EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

GPE KIX Scoping Study Working Paper

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ACRONYMS

ACE	Adverse childhood experience
CDGC	Child Development and Guidance Centre
CWD	Children with disabilities
EMAP	Eastern Europe, Middle East and North Africa, Asia and Pacific region
ECCE	Early childhood care and education
EECCA	Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia sub-region within EMAP
EiE	Education in emergencies
EMIS	Education management information systems
FCV	Fragility, conflict, and violence
FGD	Focus group discussion
FLN	Foundational literacy and numeracy
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
KIX	Knowledge and Innovation Exchange
LAC	Latin American and the Caribbean region
LMIC	Lower- and/or middle-income country
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
SDG	Sustainable development goal
SEAP	Southeast Asia and the Pacific sub-region within EMAP
WASH	Water, sanitation, and health

UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

UNICEF   United Nations Children's Fund

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper is one of a series of working papers commissioned by the [Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX)](#), a joint endeavour with Canada's International Development Research Centre, to inform its applied research and knowledge exchange activities. GPE KIX works through four hubs, comprising 85 countries worldwide: [Africa 19](#), [Africa 21](#), [Eastern Europe, Middle East and North Africa, Asia and Pacific (EMAP)](#), and [Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)](#).

The paper summarises key priorities surfaced through consultations with relevant education stakeholders in GPE partner countries and the review of selected country documents and literature with respect to early childhood care and education (ECCE; see Box 1 for definition). The paper focuses on two primary themes related to ECCE: **access** and **quality**. Within the first theme of access, the paper focuses on topics related to enrolment in ECCE, especially in rural or remote areas or areas with high rates of poverty, and ECCE for disadvantaged children, including learners with disabilities. It also includes discussion of parent-facing programmes and parental and familial engagement and participation in ECCE. The second theme, which addresses topics related to the quality of ECCE services, includes, for example, curriculum and teaching and learning processes, especially play-based pedagogies, support and capacity building for ECCE teachers, caregivers, and school leaders, and the development of foundational skills in literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning, as well as assessment strategies for early grade learners. The subtheme of quality also considers broader issues of learner development and wellbeing, including access to health and nutrition or stimulating home environments. The paper overviews the process used to collect data to surface these thematic priorities and presents the findings of the conducted research. For each sub-theme, the paper presents specificities across the four KIX regions. The paper concludes with suggestions for research.

Box 1. Defining early childhood care and education

Definitions and age ranges for early childhood care and education (ECCE) vary, with children from birth to the age of 8 often considered to be within the sphere of early childhood. For the purposes of this paper, we use the definition of ECCE from the GPE KIX discussion paper *Strengthening Early Childhood Care and Education* (Aboud & Proulx, 2019), which refers to 'organized group care outside the family for children aged 3 to 6 years to develop some skills needed for academic readiness' (p. 6). We therefore focus on the years just prior to enrolment in primary school, and while the age of school entrance varies across countries, most children begin primary school at age 6.[1] Indeed, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 addresses the importance of quality ECCE through Target 4.2, which calls for all children to have access to a minimum of one year of free, 'quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education so they are ready for primary education.'[2]

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[1] See the World Bank's presentation of UNESCO-UIS data on primary school starting age [here](#).
[2] See https://sdgdata.gov.uk/4/

2 BACKGROUND

One of the most critical development periods for a child occurs in the first five years of life. More than 90% of brain development takes place during this time and children learn how to think, communicate, and engage with others at a rapid rate, building new neurons from between 1,000 to 1 million per second (Center on the Developing Child, 2010). ECCE is thus a critical approach that can provide children with the necessary cognitive, motor, and social-emotional skills to lay the groundwork for lifelong learning and success. Children who experience quality ECCE are better prepared for primary education, exhibit improved cognitive abilities, and demonstrate enhanced social and emotional skills. These early experiences play a pivotal role in determining a child's trajectory through school and beyond, making access to quality ECCE a predictor of school readiness and educational attainment.

A clear body of evidence demonstrates that early interventions targeting children's health, wellbeing, social-emotional or cognitive development are smart policy investments. Increasing access to and quality of ECCE programmes has far-reaching benefits, as it yields significant returns by reducing dropout rates, preventing grade repetition, and increasing the overall efficiency of an education system (UNICEF, 2019a). Data from 48 countries demonstrates that— regardless of countries' income status or overall levels of support for learning at home—higher national attendance rates in ECCE programmes are linked to a significantly higher percentage of children who are developmentally on track in both emergent literacy and numeracy skills and overall development. Investing in ECCE also has long-term benefits for a country's economic development. A longitudinal study, spanning 20 years, found that children from poor households who received high-quality stimulation at a young age were not only more likely to attend and complete higher education, but also ended up earning an average of 25% more as adults than those who did not receive these interventions (World Bank, 2022). Indeed, the 2023 Cost-Effective Approaches to Improve Global Learning report indicates that providing quality pre-primary education (for children aged 3–5) and providing parent-directed early childhood stimulation programmes (for ages 0–36 months) are both 'good buys' due their evidence of impact and cost-effectiveness (GEEAP, 2023).

Various GPE KIX projects have already been examining early learning innovations, especially in East, West, and Southern Africa. With support from the LEGO Foundation (Nafungo et al., 2022) play-based learning and pedagogies have been a focus of GPE KIX research in Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Zambia. Several of these studies have also generated evidence on key pressure points in ECCE research, including scaling ECCE models, aligning pre-primary and primary curriculum and assessment, or designing inclusive or gender transformative ECCE approaches (GPE KIX, 2022).

2.1 ECCE as global policy

ECCE is widely recognised as a critical component of global education and development agendas and is reflected in various global initiatives and guidelines. As one of the pioneering

international standards, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was pivotal in setting a global framework for the protection and promotion of the well-being, dignity, and rights of all children (Wells, 2021). The Convention places the best interests of the child at the forefront of all actions (Article 3) and emphasises every child's right to education (Article 28), as well as expressing the goals of education (Article 29), which encompass the holistic development of the child from an early age. Global focus on ECCE was later solidified by its incorporation in SDG 4, which explicitly states that it should be ensured that all children, irrespective of their socioeconomic backgrounds, have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education. Similarly, many international organisations recognise the importance of ECCE and prioritise it in their directives. UNESCO's Education 2030 Framework for Action emphasises ECCE as the foundation for lifelong learning, advocating for equitable access and quality programmes (UNESCO, 2016). The World Bank recognises the role of ECCE in reducing extreme poverty and disparities in learning outcomes and supports child nutrition and early stimulation and education through its Early Childhood Development framework.[3] Another large-scale global initiative, the WHO and UNICEF's Nurturing Care Framework, highlights the linkages between health and education. Launched in 2018, it comprehensively addresses issues of ECD in numerous countries by focusing on five inter-related components: good health, adequate nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving, and opportunities for learning (WHO et al., 2018). This growing body of policies and frameworks amplifies the global call for ECCE and prompts nations to place it at the forefront of international and national education agendas. Nevertheless, more research is needed to understand how governments successfully expand ECCE provision, including through generating additional funding and regulating the diverse models of ECCE provision.

2.2 ECCE models

ECCE models encompass various approaches and modalities, including parent-facing or student-facing programmes in formal or non-formal settings or through in-person and virtual environments (Play to Learn & Sesame Workshop, 2023; UNICEF, 2017b). Each model comes with its unique benefits and challenges. Provision includes government and non-government options: government schools typically provide access to more structured and standardised curricula, but they may face resource constraints and overcrowded classrooms, which can impact the quality of education (Bendini & Devercelli, 2022). Community schools, on the other hand, are often more localised and may be more responsive to community needs; however, they often face challenges related to limited funding or access to resources, as well as low qualifications held by teachers, who may be community volunteers or contract teachers, rather than certified professionals (Bendini & Devercelli, 2022). Balancing the advantages of each

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[3] See https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/earlychildhooddevelopment#3

model while addressing each one's challenges is crucial for creating inclusive and effective ECCE systems.

Private provision of ECCE can be implemented through private daycare or nurseries and private preschool entities, run by a variety of different commercial providers. The age range of children at daycares typically spans from infancy to 2–4 years depending on the country, in contrast with preschool provision, which usually subsumes ages 3 to 5 or 6 as the years ahead of a child's start in basic education. Daycare or nursery provision is often centred on providing a safe and nurturing environment for young children and offers essential supervision, basic care needs, and a supporting atmosphere for early socialisation (Bendini & Devercelli, 2022). Private daycare centres are a common choice for parents seeking childcare solutions while they work or commit to other responsibilities. Comparatively, preschools emphasise more structured educational programmes and are an appropriate choice for parents who prioritise early academic readiness. Finally, home- or family-based provision opportunities are an important source for ECCE provision across GPE partner country contexts (Slot, 2018). Studies from the Global North indicate that the most significant reasons for favouring family daycare include trust, the flexibility it offers to parents, affordability, and the belief that children receive greater individualised care (Porter et al., 2010).

2.3 ECCE and foundational learning

ECCE plays a pivotal role in developing young children's foundational skills that serve as the building blocks for their future academic success. Foundational skills are defined by UNESCO's Institute for Statistics as the skills that 'make learning possible.'[4] They encompass a range of competencies, including foundational literacy, foundational numeracy, and social-emotional learning (UNICEF, 2023d). Foundational literacy involves the development of early reading and language skills, such as decoding, phonics and phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension, all of which enable young learners to discern meaning from different types of text and media. Foundational numeracy focuses on basic mathematical concepts, helping children develop numerical fluency, logical reasoning, or problem-solving abilities. Social-emotional learning emphasises the development of crucial inter- and intra-personal skills like self-regulation, teamwork, and conflict resolution, which are vital for establishing healthy relationships and emotional well-being. These foundational skills are the cornerstones upon which a child's cognitive and emotional development is built during their formative years, making ECCE a critical window of opportunity for academic success. In Nepal, for example, children attending ECCE programmes were 17 times more likely to be on track for foundational literacy and numeracy skills even after controlling for numerous socioeconomic variables (UNICEF, 2019a).

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[4] See https://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/foundational-skills-early-grades

The significance of nurturing foundational skills in early childhood extends far beyond the initial years of learning. Foundational skills—as their name implies—act as a springboard for a child's trajectory through the education system and have a profound impact on their overall educational success. Foundational literacy and numeracy provide the tools necessary to engage with more complex subjects in later years, enabling students to comprehend and communicate effectively across various disciplines. Moreover, social-emotional learning equips students with the emotional intelligence and self-awareness needed for effective problem-solving and conflict resolution and enhances their capacity for higher-order thinking skills. As students progress through their education journey, a strong foundation in these skills not only aids in academic achievement but also contributes to their ability to adapt to new challenges, collaborate with peers, and become lifelong learners. Longitudinal evidence from the Caribbean suggests that increased access to stimulating home environments in the early years can lead to long-term gains in cognition, academic achievement, employment, mental health, and adult earnings (J-PAL Policy Insight, 2020). ECCE that prioritises the development of foundational skills thus sets the stage for holistic growth and success in all aspects of a child's life—professional, social, and civic.

Recognising the paramount importance of foundational skills, education stakeholders have made recent commitments to investing in the foundational learning of both early learners and those children or adolescents in need of remedial support. At the 2022 Transforming Education Summit, 50 countries and organisations, including GPE, the World Bank, and UNICEF, endorsed the Commitment to Action on Foundational Learning (GPE, 2023) in recognition that foundational learning provides the essential building blocks for all other learning, knowledge, and higher-order skills. The Global Coalition for Foundational Learning (2023) is working with GPE partner countries to generate comparable data on foundational skills. A variety of assessment tools have been adapted and used across countries to measure foundational skills in early primary years (e.g., the Early Grade Reading Assessment [EGRA], Early Grade Mathematics Assessment [EGMA], and International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment [ISELA]), and new tools are also being developed and validated across GPE partner countries (e.g., to measure life skill and citizenship education for learners as young as 6 years old in East Africa; see Shariff et al., 2023). These myriad tools help measure and monitor the breadth of skills that encompass foundational learning. They also help encourage a holistic approach to early childhood development (O'Malley, 2023). Nevertheless, more research is needed to develop, pilot, and validate assessment tools that measure ECCE in LMICs (Chen & Wolf, 2021; Munoz-Chereau et al., 2021). Indeed, many countries are still not privy to comprehensive assessment data on foundational learning: for example, a recent survey of 94 countries found that more than half (58%) did not have any assessment in place to measure social-emotional learning (UNICEF, 2023d). Further, in countries where data does exist, assessment results point to overall low levels of foundational learning across LMICs. Recent data suggests that the proportion of children aged 36 to 59 months who are developmentally on track in at least three of the following domains: literacy-numeracy, physical development, social-emotional development and learning' (SDG Indicator 4.2.1) is 81% in the Middle East and North Africa, and

as low as 54% in West and Central Africa (UNICEF, 2023b). The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have further threatened young learners' access to ECCE, and their development of foundational skills, as the following section explores.
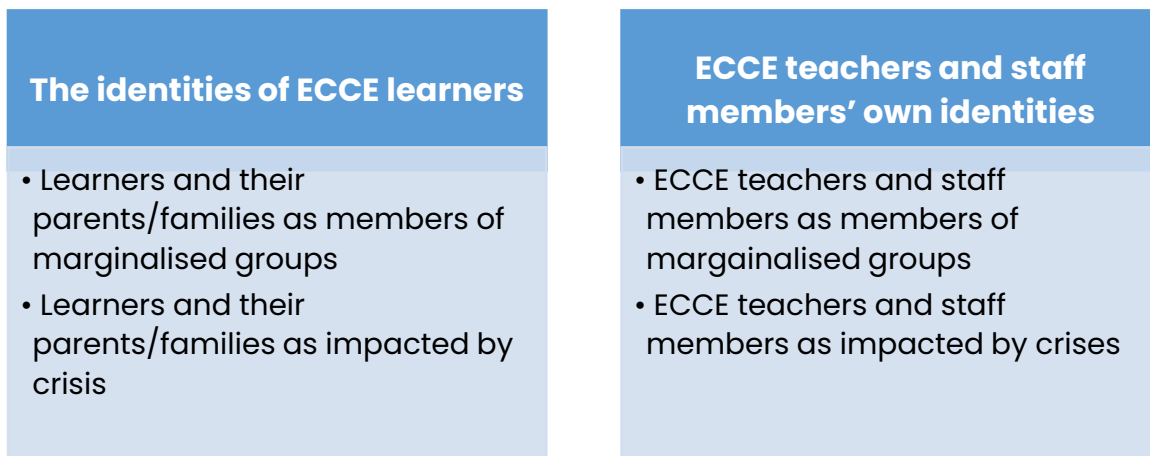
2.4 Impacts from COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges for ECCE systems. Prolonged school closures disrupted traditional learning environments, requiring innovative solutions to support young learners remotely. However, evidence suggests that young learners often had the least access to quality and age-appropriate teaching and learning strategies during school closures (Powers & Neuman, 2022). Perceptions that ECCE is less suited than other levels to the delivery of distance education contributed to governments allocating little attention or resources to ECCE during school closures (Neuman & Powers, 2021). Despite these perceptions, tech-enabled early learning, including the use of media, videos, and games, has emerged as a set of potential tools to effectively engage children during school closures caused by the pandemic and other emergencies. For example, in Syria and Lebanon, a randomised control trial evaluating a remote ECCE programme that used WhatsApp to support parents of 5-to-6-year-olds, found significant positive impacts on children's literacy and numeracy skills, social-emotional learning, and overall development, with the size of the impacts comparable to in-person preschool programmes around the world (Global TIES for Children, 2023b). In addition, Sesame Workshop's (2023a) *Watch Play Learn* videos and associated resources have been successfully implemented in parent-facing, child-facing, and teacher-facing ECCE programmes around the world. Nevertheless, ensuring all young children have access to age-appropriate digital resources, and a competent adult who can facilitate and extend learning through play, remains a significant challenge in LMICs and resource-constrained settings.

2.5 Cross-cutting issues for ECCE: GESI and EiE

Issues related to gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) and education in emergencies (EiE) crosscut the ECCE theme, with an extensive accounting of marginalised groups referenced in this series' scoping study working papers on gender equality and social inclusion (Cameron et al., 2023) and teachers (D'Angelo et al., 2023). The populations impacted by GESI and EiE concerns within the ECCE sphere is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. GESI and EiE as cross-cutting themes for ECCE.

The identities of ECCE learners	ECCE teachers and staff members' own identities
• Learners and their parents/families as members of marginalised groups • Learners and their parents/families as impacted by crisis	• ECCE teachers and staff members as members of margainalised groups • ECCE teachers and staff members as impacted by crises

As with primary and secondary education, ensuring equitable access to quality and inclusive ECCE is of paramount importance. ECCE has a profound impact on a child's future academic success and lifelong development, and therefore has the potential to either bridge or exacerbate inequalities. However, in many LMICs, disparities persist, hindering children from marginalised and vulnerable communities from accessing quality ECCE services. UNICEF's (2019a) comprehensive analysis of global data suggests various factors shape a child's access to ECCE, including:

- **Poverty:** children from the richest households are seven times more likely than children from the poorest households to attend ECCE;
- **Mother's education level:** children of mothers with secondary education and above are five times more likely than children of mothers with primary education and below to attend ECCE; and
- **Residence:** children living in urban areas are two and half times more likely than children living in rural areas to attend ECCE.

Importantly, the data analysis shows no disparities based on the child's sex (female vs. male) (UNICEF, 2019a). However, global averages can mask significant inequalities within countries and regions. Factors such as **geographic location, socioeconomic status, and gender** often influence access to ECCE opportunities, leaving behind those who need it the most (UNESCO, 2020). Further, this lack of equitable access perpetuates cycles of poverty and exacerbates existing social inequities. Research from LMICs, such as Ethiopia, India, and Peru, underlines the importance of ensuring high-quality ECCE reaches the most marginalised children to fully benefit from ECCE and its potential to mitigate poverty (Young Lives, 2010). The following paragraphs underscore the importance of addressing the specific needs and circumstances of different subgroups of marginalised children in LMICs to enhance the quality and inclusivity of ECCE policy and programming.

Linguistic- and ethnic-minority learners, including migrants and indigenous children, may be particularly disadvantaged in the ECCE years depending on language of instruction policies. Research points to the importance of teaching early learners in their mother tongue. For example, a recent evaluation of Grade 1–3 students in South Africa found that students learning in their home language developed foundational literacy skills, such as decoding, quicker than their peers (Mohohlwane et al., 2023). Because of this, the authors argue that it is a cost-effective policy decision to prioritise learning how to read in learners' first language and supporting teachers in teaching in learners' first language. This also has language policy implications for contexts where young students and teachers are still studying and working in colonial languages.

Gender is another GESI issue which is gaining increasing attention with regard to the ECCE years. For example, a recent UNICEF report notes that children begin to understand certain cultural gender stereotypes from a young age, so it is crucial that ECCE programmes seek to be gender-transformative (Nugroho et al., 2022). The authors describe gender-transformative ECCE as including a comprehensive approach, integrating gender-responsive curriculum and pedagogy into teacher training, removing gender biases and stereotypes from teaching and learning materials, using gender-responsive planning, budgeting, and quality assurance standards, engaging families and communities, and using sex-disaggregated and intersectional data for decision-making.

Gender also interacts with ECCE in terms of care responsibilities and duties of adults. Gender norms around motherhood and childrearing practices often place care responsibilities on the mother. As mothers spend more time on childcare (and other domestic responsibilities), they have less opportunity to pursue formal work, resulting in increased economic inequality for women, and often limited financial choice or power at the household level (Ajayi et al., 2022). Improving households' access to ECCE services is thus essential for ensuring women have increased opportunities to seek livelihoods and participate in formal labour markets. A review of nine evaluations of childcare interventions from eight LMICs found that access to childcare increased women's labour force participation, but only in cases where there were no additional barriers to their employment, such as restrictive gender norms or lack of employment opportunities (J-PAL Policy Insight, 2023). Indeed, the involvement of fathers in childcare and other domestic responsibilities has been an emerging area of research in recent years (Alemann et al., 2020).

In **refugee and FCV contexts**, with high rates of poverty and often nascent and over-stretched ECCE systems, further challenges hinder access to quality ECCE. These challenges include the lack of teaching and learning materials, overcrowded classrooms, and unmet training and support needs of teachers and other staff (Stevens et al., 2023). Empirical evidence remains limited on the context of ECCE for refugees in LMICs, but an evidence review conducted by Stevens et al. (2023) suggests that successful approaches to refugee ECCE include play-based methodologies, interactions that prioritise social-emotional support and recovery, community and family engagement, and the creation of culturally responsive learning environments.

Lastly, ECCE plays a pivotal role in shaping the developmental trajectories of **children with disabilities**. During this formative stage, early interventions and timely support can significantly impact the overall growth and long-term outcomes of children (WHO & UNICEF, 2012). Children with disabilities have certain needs for the support of their cognitive, motor, social, and/or emotional development. They may face challenges if not provided with the necessary attention and specialised services—including access to assistive devices, support services such as rehabilitation or speech therapy, or reasonable accommodations in curriculum, teaching, and assessment (UNESCO, 2020). In addition to parents and caregivers not understanding the value or importance of ECCE, stigma and other attitudinal barriers may influence whether their young children will participate in ECCE, and if so, where. A UNESCO (2021a) brief notes that 'parents may struggle to find an ECCE service that welcomes children with disabilities, while some may choose not to send their children with disabilities due to concerns about their safety' (p. 4). Importantly, ECCE not only provides an important window of opportunity to prepare the foundation for lifelong learning and participation, but also helps prevent potential delays in development and disabilities (WHO & UNICEF, 2012).

The challenges that relate to learners with marginalised identities and experiences also have relevance for teachers. Gender dynamics are particularly relevant at the ECCE level, where the majority of the teacher workforce are women. As of 2020, data suggests that 94% of the global teacher population at the pre-primary level were women (UNESCO & International Task Force on Teachers for Education, 2023). This is in part due to gender roles and expectations that women make better caretakers, and therefore are better placed to provide nurturing care to young learners (Harper et al., 2020). For this same reason, ECCE is often perceived as a less prestigious teaching position, pejoratively viewed as the same as mothering and basic caregiving. The low social status of ECCE teachers is also evidenced in the limited pedagogical support provided to them. The global proportion of ECCE teachers who receive at least the minimum pedagogical pre- and in-service training was just 80% as of 2020 (UNESCO, 2022b), compared with 86% of primary teachers.[5] Further, ECCE teachers often belong to the same marginalised groups as their students. Limited research exists on the specific experiences of ECCE-level teachers, but evidence from other grade levels suggests that women, ethnic and religious minority teachers (Santoro, 2015), refugee teachers (Mendenhall et al., 2018), and teachers with disabilities (Singal & Ware, 2021) may all experience inequalities in the workplace, including, at times, abuse or discrimination from their colleagues or students (see more in this series' [scoping study working paper on teachers](#)).

2.6 Note on methodology

The theme of ECCE and the sub-themes presented in this working paper were identified through a three-month research process conducted across the four KIX hubs, comprising three data sources. The first data source, a survey to rank thematic priorities and identify sub-themes that

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[5] See https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.TCAQ.ZS

was deployed in five languages (English, French, Spanish, Russian, and Arabic), had responses from a total of 158 participants from 59 of the GPE partner countries (see Annex 1 for a list of countries with survey participants). Following the survey, 18 focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in collaboration with the regional hubs, with participants providing further depth and context for understanding thematic priorities. A total of 90 participants from 51 countries took part (see Annex 1). Finally, a review of key documents published in 2019 or later indicating national education priorities was also conducted for all 85 GPE partner country contexts. A total of 258 documents were reviewed for thematic priorities and key sub-themes within those priorities. For the document review, education sector plans and other government documents were prioritised as representing national priorities; these were supplemented by reports from United Nations agencies (e.g., UNESCO, UNICEF), multilateral organisations (e.g., the World Bank), and non-government organisations, especially those with regional expertise, when government documents could not be located.

Qualitative data from the survey was coded twice: first, by the Education Development Trust team member responsible for that region, and then by the team leader. The two code sets were compared and organised into emergent central sub-themes. The data from the focus groups and literature was also coded and compared against the emergent themes, providing spaces for sub-theme expansion or revision. The emerging sub-themes were finalised with support from IDRC, and they were selected due to their representation across all hub contexts and alignment with key gaps in the global knowledge base, making them suitable for future research under GPE KIX funding.

The sub-themes were validated in two ways: first, validation workshops for each theme were organised via the regional hubs to invite KIX representatives from GPE partner countries and national and regional thematic experts with expertise in the teaching sector. In those validation meetings, the sub-themes and relevant data from the regional hub were presented. Attendees were able to comment on the sub-themes, provide additional data, and comment on innovations to address some of the challenges discussed. Second, brief data reports, summarising data for each hub, were distributed among hub contacts; this step provided content for discussion in the workshops, and also invited feedback from respondents who were unable to attend the events. Across hubs, there were some differences with validation processes due to the level of participation. In the EMAP hub, finalised data reports were sent out to GPE and national contacts for a final 'no objection' phase. Further, as is evident in the data presentations later in the paper, some hub events, namely LAC, validated data via the use of regional specialists, with expertise in multiple contexts. In the other hubs, validation was conducted with national representatives with technical expertise in the ECCE sector, and so gaps in representation in the data streams have been addressed with literature. In total, more than 130 thematic experts participated in the validation activities, indicating any data gaps, key national and regional examples, promising policies and practices, and key areas for further research. See Annex 1 for more detail on country participation in the different data collection streams.

Data for each sub-theme is presented later in this paper. Within regions and sub-regions, there is extensive national variance and the challenges for ECCE access and quality look different according to the country, and, for some sub-themes, they may not relate to every country within the regional hub. In the later data presentation, the examples provided are also not comprehensive, but they provide an illustration of some of the distinct challenges that countries face, as surfaced through the data collection activities.

3 EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION: FROM OUR RESEARCH

Early childhood education appeared as a consistent theme across the three data streams. In the survey, 20% of respondents selected ECCE as the top priority for their country context and 66% included it as one of their top four choices.[6] When top four choices were weighted, ECCE ranked as the second priority behind Teaching and Learning, but it was only narrowly ahead of the next two themes of Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) and Equity and Inclusion (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Weighted priorities for all survey data.
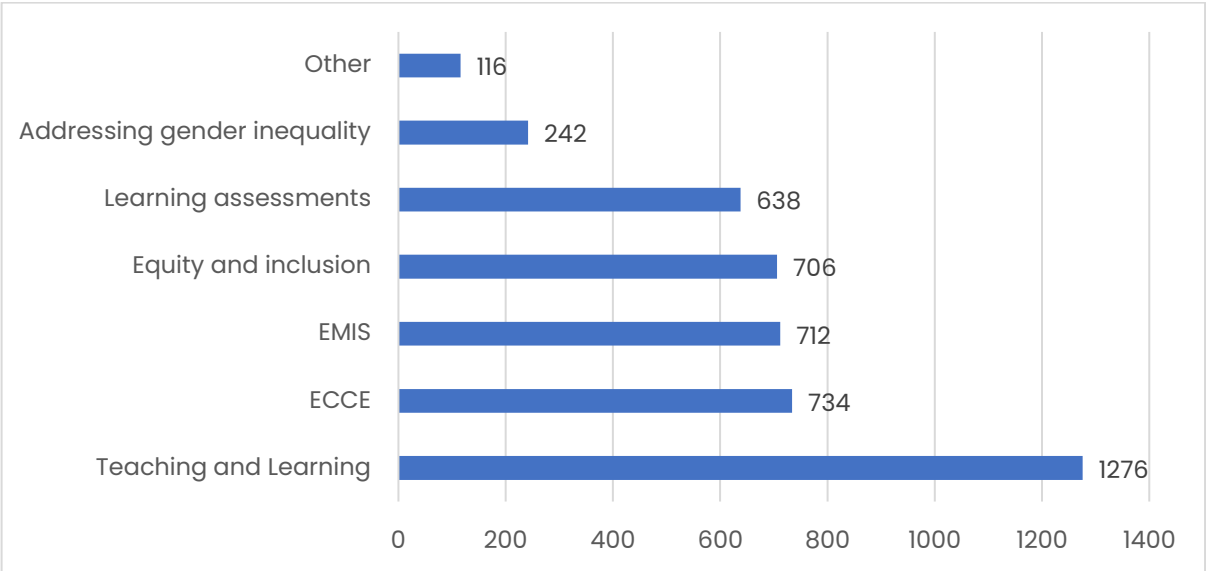
Disaggregated by hub, ECCE emerged as the second priority theme in Africa 19 and LAC and the fifth priority theme for EMAP and Africa 21.

In the survey, respondents had the option of providing write-in responses to comment on key sub-themes for their context. Of the 180 codes drawn from the ECCE responses, access and inclusion figured the most prominently, comprising nearly 30% of all codes for the theme. Issues of teacher and staff training and management were second, with 13% of codes, followed by

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[6] The seven themes to select from were Teaching and Learning, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), Equity and Inclusion, Learning Assessments, Gender Inequality, and Other, where participants could write in a theme.

health and nutrition (12%), foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN; 10%), and other less prominent areas, including curriculum and policy frameworks, pedagogy, mainstreaming and school readiness, learning, financing, and community engagement.

In FGDs, ECCE was the third most-discussed theme across all of the data, but when disaggregated for region, it is evident that ECCE primarily appeared in data from Africa 19 and LAC, reflecting the regional priorities evident in the survey. This finding may also reflect the multitude of themes and issues being discussed, but overall, discussion of ECCE in Africa 21 and EMAP hubs was very limited, with only a few references to early childhood screening in those contexts. For Africa 19 and LAC, discussion also centred around access, teacher training, and issues of curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching and learning materials.

Finally, within the literature, ECCE ranked as the second most represented theme after Teaching and Learning, with aspects of ECCE appearing as a key area for 40% of documents surveyed. Within those documents, 80% referenced issues of access, and nearly half referenced FLN. Also well-represented among the sub-themes were teacher and staff training, parental education and community awareness, ECCE as a vehicle for health and nutrition, early childhood screening (including screening for disabilities), curriculum and approaches such as play-based learning, and the development of social skills.

In collaboration with IDRC, two primary sub-themes were identified. First, access, as the most referenced sub-theme, includes overall issues of access and mirrors many of the issues referenced within our scoping study working paper on [gender inequality and social inclusion](#). **Access to learning and services**, here, also includes issues related to parental education, community awareness, and infrastructure, accounting for access that is limited because of lack of provision and access that is limited because of a lack of understanding of the importance of early childhood education. In this sub-theme, we also reference health and nutrition and child development screening in terms of being significant needs in some regions, but also as services which can incentivise ECCE enrolment. Second, **quality ECCE for school readiness** covers a variety of issues referenced in the data, including teacher and staff training, teacher and provider licensing and evaluation, and curriculum and pedagogy. These two sub-themes were validated by national and regional experts, who provided additional nuance and details, which are discussed within under Regional Specificities in the sub-sections that follow.

4 SUB-THEME 1: ACCESS TO LEARNING AND SERVICES

Access remains a challenge for many children across GPE partner country contexts. In the sub-section that follows, background literature indicates barriers to access that stem from a lack of government financing and intersecting forms of marginalisation. A brief review of the data from across all countries is then presented and is followed by more extensive presentation of data for each regional hub.

4.1 Defining access

Access to ECCE is strongly impacted by government support for the sector. Nearly two decades ago, UNESCO recommended that 1% of national GDP be committed to the early childhood development and education sector (World Bank, 2020a). Today, countries often spend much less, and UNESCO (2021b) estimates that an additional US $40 billion is needed to reach free and universal pre-primary education targets by 2030. As indicated in a recent UNESCO (2023) report on progress toward SDGs for ECCE, the sector is chronically underfunded and requires creative approaches to funding as post-COVID education budgets narrow. Creative solutions include innovative funding models (such as the use of 'sin tax' revenues in parts of East Asia), public-private partnerships, community financing and provision, inter-departmental collaborations in government, and government partnerships with non-government organisations.

Emphasis on investing in early childhood development and school readiness is often informed by evidence that suggests quality pre-primary programmes can reduce learning inequalities and break the cycle of poverty for marginalised young people. There is growing recognition of the significance of ECCE as a critical stage in shaping a child's future outcomes regardless of their socioeconomic level. An analysis of global data suggests that the provision of at least one year of free and compulsory pre-primary education is associated with an average of nearly 10-percentage point increase in primary school graduation rates, and a 12-percentage point increase in rates for LMICs and countries at the lower end of the distribution (Earle et al., 2018). In Ethiopia, for example, an evaluation of an ECCE programme found that participating children with the lowest socioeconomic status made almost double the gains in their language and literacy scores relative to their better-off peers, resulting in almost completely closing learning gaps between these children by the start of Grade 1 (Dowd et al., 2016). Importantly, investing in the early years does not mean neglecting secondary or higher education levels; rather, to maximise the impact and sustainability of investments, governments should consider a targeted approach to tracking support to disadvantaged children from the early years through the transitions to later grades (GPE KIX, 2019). Investing in ECCE is essential for ensuring equitable access to education and laying the groundwork for inclusive and sustainable development.

ECCE figures into the Sustainable Development Goals, as discussed earlier. SDG 4 Target 4.2 is measured by two indicators, namely:

- **Indicator 4.2.1:** The proportion of children aged 24–59 months [2–5 years] who are developmentally on track in health, learning, and psychosocial well-being, by sex;

- **Indicator 4.2.2:** Participation rate in organised learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex.[7]

The data collected against these indicators shows a great global diversity around ECCE provision, and despite the benefits of ECCE explained earlier, the importance of ECCE has still not been fully recognised at the policy level. There is a great disparity in the amount of education budgets allocated to ECCE in comparison with other levels of education. Worldwide, governments spend less than an estimated 2% of their education budgets on early childhood programmes (UNICEF, 2017a). Analysis of funding from overseas development assistance suggests that less than 1% of the money spent by donors between 2012 and 2015 was targeted at the pre-primary level (Zubairi & Rose, 2017). Inadequate or poorly targeted domestic financing and international aid invested in ECCE and pre-primary education represents 'one of the greatest missed opportunities to nurture the world's human capital and help children reach their fullest potential' (UNICEF, 2019a, p. 6). Government commitment in policy discourse and education reform rhetoric is rarely matched by investments in financial, material, or human resources (Neuman & Powers, 2021): 49% of countries worldwide do not offer any free pre-primary education as of 2021 (UNESCO, 2023, p. 26).

As a result, many young children are still missing out on quality ECCE. Recent evidence suggests that approximately half of the world's pre-primary-age children—or 175 million boys and girls—are not enrolled in ECCE centres (UNICEF, 2019a). In low-income countries, this figure rises to nearly eight in ten children (78%) not participating in ECCE programming. But recent reporting shows that progress is being made: while national benchmarks vary, UNESCO (2023) indicated that 15 low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are on track to reach national targets for pre-primary enrolment by 2025, which includes 14 GPE partner countries.[8] In many countries, however, pre-primary educational programmes are typically designed for children aged 3 to 5 (UNICEF, 2023c). UNICEF (2023a) indicates that at the current rate, only a quarter of all girls and boys aged 0 to 2 will have access to early childhood development programmes in 2030.

Access is also clearly impeded by characteristics of marginalisation or vulnerability. This includes, for example, household socioeconomic level or location. As noted earlier, children from the richest households are seven times more likely than children from the poorest households to attend ECCE, and children living in urban areas are two and a half times more likely than children living in rural areas to attend ECCE (UNICEF, 2019a). These children are also less likely to have access to nurturing care and stimulating home environments, and more likely to experience neglect, malnutrition, or stunting, ultimately putting them more at risk of having a childhood disability (Bendini & Devercelli, 2022; Hume-Nixon & Kuper, 2018; Victora et al., 2021). In

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[7] Also relevant for the provision of ECCE are SDG benchmarks related to the thematic area Quality, where Global Indicator 4.c.1. examines the proportion of teachers with minimum required qualifications, including those at nursery or pre-primary level.

[8] From UNESCO (2023), GPE partner countries on track to meet pre-primary enrolment targets include Burkina Faso, Burundi, Bhutan, Cambodia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Republic of Moldova, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Vanuatu, and Vietnam (see p. 20).

contexts of crisis, conflict, or displacement, these risks are exacerbated, as many governments do not have the capacity, resources, or political will to offer comprehensive responses that adequately address young children's learning and broader developmental needs (Calaycay, 2022). Indeed, a review of 26 Refugee and Humanitarian Response Plans revealed that while 58% of plans addressed nutrition, and 24% addressed security, only 9% of plans included the essential elements of early learning (Bouchane, 2018). Emerging evidence also suggests that attendance in early education programmes has been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, though comprehensive global evidence is limited (Kaga & Bang, 2021).

Evidence on effectively scaling policies or government-led approaches is scarce, especially in GPE partner countries. One exception to this is Kenya, where the scaling up of the Tusome national literacy project has been well documented (Piper et al., 2018), and evaluations indicate its relative impact on learning, the cost-effectiveness of training and coaching, the provision of children's literacy materials, and structured teachers' guides (Piper et al., 2016). Evidence from Kenya also suggests that stimulating ECCE environments can be developed at a relatively low cost (approximately USD$25; see Bendini & Devercelli, 2022). Additionally, the literature points to several innovative programmes led by development partners.

One example programme that has been successful in expanding access to remote ECCE in FCV contexts is the International Rescue Committee and Sesame Workshop's Ahlan Simsim (or 'Welcome Sesame' in Arabic), a programme serving young learners affected by conflict and crisis in the Middle East. Ahlan Simsim has effectively expanded ECCE access to vulnerable children by deploying programmes with flexible modular designs adapted for both in-person and remote delivery, and drawing on educational media and low-tech technology embedded within programme curricula (Banin & Rosbe, 2023). The initiative has reached more than 1 million children through direct services for families, and 23 million more through the award-winning locally produced TV show, which is also titled *Ahlan Simsim* and is an Arabic-language version of *Sesame Street*. Most recently, the programme has been adapted and implemented in response to the crisis in Ukraine (Sesame Workshop, 2023c). Examples of intervention models that have effectively expanded access to ECCE in acute settings include service delivery through temporary shelters, mobile caravans, and remote delivery to caregivers (Banin & Rosbe, 2023). Overall, an evaluation of its programming in Lebanon proved cost-effective and shows potential for scaling remote ECCE service delivery in 'contexts where in-person services aren't possible, whether due to a pandemic, conflict, natural disaster, or in rural or low-resource setting' (Global TIES for Children, 2023a). In Section 5, more detail of the programme's impacts on ECCE student learning outcomes is provided.

We draw on these examples and others in the following sections, in relation to their respective regional contexts (Section 4.2) or their impacts on learning outcomes (Section 5.1 on *quality* ECCE). However, more cost analyses and evidence on the scalability of ECCE programmes in GPE partner countries are needed.

4.2 Access across our data

Access featured as a strong sub-theme from survey responses, as indicated earlier, with 30% of codes linked with this sub-theme. These included general references to access and equity, along with references to inclusion of children with disabilities, including reference to assistive devices and inclusive pedagogy to facilitate access, the need for more infrastructure, and access for other groups, including migrants, national minorities, children living in poverty, and children from single-parent households. In FGDs, as noted earlier, issues of ECCE were surfaced in Africa 19 and LAC, where access and ECCE teacher training tied as the two most-discussed topics. In the literature, issues of access featured in 33% of the documents reviewed. The detail of ECCE access issues for each region is specified in the sub-section that follows.

4.3 Regional specificities

Africa 19

For Africa 19, there is great diversity in provision across the region, but **improving access to pre-primary is a key priority.** Focus for expansion is broadly on ensuring that children can access pre-primary education in the year before starting formal education, usually aged 4 or 5, in accordance with SDG Indicator 4.2.2. UNESCO (2023) found that in Sierra Leone, there has been no progress toward the national benchmark for enrolment, and Gambia, Malawi, Mozambique, and Uganda have only made 'slow' progress. Other countries have not declared a formal benchmark; these include Ethiopia, Liberia, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. In South Sudan, as with other low-income countries facing significant challenges across education provision, there is recognition of the need for improved ECCE provision, but the sector was adversely impacted by funding cuts in the face of economic downturn (UNICEF, 2022c). In the region, there are examples of countries making rapid improvements to ECCE access: Rwanda was found to be making 'fast' progress, with national strategies calling for 47% net enrolment (UNICEF, 2022b). In Lesotho, nearly 78% of 3–4-year-olds are enrolled in ECCE, with higher rates for girls and those in urban settings (Lesotho Ministry of Education & UNICEF, 2021).

Policy remains an important lever for ECCE access. In sub-Saharan Africa, there are nearly than 70 million children aged 4 to 5, but as of 2020, just 48% were enrolled in ECCE (UNESCO, 2023); many countries within both the Africa 19 and Africa 21 hubs lack the legislation to make ECCE compulsory. There is great diversity in policy across the region, with some contexts where it is compulsory and included within formal education provision, and where it is provided free of charge. Policy dictates one year of free, compulsory pre-primary education in Kenya and two years in Ghana (UNESCO, 2021b), and in Zambia fees have been abolished for public early childhood education (UNICEF, 2022a). Policy for minimum standards can also facilitate access. In Rwanda, the development of minimum standards for national ECE provision, combined with the use of inspectors to monitor services, has led to improved quality of provision especially among faith-based organisations and community-based provision (UNCIEF, 2023). Needs may be highlighted in government policy, as with Gambia, but many governments have stopped

short of making ECCE compulsory, due to the high cost. Provision from the private sector, and from various non-government organisations, civil society groups, and faith-based organisations can fill gaps, but, as noted by a workshop participant from Uganda, they are not sustainable, particularly when located in more challenging locations.

Disability, gender, poverty, and parental education often intersect to impede access. Across contexts, children with disabilities continue to lack access to ECCE services: in Uganda, a validation workshop participant noted the lack of ECCE access with children with disabilities (CWD) starting school later, as parents struggle to cope with the challenges of disability and access to rehabilitation. In Sierra Leone, few teachers are qualified to support children with vision and auditory disabilities. Regarding gender, most countries indicate a balance in boys and girls accessing ECCE, but in Gambia and Ghana, fewer boys are enrolling. For many families, the cost of ECCE is prohibitive, especially when provision is only available through the private sector, with this tuition barrier noted in many contexts, including Gambia, Uganda, and Somalia. In impoverished communities, there may also be less understanding of the importance of ECCE, especially among less educated parents: in Lesotho, enrolment is lowest for children whose mothers have only attended primary school or have no education (Lesotho Ministry of Education & UNICEF, 2021). Provision of key developmental services as part of ECCE can improve engagement: with health checks, disability screening, and nutrition services, families can be incentivised to send their children to ECCE programmes. Health and nutrition services were referenced in survey data for Lesotho, Mozambique, Rwanda, Gambia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, and screenings were noted for Nigeria.

Rural and remote regions are the most marginalised for ECCE access. Urban/rural disparities in access were specifically noted in the literature for Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, and Uganda, where particular challenges for remote, refugee-hosting areas were referenced. The challenge of long distances to centres was noted for Liberia, creating a barrier both for parents to send children, and for centres to recruit enough teachers (UNICEF, 2019b). Without government provision, private sector investments often cluster in urban areas, as with Ethiopia. In some contexts, the data demonstrated promising approaches to expand ECCE into more remote areas: in Sierra Leone, the recent GPE partnership compact (MoBSSE & MoTHE, 2022) suggests the use of modular classrooms, which can be quickly constructed to expand provision. Similarly, in Gambia, as noted by validation workshop participants, makeshift education 'sheds' are improving provision for children aged 0–3: in these community centres, which are overseen and managed by the nearest primary school through administrative annexes, parents are encouraged to participate in learning activities. In parts of Zambia and Zimbabwe, 'satellite' primary schools act as a resource centre to help guide ECCE schools that are some distance away. In Eritrea, new centres are being constructed in targeted regions where there is the most need, particularly for expanding access for girls in rural communities (GPE, 2019).

A key strategy has been to **attach ECCE provision to existing primary schools**, especially for provision of preschool for children one year younger than the official school start age. In

Ethiopia, for example, the introduction of Grade 0 in rural schools has helped improve access, but there is still extensive demand (UNICEF, 2021b). In Sierra Leone, as noted by a validation participant, policy calls for ECCE classes to be attached to primary schools but in practice, especially in rural areas, they are not available. Another participant from Uganda noted that schools have created Primary 1 'B' or 'C' classes – which are not Primary 1 classes but instead provide pre-primary education to under-age children.

Africa 21

For the Africa 21 region, ECCE was discussed during consultations with country representatives and in the review of documents published after 2020 on educational policies in French-speaking countries. Access has been increasing in some contexts: UNESCO reported that four countries were found to be making fast progress toward their set goals; these were Burkina Faso, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, and Guinea. In some countries, policies support free and compulsory access to ECCE, such as in Togo, which now calls for the right to four years of free and compulsory ECCE. In Republic of Congo, policy provides for three years of free ECCE, and in Benin, two years are provided, helping to bolster the improvements seen in enrolments from 2005 to 2015, with gross enrolment of ECCE-aged children increasing from 18% to 40% (Banu Ebrahim & Barry, 2023). But broadly, across the region, the situation remains dire for children enrolling in ECCE, with low percentages in countries like Mali (3.8%), Senegal (16%), and Chad (28%). Togo, despite having ambitious policies, is reported to have just 15% in ECCE. According to UNESCO's (2023) progress review on national benchmarks for ECCE enrolment, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Comoros, Djibouti, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Senegal were found to be making 'slow' progress'. Cameroon's progress has slowed since 2015, when it had improved to 24% (Banu Ebrahim & Barry, 2023).

Improvements in access are evident in the priorities and goals laid out in national multi-year sectoral documents which indicate priorities up to 2030. In Burundi, for example, ECCE provision has been **formalised into primary provision**: policy lays out ECCE as a single year ahead of entry to primary, and the policy calls for a curriculum relevant for five-year-olds and the creation of new classrooms within existing schools. (Ministère de l'Education Nationale et de la Recherche Scientifique, 2023). Access will also be addressed through the recruitment of teachers, the provision of equipment, the opening of school canteens, and the involvement of parents and school principals in awareness-raising campaigns in favour of mass entry into this preparatory class. More schools are being built to improve access overall. Likewise, in Côte d'Ivoire, access is to be increased by attaching ECCE to the existing primary cycle, with the country aiming for 50% of children to thus be enrolled; similar targets have been set for Mali. Formal institutional models have also been implemented in Cabo Verde. In Mauritania, a specific ministry has been set up in charge of ECCE.

Across contexts in the region, though, ECCE remains informal and un- or under-regulated by government, and private-sector options are often out of reach for poorer families or those

outside of urban areas. In Senegal, for example, there is a wide variety of providers and approaches, attending to different national languages spoken by children and their families.

In the region, there is a trend towards a **model of coexistence** between the formal system and the community model to ensure access to ECCE. In validation sessions, ECCE experts from the region noted that community-based ECCE provides a transition between the family and the school system since the form of care provided focuses on family relationships and community socialisation. Community options can adapt to parents' financial constraints and thus appeal to both poor and middle-income households (Banu Ebrahim & Barry, 2023). Community awareness campaigns are envisaged to stimulate and sensitise community structures and parents to get involved in early childhood education.

In Benin, **community ECCE models** are increasingly used to improve access in rural and remote areas (PASEC, 2021a), while in Burkina Faso, the community model involves the rehabilitation of community structures. In Mali, this strategy is seen as a mechanism for expanding ECCE, where it is key for building foundational literacy for school readiness. Despite the advantages offered by the community model in terms of access to preschool education, certain disparities are observed between regions, as in Cameroon, in addition to rural–urban disparities (PASEC, 2021b). ECCE nutrition programmes are presented as an approach for encouraging enrolment of the most impoverished: in Guinea, public canteens are to be introduced for schoolchildren along with other supports for poor families (Ministère de l'Éducation, 2020). In Togo, policy references the expansion of school canteens, including in rural areas, to stimulate entry and retention in the preschool cycle (Ministère des Enseignements Primaire et Secondaire, 2020).

Equal access for girls and boys in rural areas is a specific priority set out in sectorial strategies for Senegal, Togo, and Chad. Other countries reference improving ECCE access for other vulnerable children, in particular **children with disabilities**. In Comoros, subsidies for schooling are provided for poor families and include specific strategies to support visually impaired and hearing-impaired learners (Union des Comores, 2022).

Eastern Europe, Middle East and North Africa, Asia and Pacific (EMAP)

With the great diversity of contexts within the EMAP region, there is an equally great difference in the approaches to ECCE and commensurate issues with access for nations. In UNESCO's (2023) tracking of progress toward ECCE enrolment goals, seven EMAP contexts (Bhutan, Cambodia, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Moldova, Vanuatu, and Vietnam) demonstrate 'fast' progress. In contrast, Micronesia, Nepal, Philippines, and Solomon Islands are only showing slow progress toward enrolment benchmarks, and another seven demonstrate no progress (Albania, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Timor-Leste, and Uzbekistan) within the studied timeframe. In what follows, data is presented according to the three sub-regions, where we focus on the sub-themes that received the most discussion during the validation activities.

Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia (EECCA): There was broad agreement in the data streams for this sub-region that ECCE access remains a key challenge for education systems.

Expansion of quality ECCE provision figures in education sector strategies from all countries within the region. Where ECCE provision is not subsidised through government spending, many families are constrained by the cost of private provision, as noted for Tajikistan (GPE KIX, 2020), among others. Thus, **government support for pre-primary education** has been an important lever to improve access for all. For instance, while not showing progress in the most recent year studied (UNESCO, 2023), Uzbekistan has made great strides in improving ECCE enrolment in the past decade, increasing from 30% enrolment in 2012 to 60% in 2020. This increase was underpinned by an increase in the number of years of free pre-primary education offered; similar legal changes have seen improvements in enrolments in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Mongolia between 2015 and 2020 as well.

In some contexts, access remains impeded by a **lack of infrastructure**. For example, in Tajikistan (GPE KIX, 2020), a lack of facilities accounts for 52% of ECCE-aged children who are out of school. In urban centres in Georgia, an insufficient amount of ECCE centres results in large class sizes with high child-to-teacher ratios. Significant attention was given to the challenges of ECCE access in **rural and remote areas**, with challenges that include—but also extend beyond—infrastructure. Gaps in ECCE provision between urban and rural areas were highlighted in policy for Georgia (Ministry of Education and Science, Georgia, 2022) and Mongolia (Ministry of Education and Science [Mongolia], 2020); they was also referenced in validation workshops for Kyrgyz Republic. The location issues are often compounded by children's minority status, including children in refugee or migrant families in Tajikistan, ethnic minority children in Mongolia, and CWD, which feature, for example, as a priority area for Kyrgyz Republic (MoES, 2022).

Language is a significant social inclusion issue across contexts in the sub-region. Georgia, for example, is a multicultural and multilingual country where there is great diversity, but those who do not speak the state language—Georgian—can experience barriers in accessing ECCE, as reported by a validation workshop participant. At present, bilingual education only addresses the Azerbaijani and Armenian populations. This issue is also tied to conflict and migration: because of the war in Ukraine, Georgia has a large number of both Russian and Ukrainian refugees. Ukrainian children are included in kindergartens, but they often do not have Ukrainian language support. Similarly, in Moldova, there is an increased workload as schools are coping with the large number of Ukrainian refugees. The issue is also spreading to other Central Asian countries, as refugees arrive in those contexts as well.

Given the varied challenges impacting access within the sub-region, countries are implementing alternative approaches to improve access. As reported by a validation workshop participant, Uzbekistan, which has significantly improved access even in rural and remote settings in the past decade, has used **alternative models**, including home visits, the creation of playgroups, family-run kindergartens, and short-term groups, which are showing good outcomes. Another innovative approach to increase access and improve school readiness is the use of mobile buses which go to different rural areas, and bring trained teachers, play equipment, and programmes with activities.

MENA and South Asia: Access for all children remains a pressing issue within this sub-region, with improved ECCE access referenced in the literature as vital for all countries. Access featured strongly in validation discussions, where participants noted the need for multi-sector policies and approaches which enhance and manage ECCE provision, even when it is dominated by the private sector, as in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Indeed, policy is an essential lever for ensuring access: UNESCO (2023) notes the gap between national commitments and commensurate policy. In Pakistan, benchmarks call for 95% enrolment, but there is no corresponding law to enshrine ECCE as compulsory.

As with EECCA, there are significant challenges for ensuring **marginalised children** can access quality ECCE. For example, in Tunisia (République Tunisienne, 2021), nearly 90% of children participate in pre-primary education, but among children of 3–5 years old, the rates are closer to 51%, with significant gaps in access between poor and rich children (17% vs. 71%) and rural and urban areas (28% vs. 63%). Other enrolment gaps were related to rural locations and minority groups, as in Bangladesh (Ministry of Education [Bangladesh], 2020); socioeconomic and political disparities and increasing male child labour in Pakistan; and for children with disabilities in Maldives. For Bangladesh and Pakistan, validation workshop experts highlighted the growing impacts of climate change as driving marginalisation and preventing ECCE access. In Yemen, ECCE enrolment has been significantly impacted by more than a decade of insecurity, with knock-on effects for primary enrolment and school readiness (Ministry of Education [Yemen], 2019). Similarly, in Afghanistan, the 2021 Taliban takeover has radically impacted all areas of education, and there is a gap in available information to report on the current context for ECCE in the country, especially in light of rapid shifts, such as the 2023 closure of teacher training facilities (Sarwar, 2023). In prioritising emergency response to address gaps in primary and secondary education, the Afghanistan Education Sector Transitional Framework (Afghanistan Education Cluster, 2022) 'lacks focus on early childhood education beyond linkages to community-based education' (p. 4) though it remains a long-term priority.

To support access for children impacted by flooding, a validation workshop expert from Bangladesh highlighted an innovative approach with the use of boats for ECCE provision. As with the school buses for remote areas in EECCA contexts, the boats are stocked with learning materials and can move between communities where other ECCE venues are not available. As noted by BRAC (2022), stopovers in communities last 7–10 days, and teachers can use play-based strategies to engage children and local teachers; the boats include ramps to facilitate access for children with wheelchairs and other mobility devices.

In this sub-region, there was extensive discussion of the importance of **parental and community education**: where parents are unaware of the importance of ECCE, children enter school later or are unprepared for foundational literacy and numeracy. One participant from Pakistan called for caregiver involvement and education through a foundation-based ECD curriculum for early childhood growth and development. Another indicated that free dissemination of materials, such as video lessons, books, and materials related to nutrition,

health, and the importance of play, will help to educate parents, especially those with children aged 2–4 years.

Southeast Asia and the Pacific (SEAP): Access to ECCE remains a significant priority in the SEAP sub-region. Where children lack access to ECCE, they are under-prepared for transitioning to primary education: in Myanmar, for instance, only 20% of children have access to ECCE, and 'this under preparedness has an early impact on learning and an early educational divide' (Lall, 2021, p. 95). But across the region, literature and participants noted the diverse policy environments that reference the importance of ECCE but stop short of making it compulsory *and* fully funded. The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (2021), which includes Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu, has called for quality, universal ECCE, but there are gaps in policy to see it through: in some contexts, like Marshall Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu, one or two years is compulsory, but no free education is provided (UNESCO, 2021b). In others, like Nauru and Philippines, one and two years are compulsory, respectively, and free education is provided. In Tonga, pre-primary education is compulsory but not provided free from the government. In many contexts, where provision is through private providers, it can be difficult to get a full picture of access, as noted for Papua New Guinea (Department of Education, Papua New Guinea, 2020).

Many of the topics raised within the Southeast Asia and Pacific (SEAP) sub-region overlap with those provided for the other sub-regions. Similar challenges with **infrastructure, access in rural and remote areas, and access for CWD and minority groups** were highlighted in particular. A lack of WASH facilities in rural and remote ECCE centres was indicated for Vietnam and Lao PDR, and in Nepal, centres may lack adequate space for children to move around and play. As with the other sub-regions, there are extensive geographical disparities: in Lao PDR, for example, 91% of primary entrants in the capital city of Vientiane have ECCE experience compared with 57% in the outer province of Saravan (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020). As noted in validation meetings, location and distance were also noted as challenges for Bhutan and Nepal; in Cambodia, community-based preschools in hard-to-access areas are helping to provide ECCE services. The cost of access is a particular barrier in Indonesia, where 97% of schools are privately run and even community-based facilities can be out of reach; during the early years of the pandemic, 40% of parents struggled to pay ECCE fees (World Bank, 2020a).

As with the MENA and South Asia region, SEAP validation workshop participants highlighted the need for increased **parental awareness**. In Nepal, Lao PDR, and Bhutan, there is a need to shift parental understandings of ECCE, so it can be understood as holistic development rather than simply 'babysitting' or school readiness for primary learning. In Timor-Leste, according to a validation meeting representative, parents' understanding of ECCE was a particular barrier for CWD. A related area where more parental education is needed is around **language**, which, as with the other sub-regions, is a significance concern in SEAP. In Myanmar, parents from minority groups expect ECCE to be conducted in Burmese, providing foundations for Burmese-medium primary education, devaluing mother tongue education and potentially impacting the foundation children receive in literacy (Lall, 2021). However, parents' concerns are founded in a

context where members of minority groups like the Wa cannot access quality education and later employment if they do not master the majority language. Language thus remains a frequent barrier: according to validation workshop participants, in Lao PDR, Vietnam, Nepal, and Cambodia, children who belong to minority ethnic groups may not speak the national language, which functions as the primary medium of instruction in ECCE. In Vietnam, policies focused on improving the lives of ethnic minorities have been a driver for improving ECCE in those communities, including mother tongue provision.

Validation meeting participants also referenced the need for more programmes that provide home-, community-, and workplace-based alternatives to institutional ECCE. In Vietnam, there is a need for more high-quality, **workplace-based ECCE options in industrial parks**, where demand is rising, particularly among working mothers. There, the formal sector's provision is insufficient and dominated by less regulated, lower-quality ECCE. Further, community- and family-based approaches need more promotion and attention to ensure that people are aware of these options. The government is also ensuring favourable conditions for factories and other businesses to build preschools for children to increase access in those areas. Likewise, in Cambodia and Nepal, there is demand for flexible alternative programmes which will support access for the children of seasonal migrant workers.

Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC)

Access to ECCE emerged as a key priority for all ten GPE KIX LAC countries. Enhancing access to ECCE was a policy priority in the GPE partner country reviews of St. Lucia (Knight et al., 2021a) and St. Vincent and the Grenadines (Knight et al., 2021b), and 'Increas[ing] access to Quality Early Childhood Development Services' is one of the strategic priorities of the OECS Education Sector Strategic Policy 2012–2026 (ibid.). In 2018, Nicaragua launched a new ECCE model, the Early Childhood Development Education Model (*Módelo de Educación Inicial de Desarrollo Infantil, MEIDI*) which provides access to 3–5-year-olds and supports their retention up to Grade 3 (FGD). In Haiti, on the other hand, the focus has been more on early childhood care and development, given the high levels of poverty and food insecurity, and the need to address children's basic needs, such as access to nutrition, vaccination, and WASH. Despite the broad spectrum of ECCE models being offered, research participants generally agreed there was a need to expand access and retention for children in the region (e.g., survey, Grenada) and align service models to the demands of communities, especially in rural and remote areas (e.g., FGD, Dominica).

Expanding and establishing **standards and regulations for ECCE infrastructure** was offered as a potential solution by research participants. In validation workshops, regional experts confirmed the need for 'more and better infrastructure,' describing how ECCE centres across the region are often built in precarious locations, near busy roads or unsafe buildings. Additional cross-cutting challenges include safety concerns related to urban gang violence in Central American countries (e.g., El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala) and Haiti, as well as issues of climate change, COVID-19, and other emergencies. The accessibility of ECCE infrastructure for

young learners with disabilities was also mentioned. In addition to the physical location and infrastructure of ECCE centres, indoor and outdoor spaces should be properly prepared and equipped. The need for recreational spaces was mentioned in FGDs in Nicaragua and Guatemala. A regional expert noted the paramount importance of having safe, secure, open spaces equipped with materials for students to develop an array of skills, including fine and gross motor skills.

Access to early stimulation, especially through **positive parenting and nurturing home environments**, was recognised as a vital aspect of ECCE. Regional experts described different parent-facing programmes, most of which were not in GPE partner countries. IDB's Roving Caregivers,[9] however, has reached five countries in the region (the only GPE partner country being St. Lucia), and Child Development and Guidance Centres in St. Lucia were also identified as a promising parent-facing ECCE model (see more below). Access to health and nutrition services and the need for comprehensive and integrated approaches to ECCE were common themes in the data. Guatemala's Comprehensive Care Centres (*Centros de Atención Interal,* CAI*)* and integrated programmes called 'Accompany me to grow' (*Acompáñame a Crecer)* were also identified as promising practices by FGD participants.

Early childhood screening was discussed in relation to disability and early intervention. A regional expert from the Caribbean identified Child Development and Guidance Centres (CDGCs) established by the Special Education Unit of the Ministry of Education of St. Lucia as a promising practice. CGDCs offer developmental screening and assessments to children aged 0–5, and training for parents, teachers, and other stakeholders. Children placed in CDGCs receive close individualised attention in settings with low teacher-to-student ratios. As the regional expert noted, however, the challenge with this model has been the child's transition out of the CDGC into the formal education system. Generally, participants agreed more research was needed around the critical transition periods for young children from one ECCE model to another, or from ECCE to primary education (see more on transitions in Sub-theme 2).

5   SUB-THEME 2: QUALITY ECCE FOR SCHOOL READINESS

While not as heavily emphasised as access issues, the data demonstrated the need for improved quality of ECCE across contexts. The sub-section begins with an explanation of what 'quality' entails, which is founded in child development research and considers the aspects of the ECCE environment which support and enhance quality. A brief overview of data from all regions is then presented, followed by a lengthier engagement with the key issues for ECCE quality in each region.

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[9] See https://desarrollo-infantil.iadb.org/en/innovations/lac_region/roving-caregivers#:~:text=Roving%20Caregivers%20is%20a%20service,techniques%20for%20early%20childhood%20stimulation.

5.1 Defining 'quality' in ECCE

Understanding what constitutes quality ECCE programming requires delving into the science behind early learning and child development. Neuroscience and child psychology research demonstrate that the early years are a period of remarkable plasticity, where the child's brain is highly receptive to learning and adaptability (Center on the Developing Child, 2010). Adequate health and nutrition are equally crucial for optimal brain development, as malnutrition and stunting can have adverse effects on cognitive abilities and overall development. In LMICs, young learners are more at risk of experiencing developmental delays caused by poor health or nutrition outcomes. A large-scale study across 63 LMICs, for example, found that one in four young children (36–59 months) experienced developmental delays (Gil et al., 2020). In countries affected by FCV,[10] these rates were even higher: in Chad, for example, suspected developmental delays were found in two thirds (67%) of all children. Because developmental delays can lead to long-term disabilities, or other developmental and learning difficulties, this evidence also points to the importance of early interventions, and of ensuring all children have access to comprehensive ECCE services that include not only stimulating classroom environments, but also access to healthcare and WASH facilities (Adlerstein & Cortázar, 2022). Further, it indicates the need for more multi-sectoral collaboration and coordination to build effective ECCE systems (Adlerstein & Cortázar, 2022).

Parents and families provide the first and most influential learning environment for children, and thus play a central role in shaping a child's future development and learning experiences. **Stimulating household environments**, rich in sensory experiences and opportunities for exploration and play, are vital for promoting brain development and fostering cognitive growth (Bendini & Devercelli, 2022). Yet, globally millions of children do not have access to stimulating home environments which are rich in literacy materials, or quality parental support. For example, a study of 35 countries found that in Chad, Central African Republic, Malawi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, less than 5% of households surveyed had a single children's book at home (Manu et al., 2019). Not only may homes have access to important resources but they may also be sources of adversity that hampers a child's development. Corporal punishment, for example, still affects up to 40% of all children aged 2–14 years (WHO, 2021). A study of corporal punishment and early childhood development in 49 LMICs found that children exposed to corporal punishment were about 24% less likely to be developmentally on track than children who were not exposed to corporal punishment (Cuartas, 2021).

Adverse childhood experiences (ACE) can significantly hinder child and brain development, ultimately hampering a young person's ability to learn, not only at the ECCE level but also later in life (Center on the Developing Child, 2007). Because patterns in the early years can have long-lasting negative effects, it is vital that parents and caregivers are supported, and equipped with the tools and strategies to foster stimulating home environments and nurturing

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[10] The World Bank's (2022a) FCV list includes 29 GPE partner countries.

care. Indeed, evidence suggests that when caregivers are nurturing and responsive they contribute significantly to a child's emotional well-being and cognitive development (Scherer et al., 2019). Strengthening school–community partnerships at the ECCE level is thus essential for creating enabling home environments and equipping parents with the knowledge and skills to support their child's growth (UNICEF, 2017b). Ensuring that parents are actively involved in their child's ECCE journey can create a strong foundation for future academic success and lifelong learning habits.

Quality **parent-facing ECCE programmes** equip caregivers with the knowledge and skills they need to value and support their child's early learning and broader development. A recent J-PAL Policy Insight (2020) review of 17 randomised control trials evaluating parent-facing ECCE programmes serving 0–3-year-olds across 11 LMICs found that parental support can improve the quality and quantity of play in children's home environments, and have a positive impact on children's cognitive development. This review included some examples from GPE partner countries (e.g., Bangladesh and Uganda), though they often focused more on the integration of ECD into the health sector, and more research is especially needed to explore effective government-led early childhood education programmes.

In institutional settings, a **well-designed ECCE curriculum** is instrumental in facilitating holistic child development and fostering a love for learning. Age-appropriate teaching and learning strategies, and especially play-based pedagogies, are fundamental in the learning years. Play-based learning is an approach that encourages and promotes a child's autonomy, active engagement, discovery, and self-regulation (UNICEF, 2018). **Play-based pedagogies** encompass a range of techniques and approaches, but their effectiveness is often maximised when the child leads, and the adult scaffolds, guides, or extends learning opportunities (Jensen et al., 2019). Numerous studies have highlighted the positive impact of play-based learning on children's executive functions and overall cognitive, social, and emotional development (Ginsburg et al., 2007; Sesame Workshop, 2023b; Spier et al., 2020).

A recent evaluation of *Ahlam Simsim*, the media- and play-based learning programme supported by the International Rescue Committee and Sesame Workshop mentioned earlier in the paper, provides clear evidence on what can work in FCV settings to introduce play-based learning. The programme targeted children aged 5 (or who recently turned 6) and their caregivers across four regions of Lebanon, and, at the beginning of the intervention, caregivers received learning kits with worksheets, storybooks, arts and crafts, and other activities that could be done with common household items. Teachers trained in ECD facilitated group phone calls with five to six caregivers/children approximately two to three times per week for 11 weeks. Teachers also sent links to caregivers via WhatsApp, which included engaging and interactive videos, games, pictures, and information on the importance of ECD. A total of 180 activities were included, 63 of which drew on Ahlan Simsim multimedia, videos, storybooks, and songs, using play-based learning to teach literacy, numeracy, social-emotional learning, and health. To monitor participation and engagement, teachers asked caregivers to share WhatsApp messages with photographs or short videos of children completing activities. The programme

also included regular individual follow-up calls with parents, as needed. As a result, the programme produced statistically and developmentally significant impacts on children, particularly for foundational literacy and numeracy, social-emotional learning, and motor skills. Effects were comparable to one whole year of in-person preschool programmes (Global TIES for Children, 2023b).

While this programme demonstrated positive impacts, a variety of challenges exist in designing and implementing play-based pedagogies and curriculum. For starters, misconceptions about play as a less serious mode of instruction may result in limited government commitment or community demand for play-based learning in formal school environments (UNICEF, 2018). Limited teacher training in effectively implementing play-based strategies hinder their widespread adoption (Mendenhall et al., 2021; Rao et al., 2022). Teachers and educators need proper training and support to effectively incorporate play-based pedagogies in ECCE settings to maximise their benefits. This also includes creating a stimulating and responsive classroom environment, with sufficient space for children to move around, and access to play materials, including locally sourced and culturally appropriate tools and toys (Whitebread & Sitabkhan, 2022). Further, a key challenge in education systems is often the disconnect between curriculum and learning objectives at the ECCE and primary levels, creating obstacles for young children as they transition out of the early years and continue their academic journey (UNICEF, 2018).

To achieve the full potential of ECCE, a **comprehensive systems approach** is necessary. A well-functioning ECCE system requires alignment across various components, including curriculum development, teacher training, school infrastructure, and community engagement (Bendini & Devercelli, 2022). Additionally, providing access to essential support services, such as school feeding programmes and WASH facilities, enhances the learning environment and contributes to positive outcomes in ECCE (UNICEF, 2017b; Wagner & Pramling Samuelsson, 2019). Ensuring equity and inclusivity in ECCE implementation is also essential to address the diverse needs of children, including those with disabilities or from disadvantaged backgrounds.

5.2 Quality across our data

From the survey data, quality issues were broad and varied: within the sub-theme, 12% of write-in responses referenced health and nutrition; foundational literacy and numeracy were mentioned in 10% of such responses, and teacher training and management in a further 10%; curriculum was mentioned in 6%, and pedagogical approach/environment in a further 6%. As indicated in the previous section, ECCE teacher training and access were tied as the most-discussed topics in FGDs for Africa 19 and LAC. In the literature, a variety of quality issues were highlighted in the documents, including issues related to foundational skills and pedagogy, which appeared in 19% of documents surveyed, and health and nutrition, which featured in 18%. The detail of ECCE quality issues for each region is specified in the sub-section that follows.

5.3 Regional specificities for ECCE quality

Africa 19

Even with the diversity of ECCE approaches and programmes indicated in the discussion on access, Africa 19 representatives agreed on the need for improved quality across offerings. Across contexts, there is a need for coordination of stakeholders to ensure improvements. Even where national governments do not provide ECCE services, their role as monitors is essential: representatives from Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, and Zimbabwe called for the creation of **national standards** for ECCE provision, standards for early learning, and more robust regulatory frameworks, especially for monitoring private providers. In Rwanda, as mentioned earlier, the creation of national standards, minimum criteria for operation, harmonised stakeholder engagement, and standardised trainings by UNICEF, the Rwanda Basic Education Board, and local non-governmental organisations has great potential for improving quality (UNCIEF, 2023).

Issues related to teachers, including **training, support, and professionalisation**, were strongly referenced. Most basically, in Gambia, Uganda, and Zambia, among other contexts, there are challenges with teacher supply. In Zambia and Zimbabwe, the lack of teachers had a knock-on effect on access, as fewer teachers translated to fewer spaces for children; in Uganda, participants noted a gap between training and deployment, where private ECCE providers do not always choose to hire trained candidates. Where there are few available teachers and limited opportunities for training, schools rely on untrained teachers or volunteer teachers, as reported for Malawi and Zambia. In Malawi, caregivers at ECD centres are typically volunteers and only half have training; there is little supervision of their work. A recent roll-out of honoraria for those with certifications aims to improve training engagement (UNICEF, 2022d). Likewise, across the region, participants spoke of ECCE teaching as a low-status profession, with low (or no) salaries and poor opportunities for career advancement. As such, there is reportedly low teacher motivation, in part linked to perception of ECCE teaching as a low-status profession, indicated by participants from Malawi and Gambia, but also in the literature for Tanzania (Ndijuye et al., 2020) and Nigeria (Edwin, 2022). In addition to pay increases, some national efforts to improve working conditions—and perhaps impact motivation—include an example from the Liberian Education Empowerment for Adolescent Girls programme, which trains adolescent girls to act as teacher assistants in ECCE classrooms (Ministry of Education [Liberia], 2019).

Multiple governments have committed to **improving formal provision of teacher training**. The government of Eswatini has committed to increasing ECCE teacher recruitment and improving pre-service and in-service training, both through integrating posts for ECCE lecturers into existing teacher training colleges and with the progressive roll-out of free or low-fee training centres (Kingdom of Eswatini, 2022). Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Uganda have made similar commitments to improving teacher training and certification programmes and to the creation of ECCE career pathways to improve recruitment in Sierra Leone and to improve the status of the profession (MoBSSE & MoTHE, 2022). In Somalia, national targets call for 20% of

public and private ECCE teachers to have training (Federal Government of Somalia, 2022). For many contexts, there need to be more facilities for teacher training, as in Gambia where a validation workshop participant also indicated the need for improved training and support of ECCE staff and managers. There, an eLearning programme is providing extra support to teachers and staff for pedagogy and classroom management; the programme is offered during the summer, with annual assessments being used to help determine quality.

Where teachers can access training, they need support in implementing **developmentally appropriate curriculum and pedagogies**. The need for standardised, evidence-based curricula was referenced for Ethiopia, Gambia, Malawi, South Sudan, Uganda, and Zimbabwe; in Nigeria, curriculum materials such as implementation guides need to be better distributed (Federal Ministry of Education, 2019). In Tanzania, the roll-out of a competency-based pre-primary curriculum requires aligned teacher training curricula, and new textbooks are yet to be developed (MoEVT, 2023); likewise, in South Sudan, provision in Quranic schools often lacks a connection with the primary curriculum, which is needed in order to ensure children are ready for the transition (UNICEF, 2021a). Across contexts, school readiness through foundational literacy and numeracy needs to be balanced with play-based pedagogies and the development of social-emotional learning, as indicated by a participant from Sierra Leone, who demonstrated concern that without strong training and understanding of early child development needs, some ECCE teachers have been implementing a primary-level curriculum.

Overall, in the data from the region, there was limited engagement with how to provide quality services for **children with disabilities and those from minority language groups**. Across contexts, participants and literature pointed to poor facilities, a lack of teacher training, and additional socioeconomic and cultural barriers impacting the ECCE experience of CWD. Lack of community awareness was highlighted for Ethiopia (Federal Ministry of Education, 2021), and in Zambia, where there is an extensive public ECCE system, a participant noted the need for more special education teachers to support children with disabilities. Further, quality as related to the medium of instruction was referenced for several contexts. For instance, in Eritrea, the government has committed to expanding training of minority teachers, who are key to providing mother tongue ECCE education to children from those same populations to ensure their readiness for primary education (GPE, 2019).

Africa 21

Among the French-speaking countries of Africa 21, the sub-theme of ECCE quality was addressed and emphasised across the region. Policy was highlighted as a key enabler for improving all aspects of ECCE, namely through **establishing standards or benchmarks** for assessing the quality provided in the sub-sector. In the validation workshop, regional experts noted the growing risk in many French-speaking countries of policymakers simply 'sprinkling' issues of ECCE quality into planning documents, due to the pressure to comply with international planning guidelines such as the SDGs. Without comprehensive frameworks to guide ECCE quality, there would be no comprehensive standards to measure against. The

experts also called for the improved regulation and control of institutions and educators (Banu Ebrahim & Barry, 2023). Improved infrastructure was also highlighted as an important element for both ECCE quality and access (Banu Ebrahim & Barry, 2023), as parents need to feel that their child is in a safe place to agree to send their child to school in the first place. In Niger, researchers recorded instances of pre-primary classes taking place under tarpaulins and with poor WASH facilities due to local floods, and they call for standards to 'guarantee 1.5 meters per child and never less than 1 meter' (Akkari, 2022, p. 15).

Efforts to improve quality standards are underway in some contexts: the Comoros Islands are planning to draw up a national quality improvement strategy to professionalise the sector through the drafting of qualifications (Union des Comores, 2022). In Djibouti, efforts are focused on defining generic reference modalities in the various dimensions of preschool education (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Formation Professionnelle, 2020).

The recruitment of trained, qualified teachers remains a barrier in many contexts. **Child supervision ratio** were mentioned as one target for improving quality in ECCE. In Mali, for example, the child–teacher ratio is 25 children for 1 teacher (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2020), but in Burundi, policy calls for an existing reduction of class sizes, going from an average of 70 to just 40 children per class and per teacher (Ministère de l'Education Nationale et de la Recherche Scientifique, 2023). **Teacher quality** is also a concern: in Cabo Verde, for example, just 30% of teachers are qualified to provide services in the field (Gobierno de Cabo Verde, 2021). Survey data highlighted the need for teacher training (e.g., Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe) and capacity building for ECCE teachers (e.g., Central African Republic and Republic of Congo). From the literature, improved teacher training is noted for all countries' education policies as an important dimension in the preservation and promotion of quality for ECCE and the broader compulsory education system. Across contexts, teacher education comprises improvements to initial and in-service teacher training, capacity building for school managers, pedagogical support for teachers, and the issue of professional qualifications.

There is then a consensus in terms of the production and distribution of teaching materials adapted to early childhood (development and distribution in schools) as a strategy for promoting quality, emphasised by all countries. Language figures heavily into quality concerns in the region, especially concerning the language of materials and instruction, and preparing children to bridge from mother tongue education to national languages in primary school. In Mali, for example, participants noted that better integration of the French language into ECCE provision will support children before starting primary education.

Eastern Europe, Middle East and North Africa, Asia and Pacific (EMAP)

Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia (EECCA): Across this sub-region, research participants agreed that there were outstanding challenges for ECCE quality in their contexts. Within FGDs and validation meetings, there was broad consensus around the challenges of training, support, and professionalisation of ECCE teachers and staff. A starting point is with **teacher competencies and standards**, which need to be codified to harmonise teacher training

programmes and career advancement opportunities—a gap noted for multiple contexts. A validation workshop participant from Uzbekistan noted that a comprehensive and coherent framework in Uzbekistan, for instance, would unify the whole ECCE ecosystem, which has grown rapidly and now includes a wide variety of providers and programmes. A comprehensive framework and a standardised induction approach would harmonise efforts to attract, prepare, and compensate ECCE teachers and bridge pre-service and in-service education. Kyrgyz Republic has also indicated the need for an independent system for monitoring and assessing the quality of education at ECCE level for better learning outcomes (MoES, 2022).

Beyond framework, there is need for **extensive improvement of teaching staff** across the sub-region, with teacher development needed for a variety of contexts, including Tajikistan (GPE KIX, 2020) and Kyrgyz Republic (MoES, 2022), where improved leader capacity is also needed. In Mongolia, due to heavy workloads, ECCE teachers have only limited opportunities to improve their professional capacity (Ministry of Education and Science [Mongolia], 2020). As reported in literature documentation (Ministry of Education and Science [Georgia], 2022) and from an ECCE expert during validation, in Georgia, the existing two-year vocational qualifications are not enough to address all of the requirements for the qualification, and newly-launched Bachelor's degrees in ECCE should be the standard for teachers in the sector. Validation participants from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyz Republic highlighted the need for improved pedagogical training, particularly in innovative methods such as play-based learning, and for improved early identification of developmental delays, particularly speech delays. Likewise, in Kyrgyz Republic, a participant highlighted the need for better support and materials offered to **parents** to enable them to provide educational support for their own children, and to support them in identifying and acting on developmental delays.

MENA and South Asia: As with EECCA, participants in FGD and validation activities for this sub-region agreed that issues of access were pivotal, especially given the lack of government support for the sector: free and/or compulsory ECCE was not available in any country represented (UNESCO, 2021b), resulting in **fragmented ECCE offerings and varying quality**. In Pakistan, for instance, non-state actors are key for ECCE delivery, but a comparison of quality between government and non-public provision found lower teacher salaries and a lack of training for the non-public options (UNESCO, 2022a). Practical issues, such as funding dispersal, were highlighted during validation by ECCE experts from Pakistan: bureaucracy and negligence can result in programmes never receiving promised funds. Beyond funding, other country representatives agreed that ad hoc ECCE offerings and shorter-term interventions from international non-government actors may produce great results, but they lack sustainability, and their best practices are not widely shared, nor are they scaled up. Likewise, ECCE strategies often bridge multiple departments, and, in contexts like Tunisia, existing multi-sector strategies need sustained implementation to ensure that children's holistic needs are being met (République Tunisienne, 2021).

Curricular and pedagogical improvements were also discussed. Approaches used in the ECCE classroom need to be better linked with early child development research and knowledge, with

emphasis on holistic development and play-based learning, as noted in policy documents for Maldives (Ministry of Education [Maldives], 2019), Bangladesh (Ministry of Education [Bangladesh], and Pakistan, where curricula need to improve the transition from 'play-based learning to formal education' (Ministry of Planning, Development, & Special Initiatives, 2019, p. 34).

As noted by a validation activity participant, in Pakistan, there is a need for **rigorous teacher training** with defined criteria and appropriate material as a complete package for ECCE centres, providing teaching aids, low- and no-cost materials, workbooks, syllabus, parental engagement programmes, and standardised forms of assessment. Training needs to pay attention to gender: as noted throughout the discussion, gender norms and identities are transmitted during early years, and so teachers and staff need to be trained in gender responsiveness to ensure that they are not passing on bias; the curriculum also needs to be transformed for gender responsiveness and gender neutrality (see also the [scoping study working paper on gender equality and social inclusion](#)). Training is also linked with teacher retention: in Tunisia, the 'fragility' of private sector provision was highlighted, where a high turnover of personnel impacts consistent capacity building efforts (République Tunisienne, 2021).

In these contexts, there was also attention given to context: a representative from Bangladesh called for the integration of **local knowledges** in ECCE approaches and practices, for instance. Participants also highlighted the gap between practice and research: representatives of innovative ECCE approaches, such as ECCE boat schools in areas of South Asia impacted by frequent flooding, noted that language barriers prevent research on local practices from reaching global prominence. They called for mapping studies which can document ongoing projects, policies, and initiatives, with an eye to scaling up and using best practices to impact ECCE in other contexts.

Southeast Asia and the Pacific (SEAP): As with issues of access, there were overlaps with the challenges surfaced for ECCE quality in the SEAP region. Issues of quality are referenced throughout literature for the sub-region, though, as with policy from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (2021), the term requires more extensive unpacking to ensure that it is not being used at a 'surface' level, as noted in Africa 21. The need for policies and frameworks to create specific quality standards was a key theme for the sub-region: policies for Lao PDR called for the development of teaching and fundamental quality standards (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020). In both Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste, there is a need for implementation and monitoring of new curricula (Department of Education, Papua New Guinea, 2020; World Bank, 2020b). A validation participant commented on the situation in Bhutan, where private providers, catering to parents' wishes, may use the primary curriculum rather than something suited for the ECCE age range, which is a significant concern for proper ECD, and so better monitoring mechanisms are required. A similar situation is found in Cambodia, with a participant noting that without a strong standards framework, the government is limited in addressing the private sector. In Indonesia, where the ECCE sector is highly decentralised, with a wide range of

providers, data show that existing government standards are not being enforced: in one sample, less than 45% met Indonesian minimum standards, with the lowest rates among Islamic kindergartens and non-project playgroups (World Bank, 2020a).

Further**, teacher recruitment and retention** was noted for many countries, with shortages of ECCE teachers indicated in literature for Vietnam, Lao PDR, and Cambodia. In Cambodia, according to a validation activity participant, a limited population of ECCE teachers lead to the use of primary teachers in ECCE, who are often not well trained for the sector. Community preschools may bring on teachers who are untrained or have little formal education. Another participant from Timor-Leste indicated that a recent expansion to ECCE teacher training should address the limited number of teachers in the near future.

Improvements to teacher quality through **training, supporting, and professionalising ECCE teachers**, including issues of remuneration and monitoring, and training and supporting ECCE staff and management, also featured in SEAP data. In validation meetings, participants called for improved teacher training in Bhutan, Cambodia, and Vietnam; in Myanmar, curriculum is being developed for a distinct degree programme in Early Childhood (Lall, 2021). In Cambodia, insufficient training is a barrier for quality (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2019). There, many teachers lack capabilities for the inclusion of children with disabilities, and **inclusive practices** are only a small portion of teacher training. Likewise, as reported by ECCE experts in validation for Bhutan, there are limited centres for training teachers, and teachers need to be able to identify delays among children. In Nepal, while CWD have the constitutional right to access, in practice schools may limit their entry, as they lack the human resources to support the needs of CWD. An expert from Vietnam called for the teacher training curriculum to be improved, instilling social-emotional skills, transferable skills, green skills, and life skills; there is also a need to build teacher capacity in **gender responsiveness** and tackling gender norms and bias, which is rooted in the ECCE level. There will also be improved focus on computational skills and digital literacy. But in all contexts, there is a need not only to improve the quality of the training but also to upgrade the skills and knowledge of the trainers themselves, with a standards gap highlighted in Nepal. Learning materials need to be revised and updated to pay attention to gender, culture, context, and disability. Finally, existing teacher education needs to be supplemented with **mother tongue materials and trainings for ethnic minority teachers**: this was identified as an issue in Cambodia, where the teachers may speak the national language, but they teach in the mother tongue and need to be well prepared for that work.

Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC)

There was consensus from LAC participants about the **need to strengthen the quality and relevance** of ECCE services in the region. Research participants from various GPE partner countries placed value on ECCE both as an end goal unto itself and as a tool to better prepare young children for future schooling. In this regard, participants expressed a need to improve both the quality of ECCE, and young children's transitions from ECCE into the early primary years. This was especially a priority among research participants from Central American

countries (El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua), due to recent curricular or other reforms and the emphasis that they place on the early years 'as the basis to ensure educational continuity/ retention' (survey respondent, Nicaragua). Unsurprisingly, 'bridge' or 'transitional programmes'—such as those offered by USAID and UNICEF in the Caribbean—were thus identified as promising practices by a regional expert.

ECCE teachers can also be better supported by **developing teaching standards, and pathways** for ECCE teaching certification. This was particularly recognised as a challenge in community-based and non-formal ECCE programmes that lack government regulation. Many ECCE teachers in LAC are still volunteers and do not have formal training or ongoing support (e.g., in Honduras, as noted in the survey and FGD). Research participants highlighted the need to create pathways for certification and teaching qualification standards to develop a strong ECCE teaching force. Teaching standards should draw on effective learner-centred pedagogies, such as play-based or project-based learning (e.g., as indicated in an FGD for Guatemala). They should also be accompanied by standards to monitor ECCE infrastructure and the diverse modalities of ECCE service provision (see Sub-theme 1).

Indeed, various **model ECCE schools or programmes** exist in the region. From the Caribbean, those mentioned include CARICOM's model schools, and Guyana's teacher standards and training. Lacking from the literature, however, and as confirmed by research participants, is a robust evidence base on the impact and (cost) effectiveness of various ECCE models in GPE partner countries, and how they can be replicated, adapted, and scaled across the region.

Likewise, participants identified a particular evidence gap in relation to the **evaluation of public policies**. They described the need to further develop education stakeholders' skills, especially those of policymakers, to generate and use ECCE data for decision-making, to conduct cost analyses to better understand how to invest, finance, and plan for ECCE, and to develop accountability mechanisms to overcome implementation gaps and bridge policy to practice. Accountability mechanisms were described by one regional expert as critical for monitoring ECCE policies in contexts of 'fragmented systems with limited political commitment and financial resources.'

To enhance the use of **data for decision-making**, research participants described the importance of improving learning assessments and diagnostic tools. One potential opportunity offered by a regional expert is the use of household surveys, such as MICS, which captures a range of factors shaping early childhood development and learning (e.g., Bornstein & Rothenberg, 2022). A second regional expert described Guatemala as one country that stood out in this area, as the government has already been developing and piloting age-appropriate assessments.

Lastly, **GESI** did not go unmentioned. 'Inclusion' was a sub-theme of ECCE suggested by a participant in Grenada. Research participants also highlighted the importance of employing gender-transformative strategies to address gender stereotypes in the early years. The limited number of male teachers in the Caribbean was also re-emphasised (e.g., FGDs in Dominica)

(see for more detail the [scoping study working paper on teachers](#)). Multicultural or intercultural ECCE—especially for indigenous groups and Afro-descendants—was a key priority highlighted by a participant from Honduras. In relation to climate change and environmental disasters, a regional expert described the importance of developing sustainable approaches to ECCE, including, for example, using recycled materials to make resources, or teaching young learners about sustainable development, or how to take care of plants. While examples of such programmes exist, they remain small scale and are rarely integrated into educational policy. Suggestions for new and innovative approaches to address marginalisation in ECCE service delivery were also offered: for example, by drawing on low-tech and high-tech tools and digital technologies (e.g., broadcast media such as TV or radio), as well as engaging adolescents and youth as peers and role models in the provision of remedial support or afterschool big brother/sister programmes.

6 ECCE: POTENTIAL RESEARCH AREAS

For ECCE in LMIC contexts worldwide, there is a growing body of research which captures different aspects of the sector, from the diverse landscape of policies and approaches, to teacher training and support, to additional ECD-related supports—health, nutrition, and early disability screening—which improve enrolment and ensure a holistic approach to child development and learning. There are particular gaps within the research, a theme emphasised across our validation activities for this study. In the suggestions that follow, we focus on the research areas surfaced throughout our validation activities, many of which were directly suggested by ECCE national and regional experts.

6.1 Suggested areas: Research for ECCE access

1. **Supply-demand factors:** Research participants described a wide spectrum of ECCE models, including government-funded, privately owned, formal, and non-formal. ECCE service delivery may be child-facing, parent-facing, teacher-facing, remote, hybrid, or purely face-to-face. Despite these diverse institutional structures and modalities, primary and secondary data from across the GPE KIX hubs reveal that access to ECCE is still low in many countries, and inequitable for some young learners, especially due to their age (e.g., young learners aged <3 compared with learners aged 3+) or their household location (i.e., rural/remote communities compared with urban). To address this, research should examine supply and demand side factors to ensure that the services offered meet the demands of diverse families. As LAC regional experts expressed, there is a need to critically analyse legislation across countries, to see how 'universal access' to ECCE is defined, and who is getting access to what type/model of service and when (i.e., at what age).

2. **Scaling and sustaining ECCE:** Various promising practices or model ECCE programmes were identified across the hubs. However, participants also agreed that these models

often lacked robust evidence of impact, and that many programmes tended to be donor funded. Research should capture some of these efforts, evaluate these programmes, and generate evidence both on their impact and cost-effectiveness, and on how they can be scaled and sustained over time, and beyond donor funding. Finally, research can pay attention to how models that are effective in one country can be transferred and re-contextualised.

3. **Expanding funding for ECCE:** A much better understanding of how to increase, expand, and commission for more government funding towards the early years is needed. Various GPE partner countries have been able to generate additional funding for ECCE in recent years, through the use of the Early Childhood Education Accelerator Analysis and Planning Toolkit. The toolkit, developed by GPE and UNICEF as part of the Better Early Learning and Development at Scale (BELDS) initiative, is designed to strengthen national capacities to effectively plan, cost, finance, and monitor early childhood education programmes. Future research can examine how users of the toolkit—including ECCE actors and planning, policy, financing, and management stakeholders—have effectively used the toolkit for ECCE planning, budgeting, financing, and to generate new funds, and any impacts or lessons learned across contexts.

4. **Shaping parents' understanding of ECCE**: Across contexts, parents and communities are often seen as important resources for young learners. However, negative attitudes or a lack of understanding of the importance of ECCE for young children can also serve as barriers to access or quality. Research to examine supply-side factors (e.g., in relation to government commitment to and provision of ECCE) should be complemented by research to explore demand-side factors, such as parental engagement, perceptions, and attitudes towards ECCE. Particular areas include the following:

   a. **Parents choosing not to enrol their children:** There are often assumptions that parents do not understand or care about ECCE, but there is a need for clear research to show the complexity of their viewpoints and choices. What are the complex reasons for their lack of engagement in ECCE? What are the barriers – financial, migratory, etc.? How can they be reached, convinced, or incentivised?

   b. **Parents' limited understanding of the purpose of ECCE:** Additionally, where children are being enrolled, participants noted the frequent tension between what ECCE 'should' look like, based on ECD research, and what parents may demand, especially in contexts where provision comes through the competitive private sector. Parents may want their young children to be educated in majority languages rather than mother tongue to give them a 'leg up' in primary school. Parents may also push for more 'academic' ECCE, as seen with the use of the primary curriculum in some schools. Thus, there is a need for research to focus on what approaches are best for ensuring parents understand the nature of ECD and

its relationship to ECCE. How can parents be reached, and what knock-on effect can that have on private provision in particular?

5. **FLN and transitions from ECCE to primary education:** The perspectives of research participants—which have also been echoed by international literature—suggest that a key challenge in relation to ECCE is preparing early learners for the transition from pre-primary to the primary level, and ensuring alignment of curriculum, assessment, or pedagogical strategies that young learners are exposed to. Even with some of the developments noted in this paper, there is still a gap in understanding what constitutes quality pre-primary education in relation to pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills and how this contributes to acquisition of skills in early grades. Further research should examine this issue, which lies at the nexus of access and quality: how can the provision of ECCE better prepare young people for success, particularly in FLN, in the later years? Longitudinal research can examine the learning trajectories of young children from across different contexts, to understand the enabling and constraining factors shaping transitions form the ECCE levels to the primary level and throughout the basic education system.

6.2 Suggested areas: Research for ECCE quality

1. **Accreditation of ECCE models and approaches:** Research participants and international evidence point to myriad models and approaches to ECCE. Research should seek to generate insights from those governments that are already using innovative accreditation models and pathways, to create and implement standards for school infrastructure, provision, and curriculum. There is much to learn and strengthen in relation to the many different ECCE offers and centres (e.g., community-based, private, etc.) themselves. How are countries approaching the challenge of creating a strong regulatory framework to monitor these offers? What quality assurance mechanisms or standards are in place? There are some countries which have made promising efforts in this regard, which it would be beneficial to better understand.

2. **ECCE pedagogy and assessment:** Age-appropriate pedagogies and assessments that capture the range of skills needed in early childhood development were both highlighted as potential areas of research by participants. While many countries are launching new curricula and promoting learner-centred pedagogies such as play-based learning, there is still a need to understand how these policies are being implemented in practice. Research should include working with teachers to examine how they conceptualise and apply these pedagogies in their local contexts, and the enabling or constraining factors that shape their practice. Further, there is a need to align ECCE assessments with curricula and pedagogies. Participants highlighted a particular need to explore how ECCE assessments and diagnostic tools can be developed to capture not only learners' skills in foundational literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional learning, but also skills in

creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving, as well as other subjects such as the arts and sciences.

3. **ECCE qualification standards and teacher accreditation:** Both primary and secondary data revealed the considerable number of unqualified ECCE teachers, and the critical role of contract and community volunteer teachers in many GPE partner countries. Across countries, however, there are limited examples of teaching standards or qualification frameworks, as well as of accreditation pathways for training, certifying, or upskilling ECCE teachers and other practitioners. Future research should examine how these standards can be effectively developed along with teachers to encapsulate the myriad skills, attitudes, and knowledge that ECCE teachers need to provide age-appropriate pedagogies, and to create nurturing, child-friendly, playful, and inclusive classroom environments.

6.3 Suggested areas: Research for ECCE inclusion

1. **Gender in ECCE:** Data from across the hubs, supplemented by international research, revealed the gendered nature of ECCE. Gender norms, roles, and perceptions of the nature of caretaking and childrearing result in a large number of female teachers and limited male teachers or involvement of male caregivers. Further, the need to address gender biases in classrooms holds paramount importance even in the early years. To address some of these challenges, research should examine:

    a. **Male participation in ECCE**: Examine how men can be incentivised, recruited, and retained in ECCE teaching positions, by understanding the driving factors shaping their limited participation, designing appropriate policies or programmes to attract men to the ECCE sector, and evaluating the impact of effectiveness of such efforts. Likewise, ECCE initiatives should explore how to engage fathers in parent-facing programmes, and the vital role of male adults and role models on young children's learning and broader development.

    b. **Women's participation in ECCE Leadership:** Studies from LMICS show a positive association between female school leaders and student outcomes at the primary level (Bergmann et al., 2022). However, there is a noteworthy evidence gap regarding whether women are occupying leadership positions at the ECCE level, and how this shapes the quality of ECCE service delivery.

    c. **Gender-transformative pedagogy:** Integrating gender-transformative pedagogy into pre- or in-service teacher education and training is essential if teachers are to effectively address gender biases in the classroom. More research is needed to examine how teachers can adequately be equipped with the skills, attitudes, and knowledge to create gender transformative ECCE classrooms.

2. **Equity and inclusion in ECCE:** In addition to gender, various issues related to equity and inclusion in ECCE were revealed in the research. Potential research areas to address gaps in relation to equity and inclusion in ECCE include:

   a. **Rural and remote ECCE provision:** Across all geographic regions, research participants highlighted issues of marginalisation in relation to young learners living in rural or remote areas. How can governments address barriers to accessing quality ECCE services in these communities? What service delivery models are most effective? Interesting examples of ECCE initiatives in rural and remote areas exist and can provide rich data and evidence on which to further probe or consider for scaling efforts.

   b. **Language in ECCE:** In nearly all settings investigated, school settings are multilingual, and learners may eventually need to acquire one or more languages for success in later compulsory education. How do multilingual ECCE centres balance the different use of languages? Are they effective in improving language skills for minority speakers of the national language? Do they have positive or negative impacts for vulnerable children from indigenous ethnic minority communities?

   c. **Disability-inclusive ECCE:** Learners with disabilities were commonly described as a vulnerable group with limited access to quality ECCE services, due to challenges ranging from inaccessible infrastructure to limited access to specialised support services or qualified teachers. Which countries have been able to successfully overcome these barriers to create inclusive ECCE systems? What do inclusive ECCE systems look like? And how do early interventions and the provision of inclusive ECCE for young learners with disabilities shape their learning trajectory?

   d. **ECCE in emergency and crisis settings:** Emerging evidence points to the significant impact that access to quality ECCE can have for young children affected by conflict, crisis, or other emergencies (Calaycay, 2022). More research is needed to better understand how governments in FCV contexts can ensure access to quality ECCE continues in times of crisis. Which ECCE models have proved most effective in these contexts? What is the role of multi-stakeholder collaboration across government, development, and humanitarian actors? Which strategies yield the most impact across phases of emergency preparedness, response, and recovery? How can governments build resilient ECCE systems?

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ANNEX 1

This annex presents data on country participation in the different data streams. As a bounded study conducted in a limited time period, there were constraints on ensuring that representatives from all GPE partner countries were able to participate in data collection. There were a number of factors which could have impacted participation, including the timeline for activities, which were organised with one to three weeks of notice and may have taken place during national holidays or other periods of more limited work, and the limits of each regional hub's reach in contacting and recruiting participants. Some participants were able to join data collection events, but poor internet connectivity limited their ability to join the conversation. Finally, participation also depended on a representative's ability to participate in exercises, including their willingness to share openly and, as research activities were conducted in five languages, their proficiency in the languages being used. As such, the countries which are more active in hub activities, and participated actively in each of the data collection exercises, are thus more strongly represented within this scoping study. In hubs where national participants are less active, those country contexts may be less represented in the data, or the data may be confined to desk sources.

The countries represented for each data stream are listed here. All 85 GPE partner countries were represented via literature, so the following information only comments on survey, focus group, and validation activities.

Africa 19

Survey responses: Ethiopia, Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe

FGD, interview, and validation activities: Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Lesotho, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Africa 21

Survey responses: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Chad, Comoros, Congo (Republic), Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Central African Republic, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Togo

FGD, interview, and validation activities: Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Comoros, Congo (Republic), Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Togo

Eastern Europe, Middle East and North Africa, Asia and Pacific (EMAP)

Survey responses: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Georgia, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao PDR, Maldives, Moldova, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Sudan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Yemen

FGD, interview, and validation activities: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Georgia, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao PDR, Maldives, Moldova, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Sudan, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Vietnam, Uzbekistan, Yemen

Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC)

Survey responses: Dominica, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines

FGD, interview, and validation activities: Dominica, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines