

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE NOTE 13

SUPPORTING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

1. Topic overview

Early childhood is the most critical period of an individual's life. By the time a child starts primary school, 90% of brain development is completed. Consequently, children learn at a lightning-fast pace from birth to five years. Learning during this period forms the foundation for all future learning, including cognitive, socio-emotional learning and life skill development; affecting health, education and earning levels through adulthood, and even in the next generation.ⁱ Most economists agree that the return for investing in early childhood education (ECE) is high, and that returns are highest for the most marginalised childrenⁱⁱ.

This guidance note is intended as an introduction to the complex issues linked to early childhood education, focusing on the education and learning that takes place within a broader holistic approach to early childhood development (ECD). Early childhood interventions help to break the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage, and are a cost-effective investment spurring economic growth. In many countries and regions of the world and among donors, the debate has shifted from “*should we?*” to “*how should we?*”. There have been significant global public commitments to early childhood development, not least those stated in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which calls for universal access to education by 2030 to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030”.ⁱⁱⁱ Within the European Union, the target set for ECE provision by the European Council in 2002 in Barcelona, is to ensure 33% of the 0–3 year old population and 90% of the 3–6 year old population have access to quality ECE.^{iv}

Summary

Early childhood interventions are among the most powerful education investments to improve equity and learning. ECE is part of a broader and holistic approach to Early Childhood Development (ECD).

SDG 4.2. calls for access to quality ECD, including pre-primary education.

Universal provision of one year of pre-primary education would require an estimated 10% of education budgets, far above current levels of funding.

This paper offers a framework of issues and possible EU policy dialogue and programmes responses.

The EU policy framework for external action contains specific policies related to education, promoting a balanced approach to the sector. The European Consensus for Development states that ‘*The EU and its Member States will support inclusive lifelong learning and equitable quality education, particularly during early childhood and primary years. They will also promote education at secondary and tertiary level, technical and vocational training, and work-based and adult learning, including in emergency and crisis situations. Special attention will be paid to education and training opportunity for women and girls*’^v.

However, only about 50% of pre-primary-aged children around the world take part in ECE programmes, a ratio that drops to one in every five children in low-income countries, where participation is heavily skewed to children from wealthier families. This means that the very children who would benefit the most from participation are the least likely to have access.^{vi} Inequalities therefore start early and can be entrenched,

i For more detailed information on children's cognitive development processes, see for example: Frist, B., *Child's first five years hold the key to success*, November 14, 2013 <http://toosmall.org/news/commentaries/childs-first-5-years-hold-key-to-success>

ii Philpott, D. et al (2019). The Preemptive Nature of Early Child Education. Memorial University of Newfoundland. <https://research.library.mun.ca/13571/1/The%20Preemptive%20Nature%20of%20ECE%2C%20Feb%2012.pdf>

iii SDG 4.2: all girls and boys will have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

iv Vandenbroeck, M. (2015). Quality ECEC For All: Why we can't afford not to invest in it. In E. Shaker (Ed.), *Moving beyond baby steps : building a child care plan for today's families* (Vol. 24, pp. 171–182). Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. <http://hdl.handle.net/1854/LU-7086515>

v EU, The New European Consensus on Development – ‘Our world, our dignity, our future’, 2017 https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/24004/european-consensus-on-development-2-june-2017-clean_final.pdf

vi UNICEF, *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education*, New York: UNICEF, 2019, p. 6 <https://www.unicef.org/media/57941/file/%20A-world-ready-to-learn-2019.pdf>

even before children start primary school. Given that the early years are the most important for a child's development pattern, these learning gaps can continue to widen throughout primary and secondary school.

Globally, government domestic spending as well as aid to education have contributed to this inequality by not giving sufficient priority to ECE.

Common terminology

Early Childhood is the period from birth to eight years of age. Three terms are widely used to describe support to children over this period:

1. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) acknowledges the importance of health and social services for children as well as educational support.
2. Early Childhood Development (ECD) places the emphasis on a more holistic process of physical, emotional and cognitive growth (it can be seen as the outcome of ECEC).
3. Early Childhood Education (ECE) emphasises the learning aspect of this period.

In reality, the terms are often used interchangeably. The terms 'preschool' and 'pre-primary education' refer to organised learning programmes offered from one to three years prior to entry into primary schooling. This PGN focuses on ECE which we consider to be part of ECEC.

Why Invest in ECE?

ECE is a human right. [The Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#) mandates that all children have the right to develop to their full intellectual, physical and social potential. Data shows that inequities in early-life experiences result in dramatically different and unequal results. The most vulnerable and marginalised children are less likely to participate in early intervention programmes and require greater support to leverage "equal and equitable" impacts. According to the Lancet (2017), 250 million children under the age of five are at risk of not reaching their full development potential^{vii}.

ECE improves school readiness and longer-term learning outcomes. Children who participate in ECEC generally perform better in school and have higher rates of school completion. A 10% increase in access to pre-primary education leads on average to a 5% increase in the proportion of children who achieve minimum mathematics and reading competencies by the end of primary school.^{viii} These children transition from home to school more easily, transition at the appropriate age to primary, have lower absenteeism, reduced dropout and repetition rates and less need for future remedial support^{ix}.

ECE lowers the overall cost of education, and provides broader economic and social benefits.

By making learning at later ages more efficient, early investment in cognitive and non-cognitive skills lowers the costs to government of subsequent investments in education.^x Effective programmes also support parents and caregivers, improving family nutrition and health. Caregivers, particularly mothers, are more likely to participate in the labour market and increase their own earnings.

How is ECE provision organised?

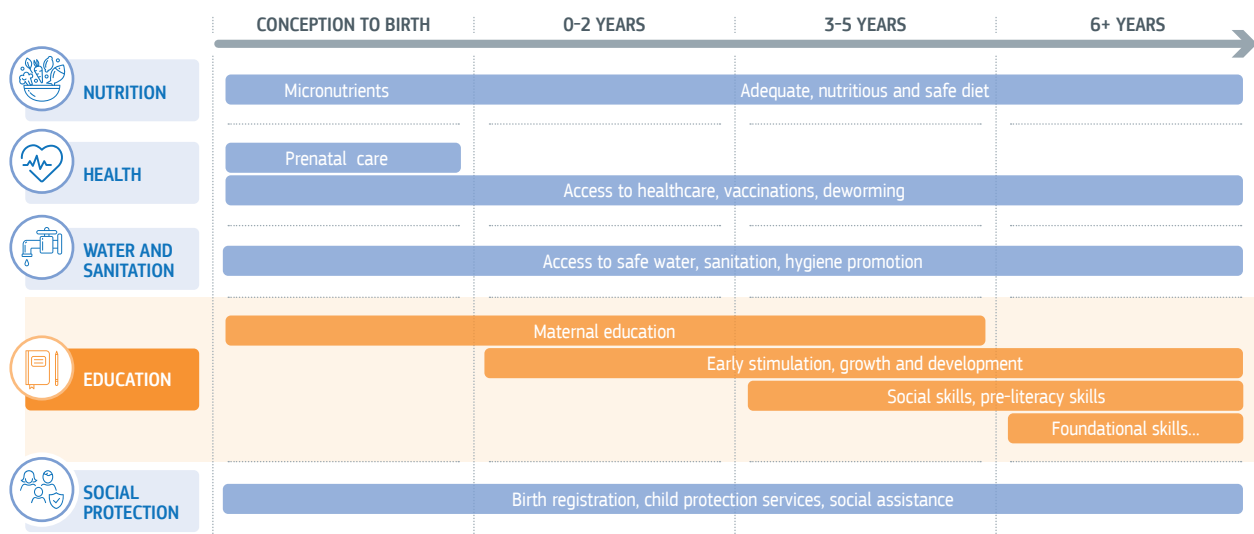
For their learning and development during these early years, children need good healthcare, water and sanitation; nutrition to avoiding stunting and promote cognition; protection from stress and the negative impacts of poverty; and stimulation and opportunities to play and learn. Most of this happens at home and in the community, and a range of government or community-based interventions and services can support this broader Early Childhood Development (ECD). As set out in Figure 1, early education interventions sit within this cross sectoral and holistic approach.

vii Black, M. et al. (2017). Early childhood development coming of age: Science through the life course. *The Lancet*: 389 (10064): 77-90. [https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736\(16\)31389-7.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(16)31389-7.pdf)

viii Ibid., p. 17

ix Philpott, D. et al (2019). The Preemptive Nature of Early Child Education. Memorial University of Newfoundland. <https://research.library.mun.ca/13571/1/The%20Preemptive%20Nature%20of%20ECE%2C%20Feb%202012.pdf>

x Fasih, T., Linking Education Policy to Labor Market Outcomes, World Bank: Washington, 2008, p. 3 <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/828021468338480190/pdf/439770PUB0Box310only109780821375099.pdf>

FIGURE 1: SECTORAL ENGAGEMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT


Source: Adapted from UNICEF Education Strategy 2019-30, and *Stepping up Early Childhood Development* (World Bank, 2014)^{xi}

Within this framework, overall policy, financing, monitoring and regulation may be the responsibility of several ministries, but the education ministry is usually responsible for the ECE component, including pre-primary education and school readiness. This can require coordination among the different ministries to ensure a comprehensive and coherent approach to provision, including health and social service visits to pre-schools (or ECE centres). Decisions over ECE financing, management of staff and provision of services are often decentralised to local authorities, but central ministries are typically responsible for setting the curriculum, standards (including for training of teachers and other educators) and regulation for both public and private education provision.

The UNICEF flagship report identifies four features of good ECE systems: (1) they are equitable, with fair access for all children, (2) they are efficient, providing the greatest benefits with the available resources, (3) they are responsive to local contexts, and (4) they are well-coordinated with other subsectors such as primary education, and sectors beyond education such as health and nutrition.^{xii} This underlines the critical role for government in establishing and monitoring minimum standards, ensuring that providers are qualified and have access to appropriate training opportunities.

Models of provision for ECE vary greatly. In many countries, one year of pre-primary is offered on the

same premises as primary schooling and may be considered part of the basic education cycle. ECE is also provided at ECE / day care centres, as well as community and home based programmes. ECE may be public or private, including both for-profit and not-for-profit providers. Private provision accounts for more than 40% of pre-primary enrolment globally and 33% in low-income countries.^{xiii} This presents opportunities for the expansion of ECE but adds to the complexity of the system, and requires effective coordination and regulation. Given the scope of private provision, there is a need for regulatory frameworks that support equity, and increased targeting of vulnerable populations through public provision.

2. Key Issues for EU Support

Given the gap between global commitments, the evidence supporting investment in ECE and the reality of both domestic and aid funding, there is a clear need for a more concerted effort and leadership by governments and development partners to expand quality ECE for all children. There are a number of potential entry points for EU support. This may involve contributing to the evidence base and understanding of needs in partner countries through research and analysis; policy dialogue focusing on development of strategies for ECE expansion and quality of provision, including sustainable financing of ECE; and the direct provision of funding and technical support to government or non-state providers. Donors may also face the challenge of deciding whether to focus on

xi <https://www.unicef.org/media/59856/file/UNICEF-education-strategy-2019-2030.pdf> and <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/21094>

xii UNICEF, *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education*, UNICEF: New York, 2019, p. 68 <https://www.unicef.org/media/57941/file/%20A-world-ready-to-learn-2019.pdf>

xiii UNICEF, *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education*, UNICEF: New York, 2019, p. 59 <https://www.unicef.org/media/57941/file/%20A-world-ready-to-learn-2019.pdf>

ECE or to support the broader scope of interventions that are part of ECEC. The Namibia case study below provides some concrete examples of key issues to consider and include in this work.

Funding the expansion of ECE. The issue of how to fund ECE interventions remains a core challenge. Governments with limited resources may give priority to achieving universal primary education, or expansion of secondary education. In addition, decision-makers are often more responsive to short-term investments that have greater political currency. This is a constraint that agencies and NGOs must work on with national governments to address. It has been estimated that countries would need to increase the share of GDP for pre-primary education, on average, from 0.1% in 2015 to 0.3% by 2030 to achieve universal coverage of one year of pre-primary education.^{xiv} This is the equivalent of about 10% of total education budgets. Recent analysis by UNICEF suggests that domestic spending on pre-primary education has increased over the decade from 2007 – 2017, reaching an average of about 9% in high-income countries, 6.5% in lower middle-income countries, and 2% in low-income countries.^{xv} This varies considerably between countries but is well below what is needed and significantly less than spending on all other education levels.

These patterns of public spending on ECE sit alongside private and household spending. Given the mixed delivery models for ECE, there is a range of financing from the private sector, including within the workplace, or through public-private partnerships. However, when public funding of ECE services is limited, this leads to high levels of household spending. When analysing spending on ECE, it is important to gather a picture of the different private and household sources of finance, as well as the development of transparent mechanisms to allocate funds where ECE is more decentralised (and may not be seen as a priority locally). Where a large proportion of provision is non-state, public funds can help address equity issues through grants, cash transfers, vouchers and other mechanisms. Public funds can also cover salaries and training for teachers and caretakers.

Governments and donor partners have a responsibility as duty bearers to support the expansion of ECE in line with SDG 4.2. This may include: (1) placing pre-primary education on a firm footing by allocating a 10% share of education budgets to the subsector, (2) increasing aid to pre-primary education to at

least 10% of international education investments, (3) leveraging non-state funding sources to expand access to affordable opportunities, (4) tracking expenditures to pinpoint areas needing the most improvement, while (5) monitoring efficiency and financing gaps.^{xvi}

Moving towards universal access to ECE. The Learning Commission recommended that where resources are scarce, the choice should be made to prioritise the poor and the early years, where social returns are highest.^{xvii} It proposed an initial focus on providing a single year of good-quality pre-school to all children, targeting the hardest-to-reach and then expanding the number of years as the capacity for pre-primary education grows. This is in line with the SDG 4.2 target for ECD which includes the indicator '*Participation rate in organised learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex*'.

Advocacy and awareness. Despite widespread awareness of the benefits of ECE investments, comprehensive social policies and programming for global and national action are lacking. The debate around ECE must engage a broad range of people from parents and caregivers to heads of state to ensure everyone comprehends the economic and social benefits of ECE investments.

Focus on content and quality. A well-designed curriculum will reflect a child-centred, inclusive approach, promoting emergent language, literacy, numeracy and social-emotional development. This does not happen by chance but depends on careful attention to three factors: the interactions children have with their parents, their ECE care providers and one another; provision of a safe and developmentally appropriate physical environment; and the establishment of a strong support structure (including good leadership, regular training opportunities, an age- and context-appropriate curriculum and adequate financing).^{xviii}

Numerous studies show that the potential benefits of ECE are not automatic and that quality matters. Not only do low-quality programmes fail to produce the anticipated benefits of increased efficiency and long-term improvements in learning and non-cognitive behaviors, they may actually be harmful to children.

xiv Wils, A., *Reaching education targets in low and lower middle-income countries: Costs and finance gaps to 2030 for pre-primary, primary, lower- and upper secondary schooling*. Background paper for UNESCO EFA Monitoring Report, 2015. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232560>

xv UNICEF, *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education*, UNICEF: New York, 2019, p. 100 <https://www.unicef.org/media/57941/file/%20A-world-ready-to-learn-2019.pdf>

xvi UNICEF, *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education*, UNICEF: New York, 2019, p. 125 <https://www.unicef.org/media/57941/file/%20A-world-ready-to-learn-2019.pdf>

xvii The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, *The Learning Generation: Investing in Education For A Changing World*, 2018, p.20 <https://report.educationcommission.org/report/>

xviii Workman, S. & Ullrich, R., *Quality 101: Identifying the Core Components of a High-Quality Early Childhood Program*. Center for American Progress, February 13, 2017 <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2017/02/13/414939/quality-101-identifying-the-core-components-of-a-high-quality-early-childhood-program/>

More reliable, consistent and relevant data for decision-making. Collection of education data often begins after children enter formal primary schooling. This is too late to leverage policy and programmatic change for ECE. Data from 2018 reporting of SDG 4 indicators highlight the gaps in data reporting especially in countries affected by conflict, natural disasters and other crises.^{xix} More countries should include questions about early childhood in their national household surveys or in Education Management Information Systems (EMIS). Accurate and reliable reporting on children with special needs is also needed. Better data, including on children's cognitive skills, will help inform policy makers on where, how and which programmes to scale up.

Developing an EU response

The table below presents a framework for developing EU responses through policy dialogue and financing or support programmes in line with SDG 4 and the 2017 European Consensus on Development. The framework suggests some possible ways in which the EU could engage and provide support, or issues on which policy dialogue may focus.

TABLE 1: FRAMEWORK FOR EU SUPPORT TO ECE

| Issues | Possible EU Dialogue/programme response |
|---|---|
| Insufficient priority given to equitable provision of pre-schooling services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage high level government decision makers on economic and social benefits of ECE investments, based on evidence. • Policy dialogue focused on inclusion of ECE as a core component of Education Sector Plans with a clear strategy for ECE expansion; support initial provision of one year of pre-schooling to all children. • Technical assistance and capacity development to support necessary sector analysis and planning, identification of strategies, and cross sectoral dialogue/coordination. • Dialogue on inclusion of children from vulnerable groups. Budget support to target inclusion of the most vulnerable children (e.g. use of disaggregated indicators, etc.). |
| Low share of external and domestic financing available for expanded ECE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget support linked to increased financing for ECE as share of education budgets (aiming for 10%) and associated increase in recruitment of personnel. • Programme support for provision of materials, infrastructure and engagement with NGOs to provide services to most vulnerable children. |
| Lack of clarity in roles of public / non-state actors, and low capacity for effective governance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical support / dialogue to strengthen roles of key ministries and departments in planning, financing and monitoring of ECE. • Develop and test equitable models for expanded provision, with clear roles for government and non-state actors in funding and delivery, including staff recruitment and training. • Ensure clarity and capacity in the roles / responsibilities of decentralised administrations in the planning, funding and delivery of ECE. • Programme / TA support for positive regulatory environment for non-state/private sector engagement in service delivery |
| Low quality of ECE provision | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical support for development of a quality assurance system, service standards, monitoring mechanisms. • Budget support to finance recruitment of qualified teachers; and technical support to their pre- and in-service training. • Policy dialogue and technical support for language of instruction, child-centred approaches, outcome benchmarks. • Technical support to revise curricular content and culturally adapted approaches, engagement with families/communities. • Capacity development for leadership and management of ECE service providers/pre-schools. |
| Limited data and evidence for decision-making | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme and capacity development support for better data collection, disaggregated across categories of vulnerability (where appropriate, as part of broader support to EMIS). • Support / fund research studies to better understand barriers to access, and models for quality / equitable provision. |

xix See UNESCO Institute for Statistics Database SDG4 data <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>

Managing the EU contribution and dialogue

The expansion of ECE coverage is a dynamic process and one for which EU policy and guidance is still evolving. Lessons from country-level policy dialogue and implementation of ECE programmes, whether by EU or partners, should inform this work over coming years, particularly in the formulation of new programmes. EU Delegations may need to enhance their capacity in this specific area of work, where there has been limited previous involvement. Given the lack of evidence in many contexts, funding / supporting research and analysis may be a good first entry point for support (e.g. linked to sector planning and annual review processes) and can provide a basis for policy dialogue, which can bring together different stakeholders and foster engagement and overall support for ECE. Given the nature of provision, there are likely to be a range of civil society organisations and other non-state actors involved and with local expertise in this work.

As noted in Table 1 above, important considerations for policy dialogue include the rate of expansion of ECE services that is feasible, the mechanisms for quality assurance and regulation, and the share of financing to be devoted to ECE. The priorities and approach will vary depending on context, but it is likely that ECE has been given insufficient attention in many countries. This is particularly true in conflict-affected countries/areas, where it should be an important part of humanitarian and development responses, and through Disaster Risk Reduction efforts. While this paper has focused on the education component of this work, any response should consider the contribution to a more holistic approach to the provision of early childhood development, and ensure coordination with and across sectors, or potentially developing multi-sectoral support programmes which address health, nutrition, and protection issues alongside and as part of early learning.

3. Case Study

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| Source | Sonia Godinho, EU Delegation to Namibia A presentation prepared for the 2019 Annual Education Seminar, and Programme documents for the 11th EDF Education Sector Reform Contract (ESRC) for Namibia (12/2016 – 12/2020). |
| Programme | Support to Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Namibia |
| Context and challenges | <p>The Government of Namibia is highly committed to improving equitable access and quality of services for the early stages of children's development. ECD is a national priority that needs to be implemented in a coordinated and integrated manner. Relevant Ministries are working together to ensure children's holistic development. Civil society, private sector and development partners, including the EU, are also supporting the Ministries' efforts.</p> <p>Access to ECD has been slowly but steadily increasing, with 27% of children aged zero to four years old attending ECD centres in 2018^{xx} (up from 13% in 2011^{xi}). The growth in the number of ECD centres and better understanding of the importance of children's foundational years amongst parents and communities have contributed to the increase in enrolment. The increase of pre-primary classes in public schools has resulted in more children aged five to six years old completing one year of pre-primary education. 31.3% of children aged five to six years old are attending pre-primary.</p> <p>However, learners' performance remains a concern. Data shows that the percentage of learners repeating Grade 1 has been stagnant from 2015 to 2018 at around 20%. That means roughly one out of five children are repeating this grade^{xii}. The number of unqualified or underqualified caregivers and teachers at the early stages of learning is decreasing but it still impacts children's levels of early literacy and numeracy and their school preparedness.</p> <p>The current Namibian National Development Plan (NDP5), running from 2017/18 to 2021/22, aims to offer all Namibian children aged zero to eight years old 'a secure educational foundation through access to ECD services'. Early childhood development must encompass all aspects of children's development including cognitive, social, emotional and physical abilities. NDP5 establishes clear and realistic targets to be achieved by 2022 as a result of national investment in ECD: i) 40% of children aged zero to four years attending ECD centres/programmes; ii) the number of qualified caregivers to increase to 3,800; and iii) the percentage of qualified pre-primary teachers to increase to 60%.</p> <p>Implementation of ECD services in Namibia is guided by the 2007 National Integrated ECD Policy (IECD Policy). The policy defines a set of interventions aimed at holistic care, development and protection of children. In February 2018, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the National Integrated ECD Strategic Framework 2017 to 2022 (IECD Framework). The Framework is aligned with the IECD policy and aims at ensuring that all ECD services are delivered in a comprehensive way covering all aspects affecting child development, namely health, nutrition, education, care and safety, as illustrated in the figure below (source: IECD Framework^{xxiii}).</p> |

20 Source: this Enrolment Rate was calculated by the EU Delegation based on the number of enrolled children in ECD centers in 2018 (96,154); and UNPD's population projections for Namibia of children aged 0-4: 349,665.

21 Source: NDP5, page 72.

22 Source: EMIS 2015 (repetition from 2014 to 2015): 19.9%; EMIS 2016 (repetition from 2015 to 2016): 19.9% – EMIS 2017 (repetition from 2016 to 2017): 20.7%; EMIS 2018 (repetition from 2017 to 2018): 20.3%.

23 https://www.unicef.org/namibia/na.IECD_Framework_Summary_2018.pdf

Context and challenges continued

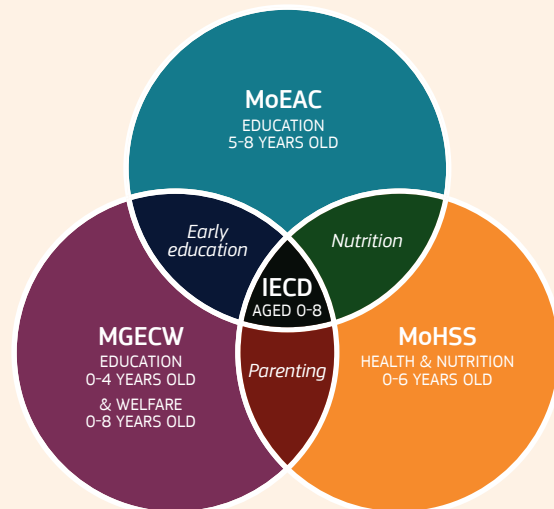
The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGECW) leads all initiatives aimed at children aged zero to four years, including registration, assessment and supervision of ECD centres and in-service training of educators, as well as the child welfare portfolio. The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC) is responsible for services to children aged five to eight years, including one year of pre-primary, primary education and the training and curriculum development for pre-primary and primary grades. All other aspects related to health and nutrition among children in ECD facilities, home-based care settings and schools are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Social Services (MoHSS). The Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration (MHA) plays a vital role in the registration of children and issuing of birth certificates.

The governance structure for ECD is the National IECD Committee with its technical Sub-Committees. Currently, three sub-committees have been created. They report directly to the National IECD Committee: 1) the Sub-Committee for strengthening ECD data collection and data analysis; 2) the Sub-Committee for capacity building of educators and caregivers; 3) the Sub-Committee for ECD visibility and awareness, including parenting support programmes. A fourth one is planned to deal with increasing funding for ECD.

ECD centres for children aged zero to four years in Namibia are privately or community-owned; the government does not run any ECD centres. Pre-primary Education (one year) takes place in government primary schools – free of charge – and in private schools. There are still geographical disparities, with differences from region to region, and between rural and urban areas. Children who are more likely to be excluded from ECD include children living in poverty, in remote rural communities or urban slums, children from minorities or children with disabilities.

The government budget share for ECD and pre-primary is relatively small. Expenditure on pre-primary as a proportion of total education expenditure only reached 1.5% in financial year 2018/19. The projected allocation for ECD in financial year 2018/19 was only 3.2% of the MGECW total budget. In the current financial year 2019/2020, public funding to pre-primary as a proportion of the total budget of MoEAC increased to 3% and the ECD sub-programme has been increased to 3.9% of the MGECW total budget (the main difference here is the increase in the capital budget for ECD).

The EU has been supporting Namibia through several successive programmes in education. The 11th EDF Education Sector Reform Contract (ESRC) for Namibia aims at improving equitable and inclusive access as well as quality in ECD and pre-primary sub-sectors through the strengthening of system delivery capacity. This budget support programme includes an important component of complementary support, with technical assistance being provided by UNICEF to the various Ministries involved in early childhood development (MoEAC, MGECW and MoHSS). The programme also involves significant engagement in policy dialogue. Extended discussions with the government, development partners and other relevant stakeholders in the IECD sector are held in the national IECD Committee mentioned above that meets on a quarterly basis. As a member of all the technical sub-committees working under the National IECD Committee's supervision, the Delegation also takes part in more technical and detailed discussions related to IECD. One of the main priority areas of discussion has been and will continue to be the need to substantially increase funding from the public and private sectors for ECD in order to continuously increase access and improve quality.



Action taken

The programme intends to support more equitable access to ECD and pre-primary education services by expanding the availability of pre-primary classrooms and ECD centres, and making sure these centres meet the minimum requirement standards of safety for children. The EU programme has been supporting and advocating for increased funding to IECD. In FY 2019/20, the government increased public funding for capital investments in ECD and pre-primary (rehabilitation and construction of ECD centres and construction of new pre-primary classrooms). If the investments are well executed, they will have a positive impact in terms of access to ECD and on the enrolment rate of pre-primary education.

The programme also aims at contributing to increased quality of teaching in ECD and PPE, through extended and increased quality teacher training and continuous professional development of teachers. The programme supports: a) the subsidy system for ECD educators (called educarers in Namibia); b) the system to assess compliance of ECD centres with minimum quality standards; c) the provision of teaching and learning materials in all ECD centres and PPE classes; and d) the assessment of children's school readiness.

In 2018, there were 5,258 ECD educarers in Namibia out of which only 1068 are qualified. This represents 20% of the ECD workforce in ECD centres. The government subsidy scheme for ECD educarers foresees different levels of subsidy based on the qualifications of the educarers. This scheme will go through an evaluation supported by the EU in order to assess its effectiveness and efficiency. Recommendations will also be provided in order to improve the impact of the scheme. Achievements so far include the improved and continuous delivery of the 7-week in-service training course delivered by MGECW staff. It is offered to unqualified educarers from ECD centres serving poor communities to provide them with basic knowledge and skills on how to care for children and prepare them for lifelong learning. Support has also been provided to the Sub-Committee on Capacity Building to include the wider discussion of how to professionalise the ECD career.

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| Action taken <i>continued</i> | <p>The programme is also supporting the efficiency and effectiveness of management and institutional processes and systems. This includes support for training on quality standards for ECD and pre-primary, and their effective application, and support to the strengthening of capacities at central and regional level in planning, budgeting, monitoring, evaluation and audit for these services.</p> <p>Finally, an important intervention supported by the programme is the development of an advocacy, communication and public outreach programme on the importance of ECD and pre-primary education. Achievements so far include the development of a national ECD advocacy strategy to strengthen the ECD sector and improve the image of its workforce in Namibia. The target audience of this advocacy campaign goes from policy-makers and administrators to parents, caregivers, teachers and members of the communities. This advocacy programme included roadshows in remote and rural areas of the country, the creation of a Namibia ECD website and a social media campaign on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.</p> |
| Lessons learned | <p>Interventions are designed to contribute to reduce inequalities and to improve quality. Support to ECD is in itself a very positive equity strategy. However, implementation is key. It is important that the targeting of interventions is well thought through and agreed so these contribute to reducing inequalities (geographical, of specific vulnerable groups, etc.).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy is an important tool contributing to understand the importance of early child development and education and the necessary mobilisation and involvement of policy-makers, teachers and educators, teacher education faculty and researchers, parents and communities in ECD and pre-primary education. • The budget dedicated to ECD and pre-primary education has increased slowly, allowing for investments in access and quality (training, teaching and learning material, etc.). The EU budget support programme has worked as an important incentive for this increase. The sustainability of public funding is crucial over the coming years to sustain the system being set up, and further expand the offer of quality ECD and pre-primary education. It cannot yet be assessed if the government will be able to sustain the funding. Evidence for investment in early years is well known now and ECD and pre-primary education feature prominently in the national policies, which should support continued investments. |

4. References and Further Reading

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