

Global Partnership Strategy for Early Childhood

2021-2030



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List of abbreviations and acronyms

COP	Child Online Protection
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECDAN	Early Childhood Development Action Network
ECI	Early Childhood Intervention
EMIS	Education Management Information Systems
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IDB	InterAmerican Development Bank
IIEP	UNESCO-International Institute for Educational Planning
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISSOP	International Society for Social Pediatrics & Child Health
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
KIX	Knowledge and Information Exchange
LMICs	Low- and Middle-Income Countries
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
NCF	Nurturing Care Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECD-DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee
OMEP	World Organization for Early Childhood Education
SABER	Systems Approach for Better Education Results
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	3
List of abbreviations and acronyms.....	4
Executive summary.....	6
Introduction.....	8
1. Importance of the early years and progress status.....	9
2. Framework of the Global Partnership Strategy for Early childhood.....	15
3. Strategies for Results.....	17
4. Proposal for the implementation and monitoring of the GPS for Early childhood.....	24
References.....	26
Annex 1 – Participants in the Global Partnership Strategy for Early childhood process.....	29

Executive summary

The efficient design and delivery of early childhood policies and services are critical to ensuring long-term learning opportunities and improved learning, behaviour, employment, and health outcomes amongst individuals. Research in neuroscience, developmental psychology and cognitive science has revealed that quality early childhood education, supportive communities and a positive family environment serve as important building blocks to promote healthy development amongst infants and toddlers.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic saw two-thirds of low- and middle- income countries reduce their public education budgets, hence reversing the hard-won gains for children, families, and communities in the field of early childhood education, nutrition, and health. In this light, appropriately designed and implemented policies and services for early childhood care and education (ECCE), early childhood development (ECD) and early childhood intervention (ECI) will enable all countries to protect and guarantee child rights, achieve high rates of return on their investments in child and family development and widen avenues for transforming societies and lives.

In this context, through partnerships and broad multistakeholder collaboration, the Global Partnership Strategy for Early Childhood (GPS) was created to counter this negative trend in early childhood and to overcome the reduction of services for health, nutrition, sanitation, and child protection in all world regions. The overall aim of Global Partnership Strategy is driven by the core principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of “leaving no child behind”, by recommitting countries and partners on their earlier promise and ensuring that ECCE, ECD and ECI services are fully inclusive, accessible, affordable, gender-responsive, equitable and developmentally appropriate for each child.

The pathway towards the achievement of this promise mainly relates to SDG Target 4.2 “By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education”. The concrete promise is reflected in SDG indicator 4.2.1 “Proportion of children

aged 24 to 59 months who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex” and SDG indicator 4.2.2 “Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex”. The overall spill-over of this target and related indicators will impact other related SDG targets for child health, nutrition, water and sanitation, rights, protection, disability, and gender.

The Global Partnership Strategy has outlined key strategies to successfully harness support to develop well-designed ECCE/ECD and ECI policies and programmes in countries around the five areas: (1) evidence for action and rights; (2) data, monitoring and evaluation for accountability; (3) scaling-up access, inclusion, equity and quality; (4) strengthened policy, governance, financing and advocacy; (5) international and national coordination and cooperation.

Considering the fact that early childhood fundamental rights and services are the foundation for achieving positive child development, family well-being, lifelong learning, and sustainable development, the vision of the Global Partnership Strategy is “all nations will make it their highest priority to invest in ECCE/ECD services by 2030”.

A flexible, interagency and fast-paced Global Partnership Strategy Results Team will coordinate work for all Strategic Priorities and assess progress in achieving the expected outcomes using key indicators and measures. An organizational framework has been established with the goal of uniting all stakeholders around 5 strategies for results and strategic priorities. By ‘speaking with one voice for children’, all partners will reflect a deep commitment towards responding to country requests for collaborative support, greatly improving child development and overcoming the impacts of severe poverty, malnutrition, and learning deficits, that have all been exacerbated by the pandemic. Ultimately, the Global Partnership Strategy will mobilize initiatives and galvanize actions from national and subnational governments and ECCE networks, to ensure that no child is left behind while “building forward better” in a post-pandemic world.

To attain this vision, countries and their development partners will commit to five Strategies for Results and Strategic Priorities



Harness evidence for action and rights

- Increasing the capacity to use evidence
- Strengthening the evidence for policy and practice
- Establishing networks of champions and increasing voices for early childhood



Leverage data, monitoring and evaluation for accountability

- Monitoring SDG targets for early childhood
- Supporting development of National Multisectoral Child Monitoring and Evaluation Systems
- Securing data and information to increase and maximise investments in early childhood
- Measuring impact of the pandemic on early childhood development and services



Promote countries' efforts to scale up access, inclusion, equity and quality

- Expanding access and tackle exclusion to early childhood services during and after the pandemic
- Expanding and strengthening services and systems for children with developmental disabilities
- Improving the quantity and quality of the early childhood workforce
- Supporting the monitoring of child development, early learning, and quality service standards



Assist countries to strengthen policy, governance, financing and advocacy

- Strengthening international/national normative frameworks and expand access to services
- Collaborating to develop and implement national multisectoral early childhood policies
- Promoting at least one year of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education
- Increasing domestic and international finance for pre-primary education and child development



Galvanize international and national coordination and cooperation

- Strengthening policies and regulations through coordinated whole-of-government approaches
- Improving multisectoral and multi-stakeholder cooperation and coordination at all levels
- Strengthening national capacity to plan, implement and coordinate multisectoral programmes

Introduction

The World Health Organization identified the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, and by February 2021, two-thirds of LMICs were reported to have reduced their public education budgets (Education Finance Watch Report, 2021). Although many challenges to achieving full access to quality early childhood services existed before the pandemic, this finding dramatically reveals how the pandemic threatens to erode hard won gains already achieved for children and families, and could continue to have exceedingly negative impacts on child development, early learning, family well-being and all types of early childhood services.

The **Global Partnership Strategy (GPS)** for Early Childhood was created to counter this negative trend in education and to overcome the reduction and closure of services for health, nutrition, sanitation, and child protection in all world regions. Well designed and implemented policies and services for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and Early Childhood Development (ECD) enable all countries to protect and guarantee child rights, achieve high rates of return on their investments in child and family development and widen avenues for transforming societies and lives. Services for Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) and inclusive early learning, childcare, pre-primary and primary schooling help countries support families and education systems to ensure ALL children, including those with at-risk situations, developmental delays and disabilities, are fully included in appropriate early childhood and formal learning activities (Shaeffer, 2019).^{1,2} ECCE/ECD programmes address the period from pre-conception to eight years of age, while ECI programmes serve families with children from birth to three or five years. Together, ECCE/ECD and ECI systems and programmes form the foundation for lifelong learning, development, productivity and good citizenship.

The GPS supports the State obligations of all national and subnational governments at all income levels, civil society organizations, and regional and global agencies and networks to help them overcome pre-existing barriers to providing effective ECCE/ECD and ECI services as well as to flexibly address new challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. The GPS also seeks to complement and not replace national and subnational early childhood policies that are comprehensive and well-funded.

This strategy document is organized into four sections:

Section 1: Provides a brief historical account of ECCE/ECD and ECI, leading to the global commitment expressed in SDG target 4.2 and subsequent initiatives. It summarizes evidence pointing to the importance and the state of learning and development in early childhood. Finally, the section highlights the challenges before the pandemic and points to the inadequacies exacerbated by the COVID-19.

Section 2: Puts forward the framework for the GPS for Early Childhood. It describes the participatory and innovative dialogic approach to the strategy's development and presents the GPS's vision, goals, mission and key principles.

Section 3: Delineates five strategies to address the current challenges in early childhood learning and development, identifying several priorities for each one. Overall, the section advances seventeen priorities.

Section 4: The document ends with a proposal for implementing and monitoring the GPS for early childhood. It includes the organizational framework, the description of the role and responsibilities of the coordinating team, a plan for the first 100 days, monitoring and evaluation activities, links with SDG 4 global coordination mechanisms, and communication and advocacy activities.

“We must give children a fair, caring, and healthy start in school and life. The GPS’s holistic approach can genuinely take off and take root in education systems”

Stefania Giannini
Assistant Director-General for Education
UNESCO

1 ECCE is the term UNESCO and some countries use for multisectoral Early Childhood Development (ECD) that includes child health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, education and protection. However, ECCE usually emphasises inclusive early childhood education (ECE) with attention to initial education (0 to 3 years), parenting support, and pre-primary education, with less attention to childcare, health, nutrition, and protection (UNESCO, 2010). ECD is a fully multisectoral term that is used by most countries, agencies and networks. It includes all of the aforementioned sectors and emphasises the holistic development of the child in all developmental domains. Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) is a separate field that provides integrated services for children with at-risk situations, developmental delays and disabilities. ECI is usually led by education ministries in strong partnership with health and protection ministries (Guralnick, 2011; Vargas-Barón, et al., 2019).

2 At-risk situations include low birth weight, pre-term births, chronic illnesses, severe poverty, stunting, traumatic experiences, etc.

1. Importance of the early years and progress status

Strengths and achievements in ECCE/ECD and ECI

Major international attention to ECCE/ECD and ECI began in the 1960s and 1970s with the advent of research in Colombia that explored the impact of malnutrition and chronic illnesses on child development (Super, Herrera & Mora, 1990). Subsequently, the adoption of important human rights instruments, global frameworks, national policies, programmes, good practices and networks have encouraged greater support for ECCE/ECD. The major international normative instrument for ECCE/ECD is the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which establishes children as rights holders and thus making access to and receipt of ECCE/ECD services a fundamental right (CRC, 1989). Other normative instruments relevant to ECCE/ECD include the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD, 2006), the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW, 1979), the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP, 2007), the *UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR, 1966), and the *UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education* (CADE, 1962).

SDG Target 4.2

'By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education'

The related *Education 2030 Framework for Action* (2015) marked the first strong global commitments to ECCE/ECD. This led to other international statements such as the *G20 Initiative for ECD* (2018) and the affirmation of universal access to ECD programmes in the *African Union's Agenda 2063* (2018). Programmatically, the Nurturing Care

Framework (NCF) proposed by WHO, UNICEF and the World Bank, features five domains: health, nutrition, responsive caregiving, security and safety, and early learning. The NCF provides comprehensive guidance for holistic support and services required by young children and their families, giving special impetus to the 'survive and thrive' agenda (Britto et al., 2017). The Global Partnership for Education's Knowledge and Information Exchange (KIX) and the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP) also draw attention to the importance of ECCE/ECD.³ The Global ECD Action Network (ECDAN)⁴ and regional and national partnerships, networks, and organizational coalitions have been established. Major support from UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO, the World Bank, regional development banks, bilateral donors, and organizations such as the Open Society Foundations and the Bernard van Leer Foundation, encouraged the growth of national ECCE/ECD and ECI systems. By 2019, recognizing the transformative power of the early years, 76 countries and one territory had adopted national ECCE/ECD policies and 14 countries are currently preparing policies (Vargas-Barón et al., submitted for publication).

Evidence of the importance of the early years to long-term learning, behaviour, employment, and health status has been growing for decades. Abundant research in neuroscience, developmental psychology and cognitive

science has revealed that serious risks to infant and toddler development must be avoided or reduced to promote healthy development and put protective factors in place. The importance of nurturing care and the roles of families, quality childcare, supportive communities, and enabling policy environments has been well documented (Black et al., 2017). Research regarding accessible and affordable quality childcare is bringing renewed attention to this neglected area (UNICEF, 2019c). Intervention science has increased our awareness of what works, including understanding implementation issues that are key to effectiveness. Leading economists have provided considerable evidence on the long-term benefits of investing in ECCE/ECD and the costs of inaction (Heckman, 2007). Investing in ECCE/ECD is critically



³ <https://www.globalpartnership.org/what-we-do/knowledge-innovation>

⁴ <https://www.ecdan.org/>

important for improving child development, eradicating poverty, reducing inequality, ending hunger, ensuring healthy lives, achieving gender equality and promoting peaceful societies (Heckman, 2007; Richter et al., 2017; Black et al., 2017; Hoddinott et al., 2013). The ratio of economic return to costs could be up to 18:1 for interventions such as preventing stunting (Hoddinott et al., 2013).

Strong empirical evidence reveals that the foundations for good health, cognitive development, and social well-being are established early in life, including during the period prior to conception and pregnancy. Studies show that the health, nutrition and general preparedness for parenting of future mothers and fathers impacts birth outcomes. In addition, adverse experiences, including malnutrition, stress, neglect and abuse and a lack of stimulation during the first months of infancy impair brain development by negatively affecting the number, connections and organization of brain cells which, in turn, threaten children's health, nutrition, and cognitive and social development (Britto et al., 2017; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2020).

While the foundations of health, behaviour and cognition are laid down during the first 1,000 days of life, a life-course perspective shows how later stages of childhood build on these foundations to promote optimal development (Bundy et al., 2017). An analysis of longitudinal data from large cohort studies in Brazil and South Africa found positive effects from early nurturing, responsive caregiving and early learning opportunities on human cognition and capital in adolescence (Trude et al., 2021). ECCE/ECD also draws attention to the importance of building on gains achieved through early learning and pre-primary education by providing good transitions for both parents and children to the early grades of primary school and encourages the continuation of play-based and project-based learning for children up to at least eight years of age (Achanfu Yeboah, 2010; OECD, 2017). In Jamaica, children who were stunted in early childhood and benefited from interventions targeting their caregivers⁵ for responsive caregiving and early learning activities, had increased earnings by 25 % in adulthood compared to those who did not receive the intervention, putting them on a par with non-stunted peers (Gertler et al., 2014).

Increasing evidence reveals the effectiveness of encouraging nurturing care and early childhood interventions.

Supportive environments, captured by the term 'nurturing care,' can promote optimal infant development (World Health Organization, UNICEF, World Bank Group (2018); Britto et al., 2017; Hanson & Gluckman, 2016). Specifically, complementary quality ECI services can change the trajectory of neural development and prevent the secondary developmental delays and disabilities that are associated with poverty, malnutrition and other socio-cultural risks. ECI services for children in at-risk situations or with developmental delays and disabilities have increased rapidly, and as of 2019, they were found in at least 98 countries, 53% in lower- and middle-income countries (Vargas-Barón, et al., 2019b).



ECCE/ECD services have made significant achievements in improving birth outcomes and child survival rates, and many countries are supporting families living in poverty through welfare programmes and subsidies.

Programmes are increasingly providing early childhood services to rural and remote communities and promoting greater use of the mother tongue in early learning and literacy. Pre-primary education attendance rates have grown slowly in all the world regions, with young girls and boys equally participating. However, much remains to be done to overcome developmental delays during the 0 to 3 period, achieve gender equity, ensure full inclusion, and better serve vulnerable children living in families with difficult circumstances.

The availability of statistical data on ECCE/ECD has significantly increased in recent years.

A wealth of measurement tools has been developed in all world regions to assess child development and programme services, reflecting technical ingenuity and a strong commitment to improving the evidence base of ECCE/ECD. Progress in data availability has been driven by the inclusion of questions on children's health, learning, nutrition, and family environments in cross-country and national household survey programmes, such as the USAID-supported Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and the UNICEF-supported Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), as well as by the launch of regional and national monitoring initiatives. Important regional and international frameworks and global and regional ECCE/ECD indicators allow for a

⁵ In this paper, caregivers are defined as a family member or paid helper who regularly looks after a young child with or without disabilities. Teachers and educators are persons who teach at a pre-primary or primary school. Educators might also provide instruction to other teachers.

degree of comparability among countries. Advancements have been made in developing national sectoral Management Information Systems (MIS) that measure some sectoral investments, outputs and impacts of specific ECCE/ECD services in the fields of education, health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and, sometimes, child rights and protection.

Insufficient investment in the early years: preconception to three years of age. Services for preconception and prenatal education and care and for children from birth to three years of age and their families, from nutrition and health to support for parenting, income and childcare, are not widely or equitably available (Devercelli & Beaton-Day, 2020). Although the period from birth to three constitutes the critically important stage of children's rapid brain development, at least 250 million young children, representing 43% of children under 5 years of age in lower- and middle-income countries, are at high risk of not reaching their full potential (Black et al., 2017).

Our challenges pre- and post- COVID-19

International conventions have not been fully implemented and rights to ECCE/ECD need better legal recognition in policies and other legal frameworks. Even though all States have ratified one or more of the international normative conventions listed above that guarantee the rights of children, parents and women and stipulate the obligation of States to ensure those human rights, many inequalities and inequities continue to exist in most countries. International human rights law recognizes rights in early childhood, including education, health care, nutrition and protection as explained, for instance, in the non-binding *General Comment 7 on the CRC: Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood* (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005). This document reaffirms young children as rights holders and reiterates that the CRC 'is to be applied holistically in early childhood.' Furthermore, despite States' political commitment to SDG4 - Education 2030, ensuring at least one year of free and compulsory universal quality pre-primary education has not yet been recognized as a right under international human rights law. The issue of 'free' public pre-primary education has not been posited as yet in the relevant policies and legal frameworks of many countries. States lack these binding obligations that would constitute a 'critical protective measure' for children (UNESCO, 2021). The development of an international normative framework to further clarify the scope and extent of ECCE/ECD under international human rights law and



related States' obligations is needed; at the national level, ECCE/ECD policies and/or other legal frameworks are required to implement international rights and goals. Where they already exist, many will need to be strengthened.

Low political will has stalled the development of all ECCE/ECD services. There is insufficient political, social and financial commitment to the ECCE/ECD agenda at global, regional, national and sub-national levels. Without government commitment to greatly increased public investment in essential services to support the foundational period of children's lives, many children notably from low-income families, are destined to a life of long-term disadvantage. This brings with it costly negative impacts on society including high levels of school dropout, societal instability, juvenile detention and criminality, low economic productivity, and more chronic illnesses related to early and lifelong malnutrition.

More and improved ECCE/ECD policies, monitoring and evaluation systems, and services are needed to achieve SDG targets. Specifically, progress towards achieving SDG Target 4.2 has been severely constrained. However, this marks the first time that ECCE/ECD has formally been included in a global monitoring framework with time-bound targets. Despite progress in developing statistical data, significant gaps persist, especially in measuring nurturing care practices and service equity and quality. Few competent national and subnational multisectoral ECCE/ECD monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems have been developed to inform national and subnational early childhood policies, action plans and programmes, most especially in lower- and middle-income countries. Some aspects of child development that are challenging to measure have been largely ignored in data collection. Improved ECCE/ECD data are urgently needed to ensure the accountability of relevant policies and programmes.

Existing statistical evidence, while increasing in quantity, has remained inconsistent in scope, coverage, and frequency. Additional socio-demographic, geographic, service, and outcome data are especially needed to prepare effective ECCE/ECD policies and costed action plans and programmes, measure child development, and assess national and subnational progress over time. Service data disaggregated and based on unique individual identification numbers and tracking systems for children are currently lacking in many countries. Where evaluations are conducted, they tend to address only the quantitative



measurement of service inputs and outputs, rather than service processes and outcomes in terms of child development, and impacts.

To attain SDG 4.2, its two indicators, 4.2.1 and 4.2.2, and related ECCE/ECD targets, it will be essential for countries to significantly increase their investments in the early childhood period (UNICEF, April 2019).

Investing in ECCE/ECD is critically important for improving child development, eradicating poverty, reducing inequality, ending hunger, ensuring healthy lives, achieving gender equality and promoting peaceful societies (Heckman, 2007; Richter et al., 2017; Black et al., 2017; Hoddinott et al., 2013). The ratio of economic return to costs could be up to 18:1 for interventions such as preventing stunting (Hoddinott et al., 2013). Very little is known at the national and subnational level about public and non-state expenditures on ECCE/ECD and ECI. Available financing data mainly relate to pre-primary education, and they highlight low levels of government spending on these services, averaging 2% of education budgets in low-income countries which is far below the target of 10% of education budgets recommended by Theirworld, UNICEF and other organizations (Ibid.; Zubairi & Rose, 2017). In 2017, on average 6.6% of national and subnational education budgets were allocated to pre-primary education and approximately 30% of countries already met or exceeded the 10% target including some low and middle-income countries. The 10% target is considered to be ambitious but is nevertheless one that most low and middle-income countries may be able to attain by 2030 (UNICEF, 2019a).

Regarding international aid, pre-primary education remains underfunded in the education sector. Between 2015 and 2017, although total aid to education increased by 11%, aid spent on pre-primary education declined by 27% (Zubairi & Rose, 2018). In 2002, annual aid to ECCE/ECD was only \$1.3 billion, increasing to \$6.8 billion in 2016; however, only 1% of education budgets was dedicated to pre-primary education (UNICEF, 2019a). With major cuts to education budgets stemming from the COVID-19 crisis, there is an even bigger risk that financial resources dedicated to pre-primary education and all ECCE/ECD services will diminish further. UNESCO estimates at least \$210 billion will be cut from

education budgets in 2022 year simply owing to declines in GDP. Pressure to reallocate scarce resources to health and social safety nets might cut 5% from education budgets amounting to a total loss of \$337 billion in education spending. Other agencies project even deeper cuts of 10% (Action Aid et al., July 2020).

Despite greatly expanded knowledge about the benefits of ECCE/ECD, investments in the early years have not kept up with the science of child development and have not met the fundamental SDG principle of ‘Leave no one behind.’



To address this principle, UNDP presented a framework for implementation, including five key factors: discrimination, geography, governance, socio-economic status, and shocks and fragility (UNDP, July 2018). Due to inadequate investments in ECCE/ECD, poverty, stunting, low parental education, disabilities, exposure to violence and lack of access to essential services are some of the factors that affect early childhood development, starting from conception. Significant inequalities persist within and across nations in terms of physical and financial access to, and the quality of, ECCE/ECD.

Children belonging to economically vulnerable communities and other traditionally marginalised communities and groups including children living in emergency and migratory situations, have less or no access to ECCE/ECD and ECI services. Such adversities often coincide with the economic level of the family and become cumulative as children grow older (Britto et al., 2017). For example, national and subnational budgets for early childhood education are very low. Consequently, half of the young children in the world, at least 175 million, are not enrolled in pre-primary programmes. In countries affected by emergencies only 1 in 3 children is enrolled, and in low-income countries, less than 1 in 4 (UNICEF, 2019a). While enrolment in early primary education has increased, attrition remains a serious issue and greater attention needs to be given to transitions from pre-primary to the early grades of primary schooling. In addition, the quality of programming throughout the early years from birth to 8 years is strained by inadequate preparation, supervision and support for personnel, large classes, inappropriate pedagogy and/or language of instruction for young learners, and under-resourced programmes and infrastructure. This is due, in part, to the absence of costed ECCE/ECD Action Plans tied to comprehensive multisectoral ECCE/ECD policies.

International ECCE/ECD and ECI funding and technical assistance initiatives have not been coordinated adequately. Most international efforts have been deployed in silos, often making effective practices, resources and

expertise inaccessible to nations in a multisectoral manner. Although at least 35 countries have successfully developed and implemented strong multisectoral ECCE/ECD policies, other countries have used sectoral rather than multisectoral approaches to prepare their policies, or they have not yet developed an ECCE/ECD or ECI policy.

Most countries face challenges in making meaningful progress in providing inclusive high quality, equitable and culturally appropriate ECCE/ECD services to foster healthy and positive child and family development and unleash the full potential of young children.

Well-intentioned efforts at the country and subnational levels sometimes fail to gain traction for several reasons: a lack of a strong organizational structure for implementing multisectoral ECCE/ECD and ECI policies; a fragmentation of governance; and responsibility and mandates split across multiple layers of government, both horizontally and vertically, have led to poor policy coherence, coordination, ownership, mobilisation, transparency and accountability.

The existence of relatively few integrated, multi-level national and subnational parenting and family support programmes that are culturally and linguistically appropriate has resulted in barriers to family and community engagement and participation and has maintained traditional and counter-productive top/down approaches. Greater communication, coordination and knowledge generation, sharing and exchange among multiple sectors and programmes is needed to ensure that families and communities will be able to participate meaningfully in community, subnational and national policy planning and decision-making (Pence, 2013). A broader understanding is needed at all levels of society about fundamental rights to ECCE/ECD and the high rates of return on ECCE/ECD investments in order to expand financial and human resources for services and implement evidence-based, whole-of-government approaches.

Inadequate attention has been given to provide qualified personnel for ECCE/ECD and ECI services with adequate compensation to certain groups of children (e.g., children with developmental delays and disabilities; living in poverty and remote locations; from an ethnic minority, migrant, refugee or displaced groups; and affected or infected by chronic diseases, indigenous children etc.). Centre-based childcare, pre-primary education services, and teachers of the early grades of primary school often have inadequate training, inappropriate child/staff ratios, and group sizes leading to poor quality education and childcare and development. As an integral part of enabling better ECCE, it is important to raise awareness of the importance of ECCE educators, in order to improve the status, attraction and retention of the profession. A great need exists for culturally and developmentally appropriate play-based curricula, more

qualified teachers and educators, adequate compensation, strong supervision and support, well-designed, safe and hygienic physical environments, pedagogical materials, and appropriate languages of learning.

Attention to diversity, inclusion and smooth transitions from home or ECI to inclusive pre-primary and the early grades of primary school lags behind in many countries. These challenges are often due to a lack of recognition of this sub-sector, inadequate pre-service training and salary, and the absence of continuous in-service training of ECCE/ECD teachers and educators, ECI early interventionists, paid child caregivers, and community health workers. Few are trained in screening to identify developmental delays and disabilities and in providing effective referrals. What training exists tends to be theory-based and neglects practical skills training. Reflective supervision, mentoring and coaching skills, peer support and performance appraisal activities are needed. Qualified and motivated ECCE/ECD and ECI personnel tend to be inequitably distributed in poor and remote areas, and many countries have not yet developed personnel standards, guidelines, accreditation and certification, career ladders and salary scales. ECCE/ECD personnel still endure poor working conditions, low status, and inadequate remuneration compared to others with a similar training.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the existing inadequacies of ECCE/ECD and ECI systems. In addition to lowering investment in education, especially in early learning and pre-primary education, the pandemic has worsened already existing inequalities, requiring explicit recommitment, action and resources to reach and prioritise marginalised children and families (e.g. gender inequalities, children with delays and disabilities, children living in poverty, in ethnic and linguistic minorities and in remote rural areas and islands, etc.). UNICEF has found that due to inadequate responses to the impact of COVID-19 on early childhood services, approximately one third of all young children are not on track developmentally (UNICEF, 2020). They are experiencing developmental delays, malnourishment, neglect, and even exploitation, with potential lifelong impacts on their development, education and well-being (United Nations, 2020). In addition, the closure of ECCE/ECD services has exacerbated existing gender inequalities and disparities among children, and left paid caregivers, who were mainly women, without an income thereby plunging more families into deeper poverty.



Ministries of education, and to a lesser degree, ministries of social welfare, women, and the family, provide most of the public funding for pre-primary education and early care and learning services notably for children aged 0 to 3 and offered

through playgroups, nurseries, childcare, parenting groups, and ECI programmes. When education or social welfare budgets are reduced, children from infancy to 5 years of age are usually most negatively affected. Due to the pandemic, the main sources of financing for sectoral, multisectoral and integrated early childhood services are being severely curtailed in most countries, and especially in lower- and middle-income countries. Ministries of finance, education and social welfare should make investing in ECCE/ECD and ECI services top priority to ensure they maximise returns on investments and give children a strong foundation for lifelong learning, good citizenship, and productivity (Heckman, 2007; Richter et al., 2017; Black et al., 2017; Hoddinott et al., 2013). These ministries should also work in close collaboration with ministries of health and protection to ensure maternal-child health care, mental health and protection services are provided and well-integrated into their services.

During the pandemic, most countries have experienced major reductions in primary health, nutrition, water, sanitation and child protection services thereby negatively impacting child health status. Many countries are falling behind in birth registration, primary health care services, immunisations, and developmental screenings. These impacts have been particularly negative for children with low birth weight, stunting and wasting which are especially problematic because recent nutritional evidence shows that children who become stunted during the first year of life tend not to overcome it (Victora et al., March 2021).

The *WHO-UNICEF-Lancet Commission on the Future of the World's Children* declared that at-risk young children, including those living in poverty, with disabilities, and from ethnic minorities and migrant populations, would be prime casualties of the pandemic (WHO, UNICEF, Lancet, July 2020). Signs of increased family poverty and a lack of family support were already appearing in July 2020, most especially but not solely in LMICs. The World Food Programme (WFP) declared that a 'hunger pandemic' would lead to widespread malnutrition in mothers, infants and young children. Low-income regions of upper-middle and upper-income countries are similarly negatively affected. Health services for children with developmental delays and disabilities have been disrupted in one-third of countries; social protection services have declined in at least a quarter of countries amid more reports of domestic violence; and learning support has declined in at least half (UNICEF, 2020). In addition, the pandemic has caused a mental health crisis that has deeply affected young children, their parents

and caregivers requiring that timely basic support, mental health, and expanded parenting services be provided to both children and families.

From March 2020 onward, early childhood services provided through centre-based programmes, such as nurseries, crèches, childcare centres, play groups and pre-primary services, and primary schools were closed in most countries (UNESCO, February 2021; Gromada et al., July 2020). In addition, programmes using home visits were cancelled causing the closure of most home-based early childhood development programmes, and initially, virtually all ECI programmes. Centre-based and home visiting programmes usually depend upon government funding and/or support from civil society organizations or the private sector but ECCE/ECD programmes that mainly depend upon family and community participation and support tended to lose their budgets more rapidly than those depending on government funding. A major impediment was the absence of internet and cell phone connectivity for families living in poverty in most countries (Nugroho et al., 2020).

Major efforts are needed to develop more and better digital access, curricula, and resources for ECCE/ECD services and to ensure home learning programmes include young children and their parents. The explosion of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has created unprecedented opportunities for children and young people to communicate, connect, share, learn, access information and express their opinions on matters that affect their lives and their communities. But wider and more easily available access to the internet and mobile technology also poses significant challenges to children's safety – both online and offline (ITU 2020 COP Guidelines). ECI programmes proved more resilient, and although some of them took modest budget cuts, most continued providing core services and developed ways to reach families using cell phones, digital media, tele-visits, videos, zoom gatherings, and materials.⁶

The International Society for Social Pediatrics and Child Health recommended countries 'ensure that health, education, early intervention and welfare services for children and families are deemed "essential" services and are not disrupted during the pandemic' (ISSOP, May 2020). This point is extremely important because it establishes personnel for early education, ECI, health, nutrition, and protection as 'essential workers,' thereby helping to ensure the maintenance of these services.



⁶ Many ECI programmes are now able to serve more families and children because they can make more home visits per day through digital means. After the pandemic, ECI programmes are expected to continue providing mixed in-person and remote services as well as reinstating in-person visits, thereby expanding their services and potentially lowering costs per child served. A study is needed to follow up these programmes.

2. Framework of the Global Partnership

Strategy for Early childhood

To meet our urgent challenges and 'build forward better' after the pandemic, global, regional, national and subnational whole-of-government policies and programme initiatives for ECCE/ECD and ECI are urgently required.

Without swift collective action and greater political will, hard-won gains achieved during recent decades in expanding access to services would be lost. Governments and the international community must act swiftly to mitigate the pandemic's many negative impacts on children. Priority must be given to children living in poverty, minority ethnic and linguistic groups, and marginalised urban and rural areas, children with developmental delays and disabilities, and those affected by climate emergencies, migrations, conflicts and other humanitarian disasters.

Our partnership

To mobilise political initiatives and galvanize collective action, a participatory approach to developing the GPS for Early Childhood was set in motion under the leadership of Her Royal Highness Princess Laurentien of The Netherlands, UNESCO Special Envoy, and Stefania Giannini, UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Education.



The GPS was developed through an innovative dialogue that was launched with education ministers from select champion countries and UNESCO's partner agencies that are active in ECCE/ECD. Ideas for the GPS were contributed through a series of international preparatory meetings and consultations followed by a High-Level Session with ministers and agency leaders. (See Annex 1 for a list of GPS participants and meetings.) The goals of our participatory approach were to co-construct the GPS, gather collective knowledge from all countries and programmes, build a strong global 'ownership' of the GPS, and empower and inspire national and subnational ECCE/ECD authorities, actors, networks, and programmes to share their knowledge and collaborate around a shared vision.

"We don't want this to be a paper strategy. We want action in every country around the world. We are all co-owners of this strategy. The outcome is real commitment to the content of the GPS. I am committed to this because I believe in the process underlying the development of the strategy"

Her Royal Highness Princess Laurentien
of The Netherlands

Vision

Early childhood fundamental rights and services are the foundation for achieving positive child development, family well-being, lifelong learning, and sustainable development; therefore, all nations will give their highest priority to investing in ECCE/ECD services by 2030.



Mission

The GPS mission supports State obligations to children and families of all national and subnational governments, and helps partners overcome challenges to providing effective early childhood services, considering especially major new barriers and impacts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.



Goals

GPS Partners are united around the GPS vision and mission:



- Mobilise all nations and relevant international agencies to collaborate in attaining SDG targets related to ECCE/ECD, with a special focus on Education target 4.2 for early childhood development and education as well as SDG targets for child health, nutrition, water and sanitation, rights, protection, disability and gender.
- Strengthen existing inter-agency and global partnerships and forge new ones, as needed, for coordination and collaboration to implement a **mission-driven costed Action Plan** with results-oriented strategies for policies and services to improve child development and family well-being and to expand and improve ECCE/ECD services in all countries in order to help ALL children attain their full potential.
- Substantially increase phased investment in pre-primary education in LMICs from an average of 2% of education budgets in 2018 to 10% by 2030 as recommended by UNICEF (2019a).
- Expand annual international aid to pre-primary education from an average of 7% in 2016 to at least 10% of education support budgets by 2030, as recommended by UNICEF (Ibid.).

Principles

The following key principles based in child and family rights will guide our work:



- Child and parental rights guaranteed in the Conventions listed above provide the essential foundation for good child and family development.
- In line with the Core Principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, all ECCE/ECD services must strive to 'Leave no child behind' by ensuring they are fully inclusive, accessible, affordable, gender-responsive, equitable, developmentally appropriate for each child, high in quality and fully accountable.
- Countries should prepare multisectoral ECCE/ECD policies in a participatory manner to ensure ownership and child rights while meeting the essential needs of children and parents and providing a continuity of care through well-coordinated and comprehensive services for all families and children, with a focus on those most in need.

- Family-focused services promote the provision of home visits, hybrid home and centre-based services, parenting programmes, mental health services to ensure nurturing care, the empowerment and rights of parents and legal guardians as full partners in child development, and ensuring each child has a family and is never placed in an orphanage.
- Parents and legal guardians have primary rights and responsibilities for promoting children's development and well-being, and the right to consent to services for their child.
- To protect child rights during emergencies, ECCE/ECD and ECI services must be included in emergency situations to help children recover from traumas and depression.
- Children with at-risk situations, developmental delays and disabilities, and their parents, have the right to receive ECI services.
- Families of all ethnicities and language groups have the right to culturally appropriate ECCE/ECD services provided in their home language.
- Children and mothers suffering from domestic violence or other traumas have the right to be protected in safe places and offered early childhood, parenting and legal services.
- ECCE/ECD practitioners have the right to receive up-to-date pre-and in-service training, and opportunities for certification, career ladders, salary scales, and supportive supervisors.
- To achieve child rights, national and subnational ECCE/ECD multisectoral organizational structures and coordination systems must be established to develop and implement effective multisectoral policies and programmes. Similarly, global, regional, national and subnational ECCE/ECD networks and coalitions should coordinate their key initiatives to support countries and programmes.

In the wake of the pandemic, an appeal to 'build forward better' is being heard around the world. In response, the GPS is creating a unified inter-agency commitment with five key strategies and 18 strategic priorities addressing the challenges presented above. Advocacy, resolute commitment, and decisive yet flexible action are urgently needed to ensure services for holistic early childhood development will be promoted, planned, well-financed, rapidly implemented and monitored to overcome the pandemic's devastating impacts on child development and family well-being.

3. Strategies for Results

We consider that country/province-level action is critical to addressing current challenges because countries are where policies and funding decisions are made that directly influence children's development and learning. As a multisectoral partnership, we are actively engaged in providing channels of communication and coordination among actors across regions and sectors to unlock synergies and increase the effectiveness of collective efforts, to develop and identify evidence-based innovations to help drive implementation to scale.

To achieve these goals, and based on our participatory planning process, five **Strategies for Results** have been identified, each with their own Strategic Priorities with proposed initiatives and challenging yet feasible proposed indicators, measures and targets.

1. Harness evidence for action and rights
2. Leverage data, monitoring and evaluation for accountability
3. Promote country efforts to scale-up access, inclusion, equity and quality
4. Assist countries to strengthen policy, governance, financing and advocacy
5. Galvanize international and national coordination and cooperation

The sections below present each of the five Strategies for Results with their relevant Strategic Priorities, proposed initiatives, indicators, measures and targets. The GPS Results Team will prepare all requisite metadata information, definitions, criteria, and timeframes.

Through promoting international cooperation, peer learning, advocacy, and the application of evidence, our primary operational goals are to:

- 1) build rapidly a multilevel coalition of partners to move ECCE/ECD policy and programmes towards practical solutions and expanded, more efficient and equitable financial investments and expenditures, and
- 2) ensure all countries meet ECCE/ECD SDGs by 2030, with a special focus on SDG Target 4.2 and national and subnational development goals for young children and families.

Strategy



Harness evidence for action and rights

Strategic Priority 1.1: Increase the capacity to use evidence

While evidence about the importance of the early years has increased, few investments have been made to increase and improve data utilisation. Evidence must be translated and communicated in formats that can be easily understood and used by policy-makers, practitioners and advocates to translate policies into budget commitments and allocations. Increased investments are needed to improve the capacity of early childhood global, regional and national networks and civil society organizations to use data in interactions with policy-makers through developing specific advocacy and outreach efforts and convening high-level decision-makers across ministries to promote the use of evidence-based policy and programmes.

The development of annual ECCE reports on the status of young children with recommendations for action should be considered in every country. Evaluation data on interventions, particularly implementation data, should inform programming and practice. Rapid-cycle research is needed that is timely and fits the needs of communities. Research institutions require support to conduct robust research and better communicate, translate, and disseminate findings. A network of research institutions would be developed, including institutes in LMICs, to 1) focus on research linked to policy, financing, budgeting and practice, and 2) strengthen the dissemination and utilisation of basic scientific research and competent programme evaluations. Global, regional national and sub national ECD networks should be supported to facilitate learning, disseminate and share evidence including promising practices to diverse audiences through their platforms.

Strategic Priority 1.2: Strengthen the evidence for policy and practice

New investments are needed to continue building evidence on many topics, particularly research on equity and the cultures of young children and families most in need, such as:

- What works best for which children and under what conditions?

- How do experiences in the initial period of life impact learning and health in the early primary grades? And what works best to ensure success along the early life course?
- How to best implement multi-generational strategies including whole family approaches to support families and promote child development? How to best integrate services?
- How can we best support those children and families who are most at risk: e.g. those with delays and disabilities, living in poverty, from ethnic and linguistic minorities and remote regions, and from migrant, refugee and displaced families?
- How best to build a prevention system to ensure child safety, security and protection?
- How do changing conditions (i.e. migration, pandemics, climate changes, environmental decline) impact child and family development? What works best to address them?

Strategic Priority 1.3: Reinforce capacities of existing networks and stimulate creation of new networks to champion and increase voices for ECCE/ECD

Increased investments in the early years of life need to become a global political priority. Too often more immediate and visible issues receive attention rather than essential investments in infant and toddler services, early education, health, nutrition, child protection, family support, and other areas that build human capital. The voices and full participation of parents, civil society and other community members are needed to make changes at all levels and push for expanded investments in early childhood. More champions are needed to raise the visibility of ECCE/ECD and the needs of young children and families. Notably, special efforts should be made to increase the participation of the business community, people in the media, the religious community, and other influencers.

Strategy



Leverage data, monitoring and evaluation for accountability

Strategic Priority 2.1: Monitor SDG targets for ECCE/ECD

To improve ECCE/ECD data availability for global, regional, national and subnational monitoring, countries must develop data monitoring systems that will help to track progress and accountability towards achieving SDG targets. Government policies and plans, including those of entities responsible for collecting official data, need to give greater priority to the measurement of ECCE/ECD indicators. High-income countries that lack data need to work on adopting norms for measuring and reporting on internationally comparable ECCE/ECD indicators when possible, even though many countries and regions may have difficulty aligning existing data and system categories with internationally comparable indicators. Countries differ as to the age ranges of ECCE provision, required child-teacher ratios, curricula content, etc. all of which may be beneficial to their own systems but not comparable internationally. Those nations with limited resources need more fundamental support, including technical and financial assistance, throughout the entire data management cycle, from collection to dissemination. Other key steps toward improving ECCE/ECD data availability and use include fostering collaborations among international and national and subnational actors and better coordination of global and regional measurement initiatives to avoid unnecessary duplications of efforts. Ensuring governmental ownership in data generation and use, as well as investment in national M&E capacity are of the utmost importance.

Countries should give greater priority to measuring SDG indicators related to ECCE/ECD. Many SDGs related to ECCE/ECD are found in the fields of health, nutrition, WASH, and child rights and protection. However, only one indicator, 4.2.1, deals specifically with the holistic development of young children, 'Proportion of children aged 24-59 months who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex.' A major current imperative is to re-establish the age range for indicator 4.2.1 to 'children under five.' Countries should give special priority to including the Early Childhood Development Index in their MICS, DHS or national household survey.

Regarding SDG indicator 4.2.2, 'Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex,' significant definitional challenges persist. Countries require additional technical guidance to ensure a comprehensive measurement. Data should also be collected on children with two or three years of pre-primary education or other forms of organized learning.

Strategic Priority 2.2: Support the development of national multisectoral ECCE/ECD Monitoring and Evaluation systems

Significant international cooperation, including regional and national seminars, advisory services, and initial funding for developmental costs, is needed to support nations that have not developed a well-functioning national and subnational multisectoral ECCE/ECD M&E system. Experience has shown that such systems should be developed in phases over a three- to five-year period. Attention should also be given to building regional synergies and supporting related mapping studies and evaluation research projects. All this work should build on country strengths, honour country leadership, and ensure that national and subnational ECCE/ECD M&E ministries and agencies select options they believe will be most effective in their nations. All countries will be encouraged and supported to develop Annual Reports on indicators of child and family well-being, including data from MICS, DHS, national household surveys, ECD Countdown 2030 data, EMIS and other national and local data.

Strategic Priority 2.3: Secure data and information to increase and maximise investments in ECCE/ECD

Obtaining sufficient and sustainable funding is one of the biggest challenges for successfully scaling up cost-effective ECCE/ECD and ECI interventions (Richter et al., 2017). To mobilise domestic and international resources for supporting ECCE/ECD and to ensure the efficient use of resources invested in achieving ECCE/ECD and ECI outcomes, tracking investments is essential for informed policy-making and planning. However, information on the financing of ECCE/ECD and ECI is very limited, often due to the lack of a common code for these services. Therefore, The GPS will place a high priority on supporting nations to improve data to increase and maximise their investments in ECCE/ECD and ECI as well as ensure that budget allocations and spending are transparent, equitable and efficient. The GPS will seek to fill major gaps in our knowledge about ECCE/ECD investments for the use of national and subnational governments, multilateral and bilateral

agencies, and regional banks, agencies and other entities. Public investment reviews (PIR), public expenditure reviews (PER) and public/private partnerships will be considered.

Strategic Priority 2.4: Measure impact of COVID-19 pandemic on child development and ECCE/ECD and ECI services

Although there is no evidence yet that COVID-19 has had more detrimental effects on the health of young children than adults, its negative indirect impacts on children's birth outcomes, health, nutritional, and social-emotional status have been notable. Many observers have noted the cessation of parenting support and a rise in domestic violence and mental health needs, as well as rising child poverty. Pandemic impacts on children from birth to 8 years of age and on ECCE/ECD services, from preconception to the early grades of primary school, are reported to have been devastating. Most ECCE/ECD programmes in all world areas have been closed for months, and many will remain permanently closed because their personnel have been drawn into other work – often for the provision of urgent pandemic services in other regions of their country.

According to reports, ECI services were curtailed to a lesser degree; however, they appear to have survived despite generally lowered budgets. It is noteworthy that many ECI programmes developed innovative tele-visits and other methods that enabled them to maintain their services. As of March 2021, no comprehensive study on the impact of the pandemic on children, families and their services has been conducted. Civil society organizations, ECCE/ECD and ECI networks, human rights advocates, research institutes, and communities should be encouraged to conduct pandemic impact studies. Key data on maternal-child health and nutrition, early child development, parenting practices, initial birth to three learning, pre-primary education, children from 6 to 8 years of age lacking quality formal education services, family welfare and child safety and protection are urgently needed to plan forward better.



Strategy

Promote country efforts to scale up access, inclusion, equity and quality

Strategic Priority 3.1: Expand access and engagement, and tackle inequity and exclusion to ECCE/ECD services

As noted, the pandemic caused many ECCE/ECD services to close resulting in increased child malnutrition, chronic ill health, and regressions in child development and learning. Even before the pandemic, despite research showing early childhood services can serve as equalisers that enable all children to make an equally strong start in life, quality services for ECCE/ECD remained inaccessible for many children living in at-risk situations. During the post-pandemic period, it will be imperative to improve data on disadvantaged populations; identify and implement policy, programmatic and financing approaches that are effective in reaching them; and scale up access to a full range of health, nutrition, childcare, education and social and child protection services from infancy onward. Various formal and non-formal delivery modes should be used, including parenting education and support, and home-, community-, centre- and school-based programmes. It will be necessary to build and strengthen family and community participation in ECCE/ECD programmes and empower families to participate in supporting their programmes and raising awareness at local, regional and central levels. Early childcare, so beneficial for mothers working outside the home, has been neglected and urgently needs expanded investment preferably from education ministries that can provide normative guidance, quality improvement, and training for caregivers (Devercelli & Beaton-Day, 2020; UNICEF, 2019d).

In collaboration with ministries of health and social protection, all ministries of education should also develop ECI and inclusive pre-primary services that enable the successful transition of children with disabilities or living in disadvantaged communities to inclusive primary schooling. As revealed by the pandemic, evidence-informed exchanges are urgently needed regarding remote learning strategies suitable for parents and young children living in diverse conditions (including digital, TV-, radio- and paper-based learning). Rather than replacing face-to-face services in homes and centres, hybrid systems for outreach, learning and communications would be created. Two-way blended high-quality communications combined with direct services

should be promoted, rather than one-way passive learning services. Ministries of education should work with other ministries and the private sector to tackle the digital divide and promote equitable access to digital platforms enabling tele-visits to expand and reinforce both parenting and child development services. At the same time, attention should be given to child online protection at the levels of policy, training, and support for families and children

Strategic Priority 3.2: Expand access to ECI services and strengthen national ECI systems for children from birth up to five years

Although over 98 countries have ECI services and at least 50 countries have developed national and subnational ECI systems, millions of children from birth to 3 or 5 years with at-risk situations, developmental delays and disabilities, continue to lack ECI services. Units guiding integrated ECI services are usually placed in ministries of education and are fully coordinated with ministries of health and social protection. With rising numbers of children suffering from stunting, delays, chronic illnesses, psychosocial traumas, and disabilities due to the pandemic, it is imperative to rapidly strengthen existing ECI programmes, support their personnel and harness technologies for the provision of low-cost tele-visits as well as home visits once permitted. Expanded developmental screenings, referrals and access to ECI services are urgently required. Increased international collaboration is needed to help more governments develop national and subnational ECI systems and promote early screening to identify infants and young children with developmental delays and disabilities as well as expand the provision of ECI services to eligible children. Countries will require greater collaboration to scale up support for supervisors, trainers of trainers, early interventionists, and paraprofessional home visitors. During pandemics and other crises, ECI personnel should be designated as ‘essential workers.’

Strategic Priority 3.3: Improve the quantity and quality of the early childhood workforce

Considerable evidence exists that the early childhood workforce (e.g. teachers, educators, home visitors, childcare workers, health care workers) is the key driver of nurturing care and quality education. When qualified, well trained and supported, and enjoying decent working conditions, they provide inclusive care and quality learning experiences that lead to positive child development outcomes. To attain effective early childcare, learning through play, health services, and social protection systems, increased attention must be given to building a strong early

childhood workforce and implementing measures to encourage professionalisation and the pursuit of pathways to accreditation or certification. Issues include developing improved culturally appropriate curricula, accreditation of ECCE/ECD programmes, enhancing qualification and certification frameworks; early recruitment and deployment, including supporting quality health, protection and education workers in rural, remote and disadvantaged areas; early childhood education, inclusive and continuous professional development, and effective appraisal systems for teachers and caregivers; practice-based supervision, mentoring and pedagogical support; and the development of career development pathways, salary scales and improved working conditions. Data are needed to plan the early childhood workforce and to align workforce training, curriculum and programme methods, personnel standards and guidelines, performance appraisal, and monitoring and evaluation systems.

Strategic Priority 3.4: Support the development, improvement and monitoring of child development, early learning, and quality service standards

Child learning outcomes mainly result from an interplay between the quality of learning environments, adult-child and child-child interactions in home environments, and teaching facilitated by teachers in ECCE/ECD settings in collaboration with parents. ECCE/ECD services from birth to five years should have a clear set of child development and learning outcomes that they work towards achieving in line with a broad child development, pedagogical and curriculum framework. Child caregivers and teachers should gain skills to work effectively with children from diverse backgrounds, needs and abilities in an inclusive manner. They should support and assess their progress in achieving expected outcomes and use assessment results to improve practice. A framework for service quality standards is required for all types of ECCE/ECD provision, and adherence to those standards should be encouraged, supported, and monitored. To support the quality of monitoring ECCE/ECD services, efforts are needed to define indicators and process quality at local levels; explore and practice culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment methods for young children; update curriculum frameworks to address emerging and contemporary concerns including early environmental education; and build the capacity of caregivers, teachers, centre leaders, teacher educators, supervisors, policy-makers and other stakeholders. Inclusive ECCE/ECD services need practical guidance, support and assistance with quality improvement, expansion and sustainability.

Strategy

Assist countries to strengthen policy, governance, financing and advocacy

Strategic Priority 4.1: Strengthen international and national normative frameworks for ECCE/ECD to ensure universal access to quality and inclusive ECCE/ECD

Based on the existing international human rights framework that recognizes rights in early childhood, and in order to ensure that high priority is given to ECCE/ECD, it is essential to develop a global normative framework that will guarantee the right to quality and inclusive ECCE/ECD for all. This framework would encourage countries to include references to the rights of children and families in their policies for ECCE/ECD and ECI. It would greatly support the development and implementation of national and subnational policies and other legal frameworks that States need to ensure universal access to essential ECCE/ECD and ECI services as set out in the Education 2030 Agenda. The development, reinforcement and implementation of national and subnational ECCE/ECD policies and other legal frameworks would be greatly supported by the adoption of the international framework on the rights of all young children and families.

Strategic Priority 4.2: Strengthen international collaboration in developing and implementing national multisectoral ECCE/ECD policies and costed action plans

In most countries, greater international technical and financial collaboration is needed to ensure participatory methods are used to attain strong national and subnational ownership of policies at all levels; support country leaders and stakeholders to consider national and subnational programmes and other evidence-based options for improving and expanding ECCE/ECD services; ensure countries devote adequate financing for strategic priorities of the policy; and support effective policy implementation.

Strategic Priority 4.3: Promote at least one year of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education in sector planning, budgeting and implementation

In line with SDG Target 4.2 and to ensure wider access to ECCE/ECD and pre-primary education for all children, governments need to plan for and implement quality ECCE programmes as part of their national and subnational education sector plans. ECCE/ECD programmes of the education sectors in many nations, including initial education, childcare and development, parenting support and pre-primary education, should be linked with health, nutrition, water and sanitation, and child rights and protection. Multisectoral initiatives of education ministries should be strategically designed and sufficiently funded, staffed, supervised and monitored. Promising initiatives currently underway such as the Early Childhood Education Accelerator Toolkit should be emphasised. Under Strategic Priorities 2.2 and 3.3, data analyses and capacity development at the national and subnational level are prioritised so that sectoral education planners and ECCE/ECD policy-makers become more adept at integrating the unique multisectoral needs of ECCE/ECD services into national and subnational education sector planning. High-level advocacy, inter-ministerial coordination, and collaboration with non-state actors will need to be enhanced under Strategies 2, 3 and 4.

Strategic Priority 4.4: Increase greatly the share of domestic finance and international aid for pre-primary education and other ECCE/ECD and ECI services

Given exceedingly low levels of investment in children's services, SDG Target 4.2, and the likelihood of funding cuts due to economic shocks caused by the pandemic, a major initiative for the international funding of ECCE/ECD and ECI services is required. Birth to three and inclusive early education services should be given strong support. Governmental support for improving and expanding ECCE/ECD and ECI services is urgently needed, especially due to the pandemic's negative impacts on child development. In 2019, several global partners issued a Call to Action for ECCE to take collective and complementary action to achieve transformational and cost-effective change (UNICEF, et al., 2019). Advocacy for greater domestic and international financing is one of the five action areas. Improving ECCE/ECD policy and planning is another action area. UNICEF and Education Cannot Wait committed to direct at least 10% of their education aid to ECE.

Strategy



Galvanize international and national coordination and collaboration

Strategic Priority 5.1: Strengthen policies, strategies and regulatory frameworks through whole-of-government and coordinated approaches to support child rights and protection

Although the number of policies, strategies, and regulatory frameworks supporting child rights and protection at national, subnational, regional, and global levels has increased, coordination for policy implementation has been inadequate across levels and responsible actors. Greater use could be made of numerous new ECCE/ECD and ECI networks at global, regional and national levels. New research, legislation, and programming around child rights has not been systematically analysed, compared and applied in services. Although mass and social media have increased their presence and influence exponentially, they have not been adequately harnessed for the promotion of child rights and services for development and protection. More systematic, comprehensive, and coordinated approaches must be designed and implemented to conduct analyses, establish evidence-based financing, build required capacity, promote behavioural change and budgeting across sectors, and develop global and national advocacy campaigns needed to achieve this strategic priority.

Strategic Priority 5.2: Promote multisectoral and multi-stakeholder cooperation, collaboration and coordination at global, regional, national, subnational and local levels

To galvanize support for ECCE/ECD and ECI services in all countries, a **United Nations Decade for Early Childhood Care, Education and Development, 2022-2031**, will be proposed to the UN General Assembly with annual activities to promote ECCE/ECD and ECI policy planning and implementation, and to expand and improve services for ALL children, from birth to age 8, and their families. The world has useful examples of effective multisectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination and collaboration achieving enhanced access to and quality of ECCE/ECD and ECI systems and programmes. As noted in Strategic

Priority 1, these are found at global, regional, national levels and local levels. Many demonstrate an ability to use community knowledge and experiences to develop and scale up inclusive innovations. Existing global, regional, and national networks must increase their focus on identifying innovations and conducting case studies of effective coordination at subnational and national levels. A knowledge platform is needed to showcase knowledge generation initiatives. Coordination must be intra-sectoral, inter-sectoral, and multi-stakeholder and lead to opportunities for cross-country learning, sharing and exchange.

Strategic Priority 5.3: Strengthen national and subnational capacity to plan, implement, coordinate and harmonise inclusive, multi-sectoral ECCE/ECD programmes

A much greater understanding exists among ECCE/ECD stakeholders, and even among still sceptical policy-makers and budget planners, of the underlying rationales, purposes, and functions of ECCE/ECD systems and of the need to strengthen them further. There is a greater awareness of requirements for inclusive and multisectoral policies and programmes and the importance of ensuring they are well coordinated, harmonised and aligned across the ECCE/ECD system. To build necessary capacities at all levels, develop needed programmes, implement policies, and ensure coordination, harmonisation, and alignment, more comprehensive, systematic, and targeted capacity development is required. Existing expertise and technical resources found in ECCE/ECD networks at national, regional, and global levels should be identified and used as a type of 'Technical Exchange Network' to provide intra- and inter-country learning exchanges.



4. Proposal for the implementation and monitoring of the GPS for Early childhood

To structure for success, a flexible and representative GPS Results Team will be responsible for the overall coordination and implementation of the GPS by harnessing and coordinating the expertise and assets of multiple partners around the world and aligning with the global coordination mechanism for SDG4. In line with the five Strategies for Results of the GPS, the GPS Results Team will develop mission-driven Annual GPS Action Plans, with indicators, measures and targets for the initiatives of each Strategic Priority. Quarterly and Annual Reports will be issued.

UNESCO offers to host the GPS Results Team, in **full partnership** with UNICEF, WHO, ILO, the World Bank, OECD, and regional development banks such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). The hosting of the GPS Results Team could be organized on a rotating basis to ensure full ownership and commitment on the part of all partners and countries. All partner agencies are deeply committed to the optimal development, support and well-being of the world's children and achieving SDG 4.2 in compliance with the GPS, which calls for synergies and maximising the use of all resources. Partners are requested to provide the GPS Results Team with at least one full-time seconded professional with extensive experience in one or more ECCE/ECD fields.

Because the central aim of the SDG4-Education 2030 implementation mechanism is to support country-led action, countries must play a critical role in the implementation of the GPS. They will also be invited to second experts to the GPS Results Team as will other organizations and partners, including the private sector, foundations, institutes, international civil society organizations, and, on a part-time basis, global and regional networks for ECCE/ECD and ECI. Regarding the implementation of Strategic Priorities, one possibility is the identification of Lead Agencies that could deliver on a mission-oriented approach to engage countries in the implementation of the GPS. For example, interested organizations or foundations could champion specific initiatives. This would have the advantage of mainly using existing mechanisms to achieve the goals outlined in the GPS.

GPS Partners, several countries and foundations are invited to contribute seed funding to establish the GPS Results Team. Opportunities for supporting the GPS will also be offered to many countries, national bilateral agencies, multilateral agencies, global and regional networks, foundations, institutes, and private sector leaders. Using

this support, a **GPS Catalytic Fund for Results** will be created and maintained for at least a ten-year period from 2021 to 2030. The operational modalities of the fund will be developed in the first Action Plan.

GPS Organizational Framework

The **Organizational Framework of the GPS Initiative** includes the main ECCE/ECD partners. The framework builds on current organizational capacities and seeks to orchestrate new initiatives for coordination and collective action among all partners. The proposed framework has the goal of greatly strengthening, increasing, and improving:

- existing multilateral and bilateral investments in ECCE/ECD and ECI services;
- the mobilisation of global, regional and national ECCE/ECD networks;
- government investments and programmes at national and subnational levels in all ECCE/ECD sectors; and
- existing and emerging coalitions of governmental and non-state programmes and initiatives to improve and greatly expand ECCE/ECD and ECI services in communities.

GPS Plan for the first 100 days

Due to the pandemic, we are facing a dire crisis in child and family development with services they require either closed or underperforming. Therefore, the first 100 days of the GPS will be very important, and 'start-up' must be conducted rapidly and well. During the first 100 days, the following actions will be undertaken:

- Inter-Agency Partnership Agreement for the GPS developed and established;
- Terms of reference for the GPS Results Team and job descriptions prepared for each position;
- Recruitment of the GPS Results Team members conducted, and candidates selected;
- The GPS Results Team established and working virtually, with plans for joint location;
- First Annual GPS Action Plan developed for Years 1 and 2; and

- All ECCE/ECD global, regional and national networks, national, subnational and municipal governments, and national coalitions are fully informed of the GPS Initiative, are consulted regarding their main needs, challenges and hopes for GPS support; and learn about their future roles in the GPS initiative, and the expected future benefits of, and opportunities for contribution at all levels.

GPS Results Team

The GPS Results Team will have multisectoral and interdisciplinary representation, including those with expertise in health, nutrition, WASH, education and rights and protection. Energetic and dedicated persons with significant ECCE/ECD knowledge and experience will be sought. The recruitment and secondment processes will ensure members of the GPS Results Team are knowledgeable about inclusion particularly regarding developmental delays and disabilities, gender, cultural and linguistic issues, early learning, and humanitarian emergencies. Regional experience and language competencies will also be emphasised. Terms of reference for the GPS Results Team will be established collaboratively.

The GPS Results Team will assume the following roles and responsibilities:

- Support the formation of inter-agency, global, regional and country partnerships and partnership agreements;
- Conduct fundraising for collaborative action and secure funding to ensure the GPS Action Plan is well implemented and objectives are met;
- Facilitate inter-agency coordination, and manage all GPS initiatives;
- Develop and implement global advocacy campaigns with strong regional and national participation;
- Establish annual Action Plans composed of strategic priorities, specific activities, and responsible parties, indicators of success, timelines, and budgets;
- Manage, guide and supervise all activities under Strategic Priorities;
- Monitor and evaluate the GPS Initiative; and
- Prepare quarterly and annual programme and financial reports for all funding sources, countries and the general public.

GPS Monitoring and Evaluation

The GPS, as a results-based initiative, will annually monitor activities and results regarding each of the 5 Strategies for Results and the 18 Strategic Priorities using agreed upon initiatives, indicators, measures and targets as proposed in this document. To fully monitor and evaluate all GPS indicators, UNESCO (Institute of Statistics, the International Institute for Educational Planning, the Global Education Monitoring Report), and the statistics offices of UNICEF, WHO, ILO, the World Bank, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Global Partnership for Education, regional development banks including the Inter-American Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the African Development Bank, will collaborate fully wherever ECCE/ECD statistics relate to their databases and reports. The GPS Results Team will conduct additional global surveys listed in this document, in collaboration with ECCE/ECD research institutes possessing necessary competencies. The important leadership roles of national statistics bureaus, and education, health and protection management information systems (MIS) cannot be overstated. The GPS Results Team will issue quarterly reports and an **Annual GPS Progress Report** in collaboration with all partners and participating countries. National, subnational, regional and global initiatives and achievements will be highlighted in the GPS Report and will be used during global, regional and national workshops, both virtual and in person.

GPS Links with SDG4 Mechanisms

The Global Education Meeting organized by UNESCO in October 2020 called for a renewed global education cooperation mechanism to strengthen the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee and enable it to guide and coordinate global cooperation in line with the *Education 2030 Framework for Action* in the post-COVID-19 context. The GPS Results Team will report to the emerging SDG4 governing body to better position and align its ECCE/ECD initiatives with the Education 2030 Agenda and evolving education policies, financing, and data to achieve SDG4.

GPS Communication and Promotion

The GPS Results Team will develop a **GPS Communication Strategy** including, among other activities, a GPS website, social media, and regular newsletters and newsflashes. They will represent and make presentations at the UN General Assembly, and other global, regional and national conferences regarding progress, challenges and advocacy required to conduct this major international GPS movement for early childhood.

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Annex 1 – Participants in the Global Partnership Strategy for Early childhood process

Agencies and organizations

Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC)

Bernard Van Leer Foundation

Ensemble pour l'Éducation de la Petite Enfance

Education Cannot Wait

Fondation Babilou

Global Partnership for Education

Inter-American Development Bank

International Labour Organization

Hilton foundation

Novak Djokovic Foundation

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Plan International

Right to Education Initiative

Right to Play

RISE Institute

Save the Children

Sesame

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and its Institutes and Chairs (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, International Institute for Educational Planning, International Institute for Lifelong Learning, International Bureau for Education, Global Education Monitoring Report, Chairs on ECCE of the University of Victoria, University of South Africa, University of Goteborg University, University trois-rivières, Together for Early Childhood Education, and others)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Volunteer Service Overseas

World Bank

World Health Organization

World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP) and its regional and national networks

Networks

ECD Action Network (ECDAN)

ECD Task Force for Children with Disabilities (ECDtf)

Regional ECD networks

- Africa for Early Childhood Network (AfCEN)
- Arab Network for Early Childhood Development (ANECD)
- Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC)
- International Step by Step Association (ISSA)
- Inter-country quality Node on ECCE of the Association of the Development of Education in Africa (ICQN on ECCE - ADEA)
- Pacific Regional Council for Early Childhood Development (PRC4ECD)

Invited ECCE/ECD specialists

- Abbie Raikes
- Frances E. Aboud
- Carlos del Castillo
- Kristel Diehl
- Hollie Hix-Small
- Joan Lombardi
- Stephen J. Lye
- Linda Richter
- Nirmala Rao
- Sheldon Shaeffer
- Emily Vargas-Barón, Chief Drafter



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Educational, Scientific
and Cultural Organization

Global Partnership Strategy for Early Childhood

2021-2030

The Global Partnership Strategy for early childhood is the result of inter-agency efforts to counter the negative trend in education and to overcome the reduction and closure of services for health, nutrition, sanitation, and child protection in all regions of the world during the COVID-19 pandemic. Well-designed and implemented policies and services for early childhood care, education and development enable all countries to protect and guarantee child rights, achieve high rates of return on their investments in child and family development and widen avenues for transforming societies and lives.

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