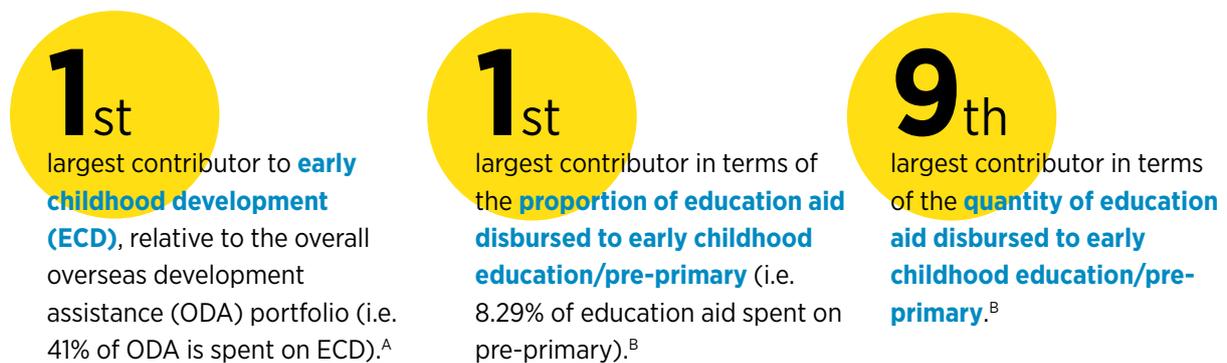


LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND

Invest in the early years

UNICEF is an important donor in the field of early childhood. Recognised as one of the key donor ‘champions’, UNICEF is driving forward the emerging inclusive early childhood development (ECD) global policy agenda with a **strong focus on the most disadvantaged children**. UNICEF’s Strategic Plan, 2018–2021¹ aims to drive results for the most disadvantaged children and young people. To achieve this, UNICEF has established five goal areas which span a child’s life cycle, beginning with antenatal care through to infancy and, then, childhood and adolescence.^A These goals give **priority to the most disadvantaged children**.

A review across 10 donors showed that in 2017 UNICEF was the:



Strategic commitment to early childhood development



Disability-inclusive early education investment commitments



Disability-inclusion is a key dimension of UNICEF’s equity agenda; equity for children is both a standalone goal and a cross-cutting priority. The agency considers protecting the rights of children with disabilities as an integral part of its work and, since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)² and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)³, this aspect of UNICEF’s work has gained momentum.

^A The five goal areas are: every child survives and thrives; every child learns; every child is protected from violence and exploitation; every child lives in a safe and clean environment; and every child has an equitable chance in life.

^B 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.

^C 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 (quantitative amount) amount spent on aid to early education, and secondly, in an attempt to measure donor ‘effort’, the authors of this report compared the ratio of aid disbursed to the early education subsector to overall aid to the education sector. The comparative table can be found in the corresponding global report.

Integrated and inclusive early childhood development

UNICEF ranked first among the donors reviewed in this study for spending on ECD across the sectors of health, nutrition, education and sanitation. In 2017, UNICEF allocated a large portion, 40%, of all its aid globally towards areas likely to support ECD. This percentage is significantly higher than that of other donors.

This shows, partly, UNICEF's mandate as a child-focused agency, but it also reflects the priority given to ECD in UNICEF's strategy. UNICEF's global strategy identifies ECD as a cross-cutting theme and sets out specific objectives and measurable results within its overall global goals (see Box 1). Among the donors surveyed for this report, UNICEF is the only agency that has made specific and measurable commitments to multi-sectoral ECD programming 'hardwired' into its global strategy.

BOX 1 Specific to early childhood development targets to which UNICEF will hold itself to account between 2018 and 2021¹

Goal 1. Every child survives and thrives. Every child has the right to grow up healthy and strong, and, yet poverty, the environment, malnutrition and inaccessible or inadequate care, maternal health and nurturing practices prevent millions of children from surviving and thriving.

Planned results for 2021 include: 80 countries having adopted, at scale, ECD packages promoting early stimulation and responsive care – up from nine.

Goal 2. Every child learns. Every child has the right to an education and to quality learning opportunities from early childhood to adolescence.

Planned results for 2021 include:

- 60 million out-of-school children gaining access to early learning, primary or secondary education – up from 10 million.
- 93 million girls and boys provided with individual education or early learning materials – up from 15.7 million.

In addition to UNICEF's strategic commitments, the agency has developed an overarching programme approach. This approach is articulated in UNICEF's Programme Guidance for Early Childhood Development,⁴ 2017. The aim of the guidance document is to provide a framework for articulating the agency's vision, corresponding goals and indicators, and linked to the commitments made for ECD within UNICEF's strategic plan. It identifies evidence-based multi-sectoral intervention packages, programmatic delivery platforms, contributions to sector goals, implementation strategies and organisational arrangements.

In its goals and objectives, UNICEF's guidance also makes specific mention of children with disabilities.

UNICEF is the only donor agency, of those reviewed, that has clear organisational guidelines for including children living with a disability into multi-sector ECD programming.

Supporting early education and pre-primary

UNICEF's Strategic Plan 2018–2021 states that “every child has the right to an education and quality learning opportunities from early childhood to adolescence”.¹ As a result, one of its five goals is dedicated to education, as a whole, and commits UNICEF to supporting early childhood within this.

At more than 8%, UNICEF disbursed the highest ratio of its education budgets to early education for 2017, by far. Due to UNICEF's high prioritisation of early education, the agency came top of the donors reviewed in this study for its 'effort'.

Furthermore, this study's evaluation of UNICEF's projects showed that its portfolio is the widest and broadest in scope (of the donors analysed in this study), and showed important hallmarks for scaling up equitable and inclusive early education funding. The proof of UNICEF's far-reaching 'effort' in these areas was found in a detailed analysis of projects coded as early education in the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Creditor Reporting System (CRS) for the period 2012–2017⁹, and this showed:

- a wide range of support coded within the early childhood care and education category;
- a clear focus on multi-sector linkages (i.e. combining cross-sectoral ECD);

⁹ In 2018, UNICEF reported that this had risen to 131 countries.

- a substantial focus on inclusive approaches and/or a focus on disability, with explicit coding that shows inclusive approaches within these programmes;
- support to governments' own efforts to scale up early education programmes and funding;
- support for early learning through parenting and play-related programmes; and,
- incorporation of community-based approaches into its programmes.

Finally, UNICEF has been a leader in developing ways for the global community to measure for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.2.1, and has shown leadership in its own programming.

Health, nutrition and sanitation

The vast majority of UNICEF's ECD spending is within the health sector, followed by nutrition, sanitation and education. This reflects a very strong portfolio of health spending. In particular, there is a notable focus on maternal and child health services. The analysis of ODA conducted for this study across the four early childhood domains (health, nutrition, sanitation and education) is, however, only a snapshot of spending within 2017. As a result, it may not reflect UNICEF's changing priorities since the 2018 strategy was published.

The first goal of the UNICEF strategic plan squarely situates the agency's spending in health and nutrition within the age group of early childhood. This goal is further clearly aligned to the Nurturing Care Framework; a framework developed by World Health Organization, UNICEF and the World Bank group for helping children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential.⁵

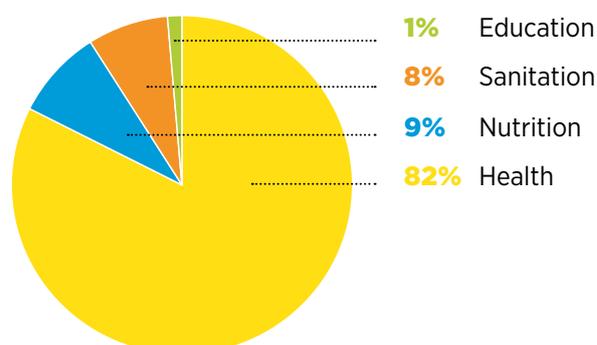
The ECD programme guidance for this area – notably, the care for development and first 1,000 days of life package – has a very strong focus on health and nutrition interventions aimed at supporting a child to survive and thrive. This is primarily delivered through the health system by community health workers, doctors, nurses, and nutrition counsellors, among others. The guidance provides healthcare professionals with clear instructions to ensure the adaptations for addressing the identification and care of young children with disabilities are well-understood.

Moreover, this work clearly aims to target children with a disability and/or at risk of delay. For instance, early identification and assessment tools to help identify children with developmental delays and those with disabilities, are central to its ECD programming. UNICEF's explicit reference to ECD provisioning in the health subsector, once again places the agency 'head-and-shoulders' above many other donors in this area.

Furthermore, the survey of health programming showed that UNICEF is investing in disability-inclusive ECD health services.

Seven countries reported specifically training health workers in skills relevant to identify and support children with disabilities in 2018. These countries and an additional four others worked with service providers in delivering ECD interventions. These interventions focus on primary healthcare as a central platform for identifying children with developmental delays and disabilities, who may then be referred for early intervention and connected to inclusive ECD services as well as other types of services. UNICEF also supports country efforts to improve accessibility in ECD facilities, and to improve the capacity of these facilities to address the needs of children with disabilities, such as through training, providing learning materials, construction and advocacy. In the Philippines, for example, UNICEF support led to the enhancement of the system for prevention, early identification, referral and intervention of developmental delays and disabilities in early childhood.^E

FIGURE 1 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

^E Personal communication, UNICEF, June 2019.

In 2018, a new UNICEF initiative to address the needs of young children with developmental delays and disabilities was also launched in health. The initiative promotes a twin-track approach to inclusion.^{6,F} First, existing ECD services – including health services – are adapted and made accessible to children with developmental delays and disabilities. Second, the initiative seeks to address the disability-specific needs of children with developmental delays and disabilities. This new model, built on universal approaches to promoting early stimulation and responsive caregiving, will be tested in Bulgaria, Peru and Uganda in 2019.

Conclusions

UNICEF is a global leader in developing and leading policy discussions on ECD, and as evidenced through its own ECD multi-sectoral programming. As UNICEF states: “as a multi-sectoral agency with global reach and long-standing experience in ECD, UNICEF is uniquely positioned to translate new scientific evidence into innovative programmes, and bring partners together to deliver results for young children”.⁴

UNICEF has a vital role to play in showing the way for other donors to follow with more substantial contributions – the kind of financing that will be required for scaling up ECD. By supporting children with a disability through inclusive ECD, UNICEF has the potential to become an even more prominent advocate of the role of ECD for the most marginalised. A move warmly welcomed, given that inclusive ECD is an important area, which needs a donor ‘champion’.

However, UNICEF must continue to increase its contributions towards early education as a subsector of ECD, and to continue to be an ECD champion, using its leadership to show the way to other donor agencies. Considering UNICEF’s incontrovertible commitment towards the right to education for children with disabilities⁷ and inclusive education (versus segregated settings), increased investments can only help to develop more inclusive approaches to early education, filling massive gaps in both knowledge and funding.

^F The twin-track approach to inclusion of children into mainstream education is an approach whereby the individual needs of children with disabilities are addressed at the same time as addressing societal, environmental, economic and political barriers to education.

Recommendations

UNICEF should:

- Play a leading role in scaling up funding to early education by increasing early education and pre-primary funding, aiming towards achieving the 10% of the total education aid sector budget by 2020.
- Demonstrate strong leadership as a proponent of inclusive ECD and early childhood care and education that explicitly targets the most marginalised and vulnerable children, including children with a disability.
- Articulate an explicit approach to inclusive early childhood development, starting with early education and communicate this to its country offices.
- Provide leadership to donor groups in order to increase funding and facilitate better coordination across sectors on country level.
- Incentivise equity by ensuring that early-years allocations include targeted actions towards the most marginalised, particularly children with disabilities..

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

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.

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