

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND (UNICEF)
Request for Information (RFI):
School Connectivity Solutions

Date: **September 16, 2024**

Closing date: **October 15, 2024**

Reference: **RFI – School Connectivity solutions**

Contact: connectivity_procurement@unicef.org with copy to **Claire Heraud** cheraud@unicef.org and **Nicolas Joel Nin** nnin@unicef.org

IMPORTANT NOTICE: Interested companies must thoroughly review this entire document, complete the Excel file “Questionnaire_RFI_School_Connectivity.xls” and send it to the above-mentioned email addresses. Please quote “RFI – School Connectivity Solutions” as the subject in your email correspondence.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

This Request for Information (RFI) does not constitute a formal solicitation. We do not request bids or proposals at this stage.

The goal of this RFI is to seek information on your service offering and pricing structure for any future tender. **Kindly note that we are not asking for you to provide exact pricing or quotes.**

A response to this RFI does not automatically ensure that you will be selected to participate in a tender or be selected for procurement. UNICEF will not be responsible for the costs you would incur in preparing and submitting the information requested.

UNICEF reserves the right to change or cancel the requirements at any time during the RFI and/or any future solicitation process. UNICEF also reserves the right to require compliance with additional conditions as and when issuing any future tender documents.

All submissions will be treated confidentially and UNICEF is not prepared to agree and sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement with any RFI participant.

UNICEF invites companies to provide clear and accurate information, as UNICEF will be better positioned to assess any technical and financial proposals from these companies in future tendering processes.

Interested service providers are requested to notify UNICEF of their intention to participate in this RFI via email, to the Contact persons mentioned above in this document by the 30th of September 2024. Questions or clarifications are receivable until the 30th of September 2024 via email using exclusively the contact details provided in this document. Please do not send questions about this RFI to any other UNICEF personnel.

1. Background

UNICEF is an international, inter-governmental organization established by the General Assembly of the United Nations by resolution No. 57(1) of 11 December, 1946 as a subsidiary organ of the United Nations, having its headquarters in New York, with offices in over 160 countries spanning 260 locations.

UNICEF works with governments, civil society organizations, and other organizations around the world to advance children's rights to survival, protection, health, development, and participation and is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Despite growing evidence of the benefits of digital connectivity on education quality and economic growth there are still 2.2 billion children who lack internet access at home, and half of the world's estimated 6 million schools remain offline. According to the ITU, this digital divide is even more pronounced in Africa where only 37% of the population uses the internet, and internet costs are five times higher than the global average.

Ensuring that every school has meaningful access to the internet is a priority for UNICEF as part of its mission to help children meet their basic education needs and expand their opportunities to reach their full potential.

2. Description of requirements

UNICEF is interested in procuring internet connectivity for schools and is seeking information about the ability and capacity of Internet Service Providers to install and operate their solutions in Sub-Saharan Africa. The main target for this Request for Information is Internet Service Providers (ISPs) who currently operate or are planning to operate in Africa. However, UNICEF also encourages responses from other organizations who have relevant knowledge of how ISPs operate and the challenges they face to connect schools in in the continent.

UNICEF is primarily looking for “turnkey” connectivity solutions that include all the equipment and services required to deliver internet to schools for the duration of the contract. UNICEF prefers pricing models that do not require purchasing of any type of equipment. The equipment shall remain the property and responsibility of the supplier over the contract term and the monthly fee should include any equipment leasing costs.

UNICEF estimates there are more than 500,000 unconnected schools in Africa and has the ambition to close this connectivity gap by procuring the connectivity of a sizeable share of these schools on behalf of governments. UNICEF expects these schools to be spread out across a country's territory, including both in urban and rural areas.

UNICEF approach is technology agnostic and recognizes that in most countries, a mix of technologies and suppliers will be required to achieve universal school connectivity.

This request for information is split in four parts:

- 1) **General questions:** questions about the company, its key value proposition, its pricing model, and any other relevant information. These questions are in the tab “General Questions” of the excel file attached.
- 2) **Capabilities by country:** questions regarding the presence and capabilities in each of the countries of interest. These questions are in the tab “Capabilities by country” of the same excel file.
- 3) **Technical requirements:** after some consultations with the industry, UNICEF has drafted a provisional list of technical requirements for a turnkey solution to connect schools. In this section, UNICEF asks for companies to provide detailed feedback on this draft list of technical requirements. This feedback will help shape the final list of requirements to be used for future LTAs. These questions are in the tab “Draft Technical Requirements” of the same excel file.

- 4) **Network presence (optional):** UNICEF encourages respondents to share the location of their backbone, transport, and access network infrastructure in the countries of interest. This information will help UNICEF adapt its procurement strategy to maximise the benefits for schools. Kindly attach this information to your submission using a separate geospatial file (GeoPackage, Shapefile, KMZ, GeoJSON, etc).

3. Timeline

The key dates of this Request for Information are as follows:

- **16 September 2024:** publication of RFI in the UN’s official web portal (UNGM).
- **30 September 2024:** deadline for requesting clarifications in UNGM.
- **15 October 2024:** deadline for final submission of the information.

4. Procedure for submission of the information

Interested service providers are requested to respond to this RFI by completing the Excel file “Questionnaire_RFI_School_Connectivity.xls” and email it back to the contacts provided at the top of this document with reference “**RFI - School Connectivity Solutions** ” in the subject line **before 15 October 2024 23:59 CET**. If you have any questions about this RFI, please send them to same email addresses listed above before **30 September 2024 23:59 CET**. Questions will be grouped and answered at in batches within reasonable delays. All questions and answers will be made public via the UNGM platform.

Service providers are kindly requested to ensure that their full current contact details (contact person details, postal/e-mail/telephone) are included on their submission using the online platform.

Notes:

- i. The sole purpose of this RFI is to request information and shall not be understood as any sign of award of a contract or as any form of commitment from UNICEFs to any company/institution. This RFI does not intend that service providers and/or suppliers prepare detailed proposals, but rather provide information regarding pricing models, capabilities, and indication as to how they would approach working with UNICEF to achieve the objectives set out in this RFI.
- ii. A response does not automatically ensure that a company/academia/corporate institution will be contacted or invited to tender in case UNICEF decides to tender for this assignment.
- iii. UNICEF reserves the right to request for product demo to help us understand the technicalities of the product. Cost for demo will be borne by the vendor.
- iv. UNICEF reserves the right to require compliance with additional conditions as and when issuing the final solicitation document.
- v. UNICEF reserves the right to change or cancel the requirement at any time during the RFI and/or future solicitation process.
- vi. All submissions will be treated confidentially.
- vii. UNICEF might use the learnings gathered through this RFI to inform the procurement process to establish LTAs for the provision of school connectivity.