Evaluation of the Early Childhood Development Programme in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Final evaluation report

UNICEF CEE/CIS Regional Office

Education for Change Ltd.
17A Christopher Street,
London EC2A 2BS,
United Kingdom

www.efc.co.uk

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<tr>
<td><strong>Authors</strong></td>
<td>Dr. Anise Waljee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John Wood (<a href="mailto:j.wood@efc.co.uk">j.wood@efc.co.uk</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jake Grout-Smith (<a href="mailto:j.grout-smith@efc.co.uk">j.grout-smith@efc.co.uk</a>)</td>
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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEE/CIS</td>
<td>Central and Eastern Europe / Commonwealth of Independent States</td>
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<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>Country Office</td>
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<td>CRC</td>
<td>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>DAC</td>
<td>(Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) Development Assistance Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECD</td>
<td>Early Childhood Development</td>
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<td>ECDC</td>
<td>Early Childhood Development Centre</td>
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<td>ELDS</td>
<td>Early Learning and Development Standards</td>
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<td>ELSR</td>
<td>Early Learning and School Readiness</td>
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<tr>
<td>EMIS</td>
<td>Education Management Information System</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>GER</td>
<td>Gross Enrolment Ratio</td>
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<td>GPI</td>
<td>Gender Parity Index</td>
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<td>HDI</td>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
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<td>HRBA</td>
<td>Human Rights Based Approach</td>
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<tr>
<td>KAP</td>
<td>Knowledge, Attitudes and Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>MICS</td>
<td>Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>MLSP</td>
<td>Ministry of Labour and Social Protection</td>
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<td>MoRES</td>
<td>Monitoring Results for Equity Systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>NER</td>
<td>Net Enrolment Ratio</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Coordination and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>OOSC</td>
<td>Out-of-School Children</td>
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<td>RECI</td>
<td>Roma Early Childhood Inclusion</td>
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<td>RO</td>
<td>Regional Office</td>
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<td>SSO</td>
<td>State Statistical Office</td>
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<td>TA</td>
<td>Technical Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOC</td>
<td>Theory of Change</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOR</td>
<td>Terms of Reference</td>
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<tr>
<td>TransMonEE</td>
<td>Transformative Monitoring for Enhanced Equity</td>
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<td>UIS</td>
<td>UNESCO Institute of Statistics</td>
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1 Introduction

1.1 Evaluation purpose and objectives

This report presents findings for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia drawn from the research and data collected as part of the multi-country evaluation (MCE) on early learning and school readiness (ELSR) that was commissioned by the UNICEF CEE/CIS Regional Office (RO) in 2013. The MCE provided findings and recommendations for UNICEF’s work on ELSR in the CEE/CIS region, built on research in six CEE/CIS country cases.¹ This report was commissioned by the RO and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Country Office (CO) in 2014 to draw out country-specific findings, conclusions and recommendations for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in more depth than was possible in the regional MCE report.

In line with the research carried out for the MCE, the specific objectives of this report, as set out in the Terms of Reference, are to:

- Document and report on impact results (in terms of changes in children's life) and reduction of equity gaps in ELSR;
- Assess how such results were made possible through system changes (removal of system bottlenecks) at national and/or local levels; and
- Document the contribution of UNICEF to these system changes.

As a central aspect of the equity focus in these objectives, the evaluation has given specific attention to gender and human rights considerations in its analysis of both system changes and UNICEF contributions. The evaluation covers the period 2005-2012.

It is important to note that because of the multiple influences and actors involved in system level changes, direct attribution to UNICEF interventions could not be sought through this evaluation. The evaluation focuses on a contribution analysis of the part UNICEF interventions played in the processes and influences that led to the system changes identified.

1.2 Context

1.2.1 Early childhood education

Over the past decade early childhood education and care has received increasing attention, drawing on a range of child development, health and psychology research, econometric analyses and frameworks of rights, social investment and human capital. These point towards the importance of cognitive, physical, social and emotional development in the period of 0-8 years old in influencing the trajectories of individuals throughout their life, overcoming inequalities and contributing to productive societies. Early childhood services are also an integral part of efforts to provide equitable access to the workforce for parents, and especially mothers who carry much of the burden of care.

Although access to early childhood education is increasing worldwide, huge inequalities remain in terms of coverage and quality. The development of early childhood services raises many challenges in terms of governance (with services spanning health, welfare, education and protection sectors

¹ Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), Kyrgyzstan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Moldova. The final report can be accessed from:
involving complex relationships of responsibility and decentralisation), financing, the labour market and gendered divisions of labour, and the cultural and social norms and traditions around child upbringing and expectations of early childhood services. Context is therefore an important consideration in the assessment of early childhood education services, and this is particularly the case in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in its transition from Yugoslavian systems.

1.2.2 Country context

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia ranks 78th in the HDI, with 27% of its population living below the national poverty line. Unemployment remains high at 31% and the Gini coefficient is at 0.39, suggesting that inequities persist. Previously steady growth in GDP has slowed since the economic crisis in 2008.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has a population of about two million comprising of two main ethnic groups, Macedonians (64%) and Albanians (25%), and other smaller minorities such as the Roma (3%) who remain marginalised: poverty rates for Roma people are three times higher than the national average. Since conflict between the two main ethnic groups in 2001, political and constitutional amendments have been carried out to develop a multi-ethnic civil state, but implementation is challenging and political reform has slowed with worrying trends including the increasing segregation of education systems.

Since 2001 the country has embarked on a process of decentralisation. Implementation, however, has been a significant challenge, with uneven competencies across municipalities and many struggling to develop their capacities to deliver on their new decentralised responsibilities.

The country was granted EU candidate status in 2005 although accession negotiations have yet to open. EU accession and related pre-accession funding is an important driver of reform and priorities for the country, including in education and early learning sectors.

1.2.3 ELSR in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Preschool enrolment in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has been gradually expanding from a low base, but enrolment levels remain some of the lowest in the region:

![Figure 1: Net enrolment rates in preschool education (age 3-6)](image)

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2 TransMonEE 2014 database: [http://www.transmonee.org](http://www.transmonee.org). Figures for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro net enrolment rates are for ages 3-5 due to the age of primary education enrolment being 6.
In keeping with many of the Republics of the former Yugoslavia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has a strong tradition of state-funded support for the care and education of preschool children, although with relatively low national coverage and largely concentrated in urban areas. This service was often provided through the workplace and consisted of a full day of care in kindergartens that allowed mothers and fathers to work. Many of the institutions were well equipped for care, with facilities for children to sleep during the day and to be fed. Following the collapse of Yugoslavia, kindergartens became reliant on payments to compensate for state underfunding and low salaries, throwing up additional barriers to access for poor and marginalised groups. This legacy established expectations of kindergartens providing full day care and education. During the transition from the collapse of former systems, this legacy biased efforts towards the maintenance and restoration of the old infrastructure of kindergartens, directing much reduced budgets on a programme model that is unaffordable for widespread, equitable access at scale.³

In 2000 350 community-based Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDCs) were set up in rural areas with external funding from the World Bank and support from UNICEF as an alternative to kindergartens. Unfortunately many of them had to close due to the conflict in 2001 and to a lack of structural funding. However, 17 ECDCs survived and were supported by UNICEF and these centres have subsequently formed the nucleus of the expanding ECDC network in the country.

2005 saw the beginning of a more sustained focus on children in general and the early years in particular, with the National Strategy for the Development of Education 2005-2015 stating the urgent need for alternative forms of preschool education that could reach all children regardless of background. Particular disadvantaged groups include children from rural areas, children living in poverty, Roma children and children with disabilities. Over the past decade the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has been working towards the realisation of legislative and policy promises within the framework of ongoing decentralisation processes that have brought new institutional arrangements, structures and accountabilities.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) has responsibility for developing and monitoring the implementation of the laws, regulations and policies for the preschool system within its child protection sector (a reflection of the continuing prioritisation of care over education in the kindergarten system). The Bureau for the Development of Education (BDE) within the Ministry for Education and Science is officially responsible for developing the educational activity within preschools (such as curricula, professional development of teachers etc), whilst the municipalities are responsible for the actual delivery of preschool education at the local level (the establishment, and monitoring of institutions and the disbursement and monitoring of funds).

1.3 Theory of change for UNICEF’s work in ELSR in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

This evaluation uses a Theory of Change (TOC) approach to understand and assess the contribution of UNICEF to increasing access and equity in ELSR in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The TOC for ELSR was developed from UNICEF’s regional generic TOC that articulates UNICEF’s understanding of how outcomes for children are brought about through changes in systems at

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³ UNICEF Innocenti (2009), *Innocenti Social Monitor 2009: child well-being at a crossroads*
Evaluation methodology

national, sub-national and local levels and how UNICEF can contribute to these system changes. A schematic version of the TOC for ELSR is presented in Figure 2.

As shown on the right hand side of the TOC, at a general level, UNICEF’s ELSR programming has been focused on contributing to the progressive realisation of children’s rights on the basis that ELSR supports children’s educational achievement, school completion, children’s development and learning and ultimately to success in adulthood. Strengthening ELSR therefore contributes to children’s rights to basic education, lifelong learning and the fulfilment of their developmental potential. In order to do this, impacts are sought in three main areas of the ELSR sector: increased overall access to ELSR, reduction in the equity gaps in ELSR access and a growing focus on improving the learning outcomes from ELSR.

Moving to the left, the diagram indicates drivers (the arrows connecting the two levels) from the system changes to these impact areas. System change outcome areas are defined using UNICEF’s global Monitoring of Results for Equity Systems (MoRES) determinant analysis framework that identifies four main categories of determinants. In relation to ELSR these categories incorporate:

**Table 1: ELSR system determinants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System area</th>
<th>System determinant</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enabling environment</td>
<td>Social norms</td>
<td>The social rules and attitudes that inform how ELSR is perceived and valued, the expectations of what it should provide, the status accorded to it and to ELSR personnel, the basis on which it should be provided (state funded, fees, etc.) and who should access it (particularly around the inclusion of marginalised groups such as Roma or children with disabilities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Legislation and policy</td>
<td>The frameworks that establish the basis of ELSR provision (as a right, as a selective service, etc.), the roles, responsibilities and regulation of those managing and providing ELSR services and the commitment to inclusive, equitable services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Budget/</td>
<td>The available levels of funding, budget commitments and levels of execution,</td>
</tr>
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### Evaluation methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core role</th>
<th>Examples of activities for ELSR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expenditure</strong></td>
<td>methods for budget calculation and channels for resourcing ELSR services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Management and coordination mechanisms</strong></td>
<td>Articulation between ELSR policies, plans and implementation practices, capacities to fulfill responsibilities at all levels, coordination amongst ELSR stakeholders within and across levels (national, sub-national, local, etc.), structures/processes for and availability of ELSR data, and frameworks and capacities for monitoring and evaluating the sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supply</strong></td>
<td>How teaching and learning materials are selected and distributed to ensure quality and availability, including consideration of the needs of different groups (such as learners using a different language or with disabilities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adapted trained staff, facilities and information</strong></td>
<td>Coverage and accessibility of ELSR facilities to all children, levels of ELSR staffing, representativeness of ELSR staffing (from marginalised groups, language groups, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demand</strong></td>
<td>Financial barriers (direct and hidden costs) for parents in sending their children to ELSR services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social and cultural practices and beliefs</strong></td>
<td>Social and cultural barriers that may hinder children from specific groups attending ELSR, either through the incompatibility of ELSR services with beliefs or practices (e.g. language, child-rearing practices, gender discrimination within families in who attends ESLR) or discrimination towards these groups from majority groups or within ELSR services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timing and continued use of services</strong></td>
<td>Enrolment, attendance and drop-out according to official ages for ELSR (and the knock-on effect to age of enrolment in primary education), capacity of ELSR services to meet the needs of migrant and mobile group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality</strong></td>
<td>Standards (e.g. Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS)) and curricula, regulatory and supervisory systems for ELSR, quality of ELSR personnel training (including inclusive and child-centred pedagogical content), levels of qualified ELSR personnel available, teaching and learning practices in ELSR, quality of ELSR infrastructure (playgrounds, toilets, etc.), extent to which ELSR provides a seamless link to primary schooling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UNICEF programming activities and outputs that feed into these system changes are framed within the seven core roles of UNICEF, with gender mainstreaming and human rights based approaches cutting across all of them.

Table 2 sets out these core roles against examples of the types of activities they include in relation to ELSR programming:

### Table 2: UNICEF core roles and types of activities they relate to in ELSR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core role</th>
<th>Examples of activities for ELSR</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Being the ‘voice’ for children and adolescents</strong></td>
<td>• Advocacy, particularly for marginalised groups of children • Raising children’s issues in policy forums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ensuring monitoring and evaluation</strong></td>
<td>• Evaluations and research studies • Support to EMIS or other national monitoring of ELSR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Providing policy advice and technical assistance</strong></td>
<td>• Direct support to policy making • Technical advice to laws and regulations • Technical assistance (consultants or internal) for training and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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4 These core roles come from a UNICEF regional “consensus that…[they] are indispensable for a sustainable UNICEF engagement and its universal presence in support of results and the realization of the rights of children everywhere” – UNICEF CEE/CIS RO (2013), ‘Regional Knowledge and Leadership Agenda: generic theory of change underlying UNICEF’s approach in CEE/CIS region’, p.6
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation methodology</th>
<th>other capacity development</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leveraging resources from public and private sectors</td>
<td>• Finding resources (money or in kind)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Influencing funds towards UNICEF aims (e.g., EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) funds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating national dialogue towards norms and standards for early childhood that are child friendly and respectful of children’s rights</td>
<td>• Media events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• National forums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discussion papers and documents to stimulate dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Formulation of working groups/committees for cross-sectoral dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enabling knowledge exchange</td>
<td>• Regional or international seminars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Exchanges of personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modelling/piloting of new services to inform policy making</td>
<td>• Establishing new forms of ELSR provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Trialling curriculum or pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Providing new forms of teaching and learning materials</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The core roles are also underpinned by the capacities of the UNICEF CO in terms of the ELSR budgets available, the human resources for ELSR, the organisational and governance arrangements for ELSR programming within the CO and the UNICEF programming, monitoring and reporting processes that are in place to support programme development and implementation.

This TOC for ELSR presents the structure within which the evaluation objectives can be analysed by testing the validity of the different components and links within the TOC. As the MoRES and UNICEF core role frameworks are relatively recent developments within UNICEF, ELSR programming and analysis has not been explicitly conceptualised or framed in these terms for the majority of the evaluation period. It is important to note, therefore, that this evaluation has necessarily constructed and tested this TOC by retro-fitting UNICEF programming and ELSR system changes in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia onto the frameworks of the MoRES and UNICEF core roles.

2 Evaluation Methodology

This country evaluation for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia draws on the data and analysis gathered for the MCE on ELSR. The methodology used for the MCE is presented in detail in the MCE report volume 2, but in relation to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia involved:

Documentation review: incorporating all UNICEF documentation relating to the design and implementation of ELSR programmes (including Situational Analyses, Country Programme Documents and Action Plans, Annual Reports and Annual Work Plans, evaluation and monitoring reports, policy and advocacy publications) and country policy and legislative documents that provide the framework for national and sub-national implementation of early childhood education services. This review formed the basis for drawing up the country-specific TOC for ELSR that was discussed with each Country Office and used as the framework for the country/territory consultations.

Data review: of available national datasets of ELSR indicators (including levels of disaggregation), time and geographical range, and data collection, preparation and analysis methodologies used. The system level focus of this evaluation meant that only those datasets that could show system level impacts would be appropriate for inclusion in analysis (i.e., those that had national coverage rather than data on individual programmes or projects, unless these related to modelling initiatives).
Country consultations: A 2-week visit to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia by an international member of the evaluation team and a national consultant. This visit consisted of consultations with stakeholder groups that covered the different levels of the TOC, from UNICEF interventions to national ELSR system changes, their mediation into sub-national implementation and the actual experience of users of ELSR local services. Meetings and interviews were arranged with UNICEF staff and a range of national early childhood education stakeholders (government, funders, INGOs, NGOs, CSOs, training agencies), at three sub-national authorities responsible for preschool services, and teachers and parents (male and female) in eleven preschool facilities (see Appendix 2 for a full list of consultations). This provided a range of different perspectives and a means to triangulate reported information between stakeholders and with the document and data reviews. Given the limited time available, the sub-national and local visits were not intended to be representative of the diversity within the country, nor of the diversity in each community (it was not feasible, for example, to set up discussions with separate groups of male and female parents, different ethnic groups, parents of children with disabilities etc.). Rather, the site visits provided specific cases from which to triangulate other data collected in the evaluation and draw insights and perspectives from decentralised administrations, local ELSR providers and communities on experience of system level changes and UNICEF contributions to changes at the different levels.

This MCE-related methodology was supplemented for this specific country report by a further documentation review (including additional documentation that had become available since the MCE), going into more depth and detail on national and UNICEF ELSR documents for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia than had been possible under the MCE.

3 Limitations

The evaluation methodology and analysis was not designed specifically for an in-depth country evaluation, but rather for the MCE that was looking at UNICEF programming in terms of groups of interventions rather than individual projects and initiatives. Whilst the overall focus of this country evaluation report and the MCE are largely aligned, it should be noted that the MCE methodology limited the depth of consultation and primary data collected around individual initiatives (both UNICEF and partners) or on aspects of ELSR quality within preschool institutions (that was a secondary focus within the MCE), which might typically be expected for a country evaluation.

There are significant data limitations in the early childhood education sector because of inconsistency and limited coverage in preschool indicators, limited capacities of the data collection and analysis agencies, widespread inconsistency in the terminology and definitions, and the levels of disaggregation that are feasible or even legitimate in the data. Issues include the omission of children enrolled in early childhood development centres (ECDCs) in official preschool statistics, lack of consistency in separating out infant nurseries (for children up to 2 years old), kindergartens (for 3-6 year olds) and combined groups (for children 1-6 years old) to capture the different types of services and coverage of these modalities, and there is no disaggregation of data by rural/urban location. Where such data gaps exist, the evaluation has only been able to go as far as system level outcomes, both qualitative and quantitative, that may contribute to the reduction of equity gaps for specific groups (for example equity considerations integrated into preschool policies and legislation, funding mechanisms that recognise and support marginalised groups).
Time and logistical constraints limited the range of consultations possible; the international and national consultants were required to prioritise respondents according to their role and influence in the sector and existing information gaps, and securing timely access to some respondents (particularly those in other sectors who did not consider their role in early childhood education as significant, such as government finance staff) was not always possible. However the evaluators are confident that, within these constraints, the range of perspectives, contexts and experiences required to address the evaluation’s objectives was achieved.

In the selection of field sites in each country/territory, the evaluation team was to some degree constrained by logistical arrangements and reliant on UNICEF contacts and sub-national authorities’ and specific preschool personnel’s support to identify and arrange visits and consultations. As mentioned above, information from site visits should not (and was not intended to be) seen as representative of the sector as a whole but rather as specific examples in particular contexts.
4 Findings

4.1 Relevance (UNICEF’s overall approach to ELSR and its programming focus)

4.1.1 UNICEF’s analysis of the national context and its programmatic responses

UNICEF programming has been mediated through a strong grasp of the political, social and economic context of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. UNICEF’s programming has shown fluidity, striking a balance between planned interventions and the room for manoeuvre to follow changing political agendas. It has also, to its credit, changed approach where it has found it necessary and been adept at seizing opportunities to maximise the results of previous or current projects or models and responded to change by constantly re-assessing its technical assistance (TA) work and opportunistic advice to support governments. The frequent changes of government/ministers has been challenging, and UNICEF has invested significant time to respond to these changes and forge strong relationships with new personalities, new perspectives and new degrees of experience at the Ministerial level.

From the outset of the evaluation period, UNICEF has moved alongside, and heavily contributed to, the government’s priorities and agendas for early childhood development. UNICEF aligned its programming with government five year planning cycles to ensure that they could engage fully with government agendas and priorities. As a result UNICEF has been able to strengthen its programming in ELSR by its close links to national objectives: the expansion of ELSR being included as one of five priorities in its Country Programme Action Plan (2005-2009) reflects the emphasis placed on the expansion of the preschool sector in the National Strategy for the Development of Education 2005-2015.

A particularly strong political drive in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is accession to the EU. UNICEF has worked effectively with this agenda to bring social policy to the forefront of EU pre-accession talks and thence to the focus on ELSR in the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) funds, for which UNICEF is the soft implementer. In the process it brought a focus to broad child rights agendas and uncovered deeper systemic issues that needed attention.

UNICEF has demonstrated a robust understanding of many of the systemic issues involved in the significant changes to the preschool sector that the objectives of both the government and UNICEF require. It has been strategic in both its analysis and programming, with multiple, intersecting initiatives simultaneously to gradually address different system determinants and build a strong foundation for the expansion of the sector. Its approach has been flexible yet systematic, working in a participatory manner to develop policy and review legislation, to facilitate dialogue around equitable financing and to establish the ELDs as a coherent framework for quality ELSR, while at the same time supporting pilots to provide evidence for changes and to demonstrate the feasibility of alternative provision. This has helped to build up the ‘framing’ aspects of the sector (political will, regulatory frameworks, and financing), although systematic investigation of the gaps in the implementation and enforcement of these frameworks and of decentralised capacities has only started more recently.
4.1.2 Analysis and programmatic responses to marginalisation and equity in preschool access

With low national preschool enrolment rates there are commonly identified broad categories of children excluded from services such as the rural poor, Roma children and children with disabilities. UNICEF has carried out a number of studies around these groups (or is planning to in the case of children with disabilities through recently secured IPA funding), such as the Roma Early Childhood Inclusion Report (RECI) or Fair Play\textsuperscript{5} that have examined the broad causes or contributors to marginalisation such as systemic issues in financing. These studies have helped to inform UNICEF programming and to make visible and bring into focus factors that can help to change perspectives towards inclusion of these groups into mainstream ELSR provision.

There has been a tendency, given the high levels of exclusion from preschool, to analyse it only at the level of these broad categories, over-simplifying the root causes of marginalisation that hampers in-depth investigation of barriers to access for the most marginalised. A more nuanced recognition of the diversity within these groups, and of the intersections and complex effects of multiple factors of marginalisation, has been emerging within UNICEF analysis across the evaluation period, but is still limited for some groups (children living in poor urban areas, migrants, Roma street children, children vulnerable to abuse, orphans and children in institutional care).

The constraining social norms that contribute to marginalisation have been an area of growing analysis in regards to prejudice towards children with disabilities and different ethnicities, with supporting data and evidence collected by UNICEF – most recently in a Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices survey amongst preschool educators, parents and children (KAP).\textsuperscript{6} However, discrimination and constraining social norms within communities remain broadly described. Further development of the work in this area will be important and will require strategic partnerships with local leaders as well as work with the ELDS curriculum and pre-service and in-service training for educators.

A significant challenge is community education where more systematic work is required to ensure communities see themselves as their children’s first and, in the earliest years (0-3), best educators to start bridging the developmental gaps between different groups of children. Part of this challenge is the compartmentalisation of UNICEF’s internal organisation that hinders the type of cross-sectoral working required to bring forward coordinated messages covering different aspects of early childhood development (education, health, child and social protection).

The limitations of the broad categories of marginalisation that have been used are reflected in the programmatic response to marginalised groups’ needs. Access has been a paramount concern but ways to address specific needs of children have been less apparent. For example, there has been limited response to: the need for sufficient language expertise to help children who do not speak the national language; services to deal with emotional needs (and not just the physical needs) of children with special needs or those left behind when their parents emigrate; representation or role models for children with disabilities in their preschool experience; services that enable children with disabilities to function as independently as possible; and diversity and representation within preschool materials (for example, dolls in all clothing from different groups, pictures depicting all types of homes and men and women in different roles, decoration/patterns and folk stories from all


\textsuperscript{6} UNICEF (2014), Mainstreaming respect for diversity and multiculturalism in early childhood development
cultures etc.). UNICEF is starting to build the knowledge base around these issues: how this is translated into programming will be critical to addressing the needs of the most marginalised children.

4.1.3 Human rights

Within UNICEF documentation, HRBA is a strong driver for programming as reflected in its focal areas such as equitable budgeting and legislative and policy frameworks that recognise the importance of preschool access for all children. In EU accession dialogue UNICEF has been at the forefront of bringing children’s rights and social policy to the top of the agenda. This constitutes a huge achievement given that, in 2005, young children’s voices and rights were not a focus of government action. The language of child rights now informs the MLSP’s work. However it still needs to percolate to the municipality levels where responsibility for ELSR provision has been devolved.

UNICEF has been strategic in the way it has sought to uncover systemic barriers to children’s rights. The studies it has commissioned have highlighted the inherent inequities in the enabling environment for ELSR, providing a basis from which to question and challenge how children are seen within these system (as dependent, vulnerable and to be spoken “for” rather than “to”, to be led rather than nurtured to grow, to be made responsive to the demands of adults rather than autonomous in learning through play).

Common shortcomings in the analysis of duty bearers have been teachers’ attitudes and behaviours towards multiple factors of exclusion and to early learning and development. It is important to note that UNICEF is now responding to this issue through an increased focus on its work around teacher training and through studies such as the KAP survey.

The voice of children has been relatively limited, in terms of their participation in the teaching and learning process as well as the design, monitoring and evaluation of preschool initiatives, although the voices of communities have been heard through community-based models with involvement in planning and programming of local ELSR services. This is also a growing area of UNICEF attention with studies such as the RECI report and the KAP report enabling marginalised groups and children themselves to voice their perspectives, needs and issues in decision-making circles, and generate explanatory narratives to challenge the popular but misguided stereotypes both within government circles, professional educators and the community.

4.1.4 Gender, employment and childcare

Gender analysis within preschool access is generally limited to national gender parity rates, and therefore overlooks some important multiple exclusion factors that make girls from specific groups amongst the most vulnerable children (see impact section below). There are additional concerns about the gender imbalance in the ELSR workforce. UNICEF is not actively advocating for an increased proportion of men working in ELSR to contribute to attitudinal change towards gender equality, to reduce gender segregation in the labour market and the feminisation of the preschool teaching force, and to provide positive role models of both sexes for young children (an underpinning principle of European provision). Parenting education has been important in this regard, with the inclusion of father’s and male carers in the parenting programming of UNICEF. However, recent data from the KAP survey has shown a high level of gender stereotyping within ELSR provision in terms of children’s play and use of toys.
There are complex issues surrounding the wider rights and equality of women (particularly in relation to their rights to access the labour market) in the UNICEF’s approach to separating care from education in preschool services. This approach has been practical given the dominance of traditional state-funded care-driven kindergarten provision, the cost of these services and the imbalance that this has caused in resource allocation to full-day provision, which is mainly serving the wealthy. However, separating care services and focussing only on educational preschool services does have implications for rights. CEDAW states in Article 11 that in order to prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of maternity and to ensure their effective right to work, State Parties shall encourage “the provision of the necessary supporting social services to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and participation in public life, in particular through promoting the establishment and development of a network of childcare facilities”. The General Comment No.7 of the CRC and the stated EU and OECD policies also emphasise the importance of integrated care and education services, particularly for low-income and migrant families as a key equality and equity issue, as well as an economic issue in expanding the productive labour market through facilitating the entry of mothers into paid employment. There are indications of some of these issues being taken up in the young child-wellbeing programming and social policy programming of UNICEF but not consistently, and there is no agreed internal position or strategy that would enable a coordinated and coherent approach to the interconnected issues of care and education across UNICEF programming.

4.1.5 ELSR approach within the wider early childhood development context

UNICEF’s division of programming in early childhood development into three separate areas (0-3 year olds, 3-6 year olds and 6-8 year olds) has resulted in some loss of coherence across the full 0-8 early childhood period. Differences in focus and approaches across these three areas has meant that continuity of services and gains made in one area are at risk of being lost as children move from home-based early childhood programming (0-3 year olds) to preschools (3-5): for example, parents extending their care role for children aged 0-3 towards that of informal educators throughout the 0-6 period and on to primary education (6-8). However, the strongly participatory development of the ELDS (which span the years 0-6) has provided a coherent framework that spans these programmatic divisions (including transition to primary education) as well as providing the basis for coherence between different forms of ELSR provision (kindergartens, ECDCs etc.). Ongoing UNICEF support to the implementation of the ELDS in preschools is important to translate this framework into practice, and similar attention will be needed to realise the continuity of focus across sectors.

With respect to transition into primary schools, further work is required to get primary schools ready to receive children from the kindergartens and ECDCs. This will become increasingly important as the most marginalised children, who are the most vulnerable to discontinuities in support services, are reached by the ELSR system.
4.2 Impact

4.2.1 Access to preschool education

National enrolment: Preschool enrolment for 3-5 year olds has shown an upward trend from 21.8% to 29.1% over the period 2007-2013 (see Figure 3). Care needs to be taken with enrolment figures across the evaluation period due to changes in preschool and primary age ranges and how these are captured in the official data. In 2005-2006 preschool provision covered the ages 3-6 with the majority of enrolled 6 year olds in a ‘grade zero’ pre-primary preparatory programme (captured in primary education statistics). In 2007, however, this ‘grade zero’ was converted into the first grade of primary education, and so preschool provision officially covers up to the age of 5 with 6 year olds entering primary education. This accounts for the drop in preschool net enrolment rates from 2006 (which includes 6 year olds) to 2007 (only 3-5 year olds) in Figure 3.

A further important caveat on these official figures is that they do not include the UNICEF-supported Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDCs) that provide ELSR services in rural locations for 3-5 year olds (current work is underway to address this). There were 20 of these ECDCs with a reported enrolment of 1,478 children in 2012, which, if included in the national statistics given in Figure 3, would increase the enrolment rates for that year from 27.5% to 29.6%.

National preschool systems have thus succeeded in expanding access to ELSR over the evaluation period but from a low base, and enrolment figures to 2013 remain under 30%. These national figures obscure a range of disparities in who is accessing these preschool services and benefiting from their expansion. In a number of cases these equity gaps have increased over the evaluation period:

Gender: As indicated in Figure 4, gender disparity in kindergarten enrolment has been in favour of girls with a consistently higher gross enrolment rate of girls than boys. As mentioned below, however, there are indications of gender intersecting with ethnicity to prevent girls from certain groups attending preschool services.

Urban/Rural: National statistics are not disaggregated by...
Findings

rural or urban location. However, MICS data on preschool attendance of 3-4 year olds indicates that attendance has increased in both rural and urban areas, but that the rate of increase in urban areas has been significantly higher than that in rural areas, widening the equity gap (Figure 5).10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 5: Rural/urban rates of preschool attendance for 3-4 year olds11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ![Graph showing rural and urban preschool attendance rates for 3-4 year olds from 2005 to 2011.](image)

Sub-national regions: Figure 6 shows that access across the country is highly uneven with the lowest enrolment rate (for 3-4 year olds) in the Polog region of only 6% and the highest enrolment rate of 43% in the Eastern region in 2013. The gap between Eastern and other regions has also increased slightly over the period, indicating a growing equity gap.

Ethnicity: There are also distinct inequities in the access of different ethnic groups to preschool. MICS data from 2011 shows significant variance in the preschool attendance rates of 3-4 year olds from Macedonian (36.5%), Albanian (2.9%) and Roma (3.9%) communities (Figure 7). Roma specific data from MICS also shows that this ethnic disparity intersects with gender as the attendance rates of Roma girls (1.1%) lags behind that of Roma boys (6.5%).15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 7: Preschool attendance of 3-4 year olds by ethnicity, 201113</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ![Graph showing preschool attendance by ethnicity for 3-4 year olds in 2011.](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 8: Preschool attendance (3-4 year olds) by wealth quintiles14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ![Graph showing preschool attendance by wealth quintiles for 3-4 year olds from 2005 to 2011.](image)

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10 It is important to note the difference between enrolment figures from national statistics, and attendance in the MICS figures, as well as the fact that 5 year olds (who make up the highest proportion of preschool enrolled children) are not included in MICS data for this indicator.


12 Calculated from NER in preschool for ages 3-4 in SSO, Public Institution for Children Care and Education (annual reports for 2007-2013), and Estimations of the Population (annual reports for 2007-2013). Population data is not disaggregated by individual years and regions, so only the category 3-4 years could be used.


14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.
**Findings**

**Poverty:** The only source of data on poverty also comes from MICS (Figure 8), which shows that the preschool attendance of children from the wealthiest sections of the population has accelerated away from the poorest between 2005 and 2011.  

**Disability:** The number of children with disabilities enrolled in kindergartens has increased over the period but remains very low (under 100). Further data on these children (for example on the type of disabilities involved) is lacking.

### 4.2.2 Changes in children’s lives and rights

As the phrase suggests, ELSR objectives include preparing children for timely entry into primary education and improving learning outcomes from education in the longer term, thus realising children’s rights to education and the fulfilment of their developmental potential. MICS provides data on the proportion of children attending grade 1 with preschool experience in 2005 (before the ‘grade zero’ year was incorporated as grade 1 of primary education) and 2011. This dropped from 75.7% in 2005 to 40% in 2011, demonstrating the age imbalance in preschool enrolment created by a focus on pre-primary programmes.

Uniquely in the region, there is also data from an important UNICEF-commissioned study on children’s outcomes from different forms of preschool provision. This study tested children in three developmental domains, based on the ELDS, drawing samples from four groups: children attending ECDCs and kindergartens where UNICEF has supported the implementation of the ELDS over the past four years, children attending kindergartens not involved in the project, and children who have not attended any form of preschool provision. The results show the highest outcomes in all three developmental domains for children attending ECDCs, only a minor difference between project and non-project kindergartens, and all preschool provision resulting in much higher outcomes than for children not attending any provision (Table 3). Importantly, therefore, this study presents solid evidence of the importance of preschool for children’s outcomes, of the efficacy of the more flexible, education-driven ECDCs and of the ELDS for quality provision (as the study also reports higher levels of ELDS implementation in the ECDCs than in the project kindergartens). It therefore provides useful evidence from which to drive future expansion of quality preschool provision.

**Table 3: Children’s outcomes from UNICEF outcomes study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ECDCs</th>
<th>Project kindergartens</th>
<th>Non-project kindergartens</th>
<th>Not attending any preschool institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall score</td>
<td>86.87%</td>
<td>79.76%</td>
<td>78.83%</td>
<td>57.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scores by developmental domains</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language, communication and literacy development</td>
<td>85.34%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>76.49%</td>
<td>57.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-emotional development</td>
<td>91.88%</td>
<td>86.11%</td>
<td>84.20%</td>
<td>63.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive development</td>
<td>85.40%</td>
<td>78.32%</td>
<td>77.61%</td>
<td>53.74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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16 SSO, Public Institution for Children Care and Education- Kindergartens (annual reports for 2007-2013)
17 The top three quintiles increased between the MICS3 and 4 with significance (p<0.05)
20 Unfortunately the full potential of the data to identify equity effects of the different types of provision have not been realised in the study due to inconsistencies and omissions in the comparative analysis of children’s characteristics across the four groups.
Anecdotal evidence from the evaluation supports the positive impacts of any preschool provision on children. Parents and preschool and primary teachers noted the social, emotional and cognitive benefits whether children were attending kindergartens or ECDCs. These included children’s increased interest in play-centred learning activities, their increased ability to focus on tasks and adapt to primary school classroom environments and their recognition of letters, shapes, counting etc. The benefits of socialisation, increased confidence and politeness were stressed by many parents (particularly amongst Roma parents) as an important aspect of preschool attendance for their children, as was the development of Macedonian language (again amongst Roma parents). Improvements in the health and hygiene practices of children were also noted by parents and some local health authorities. However, there is also some anecdotal evidence of the mismatch between methodologies used in ESLR and at primary school that can present difficulties for transition and erode advances made, for example the prevailing relationships between pupils at primary schools were reportedly inconsistent in some cases with the approaches children had learnt in the MOSAIC programme at preschool to promote diversity.

The introduction of the ELDS has been important in helping to smooth transition to primary school and has resulted in better tracking of individual children’s abilities and challenges. This has enabled programmes to be tailored to meet the needs of children as well as giving primary schools a better profile of individual children on entry. Children can therefore receive more appropriate development support and be ‘readier’ for school, whilst schools are also ‘readier’ for the children.

4.3 Effectiveness of system changes for equitable preschool provision

4.3.1 Changes in system determinants

Enabling environment

Social norms

Social norms around ELSR are changing both at systems and community level but further work is needed to embed the changes widely and deeply. There is a general change in perceptions around the importance of education in ELSR services and recognition of the benefits of holistic early childhood development (driven by the process of developing and implementing the ELDS) at government, educator and community level. There is a heavy demand for available spaces at ECDCs in rural areas in particular and, in some instances, rotation of preschool classes for the children within a community has been instituted, with children sometimes receiving only a few hours (three or four) of preschool time each week. This attests to the growing realisation of the importance of preschool education, especially as centres do not offer feeding or care.

A strong social norm remains, however, around the expectation of integrated care and education services, reflected in the continued dominance of that form of provision in the sector. Figure 10 shows that across the evaluation period over 90% of children enrolled in kindergartens and infant nurseries (the data does not disaggregate them) have attended for over 7 hours a day. Figure 11 also shows that a consistent 70% of enrolled preschool children have both parents employed, indicating the importance of the childcare aspects of the existing preschool provision. The ECDC centres (which provide 3 hour programmes) are not factored into this, but their coverage to date is relatively limited at a national scale and so would not change the relative proportions by more than a few percentage points. However, the legislative recognition of ECDCs in the 2013 amendment to the Law
on Child Protection holds the potential for an expansion of ECDCs, which may influence expectations over time.

Child rights and equity in ELSR provision are percolating through government at national levels, evidenced by the language used in documents and in the effort to distribute resources more equitably as well as to reach the most marginalised children and communities. However, a ‘project funding’ mentality with respect to some marginalised populations, in particular the Roma, persists. The funding from the Decade of Roma Inclusion which began in 2005, has unwittingly encouraged a project-based approach to their inclusion in ELSR with consequent sustainability concerns beyond the end of this funding.

Similar issues around the norms of inclusion exist around children with disabilities. Government funding mechanisms encourage kindergartens to include children with disabilities but some segregation of activities is still in place. Kindergartens lobby for ‘special units’, or call for specialists above and beyond what is required, for instance, for sign language learning, in the name of inclusion. However, this has resulted in what is effectively a parallel teaching system but one which attracts better funding for the kindergarten itself.

Challenges also remain in shifting away from the medical mind-set in relation to disabilities and in understanding the gains to all children from the presence of children with disabilities, beyond the value of tolerance. The language of rights and the attitude of respect for, and recognition of the positive aspects of, diversity and multiculturalism needs further development at the delivery end of the ELSR system.

Within the Roma community, the value and attraction of ELSR often lies in enabling their children to learn Macedonian (and hence gain access to the rest of the school system). It was observed in a number of cases that ECDCs are used by the Roma community as community centres, which welcome mothers and grandmothers as well as older children (who come in to get help with homework); no such development was observed in the kindergartens although grand parents are sometimes welcomed as storytellers to the children. Parental involvement in organised preschool provision is generally limited and often confined to financial contributions. UNICEF could position the Roma engagement in some ECDCs as a model for other parents to emulate as well as encourage a system of teaching assistants, who are drawn from the community.

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21 SSO, Public Institution for Children Care and Education (annual reports for 2007-2013). This data is not disaggregated by age in these reports, so includes all children from 0-7 years old and infant nurseries as well as kindergartens.

22 Ibid
Legislation and policy

Very significant changes have occurred over the period of the evaluation that have pushed forward the ELSR sector and established an equitable basis for future development. From an absence of a focus on children’s voices in 2005, the country is now committed to, and beginning to implement, a coherent ELSR system underpinned by sound policies, legislative frameworks and standards.

Since the National Strategy for the Development of Education 2005-2015 recognised the need for the large scale expansion of early childhood education and a focus on marginalised groups, legislative development has been ongoing. This has culminated in the 2013 amendment of the Law on Child Protection that recognises alternative forms of provision (based on UNICEF piloting of ECDCs), a focus on holistic development (based on the ELDS), mechanisms for quality and inclusion, and equitable funding approaches. Twenty seven sub-laws have been developed, covering many of the details of the ELSR system. These legislative changes (supported by significant technical assistance, policy advice and evidence gathering by UNICEF) represent a significant milestone for the development of sustainable and equitable ELSR provision in the country.

An important element in this legislative development has been the UNICEF-supported ECD policy development. From 2007 a participatory approach, with multiple stakeholders, was used to develop policy drafts. This process assisted in the development of knowledge, perspectives, dialogue, and understanding of approaches across different sectors for early childhood development and fed in substantially to the legislative developments that continued the participatory approach through working groups and national consultations.

Alongside, and feeding into, these legislative and policy processes has been the UNICEF-supported development and implementation of the ELDS. The process of drafting and validating these standards, and the final standards themselves, have contributed to a broader and more holistic understanding of school readiness amongst stakeholders, encompassing socialisation skills; hygiene and health; communication and expression; behaviours; approaches to learning; and cognitive skills. The ELDS have been in place since 2009, and have supported the integration of quality considerations into discussions around the expansion of provision and legislative change. The participatory development and pilot implementation of the ELDS have also firmly established them as a framework for quality in ELSR across teacher training, monitoring of child outcomes and transition to primary education, among other ELSR processes. This has been further embedded through the 2013 amendment to the Law on Child Protection that recognises the ELDS as the basis for ELSR programming and quality outcomes for all children.

Integrated and coherent frameworks for ELSR operations and quality have thus been put in place. There are also emerging models and good practices, through UNICEF pilots, of how these can be implemented at local levels. The translation of these frameworks into practice at a national scale, through decentralised structures, is, however a challenging process because of inadequate and uneven capacities and resources at decentralised levels (see below): this will need significant support to realise the full potential of the frameworks.

In addition further attention will be required to develop policies and legislative frameworks that address more fully the articulation between 0-3, 3-6 and primary education services, and that link ELSR expansion with social safety nets, social protection measures and child protection systems that support the poorest or most disadvantaged children.
Budget

Data are not available to separate specific preschool budget allocations and expenditures from broader MLSP budgets, so it is not possible to examine trends over the evaluation period.

There has been significant work in recent years (largely supported by UNICEF) around budget allocations and financial analysis for the preschool sector. ELSR budgetary responsibility has been decentralised to municipalities, with national budget allocation and disbursement mechanisms through block grants. These are calculated (within the basic parameter of the approved funds within the MLSP budget) per kindergarten on numbers of children enrolled and the utilised capacity of the kindergarten, and are mainly intended to cover the costs of salaries and part of current expenditures (largely heating). However, this basis for calculation overlooks critical factors such as kindergarten location, the type of services provided or the actual population of preschool-aged children in each municipality.\(^{23}\) With kindergartens only available in 44 of the country’s 80 municipalities, nearly half of the country’s municipalities do not receive any grant amounts for preschool education, whilst for the existing kindergartens there is no calculation about the actual costs of provision (full-day, half-day, nutrition, care etc.).

It has been increasingly recognised in recent years that this system of funding serves to exacerbate existing inequities in the system. Substantial work is now going into addressing the perverse incentives and inequitable allocation that these formulas produce to make them, in the words of one MLSP staff member, ‘more equitable, more rational and more efficient’ (this language in itself reflects the gains made in Ministry perspectives in these areas). EU requirements have been a major catalyst in this respect, but UNICEF has provided substantial support to clarifying and analysing the actual costs involved with the *Fair Play* estimating that actual daily costs of full-day kindergarten provision are up to four times higher than the fees charged to parents, indicating very high levels of state subsidy for those attending such provision (who tend to be wealthier). The efficiency and equity issues involved in the current block grants system have been examined through a detailed functional analysis in 2012.\(^{24}\) A further detailed financing study in 2013 (also UNICEF-supported) proposes a fundamental adjustment to the system of financing preschool institutions (including ECDCs now legally recognised alongside kindergartens) that focuses state funding on the educational elements of preschool with parents (and other sources) supporting costs of services beyond a core educational programme, using calculations based on realistic costs and their distribution per age group and per programme. Using this system the financing study proposes a model that projects full inclusion of 4-6 year olds in ELSR by 2023 through an increase of the MLSP’s budget by 22%.\(^{25}\)

Dialogue is ongoing about the financial implications and arrangements for such changes but the studies and the dialogue represent progress in understanding and seeking to address systemic equity issues in ELSR financing and the potential for substantial expansion of the sector in the future.

The capacities of municipalities to finance ELSR from municipal funds has also been challenging since the start of the decentralisation process. It will also become increasingly important should the proposed financial model be taken up as municipalities will be responsible for managing parental

\(^{23}\) UNICEF and MLSP (2013), *Functional analysis of the system for care and education of preschool children, in the Republic of Macedonia*

\(^{24}\) Ibid. This study was itself a follow-up to UNICEF’s *Fair Play* report that set out the broad principles for expanding ELSR coverage in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

\(^{25}\) UNICEF and MLSP (2013), *Formula for financing the system for care and education of preschool children, in the Republic of Macedonia, and plan to gradually increase the inclusion of the children with ECD programmes.* This report states the increase in budget is 18%, however this calculation is incorrect as it is based on the increase as a percentage of the final 2023 budget rather than as a percentage of the original 2011 budget.
contributions as well as increasing their own allocations to support preschool services (largely around care aspects). Some support has been provided to selected municipalities by UNICEF in planning and budgeting for ELSR coverage, but further work on this will be a critical factor in future plans for national expansion of the sector.

More broadly, analysis of cash transfers to poor/vulnerable families has also been undertaken as part of a wider World Bank analysis on social safety nets. This work has the potential to contribute to more equitable as well as wider access to ELSR in a broader addressing of poverty, or more directly if cross-sectoral links can be strengthened between social protection and ELSR.

Management and coordination

National coordination around ELSR has developed substantially over the evaluation period with inter-sectoral working groups around the ECD policy development, legislative amendments and the development and validation of the ELDS developing links and common frameworks of analysis and understanding on ELSR. These processes have incorporated multiple stakeholders, including work between the MLSP and the BDE, teacher training institutions, preschool institutions and development partners.

However, structural arrangements for the management of the sector continue to raise challenges, with the MLSP having responsibility for early childhood development under its child protection mandate, whilst the BDE is responsible to develop the educational content and quality of ELSR but has limited capacity to do so. These arrangements reflect the legacy of the care-driven kindergarten system, but complicate the management and coordination of the sector as quality educational preschool services have become the focus. Whilst communication and cooperation between the MLSP and the BDE has been stimulated through the legislative and ELDS processes, the underlying issues of divided responsibilities and varying capacities remain. UNICEF’s functional analysis of the preschool sector has been important in raising these issues and setting out clearly the differing roles, responsibilities, accountabilities and capacities of the various actors within the sector.

A critical layer for sectoral management lies at the municipality level. The decentralisation process began in 2005 and has faced a constant challenge in the weak and uneven capacities of municipalities to deliver on their new responsibilities. As a result, the implementation of national frameworks for preschool education (including their translation into local legislation and practice) at the decentralised level tends to depend on the priorities and capacities of specific staff members within municipalities and local (mayoral) political commitment to early childhood education. Innovation and initiative-taking within municipalities to expand ELSR coverage has thus been very uneven and there are significant risks around the politicisation of preschool services, for example catering to the childcare needs of employed voters, leading to a reluctance in some cases to engage with non-traditional forms of provision.

There has been some attention more recently to addressing some of the capacity issues at decentralised levels. UNICEF has been working to develop capacity in selected municipalities, providing advocacy around the importance of ELSR, supporting municipalities to carry out local mapping and action plans for ELSR, and encouraging them to diversify provision to include ECDCs and other forms of alternative preschool services. This has included peer support between municipalities where initial managers of pilot ECDCs have acted as ‘satellites’ to train a further five municipalities in their establishment and management. This bears witness to the progress made in this difficult but crucial area, but there is still a large variance across the country in management and
innovative capacity, transparency and strategic (rather than short-term programmatic) approaches. UNICEF’s continued focus on capacity development includes establishing transparency of operations, and more work will be needed in this area to develop a stronger culture of local accountability as well as transparency. This, it is recognised, is a long-term goal.

In regard to financial management, encouraging work (supported by UNICEF) has been carried out to shift disbursement practices so that municipalities are more accountable but also have more flexibility to fund-raise for ELSR in their localities. In some municipalities there is a more democratic process of engagement with citizens that lends credibility and trust to the work at hand.

Significant progress has been achieved in relation to inspection and supervision in the sector. The ELDS have now been established as the basis for quality assurance, including the inspection framework, professional development and licensing of teachers (every five years). This represents substantial progress from a situation in which coherent inspection and supervision had largely fallen through the cracks of ministerial and decentralised responsibilities. Implementation of the new quality assurance frameworks will be an ongoing challenge given the capacities and systems of sharing data across responsible institutions, but their development will provide an important contribution to shifting the status and professionalization of the ELSR workforce.

Important and useful data on ELSR are provided through annual reports of the SSO, and have developed over the evaluation period to incorporate new elements such as private sector provision. As noted in section 4.3 above, however, there are some challenges in the collection and analysis of this data, including the incorporation of ECDCs and the identification of marginalised groups for ELSR planning and management. Significant inputs are now being made within MLSP to establish a management information system for ECD that will address these issues and provide detailed disaggregated data for the development of evidence-based planning and management of the sector. Care will need to be taken to ensure that this new system takes into account and can articulate with the existing data collection and reporting of the SSO on kindergartens to avoid the duplication and confusion that can arise between parallel data collection systems and responsibilities.

Supply

Availability of essential commodities

Official data on the provision of teaching and learning materials, toys, furniture and other preschool materials are not available, and with the decentralisation of the preschool sector, supply of such items often depends on the municipalities or on irregular one-off supplies accompanying larger national projects. Learning materials reflecting the ELDS have been developed and ELDS tools for tracking children’s progress, planning activities and creating children’s profiles are already in use in ECDCs and pilot kindergartens with UNICEF support. The ELDS has provided a common quality framework from which to develop appropriate materials.

Evidence from the UNICEF’s KAP survey indicates that there is a specific need for expanding and developing the teaching and learning materials to promote multi-culturalism and diversity and challenge traditional gendered roles and expectations. Little work has been done on these aspects, and materials in multiple languages (particularly those of marginalised communities) are limited.

26 UNICEF and MLSP (2013). Functional analysis of the system for care and education of preschool children, in the Republic of Macedonia
Findings

There remains some discrepancy in resourcing and infrastructure between kindergartens and alternative provision: there is an expectation of ‘properly’ resourced and equipped preschool provision that is still informed by state kindergartens, with new types of provision seen as ‘poor relations’. However, UNICEF-supported dialogue around changes in financing, and the engagement with kindergartens around the implementation of the ELDS are opening pathways to addressing these issues.

Access to services

There has been a gradual expansion of preschool facilities over the evaluation period, with a total of 59 kindergartens operating through 207 buildings in 2013, up from 51 kindergartens and 185 buildings in 2006. These facilities were located in only 44 of the country’s 80 municipalities in 2013 (up from 40 municipalities in 2006), and, even when used at full capacity, it is estimated that the infrastructure available in 2011 would only enable coverage of 24% of the total national 0-6 year old population. These facilities are strongly concentrated in Skopje (Figure 12) and in urban areas (Table 4), leaving much of the country without physical access to preschool facilities.

There has been little change over the period in regard to the dominance of Macedonian language kindergartens (responsible for 94.3% of enrolment in 2005 and 93.4% in 2013), with the remainder consisting of Albanian (4.59% of enrolment up to 5.11%), Turkish (0.49% to 0.3%) and other language (0.58% to 1.2%) kindergartens, reflecting the ethnic imbalance in enrolment.

Data from the SSO (only available for 2012-13) also indicates that the capacity of existing facilities has been stretched, with only the south western region having spare capacity in 2013 and national capacity (capacity of facilities/number of children enrolled) exceeded by 16% (Table 5). This data also records an increasing number of children turned away from preschools due to insufficient capacity (1,467 children, mainly in Skopje, in 2013), and in some instances the evaluators noted the pressure on spaces having led to the rotation of preschool classes amongst a community with children receiving few hours of preschool time each week. Analysis in the MLSP and UNICEF

Figure 12: Percentage of kindergarten buildings by regional location

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Skopje</th>
<th>East</th>
<th>Southeast</th>
<th>Pelagonia</th>
<th>Vardar</th>
<th>Southwest</th>
<th>Polog</th>
<th>Northeast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Percentage of kindergarten buildings by rural and urban locations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

27 SSO, Public Institution for Children Care and Education (annual reports for 2007-2013).
28 MLSP and UNICEF (2013), Functional analysis of the system for care and education of preschool children, in the Republic of Macedonia. The ECDCs provide a small amount of coverage in a handful of other municipalities.
29 SSO, Public Institution for Children Care and Education (annual reports for 2007-2013).
30 Data from survey of kindergartens undertaken for Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and UNICEF (2013), ‘Functional analysis of the system for care and education of preschool children, in the Republic of Macedonia’. According to this data, “other premises” consist largely of schools in rural environments that carry out care and education for preschool children.
31 SSO (2014), Public Institution for Children Care and Education – Kindergartens 2013
Findings

functional analysis for 2009-2011 presents a slightly different picture in regards to capacity with 85.11% of kindergarten capacity utilised in 2008, rising to 92.11% in 2011.\textsuperscript{32} Even with this higher calculation of available capacity, it is clear that the existing infrastructure is inadequate to provide large-scale national access to preschool services.

**Table 5: Used capacity of preschool facilities by region\textsuperscript{33}**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Percentage of preschool capacity used according to SSO data (capacity of kindergartens/number of children enrolled)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>107%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North eastern</td>
<td>127%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pelagonia</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polog</td>
<td>136%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skopje</td>
<td>117%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South eastern</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South western</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vardar</td>
<td>109%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National total</strong></td>
<td><strong>111%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, there is evidence of a growing response to this issue. Official data in 2012-13 captured a small, but rapidly growing, private sector with 3 private kindergartens enrolling 83 children in 2012, rising to 4 kindergartens and 202 children in 2013, and recent data from the MLSP recording a total of 16 private kindergartens enrolling 833 children. A range of more flexible forms of preschool provision have also been developed (supported by UNICEF), including the ECDCs, community-based centres and mobile bus preschools. Given that these are more easily set up and run models, offering flexibility in terms of location, hours and financial accessibility (kindergartens would take longer to establish and equip), they can potentially serve communities’ needs better and will help to extend provision in rural and more inaccessible areas.

The recognition of ECDCs as equivalent to kindergartens in the amendment to the Law on Child Protection is an important breakthrough in regard to expanding the ECDC network and early indications since the legal amendment are that this will produce a spurt of growth in ECDC institutions. The dialogue around financing models for preschool provision will also encourage the establishment of more financially viable provision to expand coverage, and there is a growing recognition that the type of provision involves different services (care, education, meals etc.) and, inevitably, different costs. However, as mentioned previously, large-scale expansion will rely on municipalities being oriented to the development of more than one ELSR model. There is still a tendency to see a dichotomy between kindergartens and ECDCs, limiting the location of the centres as well as the flexibility of the various models on offer. UNICEF’s study on child preschool outcomes is an important evidence basis from which to allay concerns around the different impacts of such diversity of provision on children, ensuring that ECDCs are recognised as providing as good, or even better, preparation for school readiness as do kindergartens.

A critical factor in the access to adequately staffed preschool facilities is the availability and quality of preschool staff in the country. The moderate expansion of preschool enrolment over the evaluation period has been matched by an expansion of the workforce (with a roughly even split

\textsuperscript{32}UNICEF and MLSP (2013), *Functional analysis of the system for care and education of preschool children, in the Republic of Macedonia*. These calculations are based on the study’s own surveys of enrolment data from kindergartens and relates only to 0-6 year olds, resulting in a different starting figure for enrolment and capacity to those in the SSO reports.

\textsuperscript{33} Calculated from SSO, *Public Institution for Children Care and Education* (annual reports for 2012-2013)
between nursing and teaching staff across the period – Figure 13). This workforce is overwhelmingly female (above 99% from 2007-2013) and Macedonian (93% of the workforce in 2007 to 90% in 2013), although there has been a small rise in the proportion of Albanian and Roma kindergarten staff (4.13% to 6.66%, and 0.07% to 0.63% respectively – the 2013 figures equate to only 127 Albanian staff and 6 Roma staff).

![Figure 13: Numbers of kindergarten staff](image)

**Figure 13: Numbers of kindergarten staff**

![Figure 14: Percentage of kindergarten staff according to their levels of education](image)

**Figure 14: Percentage of kindergarten staff according to their levels of education**

Nearly half of the workforce (48% in 2013) has only received secondary level education, with a slight increase in this proportion over the evaluation period. The proportion of university educated staff has also increased, and more significantly, from 24% in 2007 to 36% in 2013 (Figure 14). However the relevance of this education to the preschool sector is not clear: in sites observed by the evaluators a lack of employment in their own fields found lawyers engaged in teaching or being head teachers in kindergartens and ECDCs. It was also reported that ECD at university level is a recognised way of acquiring an ‘easy’ degree, allowing graduates to move on to, or move up in, other professions. There is a general concern over the low levels of ELSR-related qualifications amongst the ELSR workforce, and the systems of career structures, pre- and in-service training, status of the profession, inspection and supervision have been weak, particularly in comparison to the workforce in other levels of education.

This issue has been increasingly recognised in recent years and is becoming a focus for interventions. UNICEF’s recommendation for the adoption of teacher licensing every five years, based on the ELDS, has been incorporated into the amendment of the Law on Child Protection, and whilst contentious (particularly amongst experienced ELSR teachers), it is an important step for quality assurance and raising the status of the ELSR workforce. Further work with pre- and in-service providers is also seeking to align professional development with the quality ELDS.

**Demand**

**Financial access**

Under existing systems, where preschool facilities are available, the direct and indirect costs of attending preschool institutions are still regarded as a significant factor in the non-attendance of poor and marginalised groups. Parents are charged 25% of the full cost of a kindergarten place and UNICEF’s *Fair Play* report estimates that the cost of full-day kindergarten provision amounts to almost half the annual average income for Macedonians.

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**Notes:**

34 SSO, *Public Institution for Children Care and Education* (annual reports for 2012-2013)

35 Ibid. Includes both teaching and nursing staff in kindergartens.
The financing models developed by UNICEF, based on a core education provision, offers ways to expand access to educational preschool services that will be more financially viable for both the state and families.36

Broader work has also been undertaken around improving social safety nets, with a UNICEF-commissioned study on child-related cash transfers identifying quantitative and qualitative gaps in the system and making recommendations for more efficient and effective targeting of the most vulnerable that the MLSP has committed to taking into legislative reforms.

Social and cultural practices

As mentioned in the social norms section above, ELSR is increasingly recognised as a valuable service in itself. The shift from the ‘day care’ concept of the function of preschool provision is occurring slowly in urban centres but more readily amongst rural populations where the ECDCs are more in evidence and where there were fewer kindergartens in the first instance.

The notion that children can only be taught by ‘experts’ militates against opportunities to involve parents or grandparents in their children’s early educational development: parents do not see themselves as the child’s first and supporting teacher. As already mentioned in section 4.2.2 there is a growing need to challenge these norms about parenting and education to ensure that each child, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds, get the same start as their middle class peers.

It is evident that there is a better acceptance of children with disabilities and Roma children in some localities but this remains at the level of ‘we must be tolerant’ rather than a nuanced understanding of diversity which acknowledges that all children benefit from inclusion, not just those who are recently included. UNICEF’s recent KAP study indicates that further work is required around how diversity and inclusion are introduced and experienced by children within the preschool system.

Timing and continued use of services

Enrolment rates by age show a rising rate for 3, 4 and 5 year olds with 5 year old enrolment increasing the most. This has resulted in a slight, but growing, skewing of kindergarten enrolment towards the upper end of the age range. There has also been a significant rise in the over-age enrolment of 6 year olds since 2009 (Figure 15).

In terms of attendance, we do not have data to examine the trend over the evaluation period. However data from the functional analysis study in 2012 reported a regular attendance rate of only 77% of the reported enrolment, with a concern that this was inflated and

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36 It should be noted that the estimated costs of the care components (up to four times the current fees charged for kindergarten attendance) that this model suggests are borne by parents would be far beyond the means of the majority of the population, so it would provide more equitable access to preschool education but equitable access to childcare would remain a significant issue.

actual regular attendance was lower. Attendance was noted to be higher in larger kindergartens which are more prone to overcrowding. This suggests that there is an issue of irregular participation and drop-out from the preschool sector that has received little attention to date and may be an important factor in the efficiency and effectiveness of the sector as it expands.

In relation to ELSR as a basis for timely school enrolment and attendance, a by-product of the ELDS implementation has been the development of good communication between the pilot ELSR services and primary schools around child profiles and teaching and learning methods, enabling better transition for the children. However, concerns over transition and the continuum of support for certain marginalised groups, such as children with disabilities or Roma children, persist, with the primary schools not always able to provide adequate support systems for their inclusion and continued participation in education.

Quality of service

UNICEF has helped to achieve strong progress in the quality of preschool services, driven by the ELDS development and implementation in pilot ECDCs and kindergartens. The ELDS seek to ensure a coherence of delivery in terms of quality within a diversity of provision in order to meet the varying needs of the community. The outcomes study undertaken by UNICEF indicates that the effective use of the ELDS in ECDCs has supported stronger child outcomes through this type of provision than in kindergartens (where the implementation of the ELDS has been more challenging due to pre-existing approaches and systems), and it will be important to carry out similar studies in the future to be able to chart progress and begin to untangle the factors that are involved in quality outcomes for children across different types of provision.

The coherence made possible by the introduction of the ELDS, which now form the bedrock of not just delivery of ELSR (pedagogy, monitoring, planning activities, tracking progress) but also professional development, curriculum, inspection and parental and community engagement, has gone some way towards maintaining and developing the quality of experience for children. The adoption of the ELDS ‘nation-wide’ in 2009/10 is an endorsement of UNICEF’s expertise in this field, and the current process of revising the standards speaks to their efficacy – they are in use and now being improved by practitioners in light of their experience of using them. As mentioned previously, the ELDS have brought a common, more holistic understanding of child development and a better alignment of planning and activities to child outcomes within preschools. They are also being co-opted by other professionals at primary level because they are seen as useful for psychological assessment as well as visits to ECD centres to check on school readiness, and are occasionally influencing early primary practice especially where ECDCs and pilot kindergartens are located within or adjacent to primary schools.

The use of the ELDS to underpin pre-service and in-service training, the development of in-service training modules by UNICEF, and the introduction of five-year licensing assessments for preschool teachers, has also worked towards enhancing quality. Where marginalised groups are served, however, the quality of provision needs further attention to ensure diversity is embraced as a strength. In this respect UNICEF has already made a start by commissioning the KAP study to reinforce its dialogue with the government.

Findings

Due to the emphasis on the ELDS development and the well-coordinated and structured approach to pilot implementation at a stage when coverage is still relatively low in the country, there is a significant basis to ensure that expanding access is of a quality provision. This contrasts to a number of other countries in the region where there has been rapid expansion without a strong quality framework. The extent to which quality gains are maintained under the expansion of services will be a critical issue in the coming years.

4.3.2 Effectiveness of UNICEF’s use of its core roles

Voice for children

UNICEF’s capacity and success in acting as a voice for children in the preschool sector is now well established, and has been closely linked to its policy advice and national dialogue roles. At a broad level, UNICEF has been instrumental in advocating for child rights with the EU and MEPs as well as the government, helping to ensure that this becomes firmly entrenched on the EU accession agenda. It has also used ‘soft’ leveraging to move the conversations on social policy to include a focus on equity and marginalisation at systemic levels and at personal/professional levels. This has provided the environment through which UNICEF has been able to advocate for the importance of equitable and accessible preschool provision and use its close relationship with ministries and other stakeholders to find entry points for lobbying and interventions. It has leveraged its reputation and expertise to become the main government partner for ELSR and has been able to marshal strong, evidence-based and practical arguments to make substantial progress with the MLSP in developing the framework for a more equitable, quality-driven preschool system.

UNICEF has also driven wider recognition of the value of ELSR for young children at community levels through parental materials and effective use of public communications, using modelling as practical examples and evidence for ELSR and the importance and viability of inclusive services. Similarly, the adoption and acceptance of challenging initiatives such as the ELDS and teacher licensing, attests to UNICEF’s ability to used evidence-based dialogue and leverage sound programme achievements as well as its good relationships with the government to achieve better services for children.

However, some work remains to be done on embedding a common understanding of concepts such as child rights, marginalisation, diversity and equity for children. The voice of children in UNICEF’s work (e.g. inclusion of children’s voices and views in ELSR service design, delivery and evaluation), particularly those from the most marginalised groups, is also relatively limited so far, although initiatives such as the recently completed KAP report offer opportunities for such voices to be heard.

Policy advice and technical assistance

Policy advice has been a strong core role for UNICEF over the past decade. Despite changing political agendas and relationships, UNICEF has been able to maintain and build a strong relationship with government and influence policy development. It has patiently and systematically pursued a multi-pronged approach to support the establishment of a coherent basis for the sector, which brings together quality, equity and access. Using relevant research and practical evidence from interventions, UNICEF has been able to contribute important advice and assistance at opportune moments to progress policy, legislation and standards for ELSR that are geared towards more equitable provision and recognition of the limitations of traditional kindergarten systems.
Findings

Simultaneous work on financing models has provided a strong practical basis for pushing these frameworks into action.

UNICEF has carefully cultivated relationships through responding to MLSP calls for assistance with a wider range of issues from drawing up papers at short notice to doing rapid research for them, among other requests, and this has built up UNICEF’s reputation for reliable expertise in the sector that has bridged the frequent changes in MLSP officials. The detailed functional analysis undertaken by UNICEF in 2012 reflects the strength of the partnership, with the MLSP participating openly in the detailed scrutiny of the management, structures and capacities of the ELSR sector.

UNICEF has also worked to develop the capacity of municipalities in management, financial management, planning (introduction of action plan process) and budgeting. Pilot municipalities receiving this support are in a better position to execute their responsibilities in all areas and in particular in ELSR. However, there is still a significant way to go to overcome the capacity gaps at decentralised levels – including a more systemic approach to capacity development that incorporates institutional and organisational capacities. The functional analysis study of 2012 is an entry point for a more holistic capacity development approach, whilst the Fair Play report recognises UNDP’s work on fiscal decentralisation. There is potential for UNICEF to improve its relationship with UNDP to tap into its public administration and institutional reform expertise.

Monitoring and evaluation

UNICEF has contributed significantly to the evidence and knowledge base for ELSR through various studies and research (the outcomes study, Fair Play, the RECI report, the functional analysis and financial study, the forthcoming work around children with disabilities under the IPA grant funds). Although some of these studies have not realised the full potential of the data and research undertaken, they have all proved important in raising awareness and clarifying the focus around systemic issues of equity and quality, and provide evidence that has informed work with government and partners.

At the service delivery level, UNICEF has helped kindergartens and ECDCs conduct ‘before and after’ surveys on particular initiatives and this has enabled some of them to improve services, for example, to meet parents’ needs and engage parents more widely into school life and activities. This is another instance of how UNICEF could facilitate local /regional capacity building through experience exchange. The ELDS are a form of monitoring and formative evaluation tool for ELSR practice and their revision will help to sharpen their usefulness. Inspection and supervision have been supported through UNICEF activities around the ELDS, but this will be a crucial aspect for maintaining quality as pilot implementation is scaled up and access expands.

With respect to the broader monitoring of the ELSR system, UNICEF has supported the MLSP in the ongoing development of an ECD management information system that offers to provide more disaggregated and detailed data. Further work by UNICEF to support the effective utilisation and integration of this data into sector planning and management at centralised and decentralised levels will be important once the system is set up.

39 As mentioned previously the outcomes study does not maximise the use of the data collected to identify equity effects of the different types of provision due to inconsistencies and omissions in the comparative analysis of children’s characteristics across the four groups
Leveraging resources

UNICEF has been successful in contributing to securing significant external funding to the development of ELSR. As part of the UN group, UNICEF helped first to push the EU pre-accession funding from a focus on financial issues, corruption reduction and governance to the social sector, and then for ELSR as part of the child rights mandate. UNICEF is currently discussing World Bank funding for ELSR and the in new round of IPA funding, UNICEF has been nominated as the lead implementer on ELSR, which will be significant step. UNICEF has also been successful in securing private sector funding for ELSR through the T-Mobile initiative.

In terms of government funding, whilst it is difficult to identify significant increases in budget allocations, UNICEF’s work on budget allocation formulae and mechanisms, and on the financial models for education-driven expansion, have potential for significant efficiency savings within the system and more equitable distribution of the resources available.

Knowledge exchange

UNICEF is recognised as being a resourceful agency with a clear knowledge-brokering mandate for ELSR. It has disseminated its own knowledge products widely, including through its website. UNICEF-driven or UNICEF-supported processes were reported as valuable for bringing together different agencies and sharing perspectives and materials that have inspired and stimulated key national and local stakeholders. There have also been some good examples of sharing experiences and knowledge with neighbouring UNICEF Country Offices around ELDS, in-service training, expert consultants etc.

UNICEF has provided a number of opportunities for local-level experience exchange and learning through its piloting of ELDS implementation and ECDC development. However, ‘experience exchange’ at regional/local level is an area for expansion that could complement and strengthen training around issues of local financial management, municipal action planning, community and parental engagement, streamlining services, mentoring and outreach to marginalised communities.

National dialogue

This is another very strong core role for UNICEF, closely tied to its success in policy advice, acting as the voice for children and knowledge exchange. UNICEF has been instrumental in keeping ELSR on the agenda in the face of competing priorities in a challenging political and economic context. This was done by building political and professional momentum through national (and regional) debates and events and through targeted and opportunistic advocacy. Participatory and consultative processes around the ELDS and policy and legislative developments have gradually built a more sophisticated national dialogue on ELSR, particularly concerning equity and quality. Sound communication strategies have paved the way for acceptance within the preschool sector and wider community. Institutionally, the voice of the pedagogical institutions has been brought forward because of their work on the ELDS and this offers potential to strengthen their leadership role in the pre-service work on, for example, the ELDS or the inclusion of children with disabilities.

UNICEF’s strength also lies in its ability to draw on global and national expertise and to include high level stakeholders, whether national or international, in national dialogue. This raises the profile of events and publications, generates more interest at political level and results in more media coverage, hence also impacting the public. UNICEF’s access to, and work with, multilateral agencies, donors, parliamentarians, ministers, academics, NGOs, civil society representatives and technical
experts has resulted in ELSR being considered from different perspectives, indirectly yielding political, financial and technical leverage.

There is still some way to go in the reconceptualization of ideas about early childhood development, such as the role and responsibilities for the provision of care and the approach to inclusion. There is room for UNICEF to do more in terms of round table discussions that accompany its studies to ensure that the shift in conceptualisation of children and childhood and education and early development are highlighted and internalised in official circles. UNICEF has been adept at finding alternative pathways to maintain momentum and this will need to be continued to ensure the principles enshrined in the ELDS and legislation are implemented appropriately.

**Modelling**

UNICEF ELSR has modelled low-cost, community-based, alternative provision to demonstrate that more children could benefit from ELSR in centres that are more affordable, especially in rural areas and poorer communities. It has developed a diversity of models: mobile buses, ECDCs in schools, in kindergartens, in markets and within the home. The challenge is to ensure municipalities use a variety of modalities rather than choose a ‘one size fits all’ solution.

Although ECDCs provide only relatively minor coverage, they have been incubators of innovation for the sector and have been managed and utilised extremely effectively by UNICEF to provide evidence and practical examples of what is possible. The process of re-establishing ECDCs has been delicate, given the mass-establishment and rapid mass-closure of such centres in 2000-2001, and UNICEF has been strategic in its planning, working with patience and instituting a gradual development of the ECDC alternative to kindergartens.

Importantly, UNICEF has also engaged with the kindergarten services, piloting the implementation of the ELDS in selected kindergartens and incorporating the capacities and potential of existing kindergartens in its financial models for expanded coverage. Such engagement has been important for a sector-wide dialogue and momentum, and utilising the expertise within the kindergartens, rather than, as in some other countries in the region, perceiving the kindergartens as a service only for the wealthy and developing parallel systems for expansion that do not incorporate them.

The modelling of approaches within ELSR has also progressed, for example in the use and implementation of ELDS for child-centred approaches, through in-service training, the development of in-service modules and work with parents, all of which UNICEF has used effectively to inform and reinforce its work in policy, voice and developing national dialogue.

**4.4 Efficiency of UNICEF’s use of its resources and core roles**

Data were submitted by the Country Office allocating programme activities and budgets since 2005 to core roles and system determinants. As neither activity nor budget frameworks have been aligned with the core roles and system determinant frameworks across the evaluation period, this has involved Country Office staff (who have also not been in post consistently across the whole 2005-2012 period) retro-fitting their understanding of activities to their interpretation of the core roles and determinants and how they link together. The variations in the allocations indicate the difficulty and the different perceptions of the core roles and determinants at this early stage in their use in programming terminology.
However, the data provided indicate that UNICEF’s overall budget for ELSR over the nine year period 2005-2013 has been relatively low at $1.8 million. This highlights the impressive contributions by UNICEF (as discussed above) despite limited resources. Perhaps unsurprisingly, modelling has taken up 69% of the programming budget due to the high costs of this type of activity, followed by policy advice and technical assistance (15%), largely around facilitating and supporting the legislative amendments and the ELDS (Figure 16). These figures emphasise the less financially-intensive nature of some of the core roles (voice, national dialogue, leveraging resources), as a lot of this work involves staff time spent on building relationships and dialogue with stakeholders and partners. This work is itself impressive when in the context of having only two programming staff members (the ECD/Education Specialist and the Programme Assistant) each spending only 50% of their time directly on ELSR work across the evaluation period.

Working with these limited financial and human capacities, UNICEF has been strategic and coordinated in its use of resources and efficient in how it has linked investments in different core roles to maximum effect in other core roles and in overall programming for ELSR. It has done this by gradually building a range of mutually supportive initiatives over time: developing coordinated frameworks through policy, legislation and standards dialogue, building consensus and ownership for new initiatives, and demonstrating the strength/efficacy of initiatives through sound modelling, practice, reflection through studies, and revisions and consultations. There has been a systematic development of relationships and ‘courting’ of changing governments and personnel, alignment of programming cycles and responding positively to government requests for help. UNICEF has been able to draw on expertise to respond to these requests in the majority of cases – decentralisation and financing have posed a challenge, but UNICEF is currently developing a strong response particularly in the financing side.

UNICEF been adept and strategic in developing, testing and documenting different models and approaches so as to provide robust evidence for advocacy. It has been able to bring this evidence to bear at influential moments to push forward the political and legislative agendas, and the simultaneous development of frameworks and practice around quality, equity and access has enabled a more coherent framework for the sector to be put in place before the pressures of mass expansion exacerbate existing weaknesses in the system.

It is therefore difficult to highlight specific core roles as more effective than others, as they have been integrated and each has played its part at different times.

### 4.5 Sustainability

UNICEF has worked hard to ensure its interventions have been a part of, and involved, other partners’ agendas (whether government or development partners) and has seen many programme
initiatives embedded into ELSR systems and frameworks. Whilst ELSR coverage is still low and equity gaps persist, positive aspects for sustainability of ELSR access and coverage in the long-term are evident: there is strong political will and equity-focused frameworks of legislation and standards are in place, underpinned by tested and costed models of quality provision.

Whilst scaling up to meet the demands of national provision is always going to be a challenge, there is a sound foundation for more equitable and quality expansion. Focus points for sustaining new models and frameworks, however, will be the capacities and capabilities of decentralised authorities and teaching staff and more equitable forms of financing. Whilst improvements have been noted in a number of selected municipalities, a more comprehensive approach to capacity development (institutional, organisational and individual) will be needed across all decentralised entities to match the increasing demands of expanding access equitably and sustainably. Equitable financing is in motion and will need ongoing support and momentum.

Similarly, for the sustainability of quality in ELSR provision, the ELDS provide a strong, accepted and owned framework of quality and coherence for ELSR and for its continuity with services for younger children and at primary school. However, the status and quality of the ELSR workforce remains an area of risk for the ELDS implementation. Experiences from pilots concerning professional development and ELSR-primary linkages and coordination will need to be used in wider programmes of support.

Despite targeting poorer communities, particularly in rural areas, inequities are likely to remain for the foreseeable future: provision is increasing in urban areas through the establishment of new kindergartens by the richest local governments and increasing private provision for the richest quintile. Whilst coverage remains low, the most marginalised will continue to struggle to gain access to scarce ELSR places, with the pressures of demand bringing into play the financial and power imbalances between the marginalised groups (e.g. through informal fees and contributions). A stronger and more nuanced recognition of disaggregated marginalised groups’ needs, constraining social norms, and integrated modalities to meet these, is starting to emerge but further work will be required to develop fully inclusive and accessible service. These developments will need to be articulated around existing preschool provision, offering flexible and innovative models to respond to parental needs and affordability.

Finally, the positioning of early childhood education within a broader framework of rights, gender equality and economic development is also currently limited through the separation of education and care components. How the sector develops so that it engages with both these aspects for an equitable, rights-based and sustainable growth in early childhood education and labour markets, is likely to become an increasingly important dialogue, not least in relation to alignment with EU practices and recommendations on early childhood education and care in EU accession processes.
5 Conclusions and lessons learned

The Theory of Change

The evaluation substantially validates the generic TOC inasmuch as it provides a workable framework for understanding how activities drive results and impacts from core roles to the system determinants to (medium and longer term) impacts. Retro-fitting of activity-driven programming into the TOC is not a trivial exercise but has revealed only a small number of issues that suggest revisiting the design of the TOC to make it more useful and useable in future.

The TOC has not captured the importance, at the system level, of decentralised responsibilities. The capacity of critical institutions to fulfil their role has been identified as an important system determinant, which is not properly shown in the current TOC. This exacerbates a tendency to minimise the challenge of institution-building and emphasise individual training rather than capacity development for organisations, their enabling environment and their institutional relationships.

Access

There has been a gradual but steady increase in access to ELSR across the evaluation period. Starting from a low base there is still a long way to go, particularly to reach those most marginalised groups for whom ELSR potentially provides the most benefit. However, whilst the majority of the population remain without access to preschool services and significant inequities exist, it is important to stress the progress that has been made in establishing the underlying frameworks, structures and systems for more accessible, equitable and quality ELSR. The basis of the ELSR sector has been institutionalised within governments and legislative frameworks not only within the education sector but also in wider national priorities and strategies.

With the amendment to the Law on Child Protection in 2013, the country is now posed to translate this progress into larger scale expansion of preschool provision and ensuring that the capacities, environment and norms at each level of the system are supportive for effective implementation will be critical in the coming years.

Equity

Interventions have increased the numbers of children receiving preschool education but, at a national level, have had limited relevance to children from the most marginalised groups, including those with disabilities, from ethnic minorities and in vulnerable families, who remain excluded. Early learning in a supportive environment is particularly important to those with disabilities and those subjected to social discrimination: it is an opportunity to identify and address learning and psycho-social needs, to provide developmental and learning opportunities not available at home and to develop self-confidence in a social environment. It can provide a critical platform to help these children transition successfully to primary school.

UNICEF has started to engage with system determinants that are important for equitable provision for marginalised children – those for identifying, assessing, budgeting and administering special support but further work will be needed around this. UNICEF has also developed models to provide ELSR to members of the Roma and other traditionally isolated and stigmatised communities, undertaking important work on understanding how ELSR can bridge the traditions and socio-economic constraints on access and continued use by Roma communities. However, the transfer of this work into the practices and social norms of other stakeholders at national and local levels has
been limited so far and systemic inclusion of children with disabilities or Roma communities within ELSR systems (rather than project-based support) remains distant. Social norms remain a constraint and will take time and require different strategies, inputs and cross-sectoral partnerships.

A critical part in addressing the most marginalised is developing a better understanding of the different needs that individual children have, including multiple, intersecting factors of disadvantage. This requires a more nuanced recognition of the diversity within broad categories of marginalisation (rural children, Roma, poor children etc.), and practical system responses to this diversity. Such understandings are starting to emerge through UNICEF’s work around diversity (the KAP study), the Roma and children with disabilities and this will need to be further developed and embedded within the expansion of services to ensure equity remains at the heart of an expanding system.

UNICEF has been working on concrete interventions to support the identification of Out Of School Children. However, to date, the work does not always apply to those aged 0-6 and contributes to the risk that children being held out of school may not get identified by the system. This would be a basis for prioritising the most vulnerable children for support in preschools (e.g. by waiving fees, subsidised placement, transport, free meals).

**Quality**

UNICEF has introduced the concept and practicalities of child-centred methodologies into all its work, including modelling, professional support, knowledge exchange and, importantly, the ELDS. The ELDS offer a useful tool for recognising and assuring quality, and provide a basis for a more coherent 0-6 range of services. They have set standards for achievement across a range of domains for young children and the progress that has been made in using these to set indicators for school readiness and quality in pilot ECDCs and kindergartens, as well as the use of the ELDS to ground professional development, inspection, teaching and learning materials and child profiles is encouraging and provides lessons for other countries in the region struggling to translate ELDS into practice. The upcoming revision of the ELDS will need to reflect other emerging areas of consideration such as diversity and inclusion.

However, taking methodologies and standards into practice at scale will be challenging and is an increasing focus of UNICEF work. The existing quality and status of the ELSR workforce is a significant issue in this regard, and emerging work on pre- and in-service training, teacher licensing and inspection, alongside more focus on aspects of teachers’ career structures and staffing norms, will be critical to addressing this over the coming years. Central to this is the capacity of the institutions for professional development and monitoring educators.

Understanding the quality implications of diverse preschool modalities will also remain an ongoing area for investigation in order to ensure quality continues to be linked with increasing access. This will involve engagement with the rapidly increasing commercial private provision, usually in urban settings, serving those parents who can afford it. Legislation allows the operation of private kindergartens but, beyond that, there has been little effort to understand, regulate and assure their quality or to develop partnerships with private providers both for the provision of education and meeting the continued demand for care.

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40 The Global Out-of-School Initiative includes, in its dimension of exclusion framework, children of pre-primary age who are out of school. We are not referring to the Out-of-School studies here, but to interventions happening in countries as a result of the initiative.
The other elements of school readiness

As well as considering children’s readiness, the findings suggest the importance of readiness of parents and of the receiving schools, as set out in UNICEF’s international guide to school readiness. All parents/carers value and seek educational opportunities for their children, including those before compulsory school age. Involvement, particularly in centres and projects that have taken steps to support parenting, has helped them to understand and support children as learners outside school and through the transition to primary education.

The concept of ELSR is strongly rooted in the assumption that appropriate preschool provision will enable timely primary enrolment, enhance primary retention and improve learning outcomes. However, the alignment of systems, approaches and services between preschool and primary education and the management of the transition are critical to the realisation of these benefits and have particular implications for vulnerable children. Involvement in preschooling can mitigate some of the shock of entry to primary education for vulnerable children, but such gains are lost if the professionals supporting the children and their families (such as psychologists and other specialised staff) change abruptly when children enter a new education institution. Preschools and schools fall under different authorities, so that support for children, and their families, tends to lack continuity and coherence. UNICEF has been supporting social service reforms and the adoption of case management systems that would enable authorities to organise services better around children and their families. It could play a role in ensuring such services link both to ELSR and primary education systems.

Primary schools also do not have strategies for differentiated approaches to children with different previous experiences. As the number of children with some preschool experience is increasing, children with none will become increasingly disadvantaged when entering primary school. Primary schools need to recognise and address the developmental needs of younger pupils and, arguably, learn from good practice in the preschool years. There is some positive evidence of this emerging in pilot areas but it will need to become a more systematic approach to ensure this element of school readiness is institutionalised and a continuum of services is developed.

Decentralisation

UNICEF has had significant success contributing to the legislative and policy framework for early childhood education. However, moving that into national implementation has been challenging in the context of decentralisation. There are concerns about capacity and responsiveness of municipalities and the priority and flexibility that they attach to preschool provision when facing competing demands on limited budgets and strong social norms around kindergarten services. Parental influence at this level can work in favour of elites with political influence. UNICEF is still developing approaches to working with decentralised management, which adds a logistical and conceptual challenge. Whilst UNICEF often provides technical assistance (usually of very good quality), it has only just begun to engage with aspects of capacity development based on analysis of institutional and organisational capacity constraints.

Decentralised institution-building usually falls to other agencies, such as UNDP or the EU. UNICEF has been able to work with these agencies to ensure that the implications and requirements for preschooling are considered within emerging decentralised systems. UNICEF can make a niche contribution in this regard: other agencies can bring greater financial resources and expertise in

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41 UNICEF (2012), School readiness and transitions
public administration and institutional reform but UNICEF’s ELSR expertise and equity agenda should inform the design, implementation and management of institutional reform to safeguard and progress quality and equity in ELSR.

**Sector integration/cross-sector work**

UNICEF advocates for integration and cross-sector policies such as those for comprehensive social protection that will address preschool exclusion. It is particularly important for UNICEF to bring together education, child protection and social protection, working with nascent (or dysfunctional) national structures, across different ministry ‘silos’. Cross-sectoral integration is particularly important for building systems that identify, address and follow through the most marginalised children and their families to maximise the benefits of early childhood services in the realisation of children’s rights and breaking intergenerational cycles of exclusion.

UNICEF’s structure does not facilitate integrated cross-sector working: there is often limited understanding by officers, at regional and national levels, of other sectors and the routes to integrated approaches, bridges and continuum. UNICEF’s work is often compartmentalised, in terms of programmes, staff allocation, reporting structures, budget lines and, possibly, staff skills.

**Care and education**

Parents recognise and appreciate a learning focus in ELSR. However, access to adequate and affordable childcare remains important and potentially life changing for families. Formal childcare in traditional state kindergartens and the private sector is affordable only to richer families, which contributes to inequity for women’s work chances and children’s development opportunities. Where UNICEF has prioritised short ELSR provision, working parents have to make informal care arrangements with carers, friends and relatives. UNICEF has yet to engage fully with the rights and equity implications of such provision, and will need to develop the discourse around this issue internally and across sectoral programmes to decide how it can address these concerns without compromising the importance of the educational and developmental aspects of early childhood service provision.

**Human rights based approach**

UNICEF has led work on parental and community involvement in the development and delivery of services, but has made limited use of HRBA concerning children in programming, such as to support children’s autonomy and voice in their learning, or simply to make explicit the implications of ensuring respect for young learners and protection from intimidation. A rights-based drive for safety and respect is of particular importance to children with special needs or from stigmatised marginal groups. It is recognised that, by tradition, HRBA is not an important driver of policy and practice but it behoves UNICEF to address that starting point.

**Knowing more: data and research**

Collecting data on preschool services for reporting, planning and administration has proved very difficult. Whilst this is an acknowledged concern across education, preschool has presented some unique problems arising from the diversity of provision (including private provision).

The potential for coordinated data systems is currently not being realised, with data not being used in sector management to understand, for example, where preschool children are going or provide a
record for each child entering primary school. The basis of data collection and management for the sector are starting to emerge but how these develop, and are integrated into sector planning and management, will be an important focus in future programming.

The evaluation has identified good examples of UNICEF-driven research that has started to bridge important knowledge gaps in the ELSR sector – including the outcomes study, the RECI report and work around system financing and structures. There is room for further development of this research agenda to understanding the differing needs created by multiple factors of marginalisation, a continuation of the work on outcomes, longitudinal research and the quality of teaching and learning practices and the ELSR teaching profession.
6 Recommendations

6.1 TOC

**Recommendation 1:** It is recommended that the TOC is amended to reflect system approaches to capacity development and the importance of system determinants at sub-national as well as national levels. This would involve:

- **Capacity development:** including ‘institutions able to deliver their function’ as a system determinant. Analysing institutional capacity at national and local levels should cover the enabling environment of institutions and both organisational and individual capacity.

- **Sub-national levels:** showing system determinants at sub-national levels where these present qualitatively different challenges and have different links to the intended impacts. This would apply to all the determinant areas but would be particularly important on the determinants of legislation and policy and management and coordination. Being explicit about sub-national system levels within the TOC will help to focus on the chain from national to sub-national systems (and hence to impact for children) in planning interventions.

6.2 Equity

**Recommendation 2:** It is recommended that UNICEF’s future ELSR programming in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is developed closely in line with the emerging UNICEF Regional Strategic Guidance on ELSR. This places equity at the core of ELSR strategies and programming, recognising that the priority must be given to the most marginalised children and children with disabilities and special educational needs even in situations where supply limits access to relatively low percentages of the population. It is neither equitable nor strategic to leave the marginalised 10–20% until ‘we have reached the rest’. This is long-term and complicated work that needs to be started.

Within the overall aim of equity and inclusion, UNICEF should develop more varied ways to understand and respond to children’s different preschool needs, to understand current practices and provide support to improve their impact on children and the overall quality of ELSR provision. Policies and systems to reach the range of children with different needs (including social needs and economic vulnerability) are complex, typically cross-sectoral, and may need new structures or operational mechanisms and professional practices to identify, assess, refer and support children.

**Recommendation 3:** It is recommended that UNICEF continues its support to reviewing and restructuring financial allocation and disbursement mechanisms for ELSR to incorporate more equitable and efficient use of resources to expand coverage in ELSR.

As well as continued technical assistance and support in the principles and details of such mechanisms, further work will also be required around transparency in fee setting for early childhood services beyond a core state-funded educational offering, and a wider dialogue about the roles and responsibilities of the state, private sector and families in the provision of such additional services (particularly care for young children). This will be critical to ensuring an enabling and supportive environment for new structures of preschool provision and developing a system that is able to support the rights of children and their families, particularly those from the most marginalised backgrounds.
6.3 Quality

**Recommendation 4:** It is recommended that UNICEF maintain and deepen its focus on the quality of different forms of ELSR provision, particularly around the possible risks to quality arising from rapidly increasing access, with short national research studies. This should also include research into the teacher determinant in quality ESLR and improved learning outcomes for children.

**Recommendation 5:** It is recommended that UNICEF deepen its approach to teacher training and professional development and work on children’s ways of learning and respect for children’s rights throughout preschool (identity, integrity, participation and agency). This will involve working with the relevant departments (BED, the pedagogical institutes) and through the use of a variety of approaches to teacher education and training (full-time, modular, on-site, through mentoring, peer and inter-school support, and including teachers’ capacities to identify needs and draw on cross-sectoral support services).

**Recommendation 6:** It is recommended that UNICEF strengthen its work in embedding diversity and inclusion within preschool environments and practice, including the representation and role models available within the ELSR sector and within teaching and learning materials that reflect gender, linguistic and ethnic diversity. This will also involve substantive work in addressing the social norms in communities around the inclusion and participation of marginalised groups in ELSR services.

**Recommendation 7:** It is recommended that UNICEF consolidate and share lessons on the use and process of implementation of the ELDS in pilot ECDCs and kindergartens, and integrate these into support for the broader integration of the ELDS into preschool practice, inspection and supervision, as well as in early primary grades, health and child protection sectors to contribute to the development and professionalisation of front line staff involved with 3-6 years old children.

**Recommendation 8:** It is recommended that UNICEF develop guidance and tools for child participation from age 4 to 8 to ensure children’s voices are heard and integrated into the general reflection on ELSR quality.

6.4 Holistic approaches across early childhood

**Recommendation 9:** It is recommended that UNICEF utilise the framework of the ELDS to develop stronger linkages and articulation between provision for 0-3 and 3-6 year olds, and between preschool and primary education. Examples of good practice that have emerged in pilot institutions could be used as a basis to drive forward a more coherent continuum of services for children across the early childhood period, and ensure that primary schools are ready to receive and support young children in the early grades (including, in the medium-term, strategies for dealing with varying levels of preschool experience amongst early grade students).

**Recommendation 10:** It is recommended that UNICEF build on existing examples of parental and community engagement with ECDCs (particularly examples coming from Roma communities) to develop more systematic involvement of parents as early educators and supporters of young children and to influence the social norms around the importance of ELSR to children’s rights and future development.
6.5 Decentralisation

Recommendation 11: It is recommended that UNICEF strengthen its ability to navigate decentralisation and to provide sustainable capacity development support to system institutions at national and sub-national levels. In particular, this would involve:

- Developing stronger partnerships with line ministries in charge of decentralisation and planning, and with sub-national levels to strengthen understanding and influence on budget allocation, disbursement and practices. UNICEF may need to reconfigure and develop different working relationships with partners to bring technical support and institutional capacity development to municipalities.
- Using the UNICEF functional analysis report on the ELSR sector as the basis to develop a capacity development strategy for sustainable strengthening of system institutions (involving institutional, organisational and individual capacities) that includes:
  - systems for career development (training, deployment, assessment, management and working conditions) of ELSR personnel and employment norms
  - systems for quality assurance (inspection) and field level support (supervision, mentoring or continuous professional development) around ELSR
  - systems for identification and support for children with disabilities and families in difficult circumstances and, where relevant, for reaching other marginalised children
  - pathways for organisational change for key institutions or units working on early childhood development and ELSR

6.6 Cross-sector coordination

Recommendation 12: It is recommended that UNICEF strengthens its cross-sectoral approach towards ELSR, both in terms of its own internal programming and organisation, and the linkages that it seeks to support at system levels. This should include:

- Internally: reviewing how it handles inter-sectorality at national levels (and this involve wider discussions at UNICEF regional levels) to avoid compartmentalising its own programmes and to ensure the adoption of a strategic joined-up approach to preschool, which covers education, health, safety nets and social benefits, social policy and child protection. By addressing preschool and ELSR cross-sectorally, UNICEF will be in a stronger position to advocate for and model change in this aspect in countries/territories.
- Externally: exploring how linkages across sectors can be supported with regard to issues of: (i) early identification and referral of disability, special needs and families in difficult socio-economic circumstances; (ii) identification and case management of out-of-pre-primary children (particularly where pre-primary is compulsory); (iii) benefits and other safety nets for the poorest and most marginalised families and young children at risk of poor outcomes; (iv) services to deal with emotional needs (and not just the physical needs) of children with disabilities or those left behind when their parents emigrate.

This might include joint training for professionals and mapping what current services exist for young children and their families across the 0-8 age range, including responsibilities for those services at central and decentralised levels, referral mechanisms and points of contact for young children and their families. Such maps can highlight the fragmentation of services,
the difficulties for parents and children in accessing the services they need and missing or duplicated channels of information and support. They also provide a basis from which to identify areas for cross-sector linkages.

**Recommendation 13:** It is recommended that UNICEF promote comprehensive professional development for ELSR staff that in addition to “learning” also includes training in comprehensive assessments and minimum knowledge on health, development, child protection, parenting and socio-economic vulnerabilities.

### 6.7 Knowing more

**Recommendation 14:** It is recommended that UNICEF support the development of a stronger framework for data collection in ELSR through:

- Mapping data users and sources at different levels, the opportunities and mechanisms for data sharing and consolidation and data protection safeguards
- Working closely with the MLSP on the new ELSR management information system to ensure that the new system is articulated with existing data systems, and addresses key gaps including:
  - how much ELSR experience individual children are receiving
  - enrolment of children with different categories of special needs
  - paid and unpaid teachers and auxiliary staff
  - level of training on inclusive education received by staff
  - categorisation of types of ELSR provision (full-day care, sessional, care etc.) per type of provider/institution (including state, private and community-based)
  - children out of pre-primary and preschool provision
- Taking opportunities to support the development of integrated information systems for children from preschool onwards, that take the individual child as the unit of data, not aggregated data at school/centre level.

**Recommendation 15:** It is recommended that UNICEF support and, if necessary, drive a research agenda on:

- understanding school readiness in the medium-term, its impact on children’s schooling and life chances and those aspects of ELSR that have the most impact on children’s subsequent lives and on the lives of their families
- deepening the understanding of children’s learning outcomes across different types of ELSR provision form the baseline established through the outcomes study
- parental attitudes that inform demand side determinants around types of early childhood education provision and inclusive approaches
- issues pertaining to increasing equity, quality and diversity

To support such an agenda UNICEF should develop research partnerships with other agencies including NGOs and universities.
Appendix 1: Terms of reference

**Country**: the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYRoM)

**Evaluation of Early Childhood Development (ECD) Programme**

- **Time period**: 2005-2012
- **ToR prepared**: 24 April 2013
- **TOR revised**: 18 August, 2014

**INTRODUCTION**

In 2013, UNICEF’s Country Office in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYRoM) had planned to conduct an evaluation to assess the impact of their work in early childhood in terms of changes at the system level as well as changes in the lives of children. At about the same time, the UNICEF Regional Office commissioned a Multi-country Evaluation (MCE) in 5 countries and 1 territory to evaluate whether UNICEF’s upstream efforts in the area of early learning and school readiness had contributed to systems level changes and whether these changes had resulted in impacts in the lives of children. For the sake of efficiency, it was proposed that FYRoM be included in the MCE and that a detailed evaluation report for FYRoM be developed after the conclusion of the MCE. The MCE was completed in July 2014. It presented evidence and lessons learned from the 5 countries and 1 territory for the purpose of contributing to the regional knowledge exchange agenda and generating mutual learning among countries. The country report, it was planned, would amplify on the FYRoM specific findings, conclusions and recommendations of the MCE and also include additional information as detailed in the ToR below to make the FYRoM report a stand alone document to be used for the purposes of advocacy and designing next steps. This ToR is based on the original ToR developed in 2013 but has been adapted to build on evidence already gathered and presented in the MCE report.

**BACKGROUND**

Since 2005, UNICEF in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has supported a system approach to programming as a way to influence ECD sector reforms and contribute to concrete changes at institutional, societal and individual level. This work has yielded tangible results not only in terms of **system changes (outcome results)**, but also in terms of **changes in the life of children (impact results)**.

In 2013, the UNICEF country office planned to conduct a country evaluation with the purpose of assessing these results and measuring the extent to which UNICEF supported programme interventions addressed major child rights violations in ECD, reduced equity gaps, and led to impact results – increased access to ECD, especially for the most marginalized groups, and improved quality of ECD.

In 2013, the UNICEF supported ECD programme in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was included in the MCE in the result area **Children’s right to Early Learning/School Readiness** as part of the Regional Knowledge and Leadership Agenda (RKLA). The RKLA emerged in 2012 with the purpose of informing and guiding UNICEF’s future work in Central and Eastern Europe and Countries.

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42 Copy of the report available on request to pmurithi@unicef.org
43 Rated as “highly satisfactory” by the region’s external evaluation quality assurance facility.
of Independent States (CEE/CIS) region in 10 results areas, children’s right to early learning/school readiness being one of them. The MCE covered five countries and one territory in CEE/CIS and gathered evidence about the ways in which UNICEF had contributed over the past decade to outcome and impact results for children (retrospective approach) in these countries.

Like the MCE, the country evaluation is based on a Generic Theory of Change underlying UNICEF’s engagement in the CEE/CIS Region, as well as specifically the Monitoring of Results for Equity (MoRES) framework, and UNICEF core roles (policy advice and technical assistance, modeling, facilitating national dialogue towards child friendly social norms, enabling knowledge exchange, monitoring and evaluation, and leveraging resources from the public and private sectors).

The MCE and the country evaluation are similar in purpose and scope. The purpose of the country evaluation is to assess and document in-depth UNICEF’s contribution in the country in the period of eight years (2005-2012) in terms of major interventions that led to achieving significant milestone in the country’s ECD agenda, such as the adoption of the new Law on Child Protection, and evidence generated from MICS IV about the impact on children’s lives and is planned to have both summative and formative purpose.

Based on the review of findings and recommendations of the MCE and in close consultation with the Regional ECD advisor, the UNICEF country Office in FYRoM decided to use the evidence gathered through the MCE to produce a country evaluation report or in-depth case study on the UNICEF supported ECD programme in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

These Terms of Reference aim to familiarize the evaluator/s with the original purpose, goal and scope of the country evaluation planned in 2013 and guide them in developing a country evaluation report or in-depth case study based on the gathered evidence.

**CONTEXT:**

The National Action Plan on Children’s Rights (2012-2015)\(^{44}\) highlights the importance of increasing access to quality ECD services for rural and marginalized children. This is to be achieved through expansion of capacities of existing kindergartens, but also through introduction of alternative forms of provision. Quality of services is to be ensured through investments in capacities of the ECD staff and establishing a system of licencing.

Similarly, the National Strategy for Education (2005-2015)\(^{45}\) in its sub-programme for preschool education (p 64) calls for inclusion of all children aged 3-6, especially the disadvantaged groups (children from rural areas, children from socially marginalized families, Roma children, children with disabilities and others). Pre-school education is seen as an opportunity for providing an equal start in primary education for all children.

The country’s ECD coverage remains among the lowest in Europe although the situation has been improving. Based on MICS\(^{46}\), for the period 2005-2011, there have been improvements at national level (from 10.7 to 21.8 per cent), and within groups based on geographical location (urban/rural), ethnicity and education of mother (among ethnic Macedonians from 16.9 to 36.5 per cent, among ethnic Albanians from 1.5 to 2.9 per cent and among Roma from 3.5 to 3.9 per cent; in urban areas from 18.5 to 37.2 per cent, in rural areas from 1.5 to 5.9 per cent; among children from mothers

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MICS IV http://www.unicef.org/fyrmacedonia/MICS_ENG_FINAL_websize.pdf
Appendix 1: Terms of reference

with high/university education from 23 to 46.5 per cent and decrease from 1.8 to 1.4 per cent among children from mothers without primary or without education).

There are many barriers that prevent young children from accessing ECD. The biggest challenge is availability and affordability of ECD services. In the old law\(^{47}\), kindergartens (KGs) were the only providers of pre-school education. Preschool education was delivered in 52 kindergartens located in 41 out of total 84 municipalities, mainly in urban areas and 17 of them in the capital of Skopje. To address this gap, UNICEF started to support municipalities in opening ECD community-based centres in rural and marginalized communities. ECD centers are offering more flexible services that address the different needs of children and families, and usually operate in a more cost effective manner\(^{48}\). Private kindergartens exist, but were also not regulated by law, and there is not yet accurate official data about the number of registered private kindergartens and the number of children included availing of their services.

The UNICEF supported Fair Play study (2010) argued that funds for ECD are unequally distributed or allocated only to municipalities with kindergartens on their territory, and state subsidies go primarily to children from parents with higher education and higher income, and urban families, rather than to those who need this support most. The cost of KG is a sum of state subsidy which is 75 per cent and contribution from parents which is only 25 per cent of the total sum. Although low, the amount still cannot be afforded by most of the parents. The country has the highest per child cost in kindergarten as percentage of average income in Europe, signalling severe efficiency issues in kindergartens.

Additional challenge to inclusion is parents’ beliefs and practices related to ECD. It is a common practice to rely on the family (grandparents, older siblings and extended family members) for care, and kindergartens are seen mainly as institutions that provide support to working parents and preparation for school. Parents also believe that learning starts with formal education and they often neglect the importance of early years and the need to provide adequate support and stimulation in this period. The current practices in kindergartens reinforce this beliefs and kindergarten staff does not focus on holistic child development and improving and monitoring child outcomes. The system of in-service training and quality inspection programme is lacking. In addition, programmes for parental involvement are lacking and cooperation with parents is limited.

The most marginalized groups of children (children with disabilities and Roma children) face additional challenge of discriminatory attitudes and practices by parents of other children and teachers. Only 3 per cent of ethnic Albanians and 4 per cent for Roma are enrolled as opposed to 36 per cent of ethnic Macedonian young children. There is no official data on inclusion of children with disabilities in kindergarten, but the number is estimated to be very low. There have been reports in the media about the opposition of parents to have children with disabilities attend kindergarten together with their children, and ECD staff has claimed lack of capacity to provide adequate support to these children. In the recent years, the Government has invested in enrolment of Roma children in kindergartens, however, evidence shows that their inclusion is failing due to lack of capacity of ECD staff and discriminatory attitudes\(^{49}\).

\(^{47}\) In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, pre-school education is regulated with the Law on Child Protection

\(^{48}\) Jan van Ravens , Fair Play , 2010

\(^{49}\) The evaluation of the project: Inclusion of Roma Children in Public Preschools (2008) showed that before the training, the staff in charge of working with the Roma children in the kindergartens had a defensive attitude or implicit prejudices towards Roma, and among the non-Roma parents there was a certain degree of ethnic intolerance which could be seen in distancing their children.
Roma Early Childhood Inclusion (RECI) Study identifies gaps in the system related to inclusion of Roma children. Because Roma is not a language of instruction\textsuperscript{50}, Roma children mainly attend kindergarten in Macedonian language which makes inclusion even more difficult. Roma children’s lower language competency combined with inadequate teacher support and discriminatory attitudes result in low school success and often placement of Roma children in special classes.

In 2013, the law on Child Protection was adopted. UNICEF supported the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) in the revision that addressed above mentioned bottlenecks, by introducing diversified provision (different providers-state, municipality, private companies, NGOs, and different forms-kindergartens, ECD centres, agencies, etc.), funding focused on learning component and geared towards children in the lower socio-economic groups. The new law on Child Protection emphasizes Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS) as a framework for quality and places it as the basis for the national curriculum, in-service training and licencing of ECD staff, and programmes for cooperation with parents.

THE PROGRAMME:

The theory of change starts with the previously described context, in which the UNICEF supported programme has been focusing on increasing access to ECD, especially for the most marginalized groups, and improving quality of support for all young children in the country. The evaluation will focus on assessing progress in both areas of access and quality of ECD.

In terms of access, the UNICEF supported programme considered the following bottlenecks: 1) kindergartens as the only form of service provision, the limited network of kindergartens and thus limited opportunities to increase coverage based on the available capacity; 2) the fact that kindergartens are not available in rural and marginalized communities or for those children who need these services most; 3) public kindergartens are provided at high cost and cannot be afforded by parents of children from rural and marginalized communities, at system level funding is favoring children from higher socio-economic groups and in addition supports care as opposed to learning; and 4) finally kindergartens are not effective in including the most vulnerable.

In terms of quality of ECD, or early learning and development, the UNICEF supported programme addressed the following bottlenecks: 1) the lack of focus on holistic child development and early learning in all child domains by ECD staff; 2) the lack of understanding and application of child-centered methodology by ECD staff; 3) the lack of focus on child outcomes and need to measure progress in child outcomes by ECD staff; 4) the lack of understanding and knowledge of parents to support young child development and their limited involvement in the learning and development of their children; 5) at system level, the lack of organized system for in-service training and inspection based on defined criteria of quality.

UNICEF has been addressing these bottlenecks though interventions at both local and policy level:

At local level, these include piloting initiatives in both areas of access and quality of ECD:

1. **Model community-based ECD centres** for the most marginalized children- the UNICEF support included identifying community premises, their adaptation into learning spaces, mobilizing communities, parents and young children for early learning and development, providing materials and equipment, identifying and training ECD educators, supervision and

\textsuperscript{50} 94.3 \% of KG groups with Macedonian language of instruction, 4.6 \% of KG groups with Albanian language of instruction, and less than 13\% are in Turkish and Serbian
on-going support for implementation of early learning and development activities with young children.

Key stakeholders are the local NGOs (Forum of Albanian Women, Lifestart Bitola and Sumnal), and the local communities. Jointly, they were mobilized in identifying premises and mobilizing communities to make voluntary contribution in refurbishment or any support for the centers. Local NGOs deliver centre-based activities with children and parents. Parents are also involved in direct work with young children on a voluntary basis.

2. **Model kindergartens** - supporting KGs in expanding ECD coverage within their existing capacities – developing action plans and organizing different activities for children and parents; but also supporting all aspects of quality ECD, and effective and efficient work of kindergartens.

The key stakeholder is the expert NGO (ECD-CoR) responsible for training (materials, delivery) and support and monitoring the implementation. Kindergarten principals provide support in re-organization of kindergarten work based on the training and they have the overall responsibility for implementation. Kindergarten staff is engaged in implementing activities with children and parents and monitoring child outcomes based on ELDS.

3. **Planning and budgeting at municipal level** - selected municipalities were trained and supported to develop, budget and implement plans for increasing ECD coverage at municipal level (training materials, local mapping and municipal action plans) and prioritizing the most marginalized groups of children.

Municipality focal points participated in the training organized by UNICEF and then they were responsible for follow-up - local mapping, development of municipal action plans, allocation of municipal funds and opening of centres or other form of ECD provision.

4. **ELDS as framework for quality** - UNICEF support included training of national trainers, the process of development, validation of ELDS and publishing and adoption of ELDS by MLSP - since then ELDS is considered as framework for quality - development of ECD training package and training of ECD and KGs staff based on this package; development and use of instruments for monitoring child outcomes based on ELDS.

Key stakeholders were international experts from Columbia University, local experts from ECD CoR, BED, and Professors from all teacher training faculties in the country, local NGOs. Based on the support from international experts, stakeholders were engaged in the process of development and validation. MLSP gave formal endorsement and support for the process at all stages.

5. **In-service teacher training** – UNICEF supported workshop and meetings with key stakeholders with the support of high-level experts on in-service training system and modules, the development of best practices report, and the process of development of in-service training modules.

Key stakeholders included international experts from Columbia University and with their support local experts from ECD CoR and Professors from all teacher training faculties developed the in-service training modules. Professors supported the piloting of these modules in their universities and kindergarten and ECD staff supported the piloting in kindergartens and ECD centres.
6. Parenting education - development of materials, planning, organizing, monitoring and measuring of impact of activities with parents; ECD COR experts developed the materials and they were piloted by kindergarten and center staff. ECD COR experts documented the process.

At policy level, UNICEF based on the evidence from implementation at local (pilot) level engaged in:

1. Legal reform - UNICEF supported the revision of the Law on Child Protection and the development of 27 sub-laws on all aspects. The adoption of the law in February 2013 is a major milestone in UNICEF support. Law on ECD is the basis for providing universal access to quality ECD services for all young children in the country, especially for the most marginalized children, through the following provisions: diversified ECD services (different forms - not just KG, but also ECD centers, agencies; different providers - public, private, NGOs, individuals; and different duration, long stay, short stay, etc); focus on holistic development and outcomes - ELDS serves as basis for curriculum, record keeping, monitoring and evaluation; mechanisms for quality and inclusion: licensing, accreditation, inspection, professional development; and funding per child to ensure support for the most marginalized.

MLSP was leading the process in advocacy with the Parliament and the Government, establishment of working group, review of the law and sub laws, revisions based on feedback from national consultation. Based on need and request from the Ministry certain institutions were also involved in the process, such as the Bureau for Education Development (BED).

2. Advocacy based on situation analysis and knowledge generation in ECD - UNICEF supported two major studies: Fair Play Study provided evidence for inequities and inefficiencies in the system, costing of ECD centres, and financially feasible scenarios for expanding ECD services to all 4 and 5 years old children in the country; Roma Early Childhood Inclusion (RECI) provided evidence for capacity gaps in the system, that prevent Roma children from accessing quality ECD- these two studies were used in UNICEF advocacy with key stakeholders.

3. Financial study and functional analysis study - UNICEF supported the development of this study as a follow-up from the Fair Play study. The purpose was to analyze more in-depth the inefficiencies in the system and capacity gaps in the process of planning, budgeting, allocation of funds and expenditures. The analysis will help the development of the financing model per child.

All studies were based on a request by the MLSP. MLSP participated in the process of conducting the studies and contributed by making available official data and statistics.

UNICEF support contributed to increase in ECD coverage for the age group 36-59 months at national level, from 11 per cent in 2006 to 22 per cent in 2011, and among the marginalized groups of children: among ethnic Albanians from 1.5 to 3, ethnic Roma from 3.5 to 4, and rural from 1.5 to 6. Quality of ECD is improving based on the evidence on supporting holistic child development and improved child outcomes in all domains based on national ELDS in 20 pilot kindergartens (20 per cent of all KGs) and 20 ECD community-based centers. Following the adoption of the new law and as a result of capacity development efforts, the main pillars of quality ECD system (in-service training,
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development of materials, record keeping, inspection, etc) were established. There is an increased awareness about the importance of early learning and development as a result of parent education activities in pilot kindergartens and ECD centres, and high level advocacy with the Government and municipalities. The MLSP has also announced opening of 14 new kindergartens in rural areas in 13 municipalities or approximately 12 630 million MKD additional funds. The Minister has announced the reforms in ECD sector and confirmed country’s commitment in supporting young children. At local level, municipalities continue to support efforts for expanding ECD provision- the number of municipalities taking over funding for ECD centers is increasing.

RATIONALE

The FYRoM country evaluation report is to be produced after the end of the programme phase (adoption of the new law on Child Protection), and in the context of upcoming process of developing a new Country Programme Document with the Government of Republic of Macedonia for 2010-2015. Given the context, the report is planned to have both summative and formative purpose, i.e. on one hand it will provide summative assessment of the completed phase of the ECD programme (how local level initiatives have influenced policy and legal reform for increasing access to quality ECD), while at the same time the results of the evaluation will be used to inform the future ECD programme (support to implementation of the new Law at national level with particular focus on the most marginalized children).

UNICEF will ensure use of ECD evaluation findings and recommendations by the following partners and potential users:

- MLSP, as a main partner and the responsible ministry for ECD will use the evaluation results in light of their responsibilities for planning, budgeting, guidance and support, inspection, monitoring and evaluation and supporting implementation of reform with a focus on the most marginalized groups;
- BED, the responsible institution for in-service training, will use the evaluation results to learn about approaches to training (content and methodology) –what works, what doesn’t work and how can in-service training and support to ECD staff be further improved to ensure best support for young children and inclusion of the most marginalized groups;
- Municipalities, will use the evaluation results in relation to their responsibilities for planning, budgeting, organizing ECD provision and monitoring ECD coverage with a focus on the most marginalized groups;
- Kindergartens and ECD centres staff will learn about ways in which they can further enhance and support early learning and development practices based on ELDS, by applying child-centred methodology and ensuring inclusiveness of the most marginalized groups;
- Other donors, UNICEF regionally and globally will be offered information on cost-effective ways for supporting increased access to quality ECD, as well as the best practices, challenges and lesson learned in ECD reforms with a focus on the most marginalized groups.

The findings of the FYRoM evaluation report, as well as conclusions and recommendations, will be disseminated to all users: to MLSP and BED as part of the regular planning and reporting process; municipalities through round table discussions and kindergartens and ECD centers through regular capacity development initiatives within UNICEF regionally and globally, and donors through network.

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51 reported on 20.09.2012 in electronic media and on 21.09.2012 in print media
52 http://vlada.mk/node/3775
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meetings and conferences and events related to education. Responsible for use of evaluation findings is the Country Representative with the support of the responsible ECD/Education Specialist.

OBJECTIVE

In view of the key results achieved in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in addressing child rights violations and reducing equity gaps in ECD, and based on the country’s Theory of Change, the purpose of the country evaluation report is two-fold:

1. Demonstrate and assess the extent to which UNICEF’s contribution to programme interventions address major child rights violations in ECD and reduce equity gaps, led to impact results for children – in terms of increasing access to ECD, especially for the most marginalized groups and improved quality of ECD/child outcomes; and

2. Generate learning on practices, innovations and models that could be used by other countries for UNICEF country programming processes, primarily the MTR.

More specifically the country evaluation report will have the following objectives:

a. Document and report on impact results (in terms of changes in children’s life) and reduction of equity gaps, as demonstrated by surveys, administrative data or other sources of information;

b. Assess and demonstrate - through an in-depth review of government and partners’ interventions - how such results were made possible through systems changes (removal of system bottlenecks) at national and/or local levels; and

c. Document the contribution of UNICEF to these system changes.

SCOPE

The evaluation will focus on the period of about eight years (2005-2012). The period includes major interventions that led to achieving significant milestone in the country’s ECD agenda, adoption of the new Law on Child Protection and evidence generated from MICS IV about impact on children’s lives.

The evaluation report will have a clear focus on impact, i.e. the inclusion of young children; especially the most marginalized but will also consider quality learning – and particularly child learning and developmental outcomes in the supported ECD centers and kindergartens.

The evaluation component that will deal with quality and learning outcomes will only focus on already available evidence gathered from the children in the supported ECD centers and kindergartens and not at national level. The quality of ECD and children outcomes will be assessed based on the shift made from the traditional approach (focus on school preparation) towards support to holistic child development and child outcomes by using ELDS. The evaluation will not include measuring of child outcomes, but will rely on exiting data.

With reference to FYRoM the MCE was based on a desk review, interviews and focus group discussions with all involved stakeholders at national and municipal level, and with pilot kindergartens and ECD centers, representative of ethnic Macedonian, ethnic Albanian and Roma children, and both urban and rural areas. At national level key stakeholders included MLSP, BED and teacher training faculties. At local level, the evaluation the geographical focus was on kindergartens located in 20 municipalities (out of total 84 or 23 per cent), 20 ECD centers functioning in 11 municipalities (13 per cent of all municipalities), and 12 municipalities supported with municipal
planning and budgeting for ECD. The municipalities participating in these three types interventions
do not necessarily overlap due to different selection criteria applied for the specific types of
interventions. Namely, kindergartens are mainly located in urban areas and they were selected to
ensure regional and ethnic representation. The ECD centers were opened in rural and marginalized
communities. Municipalities that participated in activities for planning and budgeting were selected
based on willingness to participate, lowest level of inclusion of young children in ECD. The MCE used
a sample of the supported municipalities, kindergarten and ECD centers, ECD staff and parents. The
evaluation team was responsible for selecting representative sample of municipalities,
kindergartens, ECD centers and parents.

In course of preparing the TOR for the multi-country evaluation, an evaluability assessment was
conducted and concluded that despite some data gaps (mainly related to level of disaggregation)
there are enough data available to conduct adequately the evaluation. There are 
**reliable data** to
inform the baseline as well as the situation of children in the most recent years covered by the
evaluation. In some cases results of MICS surveys would constitute a major source of data while in
others national statistics would be the main source data.

**Note:** no additional field work is anticipated for the preparation of the country evaluation report.

**QUESTIONS**

The country evaluation like the MCE will, in priority, assess **UNICEF’s contribution** to impact and
outcome results for children (good/bad practices, innovations and models as well as strategies that
work and can be scaled up or replicated) in terms of their **relevance** to the child rights and equity
agenda, **effectiveness**, **efficiency** and **sustainability** (as defined by OECD/DAC).

The questions below reflect the intention of the country evaluation planned in 2013 and are aligned
with the MCE questions. The evaluation questions were designed to establish clear **linkages**
between results for children/ reduction of equity gaps, system changes and UNICEF’s contribution

**Relevance**

- Has the programme been aligned to governments and partners’ priorities/policies/reform
  agendas for quality ECD and reducing equity gaps?
- Has the programme been successful in leveraging governments’ political will and financial
  resources to address child rights and equity issues in terms of access to quality ECD?
- Has the programme been relevant to the needs and circumstances of the most marginalized
  groups of young children (rural children, Roma children)?
- Has the programme (content and delivery) been aligned with the CRC principles (non-
  discrimination, best interest of the child, the right to life, survival and development,
  participation, special learning needs, factors leading to disadvantage), equity agenda,
  Gender Mainstreaming, Human Rights Based Approach to Programming ?
- Has the programme (content and delivery) been aligned to the international literature and
  research about strategies for covering the most marginalized children with quality ECD?

**Efficiency**

- What strategies/core roles of UNICEF have been most efficient in influencing improvements
  in access/equity and quality?
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- Have UNICEF’s resources invested in support to inclusive and quality ECD been used in the most efficient manner?
- More specifically, has UNICEF been successful in playing a catalytic role and using its meager core resources strategically to leverage government funding for ECD reform?
- Would there have been a more cost-effective way to obtain the expected results?
- How cost-effective has UNICEF supported models/pilots for the most marginalized groups of young children been, that have a potential to be replicated, expanded and scaled up?
- Are the UNICEF supported models for the most marginalized more cost-effective compared to public ECD services?

Effectiveness

- How effective have government’s interventions been in removing system bottlenecks that determined or contributed to the exclusion of marginalized children from quality ECD?
- How effective have UNICEF’s strategies been in contributing to the removal of such bottlenecks?
- Which are the system bottlenecks to inclusion of the most marginalized children in quality ECD that have not been addressed by either the government or UNICEF?
- In which among the core roles, has UNICEF been most effective in removing system bottlenecks to inclusive ECD: policy advice and technical assistance, modeling, facilitating national dialogue towards child-friendly social norms, enabling knowledge exchange, monitoring and evaluation, leveraging resources from the public and private sectors?
- In particular, how effective have UNICEF supported interventions been in influencing the formulation, adoption and enforcement of ECD law, strategies and action plans (at both national and local level) in targeting of the most marginalized children?
- How effective have UNICEF been in modelling and piloting (together with government counterparts and other partners) for reaching out to the most marginalized groups of children that have a potential to be replicated, expanded and scaled up?

Impact

- Has the programme delivered the intended outcome and impact results for young children, especially for the most marginalized groups of young children?
- Do the impact results reported in terms of greater inclusion and improved quality of ECD (in the pilot kindergartens and ECD centers) really represent a change in the lives of children, in terms of the realization of their right to quality ECD and reduction of equity gaps?
- Are these results supported by reliable and validated primary data (surveys, administrative data, evaluations, assessments)?
- What has been UNICEF’s contribution to government’s policy formulation, implementation or fine tuning through its work in terms of knowledge generation, evidence-based advocacy and policy advice, and technical support?
- Based on an analysis of UNICEF’s impact on system level at country level – where has UNICEF’s influence been the strongest? Is it in: a) supporting policy and legal reform; b)
building capacity to implement the law; c) evidence-based advocacy and/or e) design and pilot models that can be replicated and incorporated in national or municipal design?

**Sustainability**

- Will the outcome and impact results (system change for improved access and greater inclusion of marginalized in quality ECD) be sustained over time in the country?
- If not, what are the enabling factors and bottlenecks to the sustainability of the impact results?
- Is the equity gap likely to increase, remain stable or decrease when support is withdrawn?
- Are the UNICEF supported programme interventions institutionalized in the national ECD structure (record keeping, monitoring child outcome, inspection framework, teacher professional development, licencing, etc)?

Issues related to the Human Rights-Based Approach to Programming, Results-Based Management and Gender Equality will be addressed across the evaluation questions or, if required, developed as specific points as per UNEG Guidance on Integrating human-rights and gender equality in evaluation (see link below) and complies with the organization’s commitment to gender mainstreaming as expressed in the Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Girls.


Evaluation questions will be further refined and additional ones will be incorporated by the evaluator/s – if required - during the preparation of the FYRoM country report.

**LIMITATIONS**

As explained above, the main objective of the UNICEF supported programme was to achieve a system change through which the proposed model for increasing coverage with quality ECD services, especially for the marginalized children will be incorporated in the national legislation and implemented at national level. Although the programme has a strong component focusing on capacity building and improving the quality of services, the questions related to impact are limited to the impact at system level while the changes in behaviour of young children and ECD staff will not be a subject of this evaluation. This was decided in the planning phase of the programme, when a decision was made not to conduct baseline study to collect information on behaviour and practices of children and ECD staff.

**METHODOLOGY**

Stakeholders participated in the MCE through discussions, consultations, provide comments on draft documents and some of them will be responsible for follow-up to the recommendations.

The MCE followed internationally agreed evaluation criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability.

To ensure impartiality and lack of biases, the methodology included a cross-section of information sources (e.g. stakeholder groups, including beneficiaries, etc.) and a mix of quantitative, qualitative, participatory methodology to ensure triangulation of information.

The MCE was based on analysis of secondary data and on primary data collection. Secondary data were assessed during the pre-mission phase to start addressing evaluation issues and identifying the information gaps prior to the in-country mission.
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**Inception Phase:** (completed as part of the MCE) The first step of the evaluation process was the inception phase during which the Evaluation Team developed an evaluation framework based on the TOR (theory of change, UNICEF’s strategies, core roles evaluation questions). For each of the questions and sub-questions, the evaluation team developed indicators to inform the responses and identify the corresponding means of verification. On that basis, the team developed a detailed methodology based on the key elements identified above. In addition, the Evaluation Team assessed potential limitations to the evaluation work and in particular the availability and reliability of data.

A **Desk Review** (completed as part of the MCE) of evidence available at **country** level in relation to impact and systems results, reduction of equity gaps and theory of change in the area of ECD was undertaken. The desk review relied on UNICEF documentation (studies, evaluation and survey reports), but also covered government documents, including assessments, studies, policy documents, strategy papers, plans of action, evaluations and documentation of projects implemented by other partners. Survey results, administrative data or other available data sources were verified and analysed to confirm the assumption that changes in children’s lives (impact) and reduction of equity gaps had indeed (or not) occurred during the past decade. All possible evidence available at **country** level in relation to policy and legal reform, situation analysis, capacity development and teacher professional development, monitoring reports from ELDS implementation in ECD centers and KGs, and other assessment reports was used to demonstrate how UNICEF’s contribution led to system changes for quality ECD, and explain and support the logical model/theory of change; evaluations and other assessment reports were used to demonstrate how system changes and UNICEF’s contribution to them led to changes in the lives of children; and other documents were used to explain and support the theory of change.

**In-country data collection** (completed as part of the MCE) primary data collection included information from interviews and/or FGDs with key stakeholders (MLSP, municipalities, local NGOs, kindergarten principals) and questionnaires for ECD staff, psychologists, pedagogues and parents.

**Data analysis and report writing** (completed as part of the MCE) the process started in the inception phase when the evaluation team proposed detailed methodological approach and the structure of the final report. Data analysis progressed simultaneously with the desk review and the in-country data collection.

**FYRoM Country Report:** For the FYRoM country report, the evaluator/s will go into further depth with the data already gathered. The draft final report will be reviewed by the CO Evaluation Committee and by the RO M&E facility. The evaluator/s will incorporate the comments and submit the Final report to the CO.

**General considerations:** The methodology of the MCE was in line with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards. [UNEG Norms and Standards](#). These standards will also apply to the FYRoM Country Report.
## Appendix 2: List of persons consulted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tatjana Atanasoska</td>
<td>Bitola</td>
<td>Representatives from teacher training faculties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biljana Cvetkova Dimov</td>
<td>Bitola</td>
<td>Representatives from teacher training faculties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniela Andonovska Trajkovska</td>
<td>Bitola</td>
<td>Representatives from teacher training faculties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaneta Conteva</td>
<td>Bureau for Education Development</td>
<td>Advisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipality Aerodrom</td>
<td>ECD &amp; education</td>
<td>Municipality Aerodrom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stefano Sgobba</td>
<td>EU Delegation in Macedonia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadica Kostovska</td>
<td>Integration, Ministry of Education and Science</td>
<td>Sector for EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative from the Municipality of Bitola</td>
<td>Bitola Municipality</td>
<td>Education/sports/culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vera Petrovska</td>
<td>Ministry of Labour and Social Policy</td>
<td>Head of Sector for Child Protection (responsible for ECD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darka Petrushevska</td>
<td>Ministry of Labour and Social Policy</td>
<td>State Advisor responsible for Inspection in the CP sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeta Kunovska</td>
<td>Ministry of Labour and Social Policy</td>
<td>UNICEF focal point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snezana Kostovska</td>
<td>Ministry of Labour and Social Policy</td>
<td>Head of budget coordination and reporting unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanja Dzambazovska</td>
<td>Municipality of Stip</td>
<td>Social, health and child protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatjana Koteva</td>
<td>Skopje</td>
<td>Representatives from teacher training faculties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florina Shehu</td>
<td>Skopje</td>
<td>Representatives from teacher training faculties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of Municipal Council</td>
<td>Municipality of Aerodrom</td>
<td>Member of Commission of child protection, education and equal opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snezana Mirascieva</td>
<td>Teacher training facilities: Stip</td>
<td>Representatives from teacher training faculties</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kiril Barbareev</td>
<td>Teacher training facilities: Stip</td>
<td>Representatives from teacher training faculties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vesna Makasevska</td>
<td>Teacher training facilities: Skopje</td>
<td>Representatives From Teacher Training Faculties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bertrand Desmoulins</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>Country representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajae Msefer Berrada</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>Deputy Representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nora Sabani</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>ECD/Education team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrijana Micevska</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>ECD/Education team</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zoran Stojanov</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>M&amp;E Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilija Talev</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>Social Policy Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biljana Ancevska</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>National ECD expert team</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nadica Janeva</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>National ECD expert team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogue and psychologist</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>Pedagogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Velika Nikolova</td>
<td>Primary school Vasil Glavinov, Skopje</td>
<td>Pedagogue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

54
Focus groups discussions and interviews with directors, parents and teachers were held at the following schools:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School name</th>
<th>Region</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten MAJSKI CVET</td>
<td>Bitola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten ANGEL SHAJCE</td>
<td>Kumanovo</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECD centre, B AMBI</td>
<td>Novaci</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kindergarten SRNICKA</td>
<td>Skopje</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECD centre, SUMNAL</td>
<td>Skopje</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kindergarten ASTIBO</td>
<td>Stip</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECD centre, BABE</td>
<td>Stip</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kindergarten MLADOST</td>
<td>Tetovo</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECD centre, POTOK</td>
<td>Tetovo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kindergarten MAJSKI CVET</td>
<td>Bitola</td>
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<tr>
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