



REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND LEADERSHIP AGENDA FOR CHILDREN IN THE CEE/CIS REGION

INDEPENDENT MULTI-COUNTRY EVALUATION OF RESULTS AREA 3

INCREASING ACCESS AND EQUITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN CEE/CIS

FINAL REPORT
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Executive summary

Background

Across the CEE/CIS region many countries share traditions of state-funded care and education of preschool children under former Soviet Union or former Yugoslavia systems. Following the collapse of these systems and the loss of social subsidies, many countries were unable to sustain their early childhood education and care services because of lack of funds, structure and political will. The residual kindergartens are concentrated in urban areas and cater for the wealthy, leaving much of the population without access to early childhood education or care. Over the past decade governments have gradually started to rebuild national and decentralised systems for early childhood education but coverage in many cases remains low with significant equity gaps in access.

UNICEF has been working in the region at a national systems level to support transition to sustainable, quality preschool education, able to reach all children aged 3-6. It has supported approaches that prioritise early learning and school readiness (ELSR) in contrast to the legacy of care-driven provision for working parents.

Objective, scope and methodology

This evaluation of UNICEF's ELSR work was commissioned by UNICEF CEE/CIS Regional Office (RO) in 2013. It is one of five multi-country evaluations, each on a different thematic area, which were commissioned to test the validity of UNICEF's regional generic Theory of Change (TOC). This TOC articulates UNICEF's programming shift to contributing to systemic change as the most effective route to the progressive realisation of children's rights.

The specific objectives of this evaluation were to assess: i) whether changes in national ELSR systems have led to increased access and reduced equity gaps in ELSR; and ii)

the contribution of UNICEF to these system changes and the validity of the generic TOC to UNICEF's ELSR work.

The evaluation covers the period 2005-2012 and focuses on the six cases of Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova.

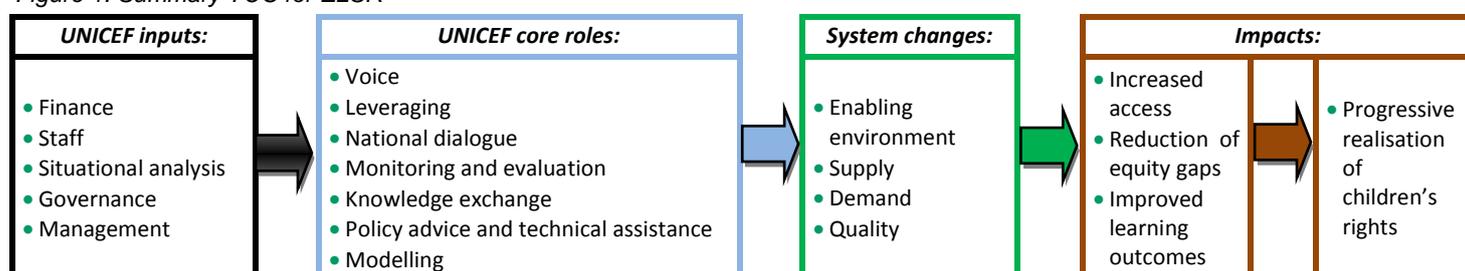
The UNICEF generic TOC sets out four areas of system changes and examines UNICEF's contribution through seven core roles. This was adapted to the ELSR sector (Figure 1) and used to guide the evaluation analysis. Extensive document and data reviews were carried out for each of the six cases. These informed two week visits to each country/territory for consultations with a broad set of ELSR stakeholders at national, district and community levels. The independent evaluation was conducted by Education *for* Change Ltd. between 2013 and 2014.

Equity focus

In many countries and territories in the region, the majority of 3-6 year old children do not have access to early childhood education. Even where national enrolments are high (such as in Moldova), these figures mask significant disparities across different groups of children and between sub-national regions. Whilst disaggregated data is often limited, at a broad level young children living in rural areas make up a significant proportion of those unable to access ELSR services, with other factors of poverty, disability, ethnicity, migration, language and gender interacting to marginalize young children from accessing and participating in ELSR.

Equity is a primary focus of the evaluation: impacts, system changes and UNICEF contributions are examined not only in relation to marginalised groups, but also in relation to whether equity gaps in the sector as a whole have grown or decreased between the most and least marginalised children. Gender equality and human rights considerations are mainstreamed in the evaluation.

Figure 1: Summary TOC for ELSR

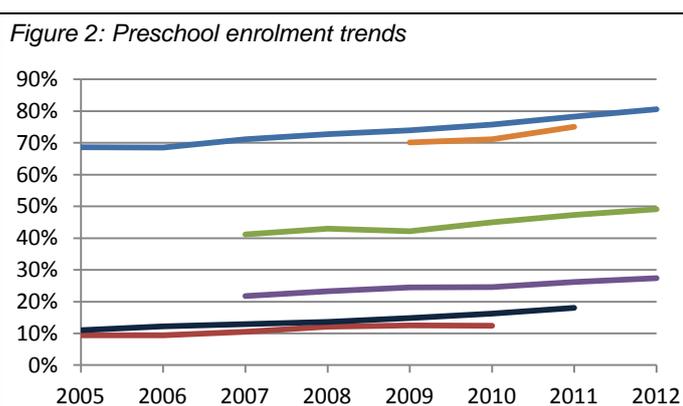


Key evaluation findings

Changes in the lives of children and equity

Data are inconsistent and complex across the six cases, but in each case there have been increases in the number of children aged 3-6 who have access to ELSR (Figure 2). Moldova, starting from a high position of 68% net enrolment in 2005, reached 81% by 2012. Despite low enrolment rates in other cases, in terms of numbers of children enrolled the expansion of services has been impressive: in Kyrgyzstan, from 2005 to 2011, annual enrolment has increased by 38,625 children aged 3-6, an increase of 89% of the total preschool population. In several cases (including Armenia and Kyrgyzstan) these increases will be even larger as data does not capture rapid expansion provided by a short course in the year before school, sometimes referred to as 'Grade Zero', which is intended to become a free, universal offering. The figures for Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) in Figure 2, which only represent this Grade Zero year, demonstrate the high coverage this type of provision can bring – 75% enrolment of 5-6 year olds by 2011.

Whilst access to ELSR has opened up for many in the large group of previously excluded children, available data show that equity gaps remain (and increased in some cases during the earlier part of the evaluation period). Children from urban and wealthier backgrounds in some cases have increased enrolment faster than

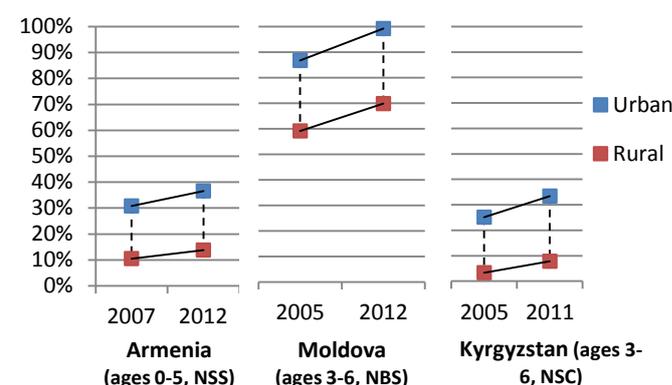


Legend:

Country	Ages	Source
Moldova	3-6	National Bureau of Statistics (NBS)
Kosovo UNSCR1244	5-6 (pre- primary)	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
Armenia	3-5	National Statistical Service (NSS)
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	3-5	State Statistical Office (SSO)
Kyrgyzstan	3-6	National Statistical Committee (NSC)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3-5	TransMonEE

those from rural (Figure 3), poor and ethnic minority backgrounds. The number of children with disabilities who are enrolled is gradually increasing, although levels remain very low and qualitative information indicates that children with disabilities still face significant access barriers to preschool. It should be noted that in a number of cases existing data collection systems do not capture the effect of more recent interventions in the evaluation period (such as pre-primary expansion, or other forms of provision), which were intended to tackle some of these gaps.

Figure 3: Trends in rural and urban preschool enrolment rates



In most cases national figures show higher preschool enrolment rates for girls than boys, but gender intersects with other factors of exclusion (such as disability or ethnicity) to prevent girls from certain groups attending. MICS data from 2011 in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, for example, shows Roma boys had preschool attendance levels of only 6.5%, but Roma girls had an even lower attendance level of 1.1%.

There are very limited data on the impact of ELSR on children's lives, although participation in ELSR has reportedly eased transition to primary school and produces children who are better socialised and more ready for formal schooling. There are concerns, however, that increased access has been achieved at the expense of the holistic child-centred nature of early childhood education.

Relevance

UNICEF has understood the particular system challenges to ELSR in each of the six case countries/territory. Analysis has supported relevant programming to build understanding, political commitment and a regulatory framework for flexible and cost-effective ELSR services able to extend access. However, investigation of the

gaps in the implementation of frameworks is less developed, as are approaches to the complex demand factors and the impact of the private sector which has been mushrooming in urban areas.

UNICEF has mediated its interventions through a strong grasp of the political, social and economic contexts in which it operates, using a range of its core roles to seize opportunities to progress ELSR.

UNICEF has sought increased access across broad categories of marginalisation (such as rural location) before addressing more complex inequities and vulnerabilities. A nuanced understanding of the needs of the most marginalised has only recently started to emerge. As a result, there has been little attention given to equity at a systemic level. The rights-based framework for ELSR has not yet been effectively articulated with other stakeholders or in programmatic implementation.

Quality of provision has, until recently, been a secondary focus of UNICEF's work. However, UNICEF is now starting to match its priority on access with concern for quality of inputs, services and learning outcomes.

Strategic decisions have been taken by UNICEF in the region to separate programming for 0-3 year olds and 3-6 year olds. This is a risk to coherence and continuity of services across the 0-6 age range. It also conspires with the separation between ELSR and early grade primary education to put at risk a coherent approach to early childhood development defined as covering the 0-8 age range. The division of education-driven ELSR from childcare support to parents, regarded as a private matter, has left an important gap in UNICEF's analysis and programming around early childhood services as they relate to issues of equity and women's rights to work.

System level changes

Enabling environment

Social norms. Social norms have increasingly recognised the importance of early learning and school readiness. However, expectations of integrated education and care provision remain strong, with education-driven half-day models often seen as the 'poor relations' to traditional full-day kindergartens.

Social norms (both within marginalised groups and within wider communities) around children from

marginalised groups' access to, and participation in, preschool remain a bottleneck to inclusive, equitable ELSR services. Coordinated approaches to changing mindsets about inclusion are needed with families, communities, ELSR staff and wider society.

Legislation, policy and budget. The evaluation period has seen legislative frameworks for preschool education established in all six cases, providing a significant step forward. New legislation has usually been complemented by preschool-specific or broader education policies strongly directed at rural, remote and underserved areas. Some cases have demonstrated political commitment at senior governmental levels to fill the preschool provision gap quickly, such as in Kyrgyzstan where the President's Road Map highlights the importance of early childhood education which is supported by the ex-President's Foundation. The establishment of legislative and policy frameworks have usually been followed by the development of Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) as a foundation for coherence and quality in provision. The translation of these frameworks into local level policies and practices, however, has been constrained because of diverse provision, decentralised responsibilities and limited and uneven budgets.

Overall, national budget allocations to ELSR have been gradually rising, supported by significant external funding in several cases, such as the Global Partnership for Education in Moldova and Kyrgyzstan and the World Bank in Armenia. However, budgetary responsibility for preschool has been decentralised (e.g. to municipalities or local authorities) in all six cases, and efforts to ensure more equitable allocations have only recently started to emerge, leaving a very uneven landscape of services.

Management & coordination mechanisms. Coordination mechanisms for ELSR at the national level have been developed, such as in the National ECD task force set up in 2005 in Armenia for the development of the legislative framework. In some instances, (Kyrgyzstan, Armenia) parliamentarian groups with responsibilities for education or children's rights have promoted the preschool agenda to secure increased political commitment. Where early childhood education has been incorporated into wider national or education sector plans, management and monitoring of the preschool sector has benefited from the broader coordination mechanisms attached to these plans, such

as the Joint Annual Review Meetings led by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244).

Yet challenges remain for cross-sectoral policy development and planning, and at the critical decentralised level where ELSR delivery is managed. Decentralised authorities lack the capacity to deliver on their responsibilities for preschool education and struggle to transfer national system changes into local service delivery. The resulting uneven level of implementation and resourcing has important implications for equity and points to systemic weaknesses for preschool education that are part of broader government-wide decentralisation bottlenecks.

Lack of data is a critical barrier to planning and management of the ELSR sector, with weak data collection and analysis systems and responsibilities that have struggled to keep up with the expansion of the sector and the diversity of provision. The continuing lack of adequate and disaggregated data and the complexities of the management of the sector constrain the extent to which priority areas and groups can be identified and limit the evidence base for planning or monitoring.

Supply

There have been substantial increases in preschool facilities, particularly in rural areas under large-scale, often externally-funded programmes. The UNICEF-supported *Magic Journey* TV programme in Kyrgyzstan, along with the *Sesame Street* translation in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), are a notable successes in relation to the development and expansion of early childhood educational materials. The daily *Magic Journey* TV programme, which was found to be watched by 95% of 5-6 year olds surveyed across the country, provides a means to deliver educational content, life skills and inclusive messages to a broad swathe of the preschool-age population, only 18% of whom are enrolled in preschool provision.

Staffing levels and qualifications have also risen although the preschool workforce remains overwhelmingly female and representation of minority groups in the workforce is low. There are concerns over the use of either unqualified or primary education-qualified teachers in some programmes.

Demand

Despite the expansion of low-cost or officially free ELSR models of provision, affordability of ELSR services remains a barrier for many families because of informal fees and costs arising under intense competition for places. A 2010 survey in two districts of Armenia, for example, highlighted that 25% of parents reported that they were unable to afford the costs associated with preschool services.

Growing recognition of the importance of early learning, has, in some cases, been accompanied by stronger home/preschool links with parents understanding their role as 'co-educators' of their children. However, these are limited examples, and more generally early learning has been identified as the realm of the 'expert' with parents not feeling equipped to engage with their children's learning. This is particularly so in the case of children with special needs where the status of the role of specialist support (such as speech therapists or psychologists) can limit both teachers' and parents' confidence in engaging with the development of these children.

Internal and international migration of whole families or parents (amongst the Roma and more widely) also creates shifting populations of children that under-resourced municipalities and institutions struggle to address.

Quality

In all six country/territory cases the focus on the expansion of access has been paramount, but there has been an increasing range of work on the quality of provision at national and local levels. Play- and child-centred approaches are increasingly recognised and implemented, although pre-primary programmes often draw on more formal approaches from primary models. ELDS are providing a basis for a more coherent approach to early learning quality, although their application at local levels remains challenging. In some cases it remains unclear how these standards can be applied within shorter pre-primary programmes.

Increasing work around improving teacher pre- and in-service training has emerged. However, systems around the ELSR workforce, including the status of the profession, licensing and certification, career structures and quality assurance and support (through inspection and supervision), remain weak.

One significant gap is a lack of understanding of how different types of preschool provision (kindergarten, community-based centres, pre-primary etc.) affect the quality of children's ELSR experience and outcomes. Apart from one comparative UNICEF study undertaken in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, little research is available on this critical issue.

UNICEF's contribution

UNICEF has played a key role in many of the system changes that have occurred over the evaluation period, using a combination of its seven core roles.

Voice for children. UNICEF has been a strong advocate and voice for early childhood education, contributing significantly to bringing the sector onto the agenda of government and other stakeholders. UNICEF's close relationship with multiple ministries and some parliamentary groups contributes to the identification of pertinent entry points for lobbying, advocacy and interventions. UNICEF has joined with other stakeholders (including OSFs, International Step by Step Association, the World Bank, World Vision, Save the Children, the Aga Khan Foundation) to advocate, communicate and facilitate awareness of young children's, particularly marginalised children's, needs for ELSR. It has a strong network of national and regional partners with whom to work to influence policies on their behalf. This has often been achieved through less tangible, but time-intensive efforts of ongoing dialogue with government officials (or multiple governments in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina).

However, there is little evidence to date of UNICEF having progressed to promoting the voice of children in its ELSR work (i.e. facilitating the inclusion of children's voices and views in ELSR service design, delivery and evaluation).

Policy advice and technical assistance. UNICEF has been an important player in the development of the legislative and policy frameworks for preschool education over the evaluation period, which has been a critical first step in moving the sector forwards. Given the complex nature of policy development, a large proportion of UNICEF policy advice is opportunistic, responding quickly to evolving political agendas, changes in governments and funding opportunities. It has also been a consistent driving force behind the development of ELDS and the acceptance of alternative, low-cost

modalities through its instrumental role in modelling such provision.

Weaker areas have been UNICEF's technical assistance in the area of cross-sector collaboration for ELSR and supporting decentralised systems. Whilst there are emerging good examples in these areas (such as cross-sector municipal teams in Moldova, and models for equitable ELSR financing in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), UNICEF is generally constrained in its opportunistic policy-advice functions by the complexities of multi-sector policy development and budgeting in decentralised contexts, as well as its own lack of technical expertise in these areas.

In all cases, UNICEF has contributed to strengthening individual capacities of staff from ministries, the agencies with responsibilities for curriculum and material development and teacher training, and local communities. At the decentralised level, however, the scale of capacity-development needs (not just at the individual, but also at the organisational and institutional levels) is greater and the short-term training and advice provided by UNICEF for municipalities have not been sufficient to contribute to system change at this level. This has been identified as an area where UNICEF will need more sustained, in-depth, systematic approaches to capacity development.

Modelling. A significant amount of UNICEF's financial resources for ELSR has been allocated to developing alternative, low-cost models for ELSR provision. These have included community-based kindergartens/ECD centres, parenting education programmes, summer school-readiness programmes for refugee children, and other ECD interventions such as the TV *Magic Journey* series in Kyrgyzstan and preschool mobile buses in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Detailed financing studies that have accompanied a number of these models have been instrumental in helping governments accept alternative preschool models that are more affordable (for government and for families) and are reaching children who were previously excluded.

However, there are indications that the tide of pre-primary programmes and the scale of the funding that they have attracted, may be sweeping aside some of these alternative models for preschool provision and eroding their advantages in covering the full 3-6 age

range and as sites for developing stronger child-centred methodologies.

Leveraging resources. Leveraging funds has been a particularly strong and successful aspect of UNICEF's work across the six cases. It has been an important supporting factor in ensuring that ELSR has not only been pushed onto the agenda of governments and agencies, but that tangible work and implementation has been possible to keep up the momentum for sectoral development. UNICEF has been one of the lead agencies in securing ELSR components in major national funding mechanisms including World Bank loans (Armenia), multiple rounds of GPE grants (Kyrgyzstan and Moldova where ELSR was the sole focus for the grant) and, recently, the EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) grant (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). UNICEF has been seen as a reputable and reliable conduit for donors seeking to work in this area and other smaller organisations look to it for help in carrying out ELSR activities. In many cases UNICEF has not only been instrumental in securing these additional resources for the sector, but also in ensuring that resources are channelled towards more marginalised areas, and, increasingly, to aspects of quality. The third GPE grant in Moldova, for example, has quality in the ELSR sector as a priority, with UNICEF as a leading implementer, and in Armenia UNICEF has played an important role in incorporating a training element alongside the infrastructure development of a World Bank funded programme.

Monitoring and evaluation. UNICEF has supported and contributed to reform agendas for ELSR by generating evidence and formulating recommendations through a growing collection of studies and reviews. These include sub-sector reviews, evaluations and fiscal studies of various preschool models, and knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) studies. UNICEF has also collected data on ELSR access for specific groups such as children with disabilities (in Armenia) and Roma children (in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).

UNICEF also conducts child rights monitoring and Country Offices (COs) have demonstrated efforts to develop the capacities of government stakeholders to conduct child rights and child poverty analyses. Although this is work in progress, the evaluation recognises that it is part of a broad rights agenda to which ELSR belongs.

However, in terms of ELSR sector monitoring, although UNICEF has increasingly been involved with education management information systems over the evaluation period, it has usually prioritised data collection for basic education and, as previously discussed, challenges to preschool and ELSR data coverage remain significant. Changing modalities of provision challenge existing data collection systems and there have been only limited attempts by UNICEF to address these issues.

Facilitating national dialogue. UNICEF draws on a range of activities to promote dialogue on child-friendly norms and standards for ELSR. In all six cases respondents recalled consultation roundtables, workshops, publication launches and training and confirmed that UNICEF had been instrumental in bringing these topics to the highest levels nationally (and in some cases regionally). UNICEF also has the capacity to bring a wide range of actors around the table to discuss matters relevant to children's rights. Most notably, UNICEF has been supporting the strong involvement in all cases of NGOs and CSOs working with children. This has resulted in policy makers being exposed to a range of views and perspectives, particularly relating to child poverty, marginalisation, disability and diversity. More interlinkages between UNICEF's own internal sectoral programmes, however, could strengthen this by highlighting the importance of alignments between, for example ELSR and primary education, or ELSR and child and social protection.

Knowledge exchange. UNICEF has been flexible in responding to *ad hoc* needs and demands from governments for knowledge exchange activities. UNICEF has used its position in the sector to broker exchanges of knowledge amongst different types of organisations and across sectors and carried out several influential regional and international study tours for government partners in the first half of the evaluation period. Some good experiences of cross-country/territory sharing within UNICEF (Kosovo UNSCR1244 and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) highlight the potential for more exchange between COs (and even between sectors within COs) concerning good practices and approaches of other countries/territories, particularly amongst UNICEF staff who only work part time on ELSR.

Overall, UNICEF has had limited budgets and human resources for ELSR but through effectively combining its

core roles (e.g. modelling provides credibility for policy advice and leveraging resources) it has been one of the most important partners for ELSR in all six cases. It has utilised its position and relationships to progress its agenda in a complex and evolving sector. However, progress has largely taken place without a clear and articulated longer-term UNICEF vision for ELSR. As both the sector and UNICEF's own programming have developed, the need for a strategic framework has grown.

Sustainability

In some cases there is evidence of necessary financial commitments and in all six cases the development of legislative and regulatory frameworks has been important to embed the sector into government systems and thinking.

There are, however, concerns that in prioritising expanded access, attention has been diverted from ensuring the coherence of multiple forms of provision and their alignment with 0-3 services and primary education. Similarly, concerns surround the integration of equity considerations in approaches and strategies for expansion, and the loss of focus on quality drivers such as inspection and career development.

Conclusions

Interventions have increased the numbers of children receiving preschool education: over the evaluation period there has been expanding provision in rural areas in order to help correct the imbalance with wealthier urban areas. This has mitigated the growth of equity gaps to some extent but has had limited impact on children from the most marginalised groups, including those with disabilities, from ethnic minorities and those in extreme poverty, factors which are often compounded by gender.

System-level bottlenecks have been addressed in a number of areas at national levels, most significantly in areas of the enabling environment and supply, with an emerging focus on quality. UNICEF contributions have been significant and impressive, given the limited budgets and resources available. However, decentralised systems remain challenging and require support to the institutional, organisational and individual capacities of decentralised entities.

UNICEF can make a niche contribution in this regard: whilst other agencies bring a background in public administration and institutional reform, UNICEF's ELSR expertise and equity agenda give it a role in informing the design, implementation and management of institutional reform so as to safeguard and progress quality and equity for ELSR. Whilst UNICEF often provides technical assistance of very good quality, it will need to engage with capacity development based on analysis of institutional and organisational capacity constraints in order to respond effectively to the challenges of decentralisation. This will require the strengthening of UNICEF's access to skill sets in capacity analysis and institutional reform, and the development of new partnerships to bring such support to decentralised authorities.

An important feature of middle income countries is that governments are less dependent on donor funds and, in many cases, have well established national institutions. UNICEF has to analyse and work effectively in these situations, targeting different stakeholders and being strategic about how and when it is able to leverage influence into system processes and ongoing sectoral development. UNICEF has the mandate and position in many countries to exercise this role: it may need to adapt and define approaches to its core roles better to reflect the regional context.

There has been inadequate analysis of the needs of, and the appropriate and practical system response to, different groups of marginalised children. Whilst efforts have been made to focus on broad areas of marginalisation, there is insufficient differentiation of the factors of marginalisation or understanding of how these interact.

A stronger systemic approach to responding to needs and equitable provision is also required, including systems for identifying, assessing, budgeting and administering support to those with special educational needs, those from isolated communities or those facing other marginalisation factors. If preschool systems expand without a core equity focus, gaps will grow and are likely to become institutionalised and more difficult to address in the long-term.

UNICEF has struggled to promote the human rights agenda in ELSR beyond the "right to access". Whilst espousing the rights of children to early learning

opportunities, it has little practice of facilitating the rights of children in programming: to include support for children's autonomy and voice in their learning, for example, or to make explicit an agenda of respect for young learners and their 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.

From a broader women's rights and equity perspective there are reasons for concern arising from UNICEF's separation of education and childcare in early childhood services for 3-6 year olds and their programmatic focus only on the former.

The simple-sounding concept of "school readiness" of a child has no shared definition in the region nor, critically, measures. UNICEF global 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. The other components of school readiness as defined by UNICEF global guidance (readiness of schools and of parents as well as of children) have yet to be fully explored. In particular, the alignment of preschool and primary education systems, approaches and services, and the management of the transition between the two, are critical to the realisation of the benefits of ELSR but have so far been limited.

UNICEF advocates for integration and cross-sector policies such as those for comprehensive social protection that will address preschool exclusion. Yet UNICEF's internal structures do not facilitate integrated cross-sector working in terms of programmes, staff allocation, reporting structures, budget lines and, possibly, staff skills.

Collecting data on preschool services for reporting, planning and administration has proved difficult because of the diverse provision and different data reporting routes. Strengthening the collection, analysis and use of data through appropriate, integrated data systems will be a critical aspect for further progress in the sector.

The burgeoning private sector has largely remained overlooked, and needs to be subject to adequate quality assurance and child protection systems.

The tide of Grade Zero provision has expanded access but, to some extent, side-lined provision for the full 3-6 year age range. The implications of Grade Zero on the

scope and quality of children's preschool experience has not been fully analysed—actors might usefully consider whether universal Grade Zero constitutes an advance in equitable preschooling or is simply lowering the school enrolment age: how different might these two perceptions be?

ELSR quality is an emerging focus for UNICEF and addressing system bottlenecks in terms of teacher career structures, management, inspection, training and professional development will be important as UNICEF emphasises sustainable progress in quality as well as access. A better understanding of what quality entails will need to underpin this. There has been limited opportunity for longitudinal research and the best research examples have been comparative reviews of modalities. There is a need for evaluation of quality and of the outcomes of different types of provision to inform future programming.

Overall, the TOC is a useful tool to inform strategies, analysis and planning and has been validated by the evaluation as a workable framework for understanding how activities drive results and impacts from *core roles* to *system changes* to (medium and longer term) *impacts*. The evaluation has revealed some gaps, however, with regard to how the TOC recognises decentralised systems and the need for institutional and organisational capacity. COs will need more support to use the TOC as intended and to ensure that it better reflects contexts in CEE/CIS as it is transferred into country/territory-relevant TOCs. Analysis of how findings validate the links in the TOC is presented in the conclusions of the report.

Main recommendations

Further detail on each recommendation, and indicative actions for the RO and COs are included in the main report.

Recommendation 1: Amend the TOC to:

(i) include 'institutions able to deliver their function' as a system determinant in the enabling environment, with the RO providing guidance on those core roles that support capacity development, notably Policy advice and TA, in line with UNDP guidelines;¹ and

(ii) show system determinants at sub-national levels to help focus on the chain from national to sub-national systems (and hence to impact for children) in planning interventions.

Recommendation 2: UNICEF, headed by the RO and working with all COs, develops a long-term vision and strategy for ELSR in the region. Equity should be at the core of this strategy, with priority given to the most marginalised children and ways to understand and respond to their different preschool needs (see main report for key recommended elements of this vision and strategy).

Recommendation 3: UNICEF COs review the possible risks to quality arising from rapidly increasing access, with short national research studies.

Recommendation 4: UNICEF deepens its approach to teacher training and professional development and work on children's ways of learning and respect for children's rights.

Recommendation 5: UNICEF develops guidance and tools for child participation to ensure children's voices are heard and integrated into the general reflection on ELSR quality.

Recommendation 6: UNICEF RO provides further support to institutionalising the development and dissemination of quality children's TV.

Recommendation 7: Where there are standards in place that do not articulate with the start and end points of the main modalities of provision (multiple-year/single year, full year/limited hours, full-day/half-day etc.), an

additional guideline should be prepared to allow the standards to be used within provision that has limited age coverage and timing.

Recommendation 8: UNICEF strengthens its ability to navigate decentralisation and support sustainable capacity development at national and sub-national levels. UNICEF COs may need to reconfigure and develop different working relationships with partners to bring technical support and institutional capacity development to sub-national units. This should be based on a capacity development strategy for system institutions, informed by an institutional and organisational mapping of those involved in the sector as part of UNICEF country/territory planning for ELSR, taking account of both national, sub-national, field institutions and (where relevant) the private sector.

Recommendation 9: UNICEF RO publishes an open call for consultants with a range of expertise, including on system change and management, such as in finance, legislation, education decentralisation and public administration, and maintains a roster of specialised consultants upon which COs/RO can call.

Recommendation 10: UNICEF supports the development of a stronger framework for data collection in ELSR through:

- (i) an extended technical document on the desirable data for the sector and the COs working with national (and increasingly sub-national) agencies, to improve data on ELSR; and
- (ii) UNICEF RO and COs taking opportunities to support the development of integrated information systems for preschool and onwards that take the individual child as the unit of data, not aggregated data at school/centre level.

Recommendation 11: UNICEF supports and, if necessary, drives a regional research agenda on:

- (i) a medium-term understanding of school readiness, its impact on children's schooling and life chances and those aspects of ELSR that have the most impact on the lives of children and their families;
- (ii) child learning outcomes (including across different types of provision);
- (iii) parental attitudes to ELSR; and

¹ [Capacity Development | UNDP](#) (referenced April 11, 2014)

(iv) issues pertaining to increasing equity and quality.

To support this agenda UNICEF should develop research partnerships with other agencies including NGOs and universities.

Recommendation 12: UNICEF reviews how it handles inter-sectorality at regional and national levels in both its own internal programming and organisation, and in the linkages it supports at system level to ensure the adoption of a strategic, joined-up approach to preschool. COs should explore how linkages across sectors can be made 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.

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

Recommendation 14: UNICEF RO works 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 TA, good knowledge brokering etc. and what standards UNICEF should aim at when engaging in each core role.

Recommendation 15: UNICEF RO and COs strengthen partnerships with the EU in accession candidate countries/territories so as to coordinate policy support with the accession agenda and align practice.