national basic public service system.

II. Purpose

Building on the analysis of China's current fertility situation and future development trend and the practice of other countries in providing childcare services, conduct in-depth comprehensive analysis on the necessity and feasibility to incorporate childcare services into the national basic public service system in China. Meanwhile, based on the analysis of the current childcare service measures in China at national and local levels, effects will be made to propose a path for incorporating childcare service into the basic national public service system balancing the exemplary, inclusive and sustainable considerations.

III. Scope of Work

Specifically, the research will be centered around completing activities as below:

Activity 1: map out the global main models and types of childcare service and select countries/regions that have similar population development status or cultural background (such as France, Nordic countries and Japan etc.) to analyse their childcare service system, thus providing international perspectives for China's policy development process;

Activity 2: conduct a comprehensive analysis of the implementation and outcomes of current national/local supportive policies, especially policies introduced after the three-child policy, to provide a solid evidence base for the research; and

Activity 3: Based on findings from the above analytical efforts of evidence from China and the globe, draft the research report "Incorporate childcare services into the basic national public service system" and revise and finalize it after consultation with relevant government departments, academic institutions and experts.

IV. Working Schedule and Expected Deliverable

The expected working schedule is as follows:

Time period	Activity	Deliverable
1 May -31 May, 2023	Activity 1	Research report on international experiences of providing childcare services
1 June-30 June, 2023	Activity 2	Research report on national practice of providing childcare services
1 July-30 September, 2023, of which : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 July-31 July ● 1 August-31 August ● 31 August - 30 September 	Activity 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Draft report on incorporating childcare services into the basic national public service system ● Collecting comments and revising accordingly ● Finalizing the report reflecting the comments, particularly those from UNFPA CO and NHC

V. Required expertise, qualifications and competencies

This research requires a strong team of experts with different backgrounds. The expertise and requirement include but are not limited to:

- Established long-term expertise in population and development studies and is familiar with China's population change pattern and its driven factors;
- Previous experience of conducting studies on China's childcare services;
- Knowledge of UNFPA mandate, especially UNFPA's perspectives on responding to low fertility is a must;
- Able to deliver high quality products within the given time.

VI. Project Management Arrangements

UNFPA China and the Department of Population Monitoring and Family Development of National Health Commission will be jointly responsible for the progress monitoring and quality control of the research.

VII. Support provided by UNFPA China

Funding support

UNFPA China will provide partial funding support, which is CNY100,000 in total.

Technical support

UNFPA China will provide the following technical documents, besides ongoing technical support: 1) the UNFPA global research reports on responding to low fertility; 2) UNFPA China research reports about responding to low fertility; and 3) support to communicate with the countries under research.

UNFPA China will also provide technical support as below: 1) UNFPA reports on global response to low fertility; 2) UNFPA China reports on China's response to low fertility; and 3) assistance in case study on different countries.