



Policy Brief

EDUCATION FOR SURVIVAL: STRENGTHENING MULTI- SECTORAL AND INTEGRATED POLICY APPROACHES TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, CARE, AND DEVELOPMENT AS A GLOBAL COMMON GOOD

Task Force 5

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Abstract

This proposed policy brief offers policy recommendations that will enable participatory, community-level, and culturally responsive solutions to support young children—from birth onward— as well as their families and communities, through the development and improvement of sustainable and cost-effective early childhood development, education and care (ECD/ECEC) policies, costed action plans, and systems. Ensuring the early development, education, and well-being of all children is a global common good, a fundamental human right, and essential for achieving the SDG 2030 Framework. Meeting children’s rights and developmental goals can prepare them to become effective contributors to humanity’s survival during these times of global existential crises.

Challenges

In 2022 the world is cautiously adapting to a post COVID-19 reality while seeking to overcome adverse effects of conflict. The pandemic—which is far from over for most of the world’s population—has been exacerbated by millions of refugees across the globe and a lack of basic health care and food, children’s services, international solidarity (vaccine nationalism) as well as inadequate global coordination, and inequality between and within countries in both the global south and global north.¹ Existential, self-inflicted, and mutually reinforcing crises include the current pandemic, climate change impacts, threats to biodiversity, inequity, hunger and malnutrition, forced migration, economic risks and poverty, the growing risk of larger scale armed conflict, and threats to democracy.

While countries have been affected differently by many crisis scenarios, analyses show that in all cases, young children are the worst affected group, due especially to the widespread disruption of systems, programmes and services for early childhood development, education and care (ECD/ECEC) (UNESCO, 2021; UNICEF, 2020, 2021). Inequalities affecting infants, young children, and their families predate the COVID-19 pandemic; and they have been compounded by it. Consequently, young children from marginalised groups in all countries, including the most affluent ones, fare increasingly worse on a whole range of indicators including stunting, healthy development, learning, protection, and the attainment of their full potential (Black et al, 2017, Danaei et al., 2016; Marmot, Allen, Boyce, Goldblatt, & Morrison, 2020). The global crisis of ECD/ECEC systems has had wide-reaching consequences through impacts on gender equality, parents’ and especially women’s abilities to work, attend educational services, skills training, and secure basic support services. This, in turn, has had both immediate and long-term implications for countries’ economic productivity, governance, social welfare systems, social cohesion, and intergenerational solidarity (e.g., the future of pension systems) (Blofield, Braunstein, Filguiera, Grimalda, & Urban, 2020; Devercelli & Beaton-Day, 2020; Gromada, Richardson, & Rees, 2020). In some countries where participatory methods for whole-of-government and society planning are not implemented, policy responses to the crises of ECD/ECEC systems have tended to rely on centralised initiatives with insufficient focus on empowering, building, and sustaining local capability (Vargas-Barón, 2016). In addition, sectoral and top-down policy responses often lack

¹ According to UNHRC ‘Despite some signs of progress, the speed and scale of forced displacement is outpacing solutions for refugees’ (<https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2022/6/62a9d2b04/unhcr-global-displacement-hits-record-capping-decade-long-rising-trend.html>)

citizen ownership and mechanisms for systematically learning from local solutions and evidence-based national, regional, and global policy planning approaches (Vargas-Barón, 2019).

The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the general lack of action and commitment in complying with Target 4.2 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Framework. Despite some welcome progress, access to the ECD/ECEC is far from universal, and highly unequal between and within countries and regions. In contradiction to the *Abidjan Principles*, countries rely heavily on private provision of services, which perpetuates unequal access, especially for the youngest children (UNICEF, 2019; UNESCO, 2021).

Multisectoral ECD policies are essential for establishing enabling environments for implementing well-planned, equitable, transparent, accountable, and effective ECD programmes at sub-national and community levels. However, as of December 2019, only 76 countries (39 percent of 197 countries worldwide) and one territory had adopted a total of 125 multisectoral ECD policy instruments. Regions leading in ECD policy development were South Asia (88 percent), Latin America and the Caribbean (65 percent), and Sub-Saharan Africa (58 percent), and greater attention is needed in other world regions and especially lower-income and lower-middle-income countries. Currently, 15 countries are preparing ECD policies; however, considerably more technical and financial support is urgently needed to increase the number of countries conducting participatory policy planning processes and implementing those policies effectively (Vargas-Barón, Diehl, & Small, 2022).

Proposals for G20

The crisis scenario outlined above requires G20 global leadership. G20 should assume an active role in promoting multisectoral ECD/ECEC policy planning, the implementation and systems of accountability to create enabling environments, and initiate proactive knowledge exchange between² the global south and north. G20 can base its leadership initiative on the existing strong G20 commitment to early childhood, as expressed in the Leaders' Declaration *Building consensus for fair and sustainable development* (G20, 2018b) and the *G20 Initiative for Early Childhood Development* (G20, 2018a). The renewed and reemphasised G20 commitment to ECD/ECEC in the context of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal Framework should extend and reinforce the coherent body of previous policy recommendations provided by the group of co-authors and adopted by T20 since 2018 (Urban et al., 2020a, 2020b; Urban, Cardini, & Flórez-Romero, 2018; Urban, Cardini, Guevara, Okengo, & Flórez-Romero, 2019; Urban et al., 2021). These recommendations encourage G20 member states and non-state actors to develop and adopt concrete policies whose national implementation should be promoted by G20. In keeping with the G20 principles of multilateralism, policies addressing inequality and well-being are relevant in areas beyond early childhood and contribute to the realisation of the entire 2030 Sustainable Development Framework (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2019).

A new global common³ – early childhood education, care, and development as a global common good

We recognise that *shared learning across diverse global contexts* is crucial for establishing the basis for a new education for survival at global scale, beginning with every young child from birth. However, the task at hand is not a mere technical one. It requires creating new shared understandings about how to engage with the existential threats facing humanity and for nurturing *the common good* on a global scale (Urban, 2022). Forums for such conversations and

² We use the terms 'Global' South' and 'Global North' in this document as they are widely used in the international debate. However, we are aware they imply a dichotomy that is no longer justifiable, considering the complexity of a hyper-diverse world. To put it simply, pockets of disadvantage and persisting inequalities exist in all countries, as do affluence, privilege, and unfair advantage. In economic terms, Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) exist in both global hemispheres. However, economic terms are not enough to conceptualize the complex reality between and within countries. This leads us to concur with de Sousa Santos and others who argue that the 'Global South' is not a geographical concept. Instead, it 'encapsulates a frame of thinking, a possible epistemology, that enables us to fundamentally question the abyssal line that separate Eurocentric, colonialist thinking including its equally Eurocentric critique – i.e. critical theory – from other forms of knowing, being, and doing' (de Sousa Santos, 2018, p.42).

³ In the English language context, the 'common' refers to a piece of land, usually near a village, that is open to be used by all. We refer to the 'common' as an image of a shared resource, a forum for shared and meaningful exchange and engagement on a global scale.

exchanges exist at various levels and in different locations. To date, they remain largely isolated, speaking to distinct audiences and sectors. T20 has set out an ambition and practical examples for how to overcome such fragmentation and disconnect. We propose that the G20 proactively engages in the processes to initiate, create, encourage, and protect public fora for such encounters. We must and can create a new *global common!*

Stakes are high and require going beyond technical, organisational, or managerial solutions. The scale of the existential crises facing humanity on this finite planet provides an alarming background to the policy approaches suggested here in relation to young children from birth, their families, and their communities. Necessary developments towards more integrated policies in ECD/ECEC (as suggested in this policy brief) will have to be framed by a substantial paradigmatic shift in order to be meaningful and, in the long term, effective. The global nature of the challenge can no longer be addressed from the perspective of binaries that have become questionable, including the distinction between global North and South, defined by imagined geographical and geopolitical lines. Instead, the opportunity arises to fundamentally reconsider knowledge co-creation and shared policy learning across multiple and diverse global sites. This involves, in practical terms, political leadership to counter and reorient the persistent (false!) hierarchy between knowledge production associated with the Global North and its application by the Global South (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012). Taking seriously the contribution of ECD/ECEC in the global context of education for survival, G20 should aspire to become a forum for ECD/ECEC policy exchange, with a particular focus on learning from integrated and multisectoral policies developed in crisis response scenarios by countries in the Global South (Urban et al., 2021; Vargas-Barón, 2019; Vargas-Barón et al., 2022).

Colombia's example on ECD/ECEC, situated at the intersection between multiple and complex crisis scenarios, can contribute to constructively addressing multi-layered social problems:

Comprehensive early childhood strategy *De Cero a Siempre* (Colombia)

Colombia is a country that has been besieged by a multitude of risk factors that have affected its possibilities for development, including an internal armed conflict that has lasted more than 50 years, narcotics, significant inequality, and a vulnerable economy that is fundamentally based on commodities among others. Nonetheless, since 1976 Colombia has included early childhood as one of the priorities for its future; indeed the Commission for guiding early childhood development is in the Presidential Offices. The agreement between the Government and the FARC-EP to end the conflict in 2016 established as one of its points the universalization of initial education in rural areas affected by the armed conflict (Gobierno de Colombia, 2016)

- (1) In 2019, the government created “the Mission of the Wise” to define guidelines for the development of the country, which postulated the universalization of initial education as a central priority (Gobierno de Colombia y Misión de Sabios, 2020).
- (2). In 2020, in the capital Bogotá, the new administration was aware that achieving progress and overcoming national challenges require concrete strategies and actions at the local level. The Mission of educators and citizens called for establishing a solid foundation for development in the education sector, from initial and early education onward, as the basis for lifelong development, learning, and productivity.
- (3). These advances were achieved after several decades of civil society, government, and international cooperation to position the field of early childhood at the forefront of all development. It resulted in a public policy and legislation—*De Cero a Siempre*—that frames Colombia’s inter-institutional and inter-sectoral coordination for achieving comprehensive child and family development.
- (4) In addition to policy development, Colombia created a robust inter-sectoral ECD monitoring and evaluation framework of agreements, with an integrated database of critical indicators. This system enables Colombia to measure the implementation and results of its ECD policy and revise it, as needed, to meet emerging realities and achieve stated outcomes.

Policy example 1: Colombia

As the example from Colombia shows, policy solutions exist for implementing multisectoral and integrated strategic priorities and for creating integrated databases to build effective, equitable, resilient, and sustainable ECD/ECEC systems. The participatory ECD policy planning methods employed in Colombia are embedded in the local realities of the children, families, and communities they seek to support.

Another example of taking such embedded multisectoral approaches to scale is evident in one of the world’s most extensive early childhood development programmes, the *Integrated Child Development Services Scheme* (ICDS) of India. The ICDS uses digital technology-based nutrition status trackers at the centres to deliver early child education, care, nutrition, and immunization for ages 3 to 6 years:

Integrated child development services (ICDS) scheme (India)

Children in the 0-6 years age group constitute around 158 million of the population of India (2011 census). These children are the future human resource of the country. The Ministry of Women and Child Development is implementing various schemes for children’s welfare, development, and protection.

Launched on 2nd October, 1975, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme is one of the flagship programmes of the Government of India and represents

one of the world's largest and unique programmes for early childhood care and development. It is the foremost symbol of the country's commitment to its children and nursing mothers as a response to the dual challenge of providing pre-school non-formal education while breaking the vicious cycle of malnutrition, morbidity, reduced learning capacity, and mortality. The beneficiaries under the Scheme are children aged 0-6 years, pregnant women, and lactating mothers. The objectives of the Scheme are:

- to improve the nutritional and health status of children in aged 0-6 years;
- to lay the foundation for proper psychological, physical, and social development of the child;
- to reduce the incidence of mortality, morbidity, malnutrition, and school dropout;
- to achieve effective policy coordination and implementation amongst the various departments to promote child development; and
- to enhance the capability of the mother to look after the normal health and nutritional needs of the child through proper nutrition and health education.

Services under ICDS

The ICDS Scheme offers a package of six services:

- Supplementary Nutrition
- Pre-school non-formal education
- Nutrition & health education
- Immunization
- Health check-ups and Referral services

The last three services are related to health and are provided by the Ministry/Department of Health and Family Welfare through the NRHM & Health system. The perception of providing a package of services is based primarily on the consideration that the overall impact will be much larger if the different services develop in an integrated manner, as the efficacy of a particular service depends upon the support it receives from the related services.

For better governance in the delivery of the Scheme, convergence is, therefore, one of the key features of the ICDS Scheme. This convergence is in-built into the Scheme, which provides a platform in the form of Anganwadi Centres for providing all services under the Scheme.

(<http://icds-wcd.nic.in/icds.aspx>)

Policy example 2: India

The Indian ICDS example demonstrates the importance of ambitious policies coordinated at the central (national) level followed by coordination and resources at the territorial and local level; in the Indian case, this is achieved through the establishment of ICDS across the vast country. Failing to extend the coordination and resourcing through all levels of government (national,

territorial [state], local), and from central policy to local service provision, may result in ineffective services that often rely on practitioners with already high workloads (e.g., midwives, insufficiently qualified teachers) and unpaid volunteers. As we have spelled out in more detail in previous T20 policy briefs, multisectoral coordination and integration must be horizontal (across government departments) and vertical (across levels of government and actors). Countries aspiring to develop and implement ambitiously integrated and multisectoral ECD/ECEC policies (e.g., Indonesia) can and should draw on the experiences made in other countries.

Early childhood, Education, Care, and Development as a global common good

We propose **coordinated, multi-sectoral and whole-of-government systems** that bridge domains of education, nurturing, care, welfare, health, nutrition, water and sanitation, finance, infrastructure, justice, and others, and **to systematically learn *with* and *from* each other about effective participatory policy planning processes and key elements of sustainable, comprehensive ECD/ECEC policies and programme practices.**

Such policies and resulting actions comprise three interconnected levels:

1. Regulatory

frameworks:

Although preschool education is present in international human rights treaties, in many countries, there is no obligation to provide it universally and free of charge. This is incompatible with the rights of children guaranteed by international law. New legal frameworks are needed to ensure it clearly at the country level. It is also needed to address governance and fragmentation, as well as budgeting and financing.

2. Public policies:

Multisectoral approaches to ECD/ECEC require an explicit emphasis on the educational value of integrated early childhood services. Taking into account the right to education, it is necessary, for instance, to consider policies related to

- a) provision of decent and sufficient buildings and materials
- b) clear educational frameworks or curriculum
- c) sufficient staff and adequate ratios
- d) governance, supervision, monitoring, data, information systems
- e) internet access for educators and families
- f) safe environments in refugee camps, conflict zones, among others.

3. Practices in ECD/ECCE:

Ensure the acceptability and adaptability of the right to education and care, quality, and commitment to achieve SDG Target 4.7:

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development, and the enabling SDG Target 4.c By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers.

We emphasise that such multisectoral approaches must be participatory, realised at the community level, and culturally sensitive.

Locally developed, culturally responsive solutions can be highly effective; with solid community ownership and properly evaluated, they can contribute to the preparation and implementation of more sustainable policies at all systems levels in all countries (Vargas-Barón, 2016, 2019).

We propose that the G20 engage with its member states and the broader global community to adopt and extend the *Abidjan Principles* on the human rights obligations of States to provide public education to ECD/ECEC (<https://www.abidjanprinciples.org/>) (Adamson, Aubry, de Koning, & Dorsi, 2021).

We propose to adopt the notion of a new global common, a space for strengthening the role of ECD/ECEC as a contributor to resolving global existential crises, going beyond the recurring task of responding to immediate crises, wars, and disasters.

We propose that the G20 draw on evidence-based concrete examples to initiate and support the coordination of policies at national and global levels to:

- resource, coordinate, and evaluate community- and provincially-managed responses to the rights, needs, and capabilities of young children and their families (e.g., through mapping studies and ground-up situation analysis research);
- involve local and provincial actors in designing and conducting data collection and evaluation to inform policy;
- ensure **participatory processes** of ECD policy planning;
- orient transnational actors, organisations, and donors towards supporting local, provincial and national governments in developing and implementing public ECD/ECEC policies;
- connect scientific evidence with the experience and knowledge, cultural values, and popular wisdom of communities and those working directly with children and families;
- recognise the potential of such knowledge about early childhood (locally embedded, co-produced, holistic) to contribute to and enrich both public policy and academic knowledge creation;

- support knowledge transfer from local to provincial to regional and global levels through global and regional exchanges (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012; de Sousa Santos, 2018).

We emphasize that refocusing education, care, health, nutrition, and welfare, beginning with the youngest children, is essential to humanity's survival on a finite planet in existential crisis. This begins with recognising that sustainable development, quality of life, well-being, and upholding the fundamental rights of every child at the local level are critically important for addressing the existential crisis at the global level.

Relevance to G20

ECD/ECEC contributes to countries' **transitions to more sustainable and equitable systems**; it **enables achieving the 2030 SDG framework** in its entirety.

The G20 plays a central role in coordinating international **collaborative responses to global challenges and crises**. As a global forum, it has a track record of setting global agendas focusing on reciprocity, collaboration, and multilateralism. The G20 has established itself as a global forum for promoting evidence-based policymaking and has underlined the **importance of systemic approaches to ECD/ECEC** over four consecutive G20 cycles. With an ambitious early childhood agenda, the G20 can provide leadership in times of crisis. It can now take its leadership to the next level and work to establish early childhood as a global common good.

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