A flexible preschool system for every child:

diversifying early learning in Europe and Central Asia

Cover photo: Children smile on their recess break after an early childhood education program in Gaziantep, Turkey. © UNICEF/UN0340080/Ergen

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Executive Summary

Why this report?

Through national and regional[1] and global[2] commitments, governments across the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region have committed to universalizing access to quality, inclusive preschool to support holistic development and to provide every child with the opportunity to thrive.

Diversification is recognized as a transformative strategy to advance early learning due to its potential to rapidly expand access to quality preschool and meeting the needs of the most marginalized and vulnerable.[3]

The process of diversification has emerged in Europe and Central Asia as a response to policy challenges. Yet knowledge and evidence about this process have not been captured systematically.

Drawing on experiences within the ECA region, *A flexible preschool system for every child: diversifying early learning in Europe and Central Asia* and *Case Studies* begins to:

- explore how diversification of preschool is understood within the region and synthesize experiences into a working definition and set of guiding principles;
- document some examples of how diversification is already supporting the realization of universal, quality, inclusive preschool and lessons learned from implementation;
- reflect on the lessons learned so that governments can engage with diversification actively and systematically;
- propose recommendations for governments and partners to adopt a diversified approach and build system resilience.

Although the report focuses on preschool services, the findings and recommendations have implications for early childhood education and care (ECEC) systems more broadly, a topic which could be explored in future work.

What is diversification?

Diversification is a flexible, adaptive and inclusive approach to planning which supports children's learning and development, responds to families' evolving needs, and builds the resilience of ECEC systems by integrating a range of preschool models into a single, coherent system.

A diversified system can support:

- increased equity and participation in ECEC by marginalized groups. By ensuring that the available preschool models meet the needs of all communities, governments can increase support for preschool and enrolment in services. See for example, the community-based model.
- more efficient use of financial resources. By investing in efficient and cost-effective models which deliver quality and inclusive services governments can expand preschool provision sustainably and increase the social returns from investment. See for example, the half day preschool model.
- sustainability and resilience of ECE systems. By maintaining the flexibility to adapt to changing demographics and needs, systems are better able to respond to social or environmental shocks.

At least half of the countries within the region operate at least one model in addition to the classic full-day model of preschool. The mapping identifies seven preschool models operating in the region: half-day, community-based, public private partnerships, forest schools, home-based services, itinerant, remote, accelerated.[4]

How to diversify the range of preschool service delivery models

Phase 1: Map what is already in place. Revisit the aims of preschool and identify to what extent these are on track to be achieved. Conduct a multi-stakeholder stock-take of preschool models. Use the results to identify gaps in service provision. Identify what evidence is required to support the scaling or introduction of models.

Phase 2: Select models to pilot or scale. Build the evidence base to demonstrate whether the model achieves the stated aims**,** capturing data on a) enrolment (disaggregated by factors of marginalization), b) quality of services or impact of services on learning; c) cost of delivering the service. Engage sub-national officials in dialogue on an ongoing basis to ensure strong coordination and buy-in from sub-national actors who may be responsible for implementation.

Phase 3: Implement the model and keep learning. Continuously monitor the quality of services and plan for service improvements.

How to integrate multiple models into a diversified ECEC system

Diversification is a system-wide approach, which takes place within a broader context of ECEC reforms, over several years. Diversification impacts all five core functions[5] of an effective ECEC system: planning and budgeting; workforce development; curriculum; quality assurance; engaging families and communities.

A strong equity and inclusion lens should be applied to planning and implementation activities to ensure that all children, including those with disabilities and from marginalized communities, have access to quality services.

Specific guidance on each of the core functions can be found in the full text, and illustrative examples are available in the case studies which accompany this report.

Key Takeaways

1. Diversification of ECEC is the process of making systems more flexible so that a range of models can operate, to meet the diverse needs of families, without compromising on equity, inclusion, quality or sustainability of service provision.

2. Diversification is not a new process: it is an approach which has emerged organically and is already under implementation across Europe and Central Asia, and likely beyond, as countries adopt preschool models that go beyond a classic full-day model.

3. Diversification can strengthen systems by increasing system capacity to respond to new and emerging challenges by increasing inclusive access to quality services, supporting financially sustainable preschool provision, and meeting the evolving needs of parents in a context of social, political, economic, and technological change.

4. Diversification is not linear: Experiences across Europe and Central Asia demonstrate that there is no one way to diversify and multiple entry points exist for governments to begin or progress their diversification journey.

5. Diversification should meet the needs of all children, including children with disabilities, and impacted by other factors of marginalization or vulnerability.

Introduction

Through national and regional and global commitments, governments across the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region have committed to providing universal access to quality, inclusive Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services for all children to support holistic development and to provide every child in the region with the opportunity to thrive.

MAY 2019

European member states adopted the **Council of the European Union Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care systems** which reiterated the right of all children to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality as stated in the European Pillar of Social Rights, and in alignment with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.[6]

NOV 2022

Global leaders adopted the **Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action**, which capture global commitments to universalize quality and inclusive early childhood education through strengthened policies, financing and services up to 2030.[7] This commitment reinvigorates progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and in particular SDG 4.2,[8] the global benchmarks for poverty reduction adopted in 2015.

Diversification of learning spaces, practices and provision is recognized as an innovative strategy to advance transformation of early childhood education in the Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action.

DEC 2022

European member states adopted the **Council of the European Union Recommendation on early childhood education and care: the Barcelona targets for 2030**, which updated targets for child participation in ECEC. Under the new targets, at least 45% of children below the age of three participate in early childhood education and care, and at least 96% of children between the age of three and the starting age of compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education and care.[9]

Diversification has the potential to create opportunities for all children to access quality preschool, and to meet the needs of the most marginalized and vulnerable.[10] The process of diversification has emerged in Europe and Central Asia as a response to a range of policy challenges. Yet for countries interested in exploring the process of diversification more fully, very little knowledge and evidence about this process has been captured and shared systematically. As a result, **there is no roadmap on how to advance this process, and no milestones against which to measure success**.

The purpose of this report is to explore and document how diversification of preschool services for 3-to-6 year olds[11] is taking place across Europe and Central Asia, and to reflect on the lessons learned from these experiences so that governments can engage with diversification actively and systematically. The report concludes with a set of recommendations focusing on two aspects of the diversification process: i) identifying a model to introduce or scale; ii) integrating diversified models into a coherent and overarching systems approach to ECEC. Although the report focuses on preschool services, the findings and recommendations have implications for ECEC systems more broadly, a topic which could be explored in future work.

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Drawing on experiences within the ECA region, this report will:

- explore how diversification of preschool is understood within the region and synthesize experiences into a working definition and set of guiding principles;
- document illustrative examples of how diversification is already supporting the realization of universal, quality, inclusive preschool and lessons learned from implementation;
- propose recommendations for governments and partners to adopt a diversified approach and build system resilience.

The analysis underpinning this report suggests that diversification offers a **flexible, adaptive and inclusive approach to planning** which **supports children's learning and development**, **responds to families' evolving needs, and builds the resilience of ECEC systems** by offering a range of preschool models within an integrated system.

The adapted models selected for the rapid mapping have been selected based on the following factors:

- The model aims to deliver quality preschool services and either meets the ICSED definition of a "formal" service[12] or is acknowledged as an alternative model;

- Parental demand for the model has been demonstrated in multiple contexts within the region as evidenced by enrolment in services;
- The model has the potential to support inclusion of children in a range of social and environmental situations, particularly for marginalized groups.[13]

The report begins by revisiting what it is that ECEC systems aim to achieve through preschools, beyond the limits of specific models. Some of the persistent and new challenges being faced by ECEC stakeholders in the region are summarized, namely issues of equity, quality, and sustainability. A rapid mapping of preschool provision captures an illustrative but not exhaustive selection of preschool models which have already emerged to address these challenges. The latter section of the report synthesizes lessons learned from implementation of these models, proposes a definition of diversification and proposes a set of principles to steer the diversification process. Finally, the report proposes entry points for governments and ECEC stakeholders who want to realize the benefits of a diversified approach to ECEC planning and systems within their context.

To accompany the report, a compendium of case studies is available, which explores some of the issues touched on in this report in further detail.

Definition of Terms:

An **Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system** consists of a set of policies, strategic plans, and services that are managed at national or sub-national level, and which require human, financial and other resources to operate.[14] The scope of ECEC services usually includes children from the first year of birth until entry into primary school, but this depends on country contexts, legislation and policies around ECEC.

Preschool refers to education services for children aged 3 until entry to primary school.[15] Preschool supports children to support development of the holistic competencies and skills, which children will need to succeed in primary school and beyond.[16]

A **preschool model** is the mode of organizing and structuring preschool delivery. Each model is characterized by a set of features or parameters including but not limited to dosage and duration, curriculum, workforce, place and ownership/management/funding source.[17]

Diversification is the process of making systems more flexible so that a range of models can operate in order to meet the diverse needs of families, without compromising on equity, inclusion, quality or sustainability of service provision.[18]
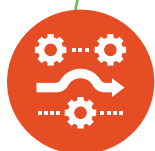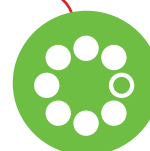
A **diversified system** is a system in which multiple models of service delivery operate under the stewardship of government in order to address a wide range of challenges and needs.[19]

What are ECEC systems trying to achieve?

For young children quality, play-based learning supports overall development. Grounded and beginning in nurturing care within the home, children's holistic development can be supported from birth through adequate nutrition, warmth and care in safe and stimulating environments, and through playful experiences with responsive caregivers.[20] Integrated approaches to health, nutrition, child protection, education and parenting can support families to provide the nurturing care young children require to thrive.[21]

Nurturing care and positive interactions with parents and caregivers in the home environment impact child development from birth and are the biggest determinant of child outcomes at the end of secondary school.[22][23]

ECEC services support child development by offering organized, developmentally appropriate learning opportunities for young children from birth up to entry into primary school.[24] Services supporting children from the age of 3 until the start of primary school[25] - or preschool services – are the focus of this report.[26]

Quality preschool services play a key role in child development.[27] While the quality of the home learning environment remains crucial for children of all ages, from the age of 3 children begin to benefit from interactions with children and adults outside the home to develop a range of holistic skills and competencies.[28] **Preschool services create spaces in which children can engage socially with other children and adults outside the home through a wide range of curated, playful early learning opportunities**. These early experiences support young children to develop a sense of self, to understand how to relate to others, and to connect to their environments. It is through participating in these interactions and experiences that they discover their sense of identity and what it means to be a member of a community.[29]

Studies demonstrate that preschool programs are most effective in improving outcomes for children when they display the following characteristics:

- Developmentally appropriate, holistic and inclusive curriculum that builds on young children's skills and strengths;[30]

- Play-based approaches to teaching and learning which supports children to acquire foundational skills such as learning to learn as well as to understand core concepts[31];

- Warm, responsive and nurturing adult-child interactions to support wellbeing and socio-emotional development;[32]

- Small group sizes and low adult-child ratios to afford personalized attention and care that is suited to young children's developmental needs;[33]

- Qualified and appropriately compensated personnel to deliver quality services;[34]

- Language- and print-rich environments to foster language development;[35]

- Child-friendly physical settings for young children and the ECEC workforce to promote safety and wellbeing.[36]

The above should be provided through a program which provides preschoolers with sufficient time in preschool settings to develop holistically and build their repertoire of skills across different developmental domains. Across the ECA region, preschool policies and systems aim to provide children with crucial opportunities for socialization and play in their early years in high quality preschool programmes.

Preschool: How much is enough to support development?

There are no agreed guidelines on the recommended duration and dosage of preschool to support holistic development. Multiple studies show that a quality half-day program can have the same impact on child development as a full day program.[37] If we calculate this at 4 hours a day, 5 days a week, for a 39-week academic year, this equates to at least 480 hours of preschool education per year. However, well-designed accelerated programmes delivered over weeks and months rather than years have been demonstrated to be effective in supporting learners who have not attended formal preschool due to displacement or other factors.[38] Some researchers caution against providing only the minimum number of hours proven to be effective, citing the risk that if services are of poor quality, longer exposure may be beneficial.[39] The benefits, risks and trade-offs of calculating duration of services should be weighed and considered by ECEC planners and policy makers.

Challenges to delivering inclusive, quality preschool

Central Asia, the Caucuses, the Western Balkans and the European Union together constitute the broader Europe and Central Asia region. Governments in the region face diverse challenges in ensuring that preschool provision meets national and international goals for inclusion, quality and access. While the challenges of delivering quality preschool services are complex, and unique to each sub-region, country or province within the ECA region, some overarching key challenges include:

i)   achieving access to quality and inclusive preschool for all children including children impacted by factors of individual or place-based disadvantage;[40]

ii) ensuring that available preschool funding is allocated equitably and efficiently to strengthen the quality, scope and inclusion of preschool services, particularly where they are needed the most, and mobilizing additional resources to invest in system and service enhancement;

iii) building the resilience of ECEC systems more broadly to serve children to meet the needs of families in a dynamic political, economic and social global ecosystem in which the needs of families and societies are changing.[41]

Of the 13.97 million preschool aged children in the 22 countries where UNICEF has had longstanding presence in the Europe and Central Asia region, 6.6 million are not enrolled in preprimary education.[42] The regional pre-primary gross enrolment ratio (GER)[43] average stands at 52.45 per cent, indicating the need for urgent action to expand rapid access to high quality preprimary education in the region.[44] Children with disabilities, children in remote communities, and children belonging to minority ethnic and linguistic groups are all less likely to be enrolled in preschool than their peers.[45] As a result, access to services, particularly for marginalized children, needs to accelerate rapidly if countries are to deliver on regional and global commitments.

Investments in ECEC and preschool, particularly for marginalized communities, have been identified as **critical to addressing learning gaps** which are evident as early as the first grade of primary school and persist throughout children's lives.[46] Among middle-income countries, an average of 7% of education funding is spent on ECEC,[47] falling short of the internationally recommended benchmark for ECEC spending, which is 10% of domestic education funding.[48] Comprehensive data on ECEC and preschool expenditure in the ECA region is not available. However, several countries in the region have identified financing for preschool as a key constraint in planning documents.

Governments across the region are delivering preschool, and ECEC services more broadly, against a complex backdrop of global economic and political uncertainty, and huge social change.[49] The war on Ukraine, large scale migration into the region, natural disasters, and the enduring impact of the COVID-19 pandemic are just some of the factors influencing the way families in the region live, their expectations of public services, and the governments' resources to address persistent and emerging challenges.

While some of the challenges governments face today are unprecedented and require new ways of thinking, others are long-standing issues, which preschool stakeholders have begun to address over time. It is through the process of creatively navigating challenges that innovations in preschool service delivery have emerged and formed a diverse landscape of preschool models across the region, some of which are explored in the mapping below.

Mapping diversification of preschool provision in Europe and Central Asia

Diversification of preschool services is already underway across Europe and Central Asia. At least half of the countries within the region operate at least one model in addition to traditional full-day preschool.[50] The mapping highlights eight preschool models operating within the region, which are explored in more detail below. Table 1 provides a quick overview of the distribution of these models, across a selection of countries for which data was available, noting that across the countries two or more models of pre-school are in operation and available to families.

Table 1: **Distribution of 7 adapted models operating in ECA region, in select countries[515253]**

	Half-Day	Community	PPP	Forest	Childminder	Itinerant	Remote	Accelerated
Bulgaria	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Czechia	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Data not available
Georgia	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Data not available
Kosovo[51]	Yes*	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Data not available
Kyrgyzstan	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Serbia	Yes	Yes	Yes [52]	No	No	Yes	No	No
Tajikistan	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Data not available
Türkiye	Yes	Yes	No	No	Data not available	Yes	Data not available	Yes
Ukraine	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes [53]	Yes	No
Uzbekistan	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes

*Legally permitted but not commonly implemented

🟢 **Yes** 🔴 **No** ⚪ **Data not available**

Summary of Definitions (See mapping for more details)

Half-day: A daily 3-4 hour service, similar to the full-day model in terms of curriculum and pedagogy.

Community: A free or low-cost service designed to meet the needs of a specific community, often established and/or managed with support from families and community members.

Public Private Partnership (PPP): Government contracts a private service provider to establish, manage and deliver preschool services in a profit-making model. Usually fee-paying.

Forest: An approach to learning in which children spend most of the time in nature, developing competencies through self-directed play and exploration. Usually fee-paying.

Childminder: A service, usually multi-grade, offered in the home of a trained and registered caregiver. Usually fee-paying.

Itinerant: Itinerant teachers travel to very remote communities to deliver preschool on a regular basis, for example weekly. Usually a free public service.

Remote learning: Parents are often trained as first educators to provide preschool services to their children at home. Used in remote communities and gained traction during COVID-19 pandemic related school closures.

Accelerated learning: A condensed program of around 8-12 weeks which supports the development of holistic skills before the beginning of primary school, often focusing on children who have not attended any preschool.

Data no available

Alternative provision

Preschool models which have adapted one or more features of the full-day model are often referred to as alternative models. Within an approach of diversification, a range of models are endorsed and adopted due to their abilities to meet a wide variety of needs. It is important to note that within a context of diversification, the term "alternative" becomes less relevant, and may fall out of usage altogether.

The rapid mapping of diverse models of preschool provision within the ECA region was conducted with a view to better understand:

a) What is the dominant preschool model across sub-regions? Does this model meet the needs of all families? Does it meet system goals for quality, equity and financial sustainability?

b) What other types of preschool models exist? How do they differ from one another? Which sets of challenges are these models responding to?

c) What implications could this have for the diversification of ECEC systems?

The mapping presents eight preschool models, briefly elaborating how these diverge from the traditional center-based, full-day model, defined below.

The classic full-day model of Preschool

The classic full-day model – also referred to in this report as the traditional model-[54] has been dominant across the ECA region for many years. While specific characteristics of the full-day service vary by context, the model generally displays the following features:

- A full-day (8-10 hrs.) model offered over 5 days, usually coinciding with a large part of the conventional working hours.

- May be free, subsidized, or fully supported by parental fees.

- Structured day and services in addition to learning, including meals, snacks and naptime.

- A national curriculum delivered by qualified and licensed professionals[55] in a dedicated setting such as a preschool classroom.

- An approach to teaching and learning which uses educational toys, books, games and other resources to support teaching and learning.

- Varying levels of engagement with families and communities, depending on social norms within the context.

- A national regulatory and quality assurance framework to monitor and govern the provision and quality of services.[56]

- Opportunities for workforce to avail of certified and recognized professional development opportunities, when available.

- Predictable working conditions for preschool staff such as designated contact hours and planning time, a traditional classroom environment, and more as per the context.

- Operational costs provided by national or sub-national authorities and investments in the enhancement of quality or in the infrastructure of settings determined at national or sub-national level.

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The traditional, full-day model is often popular with working families who appreciate the childcare function the centres offer.[57] **If fully subsidized and widely available, the traditional model is an important part of family friendly policies and services that can provide both a childcare and early learning and development function**, particularly in contexts where parents and caregivers may receive limited benefits through their employers. The traditional model can also meet social protection needs and can provide free or subsidized meals to children from low-income households as is the case in Kosovo (see below). At the same time, not all families need or desire a full-day pre-school, and social perceptions of the role of preschool vary by context.[58]

The adapted models of the rapid mapping have been selected on the basis of the following factors:

- The model aims to deliver quality preschool services and either meets the ISCED definition of a formal service (see below) or is already regarded as a formal model;
- Parental demand for the model has been demonstrated in multiple contexts within the region;
- The model has the potential to support inclusion of children in a range of social and environmental situations, particularly for marginalized groups.[59]

The selection is not designed to be exhaustive, but illustrates a variety of approaches to adapting and delivering preschool in ways which cater effectively to different needs across the region.

The mapping places greatest emphasis on formal preschool services. These are defined by UNESCO International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) as services offered for a minimum of 2 hours per day, for a minimum of 100 days per year.[60] [61] Any services which meet the ISCED definition have been included.

In addition, some services which do not meet the ISCED definition have been included:

- Community-based models vary in duration. Given their prominence in many contexts, they have been included, and duration of services specified in country examples or case studies, where this information is available.
- The itinerant teacher model is a recognized, formal entitlement in several countries and its inclusion in the mapping reflects this status.
- Remote gained prominence during the recent COVID-19 pandemic, and as part of the refugee response in Ukraine. As technology continues to evolve, remote learning- and specifically digital learning - may become more prominent for all age groups.
- Accelerated learning programs are included due to their emerging prominence globally.

Excluded from the mapping are any services which are complementary to preschool, but do not aim to deliver a comprehensive preschool education. Examples include toy libraries and play hubs.

Off-site construction approaches such as the use of prefabricated classrooms or modular classrooms play a key role in preschool planning and service provision. While they offer some advantages (see Box 1) their use is not necessarily correlated with the adoption of a non-traditional model of preschool. They are therefore not included in the mapping. A separate case study is dedicated to innovative approaches to construction services in the region.[62]

Although cost effectiveness of preschool is an important consideration in diversification, there is not scope within this report to conduct a financial analysis of the selected models. Several previously published tools are available to support the costing of preschool models and ECEC provision more broadly.[63]

Inclusion of marginalized populations was a key focus of the research. The mapping attempted to identify the extent to which children with disabilities were able to access the full range of models. With a few exceptions, data on inclusion of children with disabilities in these models was not available.

Box 1: Offsite construction approaches

Identifying ways to expand access to preschool affordably, rapidly, and equitably, is a challenge faced by many governments. Off-site construction of modular or prefabricated preschools has been used to address this challenge in Estonia and Türkiye, and there are plans for offsite construction to be piloted in Kosovo in 2024. The approach has several advantages including: a) shorter construction schedules result in children accessing facilities sooner, with fewer children missing out on preschool while waiting for infrastructure to be completed; b) contemporary designs provide environments that are conducive to early learning and stimulation and can provide improved accessibility for children with disabilities. More information is available in the case study "Diversification of preschool settings using offsite construction in Türkiye and Ukraine.
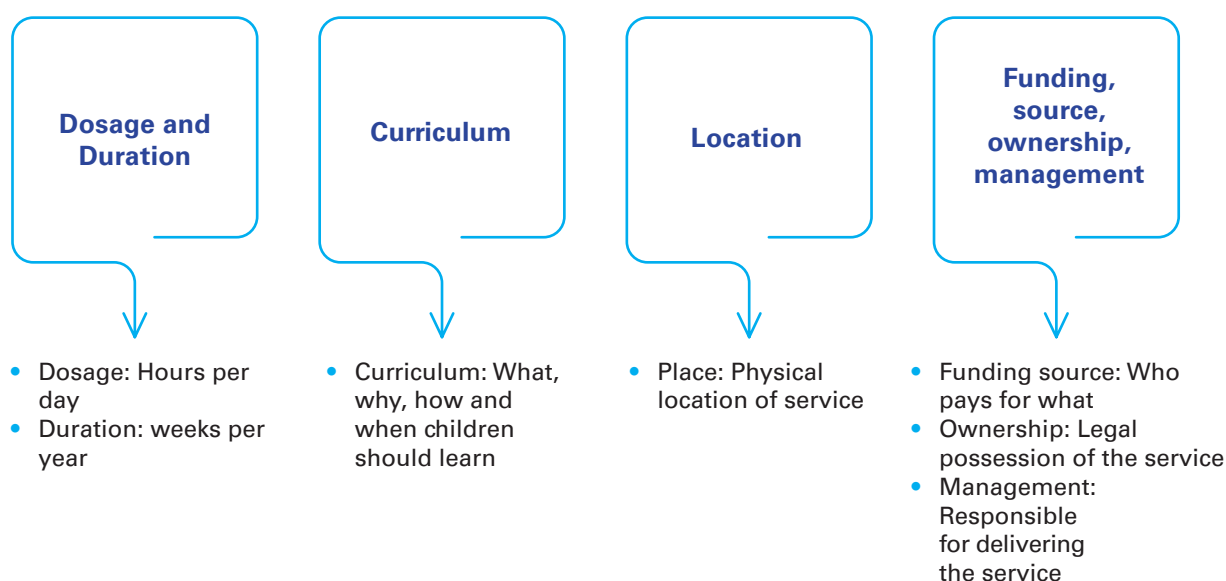

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Typology

A rapid analysis of adapted preschool models in the ECA region finds that there are generally **four elements of the full-day model which countries are recalibrating to address new or persistent challenges and meet families' needs**. Governments may choose to diversify along one or more of these axes, depending on the challenge they wish to address. For example, a government aiming to increase access to quality services rapidly and cost-effectively may choose to adjust the dosage of the traditional model, reducing an 8-hour day to a 4-hour day, with one session operating in the morning, and one in the afternoon.

Figure 1: Axes of diversification

Dosage and Duration	Curriculum	Location	Funding, source, ownership, management
• Dosage: Hours per day • Duration: weeks per year	• Curriculum: What, why, how and when children should learn	• Place: Physical location of service	• Funding source: Who pays for what • Ownership: Legal possession of the service • Management: Responsible for delivering the service

Adjusting the dosage, or the number of hours of preschool that a child accesses per day, can meet the needs of governments to expand services rapidly, or to reduce the pressure on existing services. To calculate a child's overall exposure to preschool, dosage should be multiplied by the duration of services, the number of years of preschool a child will attend.

The funding for preschool may come from governments, parents, NGOs, the community, or a combination of the above. Ownership refers to the entity or entities legally responsible for establishing and managing the service. Ownership of the service may or may not correspond to ownership of the physical infrastructure in which the service is delivered. Management of the service refers to the entity responsible for making decisions about how the service is directed and delivered. All three concepts are closely linked, but their relationship can be complex.

As for the place, the traditional model is usually delivered in a classroom, a physical space specifically designed to facilitate teaching and learning in a controlled environment. Some models are identifying ways to move learning outside the classroom space, without compromising safety or child development.

The curriculum defines what children should learn, why this is important, how learning should be delivered and when it should take place.[64] Since young children learn through play, curriculum adaptations should not move away from a playful child-centred approach. However, models may deliver a more condensed curriculum, sharpen a focus on curricular values and goals, change the structure of the day to increase learning time, and more. Since teaching and learning processes are inextricably linked to curriculum, they are included in this aspect.

Since preschool service delivery happens through a series of interlinked processes, when one element of a model is adapted, it follows that adjustments will need to be made to supporting or connected factors. The rapid mapping in this report also notes additional elements that are adapted:

Figure 2: Additional elements adapted in preschool models

Workforce development and benefits

Workforce development refers to the qualifications required to work in service as a teacher or ECEC professional, as well as expectations around pre-service or in-service training requirements and opportunities. Workforce benefits refer to renumeration of teachers and ECEC professionals and working conditions such as roles and responsibilities, hours and more. Workforce development and benefits are impacted by adaptations against all axes of divergence, but particularly duration, dosage and curriculum.

Engagement with families and communities

Refers to the extent to which families and the broader community actively participate in service delivery. Engagement with families and communities is primarily impacted by changes in ownership, management and funding source, but can be impacted by all aspects.

Regulation and quality assurance systems

Refers to the extent to which the model interacts with national or subnational systems and processes guiding regulation and quality assurance of services.

Data systems

Refers to the extent to which the model interacts with national or subnational systems and processes guiding the collection and reporting of data related to children, quality of services, learning outcomes (where applicable), and financial management of settings.

A summary of the mapping is captured in Table 3, with further details provided in the narrative below. Table 3 captures general features which characterize the model across a range of contexts. Where there is no clear pattern to a feature, the response "varies" is used. Where data was not available, this is explicitly stated.

The narrative below summarizes and describes how the models are defined and operate in the Europe and Central Asia region. It is not intended to offer a review of the literature or evidence around each model, or to rank the models in order of any characteristic or outcome.

Table 2: **Summary of mapping**

	Half Day	Community	Public Private Partnerships	Home-based/ childminder	Forest schools	Itinerant Teachers	Remote Learning
Aspect(s) of diversification	Dosage and curriculum	Funding source and owner, dosage	Funding source/owner	Place	Place and curriculum	Place, dosage	Place, curriculum
Key concepts	Shorter program offered daily, sometimes am and pm	Established, run and sometimes staffed by the community.	Private sector contracted to establish and manage services	Small group, multi-age setting usually in a family home.	Outdoor education, minimal access to classrooms.	Teachers travel to provide preschool in very remote areas.	Distance learning using accessible materials or tech
Communities served	All	Often rural. Often marginalized.	Often urban or peri-urban.	All	Often fee-paying urban.	Rural remote.	Rural remote. Displaced.
Owner/Manager/Funding	Owner (service and infrastructure): State, community, private, NGO Manager: State, community, private, NGO Funding source: State, community, private, NGO	Owner (service and infrastructure): Varies Manager: Community or NGO Funding: Community (fees, in-kind), NGO, sometimes subsidized by state (cash or in-kind).	Owner (service): Private Owner (infrastructure): varies Manager: Private Funding source: Households, state subsidies	Owner (service): Private Owner (infrastructure): varies Manager: Private Funding source: Households, sometimes with state subsidies	Owner (service): Often private Owner (infrastructure): data not available Manager: Often private	Owner (service): State Owner (infrastructure): Often state Manager: State	Owner (service): State, NGO Owner (infrastructure/ devices): Varies/ households Manager: Varies
Duration, dosage	3-4 hours up to 5 days per week	Varies. Half-day model common.	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies. Can be weekly.	No set hours.
Curriculum, teaching/ learning	Varies by owner/manager	Varies	Likely to align with national curriculum.	Varies	Varies.	Aligned with national curriculum.	Varies.
Workforce development	Varies by owner/manager	Varies	Varies.	Varies	Varies. Specialist training may be required.	Specialist training required.	Varies.
Engaging families and communities	Varies by owner/manager	Strong engagement	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies	Parents critical to delivery
Cost to user	Varies by owner/manager	Free or low-cost	Fee-paying. May be waived/ reduced for priority groups.	Fee-paying. Cost varies.	Fee-paying.	Free.	Free services. Devices: data not available.
Regulation/Quality Assurance	Varies by owner/manager	May be registered. Unlikely to be inspected.	Likely to align with national systems	Likely to align with requirements for private providers.	Likely to align with requirements for private providers.	Regulated and inspected	Unlikely to be regulated or inspected.
Data	Varies by owner/manager	Not usually aligned with national system	Likely to align with national systems	Likely to align with requirements for private providers.	Likely to require with requirements for private providers.	Aligned with national system	Data not available.
Countries of use (Sample)	Georgia, Serbia, Tajikistan Uzbekistan Ukraine	Czechia, Georgia, Kosovo, Republic of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan.	Kosovo, Serbia Tajikistan, United Kingdom, Uzbekistan.	Austria, United Kingdom, Uzbekistan	Czechia, Denmark Germany, Ireland, UK, Sweden	Georgia, Serbia, Spain, Türkiye.	Tajikistan, Ukraine

Please note: This mapping is based on a desk review of a range of models within the region. It is not a comprehensive analysis of all models operating within all countries regionally. Further details on specific cases are included in the narrative below, and in a compendium of case studies.

Half-Day Model: Diversification of dosage, duration and curriculum

The regional mapping identified that half-day programs typically offer 3-4 hours of provision up to five days a week, for a full academic year, providing a shorter daily dosage than the classic full-day model. On this basis, a child in a half-day program in ECA could expect to receive anywhere between 585 and 780 hours of preschool annually, assuming a school year of 39 weeks.[65] **Half-day models in ECA are owned and managed by a range of entities including state,[66] community,[67] private,[68] and others**. Funding may come from households or be partially or fully subsidized by national or sub-national governments. The half-day model can be delivered in any form of infrastructure which is safe, child-friendly, and meets already established infrastructure guidelines. Across the region, **national laws and regulatory frameworks for state and non-state providers determine working conditions, engagement of families and communities, and links to national quality assurance and data systems**.

Central to the success of the half-day model is the principle that the **impact and benefits of the full curriculum can be experienced by children over a shorter duration, without compromising on quality.[69]** Adaptation of the curriculum is a central feature of the half-day model and is inextricable from discussions around shortening the length of the day.[70] The half-day model is likely to require a **revisiting and streamlining of the curriculum to ensure that opportunities are provided for children to develop a full range of competencies and skills** over the course of the preschool program. While a shift to half-day model has implications for teachers' planning, the model should not deviate from an approach and commitment to play-based pedagogies and inclusive, playful learning.

Some half-day models operate using a double shift model whereby children are enrolled in either an afternoon or morning shift, with teachers and other workforce on site for an extended/full working day, or where teachers too might work in shifts.[71] This arrangement allows providers to reach twice as many families in one day as they would with a traditional model, without requiring additional recruitment of ECEC workforce or procurement of infrastructure. **When designed well, this makes the half-day model a potentially viable option for governments looking to rapidly universalize ECEC services, or to reduce overcrowding in full-day services.[72]** A double shift model has implications for the quality of ECEC workforce working conditions as well as the number of contact or learning hours which should be carefully considered and discussed with all relevant stakeholders.

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Improving quality and access to preschool through Serbia's half-day model

In Serbia, the half day model has been adopted as an alternative to full-day provision in both urban and rural areas. Children receive 20 hours a week of preschool through the centres, which evidence demonstrates is sufficient to achieve the same impact as a full-day dosage. By removing nap time and meal times, and adapting pedagogical approaches, preschool teachers were able to deliver the same quality of service in half a day. To ensure quality was maintained and improved, Serbia worked with the Institute for Pedagogy and Andragogy in the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Belgrade to develop the 'Theoretical Foundations for Diversified Education Programs' in 2012, which guided the content and delivery of the half-day models through an emphasis on play and project-based learning. The theoretical foundations later formed the basis of the updated competency-based national curriculum framework for ECEC, which has guided both full-day and half-day services since 2018. Quality assurance standards have been updated in alignment with the competency-based curriculum and have been constructed to facilitate assessment of both full-day and half-day ECEC services. Continuous professional development has supported teachers to develop the knowledge and competencies to deliver the half-day model. Initial teacher training is being updated to prepare teachers to deliver services in full or half-day ECEC models.

The introduction of the half-day model has had a lasting impact on approaches to pedagogy in full-day and half-day models, enhancing the quality of services. It has also increased enrolment among communities who did not want or require full-day services and has reduced overcrowding in urban kindergartens that previously offered only full-day models.

For more information on Serbia's diversification journey, please see Diversification of Preschool in Europe and Central Asia: Case Studies

Taking a half-day model to scale in Tajikistan

In Tajikistan, a half-day preschool has been scaled nationally thanks in part to evaluation data demonstrating its positive impact on learning outcomes in primary school. By 2027, enrollment in the alternative model as it is now known, accounted for approximately 30% of preschool enrolment nationally.[73]

The original centres offered a half-day program to children aged 3-6, operating out of empty classrooms or community buildings with support from the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) and Open Society Foundation (OSF).[74] The model was partially overseen by the local education departments. Parents paid a small fee, roughly 20% of the cost of a full day program in public preschool.

An evaluation of the model by Aga Khan Foundation showed that learning outcomes of primary students improved after attending these centres. The evidence was shared with the Ministry of Education, who recognized the potential of the model to be scaled and increase access nationwide. The model was legally recognized as a form of preschool, and Ministry of Education worked with development partners, including UNICEF, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) including AKF, to replicate the model.

Centres delivering the model now focus on preschool services for 5-6 year olds. The preschools are required to follow the ECEC curriculum, and are subject to national regulatory frameworks and processes, though further investment in quality assurance by government is required to facilitate inspection and supportive supervision of all centres. Teachers in these preschools receive equivalent salary and benefits to teachers working in full-day public preschools. Of the 1700 centres currently operating, approximately 600 were established by AKF, UNICEF and OSF, with the remaining 1100 have been established by parents, local governments, and the private sector.

The experience of scaling has brought challenges as well as opportunities. For more information, please see Diversification of Preschool in Europe and Central Asia: Case Studies.

040835/Pirozzi

Community-based ECEC: Diversification of funding source and owner

Community-based services are typically a non-state form of preschool or integrated early childhood education and development provision, **whereby the service is established and/or run by communities**, sometimes with financial and technical support from non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations, or other non-state entities.[75] Within the ECA region community-based ECEC services may receive support from local authorities such as permission to operate, or rent-free/highly subsidized spaces provided by the state to operate etc.[76]

The legal status of community-based services, and the national or sub-national laws and regulations governing their operation, **vary considerably by context**. As a result, the services delivered can vary significantly in terms of dosage and duration, curriculum, workforce development and benefits, management and links to regulatory systems.

What community models in the ECA region usually have in common include a commitment to: a) low-fee or no-fee service; b) presence in localities where preschool services are limited or absent; c) inclusion of all families including member of marginalized linguistic, ethnic or cultural groups; d) strong engagement of families and communities such as providing volunteer teachers, making toys and supplies, providing food, renovation of infrastructure and more. Community models may also adapt to local requirements such as preschool delivered in a minority ethnic language, and sometimes offer classes for parents to support nurturing care and improve the quality of the home-learning environment.

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Reaching marginalized urban families in Kosovo

In Kosovo, community-based kindergartens have been operating in Pristina since 2012-2013. The model appears to meet the needs of urban, low-income, minority ethnic, and/or single-parent families more effectively than public preschools. The urban centres typically offer a full-day model. Under the community-based model, parents form an NGO, or collaborate with an existing NGO, to deliver preschool services under an agreement with the local municipality. Municipalities subsidize the centres, which have also been supported by UNICEF at the initial stages of establishment. Parents fees are subsidized according to household income levels, with families from lower-income households paying lower fees. Access to this additional financial support is believed to be one of the key attractions of this model for many families.

Adapting to semi-nomadic lifestyles in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan

In the Republic of Kyrgyzstan's mountainous regions, seasonal community ECD centres, or jailoos, were originally established in 2010 with support from the Aga Khan Foundation.[77] Under the jailoo model, community members are trained to deliver affordable, culturally sensitive preschool services throughout the migration period in exchange for a small fee. Outside the migration season, children attend preschool classes in their villages. The service is highly valued by families, whose children would previously miss out on at least 4 to 5 months of preschool a year during the annual migration.[78] The curriculum is aligned with nomadic culture, fostering respect for local traditions and the natural environment.[79] As the jailoo model has scaled, it has evolved into a network of central and satellite kindergartens.[80] Originally piloted in 21 communities in 1 province, the model has now been adopted by over 100 communities in 5 provinces, attracting financial support from local and national NGOs, embassies and the local private sector.[81]

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Public Private Partnerships (PPPs): Diversification of funding source, ownership and management

Public Private Partnerships are being explored as means of rapidly expanding quality preschool in several countries in the region. **Definitions and models of PPP vary, but at the heart of the concept is a legal arrangement in which the government contracts non-state providers to deliver ECEC services, under a partnership arrangement.[82]** The non-state providers can be corporate organizations, but could also be NGOs, or individual entrepreneurs. Under a PPP, **government agencies define the scope, outputs and targets for the contract, while non-state providers deliver the service within the agreed contractual arrangements.[83]** Governments retain oversight of service regulation and quality assurance. Governments typically provide financial support in the form of subsidies, tax-breaks or other mechanisms which support the establishment and operation of ECEC services. PPPs can be structured to increase equitable enrolment in services for marginalized populations.[84]

Governments may introduce more than one type of PPP at a time, to meet more than one need.[85] Duration and dosage, curriculum, place and all

secondary aspects of divergence can be negotiated as part of the PPP arrangements. **The design of each PPP model dictates which populations will be served by the centres, and what type of service is offered.[86]** For example, a corporate PPP provider may be incentivized to establish and operate fee-paying services in an urban or peri-urban environment where demand is high and families are willing and able to pay fees for a full-day service. This may be a useful arrangement which helps the government achieve its goals for ECEC where low enrolment among middle-class urban families is a challenge. On the other hand, the government may use the opportunity to incentivize or require the enrolment of marginalized populations, or to introduce services to geographical locations which are currently underserved.

A voucher system whereby parents receive government funding to enroll their child in a participating non-state institution are also a form of PPP. Voucher systems are present in the region, though it was not possible to explore any models in detail during the mapping.[87]

Using PPPs to double preschool enrollment in Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan introduced PPPs in 2018 to rapidly increase access to preschool across the country.[88] Between 2018 and 2021, 16,646 preschools were established under PPP arrangements with family providers, and a further 1091 with private commercial entrepreneurs.[89] As a result, enrolment rates reported to increase from 28 per cent in 2017 to 65 per cent by the end of 2021.[90] Different PPP arrangements govern the family-based and commercial providers.[91] For example, family-based providers have a smaller maximum group size than commercial providers. Family-based providers can accept 0-3 year old children in addition to children of preschool age (3-7 years) while commercial providers are restricted to offering services exclusively for preschoolers. Under both arrangements, providers charge fees for users, but for commercial centres 25% of places must be reserved for children from vulnerable backgrounds, who can expect a reduction in fees of up to 70%. Financial support arrangements between government and providers varies between the models. Quality assurance standards and arrangements are being updated to reflect the services offered by both types of providers. All centres must be certified and accredited in order to operate. Services must be aligned with the national curriculum and all teachers in commercial and family-based providers must have completed at least secondary specialized education for preschool teachers. As with the introduction of any radical shift, there will be lessons to be learned from these early years of implementation. However, the Uzbekistan case offers an illustration of how PPP arrangements can be introduced and combined to meet diverse needs.

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Forest Schools: Diversification of curriculum and place

Forest schools are an increasingly popular form of preschool, in which most or all preschool provision takes place outdoors. Replacing classroom infrastructure with natural environments, forest schools are a nature-based approach to learning in which **children co-create their experience and direct their own learning according to their intrinsic motivation and interest.[92]** Greater use of outdoor education and nature-based classrooms are being considered as part of national sustainability and climate change strategies in at least one country in the region.[93]

Some forest schools may follow a competency-based national curriculum, however this is not the case for all forest school centres. Instead, through extended, outdoor experiences children connect with the natural environment, increase their understanding of ecological cycles, and gain an appreciation for the local landscape and ecosystems which they experience on a daily basis.[94] In some cases, outdoor education may support the transfer of cultural knowledge and practices to younger generations.

Within the region, approaches to teaching and learning and workforce development and benefits are impacted by the forest school model. The resources found in a traditional classroom such as traditional toys are generally replaced with plentiful time outdoors. Teachers may use natural materials and ecological phenomena to teach young children.[95] Despite being outdoors, children have access to water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, and in some contexts may even have some physical space for nap time and for rest and relaxation purposes. **Teachers may require specialist training to develop and refine the competencies and skills required to safely facilitate playful, experiential learning in an outdoor environment**. Forest school associations frequently offer specialist training for forest school facilitators. Duration and dosage vary.

Forest schools are often a privately operated and owned, fee-paying service. There are exceptions, however. For example, Germany offers forest school as a form of public ECEC provision.

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Adopting outdoor learning in Czechia

In Czechia, forest kindergartens were introduced in 2016-17.[96] They offer a minimum of 6.5 hours and a maximum of 12 hours of preschool per day.[97] To operate, forest schools are licensed by the municipality and then accredited by the national forest school association.[98] Parents pay a fee to enroll their children in the service. Forest kindergartens follow the national competency-based curriculum in an outdoor environment and include a heavier emphasis on nature. Forest kindergartens are subject to the same regulations and standards as indoor kindergartens with a few exceptions. For example, health and safety standards are adapted to reflect the outdoor setting, while maintaining safety and hygiene, and the maximum number of children per member of staff is higher.[99] Class sizes are capped at 24 children per class, in alignment with indoor settings.[100] Teachers are trained to the same minimum standards as teachers in indoor kindergartens. Additional courses are available to support forest education for all age groups and are accredited by the Ministry of Agriculture.[101] Forest schools must be registered in the Register of Schools and School Facilities and are monitored by the Czech School Inspection. Forest schools' operational costs are subsidized by the regional authorities and school fees are paid by parents, who can deduct school fees from their taxable income.

In addition to the official forest preschools, forest clubs operate in some areas. These are certified by the National Forest School Association and follow the national competency-based curriculum.

Home-based preschool/Childminder: Diversification of place

Sometimes referred to as a childminder model, **home-based or family-based preschool refers to organized small group, multi-age settings which are usually based in a residential environment, which is not the child's home**.

The laws and regulations covering home-based preschool vary by context but in general **home-based providers are expected to meet standards for health and safety, and nutrition, among others.[102]** Expectations around curriculum and pedagogy, workforce development, and quality assurance vary by context. The examples below illustrate some of the ways these factors are addressed in different contexts.

The model can appeal to families who prefer a more residential environment, especially for younger children between 0-3 years, or who prefer a multi-age setting for their preschool-aged children. Home-based providers may offer additional after-school services for children of school age.[103]

Ownership can be public, private or a combination of both, with funding for public services being provided by national or municipal governments, and funding for private services coming from household contributions.

Professionalizing in-home childminding in Austria

In Austria, childminders operate as private providers, requiring fees from parents in exchange for childcare and education.[104] Some families may be entitled to state subsidies to support home-based care. Childminders must receive a license from the relevant local authority to operate and are governed by federal childcare and daycare laws. Childminders are not required to be qualified teachers but must complete pedagogical training. This consists of approximately 225 hours of theory and 133 hours of practice. Associations of childminders provide continuous professional development opportunities for members. Childminders have flexibility over the curriculum offered, but if they look after children the year before they attend primary school, they must follow specific guidelines which contain practical ideas for educational development.

Quality assuring home-based childminders in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, 34,800 childminders offer around 16% of ECEC places nationally.[105] Childminders in England must follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum framework, which focuses on the following areas of learning: communication and language; physical development; personal, social and emotional development; literacy; mathematics; understanding the world; expressive arts and design.[106] Childminders who look after children under 8 years for more than 2 hours a day must register with the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), the government agency responsible for assessing the quality of educational provision. To register, childminders usually require a home-based childcare course that covers the national early years curriculum framework, a pediatric first aid course, safeguarding training and a food safety qualification.[107] Childminders are subject to an unannounced, 3-hour inspection within 30 months of initial registration, and no less than once every 6 years subsequently.[108] Inspections include observations of teaching and learning, as well as discussions with childminders and sometimes parents. Childminders receive a rating from Ofsted, which is publicly available for parents to access.

Itinerant Teachers: Diversification of place and dosage

Families living in extremely remote communities face particular challenges in accessing preschool services. Distance from the nearest preschool can be too great for young children to attend regularly or at all, and weather or road conditions can make travel to preschools impossible for some or all of the year. **The itinerant teacher model aims to bridge this gap by keeping children in their village or local area, while teachers travel to provide preschool on a weekly, or monthly basis**.

Specialist itinerant teachers are used to support children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms in the region and beyond, in support of inclusive education practices.[109] For example, in Germany itinerant teachers have been deployed to support children with visual impairments.[110] During the mapping, no examples were identified which document experiences of using itinerant teachers to support preschool children with disabilities in the region. Some experiences of this approach are documented in the United States.[111] Studies at all levels of education indicate that in addition to working directly with children, key aspects of the role include coaching and mentoring teachers and school staff in inclusive practices, supporting dialogue and processes around individual education plans, liaising with non-school based staff involved in service delivery or oversight of service delivery for children with disabilities, and engaging with families and communities.[112]

Reaching remote communities in Türkiye with adapted services

In Türkiye, villages with less than 5 young children are eligible to receive preschool from an itinerant teacher. Under this model, teachers travel to the village to spend 2-3 hours with children per week. Itinerant teachers receive specialist training to support them in their role, and deliver a specialized curriculum, using teaching and learning materials which they bring with them to the village.

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Adapting teachers' working practices to reach rural children in Spain

In Spain, itinerant ECEC teachers travel to rural schools and gathered rural schools[113] to support young children.[114] Class arrangements vary depending on enrollment, but classes are likely to be multi-grade. Non-itinerant staff supervise children while specialist itinerant teachers travel between schools. According to the national regulations governing the operation of ECEC centres and staff, itinerant ECEC teachers should be deployed to schools in close proximity to each other and should ideally be deployed within the same area year on year.[115] This arrangement maximizes the amount of time teachers spend with children and increases continuity of services across academic years.

Supporting remote preschoolers in Uzbekistan using mobile kindergartens

In 2019, the Government of Uzbekistan introduced mobile kindergartens to serve children in remote areas.[116] The mobile kindergartens take the form of specially adapted buses, which travel to villages where they provide 9 hours of preschool per child per week over a 3 day period. The buses are equipped with water, sanitation and hygiene facilities and meet national standards for sanitation. The majority of the learning takes place outside in a playground, which is equipped with developmentally appropriate equipment such as a sandbox and a playhouse. The mobile kindergartens bring teaching and learning materials to the village, including books, educational games and toys. Children in mobile kindergarten groups learn and develop their skills and abilities based on the national preschool curriculum and Early Learning Development Standards. Since the launch of the project in the academic year 2019-20, the pilot has reached over 1500 children across 44 localities in 13 regions.

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Remote Learning: Diversification of place and curriculum

Remote learning, sometimes called distance learning, **reaches children and families with learning opportunities in their own homes**. In a remote learning model, **parents play an active role in facilitating structured learning opportunities**, sometimes receiving training as first educators (see examples below). While various forms of remote learning have existed for some time, remote learning was brought into sharper focus during school closures due to the COVID 19 pandemic, though it has been underutilized for preschool.[117]

Technologies which can be employed to support remote learning have historically included radio and television, but increasingly include digital technologies such as apps and web platforms.[118] Digitalization of preschool- and ECEC services more broadly – create distinct opportunities such as creating new learning materials and activities, facilitating closer links between preschool teachers or other staff and parents, and eventually supporting children to develop age-appropriate digital literacy.[119] Strategies which take advantage of digital opportunities must also consider the risks of online engagement, and ensure that children remain safe while learning online.[120]

The flexibility provided by remote learning can be useful for families in remote communities, and has been used effectively with communities **which have been dispersed and displaced due to factors such as conflict or natural disasters.[121]**

One concern around remote learning has been whether these services can support the development of socio-emotional skills. A recent evaluation of the media-integrated remote early learning program (RELP) implemented by Sesame Workshop and International Rescue Committee in the Middle East found that remote programming had a significant, positive effect on children's social-emotional skills, though the effect on literacy, numeracy was higher.[122]

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Supporting Ukrainian preschoolers and parents with digital solutions

In Ukraine, the Ministry of Education and Science and UNICEF have collaborated to support the development of a remote learning program for preschool children aged 3-6.[123] Through the platform children can watch daily, bite-sized direct video content designed to support holistic skills development. In addition, parents access content which supports them to support learning and development within the home by improving the quality of parent child interactions, and by integrating some pedagogical approaches when playing with their children.

Supporting parents to be first educators in Tajikistan: Piloting a blended approach to preschool

Tajikistan is exploring the potential of remote learning to deliver high quality early learning content to children in very remote communities. A small pilot is testing the approach for children ages 0-3 (parental app Hello Bebbo)[124] and 3-6 (digital customized platform Learning Passport called "Magic Box")[125]. By using a combination of digital and analogue materials, parents build the competencies to deliver age-appropriate, interactive learning experiences as first educators. A trained facilitator delivers 10-16 face to face sessions for parents to support them to use the materials and to advance learning between sessions. Youth volunteers provide hands-on tech support to parents who require this. Currently materials are available offline, as only 20% of rural preschool aged children in Tajikistan have an internet connection at home.[126]

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Accelerated learning: Diversification of duration, dosage and curriculum

Accelerated school readiness (ASR) programs aim to support holistic skills development in only a few weeks or months by delivering a compressed curriculum. Commonly ASR programs also aim to increase on-time enrolment in grade 1. Accelerated learning programs have been used in non-formal primary education for over a decade.[127] ASRs build on these experiences to deliver preschool, especially for children who have had little or no exposure to preschool. They have been successfully piloted among children living in areas with low preschool coverage, as well as for children in humanitarian settings.[128]

 ASR preschool programs are often offered for around 8-12 weeks immediately prior to beginning Grade 1 of primary school,[129] though definitions of accelerated learning vary by country.[130] They are usually taught by teachers who have been trained to deliver an accelerated, competency-based program. Studies of ASR programs globally have demonstrated their effectiveness in supporting children to develop a range of critical skills and to lower attainment gaps in grade 1.[131]

ASR programs create the flexibility to:

- deliver catch-up education for children who have missed preschool due to a range of factors e.g., migration, illness, school closures etc.

- complement other forms of preschool by providing opportunities for socialization and familiarization with a classroom environment for children who have not attended face to face classes due to remoteness or other factors.

- support the development of holistic foundational skills in the short-term while longer-term programs are designed and implemented.

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Increasing school readiness and grade 1 enrolment among refugee and host populations in Türkiye

In Türkiye, a summer school program for Syrian refugees and local children aged 5-6 was piloted in 2016 by the NGO ACEV in collaboration with MONE.[132] The 10-week program aimed to increase school readiness among children who attended, and to boost enrolment in grade 1 among program participants. An evaluation of the program demonstrated that compared to children who did not attend the program, children who attended the program demonstrated higher outcomes in language development, self-care, and verbal and mathematical skills. Children graduating from the program enrolled in primary school education at a rate of 91 percent compared to 54 percent of children who did not attend the program.

Reflections on
the rapid mapping

Across the region, narratives on preschool services focus on the dominant, traditional of full-day, public service provision. The traditional model is often the most long-established model, and is the model around which curriculum, workforce development and benefits, quality assurance and data have been structured. This model is likely to be at the heart of preschool planning. The traditional model is structured to closely align with primary school and may even be physically integrated into primary schools.

While many features of the traditional model can be effective in delivering quality services, **the traditional model is resource intensive and highly structured**. As a result, it is **not well-suited to respond to rapid changes in societies or to keeping pace with the evolving needs of families**. Another constraint is the cost of running and staffing a traditional model, which is likely to account for a significant percentage of the preschool budget. In Uzbekistan, the introduction of a half-day model was reported to have saved the government of Uzbekistan US$3.6 million in cost-efficiency savings, and parents over US$10.4 million in pre-school fees over a 3 year period.[133]

For the purposes of the mapping the models have been grouped into categories according to their main features, but in practice some of the models fit into more than one category. For example, Uzbekistan's family-based PPP provider has been mapped as a PPP because the contractual arrangement is integral to how and why the model has emerged, but it is also a home-based childminder model. The mapping above focuses on the half-day model as a form of state-provision, but it is also commonly used in community-based models.[134] How successfully a model responds to contextual realities is more important than the category it is placed into.

These models can be roughly grouped by the contextual realities they appear to be responding to (see Table 4), though it should be noted that some models respond to more than one challenge.

Table 3: Which adapted models are responding to which need?

Challenge	Half Day	Community	PPP[135]	Forest	Childminder	Itinerant	Remote	Accelerated
Reaching marginalized populations	● Yes	● Yes	○ Unclear	● No	○ Unclear	● Yes	● Yes	● Yes
Increasing access to quality services rapidly and cost effectively	● Yes	● Yes	● Yes	● No	● Yes	● No	○ Unclear	● Yes
Generating demand among families whose needs are not aligned with the traditional model	● Yes	● Yes	● No	● Yes	● Yes	● Yes	○ Unclear	○ Unclear

● Yes   ● No   ○ Unclear

The community-based model and half-day model address all three challenges, which may account for their prevalence across countries. The community-based model was present in every country that was considered in the mapping.

The mapping attempted to discover the extent to which the range of models were inclusive of children with disabilities. It was not possible to find data about this, a fact which reflects an overall lack of data on children with disabilities,[136] but which may also indicate that children with disabilities are not yet at the center of conversations around diversification. **As diversification progresses the issue of disability inclusion needs further consideration to ensure that the needs of children with disabilities do not fall through the gaps, and that inclusive approaches are mainstreamed into the full range of models**.

The mapping captures models which have been implemented up to mid-2023, but the nature of diversification is that models will shift and evolve to keep pace with social, political, technological and environmental developments. Some models, which appear to occupy a relatively small space of the preschool offer at the time of writing, may develop in both significance and market share in the future. For example, digitally supported remote preschool is relatively limited in its use in 2023, though as digitization of education services continues to advance, and global connectivity increases, this may change. Similarly, forest schools currently account for a small share of provision. Yet a model of outdoor education could offer solutions to families whose lives are already deeply connected to the natural environment, including those in extremely remote rural areas.

While the future is not predictable, **countries can take advantage of the evidence that is available to begin to anticipate some likely shifts and to invest in models which boost resilience to shocks and which create the flexibility to adapt to shifting norms**. For example, droughts and climate-change related events are already being felt in the region and are likely to increase.[137] Direct impacts could include more frequent or more wide-ranging temporary or permanent school closures, but indirect impacts would also impact demand for services.[138] Migration away from the worst-affected areas may increase demand for services in some areas, while decreasing demand in others. Negative impacts on livelihoods may impact the ability of families to pay for preschool services, which may increase the need for government funded, or heavily subsidized places.

The Future of Preschool: Diversification

As the mapping illustrates, a wide variety of preschool models operate within the region, each meeting the distinct needs of a diverse range of families and addressing a variety of challenges. As these models emerge and families opt to enroll their children in a range of different settings, it becomes challenging to justify a one-size-fits all approach to preschool. In fact, a homogenous system does not appear to exist in many countries, and neither is it necessary to meet preschool goals, and may even hinder progress towards broader national, regional and global ECEC commitments.

If multiple models operate in parallel without government oversight, a principle that is at the heart of all diversification efforts, there is a risk that governments are unable to monitor the full range of preschools to maintain and improve quality and inclusion of services. In the absence of this oversight, data on enrolment, quality of services, and financial flows would be negatively impacted, thereby reducing the government's ability to govern the sub-sector effectively and transparently. Moreover, a fragmented ECEC sector also results in inefficiencies in spending and undermines the effectiveness of public financing strategies targeting the ECEC sub-system. If governments are unable to monitor allocation and expenditure, it becomes impossible to budget efficiently and equitably to achieve the very goals ECEC systems seek to so urgently achieve.

The combined impact of these risks threatens quality, inclusion, and progress towards national, regional and global goals for preschool and ECEC more broadly.

What is diversification?

Diversification offers an approach within which governments can link diverse preschool models within an integrated system, with a consistent and overarching approach to delivering quality, inclusive services for children.

Put simply, **diversification of ECEC is the process of making systems more flexible so that a range of models can operate, in order to meet the diverse needs of families, without compromising on equity, inclusion, quality or sustainability of service provision**. It offers an approach to planning which combines the need to deliver on commitments supportive of young children's learning and development in the short-term, while simultaneously making preschool more flexible and responsive to families' needs and eventually building the resilience of ECEC systems to adapt to challenges and opportunities that the future will bring.

Why diversify?

A diversified system can support:

- **increased equity and participation in ECEC by marginalized groups.** By opening the system to innovation and creating flexibility for ECEC systems to evolve with the goal of meeting the needs of a rapidly changing society, governments are able to extend critical services to all families, in particular to those who have been historically unable to access ECEC. See for example, community-based preschools.

- **more efficient use of financial resources.** By investing in models which deliver quality and inclusive services using methods which are less resource intensive, governments can expand preschool provision sustainably, increase the availability of funding to support investments in system enhancement, and increase the social returns from investment. See for example, the half day preschool model.

- **sustainability and resilience of ECEC systems.** By maintaining the flexibility to adapt to changing demographics and needs, systems are better able to respond to social or environmental shocks. While specific models within a diversified system may be added, removed, or altered and adapted over time according to evolving needs the system itself continues to offer a resilient and consistent approach to meeting the needs of children. See for example, remote learning.

Patterns emerging from diversification of preschool within Europe and Central Asia
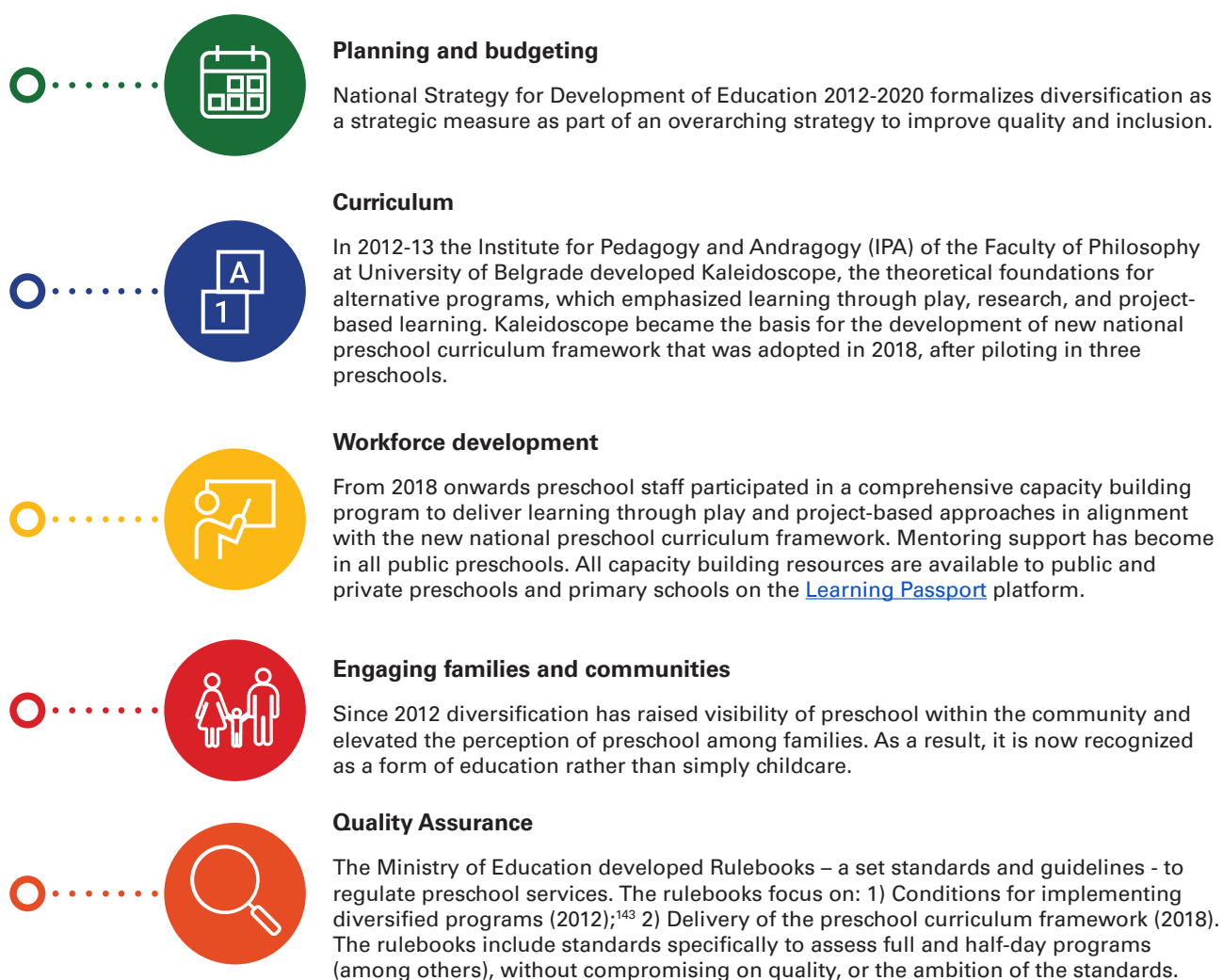
Diversification of preschool is a system-wide approach, which takes place within a broader context of ECEC reforms, over several years. In Serbia, diversification was promoted as an approach in 2012 when it was endorsed as a strategic measure within an overarching strategy to improve access to quality and inclusive services as documented in Serbia's National Strategy for Development of Education 2012-2020. This was the first step in a series of reforms which have spanned a decade to present day.

Diversification impacts all five core functions[139] of an effective ECEC system. It requires flexibility or adaptation in terms of planning and budgets, curriculum, workforce development, quality assurance, and engaging families and communities. Since 2012, Serbia has designed and adopted a range of ECEC models to meet the needs of all families, introduced a competency-based national curriculum framework, updated regulatory and quality assurance frameworks, ensured teachers are supported to develop the competencies required to deliver the new models, and has changed the way that ECEC services are viewed and supported by families and communities (see Table 5). The reforms have been implemented gradually and are part of an ongoing approach to delivering quality services in a changing environment.[140]

Figure 3: Impact of diversification on the Five Core Functions of an effective ECEC system in Serbia[141]

Planning and budgeting

National Strategy for Development of Education 2012-2020 formalizes diversification as a strategic measure as part of an overarching strategy to improve quality and inclusion.

Curriculum

In 2012-13 the Institute for Pedagogy and Andragogy (IPA) of the Faculty of Philosophy at University of Belgrade developed Kaleidoscope, the theoretical foundations for alternative programs, which emphasized learning through play, research, and project-based learning. Kaleidoscope became the basis for the development of new national preschool curriculum framework that was adopted in 2018, after piloting in three preschools.

Workforce development

From 2018 onwards preschool staff participated in a comprehensive capacity building program to deliver learning through play and project-based approaches in alignment with the new national preschool curriculum framework. Mentoring support has become in all public preschools. All capacity building resources are available to public and private preschools and primary schools on the Learning Passport platform.

Engaging families and communities

Since 2012 diversification has raised visibility of preschool within the community and elevated the perception of preschool among families. As a result, it is now recognized as a form of education rather than simply childcare.

Quality Assurance

The Ministry of Education developed Rulebooks – a set standards and guidelines - to regulate preschool services. The rulebooks focus on: 1) Conditions for implementing diversified programs (2012);[143] 2) Delivery of the preschool curriculum framework (2018). The rulebooks include standards specifically to assess full and half-day programs (among others), without compromising on quality, or the ambition of the standards.

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Approaches to diversification are grounded in strategic planning. Governments can ensure that the overarching ECEC system remains integrated and coordinated by endorsing and adopting multiple models within one system. This is an approach which governments in the region are already actively promoting. For example, Kosovo's Strategy for Education aims to increase the quality of ECEC services, and to increase access to services for children from vulnerable groups and low-income households through diversification.[142]

An enabling legislative environment is critical to success. In Kosovo, the new law on ECEC[143] itemizes the main forms of service provision including public, private and community based, while leaving space for the introduction of other models. This creates the legal space to diversify, and to implement the Strategy for Education. Similarly, in Uzbekistan, the adoption of the Law on Preschool Education (2019) recognized different models as part of preschool education and enhanced the diversification of services. As a result of the adoption of the law and by-laws, Uzbekistan has been able to introduce preschool services such as mobile kindergartens and to pilot initiatives like mixed age community-based preschools.

Diversification is a dynamic process which is responsive to emerging evidence. As new evidence comes to light about preschool service delivery, a diversified system is able to respond by adjusting policies or models to incorporate relevant findings.

In Tajikistan, evidence about the impact of the half-day community-based preschool model on learning outcomes in primary school informed the scale up of the model by a range of actors across the country. Thanks to this evidence, the Ministry of Education and partners could be confident this model had the potential to support Tajikistan to make progress towards goals for both access and quality.

Prior to adopting PPPs as a strategic measure to increase access to quality preschool, Uzbekistan launched a feasibility study of public partnership models to assess their suitability to meet national goals. Through multi-stakeholder dialogue, PPPs were identified as one of a range of strategies which could support the government to meet preschool targets for children. The results of the study informed the design of two PPP models – family-based and corporate providers, which are now being implemented nationwide. See the accompanying case study for further details.

Governments maintain responsibility and oversight of all services, but do not necessarily provide all services. Within the role of stewardship, governments support continuous improvement of quality, equity, and inclusion across all services and continuously evaluate the extent to which the system is meeting its goals, adjusting types of provision as required.

In Serbia preschool quality assurance standards have been adapted to ensure that all models are aligned with the primary curriculum framework, and that quality is measured appropriately, according to the models' various aims and scope. The standards focus on 4 areas: i) direct work with children, ii) support to children and families, iii) professional learning community, iv) management and organization. Full-day and half-day preschool models are subject to the full set of quality assurance standards and indicators. Models which offer shorter-duration project-based learning or complementary ECEC services are required to demonstrate alignment with key elements of the quality assurance framework but are not required to meet the full range of indicators which govern the full and half-day models. This approach allows the government to maintain oversight of the quality of all types of ECEC provision, and to keep the learning and development of all young children at the heart of services.

In Bulgaria, the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) initiated the development of Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Framework (ECEC QF) to ensure that all providers are focused on key outcomes for children. Launched in 2020, the strategy aimed to bring coherence to public ECEC services as they integrated under one ministry, to establish quality standards and common measurement tools across sectors, and to enhance regulation of ECEC providers.

In Georgia, the introduction of the Preschool Authorization Process has created space for a system wide conversation on diversification, fostering an environment in which the government can strategically reflect on its relationships with all providers, and consider the principles of quality which are non-negotiable.

A diversified system is frequently collaborative and attentive to emerging needs, working with existing partners in new ways, and/or bringing in new partners to the space. It can involve multiple ministries and frameworks and takes place at both national and sub-national level.

In Türkiye, access to preschool services was increased through the introduction of a half-day model, delivered through modular classrooms in provinces where the number of children was greater than the number of preschool spaces. The National Ministry of Education (MONE), in collaboration with Provincial Directorates of National Education (PDoNE), has installed 310 modular preschools in several provinces, creating capacity for an additional 30,000 preschool places across the country. Implementation of this innovation required officials at all levels to adapt the way they worked together, and to strengthen coordination to achieve shared goals.

Public Private partnerships are a clear example of opening the system to new partners, under the oversight of government. In Uzbekistan, the family-based PPP created thousands of preschools, as individual entrepreneurs were able to partner with the government to deliver preschool services in their towns and villages for the first time.

Recommendations for diversifying preschool

There is no one way to diversify preschool services. Experiences of diversification in the ECA region reveal the complex and creative pathways which governments have adopted to create diversified ECEC systems that are agile and responsive to families' needs.

Dialogue within the region indicates that discussions around diversification frequently focus on two key objectives:

i) increasing the range of preschool service delivery models;

ii) maintaining quality and oversight of multiple models within a coherent and overarching system.

While the two objectives are closely linked, the recommendations have been structured to allow readers to focus on each objective separately, to the extent that this is possible.

Recommendations to enhance the range of preschool service delivery models

Multiple preschool models are already being implemented in several countries. As governments consider the range of models which can support their ECEC goals, they should focus on models which offer quality services, are affordable for users, and are inclusive of all children, especially those in marginalized groups.

The recommendations below aim to:

a) clarify which models already under implementation in a given context;

b) identify if and how these models work together to support the achievement of overarching sub-sector goals;

c) support governments and stakeholders to identify new preschool models to pilot, and to assess existing models to explore potential to scale, to fill gaps in access, equity, quality and financing, among others.

PHASES

PHASE 1: Map what is already in place

PHASE 2: Select models to pilot or scale

PHASE 3: Implement the model and keep learning
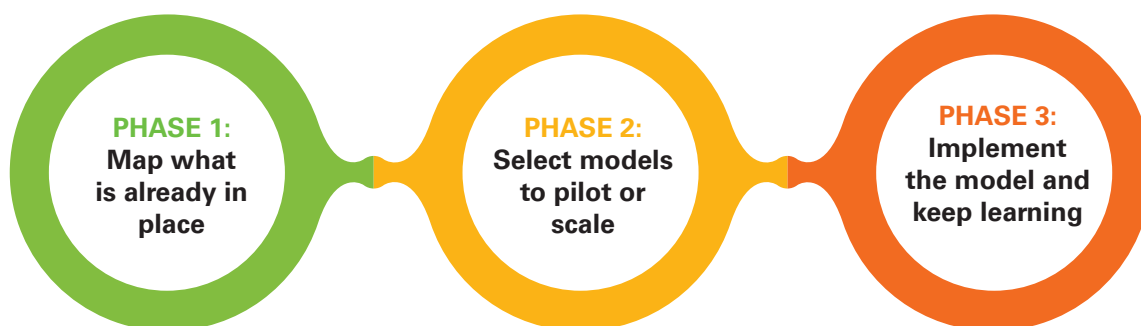
PHASE 1: Map what is already in place

1. **Revisit the aims of preschool within the context and identify to what extent these are on track to be achieved**. Use data and multi-stakeholder dialogue to identify gaps in equity, access, quality, financing and other priority areas, noting data gaps. Identify the priority challenge(s) to be addressed through diversification of models: access, quality, equity and finance.

2. **Conduct a multi-stakeholder rapid stock-take of preschool models which are already operating**. To the extent possible establish the extent to which the model supports the priority challenges and include families and sub-national government officials in the dialogue. For example, explore whose needs each model is meeting, the accessibility of the model for marginalized groups, the cost of accessing services for users, who is teaching in these services, who owns, operates and manages the service, any formal or anecdotal data on quality.

3. **Use the results of the rapid stock-take to identify to what extent existing models are supporting overarching ECEC goals, and to what extent they could address gaps in preschool coverage, quality, financing or other priority challenges**. Identify what evidence is required to be able to explore the scaling or enhancement of models captured in the stock take.

PHASE 2: Select models to pilot or scale

1. **Build the evidence base to demonstrate whether the model achieves the stated aims.** At a minimum, it will be important to capture data on:
   a. enrolment (disaggregated by factors of marginalization);
   b. quality of services or impact of services on learning;
   c. cost of delivering the service.

   The following approaches have been used to generate evidence about individual models within the ECA region:

   • Small-scale pilots test the effectiveness of models and generate the evidence required to take a model to scale across the region. An evaluation of Tajikistan's community-based half-day model generated evidence about the positive impact of the service on learning outcomes at primary school. This was a key factor in the decision to scale nationwide.[144]

   • Feasibility studies assess the extent to which a proposed project is likely to succeed. In Uzbekistan and Serbia, feasibility studies were conducted to assess the viability of prospective PPP models, before identifying which models to pilot in Uzbekistan, and which to adapt and scale in Serbia.

   • Costing simulation models use demographic and budget data to simulate the cost of delivering one or more services over a period of time. The Government of Ukraine has commissioned a costing simulation of seven models of ECEC. The costing analysis informs evidence-based decision-making about the adoption of models and will support budgetary allocation to deliver preschool services.[145]

• Focus groups and community-based consultations generate qualitative data about service delivery and attitudes to the service among families. In Türkiye, the term "container preschools" attracted negative attention in the media, risking creating attitudinal barriers to enrolment. The preschools are now referred to as modular preschools.

   To the extent possible, work with development partners, NGOs and other stakeholders to identify opportunities to collaborate on evidence-generation, leveraging technical expertise and financing to generate data and achieve shared goals.

2. **Engage sub-national officials in dialogue on an ongoing basis**. Implementation of new models will impact roles and responsibilities of stakeholders at sub-national level who may be responsible for preschool budget allocation, quality assurance, teacher deployment and more. Ensuring strong coordination and buy-in from sub-national actors from the outset is critical to success. As Georgia prepares the pilot of a new preschool model, it has established a structured and transparent approach to stakeholder engagement and consultation across all municipalities initially, with plans to work systematically with municipalities to design, implement and eventually evaluate the pilot in up to three municipalities.

PHASE 3: Implement the model and keep learning.

1. **Continuously monitor the quality of services and plan for service improvements**. As Tajikistan's half-day model has scaled nationally, the design has inevitably shifted to respond to contextual realities across different urban and rural communities across the country. Now owned and managed by local governments, the national government continues to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the model as it evolves, and to plan for continuous improvement of the service, with the support of development partners.

Recommendations to integrate multiple models into a diversified ECEC system

A diversified system uses multiple models of preschool delivery to achieve its overarching goals and commitments. While individual models may vary in their features, they all contribute to a well-functioning and coherent systems approach to delivering services. By maintaining active oversight and stewardship of the full range of models, the government manages and directs the sub-sector, so that all children access quality services, within a flexible and sustainable system.

Diversification is a system-wide approach, which impacts all five core functions of an effective ECEC system. It requires flexibility or adaptation in terms of: i) planning and budgets, ii) curriculum, iii) workforce development, iv) quality assurance, and v) engaging families and communities.

PLANNING AND BUDGETING

1. **Ensure the full range of models are legally allowed to operate and develop robust advocacy and strategies to support the case for legal reforms, where necessary**. In Kosovo and Uzbekistan, the new laws on preschool permit a range of models to operate, which will allow each Ministry of Education to rebalance the configuration of services to meet the needs of more families in both countries.

2. **Integrate diversification into sub-sector governance and planning by ensuring that the full range of models are reflected in sub-sector analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation processes**. A strong equity and inclusion lens should be applied to planning processes to ensure that all children, including those with disabilities and from marginalized communities, have access to quality services. In Serbia, the National Strategy for Development of Education 2012-2020 promoted diversification as a strategic measure as part of an overarching strategy to improve quality and inclusion. Progress towards diversification was then integrated into ESP reviews, M&E and budgeting processes. Diversification continues to be promoted as an approach in Serbia's Strategy for the National Development of Education by 2030.[146]

3. **Costing data on the full range of models should be integrated into dialogue around sub-sector finance and budgeting, to promote efficient and transparent use of resources**. Ukraine, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have all prioritized data on costing and financial

sustainability as a part of early-stage decision-making in the adoption of new preschool models.

4. **Identify how ongoing reforms can be harnessed to create a more supportive environment for diversification**. In Georgia, the Preschool Authorization process and ensuing dialogue around the nature of quality preschool opens the door for increased government oversight of a broader range of models and providers.

5. **Regularly monitor the preschool landscape and assess on an ongoing basis whether the current configuration of services is advancing sub-sector goals**. As society changes, the extent to which various models remain relevant will shift. Continuously evaluating the contribution of individual models to overall sector goals through evidence-based dialogue will ensure that the system remains agile and responsive to evolving needs and challenges.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

1. Roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders at national and sub-national level may evolve under a diversified approach. **Ensuring transparency and clarity around changing roles and responsibilities** and supporting colleagues to perform their new roles effectively through the provision of professional development and training will be critical for long-term success.

2. **Plan for sufficient numbers of trained teachers to be available to deliver services through all models**. This requires a focus on retaining existing teachers and building a pipeline of qualified teachers to compensate for natural attrition. Türkiye was able to implement the half-day model quickly due to the availability of trained, preschool teachers ready and willing to be deployed. In Uzbekistan, where teacher shortages were more acute, teachers with a basic preschool qualification[147] were employed in newly established services and are being supported to develop enhanced competencies through in-service training.

3. **Support teachers to develop the competencies to deliver the new models**. In-service and pre-service training needs for the preschool workforce should be reviewed to ensure that they remain relevant to the new models. In Serbia, the introduction of the half-day model led to the development of a new curriculum and the adoption of learning through play. Teachers received in-service training on the new approaches before delivering them to children and peer to peer mentoring was introduced in some kindergartens. In Kyrgyzstan, UNICEF and Republican Teacher In-service Training Institute have been developing a comprehensive training to ensure those entrepreneurs who are going to open home based kindergartens gain skills and knowledge on child development, safeguarding, play-based learning, and business administration.

CURRICULUM

1. **The introduction of new models can be a good time to pilot new approaches to learning**. In Serbia, the introduction of the half-day model aimed to increase quality and was accompanied by the development of the theoretical foundations for alternative programs, which emphasized learning through play, research, and project-based learning. These theoretical foundations later became the basis for the new preprimary curriculum framework.

2. **It may be necessary to revisit the existing curriculum framework, and to ensure it is flexible enough to be implemented through a range of models**. Assessment of competencies should be flexible enough to be used in a non-traditional learning

environment. In Kosovo, the core curriculum will be introduced in 2023, which increases the autonomy of teachers, emphasizes formative assessment approaches, and shifts away from a focus on rigid developmental milestones.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

1. **Licensing and regulation requirements should be flexible enough to allow a range of models to operate**. In Georgia, the introduction of the Preschool Authorization Process has created an opportunity for the government to strategically reflect on the principles of quality which are non-negotiable for authorization, and on those which are less critical.

2. **Quality assurance frameworks should be adequate to assess the quality of preschool in the full range of models and should focus on process quality rather than structural quality**. In Bulgaria, the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) initiated the development of Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Framework (ECEC QF) to ensure that all providers are focused on key outcomes for children. Launched in 2020, the strategy aimed to bring coherence to public ECEC services as they integrated under one ministry, to establish quality standards and common measurement tools across sectors, and to enhance regulation of ECEC services.

3. **Quality assurance frameworks should be practical enough to use, and can be adapted for use in various models**. In Serbia, The Ministry of Education developed rulebooks – a set standards and guidelines - to regulate preschool services. The rulebooks include standards specifically to assess the full range of preschool services, without compromising on quality, or the ambition of the standards.

4. **The quality assurance workforce should be appropriately trained and supported to develop expertise in monitoring preschool, and should be capacitated to deliver supportive supervision to continually improve services**. The Ministry of National Education in Türkiye is revising its ECE standards as part of the overall Education Institutional Standards. The revision could be accompanied by the development of practical

monitoring tools, which inspectors will be trained to use. Kosovo's quality assurance standards will also be reformed to align with the introduction of the core curriculum.

5. As preschool enrolment expands, **governments should plan to expand the capacity of the quality assurance workforce to keep pace**, for example by creating a pipeline of skilled personnel.

ENGAGING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

1. **Engage with families strategically to understand their needs and preferences for preschool services**. Demand for Kyrgyzstan's jailoo kindergartens and child development centers at libraries has been high thanks to a flexible model which aligns with semi-nomadic lifestyles, and which centres local cultural practices.

2. **Families and communities can actively engage in some models, particularly community-based models, which can positively impact perceptions of preschool**. In Georgia, UNICEF and CIVITAS opened a cohort of community preschools with support from the Ikea Foundation. Communities and parents were involved in site selection, renovation of municipal spaces, and volunteered at the centres, which were staffed with trained teachers. Perceptions of preschool were positively impacted by these experiences.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

Quality of services must continue to be a central concern as a range of preschool models are adopted. As governments adjust the characteristics of preschool models to meet new and existing challenges, quality of services should not be compromised.

Similarly, equity of access and opportunity must also remain a central tenet of service provision. While some models are designed to meet the needs of specific communities, no child should find themselves excluded from accessing services. In particular, it is unclear to what extent the inclusion of children with disabilities is being mainstreamed into the full range of models. The flexible systems created through a diversified approach must be able to support all children.

Roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders at national and sub-national level may evolve under a diversified approach. For example, national governments may transition from a role of provider to steward, municipal governments may become responsible for establishing, assessing or quality-assuring innovative models. Ensuring transparency and clarity around changing roles and responsibilities, and supporting colleagues to perform their new roles effectively through the provision of professional development and training will be critical for long-term success.

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Key Takeaways

1. **Diversification is an ongoing process to create flexible systems:** diversification of ECEC is the process of making systems more flexible so that a range of models can operate, in order to meet the diverse needs of families, without compromising on equity, inclusion, quality or sustainability of service provision.

2. **Diversification is not a new process:** it is an approach which has emerged organically and is already under implementation across Europe and Central Asia, and likely beyond.

3. **Diversification strengthens ECEC system to be responsive:** diversification can be actively harnessed to strengthen systems by increasing system capacity to respond to new and emerging challenges such as increasing inclusive access to quality services, supporting financially sustainable preschool provision, and meeting the evolving needs of parents in a context of social, political, economic, and technological change.

4. **Diversification is not linear:** experiences across Europe and Central Asia demonstrate that there is no one way to diversify and multiple entry points exist for governments to begin or progress their diversification journey.

5. **Diversification can enable equity:** diversification should meet the needs of all children, including children with disabilities, and impacted by other factors of marginalization or vulnerability.

ENDNOTES

1   Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems; Council Recommendation on the Revision of the Barcelona Targets on early childhood education and care Dec 2022

2   UNESCO (2022) Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action for Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education 16 November 2022

3   UNESCO (2022)

4   See full report for descriptions of each model.

5   UNICEF 2020 Build to last A framework in support of universal quality pre-primary education

6   Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems ST/9014/2019/INIT OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4–14 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605(01)&rid=4

7   UNESCO (2022) Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action for Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education 16 November 2022

8   By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

9   Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on the Revision of the Barcelona Targets on early childhood education and care COM/2022/442 final https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/12/08/eu-ministers-adopt-recommendations-on-early-childhood-and-long-term-care/

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11 This report used the term "preschool" as a generic term to refer to education services for 3-to-6-year-olds. Contextually specific terms such as "kindergarten" and "pre-primary" are avoided for readability, except where a more specific term is necessary in a country example or case study.

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26 The exact duration of preschool and legally defined age of preschoolers varies by country across the region. As per footnote 6, this report used the term "preschool" as a generic term to refer to education services for 3-to-6-year-olds. Contextually specific terms such as "kindergarten" and "pre-primary" are avoided for readability.

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43 Pre-primary GER is an indicator collected by UNESCO Institute of Statistics and is calculated by dividing the number of students enrolled in pre-primary education regardless of age by the population of the age group which officially corresponds to pre-primary education, and multiplying by 100. In this context "pre primary education" corresponds to the term "preschool" used throughout this document.

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50 See p.10 of this report for a description of the full-day model.

51 Pilot ongoing

52 Voucher system, available in some regions

53 All references to Kosovo should be understood in reference to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.

54 In some contexts, "traditional" education is associated with religious providers. In this report, the term "traditional" is not used to designate a faith-based provider.

55 Such as teachers, assistants and other professionals as relevant in each context.

56   As enrolment has expanded across the region, some quality assurance systems have struggled to keep pace in terms of implementation.

57   van Ravens, J., Crouch, L., Merseth King, K., Hartwig, E. A., & Aggio, C. (2023). The Preschool Entitlement: A locally adaptable policy instrument to expand and improve preschool education. RTI Press. RTI Press Occasional Paper No. OP-0082-2301 https://doi.org/10.3768/rtipress.2023.op.0082.2301

58   Sharon Lynn Kagan and Caitlin M. Dermody, in Bendini, Magdalena, and Amanda E. Devercelli, editors. 2022. Quality Early Learning: Nurturing Children's Potential. Human Development Perspectives. Washington, DC: World Bank.

59   A literature review of the models is not within the scope of this report.

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61   ICSED's definition of formal services by duration does not necessarily capture the optimum dosage of preschool services. See box "Preschool: How much is enough?"

62   See Diversification of Preschool in Europe and Central Asia: Case Studies for further information

63   See Add Today Multiply Tomorrow for an overview of tools available up to November 2022 including the ECE Accelerator Toolkit Costing and Financing tool. Tools released since November 2022 include The Center for Universal Education at Brookings' Childhood Cost Calculator (https://www.childhoodcostdata.org/) and the International Labour Organization's Care Policy Investment Simulator.

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67   E.g., Republic of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan

68   E.g., Tajikistan

69   See van Ravens et al (2023) for a review of the literature around duration of preschool.

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147 Secondary specialized qualification for preschool teachers

Through national and regional and global
commitments, governments across the Europe
and Central Asia (ECA) region have committed to
universalizing access to quality, inclusive preschool
to support holistic development and to provide every
child with the opportunity to thrive.

Diversification is recognized as a transformative
strategy to advance early learning due to its potential
to rapidly expand access to quality preschool and
meeting the needs of the most marginalized and
vulnerable.

The process of diversification has emerged in
Europe and Central Asia as a response to policy
challenges. Yet knowledge and evidence about this
process have not been captured systematically.

Drawing on experiences within the ECA region,
Diversification of Preschool in Europe and Central
Asia: Report and Case Studies explores how
diversification of preschool is understood within
the region and documents some examples in
order to reflect on lessons learned and propose
recommendations for governments and partners.

unicef

for every child