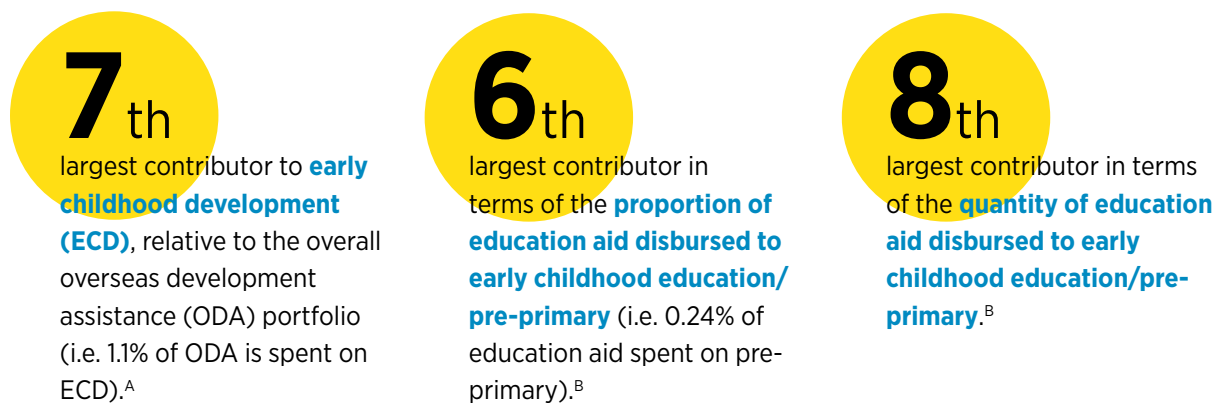


# LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND

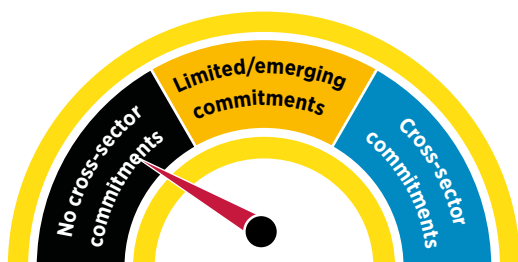
## Invest in the early years

Early childhood as well as disability are explicitly addressed in the renewed European Consensus on Development titled 'Our world, our dignity, our future'. The Consensus also commits the European Union (EU) and its Member States to continue playing a key role in ensuring that no-one is left behind.<sup>1</sup> The EU is **committed to supporting children with a disability in their Disability Policy Framework<sup>2</sup>, which promotes disability inclusion** in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).<sup>3</sup> However, this has not always translated into their development policies, with their primary focus in development co-operation on supporting non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and disabled persons organisations (DPOs).

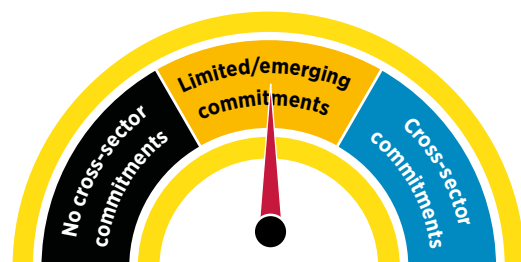
A review across 10 donors showed that in 2017 EU institutions were the:



### Strategic commitment to early childhood development



### Disability-inclusive early education investment commitments



The EU is playing a leading role in rolling out the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD's) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) marker on disability, and is planning to report on it in 2019. **However, these commitments to disability-inclusive development also need to be better reflected in their actions supporting early childhood development (ECD) in developing countries.**

<sup>A</sup> The table looking at the comparative levels of spending on ECD for the donors in this report can be found in the corresponding global report.

<sup>B</sup> In this report, two aspects were looked at in order to draw a comparison between the aid given to early education by various donors. Firstly, the total amount (quantitative) spent on aid to early education and, secondly, in an attempt to measure donor 'effort', the authors of the report compared the ratio of aid disbursed to the early education subsector to overall aid to the education sector.

## Integrated and inclusive early childhood development

**Aid disbursements from the EU were among the largest in the world, in quantitative terms, within the early childhood development (ECD) domains measured in this report, however this is not deliberate intention rather a consequence of the methodology used.<sup>c</sup>** However, this only accounted for 1.7% of total aid contributions in 2017, and, of the donors in this study, the EU was ranked in seventh place for its ECD spending. In other words, by virtue of having a large aid portfolio in quantitative terms, the EU was one of the larger donors to ECD. However, the EU allocated less of their total ODA share to ECD services, relative to other donors in this study.

Within the policy frameworks and policies guiding the work of the EU's development assistance, there are no specific commitments to ECD as a strategic multi-sectoral approach. Moreover, a search across current EU-funded projects in their current aid portfolio found no explicit country-level projects on ECD.<sup>4</sup>

### Supporting early education and pre-primary

There was a woeful under-investment in early learning. The EU's aid contribution targeting early education accounted for less than 1% of aid to education in 2017 (0.3%). The EU ranked sixth by percentage of overall education aid channelled towards early education, of the donors assessed in this report. Moreover, as Figure 1 shows, aid to early education decreased in recent years. This clearly does not match the EU's commitment

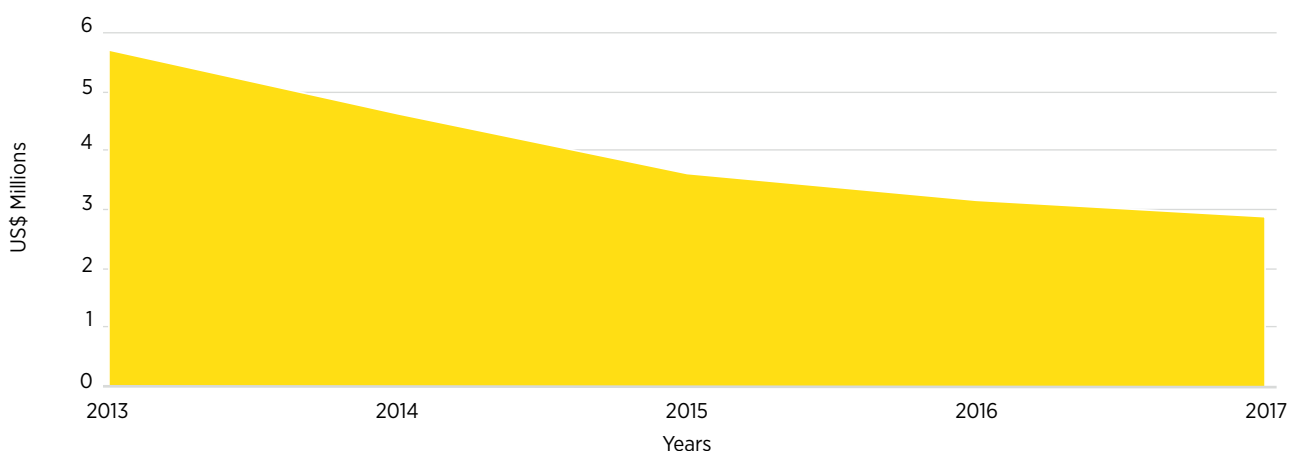
to supporting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular its commitment to meet the early education target (i.e. SDG 4.2 target).

A more in-depth analysis of the early education aid portfolio for the five-year period from 2012 to 2017 further showed that a significant proportion of the aid disbursed across early education projects by the EU was channelled towards countries within Eastern Europe, and other middle-income countries.<sup>d</sup> This demonstrates a diminished focus on scaling up aid towards early education in lower-income countries.

Even though the European Commission in its Staff Working Document, More and Better Education in Developing Countries<sup>5</sup>, noted that early childhood education has been overlooked and under-financed as a vital part of a whole-sector approach to education, the commission has made no specific commitments towards it. The EU development policies also commit to a comprehensive approach to education from early childhood education to employment. While the EU advocates for a 'balanced education sector', it is currently failing to invest in early education to the same extent as other areas. For instance, during 2017, it spent 70 times the amount on higher education and 60 times more on secondary education, than it did on early childhood education.

The Communication on Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crises<sup>6</sup>, the latest EU policy document on education, also represents the EU's strategic and

**FIGURE 1 European Union disbursements to early education, 2013–2017 (disbursements, US\$ constant 2017)**



**Source:** OECD Creditor Reporting System. Accessed May 2019

<sup>c</sup> The report uses a methodology aimed at giving best estimates of spending on children below the age of five in the areas of health, nutrition education, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) – adapted from a 2017 Theirworld publication.

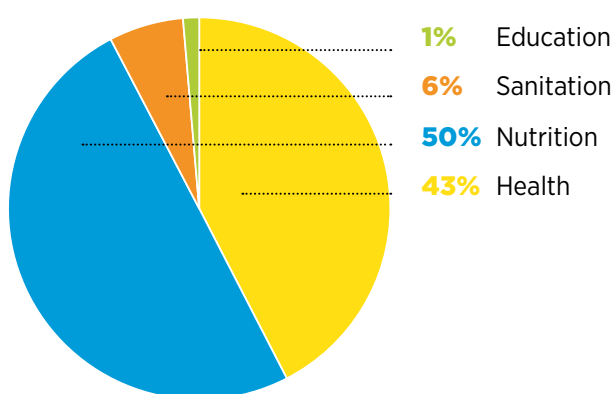
<sup>d</sup> Inclusive education approaches were found in projects in China, Morocco, Azerbaijan, Serbia and Uzbekistan. The same programmes explicitly target children with disabilities.

integrated approach to strengthening education systems. It does include early childhood education to life-long-learning, and promotes measures for the education of conflict-affected children, starting from the age of three. This could herald a scale-up of investment in early education for children affected by conflict. However, this commitment has yet to translate into spending levels.

**Moreover, the EU has no specific policies and strategies addressing the intersectionality between disability, education, and early childhood education.**

Disability is referenced briefly in the European Commission's Staff Working Document<sup>5</sup> as a barrier for accessing education, but no specific policy solutions are proposed. In other words, children with disabilities are mentioned as a vulnerable or disadvantaged group, and early childhood education is highlighted as an aspect of the whole-sector approach to education. However, the connection of this specific population to early childhood education is absent. The EU has ratified the CRPD<sup>3</sup>, and is a large supporter and advocate for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>7</sup>, and the 'leaving no one behind' agenda.

**FIGURE 2 Breakdown of early childhood development ODA across different ECD domains. 2017 constant US\$ disbursements, based on DAC figures**



Source: OECD Creditor Reporting System. Accessed May 2019

## Health, nutrition and sanitation

### Health, nutrition and sanitation, together, accounted for 70% of all ECD spending in 2017.

Half of the EU's aid was channelled towards nutrition within the ECD domains measured for this report (see Figure 2). Nutrition programming may benefit mothers and their children, but the kind of explicit investment which supports young brains to grow and 'thrive', such as investment from an early-development perspective, appeared largely absent in projects and strategic documents.<sup>8</sup> Within the health sector, services aimed at ECD receive little attention; the same holds true for the delivery of services targeted at more marginalised groups, such as spending that targets inclusive early childhood health services.

**Meanwhile, sanitation investments were shown to be very small in the most recent years.** There was no focus found on spending in the areas of health, nutrition or sanitation linked to disability-inclusive early-years' service delivery in their most recently available aid disbursements in 2017.



Photo credit: Ulrich Eigner

## Conclusions

The EU should work harder to incorporate ECD into its strategic approaches, because ECD programming offers considerable opportunities for working cross-sectorally, and the EU has committed to this approach with the SDGs. Furthermore, the EU should aim to better integrate a deliberate focus on how its spending can support ECD in sub-sectors, such as health and nutrition. Within education, the EU needs to start working towards allocating considerably larger amounts of education aid to the early years, or set conditional targets related to inclusion and early childhood education to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), as its largest donor.

This must be complemented by an analysis of how this can help limit developmental delays, and target children with disabilities to better reflect an overall approach to disability-inclusive development. In 2015, the CRPD's concluding observations of the review of the EU recommended that the EU adopt a harmonised policy on disability-inclusive development, and that it establishes a systematic approach to mainstreaming the rights of persons with disabilities within all EU international co-operation policies and programmes.<sup>9</sup> There are encouraging signs that in the future the EU will be better able to identify targeting of children with disabilities, given that from 2019 the EU is implementing the OECD DAC disability inclusion marker, and has submitted a first report related to 2018 aid flows. It is hoped that these encouraging signs can also feed into an approach to ECD, which directs support to children with a disability.

## ABOUT THE RESEARCH REPORT AND DONOR PROFILES

Light for the World and their partners conducted a detailed analysis of the aid disbursements, which 10 donors have committed to support early childhood development. Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, UK and USA are the six bilateral donors reviewed for this report together with four multilateral donors namely, the European Union, World Bank, UNICEF and the Global Partnership for Education. Particular attention is paid in the research to donors' commitments towards children who are vulnerable or at risk of being marginalised or delayed in learning due to a disability. For this reason, donors' strategic frameworks were also analysed, in addition to their aid spend.

Light for the World and their partners have provided input to the donor profiles.

## Recommendations

The EU institutions in their development assistance should:

- Increase early education and pre-primary funding, aiming to work towards disbursing 10% of their total education aid towards this subsector in the longer term.
- Set timebound targets to make all ODA projects, which potentially support early childhood development, disability-inclusive.
- Increasingly work with low-income countries helping to build their capacity to scale up early childhood education, focusing on the most marginalised among these. To realise this, these institutions should use the knowledge gained from having supported middle-income countries in scaling up early childhood education.
- Use pre-existing financing in health, WASH and nutrition, and co-ordination mechanisms at country-level to embed a greater focus on the benefits of ECD for the most marginalised children, particularly children with a disability.
- Place working on ECD at the heart of SDG cross-sectoral approaches, and ensure that work with ministries in countries helps also to foster and encourage co-ordination on ECD.

## COMPENDIUM OF ADVOCACY TOOLS

This Donor Profile is one of 10 advocacy briefs for ODA advocacy. There are also four recipient country profiles for national advocacy, as well as a Global Report and a user-friendly checklist to support the design of inclusive ECD programmes which seek to support the most marginalised children.



A Methodology Note providing more information on the process of analysis along with all the tools may be accessed at: [www.light-for-the-world.org/inclusive-ecd-investment](http://www.light-for-the-world.org/inclusive-ecd-investment)

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