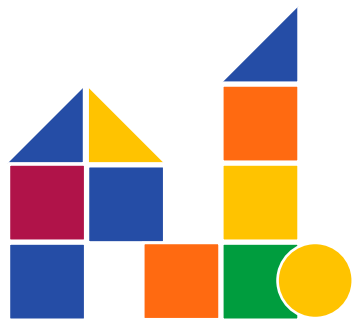




Growing Steady and Strong



Early Childhood Development
Regional Guidance in East Asia and the Pacific

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Contents



ACRONYMS	2
FOREWORD	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	6
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS	10
1 Introduction and purpose	14
2 Overview of East Asia and the Pacific: ECD system-wide context	17
Highlights of regional achievements	17
Key challenges in East Asia and Pacific	18
3 Overview of East Asia and the Pacific	22
4 Building back better: A strategic vision to push forward the ECD agenda in East Asia and the Pacific	30
Response pillar 1: Systems strengthening	32
Key action 1.1 Integrated ECD approaches	33
Key action 1.2 Financing for ECD	36
Key action 1.3 ECD in emergencies, including climate change and environmental degradation	42
Response pillar 2: Family-friendly and child-friendly policies	47
Key action 2.1 Quality assurance for ECD services	48
Key action 2.2 Parenting and family support	59
REFERENCES	70
ANNEX: Examples of ECD work streams based on 5 key actions	74

ACRONYMS

ARNEC	Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BKKBN	National Population and Family Planning Board (Indonesia)
EAPRO	East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF)
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECDAN	Early Childhood Development Action Network
ECE	Early Childhood Education
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
ILO	International Labour Organization
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (UNICEF)
MOLISA	Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PFP	Private Fundraising and Partnerships (UNICEF)
ROMP	Regional Office Management Plan (UNICEF)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEAMEO	Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization



FOREWORD

Young children need to be nurtured and cared for in a holistic manner by their main caregivers and service providers. This means that as early as during pregnancy, mothers should receive all the necessary physical and emotional support and services to secure a safe pregnancy and delivery. Babies should have a protective, healthy and adequately stimulating environment, while toddlers and young children should be nourished, protected, and ready to learn by the age of 5. Governments and stakeholders can contribute to achieving this through integrated policies and programming. Robust financing and assessments are needed to track child development and the quality of early childhood development (ECD) services for countries to firmly advance towards the achievement of target 4.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The ECD Regional Guidance in East Asia and the Pacific, **Growing Steady and Strong**, aspires to provide clear, useful and context-adaptable tools for advancing the ECD agenda in countries. It presents the most up-to-date research, tools and global guidance from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as well as other ECD expert organizations. It contains country examples and best practices to strengthen the regional community of learning and practice to support UNICEF country offices in planning and advocating for ECD policies and programming.

The latest reports on the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on young children show that critical and quick recovery interventions are needed to mitigate the catastrophic effects of isolation, service disruptions and school closures on children's development and learning, which have hampered the fulfilment of their rights, in particular the most vulnerable young children. In recent years, countries in the region made significant gains in reducing the number of children at risk of not reaching their maximum developmental potential. Unfortunately, the pandemic has reversed this trend by exacerbating the inequity gaps, which has highlighted the importance of sustainable and sufficient investments for countries to build back faster and better from the crisis.

We know now that the future income loss for those young children who have missed out on early learning and development services will be the highest, estimated at USD\$1.6 trillion; and we also know that the highest social and economic return is the investment in ECD programming estimated at USD\$17 for every USD\$1 invested in quality ECD interventions. Therefore, sustainable and equitable investment in ECD interventions is the most strategic and effective way for countries to mitigate the negative impacts the pandemic has brought upon younger children and their families. This is especially true for the most vulnerable, such as children with developmental delays and disabilities, children from ethnic minority groups and rural and dispersed areas, among others.

More than three decades of continuous research and evidence have shown the importance of the early years in determining the foundations of development and learning of children, and it is time for all relevant stakeholders to implement high quality, timely and sustainable, scalable actions to push forward the ECD agenda towards urgent recovery to build back better. **Growing Steady and Strong** reflects UNICEF's commitment to young children and their families by providing technical guidance and support to all UNICEF country offices and stakeholders in this objective.



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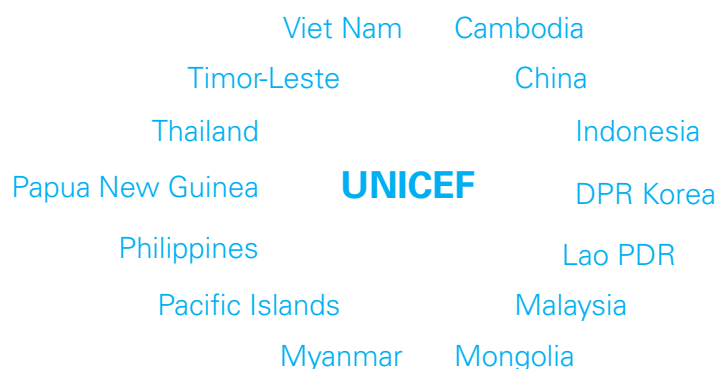
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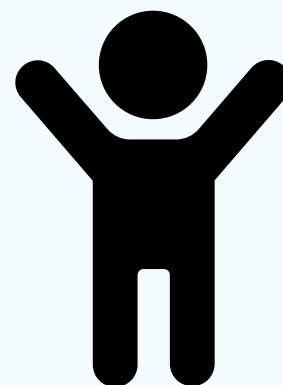
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Keeping ECD at the centre of COVID-19 recovery strategies is right and urgent


Growing Steady and Strong: Early childhood development regional guidance in East Asia and the Pacific was developed against the backdrop of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis to support the country offices of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in implementing the early childhood development (ECD) agenda as a key pillar for UNICEF in 2022–2025. It aims to provide a vision for action to UNICEF country offices in East Asia and the Pacific and other interested ECD partners and stakeholders to enhance the ECD policies and programmes in the region and position its importance in policymakers’ plans for a brighter future.

EARLY CHILDHOOD IS THE MOST CRITICAL AND INFLUENTIAL DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE IN A CHILD’S LIFE AND INVESTING IN IT CANNOT BE DELAYED.

Chapter 1 highlights the purpose and rationale of the document. Holistic ECD efforts and investments across sectors by countries, institutions, communities and families can have profound impacts on a child’s physical, socioemotional and cognitive development. The effectiveness of these investments also influences children’s long-term health, learning, earning and contributions to socioeconomic development in society. Young children need nurturing care, as they depend on adults for good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, early learning and stimulation, as well as security and safety. Furthermore, supportive policies adapted to the socioeconomic situation, climate and physical environment, and community participation are all key elements to facilitate children’s development and well-being. In essence, a wider and more enabling environment is crucial to strengthen the capacity of families and caregivers to support child development.




EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC COUNTRIES HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY PROGRESSED ON INTEGRATED ECD POLICIES AND SYSTEMS, MANY ALIGNED WITH THE NURTURING CARE FRAMEWORK.



Chapter 2 highlights East Asia and the Pacific system-wide advances as well as challenges in ECD systems strengthening and integrated national policies, including the use of the Nurturing Care Framework to advance coordinated efforts of governments and cross-sectoral linkages. ECD advances in the region have been numerous and countries have shown achievements in integrated ECD policies, costed national action plans, high-level multisectoral coordination mechanisms, laws to integrate key ECD services across sectors, and child-friendly community-based parenting support services. However, system-wide challenges have persisted and have been exacerbated during the pandemic, including:

- Slow policy adoption and implementation;
- Weak governance and lack of intersectoral coordination;
- Inadequate financing and budget allocations to ECD programmes;
- Limited understanding of holistic ECD;
- Lack of quality and inclusive ECD programming;
- Inadequate national ECD data and monitoring systems; and
- Critical loss of development and learning during COVID-19.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS HAD CROSS-CUTTING IMPACTS ON YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES.



Chapter 3 highlights the direct impacts on young children and their families in the region amidst the COVID-19 pandemic that has affected more than 150 million young children under 5 years of age. In many of the 27 countries supported by UNICEF programmes in East Asia and the Pacific, life-saving health and nutrition services came to a halt; access was curtailed to much needed water, sanitation, child protection and social services; and childcare, early learning centres, and preschools closed. The crisis has disrupted the delivery of essential ECD programmes and services across sectors with **negative repercussions on children across the five nurturing care components** (health, nutrition, security and safety, responsive caregiving, and early learning). There is an urgent need to address the following:

- **Gains made in children's survival and development are at risk of being reversed.** Given disruptions in essential maternal, newborn and child health services, the rates of child and maternal mortality could be higher especially given the lingering negative economic impact on households.
- **Diet-related non-communicable diseases are worsening.** Given lower access to and affordability of nutritious food owing to the impacts of pandemic mitigation measures, children face the risks of falling prey to the inappropriate marketing of inexpensive, readily available and unhealthy foods.

- **Developmental and learning loss have been exacerbated.** Young children are growing up without adequate stimulation, socialization skills and school readiness competencies given prolonged closures of ECD services and/or preschools. These losses have yet to be determined, but recent evidence suggests that pre-primary school closures in 2020 will result in approximately \$1.6 trillion in lost future earnings.
- **Parents are under greater stress.** Amid fewer resources available to support children's development, parents and caregivers have an increased burden to meet their children's needs for learning, attentive and responsive care, while facing additional stressors of increased unemployment and poverty as economic consequences of the pandemic.
- **Children and caregivers have unmet needs for mental health and well-being.** As a result of lockdown measures, young children have been missing essential social interactions, a key developmental domain that can be nurtured prior to primary school entry - with implications on their executive functions, socioemotional and language competencies. The pandemic has increased the risks of young children to toxic stress, domestic violence and other protection risk factors, thus it is essential to also protect and promote mental health of caregivers so that they can best provide nurturing care for children.
- **Budget allocations to ECD have been reversed.** The promotion of integrated ECD and the protection of ECD financing are more urgent than ever in an environment of financial constraints as the crisis will profoundly impact the development and well-being of young children; for many, the impact will be lifelong.
- **At-risk, excluded, marginalized young children will be most affected.** Negative impacts of the pandemic will not be distributed equally and they are expected to be most damaging to the most vulnerable children, including:
 - Children living in poverty, including girls;
 - Children from marginalized urban and rural/ remote areas;
 - Children with developmental delays and disabilities;
 - Children from ethnic and linguistic minorities;
 - Refugee and migrant children;
 - Children from fragile or conflict-affected States;
 - Children affected by disasters and climate emergencies; and
 - Children who lack documentation of their legal identity.

BUILDING BACK BETTER FOR YOUNG CHILDREN THROUGH ECD: RECOVERY STRATEGIES

Chapter 4 details pathways to achieve the strategic vision of “Building back better for young children through ECD”. The analysis suggests two key response pillars: systems strengthening and family and child-friendly policies. It also recommends five key policy actions. These components complement each other and can contribute towards a successful and systematic implementation of the ECD agenda in the countries of the region. For each of the key actions, the regional guidance provides an overview of ideas and examples of good practices and successful implementation from the region and beyond. Relevant resources from UNICEF and its development partners are also provided, along with examples of successful implementation from UNICEF country offices in the region.

Vision: Building back better for young children through ECD	
Response pillar 1: Systems strengthening	Response pillar 2: Family and child-friendly policies
<p>Key actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.1 Integrated ECD approaches • 1.2 Financing for ECD – multisectoral and sectoral • 1.3 ECD in emergencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Climate change/ environmental degradation 	<p>Key actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.1 Quality assurance for ECD services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Quality standards ◦ ECD workforce ◦ Monitoring and evaluation of services • 2.2 Parenting and family support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Parenting for nurturing, responsive and violence-free caregiving ◦ Mental health of caregivers and children ◦ Family-friendly policies, including childcare

The **UNICEF ECD Regional Guidance in EAP** provides a vision for action to build back better for young children and their caregivers through ECD to address the issue of development and learning loss exacerbated by disruptions and closures of essential ECD services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has a particular focus on improving the provision of nurturing care, parenting and addressing child protection risks heightened by the pandemic, while also highlighting emerging areas of young children's usage of technology and vulnerability to climate and environmental stresses. The document is intended for UNICEF country offices, government counterparts and strategic partners in the region.

The response pillars and key actions suggest the following needs: 1) to emphasize ECD systems strengthening to pursue an intersectoral approach to holistic and integrated ECD services; 2) to promote family and child-friendly policies from a life course approach that considers the need for multi-level planning across systems; and 3) to focus on equity and inclusion as a fundamental approach to ECD, in particular for vulnerable populations, including children with developmental delays and disabilities and children in emergencies. Put together, these actions will ensure that by 2025, East Asia and the Pacific countries have strengthened capacity, knowledge, partnerships and resources to enhance delivery of ECD programmes and services for the most disadvantaged young children and their families.



CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS



Early childhood: Research has proven that brains are built over time and from the bottom up during the early years of a child's life (Center of the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2021). Early childhood spans from conception until 8 years of age. As with the UNICEF ECD Programme Guidance, the focus of this UNICEF EAPRO ECD Regional Guidance extends to the official age of primary school entry, either 5 or 6 years. It encompasses several distinct periods of the life course, including pre-conception to birth, postnatal and newborn within the first year, infant and toddler up to 3 years of age and young child between 3 and 6 years of age. Special emphasis is placed on the first 1,000 days, from conception to 2 years of age.



Child development refers to the process of thriving, growing and learning that happens throughout childhood, being at its highest rate during the first 5 years of life with an accelerated pace between birth and three years of age. By 3 years of age, a child experiences more than 1 million neural connections each second (see [Zero to Three](#)). By 5 years of age, the brain reaches almost 90 percent of its adult size (Brown and Jernigan, 2012). The process of development during early childhood is different for each of the stages and one of the most common ways to measure its progress is through set milestones that children should attain depending on their age and context. Evidence shows the main risks for children not to reach their maximum developmental potential are mostly related to poor health and nutrition, unresponsive caregiving, inadequate stimulation and poor learning environments, violence, trauma and economic deprivation (WHO, UNICEF, World Bank Group, 2018).



First 1,000 days: The period from conception until 2 years of age – the first 1,000 days – constitutes a golden window of opportunity to shape children's growth and development for lifelong health and wellbeing. It is a period of immense vulnerability as children's brains, bodies and emotions develop rapidly. Toxic stress, inadequate nutrition, deprivations of cognitive and language stimulation during this period will have adverse consequences for the child that are sometimes irreversible. They include poor cognition and educational performance, lost productivity, and an increased risk of nutrition-related chronic diseases in adult life. Bonding and attachment are formed during this period. Thus, it is critical to provide children with warm, loving and nurturing relationships so that they feel secure and valued.



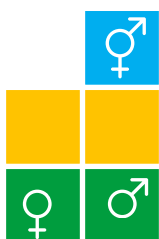
Nurturing care refers to conditions created by public policies, programmes and services. These conditions enable communities and caregivers to ensure children's good health and nutrition and protect them from stress while giving young children opportunities for early learning, through interactions that are responsive and emotionally supportive. To reach their full potential, children need the five interrelated and indivisible components of nurturing care (good health, adequate nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving and opportunities for learning).



The **Nurturing Care Framework** provides a road map for action to help children survive and thrive and transform health outcomes, and increase human potential by describing how a whole-of-government and a whole-of-society approach can promote nurturing care for young children. It builds upon state-of-the-art evidence of how child development unfolds and effective policies and interventions that can improve development in early childhood. It outlines why efforts to improve health and well-being must begin in the earliest years, from pregnancy to 3 years of age; the major threats to development in early childhood; how nurturing care protects young children from the worst effects of adversity and promotes physical, emotional and cognitive development; and what families and caregivers need to provide nurturing care for young children.



Responsive caregiving includes observing and responding to children's movements, sounds, gestures and verbal requests. It is the basis for protecting children against injury and the negative effects of adversity, recognizing and responding to illness, enriching learning, and building trust and social relationships. It also includes responsive feeding, which is especially important for low-weight or ill infants. Before young children learn to speak, the engagement between them and their caregivers is expressed through cuddling, eye contact, smiles, vocalizations, and gestures. These mutually enjoyable interactions create an emotional bond, which helps young children to understand the world around them and to learn about people, relationships and language. These social interactions also stimulate connections in the brain.



Gender roles and expectations shaped during the early years can impact children throughout their lives. Gender roles are imposed upon children from birth, and they start to form concepts of gender by 2 years of age. Between 3 and 5 years of age, children develop their gender identity and begin to embody gender norms and apply these to their friends and communities. Gender parity has been consistently reported in pre-primary education enrollment as well as programmes targeting children during the first 1,000 days, making ECD programming tactical platforms to include gender sensitive educators, curricula, pedagogy and infrastructure to lay the foundation for a more equitable future for young children.

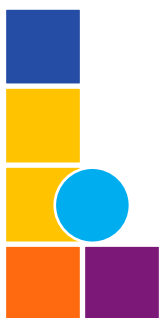


Family-friendly policies are the measures and arrangements that have a positive impact on parents and caregivers' abilities to reconcile work and family responsibilities – and advance the development and well-being of children and caregivers. The potential advantages of family-friendly policies include reducing rates of child mortality and low birthweight, decreasing instances of child abuse, increasing rates of breastfeeding and immunization, enhancing children's cognitive development and school performance, as well as increasing economic empowerment and well-being for primary caregivers. UNICEF calls on governments and businesses to redesign workplaces of the future in four main ways: 1) paid parental leave to care for young children; 2) support for breastfeeding; 3) affordable, accessible and quality childcare; 4) child benefits. For information of how these policies can be implemented by Governments and employers/ businesses, refer to page 7 in Family-Friendly Policies in South Asia (UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti Working Paper, 2021).

Children with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Some children will be born with a disabling health condition or impairment, while others may experience disability as a result of illness, injury or poor nutrition. Children with disabilities include those with health conditions such as cerebral palsy, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, traumatic spinal cord injury, Down syndrome, and children with hearing, visual, physical, communication and intellectual impairments. A number of children have a single impairment while others may experience multiple impairments. For example, a child with cerebral palsy may have mobility, communication and intellectual impairments. The complex interaction between a health condition or impairment and environmental and personal factors means that each child's experience of disability is different (WHO and UNICEF, 2012).



Developmental delays are common in early childhood, occurring in 10–15 per cent of preschool children (Choo et al., 2019). A developmental delay is noted when a child does not achieve developmental milestones in comparison to peers of the same age range. Children may not have access to any available early intervention services unless delays are identified early. Few countries in East Asia and the Pacific have the capacity to conduct universal clinical assessments for all children of such delays; however, advice on appropriate stimulation activities can be provided to impact developmental trajectories (UNICEF EAPRO, 2016). Missing out on nurturing care in the early years may lead to lasting consequences of less optimal outcomes for the rest of a child's life, including lower cognitive, language and psychosocial outcomes. Thus, early intervention is essential because it becomes progressively harder to treat developmental delays in later life (UNICEF, 2014a).







Introduction and purpose

The scale and impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic since 2020 have created unprecedented challenges worldwide, including in East Asia and the Pacific. The present document, **Growing Steady and Strong: Early childhood development regional guidance in East Asia and the Pacific**, developed against the backdrop of the COVID-19 crisis, primarily aims to support country offices of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in the region in implementing the early childhood development (ECD) agenda in a context-pertinent matter and to strengthen programming and advocacy around ECD. As UNICEF is launching new global and regional strategies, this guidance will position ECD as a key pillar for its work in 2022–2025.

The **purpose** of the present document is to provide a vision for action considering emerging and persistent issues during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The key **objectives** of the present document are to highlight strategies to advance progress for young children towards achieving target 4.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by taking regional and country contexts into consideration while encouraging the efforts of country offices to strengthen existing integrated ECD systems and coordination mechanisms and to develop systematic integrated ECD approaches. These can be achieved through coordinated action across sectoral teams within UNICEF and in partnership with government counterparts and strategic partners globally, regionally and in-country.

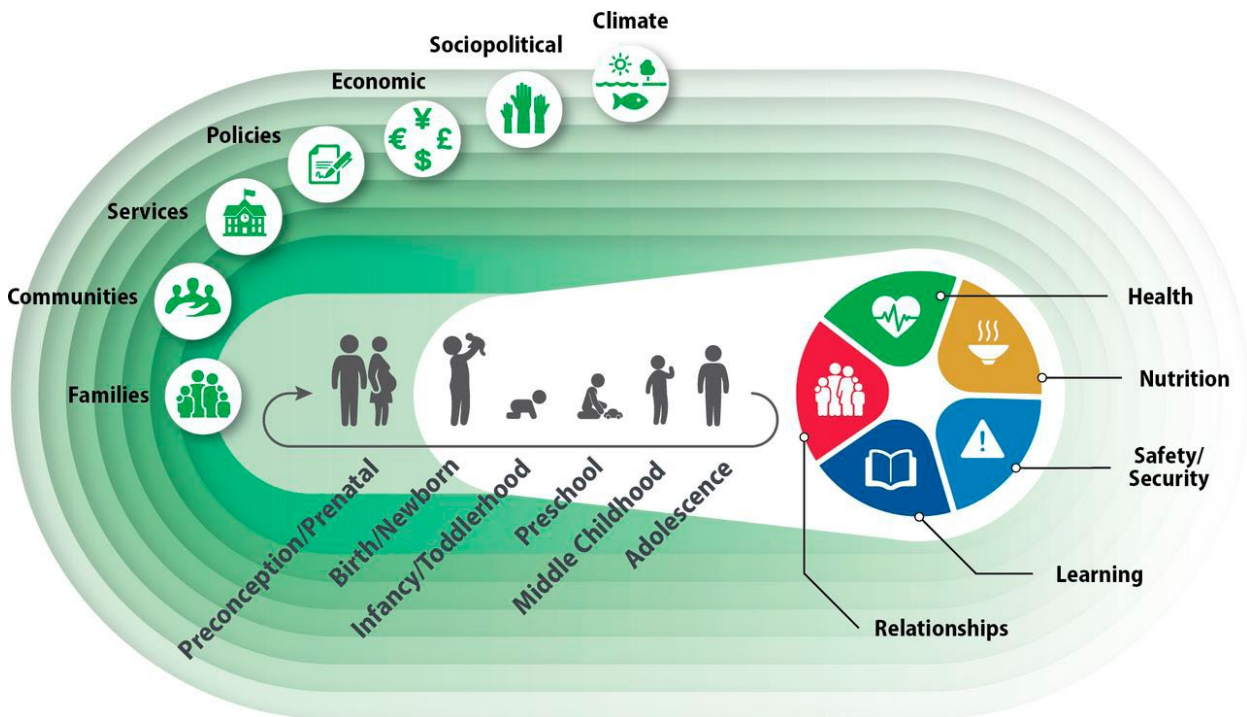
While the main **target audience** of the present document is UNICEF country offices in East Asia and the Pacific, it may also be of interest to experts and researchers, universities, regional networks (e.g., ASEAN, SEAMEO, ARNEC), development partners (e.g., UNESCO) and civil society representatives (e.g., faith-based organizations, women’s organizations, parent associations and groups for children with disabilities) to enhance collective action for young children and their families.

The document links to both global and UNICEF-internal priorities on ECD:

- It is informed by **global and regional frameworks on ECD**, SDG target 4.2, [UNICEF Programme Guidance for ECD](#), [UNICEF Education Strategy 2019-2030](#), [A UNICEF Vision for Parents \(2021\)](#), [the UNICEF Strategic Plan \(2022–2025\)](#), UNICEF Regional Office Management Plan, [the Putrajaya Declaration \(2016\)](#) and [the Kathmandu Statement of Action \(2018\)](#). It aligns with the Global Partnership Strategy for Early Childhood as well as strategies for collaborative action set out by key partnerships and networks for collaborative action, such as the Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN), the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Asia and the Pacific Regional Bureau for Education. It is structured around collaborative global ECD frameworks, including the Nurturing Care Framework, Care for Child Development and Early Moments Matter.
- **Country perspectives and realities** are also reflected, as the present document is informed by an East Asia and the Pacific regional ECD pulse check survey involving all 14 UNICEF country offices in the region, bilateral consultations with UNICEF country

offices, and [ECD rapid assessments](#) conducted in four selected countries as part of a grant from the Prudence Foundation.

The new **Management Plan (2022–2025) of the UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO)** frames the development of the present document on ECD regional guidance within overall output 2.3, that by 2025, East Asian and the Pacific countries have strengthened capacity and benefit from quality and comparative evidence, knowledge, partnerships and resources to expand and improve ECD, parenting and early learning programmes for the most disadvantaged young children and their families, including in humanitarian situations. In addition, it reinforces the multidisciplinary approach needed to successfully implement the agenda in the region. EAPRO has included ECD in its management plan in outputs related to maternal and newborn health¹ and nutrition.² Although not explicit, throughout the Regional Office Management Plan (ROMP) are actions related to protecting children, including younger children, and promoting healthy and safe environments for them in all different contexts.



Young children need nurturing care and support from the wider environment.

Source: Black, et al. (2021). [The Principles of Nurturing Care promote human capital and mitigate adversities from preconception through adolescence](#). *BMJ Global Health*.

¹ Output 1.1 (HEALTH - Programme Excellence): EAP country offices have enhanced analytical and implementation capacity to address each country's structured bottlenecks in their national and sub-national health systems and support achieving Universal Health Coverage for pregnant women, newborns, children, adolescents and youth with strengthened, contextualized, quality, emergency and climate responsive, resilient and sustainable Primary Health Care.

² Output 1.3 (NUTRITION - Programme Excellence): EAP countries have enhanced capacity to prevent and treat malnutrition along the lifecourse in both development and humanitarian settings, Output 1.4 (NUTRITION - Public Goods): UNICEF EAPR benefits from better evidence, knowledge, partnerships and resources to conduct evidence-based policy advocacy for the prevention and treatment of malnutrition along the lifecourse in both development and humanitarian settings.



Overview of East Asia and the Pacific: ECD system-wide context



Highlights of regional achievements

A 2021 [ECD rapid assessment](#)³ in four countries, informed by the Nurturing Care Framework, has shown **country-level advances in integrated national policies** with further interest to enhance cross-sectoral implementation at the subnational and local levels. This is to ensure that children not only survive with support from policies for health and nutrition, but also thrive through the engagement of education and other key social sectors. The Nurturing Care Framework continues to be integral amid implementation challenges arising from COVID-19. While it was initially created with a focus on the younger age group (children under three), the Nurturing Care Framework can also be used to inform programming for children through adolescence, including advancing the coordinated efforts of governments and cross-sector linkages with ECD provision for young children prior to school entry. Recent data from a UNICEF internal ECD survey of the country offices in the region revealed the following advances in **systems strengthening**.



Cambodia has a National Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy and costed National Action Plan with an established inter-ministerial mechanism to foster intersectoral coordination. UNICEF Cambodia's ECCD theory of change 2021–2022 has been informed by the Nurturing Care Framework. In 2022, a nurturing care parenting package will be available for implementation by the ECCD secretariat with UNICEF support.



China has a broad coverage of preschool education with a demonstrated increase in the gross enrollment ratio to 85 per cent in 2020 from 57 per cent in 2010. It has strengthened ECD in the maternal and child health-care system through care groups and home visits. It also has a demonstrated model on child-friendly community-based parenting support services.



Indonesia has an ECD policy and costed Holistic-Integrated ECD Action Plan, which shows the Government's interest to enhance ECD integration and coordination. This will be strengthened between line ministries at both the national and subnational levels through the Holistic-Integrated ECD Taskforce. Holistic-integrated ECD technical guidelines have been developed based on the Nurturing Care Framework to guide subnational level implementation.

³ With generous support from the Prudence Foundation. The four countries involved in the ECD rapid assessment are Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand.



Pacific island countries established a high-level and intergovernmental body, the Pacific Regional Council for Early Childhood Development, comprising ministers for finance and social sector ministries (health, education, community development, etc.), and endorsed a nine-point action agenda called the Pasifika Call to Action to guide national multisectoral efforts for ECD. At the national level, some countries in the Pacific region (Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) are progressing on national ECD policies, costed action plans and coordinated mechanisms.



The Philippines adopted the costed National ECCD Strategic Plan 2019–2030 and passed the First 1,000 Days Law to facilitate the integration of key ECD services across sectors. The First 1,000 Days Manual of Operations will soon be finalized to guide the implementation of nurturing care and integrated ECCD in local planning.



Thailand, through the 2019 ECD Act, has set in place a holistic, high-level multisectoral coordination mechanism with a steering committee to convene relevant ministries and agencies in furthering implementation of the National Road Map for ECD. With UNICEF support, local governments are including ECD in their results-based management and budget proposals to increase decentralized financing for ECD quality improvement.

Key challenges in East Asia and the Pacific

As highlighted above, there have been numerous ECD advances in the region. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented substantial challenges as almost every country in East Asia and the Pacific has been greatly impacted by it. The findings of the 2021 UNICEF-internal ECD survey for country offices in East Asia and the Pacific and the four-country [ECD rapid assessment](#) revealed the following common systemic ECD challenges across the region.

Slow policy adoption and implementation

Despite achievements made on the policy front with ECD policies and road maps mostly in place, the region has a need to strengthen focus on policy implementation at the subnational and local levels. Few ECD policies have been translated into effective, scaled-up, sustainable programmes to impact the lives of young children and families, particularly among the poor people in remote villages or urban slums. Moreover, this implementation challenge is compounded by competing priorities of different ministries in response to the COVID-19 crisis in addition to fiscal constraints resulting in inadequate resources. Given huge disparities within the region itself, consistent implementation efforts are needed through planning, financing and coordinated actions for monitoring and evaluation.

Weak governance and lack of intersectoral coordination

Despite evidence of the value of integrated ECD, there are limited examples of successfully coordinated ECD services in the region. The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated coordination challenges that countries face across sectors and among government departments, including at the subnational level. The current default towards project-based interventions rather than a much-needed systems approaches paired with current incentive structures that do not encourage vertical and horizontal coordination, tends to hamper absorption of integrated service delivery concepts, including nurturing care. This issue is further compounded by the lack of functional, multisectoral coordination mechanisms and comprehensive road maps to bring together different ministries under a common objective with complementary and collaborative services, as well as facilitate partnerships among key ECD partners and actors.

Inadequate financing and budget allocations to ECD programmes

In the region, while some countries have adopted ECD policies, they lack adequate budget allocation or a costed⁴ plans to take ECD services to scale. Worldwide, governments spend less than 2 per cent of their education budgets on early childhood learning programmes (the international recommendations for ECE investment is 10 per cent of the national budget) while low- and middle-income countries spend just 1 per cent of their national health budgets on early childhood nutrition (ECDAN, 2020). While total share of ECD official development assistance (ODA) has seen an increase between 2002 and 2016, aid to pre-primary education remains a very small proportion (1 per cent in 2016) (Zubairi and Rose, 2018). Despite a general increase in aid to the education sector between 2015 and 2017 which rose to 11 percent, aid to pre-primary education has declined by 27 percent from USD\$94.8 million to USD\$68.8 million (Zubairi and Rose, 2019). Compared with has the lowest priority in budgetary support from the private sector across most countries in the region. Protecting ECD investments and improving the planning, costing and prioritization of essential ECD services are more important than ever in the COVID-19 context.

Limited understanding of holistic ECD

Children's development is holistic in nature, cutting across sectors, including health, nutrition, early learning, child protection, social policy and the environment. Children need a range of support for their growth, development and well-being, not just to survive but to also thrive. There tends to be a reductionist view among stakeholders that ECD programmes are equal to sectoral focused work in either pre-primary education or nutrition. There is a need to strengthen public knowledge and perception of ECD and the importance of holistic ECD and nurturing care in the early years of a child's life, in particular its impact on brain development.

⁴ Some countries in the region have ECD or ECE action plans that are costed: Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines.

Lack of quality and inclusive ECD programming

The development and expanded implementation of quality ECD programming and expansion of it have been further strained by the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before the pandemic, the number of qualified ECD staff was inadequate to scale up early learning to reach universal pre-primary education by 2030, and the workforce shortage was compounded poor allocation of financial and human resources. The pandemic has now further impacted ECD workforce and caregivers, as many of them face issues of job security, sometimes with no pay or reduced salaries (and even permanently closed services), and the stress of managing remote learning. Moreover, frontline workers are further stretched during the pandemic with a primary focus on the survival agenda of health and nutrition while the thrive agenda of incorporating learning is further challenged, especially in under-resourced settings. This will have implications on the quality of ECD and care, especially for the most disadvantaged children. In order to fill these gaps, it could be helpful to leverage existing sectoral platforms for holistic support of children and families, paired with cost-effective approaches building on community-based systems while mobilizing parents and families with relevant support and mentorship.

- **Inadequate national ECD data and monitoring systems.** Data gaps, due to inadequate real-time data to track ECD interventions and outcomes across sectors, as well as limited usage of existing data to enhance policies hamper decision-making. Currently, not all countries in the region have adopted and monitored SDG indicators for SDG target 4.2, including for proxy indicator 4.2.1 (countries that have done both include Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pacific Island countries, and Viet Nam). While key data points for ECE analysis planning are available through the [ECE Accelerator Toolkit](#), difficulties in gathering, analysing and reporting on holistic ECD progress towards SDG indicators remain a key challenge thus hindering effective ECD policy implementation.
- **Critical loss of development and learning during COVID-19.** The interruption of ECD services, including early learning and preschool services, represents massive disruption to child development and learning. Additionally, it has posed a huge challenge on childcare and other family policies hampering efforts regarding responsive caregiving and other family-oriented actions in countries. This interruption has been especially damaging for children already excluded (disadvantaged and vulnerable) before the pandemic; the disparities they faced in their development and learning in comparison with more “included” peers, have only increased since the pandemic. Children with developmental delays and disabilities have lost targeted services provided in daycare centres and preschools before the pandemic; children of ethnic minorities have lost benefits they had been gaining in mother tongue-based services; and children of the poor, barely able to be enrolled before the pandemic, are not re-enrolling after.



Overview of East Asia and the Pacific: Status of young children and their families



Based on pre COVID-19 pandemic estimates, fewer children under 5 years of age in the region were at risk of not reaching their developmental potential: a decrease from 55 million affected children in 2004 to 42 million in 2010 (Black et al., 2016). Owing to concerted efforts of governments in East Asia and the Pacific to advance the rights and improve the lives of young children, more children could experience safe delivery, live to celebrate their first birthday and enter school ready to learn. This has coincided with increasing recognition by policymakers in the region that investments in children, in particular in the earliest years, can help pave the way for economic prosperity and social development characterized by achievements in human capital development, effective responses to emerging inequities and societies and populations that would be able to respond to emerging opportunities in the twenty-first century. From 2000, countries in East Asia and the Pacific have showed mixed progress towards ECD indicators. In countries including the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thailand and Viet Nam, 9 out of 10 children were on track to reach their potential in at least three of the four ECD domains (literacy-numeracy, physical, socioemotional and learning) while in the other countries, children were not developing well in those domains (UNICEF EAPRO, 2018). In some countries, as few as 9 per cent of children were on track for literacy-numeracy.

As some countries now emerge from the COVID-19 crisis, some forecasts have estimated even greater challenges facing children and their families, although data on the longer-term impact of the pandemic on young children are very limited. The pandemic is expected to drastically reverse gains made in East Asia and the Pacific over the years, including the attainment of SDG target 4.2, given that countries were already off track prior to the pandemic (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2020). The number of children living in multidimensional poverty – without access to education, health, housing, nutrition, sanitation, or water – has increased by 15 per cent since the start of the pandemic (UNICEF, 2021b).

The UNICEF EAPRO publication on **Young Children and the Pandemic** (UNICEF EAPRO, 2021) highlights the impact of COVID-19 disruptions on ECD services in countries across the region based on the five nurturing care components. The unprecedented disruption of children's access to nurturing care opportunities means fewer children have a fair chance to develop and thrive. While the crisis has disrupted the provision of nurturing care programming and services for young children, in particular the most marginalized children, it has also brought attention to emerging issues, including children's usage of technology, the mental health of caregivers and children, child protection risks, as well as environmental and climate change risks facing young children and their families, as detailed below. More specifically, the pandemic has highlighted the urgent need for **integrated parenting support** so caregivers can cope with the unprecedented crisis, in particular through family-friendly policies and practices with the engagement of companies and governments.



Nurturing care for marginalized children

Given the current global crisis, children from marginalized groups need further attention. Even within the four countries that have shown progress and interest on further implementation of nurturing care⁵, service provision across sectors does not tend to be widely available, especially during emergencies and for children with developmental delays disabilities, children from remote communities and children from poor and vulnerable groups, nor is service provision available in the languages spoken by children and their families. The most affected are young children from the following marginalized groups:

- Children living in poverty, including girls;
- Children from marginalized urban and rural/ remote areas;
- Children with developmental delays and disabilities;
- Children from ethnic and linguistic minorities;
- Refugee and migrant children;
- Children from fragile or conflict-affected States;
- Children affected by disasters and climate emergencies; and
- Children who lack documentation of their legal identity.



⁵ Four countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand) participated in the ECD rapid assessment with generous funding from the Prudence Foundation.





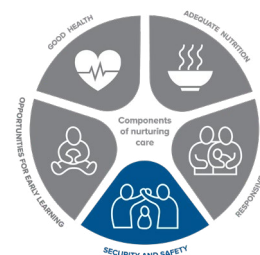
Health: 38 per cent of countries in the region reported health and nutrition service disruptions for children and mothers. Most preventable newborn deaths tend to be higher among the poorest and most vulnerable groups in the region (UNICEF EAPRO, 2018). After the pandemic, rates of child and maternal mortality could be higher given the lingering negative economic impact on households paired with disrupted access to essential health services, including maternal, newborn and child health services (UNICEF EAPRO, 2021). More than 50 per cent of health services in South-East Asia have been disrupted by the pandemic, owing to a combination of supply and demand factors – with decreased operationality of services as well as reduced demand stemming from lockdowns, financial difficulties and fear of contracting COVID-19 while accessing health facilities (WHO, 2020a).



Nutrition: Decreased availability and affordability of life-saving preventive and curative nutrition services during the pandemic will likely exacerbate malnutrition in the region, particularly for those who are already suffering from inequities (Development Initiatives, 2020). Given lower access to and affordability of nutritious food owing to the impacts of pandemic mitigation measures, children face the risks of falling prey to the inappropriate marketing of inexpensive, readily available and unhealthy foods. This could lead to worsening outcomes related to COVID-19, including overweight and obesity and the worsening of diet-related non-communicable diseases (Kupka, 2020).



Responsive caregiving: Given the pandemic, children are now at greater risks of violence, abuse and neglect as families face social isolation and stress. Even prior to the pandemic, children are sometimes left to care for themselves as more than 1 in 10 young children (12 per cent) across countries in the region have been left without adequate supervision at least once a week, based on available data from UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (UNICEF, 2019a). Disaggregated data show striking differences based on wealth as children from poorer households are consistently the least likely to experience adult engagement. This has implications on young children as they form attachment relationships and develop socioemotionally in the formative early years.



Security and safety: In the region, it is projected that the number of children under 5 years of age living in extreme poverty in 2021 will increase to 1.4 million. Households that were already disadvantaged before the pandemic now face greater vulnerability to poverty and economic shocks, and they are at greater risk of negative economic impacts of the pandemic. For example, in Indonesia, the share of minority groups (40 per cent) experiencing financial difficulties was greater compared to the general population (34 per cent).⁶ In the Philippines and Papua New Guinea, households that were already economically disadvantaged pre-pandemic have been disproportionately impacted by the economic crisis (UNICEF EAPRO, 2021).



Early learning: At least 7 million young children in the region are unable to continue pre-primary education with less than half of countries in East Asia and the Pacific having established distance learning opportunities. Around 40 per cent of low- and middle-income countries have not supported learners at risk of exclusion during the pandemic, including children with delays and disabilities and those living in poverty and in remote areas, and those from ethnic and linguistic minority groups (UNESCO, 2020). Moreover, migrant and displaced children, including girls, are at heightened risk of not being able to access any formal learning (International Data Alliance for Children on the Move, 2021). Boys from poorer households and remote rural areas also deserve particular attention as they tend to lag behind girls in achieving minimum proficiency skills in reading and writing at the primary level in South-East Asia (UNICEF and SEAMEO, 2020).

Parenting and mental health

A higher childcare burden at home is a key contributor to family stress. Worsening mental health of parents and caregivers (owing to the added burden to balancing childcare and work responsibilities, compounded by economic insecurity and social isolation) can lead to less parent-child bonding and, at the extreme, heighten a child’s risk of exposure to adverse early experiences and toxic stress in the home environments (UNICEF EAPRO, 2021; FHI360 and the LEGO Foundation, 2021). Special attention should also be placed on the **needs and vulnerabilities of workers in the informal economy** in considering the range of family-friendly policies needed to support them as they are among populations that are most severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (UNICEF, ILO, WIEGO, 2021).

Across the region, there is a need to strengthen fathers’ involvement in parenting, given that levels of fathers’ engagement pre-pandemic were low to begin with (UNICEF, 2019a). Post-pandemic, even though evidence shows that fathers have taken on more childcare responsibilities than before, mothers still bear disproportionate responsibility for childcare and housework (FHI360 and the LEGO Foundation, 2021). More data are needed to assess the impact of the pandemic on childcare, especially for low-income families, given lockdown measures. In response to these compounding issues, there is an urgent need for stronger gender-responsive parenting support and greater advocacy for family-friendly policies.

Child protection risks amid COVID-19

Prior to COVID-19, at least eight countries in East Asia and the Pacific had demonstrated frequent use of violent discipline against children under 15 years of age (UNICEF EAPRO, 2018). Children with disabilities are unfortunately at greater risk for maltreatment with a rate of child abuse and neglect that is at least three times higher than the rate among typically developing children (Legano et al., 2021). Recent studies have confirmed that physical punishment, including spanking, can cause visible damages to children’s brains similar to more severe forms of maltreatment, including physical or sexual abuse (Cuartas et al., 2021). In responding to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need for more positive parenting programmes, such as Parenting for Lifelong Health in the Philippines, to reach families and meet their needs to prevent violence against children (Hackett et al., 2021). As the region’s vulnerability to poverty and economic shocks increases owing to the impact of the pandemic on families that were already vulnerable, children are at greater risk of suffering violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect.



YOUNG CHILDREN AND DIGITAL USE



During the pandemic, the most vulnerable children have been the least likely to access remote alternatives to pre-primary education, as they face additional learning disadvantages for an effective transition to online learning platforms. Even with low-technology approaches using television or radio, some countries have little chance of ensuring learning continuity; for instance, only 22 per cent of households in the poorest wealth quintile in Cambodia owns a television (UNESCO, 2020).

In response to school closures, various strategies and initiatives have been supported by UNICEF in collaboration with ministries of education to **ensure children's continued learning**. They include Escola Ba Uma (School Goes Home) initiative in Timor-Leste with a target to reach 350,000 children across the country through television and radio programmes, electronic books, and the online platform "Learning Passport," to be supplemented by printed books for children who are not digitally connected. Khang Panya Lao is the first national digital teaching and learning platform in the Lao People's Democratic Republic to increase children's access to learning through a range of online and offline learning resources, such as digitalized official textbooks, quizzes, videos, and games. The platform is accessible online and as an app, even without an Internet connection.

Global lockdowns and a variety of measures that restricted movement in response to COVID-19 have resulted in significantly reduced play and interaction opportunities for children that are essential to **children's mental health and physical and socioemotional development**. Excessive technology use may have implications on children's physical activity and sleep (UNICEF EAPRO, 2021). WHO Guidelines on Physical Activity, Sedentary Behaviour and Sleep (2019) suggest that infants younger than 1 year or age should never be in front of screens, while children 1–4 years of age should have no more than an hour each day of sedentary screen time. This can help maintain and increase quality time of parents and caregivers with young children. Caregivers should be further supported to spend time with children through active play and communication.

Furthermore, the **unique needs of young children with developmental delays in relation to digital use require greater attention owing to pandemic-induced habits**. Recent studies have described that increased technology use related to COVID-19 is problematic for children (Eales, et al. 2021). While the impact of the pandemic on developmental delays is still unfolding, hospitals in Singapore have already reported greater referrals for conditions associated with increased screen time, such as speech delay and short attention span.¹

¹ See article 'More young children diagnosed with developmental delays'.





YOUNG CHILDREN AND CLIMATE CHANGE/ ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Young children and families in the East Asia and the Pacific region are on the front line of the climate and environmental crisis as they live in one of the regions most vulnerable to climate-related disasters with about half of the population directly affected every year (IPCC, 2021). More than one quarter of 5.9 million under-five deaths annually are attributable to unhealthy environments (defined as all environmental physical, chemical, biological and work-related factors external to a person, such as air pollution, lack of clean and safe play spaces, and environmental toxins, including lead and mercury) while 26 per cent of the under-five deaths annually are due to the impacts of environmental factors, including air pollution, lack of adequate water and sanitation, hazardous chemicals and increasing exposure to the climate change impacts (Save the Children, 2021; UNICEF EAPRO, 2020). Climate change is widespread, rapid and intensifying (IPCC, 2021) which means that there will be increasing extreme climate and weather shocks in the future as a result of human activities – more heatwaves, floods, tropical cyclones/hurricanes, droughts, crop failures, and wildfires; rising rising sea levels; and more vector-borne diseases, air pollution and lead pollution (Save the Children, 2021; UNICEF, 2021c).



Children in South-East Asia are especially vulnerable given the high concentration of children living in developing economies in tropical regions. Urbanization in the region will further increase the vulnerability of children as 7 out of 10 children worldwide will be living in cities by 2050, mainly in Asia and Africa (ARNEC, 2020b). Most of the population growth in the region is also estimated to happen in coastal areas which are vulnerable to the impacts of tropical storms, flooding and sea level rise.



Children in the Pacific, given the relative isolation of many islands, are extremely vulnerable to a large number of climate disasters, including tropical cyclones and typhoons, flooding, drought and temperature extremes. Several Pacific island countries and territories are low lying or have low-lying territories that are vulnerable to coastal erosion and rising sea levels, and all are affected by climate change and natural disasters that have considerable impacts across all outcome areas in relation to the realization of children's and women's rights (UNICEF Pacific, 2017).

The impacts of climate change and environmental risks on young children, including in utero, are many and they cut across sectors. Furthermore, climate change can reinforce inequalities while undermining progress achieved over the past several decades. Children, especially the most vulnerable ones who live in fragile and developing contexts, are the least responsible but will suffer the most from it with potentially devastating consequences on their sensitive brains and growing bodies. The urgency to address these growing risks has become critical and should be approached through an integrated response.



Children will suffer from increased risk of health diseases and nutritional deprivation as climate change induces water stress and alters crop conditions. This could worsen malnutrition and stunting with long-term impacts on their capacity to learn and seek employment in the future.



Children's education and learning opportunities may also be threatened (UNICEF EAPRO, 2019), thereby worsening the current learning loss situations.



There will be increased social risks of migration and exposure to violence, exploitation and abuse as communities face pressures arising from food, livelihood and income insecurity.



The numbers of forced international migrants from East Asia and the Pacific as well as internally displaced persons across the region might also increase because of climate disasters induced by natural hazards, including water stress, crop failure and sea level rise.



All these risk factors may induce toxic stress in young children, their parents and caregivers, which will reduce their capacity to fight diseases while increasing mental health challenges. Additionally, existing evidence indicates that governments' inaction on climate change is linked to psychological distress and mental health crises in children (Hickman et al., 2021).





Building back better: A strategic vision to push forward the ECD agenda in East Asia and the Pacific

Humankind is facing an unprecedented global crisis that will leave multiple effects on different levels of society. Young children, especially those most vulnerable, are possibly the most affected by the COVID-19 crisis but troublingly, they seem to be the least prioritized by governments and organizations in pandemic recovery plans. As stated before, the present document aims to provide some guidance to UNICEF country offices in East Asia and the Pacific and other interested partners and stakeholders in ECD to enhance the ECD agenda in the region and position its importance among policymakers' priorities. Undoubtedly, COVID-19 has changed many of the ways UNICEF works, and this is a golden opportunity to reshape programming at the field level to make the work more efficient and pertinent to attain results for children.

Strategic vision: “Building back better for young children through ECD” means that UNICEF actions for children continue to be high quality, innovative, inclusive and pertinent, but they must be reinvented in a context that requires a stronger connection between development and humanitarian work, in which strategic interventions are more flexible to respond to the needs of children and their families in a more timely and cost-effective way, and with feasible scalability.

Response pillars: The strategic vision for EAPRO on ECD is divided into two main areas of work: i) system strengthening; and ii) family and child-friendly policies. These components complement each other and can contribute towards a successful and systematic implementation of the ECD agenda in the countries of the region. The level of effort in each area will depend on the context of the country as well as the priorities set in each country office.

Key actions: Under the system strengthening response pillar, there are three key actions to strengthen ECD in the region: 1.1) integrated ECD approaches; 1.2) financing for ECD; and 1.3) ECD in emergencies, including climate change. For the second response pillar on family and child-friendly policies, there are two key actions: 2.1) quality of ECD services, including quality standards, the ECD workforce, and the evaluation and monitoring of services; and 2.2) family support and parenting, including parenting for nurturing, responsive, and violence-free caregiving; mental health of both caregivers and children, and family-friendly policies in the workplace and childcare. Each of the key actions is interdependent and contributes to the other actions.

Guiding principles: The present document corresponds to a set of guiding principles that shall be referred to and considered in advocacy and programming for ECD. Those principles include the following:

- Child and parental rights (as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Rights of Children with Disabilities, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), which provide a solid foundation for child development and family well-being.

- Holistic nurturing care through intersectoral collaboration to meet the holistic needs of children and their caregivers.
- Equity and inclusion through accessible quality ECD services for all children, including those from the most vulnerable populations, with special attention towards gender, emergency response, the early identification of children with developmental delays and disabilities and inclusion.
- Multilevel planning across systems from the level of the child, to the level of the household or family context, to the service provision level and to the level of the policy and legal environment.
- A life-course approach throughout different early childhood stages.
- Programming at scale by strengthening family-friendly policies (paid parental leave, breastfeeding support, childcare, child benefits) through home support, community-based, employer-supported services as well as government service delivery platforms at both the local and national levels.

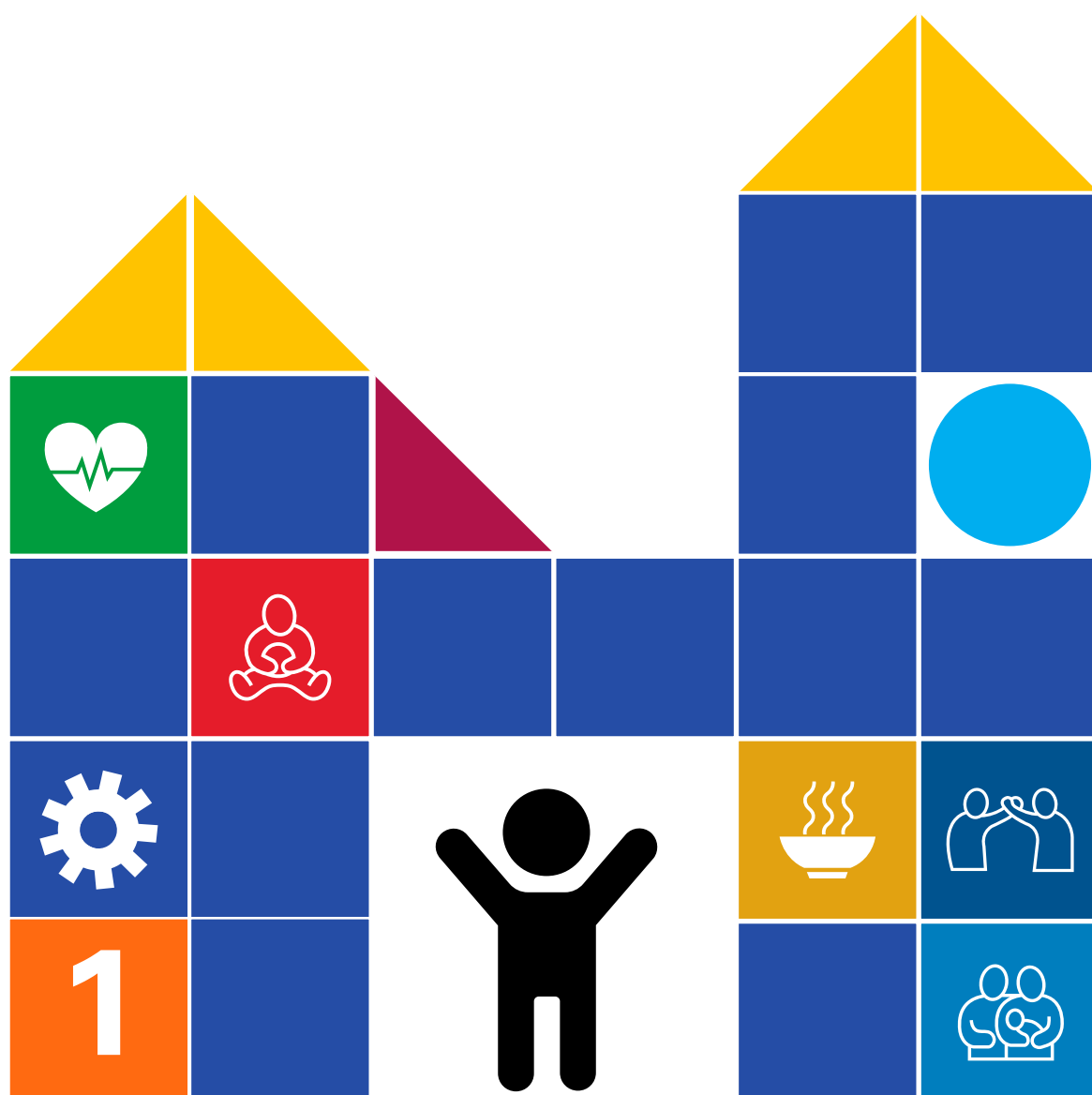
Linkages with UNICEF Programme Guidance for ECD: The present document is informed by the 2017 Programme Guidance for ECD (refer to page 9) to address the immediate, underlying and macro causes of poor child development given emerging and persistent issues during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Specifically, the present document has a particular focus on improving the provision of nurturing care, parenting and addressing child protection risks heightened by the pandemic, especially among the most marginalized, while also highlighting emerging areas of young children’s usage of technology and their vulnerability in regard to climate change and environmental stresses.

Vision: Building back better for young children through ECD	
Response pillar 1: Systems strengthening	Response pillar 2: Family and child-friendly policies
<p>Key actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.1 Integrated ECD approaches • 1.2 Financing for ECD – multisectoral and sectoral • 1.3 ECD in emergencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Climate change/ environmental degradation 	<p>Key actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.1 Quality assurance for ECD services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Quality standards ◦ ECD workforce ◦ Monitoring and evaluation of services • 2.2 Parenting and family support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Parenting for nurturing, responsive and violence-free caregiving ◦ Mental health of caregivers and children ◦ Family-friendly policies, including childcare

Annex on ECD work streams provides further example initiatives based on the five key policy actions.

Response pillar 1:

Systems strengthening



Key policy action 1.1



Integrated ECD approaches

As a multidomain process, ECD needs to be addressed in an integrated manner by all relevant and responsible sectors. The [Nurturing Care Framework](#) provides a clear understanding of how and why children need integrated actions and services to reach their maximum developmental potential and how caregivers are the main actors that can boost their development. However, policymaking in an integrated approach is difficult to achieve, mainly because governance structures (ministries, budget allocations, management) exist in silos that respond to traditional areas of expertise and needs of populations. In East Asia and the Pacific, there are different levels of integrated approaches to ECD policies. Some countries have established solid integrated national policies and others are moving towards that objective. However, a common challenge in the region is the implementation of these systemic governance structures and policies at both national and local levels.

Achieving an integrated approach to ECD policies requires that political and technical challenges are resolved through consultations and adaptations depending on the country's context and needs. However complex it may seem, it is worth pursuing as an integrated approach to ECD can improve the delivery of services that are inclusive, accessible, high-quality, gender responsive and developmentally appropriate for all young children.

Key ideas and resources for implementing integrated ECD approaches in countries

- Develop a strong situation analysis on ECD using the guidance provided in Annex 2 of [UNICEF's Programme Guidance for Early Childhood Development](#) (2017) and [Countdown](#) to 2030 while using official data where possible, depending on the context. The analysis should provide concrete information on key stakeholders in the country as well as data on advancements and gaps in national ECD guidelines and coordination, service provision, the development and learning crisis resulting from COVID-19, and the monitoring of the quality of services and of child development.
- Include in situation analysis some evidence about the current situation of young children in the country, deprivations and inequities, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The situation analysis can be conducted using tools, such as 1) the [pre-primary subsector analysis tool](#) for situation analysis of the ECE component or 2) [rapid assessment of national preparedness for implementing nurturing care for ECD](#) (WHO, 2020b) to facilitate a whole-of-government approach or 3) the [ECD rapid assessment](#) tool developed by UNICEF EAPRO that has been piloted in Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand.
- Identify key stakeholders within the Government who could be champions to lead ECD coordination mechanisms and agencies. Promote a conversation among these actors to understand the political will and capacities to advance intersectoral working groups.
- As a global custodian of ECD-related SDG targets, UNICEF is in a strong position to achieve progress on the public agenda of ECD in a country, supporting national, subnational and local governments in the creation of integrated coordination mechanisms. Ideas for this include:
 - Advocate for investment and coordinated action with strategic alliances among the private sector and civil society. For example, UNICEF can advocate for the investment of 10 per cent of National Education Budget on ECD (UNICEF, 2019b).
 - Promote champions at national, subnational and local levels; strengthen the capacity of sectoral ECD leaders led by a coordinating body under the auspices of the head of state or relevant coordinating minister.
 - Support Governments in developing or updating national ECD road maps that are linked to sector plans, and sector action plans that integrate different sectors.
 - Convene all relevant stakeholders via national sensitization workshops to review the country's situation and present available data so countries are supported to update and implement their multisectoral ECD policy and action plans.

- Strengthen national integrated early childhood intervention systems for children from birth up to school age by cross-sectoral collaboration with ministries to develop disability-inclusive services to enable children with disabilities to transition into inclusive primary schooling.
- Create an internal integrated ECD working group within UNICEF Country Offices with membership from all sectors to achieve collective decision-making with clear participation; senior management should lead cross-sector coordination. Alternatively, have a dedicated cross-sectoral role to lead ECD with the support from senior management, depending on the internal UNICEF structures that would work best in the country office context.
- Develop an integrated ECD theory of change that includes a first decade vision statement with long-, medium- and short-term desired outcomes. For example, UNICEF Cambodia has developed an integrated ECD theory of change 2021–2023 informed by the Nurturing Care Framework in response to the ongoing COVID-19 context.

Resources

- [Global Survey of Inclusive Early Childhood Development and Early Childhood Intervention Programs](#)
- [Scaling up Integrated ECD programs: Lessons from four countries](#)
- [Resource repository on Nurturing Care Framework](#).
- [Nurturing Care Handbook](#) (Currently under revision) with good examples of multisectoral collaboration.
- Thematic brief: Nurturing care for every newborn (forthcoming).

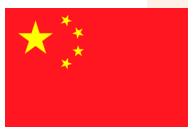


UNICEF highlights: Integrated ECD approaches in country offices



UNICEF China

The ECD cross-sectoral working group in the UNICEF China office involves the following UNICEF sections: child health and development (Chair) (including the maternal and child health team and nutrition team), education (Co-Chair), social policy, child protection, communication and planning, monitoring and evaluation. While a terms of reference is available, the working group is currently developing an integrated work plan. The working group meets monthly and is coordinated by the ECD focal point. Examples of cross-sectoral support include contributing to the development of the ECD advocacy strategy, ECD training packages and dissemination of key messages; providing overall oversight and coordination on ECD activities in the 2021–2025 country programme; developing, gathering and sharing national and international guidance and tools; and establishing an ECD professional network in China involving multidisciplinary experts and institutes.



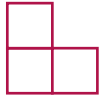
UNICEF Viet Nam

The country office has an integrated ECD working group, involving the following UNICEF sections: child health and development (Chair), education, child protection, social protection and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). It focuses on delivery of Integrated ECD services to mothers and children in a holistic manner, including integration of early stimulation with health and nutrition services, through upstream and downstream components. The upstream delivery focuses on policy advocacy with the government bodies, development of policy and Integrated ECD scheme and government scale-up and engagement with the Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) as Viet Nam focal points. The downstream component involves multisectoral engagement at the subnational level in three pilot provinces targeting households through platforms of preschool (children 3–5 years of age), community centres (children under 5 years of age) and a community-based Integrated ECD Club (see the section below on Pillar 2, quality standards).



UNICEF Philippines

An Early Moments Matter Taskforce in the UNICEF country office was established in 2018 involving the following UNICEF sections: health and nutrition (Chair), child protection (Vice-Chair), education (ECD focal point), WASH, communications and social financing. The taskforce is guided by its terms of reference and meets quarterly. The taskforce chair and vice-chair oversee cross-sectoral coordination through a collaboration matrix which tracks ECD milestones of the country office while the ECD focal point manages overall holistic work with the ECCD Council.



Key action 1.2

Financing for ECD

Globally, data show that Governments usually do not invest sufficient resources in ECD policies and interventions, despite the importance of the early years to child development. In recent years the total amount of aid to ECD has decreased: in 2019, aid to ECD amounted to 3.1 per cent of total aid, down from 3.3 per cent in 2015 (Zubairi and Rose, 2021), while funding on post-secondary education is 37 times more on average than spending on pre-primary education. Low investment in ECD poses a great risk that Governments will not be able to implement their ECD plans and programmes. The issue of financing applies both to challenges for regular implementation of ECD services (for example, expanded access to at least one year of preschool) and budget cuts or reductions when shocks and crises hit (for example, after a disaster there may be budget cuts on parenting programmes or home visits for early childhood).

In addition to the need to increase ECD investments, tracking of existing funds and more efficient usage of available funds are also critical. For example, ECD financing analysis from UNICEF Pacific Islands has revealed the following:

“ECD financing is not only about allocating more resources but also about using available funds more efficiently, effectively and equitably. Public expenditure analysis on ECD conducted by UNICEF in Solomon Islands and Kiribati, for instance, shows that levels of ECD expenditure exceed the international benchmark of 1 percent of gross domestic product. The report also found that both countries suffer from some of the poorest child outcomes in the region, indicating that their investments in health, education and social welfare of their children are not achieving their goals. Both countries are now undertaking reviews of their ECD services and budgets, with a goal to design a comprehensive national ECD policy and action plan that will better link strategic priorities on ECD with public resources.”

The viability of implementing integrated ECD policies is tied to fiscal space and intentional budgeting at the national level. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries have been obliged to make budget cuts, often to the education sector (UNICEF and UNESCO, 2021). Within the education sector, budget cuts often impact the ECD sector, which will lead to a widening of the developmental and learning gaps for younger children. Protecting ECD budgets is vital for children and for caregivers, particularly those who are most vulnerable. UNICEF is well positioned to support Governments in strengthening existing support to reach this objective, where possible. Below are some ideas that could contribute towards helping countries to attain this goal. The ideas can be adapted depending on the context.



Key ideas and resources for protecting ECD budgets and financing

- Conduct in-country evidence-based and targeted advocacy for finance decision-makers* by gathering information on total ECD expenditure, including public expenditure tracking and non-public spending. This can be done with the guidance of global and regional resources, such as the Cost of Inaction Online Plug and Play tool (forthcoming resource from UNICEF-ECDAN), UNICEF's Global Resource Guide on Public Financing for ECD, [Nurturing Care Handbook – Lead and Invest chapter](#), and [Regional Guidelines on Innovative Financing Mechanisms and Partnerships for Early Childhood Care and Education](#) (UNESCO Bangkok; SEAMEO CECCEP, 2019).
- Develop advocacy strategies to make the investment case for protecting, maintaining or expanding fiscal space for ECD in national public systems, while leveraging resources from development partners and international financial institutions. Countries should have a clear road map to implement strategies that are designed. For example: some countries have clear budget allocations for ECE and ECD recovery and strategies to deal with learning and development losses amid school reopening.
- Conduct an ECD budget analyses to strengthen the advocacy agenda.
- Integrate ECE within Education Sector Plans to attract donor support and promote multi-stakeholder engagement in the short term while strengthening sustainability of preschool education in the long term. Refer to [Call to Action Statement: Early Childhood Education for All](#).
- Support countries to build a transparent and effective accountability system (with clear lines of responsibility, resource allocation and use of available funds) while strengthening budget coordination across sectors and levels of government.
- Strengthen capacities of governments to understand and prioritize evidence generation and policy advocacy for ECD budgeting and financing in the context of COVID-19, e.g., continued financing for newborn and antenatal health.
- Advocate for greater domestic and international financing by encouraging increased and harmonized financial assistance among national governments, development partners, multilateral development banks, international finance institutions and the private sector (including identification of innovative financing mechanisms for ECD) to support regional and national implementation of ECD priorities.
- Advocate for the recommended benchmark allocation of at least 10 per cent of government education budgets for pre-primary education and ECE to ensure continuous provision of quality early learning opportunities (UNICEF, 2019b). Refer to [A better start? A progress check on donor](#)

* This includes providing policy advice to ministries of finance to shape national investment plans and leverage international finance institutions.

funding for pre-primary education and early childhood development

(Theirworld, 2021).

- Support countries in developing/adapting or strengthen existing costing models that also respond to shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
- For additional ideas, refer to the [ECDAN blog](#) for suggestions on how to protect and promote ECD public financing:
 - Identify priority ECD services and complete a costing exercise of priority ECD interventions, for a timely response to emerging opportunities or challenges to ECD resourcing.
 - Identify new opportunities for ECD in COVID-19 support packages and COVID-19 recovery investments.
 - Analyse budget expenditure to understand how the crisis is affecting ECD-related investments.
- The following are examples of activities as outlined in a [UNICEF internal technical brief](#) to protect and promote public financing of ECD during the COVID-19 crisis:
 - Support government partners in using existing COVID-19 response budgets to provide timely support to young children and their families.
 - Track impacts of ECD-related budget allocations and expenditure to inform targeted support and entry points for the bullet point above.
 - Identify priority ECD services and programmes and use data and evidence to make and defend investment cases during budget deliberation processes.
 - Support the costing of ECD-related services in recovery/ stimulus plans and provide recommendations on sources of financing, based on programme data and analysis of ECD-budget allocations/ expenditures.
- For a sample of a regional analysis of ECD budget allocations, see "[Quantifying Heckman: Are governments in Eastern and Southern Africa maximizing returns on investments in early childhood development?](#)"; a working paper published by the UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office in 2021.

UNICEF Highlights of country cases: Financing on ECD



Cambodia

UNESCO, with support from Korean Funds-In-Trust, has developed a pre-primary education cost and finance simulation model. [The costing model for ECE](#) has been developed to strengthen systematic review and resource analysis to help governments adequately plan and resource, as well as effectively address unequal access and poor quality in the pre-primary education subsector to achieve SDG target 4.2 in the region.



Thailand

UNICEF has been supporting local government authorities on improving the quality and financing of subnational ECD centres and scaling up capacity-building. This is done through work on decentralized financing to improve the quality of the centres by incorporating ECD within budget proposals and results-based management. In 2020, a decentralized financing modelling was initiated to accompany the ECD centre demonstration sites with a focus on staff capacity-building, integrated health and nutrition awareness and engaging families in services for ECCD through school-based interaction and home visits. In its Country Programme 2022–2027, UNICEF Thailand aims to continue to work on assessing ECD financing and expenditure.



China

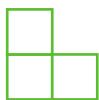
With fiscal support from the national Government and a focus on increasing access to ECD services in rural areas, UNICEF China supports the integration of ECD into national and local health systems. An ECD package for children 0–3 years of age, underpinned by the service categories in the UNICEF Nurturing Care Framework, is provided via health clinics, home visits and care group sessions. In addition to service inclusion, UNICEF China also supports capacity-building for health providers on identifying, counselling and referring children at risk of developmental delays and disabilities. Currently, UNICEF China is finalizing its scale-up proposal in 13 provinces of western and central China, which aims to integrate ECD into the national primary health care package and enable fiscal resource optimization and sustainability through partnership with the National Health Commission of China and the Ministry of Finance. (See also Key Action 2.2 Parenting and Family Support – box on China’s Family-friendly policies.)



Philippines

The Government, with UNICEF support, is currently implementing the approved National Strategic Plan for ECCD 2019–2030. In support of its implementation, UNICEF Philippines is in the process of conducting budget and financial analysis of the ECCD sector in country to support advocacy work for increasing and protecting the budget for ECCD programmes and services.





Key action 1.3

ECD in emergencies, including climate change and environmental degradation

In 2018, approximately 30 million children were born in conflict- or crisis-affected areas globally (WHO, 2020c), with significant risks for their survival and development. During emergencies, besides experiencing severe life-threatening situations, families and young children are also exposed to total or massive disruptions in the provision of social services (UNICEF, 2014b). As evidence has shown, exposure of young children to trauma and toxic stress can significantly affect their development, because the production of high levels of cortisol in the brain for long periods of time affects neurological and physical development (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2012). Concrete family support packages and responsive caregiving are effective ways to protect children from stressful and harmful situations, which tend to be common during times of crisis and emergencies (WHO, UNICEF, World Bank Group, 2018).

The pandemic has also brought to light that countries and systems lack tools and capacities to respond adequately and timely to the specific needs of young children and families in emergencies, even more so when a crisis becomes protracted. Particularly, the planning tools of humanitarian coordination mechanisms do not usually include ECD, which leads to the allocation of little or no funding, limiting the actions of humanitarian responses to specific health or nutrition interventions for younger children.

Within the context of emergencies, the unfolding **climate change emergency** (as detailed in [Chapter 3: Status of young children and their families](#)) is a child rights crisis (UNICEF, 2021c). Children are greatly affected by natural emergencies, given the increase of nearly 35 per cent in climate and weather-related disasters since the 1990s (IFRC, 2020). The climate crisis has severe humanitarian consequences thus reaching families and children with developmentally appropriate responses is critical.



Key ideas and resources ECD in emergencies and climate change/ environmental degradation

- Enhance humanitarian or emergency response in programming and services by giving special attention to gender and developmental delays.
- Advocate in existing humanitarian coordination mechanisms the importance of including specific ECD indicators in planning tools and assigning reporting responsibilities to sectors.
- Partner with champions within the ECD community as well as the non-ECD community from both public and private sectors, to increase evidence generation linking the impacts of climate change, disasters and environmental degradation on pregnant mothers, young children and their families.
- Build internal capacities (regionally and in-country) of ECD focal points to increase their understanding and ability to communicate to stakeholders the urgency to address ECD and climate change/ environmental degradation. This can be done through the development and sharing of regional goods, such as communication toolkits, guidance, position notes and case studies (e.g., UNICEF EAPRO, 2019 publication, [It Is Getting Hot](#))
- Increase advocacy and awareness-raising on these issues. For instance, discuss scientific advances, including climate change, with key stakeholders across sectors and institutions that engage with families and young children to make clear the costs of inaction that will impact the development and well-being of future generations.
- Recruit supporters to increase voices for ECD on current and future issues, such as climate and environmental crises, through public engagement by including parents, caregivers and young people.
- Work with cities and key partners on clean air, sustainable practices in communities and green practices at home.
- Establish child-friendly spaces that provide intersectoral services, including play, recreation, education, health and psychosocial support.
- Identify existing entry points to integrate ECD in emergencies and climate change interventions. For example, provide access to health-care facilities stocked with emergency supplies; provide nutrition programmes with appropriate feeding practices and responsive parenting; psycho-social support; and ensure the availability of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities at ECD centres, child-friendly spaces and temporary learning facilities.
- Employ climate change financing facilities, such as the Green Climate Fund, to resource ECD exemplifies the kind of implementation-ready investments that can achieve both mitigation and adaptation objectives, while multiplying the associated social and economic returns.
- Develop a regional strategy of engaging and convening expert groups, youth activists, and partners in partnership with ARNEC and key regional stakeholders to mobilize the ECD and climate change advocacy, including the following themes:

Disaster risk reduction	Reducing vulnerability to current and projected climate risks while increasing the resilience of young children and their families by increasing responses to climate and disaster emergencies.
Climate resilience of ECD services	Understanding the impacts of climate change across sectors (including the five nurturing care components) in terms of risks, vulnerability and capacities to improve climate resilience and climate-smart programmes and services that are essential for young children’s health, nutrition, education, protection and well-being.
Disaster-resilient family-friendly facilities	Increasing the accessibility and use of safe, child-friendly physical play spaces and learning facilities to best integrate the needs of children and to ensure that they are free from physical harm in their communities.
Addressing environmental degradation	Developing a strategy on how ECD programmes can incorporate effective responses to environmental risks such as air pollution, as these affect young children’s growth and development.

Resources

- [COVID-19 response and recovery: Building back better for young children with developmental delays and disabilities and their families.](#)(UNICEF, 2021)
- [Early childhood development in humanitarian standards and guidance documents](#) The study by the Moving Minds Alliance (2021) reviews existing humanitarian standards and guidance documents, including in the Nurturing Care Framework, and assesses the extent to which early childhood interventions and the needs of infants, young children and caregivers are included.
- [Children Uprooted in a Changing Climate: Turning challenges into opportunities with and for young people on the move](#) (UNICEF, IOM, UNMGCY, 2021)
- [Children’s Rights to a Safe, Healthy and Sustainable Environment in the ASEAN Region](#) (UNICEF, UNEP, OHCHR, 2021)
- [Impact of Climate Change on Children: A Malaysian Perspective](#) (UNICEF, UKM, UMS, 2021)
- [Early childhood development in emergencies: Integrated programme guidance](#) (UNICEF, 2014b).
- ECDAN Thematic Brief: [Nurturing Care for children living in humanitarian settings.](#)
- [ECDAN thematic webpage on climate change.](#)
- ECDAN thematic brief: [Clean, safe and secure environments.](#)
- ARNEC Connections 2020: [Ensuring the well-being of children amidst environmental risks in the Asia-Pacific region; ARNEC Advocacy page on ECD-Climate Change](#)
- Childhood Education International thematic webpage on [children and climate change.](#)
- Bernard van Leer Foundation ‘s policy brief on [Air Pollution in Early Childhood.](#)

Highlights of country cases - Climate change/ environmental degradation



Mongolia

UNICEF Mongolia and the Government of Mongolia have partnered to scale up successful initiatives, including a partnership with the academia to improve indoor air quality in 29 kindergartens by retrofitting them with better insulation, ventilation, air filtration and electric heating systems. The purpose of these initiatives is to address the severe air pollution issue, in particular during winter when people have traditionally burned coal for heating and children 2–5 years of age typically spend long hours in kindergartens. Young children have greater vulnerability to the risks posed by air pollution, and pollution has caused an unprecedented maternal and child health crisis ([ARNEC Connections, 2020](#); Early Childhood Matters, 2021, forthcoming). See also Mongolia case study in [Urban Air Pollution and Children in Low and Middle-Income Countries](#) published in 2021 by Cities 4 Children Global Alliance.



Pacific

During the [2019 Pacific ECD Forum](#), UNICEF Pacific Islands launched dialogues to link ECD and climate change. The Forum included a special session featuring young climate activist, Timoci Naulusala, who urged government leaders to collaborate and take action to combat climate change for young children and future generations. The President of the Marshall Islands delivered a message reinforcing the urgent need to integrate resilience and response on climate change to ECD as well as the need to invest in children as part of national climate plans on mitigation and adaptation. A plenary session on the role of ECD in the Pacific's climate change resilience and adaptation featured presentations by an ECD expert as well as colleagues from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat which highlight how ECD policies and programmes provide a pathway towards climate resilience and adaptation capacity.



Viet Nam

UNICEF Viet Nam has been working on the ECD-climate change linkage as a cross-cutting priority across sectors, including disaster risk reduction, protection and nutrition at national and subnational levels, through the following key activities:

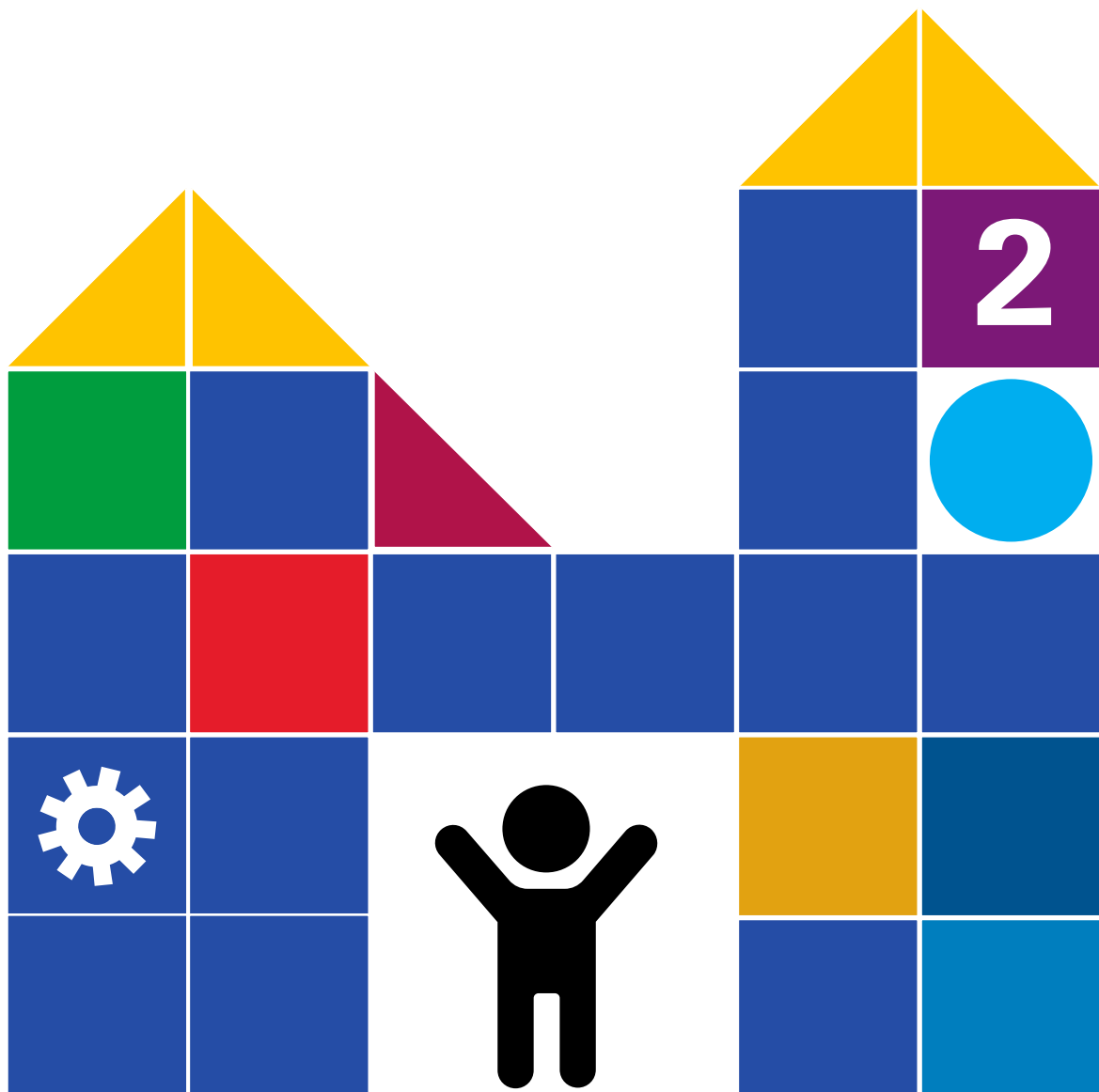
1. At the national level, a national framework for climate-responsive and climate-smart education systems has been developed. At the subnational provincial level, there are teacher capacity-building initiatives and advocacy campaigns on green habits.
2. The One UN Climate Change Learning Partnership's [UNCC course](#) has been adapted to suit the local context with support from the United Nations Institute for Training and Research to benefit 1 million teachers in Viet Nam, including preschool teachers, to further work with parents and communities.

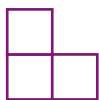
3. In collaboration with the Green Growth Institute, an initiative on solar rooftops in schools has provided clean, solar energy to benefit children from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as children with disabilities, ethnic minority children and children living in remote areas.
4. Multiple ECE initiatives have promoted climate change adaptation from preschool age. UNICEF conducted surveys on plastic waste and air pollution, held online workshops on the impact of climate change and air pollution for children with disabilities in partnership with Wakayama University in Japan and Hanoi National University of Education; and established social innovation clubs and student-led initiatives.



Response pillar 2:

Family and child-friendly policies





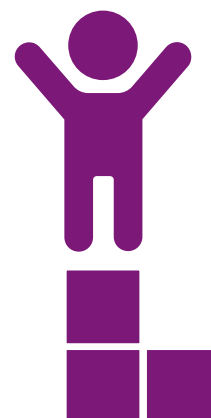
Key policy action 2.1

Quality assurance for ECD services

For young children to reach their maximum developmental potential, services directed towards them and their caregivers should be appropriate, timely and continuous while promoting equity from the beginning of life. As evidence suggests, these services need to be of good quality. Data show that the negative impacts of low-quality ECD services can be even worse than the impacts of children not accessing services at all. Given that ECD services are of many types and include various sectors and platforms, quality is a result of multiple variables coming together, such as curriculum, infrastructure, workforce, families, communities and policies. Good quality ECD services can promote equity from the beginning of life. The present section proposes key ideas for quality assurance.

Children, service providers and governments benefit from quality assurance for ECD services. This is important for governments and service providers because it can enable them to constantly improve their policies, programmes and services, which can have a positive impact on child development. The education sector provides a good example of this process (see figure).

How quality assurance benefits children



Source: Defining, monitoring and improving quality. [Guidelines for stronger quality assurance systems in early childhood education](#) (UNICEF, 2019).

Three main areas are targeted in policy planning and programming for integrated, high quality ECD services: 1) quality standards; 2) the ECD workforce; and 3) monitoring and evaluation of services.



2.1.1 Quality standards

ECD services should be regulated, as education and health services usually are. When quality standards or regulations are not in place it can be difficult to achieve good quality ECD services; this represents a risk that children will not reach their full developmental potential and inequalities will widen between children who are more privileged and those more vulnerable. Families who are able to pay tend to access private services of better quality, although private services per-se do not guarantee good ECD services. Developing strong governance to establish national regulations for service provision is a way of standardizing modalities and services and therefore reducing inequalities.

Examples of quality standards include the provision of safe and secure spaces (e.g. free from environmental hazards, for example), clean water for consumption and good hygiene, sanitary toilet facilities, clean and safe spaces for breastfeeding, age-appropriate curricula and pedagogically rich contexts that are responsive to the needs of all children, including those with developmental delays and disabilities. Different service modalities require different levels of quality and cannot be measured in the same way (see box). For example, this means that a safe bathroom may look very different in a distant rural area compared to a private urban ECD centre, but all bathrooms need to be clean, have locks on the doors, and have water and meet other minimum requirements.

Resources

- [ABC/CARE: Elements of quality early childhood programmes that produce quality outcomes](#) (Heckman Equation).
- [Building Futures: Early Childhood Development Services Quality Standards for South Asia](#) (UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, 2020) with country references, including:
 - o Bangladesh: Pre-Primary Education: Basic standard guidelines;
 - o Bhutan: Maternal and Child Health Handbook (2019), Bhutan Care for Child Development Screening Tools (BCDST);
 - o India: Quality Standards for ECCE (2014);
 - o Maldives: Child Progress Card;
 - o Nepal: [ECD handbook \(curriculum\) in English \(2008\)](#);
 - o Sri Lanka: [National Guidelines for Day Care Services in Sri Lanka](#) (2017).
 - o [ARNEC webinar for the launching of Building Futures publication](#)
- UNICEF publication [Build to Last: A framework in support of universal quality pre-primary education](#) (2020).
- UNICEF publication [Defining, Monitoring and Improving Quality: Guidelines for stronger quality assurance systems in early childhood education](#) (2019)
- [ASEAN Early Childhood Care, Development and Education Quality Standards.](#)

Highlights of country cases:

Quality standards Service modalities for the provision of ECD services

ECD services can be delivered through different platforms, as suggested in the Nurturing Care Framework handbook and UNICEF Strategic Guidelines (UNICEF, 2017). The range of modalities is large and has been expanded especially given the COVID-19 pandemic. Home visits, home care, ECD and ECE centres, preschools, creches, kindergartens and distance learning are all valid modalities and, therefore, should be of good quality to enhance child development. Minimum quality standards need to be in place for children to thrive and develop to their full potential.



Mongolia's mobile kindergartens

A comprehensive example of inclusive and flexible modalities is the Mobile-ger-kindergartens (established in 2012) in peri-urban areas of Ulaanbaatar and in rural areas in Mongolia for nomadic families. This is a flexible service implemented by the Government of Mongolia to reach the most dispersed communities in the country and increase the coverage of ECD services, child development and early learning opportunities for disadvantaged children. In 2020, UNICEF Mongolia, with the financial and technical assistance of the Government of Monaco, donated two fully furnished gers with toys, furniture and learning materials to Shivee village. Now, outfitted with colorful furniture, the gers look no different than an ordinary kindergarten. The mobile-ger-kindergartens are helping to develop children's learning, social skills and physical growth as well as helping herders boost their productivity by providing childcare that enables them to focus on animal husbandry.



Viet Nam's community-based Integrated ECD Club

is a four-year project that has successfully garnered government buy-in for further scaling up. The project has been adapted based on a Canadian holistic ECD model encompassing aspects of health, brain development and learning, love and behaviour. The Integrated ECD Steering Committee has oversight of the project at the community level. It also consists of a trained core facilitator on holistic parenting to facilitate social workers' delivery of direct support to parents in individual households. A baseline survey was conducted for the project and a final evaluation survey will be conducted with 25 key indicators. The Integrated ECD Club is being considered for nation-wide application under the national Integrated ECD programme to be led by the Ministry of Labour – Invalids and Social Affairs while UNICEF is also advocating to mobilize provincial resources to replicate the model in UNICEF-supported provinces.

Viet Nam's digital literacy in ECD

UNICEF Viet Nam has spearheaded new approaches to close the digital learning gap among young children, including the development of a competency framework on digital literacy from the preschool level. Modelled on an example from Singapore, the UNICEF country office has developed a preschool module for piloting on computations and thinking with 40 lessons contextualized to Viet Nam's situation. Additionally, an augmented and virtual reality education solution has been piloted from the preschool level to improve school learning for children from minority groups in rural areas whose teachers lack skills in teaching subjects related to science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). There is also a mobile ECD application developed to track newborn health.



China's community-based ECD service model (for children 0–3 years of age)

UNICEF China in partnership with national and local counterparts to establish parenting support service for the parents and caregivers in the disadvantaged areas. It is composed of an ECD centre with play and reading resources , parent –child group play and reading , and home visiting to inspire parent-child interactions and nurturing care with better digested ECD parenting information/ knowledge . This model is being replicated in 10 provinces of China by goverment with support by UNICEF. Moreover, by making use of the established child-friendly spaces, UNICEF China supports building the capacity of para-professional community-based workers to adapt this ECD model /techniques into the child-friendly spaces to help to prevent children from being exposed to violence in early childhood.

China's Anji Play preschool curriculum (for children 3–6 years of age)

Anji Play innovatively translated the learning-through-play principle into a practice, which emphasizes the importance of independent learning, well-being and exploration, as children are encouraged to think and play independently while enjoying the learning and cooperative process. Lessons take place indoors and outdoors to encourage children's connection to the natural and social environment. Parents are involved in various ways, including a parents' association, management, pedagogy and curriculum. Anji Play is practiced in all 130 public ECE programmes in Anji County, and it is being adopted into some programmes in the United States and other countries. UNICEF supported pilot testing of the replication of the Anji play approach in Guizhou and Shangdong public kindergartens that are available to families from different social backgrounds, and it proved effective in raising the quality of teaching and learning, as teachers are supported through continuous professional development. UNICEF China, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, is rolling out "Learning through Play" as part of the fourth national action plan goal to close quality gaps, and has set up pilot process to replicate Anji Play in every province. (For more highlights, refer to section below on ECD workforce)



2.1.2 ECD workforce

The possibility of providing good quality ECD services is significantly impacted by the quality of interactions between responsible adults and young children. Teachers and other professionals and community actors that make up the existing ECD workforce are the driving force of service provision. Evidence shows that high quality interactions have a meaningful impact on children's executive function, socioemotional development and pre-academic skills, including literacy, mathematics and fine motor skills (UNESCO et al., 2017). Investing in professional development and training at the community level, where relevant, has proven to be a sustainable quality booster for countries that are pursuing national ECD agendas.

However, actions aiming to boost the ECD workforce have fallen short in different countries for various reasons, such as budget limitations, the low priority given to the issue, the informal nature and low status of the work, a lack of information about the status of the workforce, and a lack of quality standards which the workforce should attain. In addition to these challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic has put immense pressure on the ECD workforce as they face lower pay, job insecurity (and even job loss) and stress in managing the uncertainties arising from the closure of ECE settings and the challenge of remote learning (digital age-appropriate teaching skills) (UNESCO, 2021).

To build back better, countries should pursue a strong line of professional and community development of the ECD workforce to strengthen their capacities needed for the new context of alternative and flexible ECD service modalities, including digital skills, understanding the role of the workforce versus the role of caregivers and hybrid models of service delivery. Additionally, the ECD workforce needs enhanced capacity for returning to providing in-person services (with the reopening of preschools and other ECD services) as part of the strategy for mitigating and reversing the adverse impacts of service disruptions on young children's development and learning. Enhancing skills of ECD workforce in identifying and mitigating the enhanced developmental and learning losses, post-COVID, among the most vulnerable and excluded children is especially important. Some ideas for strengthening or initiating the conversation in UNICEF country offices are provided below.

Key ideas and resources on ECD workforce

- Create a national costed strategy for ECD/ pre-primary staff, health workers, community workers and other relevant workforce development.
- Complete a situation analysis of policies (including qualifications, training, remuneration) for preschool teachers and other ECD professionals in the country.
- Identify members of the ECD workforce in the community and assess their level of skills and training. The assessment should answer such questions as: Are they part of a non-formal or formal system? What types of contracts do they have? Are these contracts stable and indefinite? Do they meet the required qualifications for their job? What is their status in regard to teachers working at the formal primary school level?
- Analyse information regarding the training provided to the ECD workforce and teachers (including pre- and in-service training, continuous professional development opportunities) and identify areas for improvement, including in socioemotional learning and development, digital skills for distance service provision and teaching, brain development, child development stages, pedagogical planning, early identification of children with developmental delays and disabilities and responses to them, teaching in a multi-lingual classroom, etc.
- What is the situation on school/ ECD services reopening? Does it include specific guidance and training for the ECD workforce on how to assess and then mitigate developmental and learning losses, especially among the most marginalized children?

Resources

- [Technical guidance on pre-primary workforce development in low and middle income Countries \(internal\)](#).
- [ECD Workforce Initiative](#), an initiative between International Step by Step Association and Results for Development Institute.
- [Southeast Asian Guidelines for Early Childhood Teacher Development and Management](#) (UNESCO Bangkok and SEAMEO, 2016)
- [Early Childhood Care and Education Teacher Competency Framework for Pacific Small Island Developing States](#) (UNESCO Bangkok; Suva: PRC4ECCE 2018)
- Early Childhood Care and Education Teacher Competency Framework for Southeast Asia (UNESCO Bangkok and SEAMEO, 2018)
- [Case study: Supporting the early childhood workforce at scale – the Cuna Más home visiting programme in Peru.](#)

Highlights of country case: ECD workforce



China's Anji Play

The quality of an ECD programme is highly dependent on its workforce. Among teachers, assistants and childcare workers for Anji Play, 67 per cent have an undergraduate degree and the rest of the staff have college diplomas. The ECD workforce are supported through regular training, seminars and further professional development opportunities. In order to facilitate a smooth transition for children from kindergarten to primary school, preschool teachers and primary school teachers are in frequent communication and conduct exchange visits to increase their mutual understanding of each pedagogy. Teachers are also encouraged to observe and interpret children's interest in play and learning, to facilitate children's learning through play while they are free from formal instructions. Observations of children's performance in primary school are also conducted to facilitate curriculum improvement at the kindergarten level ([Whitebread, Kvalja and O'Connor, 2019](#)).



Papua New Guinea

The National Department of Education supported by UNICEF has been working on a range of initiatives to improve ECE teacher quality. They include development of ECE diploma program in partnership with the Papua New Guinea Education Institute (PNGEI), management of ECD Leadership program across 22 provinces through PNGEI, advocacy for provision of 100 percent scholarship from the Department of Higher Education Science and Technology to students enrolled in the ECE diploma, development of ECE curriculum and minimum operating standards, and validation of Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS) scales.



2.1.3 Monitoring and evaluation of services

Despite significant progress in recent years, much more needs to be done to generate evidence and utilize data and evidence in support of ECD. In particular, the data from the measurement of child development outcomes can be further harnessed to inform policy, programmes, services and innovation. Key components include the following: the adaptation of global metrics, tools and their roll-out; monitoring results and analyses of ECD data and programmes; and research and evaluation of ECD programmes for quality improvement and scaling up.

The [East Asia-Pacific Early Childhood Development Scales \(EAP-ECDS\)](#) are the first regional child assessments of children between the ages of 3 and 5 developed based on culturally and contextually appropriate values of countries from the region. The purpose of the tool is to monitor child development in the context of poor school readiness and learning outcomes, track the development of vulnerable and at-risk children, and analyse the impact of early childhood policies and programmes of children. The EAP-ECDS tool has been developed between 2010 and 2014 based on the Early Learning Development Standards and validation involving six countries in the region (Cambodia, China, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, and Vanuatu). The tool is a collaborative effort involving UNICEF, ARNEC, Open Society Foundation and University of Hong Kong's Faculty of Education.

Recent initiatives to study the impact of the pandemic on ECD include: [Young Children and the Pandemic](#); [Situation analysis on effects of and responses to COVID-19 in the education sector in Asia](#); and [Case studies of programmes to promote and protect nurturing care during the COVID-19 pandemic](#). Furthermore, UNICEF EAPRO has recently published an [ECD Rapid Assessment Instrument](#) adapted from the rapid assessment tool developed by WHO (2020b) for a swift yet comprehensive stocktaking of country readiness in operationalizing the Nurturing Care Framework. With the support of the Prudence Foundation, four UNICEF country offices (Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand) have participated in the rapid assessment to detail services across the five components of the nurturing care (health; nutrition; responsive caregiving; early learning and play; safety and security) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Country profiles have been developed to document the findings of these assessments.

Further studies are needed to understand more comprehensively the impact of the pandemic on ECD services, pregnant mothers, birth rates, parenting skills and practices, child development and well-being (including health status, nutrition, learning and socioemotional development), child safety and protection, family income and welfare, ECD services and the ECD workforce. Also needed are studies on the capacity of existing services to identify and mitigate the effects of the pandemic on the most disadvantaged children.

Key ideas and resources for monitoring and evaluation of services

- Conduct a situation analysis with updated data across sectors and with ECD and nurturing care components, including tracking of quality and coverage, to develop a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young children and their families.
- Strengthen systems and tools to collect, track and use data to drive ECD policy formulation, priorities of programmes and services, and accountability. This includes developing coding within UNICEF systems and indicators that can be tracked annually and embedding ECD in UNICEF planning, monitoring and reporting tools, such as the ECD dashboard.
- Support countries to standardize monitoring tools, prioritize and collect data linked with SDG targets related to young children (including but not limited to targets 2.2, 3.2, 4.2 and 16.2) while aligning these SDG targets with national monitoring frameworks.
- Employ a common tool (e.g., a dashboard) that links all data into one ECD assessment and promote shared data systems and real time availability of data across sectors.
- Build country capacities in quality ECD data collection, analysis and informed decision-making through the following actions:
 - Conducting multisectoral joint reviews of progress in implementation of the national ECD road map;
 - Strengthening education management information systems, health management information systems and other relevant data systems to ensure that they include key aspects of ECD;
 - Strengthening multisectoral approaches by engaging all stakeholders to monitor indicators of SDG target 4.2;
 - Improving quality and levels of disaggregation of data and ensuring that indicators measure progress towards reducing inequality and mitigating the increased disadvantage post-pandemic of the most vulnerable young children;
 - Ensuring transparency of monitoring by making relevant information and data on ECD publicly available; and
 - Strengthening the role of ECD, education and social sectors to lead coordination with other relevant sectoral ministries for the collection, analysis and usage of data on ECD.
- Use the national ECD 2023 milestones to benchmark progress, including but not limited to the following:
 - Establish a national and subnational coordination mechanism;
 - Create ECD/parenting communication strategies;

- Ensure that there are at least two front-line ministries collaborating to include responsive caregiving in policies and interventions;
 - Collect data to track the quality and coverage of ECD and Nurturing Care;
 - Use research to improve integrated service delivery and enhance the enabling environment.
- Increase bilateral and multilateral support for research on key issues that are central to early childhood policy and practice, including longitudinal research and the implementation studies on emerging interventions at scale.
 - Work with local researchers to build the expertise of local ECD experts to expand and sustain ECD specialists.
 - Promote and technically assist processes for measuring quality of service provision to generate evidence that will result in better policy decision-making. For example, population-based methodologies that mix quality of services and their impact on developmental domains can be a good strategy to take actions resulting in better outcomes for children and their families (see [UNESCO et al., 2017](#)).

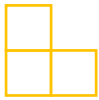
Highlights of country case: Monitoring and evaluation of services



Indonesia

The Early Childhood Development Index has been adapted in Indonesia for inclusion in the national household survey which will be used to monitor progress on SDG target 4.2, including indicator 4.2.1. There is a current joint cross-sectoral ECD monitoring plan in line with the national ECD road map. A multisectoral progress review of the national ECD road map implementation will be conducted following the formation of the secretariat of the National Coalition for Holistic-Integrated ECD in 2021. Results of the progress review will be reported annually directly to the President of Indonesia. In the future, Indonesia aims to harmonize two internationally standardized and validated tools: the Global Scale for Early Development for children under 2 years of age and the Early Childhood Development Index for children between 2 and 5 years of age.





Key action 2.2

Parenting and family support

In response to current challenges (as detailed in Chapter 3: Status of young children and their families), UNICEF has envisioned its work across the following areas:

- **Parenting for nurturing, responsive and violence-free caregiving.** This is done by providing parents and caregivers with access to cross-sectoral nurturing care and positive parenting training, especially prioritizing reaching families who are facing difficulties exacerbated by COVID-19 (for example, parents or caregivers of children with developmental delays and disabilities, and families affected by migration or conflict).
- **Mental health of caregivers and children.** Preventive support for caregiver health and emotional well-being, including maternal mental health, is key to optimal child development. Mental health is built early in life, and disruptions experienced early in life can limit children's capacities to learn and interact with others and can have lifelong implications.
- **Family-friendly policies including childcare.** It is essential to explore policies for family-friendly workplaces to enable parents and caregivers to give their children the supportive care needed while boosting productivity and women's economic empowerment. Further exploration of routine childcare arrangements during this pandemic crisis can both improve the economic security of women workers, including those in the informal sector, while supporting their transition to the formal economy and promoting gender equality at work.
 - The UNICEF call-to-action includes four family-friendly policies: paid parental leave, breastfeeding support, childcare, and child benefits [refer to UNICEF publication, [Redesigning the workplace to be family-friendly: What governments and businesses can do \(2019\)](#)].



Key ideas and resources – Parenting, mental health and family support

Parenting

- Engage parents and caregivers across sectoral platforms to promote responsive caregiving behaviours while supporting their parenting efforts. For example, incorporate caregiving messages in the implementation of the 'First 1,000 Days' package; provide mental health and related resources to support parents in providing nurturing care for their children, including children with disabilities.
- Strengthen parenting efforts by reducing negative impacts of the pandemic through initiatives, such as the development of a parenting financial literacy module, the compilation of resources on supporting children's learning at home and good hygiene practices.
- Strengthen demand from parents and communities for holistic ECD programmes and services (including positive parenting) through social and behavioural change communication strategies, as well as continuous advocacy on the importance of the early years for healthy brain and body development while providing them with supportive messages and resources to adapt to the pandemic's impacts.
- Identify families and communities where children are at risk of suboptimal development or maltreatment and prioritize them for support, addressing the needs of children as well as those of their families with particular attention to gender, emergency response and developmental delays.
- Support parents to understand and engage with the early identification process as well as advocate for policies that respond to the needs of children with developmental delays and disabilities (including national screening of delays, early identification and access to early interventions).
- Integrate positive parenting for violence reduction in ECD programming. Ensuring positive parent relationships is part of the programme in order to reduce intimate partner violence; evidence shows that witnessing intimate partner violence has a significant detrimental impact on children.
- Sensitize local decision makers and leaders, including religious leaders, media, business communities and other influencers, around the importance of involving parents in nurturing care and integrated ECD programmes and services.

Parenting resources

- [Standards for ECD Parenting Programmes in Low and Middle Income Countries](#) (UNICEF) to guide practitioners through a set of recommended parenting standards by building on several systematic review studies.
- [Global Initiative to Support Parents: Inter-Agency Vision](#) (UNICEF, WHO, PLH, ECDAN and the End Violence Partnership) with a framework for collective action towards a shared inter-agency vision of universally available parenting and caregiver support.

- [UNICEF Vision for Parents](#) internal version (and [external strategic note](#)) which provides rationale and vision for elevating support for parents and caregivers through UNICEF's existing programmes.
- [Technical Note: Elevating Parenting in Existing UNICEF Programmes](#) provides a common set of definitions, framing principles, approaches, and suggested actions.
- [Technical Note: COVID-19 Parenting Response Strategies and Resources](#) developed to support UNICEF staff in developing parenting programming as part of an agile, coordinated, and multisectoral response during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- [Designing Parenting Programmes for Violence Prevention: A guidance note](#), published by UNICEF (2020).
- [The ASEAN Guidelines for a Non-Violent Approach to Nurture, Care and Development of Children in All Settings](#) (2016).
- [Promoting positive parenting: Lessons from programmes in East Asia and Pacific – Case studies](#), published by UNICEF EAPRO and Maestral (2019).
 - [Review and analysis of lessons learned from existing positive parenting programmes in East Asia and Pacific.](#)
 - [Preventing violence against children in the home: Summary of the lessons learned from positive parenting programmes in East Asia and Pacific.](#)
- [Care for Child Development \(CCD\)](#) as updated in 2012. An evidence-based approach to guide parents and caregivers on engaging play and communication activities that promote early learning and responsive caregiving through integration into existing services across sectors. It also has adaptations to address the identification and care of young children with disabilities.
- [Reach Up and Learn for 0-4 years old.](#) This is a structured programme with training package for trainers, supervisors, and home visitors to support caregivers on responsive care and activities to help children learn. It was initially implemented through the Jamaican home visit intervention and has been adapted for implementation in Bangladesh, Colombia and Peru.
- [UNICEF Technical note on gender-responsive parenting; Tip sheets on gender-responsive parenting.](#)

Highlights of country cases: Parenting



Indonesia

A parenting financial literacy module is in development, in partnership with UNICEF and [Generali Foundation's Human Safety Net Initiative](#), to provide parents with financial literacy education to enrich their abilities to provide responsive and nurturing care for their children while responding to the urgent need arising from the COVID-19 economic shocks. The module will be delivered through multiple delivery platforms, including a digital learning approach, initially in Italy and Indonesia with potential for expansion to other countries.



Lao People's Democratic Republic

During the COVID-19 school closure, UNICEF has been supporting parents and caregivers with alternative home learning approaches, including television series, storybooks and digital platforms. The early learning television series "My House" and "My Village" can be accessed in remote communities via distributed pre-loaded SD cards while sign language interpretation has been included to reach children with hearing impairments. Parents have also been supported by trained village facilitators and pre-primary teachers to support children's learning by using storybooks adapted from the television series. These television series are also accessible on the Learning Passport platform and online learning platform. UNICEF is continuing to develop a 'Love and Care for Every Child' parenting pack consisting of nurturing care, protection and communication key messages and pictures to target parents in poor communities and who do not speak the dominant language ([UNICEF case study, 2021](#)).



Timor-Leste

In order to mobilize parental support on children's home learning, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport with UNICEF support, has been implementing nationwide Eskola Ba Uma (School Goes Home) multiple episodes of television and radio programmes based on curriculum for children from preschool to primary school. The programme is also accessible via electronic books, printed books for children who are not digitally connected, as well as the online [Learning Passport](#) platform in partnership with Microsoft and [YouTube channel](#). The GPE-supported accelerated grant on COVID-19 is intended to scale up these initiatives, including development of a cross-sectoral parenting package in the areas of home learning, WASH and safe return to school.



Cambodia

In responding to the COVID-19 context, UNICEF Cambodia's internal integrated ECD Theory of Change 2021–2023 is informed by the Nurturing Care Framework, with a key component on parenting. It has been formulated with the aims to develop and implement a locally-developed Social and Behaviour Change Communication strategy on Nurturing Care Framework at the community level, as well as to increase access of caregivers to practical tools to support parenting education and positive parenting. Furthermore, a Nurturing Care parenting package is in development and will be available in 2022 for implementation by the ECCD Secretariat.



Viet Nam

See *Family-Friendly Policies* box for UNICEF Viet Nam's "Nobody's Perfect" positive parenting programme involving businesses



Mental health

- Provide mental health support of care providers and caregivers by drawing from available resources, including [Caring for the Caregiver](#) to build skills of front-line workers on mental health counselling to caregivers.
- Identify existing platforms for possible integration of parenting coping strategies to help parents and caregivers adapt to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, parenting, coping, and ECD messaging can be integrated into COVID-19 public health information campaigns.

Mental health resources

- [WHO Guideline on Improving Early Childhood Development](#): Intended for a wide range of stakeholders with global, evidence-informed recommendations on improving ECD while recommending integrating caregiving and nutrition interventions as well as supporting mental health.
- Harvard Center on the Developing Child: [Early childhood mental health](#).
- [COVID-19 Playful Parenting](#) resources by Parenting for Lifelong Health. These open-source and evidence-based parenting resources aim to support parents and caregivers during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond with thematic focus, including building positive parent-child relationships, reducing violence against children by learning through play, creating structure and routines and reducing stress and conflict.
- [The Power of Play in the Pandemic](#) on UNICEF Connect. This blog highlights how Caring for the Caregiver can strengthen playful parenting to promote caregivers' mental health.

Family-friendly policies, including childcare

- Understand gaps in the current state of family-friendly policies and employer-supported childcare in the country contexts, including national regulations, enforcement, best practices in country, and the needs of childcare workers.
- Develop a theory of change that aligns with programmatic priorities (refer to the UNICEF China example below).
- Advocate for flexible work arrangements in response to the pandemic with government partners and the business community by referring to the brief on [Family-friendly Policies and Other Good Workplace Practices in the Context of COVID-19: Key steps employers can take](#) (UNICEF, ILO, UN-Women, 2020).
 - Develop ECD family-friendly policy guidance on linkages across key ECD sectors, including Child Protection and Nutrition which have been greatly impacted during the pandemic.
 - Promote employer-supported childcare and parenting programmes in the workplace by engaging with the private sector and relevant government ministries.
 - Explore private-sector portals where young mothers and fathers might benefit from additional parenting support from their employers.
 - Explore routine childcare arrangements for families, including:
 - Childcare in the formal sector via employer-provided childcare;
 - Childcare in the informal sector: i) home-based (including a combination of work and care); ii) extended family or community-based; and iii) centre-based care services.
 - See helpful childcare classification in [Family-Friendly Policies in South Asia](#), a Working Paper of the UNICEF Office of Research- Innocenti (2021).

Family-friendly policies resources

- UNICEF publication, [Redesigning the workplace to be family-friendly: What governments and businesses can do](#) (2019).
- WIEGO, UNICEF and publication, [Family-friendly policies for workers in the informal economy: Protecting and ensuring social protection and care systems for all children and families in the context of COVID-19 and beyond](#) (2021).
- UNICEF EAPRO publication, [Handbook for Business on Family-Friendly Policies](#) (2020).
- [EAPRO website articles](#) on family-friendly policies.
- UNICEF EAPRO publication [Recover, Rebound, Reimagine](#) Report: Actions for a post-COVID-19 world in East Asia and Pacific (2020; page 37).
- [Protecting children from the economic impact of COVID-19 on small businesses](#): Blog post linking family-friendly policies and social protection response (UNICEF EAPRO and UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia).

- Family-friendly policies 2020 UNICEF EAPRO and UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia [workshop resources; Draft guidance note on family-friendly policies](#).
- [Where do rich countries stand on childcare?](#) A study by Gromada and Richardson (2021). This publication assesses parental leave and childcare policies in the 41 high-income countries that are part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development or the European Union.

Highlights of country case: Family-friendly policies



Thailand

UNICEF Thailand conducted a survey of 100 companies on family-friendly practice and an in-depth study of 10 selected companies. Findings will be highlighted in a forthcoming family-friendly policy report that will be used to engage the private sector in the promotion of family-friendly policies in workplaces, including childcare services.

Separately, a universal Child Support Grant scheme for children under age 6 has been introduced by the Government of Thailand to benefit poor and near-poor families with children. Initially introduced in 2015, families with children receive a monthly allowance of 400 baht per child from 0 to 1 year of age. It was subsequently increased to 600 baht to cover eligible children under 3 years of age (in 2016), and then it expanded to cover children under 6 years of age (in 2019). Universalizing of this scheme, as endorsed by the cabinet, will further support and protect vulnerable families at risk of falling into poverty ([UNICEF Thailand, 2019](#)).



Viet Nam

UNICEF Viet Nam in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and the Viet Nam Chambers of Commerce and Industry have piloted a Canadian positive parenting programme called "[Nobody's Perfect](#)" in factories for parents/ caregivers with children under 8 years of age. The purpose of the programme is to better support caregivers by improving their understanding on children's health and well-being, improve caregivers' confidence their parenting skills and related stress-management skills. In all, 20 facilitators from enterprises, business consulting firms and non-governmental organizations have been trained, and seven companies have committed to roll out the training for their employees. UNICEF will continue collaboration with MOLISA and Viet Nam Chambers of Commerce and Industry to scale the programme while developing programmes to build capacities of enterprises in Viet Nam to enable a family-friendly workplace environment for working parents.



China

The inclusion of family-friendly policies in child-friendly city development to support working parents with children under 6 years of age is supported by UNICEF China in view of the emerging needs stemming from the new three-child policy. This has been done in partnership with other United Nations agencies to jointly advocate for and promote family-friendly policies at workplaces through issuing guidance, organizing campaigns and establishing pilots within cities and workplaces. Specifically, demonstration pilots for family-friendly policies at workplaces have been conducted in the cities of Shenzhen and Changsha under the overarching child-friendly city initiative with the possibility of scaling up in other cities and ultimately influence policy changes at the national level.

Specific to childcare, UNICEF China supports the agenda of the Government to promote wider childcare access for children 0–3 years of age ([refer to UNICEF China's summary report on supply mechanism of childcare services](#)). UNICEF China is seeking engagement with the Government to include fiscally subsidized childcare service provisions (10,000 renminbi per slot), development of childcare standards, capacity enforcement of professionals and quality service improvement informed by the Nurturing Care Framework. Although such childcare services remain at the institutional design stage, there has been progress in facilitating service delivery at the local level. UNICEF has supported the development of certification criteria for family-friendly workplaces with lessons learned that will be made available at the end of 2021. Currently, the five types of childcare service modalities are as follow:

- Universally beneficial childcare centres operated by non-government entities. China is now pushing forward local pilots on developing these childcare centres with the aim of ensuring service provision is affordable and easily accessible (e.g., besides fiscal subsidy, innovative financing mechanisms and preferential land leasing policies are trialled to incentivize private sector participation);
- Childcare centres integrated into workplaces and industrial parks;
- Public-run childcare centres;
- Childcare services integrated into kindergartens and as an extension of ECE services;
- Home-run childcare facilities to help reinforce the care functions of families.

Social and Behaviour Change Communication: Indonesia

In Indonesia, the Holistic-Integrated ECD National Action Plan provides a solid foundation for Posyandu, a multisectoral community-based health post for children under 5 years of age from the region and beyond that integrates health, nutrition and responsive care to address high prevalence of child malnutrition and maternal mortality rates. In 2011, a parenting education component was added to these holistic-integrated ECD services.

The Government, in partnership with UNICEF and [Prudence Foundation](#), through the National Population and Family Planning Board (BKKBN) is now developing a national Social and Behaviour Change Communication strategy on parenting and COVID-19 Early Moments Matter Family Response Plan. This strategy is informed by the Nurturing Care Framework as well as a knowledge, attitudes and practices study in the pilot districts to improve parenting demand and assess how responsive parenting can be replicated throughout Indonesia. The initial piloting in two districts of West Papua Province is expected to reach 30,000 parents with parenting communication materials to benefit 60,000 children under 5 years of age.



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ANNEX: Examples of ECD work streams based on 5 key actions

Starting strong: Strengthening integrated ECD systems

In order for children to achieve their maximum developmental potential, they need nurturing care, this means that Governments, partners and relevant stakeholders have to provide the conditions that promote health, nutrition, security and safety, responsive caregiving and opportunities for early learning as described in the Nurturing Care Framework. The COVID-19 recovery must prioritize integrated ECD to ensure that children are able to reach their potential.

UNICEF in action:

- Develop a national integrated ECD coordination mechanism, costed action plan and strong monitoring system.
- Generate evidence on access and quality services for ECD.
- Invest in local research to strengthen implementation, policy and standards.
- Create a national communication strategy through community structures and local leaders.
- Strengthen the capacity of the existing front-line workforce to support responsive caregiving and early learning among all families and children.
- Strengthen information gathering on ECD public financing to support advocacy targeted to finance decision makers with the guidance of the [UNICEF Global Resource Guide on Public Financing for ECD](#).

ECD and climate change/ environmental degradation

The East Asia and Pacific is the most disaster-prone region in the world, and 70 per cent of people affected by disasters globally live in the region. Several countries situated along the Pacific Ring of Fire are prone to earthquakes, volcanic activity and tsunamis. The region is significantly affected by the negative impacts of climate change, with cyclones, floods and droughts on the rise, both in frequency and intensity. It is estimated that over 1.6 billion people in the region have been affected by natural disasters since 2000. Young children are uniquely vulnerable to climate hazards. The latest evidence shows that the average 6 year-old child will live through 2.7 times as many climate disasters as his or her grandparents if the planet continues to warm on its current trajectory.

UNICEF in action:

- Generate evidence through literature reviews on the impact of climate change and environmental degradation on young children.
- Document country case studies to identify good practices with innovative and practical approaches to address the impacts, in addition to understanding key challenges/ gaps on policies and programme interventions to integrate climate change, disaster risk reduction, and environmental actions into ECD.

- Develop policy and technical briefs to disseminate key findings to climate/ environmental and ECD policymakers and practitioners in the region and globally.
- Increase advocacy and increase voices on the topic.
- Engage and convene cross-sectoral experts and stakeholders to develop technical guidance and theories of change to link ECD with issues of climate change and environmental degradation.

Ready to learn by age 5

Preschool education benefits children, families, education systems and societies: every US\$1 invested in quality preschool education, in particular for the most disadvantaged children, can have a return of up to US\$17. Furthermore, children who attended high quality early childhood development services are more ready for school and have a greater likelihood to remain on track with learning outcomes in the future.

UNICEF in action:

- Enact quality standards, regulations and certifications for ECD services to increase their quality.
- Support country efforts to position ECE within the Education Sector Plans.
- Support country efforts to increase the capacities of teachers and ECD care workers from different sectors.
- Bring preschool education to the most marginalized communities through support for quality community-based pre-schooling and other innovative and alternative modalities for service provision to increase access. Examples include age-appropriate distance learning and home visiting.
- Expand access to early interventions systems and promotion of early developmental screening for infants and young children with developmental delays and disabilities.
- Advocate with Governments and for 10 per cent of the national education budgets to be allocated to pre-primary education.

Caring for the caregivers

The Nurturing Care Framework affirms that nurturing care is about children, their families and other caregivers, so in order to assure that children are developmentally on track, safe and happy, their parents, families and caregivers need to be able to provide safe and stimulating environments. Amid COVID-19, parenting interventions are much needed to mitigate the devastating effects on developmental, care and learning loss of young children as well as on parents and caregivers deteriorated mental health and ability to cope with stressors.

UNICEF in action:

- Support countries in developing holistic age appropriate (for children 0–5 years of age) parenting tools to build back better from the crisis generated by COVID-19, including rolling out and adapting the Caring for the Caregivers approach within existing entry points.

- Enhance the involvement of parents and caregivers in their children’s development and learning activities (at home and in community-based or institutional services).
- Support countries in developing and implementing family-friendly policies and packages that include both the private sector and public sector for greater impact.
- Create a regional communication strategy through community structures and local leaders focusing on behaviour change to enhance good practices.

Strengthening parenting for a violence-free, nurturing childhood

Not all parents have knowledge, skills, resources, and support to provide nurturing care for their children. Suffering or witnessing household violence violates children’s fundamental right to protection from all forms of violence and has negative mental and physical impacts that last into adulthood. Parenting programmes that strengthen families by developing and reinforcing positive parenting practices and enhancing positive parent-child relations are an effective strategy to reduce the risk of violence against children in the home. By assisting families to become more stable and secure, parenting interventions can play a vital role in improving child outcomes, bolstering social development and contributing to economic growth.

UNICEF in action:

- Strengthen the engagement and capacity of social services, health and education sectors, and community and religious groups to deliver positive parenting support services and programmes across the life cycle of a child.
- Increase the access of parents and caregivers to mental health and psychosocial support services, including online support and helplines.
- Support parents and caregivers to adopt non-violent disciplinary practices.
- Support countries to develop holistic, age-appropriate (for children 0–5 years of age) parenting tools to build back better from the COVID-19 crisis and enhance the capacity of parents and caregivers to support children’s development and learning activities at home and in community-based or institutional services.
- Support the development of alternative family-based care for children who cannot safely remain with their parents.
- Advocate with Governments and businesses for family-friendly policies to address the needs of parents and families for adequate time, resources and services to care for their young children while fulfilling their work obligations, staying in employment and improving their skills and productivity.



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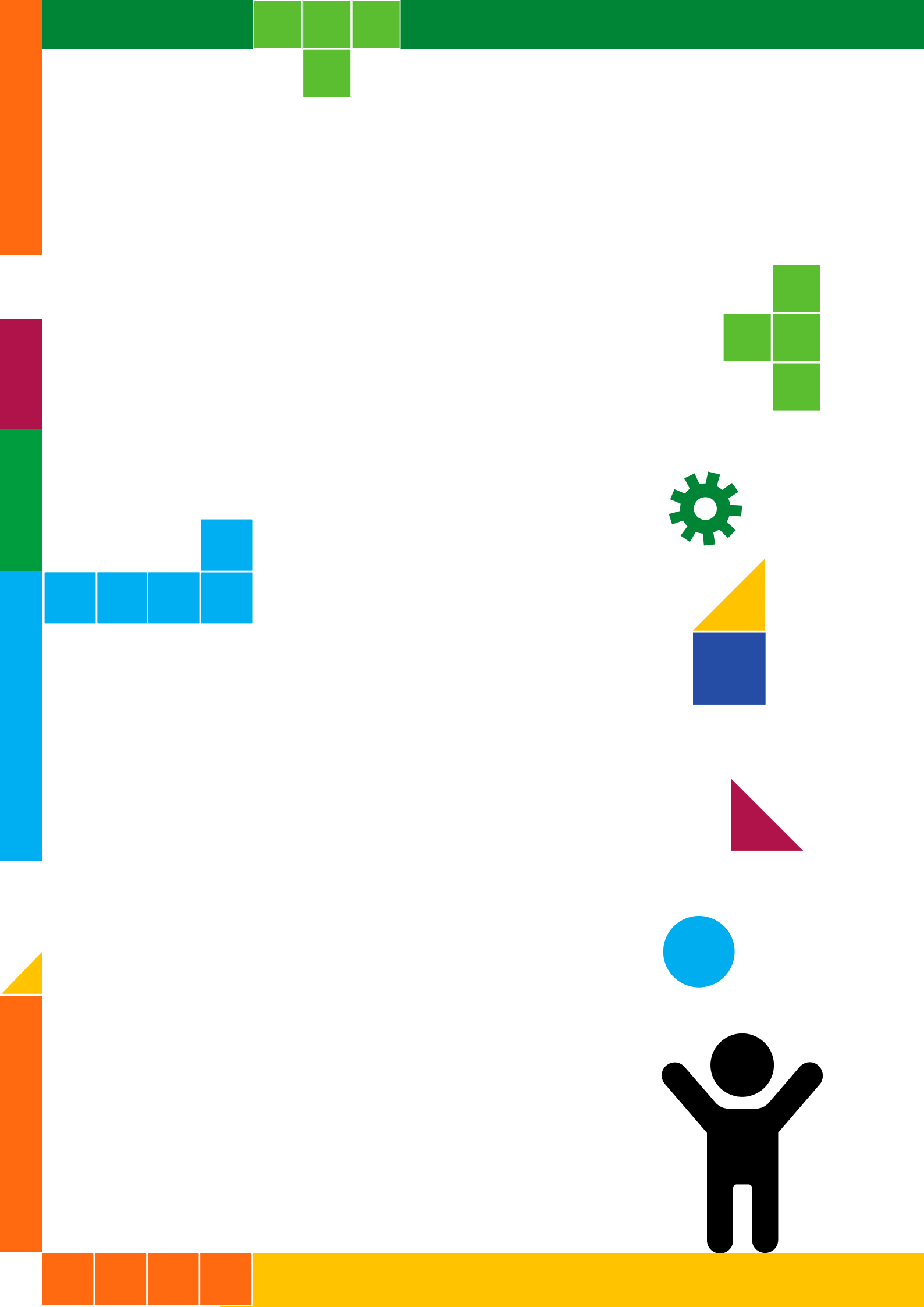
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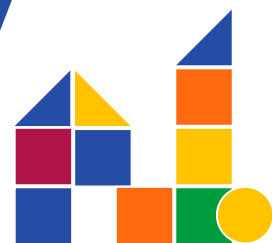
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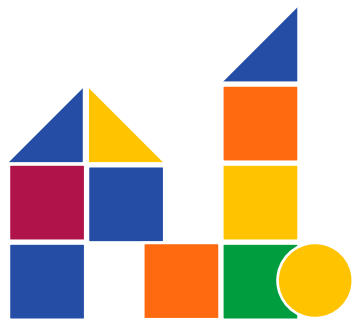
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Growing Steady and Strong:



Early Childhood Development Regional
Guidance in East Asia and Pacific



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