

# UNICEF Evaluation Management Response

**Evaluation title:** Increasing access and equity in early childhood education in the CEE/CIS region<sup>1</sup>

**Year:** 2014

**Office and person in charge for management response:**

Regional Office CEE/CIS, Regional Adviser, Early Childhood Development – Ms. Deepa Grover; and Head of the Kosovo<sup>2</sup> Office and Regional Knowledge and Leadership Agenda (RKLA) for Children in the CEE/CIS Region Reference Group Chairperson, Ms. Laila Omar Gad.

**Overall response to the evaluation:**

The final report for the Multi-Country Evaluation of Regional Knowledge and Leadership Area 3: Increasing access and equity in early childhood education (ECE) has been reviewed by the Regional Reference Group (RRG) for the evaluation as well as by an external expert panel. The RRG was satisfied with the work of the evaluation team in terms of the timeliness of submitted reports, responsiveness in addressing suggestions and producing a high quality final report. The evaluation report was also reviewed by the management of the UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEE/CIS), who found the equity gap analysis and the financial analysis by core role to be useful, as was the analysis of the contribution of core roles for each determinant aggregate group that linked to both regional results for children and approaches outlined in the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2014–2017. The management of the CEE/CIS region fully agrees with 11 of the 15 recommendations and partially agrees with the remaining 4 recommendations. As elaborated in the table that follows, the implementation of most of the recommendations is underway.

**Were there shortfalls or limitations in the process and/outcomes?**

The lack of standardized data disaggregated by wealth status, rural-urban residence, ethnic group affiliation and disability status, posed a significant barrier to making an even deeper analysis, drawing conclusions and making recommendations. A significant recommendation of the report is the improvement of early childhood management information systems.

**Are there any additional insights not articulated in the recommendations?** The recommendations are comprehensive.

**Planned use of the evaluation:** In this regard, an indicative dissemination, communication and engagement plan has been prepared.

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<sup>1</sup> The evaluation covered five countries and one territory of the CEE/CIS region.

<sup>2</sup> Under United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

**Evaluation Recommendation 1:** It is recommended that the theory of change (TOC) is amended to reflect system approaches to capacity development and the importance of system determinants at subnational as well as national levels.

**Management Response:** (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): **AGREE**

**If recommendation is rejected or partially accepted, report reasons:**

Actions planned	Responsible Office/Person	Expected completion date	Implementation stage: Not Started Underway Completed Cancelled	Actions taken	Supporting documents
TOC to be reviewed and revised.	Regional Office (RO)/Regional Adviser early childhood development (RA ECD)  Country Office/ (CO/RRG )	April 2015	Completed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on the recommendation, a workshop facilitated by external experts was organized from 8–9 October 2014.</li> <li>• An output of the workshop was a TOC that addresses capacity development as well as system determinants at subnational and national levels with respect to ECE.</li> <li>• In order to establish and reinforce continuity with basic education, the ECE TOC has been aligned with the TOC prepared for the document “Including All Children in Quality Learning”.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Workshop concept note.</li> <li>2. Presentation.</li> <li>3. Final draft of the document “A Fair Start: Strategic directions in early learning and school readiness”</li> <li>4. TOC – “Including All Children in Quality Learning”.</li> </ol>

**Evaluation Recommendation 2:** It is recommended that UNICEF, headed by the RO and working with all COs, develop a long-term vision and strategy for early learning and school readiness (ELSR) in the region, with differentiated goals and strategic approaches for low-income countries/territories, middle-income countries/territories, those with European Union (EU) pre-accession status and those that are already members of the EU.

**Management Response:** (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): **AGREE**

**If recommendation is rejected or partially accepted, report reasons:**

Actions planned	Responsible Office/Person	Expected completion date	Implementation stage: Not Started Underway Completed Cancelled	Actions taken	Supporting documents
Develop a long-term vision and strategy for ELSR in the CEE/CIS region, with an emphasis on closing the equity gap in terms of access to and quality of ELSR.	RO/RA ECD CO/CRRG	April 2015	Completed	A workshop facilitated by external experts was organized from 8-9 October 2014. A long-term vision and strategic direction for ECE in the region was developed. The document recognizes the influence of EU accession processes on the priorities and policy focus for early childhood services where countries are seeking accession to the EU, and provides recommendations and examples of strategies to accelerate early education expansion in low- and middle-income countries/territories.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Workshop concept note.</li> <li>2. Presentation.</li> <li>3. Final draft of the document "A Fair Start: Strategic directions in early learning and school readiness."</li> </ol>

**Evaluation Recommendation 3:** It is recommended that, by conducting short national research studies, UNICEF review the possible risks to quality arising from rapidly increasing access.

**Management Response:** (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): **AGREE**

**If recommendation is rejected or partially accepted, report reasons:**

Actions planned	Responsible Office/Person	Expected completion date	Implementation stage: Not Started Underway Completed Cancelled	Actions taken	Supporting documents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support COs to review and upgrade quality in ECE programmes, with a focus on providing access of the most excluded to quality ELSR.</li> <li>Strengthen partnerships with other agencies engaged in promoting monitoring and measuring quality, and promote exchange of lessons and knowledge products.</li> </ul>	RA ECD	December 2016	Underway	<p>The RA is linked to an EU group as well as a global group working on the issue of quality in ECE. Learning from these forums will inform the assessment and improvement of ECE quality across different forms of provision in CEE/CIS countries.</p> <p>The RO has recruited the services of a senior ECE expert. The expert, who comes from the University of Ghent, Belgium, and is the Director of the Centre for Innovation in the Early Years, has worked closely with the EU. Using the EU quality framework for early childhood education and care, the expert is cooperating with UNICEF COs to support national Governments to unpack the question of quality in ECE and the risks arising from rapidly increasing access. Detailed recommendations with regard to measuring, monitoring and improving the quality of ECE are expected as a result of this exercise.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EU quality framework.</li> <li>Report of the global group on ECE quality.</li> <li>Brief on quality in ECE in CEE/CIS.</li> <li>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Starting Strong III and IV.</li> </ol>

**Evaluation Recommendation 4:** It is recommended that UNICEF deepen its approach to teacher training and professional development (including teachers' capacities to identify needs and draw on cross-sectoral support services); and work on children's ways of learning and respect for children's rights throughout preschool (identity, integrity, participation and agency).

**Management Response:** (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): **AGREE**

**If recommendation is rejected or partially accepted, report reasons:**

Actions planned	Responsible Office/Person	Expected completion date	Implementation stage: Not Started Underway Completed Cancelled	Actions taken	Supporting documents
<p>Document and share best practices in the region</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support evaluation on including the use of nationally approved early learning and development standards to strengthen teacher training.</li> <li>Document teacher support through mentoring in the Republic of Moldova.</li> </ul>	<p>RA ECD CO ECD focal points</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia evaluation completed</li> <li>Republic of Moldova documentation – July 2016</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Underway</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia evaluation report on ECE, including the use of nationally approved early learning and development standards to strengthen teacher training, has been completed.</li> <li>Documentation of teacher support through mentoring in the Republic of Moldova, is to be initiated.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia final evaluation report.</li> <li>Republic of Moldova: Education Code and Education Strategy 2020; modules on mentoring.</li> </ol>

**Evaluation Recommendation 5:** It is recommended that UNICEF develop guidance and tools for child participation from ages 4 to 8 to ensure children’s voices are heard and integrated into the general reflection on ELSR quality.

**Management Response:** (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): **PARTIALLY AGREE**

**If recommendation is rejected or partially accepted, report reasons:** Other agencies, such as Save the Children, have developed a critical mass of literature on the question of children’s participation. UNICEF already supports the integration of children’s voices into ELSR through promoting child-centred curricula and play-based learning. There is no need to develop new guidance and tools; rather what exists needs to be consolidated, repackaged and shared.

Actions planned	Responsible Office/Person	Expected completion date	Implementation stage: Not Started Underway Completed Cancelled	Actions taken	Supporting documents
<p>In-house review of existing tools and material on young children’s participation as it relates to ELSR quality.</p> <p>Packaging and sharing of the review.</p>	RA ECD	December 2016	Not started	To be initiated.	<p>Putting Children at the Centre: A practical guide to children’s participation (Save the Children, November 2010),</p> <p>&lt;<a href="http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/putting-children-centre-practical-guide-childrens-participation">www.savethechildren.org.uk/resources/online-library/putting-children-centre-practical-guide-childrens-participation</a>&gt;.</p>

**Evaluation Recommendation 6:** It is recommended that the RO provide further support to institutionalizing the development and dissemination of quality children’s television (TV), such as *Magic Journey*. However, this may need engagement with commercial channels and rights management, which is beyond the capacity of the CO.

**Management Response:** (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): **PARTIALLY AGREE**

**If recommendation is rejected or partially accepted, report reasons:** While it is agreed that the RO should provide further support to the development and dissemination of quality educational TV for children, questions of engaging with commercial channels and rights management require corporate engagement. This is beyond the capacity of the RO and certainly beyond the very limited current capacity in private sector engagement of the RO ECD Unit, and would require the involvement and support of New York headquarters. The RO will be in a position to only provide support related to the technical aspects of improving programmatic quality.

Actions planned	Responsible Office/Person	Expected completion date	Implementation stage: Not Started Underway Completed Cancelled	Actions taken	Supporting documents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The RO will provide technical support to advancing and expanding early childhood educational TV, at the specific request of the COs involved, i.e. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The possibility of horizontal cooperation will also be supported.</li> <li>• Kyrgyzstan will continue efforts on institutionalization of development and dissemination of quality children’s TV programmes, with a focus on the newly opened children’s channel (under the auspices of the national broadcaster).</li> <li>• Explore potential broader action at the global level</li> </ul>	<p>Kyrgyzstan CO/ECD and Communication team</p> <p>Tajikistan CO/ECD and Communication team</p> <p>RO ECD</p>	<p>December 2016</p>	<p>Underway</p>	<p>Kyrgyzstan <i>Magic Journey</i> expansion proposal prepared.</p> <p>Tajikistan concept note prepared.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kyrgyzstan <i>Magic Journey</i> expansion proposal.</li> <li>2. Tajikistan concept note.</li> </ol>

from the perspective of engaging with the corporate sector.					
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**Evaluation Recommendation 7:** Where there are standards in place that do not match the main modalities of provision (multiple year/single year, full year/limited hours, full day/half day, etc.), it is recommended that an additional guideline be prepared to operationalize the standards for different forms of provision, including those that have limited age coverage and shorter hours. This could be led by COs with their experiences shared through the RO.

**Management Response:** (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): **AGREE**

**If recommendation is rejected or partially accepted, report reasons:**

Actions planned	Responsible Office/Person	Expected completion date	Implementation stage: Not Started Underway Completed Cancelled	Actions taken	Supporting documents
Joint initiative of selected COs (which will self-nominate) to develop standards of provision across different forms of provision.	ECD focal point of self-nominated CO and RA ECD	December 2016	Not started	Most countries have standards for basic provision, which need to be customized, refined and expanded. This exercise will be linked subsequent to the outputs of the ECE quality exercise (see Evaluation Recommendation 3 above). Action will be initiated in 2016.	Existing standards documents.

**Evaluation Recommendation 8:** It is recommended that UNICEF strengthen its ability to navigate decentralization and to provide sustainable capacity development support to institutions at the national and subnational levels.

**Management Response:** (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): **PARTIALLY AGREE**

**If recommendation is rejected or partially accepted, report reasons:** This is an area of governance that is not specific to ELSR and requires a better understanding by the entire organization of how to support reforms and how to work at decentralized levels. Navigating decentralization is relevant to all of the sectors in which UNICEF is engaged, and generic guidelines are required to inform ELSR-specific programming. From the sectoral perspective, it should be possible to examine the structures, mechanisms and processes that either obstruct (bottlenecks) or facilitate (opportunities) access, equity and quality in ELSR. The results of the review should both be shared with relevant stakeholders at country level and also feed into a larger effort that results in the preparation of guidance on how UNICEF can engage with decentralization.

Actions planned	Responsible Office/Person	Expected completion date	Implementation stage: Not Started Underway Completed Cancelled	Actions taken	Supporting documents
Review of ELSR – functions, functionaries and funds – at the subnational level (in selected countries to be identified in consultation with COs and the UNICEF Subnational Engagement Working Group), including rural/urban dichotomies in terms of the availability of services in ELSR and the private/public sector divide.	RA social policy/ protection  Chair, RKLA 8  Chair, RKLAs 3 and 4  RA ECD  CO focal points	December 2016	Underway	In collaboration with Social and Economic Policy colleagues, a terms of reference (TOR) for a detailed review of ECE at the subnational level has been prepared, and the selection of appropriate expertise to undertake this task is in process. It is expected that the review will provide the necessary information, guidance and recommendations to (a) better navigate decentralization; and (b) enable UNICEF and partners to provide support to capacity development of national and subnational institutions.	1. UNICEF RO decentralization guidance documents (draft). 2. TOR document.

**Evaluation Recommendation 9:** It is recommended that the UNICEF RO publish an open call for consultants with a wide range of expertise, including on system change and management (e.g. finance, legislation, education decentralization and public administration), and maintain a roster of specialized consultants who could be contacted by COs/RO. This would enable UNICEF to draw from a wider range of expertise and to maximize its chance of timely recruitment of experts in the range of areas required as the sector develops. Regional expertise in these areas can be identified and nurtured.

**Management Response: (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): AGREE**

**If recommendation is rejected or partially accepted, report reasons:**

Actions planned	Responsible Office/Person	Expected completion date	Implementation stage: Not Started Underway Completed Cancelled	Actions taken	Supporting documents
Call for curricula vitae (CVs)	RA ECD	End-2015	Underway	The RO already has several CVs on file, which are updated and shared with COs upon request. The RA ECD is also supporting the RO initiative to develop and maintain rosters of qualified experts. A TOR has been prepared for consultants with expertise in the various disciplines and sub-disciplines associated with ECD, including ECE. A call for expressions of interest will be issued in the near future.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. CVs available on the RO shared drive.</li> <li>2. TOR document.</li> </ol>

**Evaluation Recommendation 10:** It is recommended that UNICEF support the development of a stronger framework for data collection in ELSR by developing an extended technical document on required data for the sector and for COs working with national (and increasingly subnational) agencies, to improve data on ELSR and to address gaps.

**Management Response:** (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): **AGREE**

**If recommendation is rejected or partially accepted, report reasons:**

Actions planned	Responsible Office/Person	Expected completion date	Implementation stage: Not Started Underway Completed Cancelled	Actions taken	Supporting documents
<p>A review is planned to assess current systems of collecting data on early learning in CEE/CIS. Based on the expert review and recommendations, the ECD Section and RRG will work with the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&amp;E) Section to define and refine indicators and identify ways in which data are used for: (a) evidence-based decision-making; and (b) monitoring progress and trends.</p>	<p>RA ECD RA M&amp;E</p>	<p>December 2016 (funds permitting)</p>	<p>Underway</p>	<p>Two key actions have been undertaken in this regard and will assist in the development of a stronger framework for data collection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In collaboration with the Education Section, a detailed list of existing ECE indicators has been prepared. Core indicators will be agreed upon with COs to monitor common results.</li> <li>• A TOR has been developed in collaboration with the Education and M&amp;E Sections to conduct an expert review of ECE data gathering and management systems at country level.</li> </ul>	<p>Indicators list attached to TOC – “Including All Children in Quality Learning”.</p>

- Evaluation Recommendation 11:** 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.
  - Children’s learning outcomes, including comparisons across different types of ELSR provision.
  - Parental attitudes that inform demand-side determinants around types of ECE provision and inclusive approaches.
  - Issues pertaining to increasing equity and quality.

**Management Response:** (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): **PARTIALLY AGREE**

**If recommendation is rejected or partially accepted, report reasons:**

If they are to be pursued in a rigorous manner and with technical assistance from experts, the suggested research topics will need significant funding. Given the limited funding available in CEE/CIS for ECD/ELSR, research topics would need to be listed, prioritized and pursued with the participation of the RRG.

- 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. **Given the extensive research on these topics globally, it would be more efficient to collate research findings and develop policy and advocacy briefs rather than conducting specific primary research in CEE/CIS.**
- Children’s learning outcomes, including comparisons across different types of ELSR provision. **Measuring young children’s learning outcomes requires measuring several complex constructs (e.g. “executive function”); there is little agreement on how this can be done to allow for valid comparisons between countries. There already exists some research of this nature within countries and this will be supported and encouraged.**
- Parental attitudes that inform demand-side determinants around types of ECE provision and inclusive approaches.
- Issues pertaining to increasing equity and quality.

Actions planned	Responsible Office/Person	Expected completion date	Implementation stage: Not Started Underway Completed Cancelled	Actions taken	Supporting documents
Hold a consultation with the RRG to define a research agenda and calendar.	RA ECD RRG Chair	Mid-2015	Not started	The development of a regional research agenda on ECE has been deferred until Q2 of 2016. This will be one of the topics of discussion and consensus-building at the ECE and Education Network Meeting to be held jointly between the ECD and Education Sections in Q1 or Q2 of 2016.	

**Evaluation Recommendation 12:** It is recommended that UNICEF strengthen its cross-sectoral approach towards ELSR, both in terms of its own internal programming and organization, and the linkages that it seeks to support at the system level.

**Management Response:** (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): **AGREE**

**If recommendation is rejected or partially accepted, report reasons:**

Actions planned	Responsible Office/Person	Expected completion date	Implementation stage: Not Started Underway Completed Cancelled	Actions taken	Supporting documents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a programme guidance note.</li> <li>• Link with headquarters efforts to build capacity of ECD staff based on evidence available in the capacity needs assessment report.</li> <li>• Link with headquarters efforts to define generic job descriptions of ECD professionals to include a multisectoral orientation.</li> </ul>	RA ECD	End-2015  End-2015  End-2015	Underway	RO CEE/CIS has been working closely with New York headquarters (NYHQ) in the preparation and production of a Global Programme Guidance Note that clearly addresses the cross-sectoral approach necessary for ECD, as well as developing more robust ECD capacity within UNICEF. The Guidance Note is currently being finalized at NYHQ.	

<p><b>Evaluation Recommendation 13:</b> 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.</p>					
<p><b>Management Response:</b> (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): <b>AGREE</b></p>					
<p><b>If recommendation is rejected or partially accepted, report reasons:</b></p>					
Actions planned	Responsible Office/Person	Expected completion date	Implementation stage: Not Started Underway Completed Cancelled	Actions taken	Supporting documents
Align with UNICEF NYHQ efforts on ECD capacity development within the organization	RA ECD Senior Adviser ECD - NYHQ	Ongoing	Underway	<p>NYHQ developed a management response to the evaluation of ECD in 2012. Some of the planned actions relate to capacity development – these are still to be undertaken.</p> <p>NYHQ has identified several suitable ECD courses that are available online. A comprehensive Early Childhood Resource Pack is available to all stakeholders. In the meantime, in 2015, the RO developed a set of training modules (pitched at outreach workers, but usable by a wider variety of stakeholders) on ECD that cover key areas relating to all domains of child development as well as the risk and protective factors in the environments of young children. While there are several appropriate materials and courses available, CO staff need to be incentivized to undertake training/professional development opportunities.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Evaluation of UNICEF early childhood development programme with a focus on Government of Netherlands funding – Management response.</li> <li>2. Early Childhood Resource Pack, second edition.</li> <li>3. ECD training modules.</li> </ol>

**Evaluation Recommendation 14:** It is recommended that the UNICEF RO work with COs to strengthen the definition of core roles, identifying challenges and opportunities as well as good practices for each role. UNICEF could specify what constitutes good technical assistance and good knowledge brokering, and what standards UNICEF should aim to achieve when engaging in each core role.

**Management Response:** (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): **AGREE**

**If recommendation is rejected or partially accepted, report reasons:**

Actions planned	Responsible Office/Person	Expected completion date	Implementation stage: Not Started Underway Completed Cancelled	Actions taken	Supporting documents
Guidance developed and shared with COs	RAs Planning and M&E	End-2015	Underway	UNICEF RO has prepared a new paper that defines and describes core roles. The paper was presented, discussed and endorsed by the Regional Management Team in October 2015 and presented to Deputy Representatives in November 2015.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. RO TOC document.</li> <li>2. RO revised core roles document.</li> </ol>

**Evaluation Recommendation 15:** It is recommended that UNICEF strengthen its partnership with the EU in accession candidate countries/territories so as to coordinate policy support with the accession agenda and align practice.

**Management Response:** (Agree, Partially Agree, Disagree): **AGREE**

**If recommendation is rejected or partially accepted, report reasons:**

Actions planned	Responsible Office/Person	Expected completion date	Implementation stage: Not Started Underway Completed Cancelled	Actions taken	Supporting documents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular knowledge exchange with EU and key partners.</li> <li>Sharing of EU knowledge products with COs.</li> <li>Preparation of a two--pager of CO-EU partnership highlights.</li> <li>Strengthening partnership with other key agencies in ELSR, such as OECD, Council of Europe, World Bank and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, to ensure harmonization of practices and approaches.</li> </ul>	<p>RA ECD ECD/Education Officers in the region</p> <p>RA ECD</p> <p>RA ECD</p> <p>RA ECD Regional Partnership Manager ECD/Education Officers in the region</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Underway</p>	<p>The RO has been a part of the Directorate General Education and Culture (DG EAC) Stakeholders Group and is in regular touch with regard to matters of common interest. UNICEF is a regular participant at EU early childhood care and education events (representatives of UNICEF most recently participated in the Conference on Diversity and Multilingualism in Early Childhood Education and Care conducted under the auspices of the Luxembourg Presidency of the EU in September 2015). EU knowledge products are shared with the ECD/ECE network on a regular basis. UNICEF has recruited and continues to recruit EU expertise to support ECE activities in the region. UNICEF, in collaboration with the Open Society Foundations and the Roma Education Fund, has also been engaged with EU countries such as the Czech Republic in the preparation of research and advocacy reports on the pan-European theme of Roma early childhood inclusion. The Roma Early Childhood Inclusion+ Czech Republic Special Report was launched in November 2015. Its</p>	<p>EU Communications DG EAC “Quality Framework for ECEC”</p> <p><i>Roma Early Childhood Inclusion+ - Czech Republic – Special Report on Roma Inclusion in Early Childhood Education and Care, November, 2015.</i></p>

				findings and recommendations were discussed at an event attended by a variety of partners and stakeholders from government and civil society.	
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