

Global Partnership Strategy for Early Childhood

01. OUR CHALLENGES

Progress towards achieving 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” is severely constrained by a number of major challenges:

- Virtually every country in the world faces challenges in making meaningful progress in providing high quality, equitable and culturally appropriate Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) / Early Childhood Development (ECD) services that are required to foster good child and family development and unleash the full potential of young children for their lifelong journey. At present, even well-intentioned efforts at the country-level fail to gain traction for several reasons: fragmentation of governance, responsibility and mandates split across multiple government ministries leading to a lack of policy coherence, ownership, mobilisation and accountability; ineffective communication, coordination and knowledge sharing across multiple sectors; under-articulation of potential returns on investment leading to under-resourcing; and failure to articulate and implement whole-of-government evidence-based policies.
- Although the early years are the critical stage of children’s rapid brain development that lay the foundation for good health and nutrition, educational success, social-emotional learning and economic productivity throughout life, at least 250 million young children, representing 43% of children under 5 years of age are at high risk of not reaching their full potential¹.
- There is insufficient political, social and financial commitment and urgency around the ECCE/ECD agenda at global, regional and in many cases national levels. Most international efforts to date have been deployed in silos such that effective practices, resources and expertise are fragmented and inaccessible to all actors.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated already existing inequalities, requiring explicit

1 Black et al, 2017

recommitment, action and resources to reach and prioritise marginalised children. Widespread neglect of the COVID-19 response to childhood services has resulted in many contexts in the children becoming developmentally delayed, malnourished and neglected, with potential lifelong impacts on their development, education and wellbeing².

As a result, global, regional, and national whole-of-government initiatives for ECCE/ ECD are urgently required!³ These programmes address the period from preconception and pregnancy to children eight years of age and their families. Without swift collective action, the hard-fought gains made on expanding access to Early Childhood Care and Education will be lost. This requires governments and the international community to act with speed in mitigating the pandemic's negative impact, with a particular focus on children with developmental delays and disabilities; minority cultural and linguistic groups; and families and children affected by climate emergencies, conflicts, and marginalisation in urban and rural areas.

We must UNITE and reinvigorate **PARTNERSHIPS** for coordinated response and genuine international solidarity within and across all countries in order to establish strategic priorities and breakthroughs and implement new mission-oriented and results-based initiatives that are fully accountable and in line with the SDG4 commitments.

02. OUR PARTNERSHIP

To mobilise political drive and galvanise collective action, a highly participatory approach to develop the Global Partnership Strategy (GPS) for ECCE has been set in motion under the leadership of HRH Princess Laurentien of The Netherlands, Special Envoy for ECCE to UNESCO and Dr. Stefania Giannini, UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Education.

The innovative dialogue to develop the GPS was launched in the presence of education ministers from five champion countries⁴ and development partner agencies active in ECCE. Ideas for the GPS were contributed through a series of international preparatory meetings and consultations. Participants included: Member States representatives, regional and intergovernmental organizations, and regional and sub-regional communities; UNICEF, World Health Organisation, World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, Global Partnership for Education, OECD, International Labour Organisation, Save the Children, the ECD Action Network (ECDAN) and regional ECD networks (AFCEN, ARNEC, and ISSA); the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP) and its regional and national networks; ECCE/ECD researchers and professionals; RISE Institute, ECD Task Force for Children with Disabilities (ECDtf), Right to Education Initiative, Right to Play, Volunteer Service Overseas; UNESCO

2 UN Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on children, April 2020

3 ECCE is the term UNESCO and many countries use for Early Childhood Development (ECD). ECCE includes, but is not limited to, inclusive initial and early childhood education (ECE) and early childhood intervention (ECI) for children with developmental delays and disabilities. The Global Partnerships Strategy (GPS) features all five domains of the "Nurturing Care Framework" (NCF) proposed by UNICEF, WHO and the World Bank, which are: health; nutrition; responsive caregiving; security and safety; and early learning. In addition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) are included. These programmes address the period from preconception and pregnancy to children eight years of age, and their families.

4 Cambodia, Seychelles, Qatar, Saudi Arabia (chair of G20), Uruguay

together with its Institutes (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, International Institute for Educational Planning, International Institute for Lifelong Learning, International Bureau for Education) and chairs on ECCE of the University of Victoria, University of South Africa, University of Goteborg University, Ensemble for Early Childhood Education, and others. The goals of this participatory approach were to co-construct and gather collective intelligence, build a strong global “ownership” of the GPS, and empower and inspire national ECCE/ECD and Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) leaders, networks, and services to collaborate around a shared vision.

03.

OUR VISION

We are united around the GPS Vision.

VISION OF THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY

ECCE/ECD services for child and family development as the foundation of Lifelong Learning are the essential investment for achieving sustainable development, and all nations give their highest priority to investing in ECCE/ECD to leave no-child behind.

To attain this Vision, we shall achieve these goals:

- Mobilise all nations and relevant international agencies to collaborate and reach Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets related to ECCE/ECD, with a special focus on Education Target 4.2 for early childhood and in synergy with targets for essential child health, nutrition, water and sanitation, child rights and protection, disability and gender; and
- Forge new inter-agency and global partnerships, coordination and collaboration to implement a **mission-driven Action Plan** with results-oriented strategies for policies and services that will improve child and family development; and accelerate, expand and improve ECCE/ECD services in all nations to help ALL children attain their full potential.
- Substantially increase domestic investment and international aid to ECCE/ECD from less than 1% to 6% within next 5 years and to 10% by 2030.

04.

ECCE/ECD KEY PRINCIPLES

The following key principles will guide our work:

- Child rights guaranteed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child are the basis of good child and family development.
- All ECCE/ECD services must be inclusive, developmentally appropriate to each child, equitable, high in quality and accountable.

- Every child should have a family and never be placed in an institution.
- Family-focused services help ensure nurturing care, while also empowering parents and considering parents as partners in child development.
- Parents and legal guardians have the right to consent to the services their child receives.
- Basic services for child development should be free-of-charge and considered essential, and always so during crises such as pandemics, environmental crises, and violence.
- Families of all ethnicities and language groups should always be included in ECCE/ECD and ECI services, which we need to ensure are culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- Children and families suffering from domestic violence or any other form of trauma should be offered early childhood and parenting services.
- Countries should plan and prepare ECCE/ECD policies, from bottom up, to ensure a continuity of care and fully comprehensive services for all families and children.
- ECCE/ECD service providers should have up-to-date pre- and in-service training, opportunities for certification, career ladders, salary scales, and supportive supervisors.
- Global, regional, and national coalitions and networks of early childhood programmes should be strongly encouraged and well supported.
- Intersectoral coordination and collaboration should always be encouraged and pursued.

05.

OUR STRATEGIES FOR RESULTS

We consider that country-level action is critical to address the challenges — countries are where policies and funding decisions that directly influence children's development and learning are made. As a multi-sector partnership, we are also actively engaging to provide channels of communication and coordination among actors across geographies and sectors to unlock synergies and increase effectiveness of collective efforts, with an aim to develop and identify evidence-based innovations, and drive implementation at scale.

Our primary operational goal is to move ECCE/ECD action forward rapidly to the field and to ensure each country meets its concrete national development objectives for their children through international cooperation and solidarity, peer learning, advocacy and evidence. To achieve this goal, five **Strategies for Results** have been identified. Each Strategy has 2 to 3 Strategic Priorities, each with concrete proposed initiatives and challenging yet feasible indicators, measures and targets (See the GPS paper for details).

Based on our participatory planning process, the following five **Strategies for Results** have been identified:

- **Harness Evidence for Action and Rights**
- **Leverage Data, Monitoring and Evaluation for Accountability**
- **Scale up Access, Inclusion, Equity and Quality**
- **Strengthen Policy, Governance, Financing and Advocacy**
- **Galvanize Coordination and International Cooperation**

Strategy 1: Harness Evidence for Action and Rights

Evidence for action gained through years of research rarely has been consolidated and well harnessed for greater use in promoting child and parental right; developing robust ECCE/ECD policies and plans; increasing investments in programmes; providing pre- and in-service teacher training services; and preparing ECCE/ECD advocacy campaigns.

Strategic Priority 1.1: Build the capacity to use evidence

- Develop tools, including digital technology, to capacitate early childhood networks, civil society organisations and ministries to use research, lessons and evaluation data to advocate for improved child and family rights, and early childhood development policies, programmes and practices.
- Strengthen the capacity of teacher training institutions to use data including real-time data and data analytics to improve practice in the professional preparation of all early childhood personnel.
- Develop a global network of research institutions around the world, including UNESCO's chairs, supported by regional network institutions to share and better use data for action, with a focus on researchers in low- and middle-income countries.

Strategic Priority 1.2: Strengthen the evidence

- Increase bilateral and multilateral support for research on key issues that are central to policy and practice, including longitudinal, cross national and cross regional research, surveys and implementation studies.
- Create and maintain an international clearinghouse of research, effective policies and practices and high-quality ECCE/ECD resources.

Strategic Priority 1.3: Recruit new champions and increase voices to move from evidence to action for ECCE/ECD

- Develop and support training, advocacy and outreach efforts in all countries to promote parent and caregiver voices in policy and programme processes at all levels.
- Create networks of champions in every country who can become the national voice for children while working with the early childhood community and contributing to international community of practices

Strategy 2: Leverage Data, Monitoring and Evaluation for Accountability

Processes for collecting, analysing and disseminating data on the physical, cognitive and social-emotional development of young children and the services they receive are lacking and weakly informing ECCE/ECD policies, addressing service gaps, and improving and expanding national ECCE/ECD systems at all levels. Nationally, regionally and internationally, there is a lack of sufficient or adequate mechanisms and data to measure SDG Target for 4.2.1 for early childhood, and Target 4.2 for providing at least one year of pre-primary

education in all countries. To develop accurate and timely data, countries will urgently need to establish National ECD Monitoring and Evaluation Systems including regular surveys and use of data analytics for providing regular reports to their citizens, government ministries and SDG Committees.

Strategic Priority 2.1: Monitor the SDG Targets for ECCE/ECD

- Encourage all countries to monitor SDG targets 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 through conducting international, regional and national seminars for national ECCE/ECD monitoring and evaluation units, statistical bureaus and policy planners for developing strong country initiatives to measure these targets, including by leveraging real-time data and data analytics, and use results in policy and programme planning.
- Map regularly progress in coverage and quality of SDG targets 4.2.1 and 4.2.2.

Strategic Priority 2.2: Develop National Multisectoral ECCE/ECD Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

- Support governments in developing National Multisectoral ECCE/ECD Monitoring and Evaluation Systems, with a multisectoral coordination body; a legal framework for inter-sectoral arrangements, protocols, indicator frameworks, measures, targets, digital reporting forms; and analytic systems to track and report on policy, service and child indicators.
- Encourage and support every country to develop Annual Reports on ECCE/ECD and ECI services and indicators of child and family wellbeing, including data from UNICEF MICS, Countdown data, and other national and local data.
- Publish an annual global report on the state of ECCE/ECD in the world building on the Global Education Monitoring Report.

Strategy 3: Scale up Access, Inclusion, Equity and Quality

Despite notable progress over the past decade, many countries are still far from achieving equitable access, and full equity and inclusion of all children — especially those with developmental delays and disabilities, from minority groups, migrant, refugee or displaced families; children affected or infected by HIV/AIDS and other chronic diseases; children without birth registration; and with other challenging circumstances. In many contexts, quality of services are weak and national, regional and international standards to improve the quality ECCE/ECD services for all children are needed. Similarly, the coverage of a broad range of ECCE/ECD and ECI services remain limited, and over 175 million children lack access to pre-primary education and are likely to enter primary education with inadequate preparedness.

Strategic Priority 3.1: Expanding access and tackling inequity and exclusion in ECCE/ECD and ECI services

- Strengthen ECCE/ECD and early childhood intervention (ECI) policy, programme planning and implementation, focusing on scale-up, equity and quality, including: identifying barriers to equity and inclusion; data collection and analysis regarding barriers; expanding referrals and access to ECI services and building resilient learning and support systems for children and parents.

Strategic Priority 3.2: Improve the quantity and quality of the early childhood workforce

- Increase the quantity and quality of the early childhood workforce, with emphasis on the education sector workforce, and with attention to continuous pre- and in-service training including: leveraging digital technologies, qualifications, certification, career ladders and salaries and social motivation; supervisory and accountability systems; data collection for monitoring and pedagogical support; and a particular reference to issues around equity and inclusion.
- Set-up an international observatory of effective pedagogical practices in ECCE/ECD in coordination with teachers' taskforces and other relevant knowledge platforms.

Strategic Priority 3.3: Support the development, improvement and monitoring of child development, early learning, and quality service standards

- Support early childhood curriculum review, development, improvement and monitoring of child development, early learning and quality service standards with respect to equity and inclusion.
- Develop international references, standards and education resources in early learning and promote open education resources.

Strategy 4: Strengthen Policy, Governance, Financing and Advocacy

Child and family rights, enshrined in conventions and official documents, are not always applied in countries and agencies. Within current rights conventions and other international documents, a specific international legal framework for ECCE/ECD is lacking and needs to be developed and adopted to give stronger support to these essential services. Focused action and strong leadership are urgently required to mobilise national governments to prioritize ECCE/ECD and ECI in policy planning, governance and financial investments.

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

- Develop an international normative framework with a view to anchor the human rights dimension of ECCE/ECD as central to ensuring universal access to quality and inclusive services, including at least one-year of free pre-primary education, and to embed ECCE/ECD in a lifelong learning perspective.
- Include systematically the monitoring of ECCE/ECD in the context of human rights and engage countries in ensuring wider access to quality and inclusive ECCE/ECD by developing their national legal and policy frameworks, through guidance and policy dialogue, technical support, and advocacy.

Strategic Priority: 4.2 Prioritise at least one year of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education in sector planning, budgeting and implementation

- Encourage all countries and international donors for ECCE/ECD and ECI to collaborate more

closely to increase technical and financial support for education sector planning, budgeting and implementation to ensure all countries will provide a minimum of one year of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education, and more years if possible.

Strategic Priority 4.3: Increase greatly the share of domestic finance and international education aid for pre-primary education and other ECCE/ECD and ECI services

- Build on the 2019 global Call for Action, conduct global and national campaigns to increase investment in ECCE and ensure that inclusive initial and early education, and related ECD and ECI services receive greatly increased funding from international and regional agencies, organisations and foundations.
- Develop and share updated evidence of return on investment in ECCE/ECD and ECI.

Strategy 5: Galvanize Coordination and International Cooperation

In order to ensure coherent and effective ECCE/ECD policy planning — building on experience gained through developing and implementing successful policies, collaborative partnerships, networks, and coalitions of ECCE/ECD — programmes should be nurtured and supported at global, regional, and national levels to build a vibrant and dynamic global movement for young children and their families and to strengthen national and sub-national capacity to develop and implement innovative, inclusive policies and approaches that result in equitable services of good quality.

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

- Develop and conduct a series of comprehensive global child rights campaigns in collaboration with UN CRC review Committee, as well as related regional and national activities.
- Identify, document and share effective whole of government approaches in ECCE/ECD.

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

- Propose to the UN General Assembly to establish the United Nations Decade for Early Childhood Care and Development, 2021-2030 with annual activities to promote ECCE/ECD and ECI policy planning and implementation as well as the expansion and improvement of services for ALL children and their families.
- Develop a multisectoral ECCE/ECD Global Knowledge Exchange Platform (building for example on the GPE/KIX platform) with global, regional, and national networks, building on what exists, to enable large-scale innovation, inclusive implementation, and collective impact.
- Generate and disseminate knowledge and develop global public goods, including tools and training materials.

Strategic Priority 5.3: Transform ECCE/ECD systems by strengthening capacities at all levels to plan, develop and implement multi-sectoral ECCE/ECD programmes

- Provide systematic Technical Assistance with inter-country learning exchange built around existing expertise found in regional networks and global technical resources.

06. OUR PROPOSAL FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING TO ACHIEVE RESULTS

GPS Results Team

To structure for success, an agile, representative and inter-agency GPS Results Team will be responsible for overall coordination, guidance and monitoring of the implementation of the GPS. It will harness and mobilize the expertise and assets of multiple partners around the world. In line with the five Strategies of the GPS, the Results Team will develop annual mission-driven GPS Action Plans to achieve the GPS Vision and targets established for each of the Strategic Priorities.

The GPS brings together an impressive set of partners and the large political support of UNESCO member states across geographies and income-levels. The implementation modality will build on the assets of the Partnership to attain its objectives.

UNESCO offers to host the Results Team, in full partnership with UNICEF, WHO, ILO, World Bank, OECD, and regional Development Banks such as the IADB. The hosting of the Results Team could be organised on a rotating basis to ensure full ownership and commitment of all partners and countries. Each partner agency is dedicated to the good development and support of the world's children, including through secondment of at least one full-time professional with extensive experience in at least one ECCE/ECD field. They will comply with the partnership strategy, which calls for synergies and the optimisation of all resources. As the central aim of the SDG4-Education 2030 implementation mechanisms is to support country-led action, countries should play a critical role in the implementation of the GPS and are also encouraged to second experts to the Results Team, as could other organisations and partners, including the private sector, foundations, institutes, and networks.

Regarding the implementation of Strategic Priorities, Lead Agencies will be identified, which could mobilize like-minded partners around a mission-oriented programme to supporting countries in the implementation of the GPS. For example, interested organisations or foundations could champion specific Initiatives. This would have the advantage of using existing mechanisms to the extent possible. In addition, all partners will be requested to provide modest seed funding to support and sustain the GPS Results Team as soon as possible. The terms of reference of the Results Team will be established collaboratively. Opportunities for supporting the GPS will be offered to many countries, bilateral and multilateral agencies, global 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 funds will be developed in the first Action Plan.

Organisational Framework

The Organisational Framework of the GPS Initiative (see attached) builds on current organisational capacities and seeks to orchestrate new initiatives for coordination and collaboration among all partners. The proposed Framework has the goal of greatly strengthening, expanding and improving:

- existing multilateral and bilateral investments in ECCE/ECD and ECI services;
- mobilisation of global, regional and national ECCE/ECD networks;
- government investments and programmes at central, provincial and district/municipal levels in all ECCE/ECD sectors; and
- existing and emerging coalitions of civil society and government programmes to improve and greatly expand ECCE/ECD and ECI services in communities.

The GPS Results Team

The GPS Results Team will have multisectoral and interdisciplinary representation, including health, nutrition, WASH, education, rights and protection. The GPS Results Team will assume the following roles:

- Coordination of all GPS initiatives.
- Support for inter-agency coordination of all GPS strategies.
- Ensure participation of all interested / selected countries and partners to lead a component / mission and to deliver result
- High-priority global advocacy campaigns.
- Annual preparation of the mission-driven Action Plan;
- Guidance and supervision of all activities under Strategic Priorities.
- Monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the GPS Initiative.

The First 100 Days

Because we are facing a dire crisis in child and family status and development, the first 100 days will be very important, and “start-up” must be conducted rapidly and well to set-up the organisational arrangements, make visible the GPS and achieve quick wins. During the first 100 days, the following actions will be undertaken:

- Inter-Agency Partnership Agreement for GPS developed and established.
- Terms of reference for the Results Team, secondment protocols and modalities, and job descriptions prepared.
- Recruitment conducted and candidates selected, especially among secondment proposals by Countries and agencies)
- GPS Results Team established and working virtually, with plans for joint location.
- First Annual GPS Action Plan developed for Years 1 and 2.

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

Monitoring and Evaluation of the GPS

The GPS, as a results-based initiative, will annually monitor all activities and results regarding each of the Five Strategies and their Strategic Priorities using the agreed upon initiatives, indicators, measures and targets, as proposed in this document. To fully monitor and evaluate all GPS indicators as well as the impact of its initiatives, UNESCO Institute of Statistics, International Institute for Educational Planning, the Global Monitoring Report, and the statistics offices of UNICEF, WHO, ILO, World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank will collaborate fully wherever ECCE/ECD statistics relate to their databases. The GPS Results Team will conduct additional global surveys that are listed in this document, often in collaboration with ECCE/ECD research institutes possessing the necessary competencies. The important leadership role of national statistics bureaus, and education, health and protection management information systems (MIS), wherever they exist, cannot be over emphasised.

The GPS Results Team will issue an **Annual GPS Progress Report** in collaboration with all partners and participating countries. National, 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, when feasible.

Links with SDG4 Steering Committee

The Global Education Meeting organised by UNESCO in October 2020 called for a renewed global education architecture, and to strengthen the SDG-Education 2030 Steering Committee to effectively steer and coordinate the global education cooperation mechanism in line with the Education 2030 Framework for Action and in the post-COVID-19 context. The GPS Results Team will report to the SDG-Education Steering Committee to align with the proposed Education-2030 steering process, better position ECCE/ECD, and benefit from global conversation about better aligning policies, financing and data to achieve SDG4.

Communication and promotion of GPS

The GPS Results Team will develop a communication strategy of the GPS which will, among others, include 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 create a large movement around the GPS.

About the executive summary of the Global Partnership Strategy for Early Childhood Care and Education of GPS

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