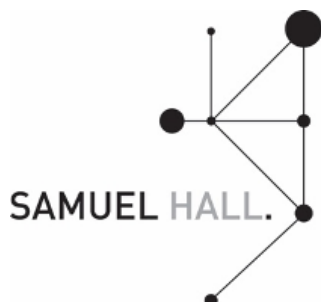


Review of Early Childhood Education (ECE) Models in Pakistan

January 2023 – FINAL REPORT



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KEY CONCEPTS

Early Childhood Education (ECE)	Learning and educational activities at a pre-primary level, typically considered between the ages of three to five years old, before kindergarten or primary level schooling.
Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)	A more holistic development of a child’s social, emotional, cognitive, and physical needs in order to help children reach their full potential. This “can lay the foundation for good health and nutrition, learning and educational success, social-emotional learning, and economic productivity throughout life”. ¹ Typically thought of as between birth and eight years of age, though often thought of as before primary level schooling.
Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD)	A phrase used interchangeably with ECCE, often focusing more on the child’s development and learning.
Early Childhood Development (ECD)	The holistic and multidimensional development of a child from prenatal stage to age 8, including health care, adequate nutrition, protection, responsive caregiving, and early learning opportunities. ²
Caregivers	ECE teaching assistants, generally lacking formal training. They are assigned to ECE classrooms to provide support to teachers.

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¹ UNESCO. (2022). *What you need to know about early childhood care and education*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/education/early-childhood/need-know>

² UNICEF. (2019). *A world ready to learn: Prioritizing quality early childhood education*. <https://www.unicef.org/media/57926/file/A-world-ready-to-learn-advocacy-brief-2019.pdf>

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AEO	Assistant Education Officer
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
BESP	Balochistan Education Sector Plan
COVID-19	2019 Coronavirus Disease
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ELCDP	Early Learning for Child Development Project
ELDS	Early Learning and Development Standards
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
KII	Key Informant Interview
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
KP-EIP	KP Education Improvement Program (KP-EIP)
MEA	Monitoring and Evaluation Assistants
MELQ	Measuring Early Learning and Quality Outcomes
NCECE	National Curriculum of Early Childhood Education
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PESP	Punjab Education Sector Plan
PMIU	Project Management Implementation Unity
PPE	Pre-Primary Education
QAED	Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development
R&RBM	Right and Results-Based Management
SED	School Education Department
SEF	Sindh Education Foundation
SESP&R	School Education Sector Plan and Roadmap for Sindh
SNC	Single National Curriculum
SSI	Semi-Structured Interview
ToR	Terms of Reference

UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A strong early childhood education (ECE) system is critical for children's development as well as countries' socio-economic and human capital development. Participation in quality ECE programmes supports the development of critical foundational skills which in turn contribute to better long-term educational outcomes including age-appropriate primary enrolment, improved school attendance and retention, and stronger performance in core academic subjects.³

Despite the known benefits of ECE, participation in Pakistan remains low due to a variety of factors, including limited capacity and budget, gender and regional inequalities, limited and poorly maintained school facilities, limited professional development of ECE teachers, and the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting education services and widening existing inequalities, among others.

Various ECE initiatives have been implemented both at federal and provincial levels in Pakistan in collaboration with UNICEF and other local and international development actors. At the federal level, the National Education Policy and the Single National Curriculum (SNC) were developed by the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training in 2009 and 2020 respectively, including provision for ECE. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) of 2017 was also developed through a National Curriculum Council (NCC) to help steer curriculum development in the country.⁴

Primary education – including ECE – was devolved to the provincial level in 2010, following the adoption of the 18th amendment. Since then, a wide range of policy documents on ECE have been drafted, as well as programmes prioritising access and quality improvements in ECE. Despite these developments, information on ECE in the country is sparse, the disparity between and within provinces relating to all aspects of the ECE models remains large, and inequalities relating to access to ECE persist.

Study Objectives and Methodology

Effective ECE systems require availability and equitable access to quality pre-primary services, and are grounded in a set of interconnected components, or core functions, and include teachers, families and communities, resource allocation, monitoring and evaluation, and a well-designed curriculum.⁵ **The goal of this study was to obtain critical knowledge about how ECE is structured and implemented in four provinces in Pakistan – Sindh, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and Punjab – to support an evidence-based programmatic strategy for UNICEF Pakistan. Within this, the study had four main objectives:**

1. Provide an overview of the current regional, sub-regional, national, and provincial planning and implementation of ECE
2. Analyse the ECE situation in Pakistan at four levels: policy, system, school, and household/community and child
3. Profile the characteristics of government provided ECE in the four provinces studied in terms of policy, frameworks, and implementation
4. Propose the main components of a strategic and evidence-based intervention for improving ECE's implementation and institutionalisation

This study employed a qualitative research approach with four main tools implemented at the national and provincial levels. In-person **case studies** (20) and **focus group discussions** (38) were conducted with education providers and stakeholders as well as parents and guardians of ECE-aged children. **ECE teacher and classroom observations** (8) provided contextualised information regarding the ECE situation in practice. **Key informant interviews** (69) were conducted remotely with selected key stakeholders including national and provincial government officials, UNICEF staff, donor organisations, and ECE technical experts.

This research utilised UNICEF's Build to Last Framework to map and understand the ECE system in Pakistan. This conceptual framework is used globally by UNICEF to support the development and strengthening of ECE

³ UNICEF. (2020). Build to Last. A framework in support of universal quality pre-primary education. <https://www.unicef.org/media/67191/file/Build-to-last-framework-universal-quality-pre-primary-education.pdf>

⁴ Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training. (2017). National Curriculum Framework Pakistan. <https://www.pc.gov.pk/uploads/report/NCF.pdf>

⁵ UNICEF (2020). Build to Last.

systems; the framework includes an examination of both the enabling environment as well as the core functions of the ECE subsector.⁶ Situating the issues, challenges, gaps, needs or opportunities within the 'system' allowed for the identification of bottlenecks and barriers, as well as strengths and weaknesses within the system.

KEY OVERALL FINDINGS: 10 MESSAGES

While the provincial level findings highlight differing progress and frameworks as ECE currently stands, each province must address the same fundamental aspects of building an ECE. The following highlights key findings synthesised from across all provinces.

1. ECE is challenged at the national level due to limited policy coordination and financing.

A system-strengthening approach to ECE requires consistent coordination and communication across all levels. In Pakistan, there is a 'ministerial anchor' for ECE, though this lead ministry, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, does not have oversight of the results of the subsector nor the devolved provincial Ministries of Education. **Provincial Ministries are responsible for ECE, but without prioritisation in national plans, their coordination with other relevant ministries and stakeholders is challenged. It is a challenge to ensure that provincial Ministries are operating in a coherent manner with the other relevant ministries, providers, and stakeholders.**

The study found that despite there being a national curriculum for ECE, few are using it; responsibilities for coordination and dissemination of ECE policy appear to be diluted through the national-provincial transfer of responsibilities. ECE is insufficiently separated from primary education and requires a stronger base of expertise in ECE.

2. On the whole, the development of policies and legislation at the provincial level shows promise.

Quality ECE services benefit from strong, specific policies and legislation which are able to establish pre-primary education within the government's oversight, showing the vision and commitment from the government. In Pakistan, **each province explicitly mentions ECE in their Education Sector Plans, and Punjab and Sindh further have a fairly comprehensive set of policies and curricula for ECE;** some successes are thus in place in all four provinces. However, **KP and Balochistan have made less progress on policy creation and adherence than Punjab and Sindh.** The most frequently reported gap relating to policy which came out from the qualitative research was that of implementation: respondents regularly expressed concerns relating to the fact that existing plans and policies do not match the on-the-ground realities experienced at the classroom level.

3. There are numerous practical difficulties in the current ECE system preventing the translation of the ECE policies into reality.

Evidence suggests that the country's ECE policies are regularly changed and updated, and as such are 'living' documents, highlighting the dynamic and ever-changing nature of ECE as a component of the education system in Pakistan. Combined with limited coordination of implementation, ECE teachers and administrators are frequently unable to access and understand the curriculum and policies. With teachers and administrators not always aware of or receiving these documents, little progress in terms of implementing a province-wide curriculum and set of standards can be made. This includes coordination efforts to facilitate linkages within the broader ECD landscape, including existing Katchi classes and early childhood care, and ensure clarity around age of ECE enrolment.

4. Further support for parental and community involvement in ECE is needed across provinces.

Despite programmes initiated by UNICEF to engage local community members and parents, many respondents pointed to a marked lack of effort by the government to support communities' and parents' engagement in ECE. At the same time, at the school level, there are often few policies or practices in place to support and engage with members of the community to promote ECE, and few champions within the community to work collaboratively to enhance school-home participation. Limited parental interest has been cited as an issue across provinces, resulting in significant impediments to children's learning.

⁶ Ibid.

5. Limited budgetary transparency challenges assessment of investment in ECE - and thus where support is needed.

Throughout Pakistan, there is no discrete funding allocated for ECE, and even key stakeholders (and documentation around ECE) struggle to provide exact figures of ECE budgets. This is at least partially due to the lack of implementation plans linked to ECE policies in Pakistan, meaning that financial commitments to ECE are not guaranteed. With policies on ECE but no explicit financing for it, ECE is pushed aside as a secondary issue within the larger issue of education in Pakistan.

6. Infrastructural and capacity needs limit ECE implementation.

Though existing policies call for separate ECE classrooms, **infrastructure limitations mean that ECE is often taught in multi-grade classrooms** instead. In KP, and Balochistan, for example, where there is a long history of multi-grade classrooms, one of the key challenges in transforming Katchi classes into ECE is the lack of dedicated separate spaces. Human resource bottlenecks further contribute to this approach. Further, oversubscription to ECE classrooms is common across provinces, with ages up to eight permitted into ECE classrooms, overburdening the crowded system. Finally, school infrastructure is often inadequate, with crumbling walls, a lack of toilet facilities, and a lack of safe drinking water. Infrastructural challenges act both as a barrier to enrolment and as a hindering factor for quality lesson delivery.

7. Nascent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at the system level are in place across all provinces.

Quality assurance processes vary across provinces. Although most provinces claim to capture data related to participation, retention, equity, and infrastructure, much of the data lacks sufficient means of disaggregation. Quality assurance is more commonly supported in primary education, while the existence of actual monitoring of the implementation of the ECE policy is poor, which limits the ability to capture school-level data effectively and ensure implementation of ECE-friendly teaching practice. This results in weak implementation in areas where children do not have adequate resources, such as in rural communities. In addition, significant gaps exist in available data.

8. Pedagogical, capacity, and resource gaps at the school and classroom level challenge ECE teaching across provinces.

Human resource capacity challenges were one of the key system level gaps identified through this research. Specifically, respondents noted teacher recruitment and retention as calling into question the feasibility of ambitious recruitment targets. They also identified current training practices - both pre- and in-service - as insufficient, meaning they cannot fully provide the needed professional development to effectively put into play early childhood education practices called for.

Finally, unclear requirements in terms of qualifications for ECE, and a nomination system for the position rather than application based on qualifications in some provinces showcase a gap in terms of understanding what an ECE teacher's skill set should look like.

9. Respondents in all provinces reported challenges related to curriculum design, training, and dissemination.

The respective provincial curricula are largely based in good practice, with a focus on psychomotor and cognitive skills. However, the curricula (and the teaching manuals) are lengthy (or unclear or non-existent, in some cases), and teachers may not be equipped to understand their respective curricula let alone teach it. In some provinces, some teachers were unaware of an ECE curriculum.

Punjab offers practices from which to learn, with teachers and schools using ECE practices to some degree of effectiveness, although overall, the provinces in this study show mixed results, with a lack of capacity among teaching staff and school administration to adequately implement child-focused learning through play noted. Rote learning, with authoritarian teaching styles and reference to workbooks and textbooks, continues to be common.

10. Broader knowledge around ECE is missing, impacting enrolment and participation.

One of the key gaps identified was the limited knowledge of ECE by many at the household and community level, particularly related to purpose, age of enrolment, and benefits. Parents cited a lack of trust in the ability of

ECE teachers and schools to care for their young children. Without a clear understanding of the benefits of ECE, particularly for children between the ages of three to five, parents are sometimes reluctant to enrol their children, particularly the youngest, in new and unfamiliar ECE programs.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROVINCIAL PRIORITIES

The Government of Pakistan has integrated an ECD framework into its National Education Policy since 2009, explaining that, for a child to develop in a healthy way, it is important not only to meet the basic needs for protection, food and health care, but also interaction, stimulation, affection, security and learning.⁷ More recently, various ECE initiatives have been implemented both at federal and provincial level in Pakistan in collaboration with UNICEF and other international development actors. At the federal level, the new curriculum acknowledged the importance of comprehensive early childhood development, which includes physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and moral development. At the provincial level, a wide range of policy documents on ECE were drafted and specific programmes developed, prioritising access and quality improvements in ECE, through the establishment of ECE classrooms, and specific standards for teacher training, teaching, and learning materials, within a process aimed at achieving a better institutional coordination, community participation and constant monitoring.

Despite the developments made, **very few ECE policies are being actively and comprehensively implemented.** Gaps still exist in a systematic approach on ECE – both at the national and provincial level— along with well defined, measurable indicators of what a successful and effective ECE system looks like. **This study highlights that the existing disparate ECE components offer building blocks for a broader systems approach better institutionalising and implementing existing ECE models.** This is in line with UNICEF Pakistan Country Programme 2018-2022, which aims at increasing the number of children in school and learning at the pre-primary education level, with policies and plans that are more equity focused.

While provinces are at different levels of progress in their development and implementation of ECE policies, at a high level the current status thereof calls for close coordination at **all levels, from the ministerial down to the community, to build both structures and ownership from the ground up.** The disparate challenges they face require examination to identify specific priorities for reach:

PUNJAB

Punjab has strong foundations for the development of a well-functioning ECE system. There has been a large-scale effort within the province to ensure that ECE classrooms are set up and functional, and that there is an institutionalisation of ECE in the province. While policy is often quite ahead of on-the-ground realities, and there is limited coordination at varying levels, Punjab has all of the pieces in place for ECE to be run successfully. Much greater financial prioritisation and transparency for ECE is needed at the federal and provincial level, as Punjab is largely reliant on external funding for ECE. Doing so can help to better implement quality assurance processes and empower government stakeholders at all levels to emphasise the importance of ECE.

- **Priority 1:** Scale up ECE funding from provincial and national education budgets, and increase transparency on funding flows and financing
- **Priority 2:** Clarify expectations for teachers/headteachers/ caretakers and commit to enhanced professional development
- **Priority 3:** Establish a robust system for quality service delivery of ECE

SINDH

By adopting its own Early Childhood Care and Education policy, Sindh has shown its determination to forge its own path with regards to education. The Government of Sindh should demonstrate the political will to adequately embed quality frameworks, standards, and curriculum across all schools, in addition to investing heavily in infrastructure; this will require extensive finances and a multisectoral approach. By doing so, they can show that having provincially differentiated ECE systems is possible and beneficial.

- **Priority 1:** Improve quality of system of delivery
- **Priority 2:** Strengthen political will and financing
- **Priority 3:** Improve quality assurance system

⁷ Government of Pakistan, National Education Policy 2009

Balochistan

Balochistan recognises its shortcomings with regards to education in the Balochistan Education Sector Plan which details the state of infrastructure, teaching quality, and political coordination. With this acute sense of the reality on the ground, the province requires significant political will to make ECE interventions at scale and sustainable. Funding is inadequately set aside and managed for ECE. As a result, the province, already challenged to equip with a trained and skilled workforce and adequate infrastructure, chronically lags behind its peers with regards to ECE provision.

- **Priority 1:** Increase political will and support policy-level championship and financing
- **Priority 2:** Improve coherence of ECE system
- **Priority 3:** Establish a robust system for quality service delivery of ECE

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

KP has the foundational prerequisites for successful implementation of quality ECE learning across the province. Its substantive internal funding for education shows that it takes education seriously, and infrastructural development commitments further demonstrate its willingness to invest in human capital. It is held back by insufficient coordination and transparency on ECE and requires stronger political will and leadership in approving and coordinating the dissemination of its ECE policy, currently in draft.

- **Priority 1:** Improve existing infrastructure to meet demand
- **Priority 2:** Develop a coherent professional development system
- **Priority 3:** Prioritise the inclusion of ECE in Article 25-A to position ECE as a standalone budget and policy item

RECOMMENDATIONS: IMPLEMENTING A SYSTEMS APPROACH

UNICEF needs to move beyond making the case for ECE and supporting demonstration projects to playing a catalytic role in the building of an ECE system that will be expanded, strengthened, adapted to provincial priorities and needs, and sustained over the long term so that it can deliver on its promise of development for all of Pakistan's young children. This will require a strategic shift for UNICEF to secure gains for young children. To this end, recommendations are structured around the following three core outcomes to keep the larger picture in mind – improving the ECE system for all children in Pakistan, while also identifying specific actions to take forward at both the national and provincial levels for a comprehensive UNICEF strategy.

A strong enabling environment, in which all levels of government work collaboratively to support and enhance the ECE subsector, is necessary to achieve an equitable and quality ECE system. The following recommendations, encompassing all core functions, are cross-cutting and applicable to all provinces. These recommendations are developed based on the assumption that UNICEF will continue to play a supporting role to the Government of Pakistan in all proposed initiatives.

Recommendation 1. Champion sub-sector coherence and agreement across provinces and nationally

- **Advocate for standardised definitions and expectations to ensure a solid understanding of ECE.** ECE in Pakistan is currently characterised by significant differences in terms of children's age of participation, style of pedagogy, resource requirements, graduation from ECE to primary school, teacher training, data collection and more. It varies across implementation and definition of Katchi, pre-primary and ECE classes. This has far-reaching impacts on successful implementation of ECE policies, frameworks and curricula, moving away from ad hoc implementation at the local level.
- **Focus on ECE sensitisation and awareness raising with parents, communities, and teachers.** Developing a multi-sectoral awareness strategy/campaign to influence perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes towards ECE would lower the structural barriers that have hindered the adoption of positive practices relating to ECE. Aligned with the point above, this supports a broader institutionalisation of ECE standards, including enrolling children at appropriate ages or demanding developmentally appropriate learning. Components of the strategy could include a C4D campaign as well as a social and behaviour change (SBC) component. This should emphasise both the role of parents and ECE teachers and classes in child development, working to improve the perception of the ECE teacher profession.

- **Build coordination and knowledge sharing mechanisms within and beyond the ECE sector to ensure coherence in services from birth to age 8.** Poor policy communication and coordination across the different levels of the system emerged across provinces from community to school to district to province to national, as many stakeholders at lower level were either not aware of policies or had limited understanding thereof. UNICEF can play an important role within the broader ECE movement to ensure strong linkages and knowledge exchange across development actors.

Recommendation 2: Support system-level vision and capacity for quality ECE in Pakistan

- **Support implementation of quality standards across public and private ECE providers through a clear regulatory framework.** At the provincial level, there is a gap between policy directives and what is implemented; existing accountability mechanisms are either very limited or seemingly not checked regularly. Building on the establishment of clear understanding of quality ECE at all levels of the system noted in recommendation 1, a clear regulatory framework must be designed to ensure these are applied consistently across all providers of ECE.
- **Help the Government to build strong systems to support ECE professional development.** While some provinces have a dedicated ECE cadre (Sindh) and others have mixed approaches to developing ECE capacity of existing schoolteachers, there was a strong consensus across all provinces that significant work needed to be done to develop the ECE workforce and the systems to support them if significant progress to scaling ECE is to be sustainable. Professional development should incorporate several key components:
 - **Establish a cadre that is linked to the early grades of primary school** to ensure common training for teachers from pre-primary to Grade 3 to facilitate coherence in early years education and smooth transitions across grades
 - **Link ECE capacity building to the education sector's teacher training** to move away from one-off trainings to an adequately capacitated, resourced, and mandated ECE institution to deliver systematic pre-service and in-service training
 - **Support ECE teachers** through adequate compensation, access to teaching and learning materials, opportunities for career development and quality supervision and mentorship
 - **Foster cross-provincial knowledge exchange and collaboration** to learn from best practices, such as the ECE cadres in Sindh, to strengthen the ECE workforce
- **Work with the Government to create a robust quality assurance system with a clear governmental agency in charge and with the necessary capacity to coordinate data collection.** Without transparent, quality, and timely data on both process and impact indicators for all aspects of the ECE system including workforce capacity, children's learning, administrative effectiveness and efficiency, and parent and community engagement, it is challenging to have an accurate understanding of the health of the ECE system, and thus impossible to make evidence-based decisions to improve it. A centralised quality assurance system, paying attention to the quality, transparency, and access to data for all stakeholders, will support the systematic use of data for decision making at all levels.

Recommendation 3: Promote and advocate for financing and political will for ECE

- **Promote accuracy and transparency around ECE costs.** At this time, ECE is lumped in with primary education, making it challenging to determine actual costs and expenditure, and the source funding, whether public, donor, or private. Without an accurate assessment of spending, a correct assessment of actual gaps is impossible. Advocating for clear ECE budget lines at the provincial and national levels will ensure that spending decisions are not left to the school.
- **Build high levels of political will around ECE.** Without strong champions both within the government at the national, provincial, and district levels, and outside of the government by influential public figures, there is a risk that the progress in the ECE sub-sector will stagnate or even decline without adequate funding. UNICEF is well-positioned to facilitate the cultivation and continued engagement of public, private, and civil society champions for ECE, even facilitating governmental visits to other countries to understand and explore ECE models and supporting broader public demand for services.
- **Advocate for increased ECE funding to 10% of the education budget.** The research clearly highlights that one of the biggest barriers to a reinforced provincial level ECE is insufficient financing. UNICEF should lead on this through advocacy efforts; a range of advocacy efforts to address this can include campaigning to expand the fiscal space for ECE in the Ministry of Education budget allocation;

exploring potential funds from other ministries (e.g., health for WASH and nutrition inputs for ECE); private-public partnerships; tax credits / subsidies; philanthropy and development aid.

- **Conduct necessary research to evidence the impact of ECE in Pakistan.** Develop a large-scale study across all provinces demonstrating that investing in quality ECE results in a high return on investment (ROI) in addition to the more immediate physical, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional benefits to the child. Solid evidence of significant ROI will strengthen advocacy campaigns and increase political will. In addition, anchoring awareness raising campaigns on these findings will support public buy-in.

1. INTRODUCTION

“We say that when you are going to construct a house, if the foundation is strong, then the house building will be very strong. So, if a child will go through ECE, his/her educational foundation will be very strong.”⁸ -Key Informant Interview, Assistant Director, KP, April 2022

1.1 Overview

A strong early childhood education (ECE) system is critical for children’s development as well as countries’ socio-economic and human capital development. Participation in quality ECE programmes supports the development of critical foundational skills which in turn contribute to better long-term educational outcomes including age-appropriate primary enrolment, improved school attendance and retention, and stronger performance in core academic subjects.⁹

Effective ECE systems require availability and equitable access to quality pre-primary services, and are grounded in a set of interconnected components, and include teachers, families and communities, resource allocation, monitoring and evaluation, and a well-designed curriculum.¹⁰

Despite the known benefits of ECE, participation in Pakistan remains low due to a variety of factors, including limited public ECE system capacity including limited and inefficient expenditure on education, familial financial constraints limiting access, gender and regional inequalities, limited and poorly maintained school facilities, limited professional development of ECE teachers, and the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting education services and widening existing inequalities. A slight documented gender disparity also exists within primary-level education in Pakistan, with a gender parity index score of 0.82, and a Plan International study on the gender dimensions of early childhood in Pakistan shows that poverty prevents both sons and daughters from going to school; boys take precedence, girls are needed to help out around the house - even at the age of three - and because the education of girls is against family and cultural traditions.¹¹

Various ECE initiatives have been implemented both at federal and provincial levels in Pakistan in collaboration with UNICEF and other local and international development actors. At the federal level, the National Education Policy and the Single National Curriculum (SNC) were developed by the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training in 2009 and 2020 respectively, including a provision for ECE. The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) of 2017 was also developed through a National Curriculum Council (NCC) to help steer curriculum development in the country.¹²

Primary education – including ECE – was devolved to the provincial level in 2010, following the adoption of the 18th amendment. Since then, a wide range of policy documents on ECE have been drafted, as well as programmes prioritising access and quality improvements in ECE within a process aimed at achieving better institutional coordination, community participation and better monitoring. Despite these developments, information on ECE in the country is sparse, the disparity between and within provinces relating to all aspects of the ECE models remains large, and inequalities relating to access to ECE persist.

After years of support to a variety of Early Childhood Education (ECE) initiatives in Pakistan, UNICEF Pakistan aims to broaden their evidence-based knowledge about how ECE is structured and provided in Pakistan (considering federal and provincial specificities) and implement strategic interventions for improving the future support given by UNICEF Pakistan to governmental entities related to the institutionalisation of ECE. **Samuel Hall was commissioned to conduct a programme-informing study with the aim to “offer key inputs for structuring a multi-sectoral and comprehensive intervention on ECE based on the identification and analysis of how ECE is institutionalised in each province in Pakistan.”¹³**

⁸ KII, Assistant Director, KP (04/2022)

⁹ UNICEF. (2020). Build to Last. A framework in support of universal quality pre-primary education. <https://www.unicef.org/media/67191/file/Build-to-last-framework-universal-quality-pre-primary-education.pdf>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Farooq, M. S. (2018). Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) And Quality Education Situation In Pakistan At Primary Level. International Online Journal of Primary Education, 7, 1.; Plan International. (2017). Gender inequality and early childhood development.

https://reliefweb.int/attachments/e98ab8f8-820f-36e9-837d-31079f4d1e26/glo-gender_girls_rights_eccd_linkages-june2017.pdf

¹² Ministry of Federal Education & Professional Training. (2017). National Curriculum Framework Pakistan.

<https://www.pc.gov.pk/uploads/report/NCF.pdf>

¹³ UNICEF Pakistan. (2021). Terms of Reference: Technical and financial support to deliver and implement a review of Early Childhood Education (ECE) Models in Pakistan of Federal RWP E-R1.

1.2 Research Objectives

The goal of this study was to obtain critical knowledge about how ECE is structured and implemented in four provinces in Pakistan – Sindh, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and Punjab – to support an evidence-based programmatic strategy for UNICEF Pakistan. Within this, the study had four main objectives:

1. Provide an overview of the current regional, sub-regional, national, and provincial planning and implementation of ECE
2. Analyse the ECE situation in Pakistan at four levels: policy, system, school, and household/community and child
3. Profile the characteristics of government provided ECE in the four provinces studied in terms of policy, frameworks, and implementation
4. Propose the main components of a strategic and evidence-based intervention for improving ECE's implementation and institutionalisation

1.3 Research scope

The scope of the study is elaborated in the table below:

Table 1 Scope of the Study

Timeframe	The study covers a period of five years – 2016 through 2021 (including the impacts of COVID-19 on ECE).
Programming	Includes ECE programming provided by provincial governments. ¹⁴
Geographic	Includes four provinces in Pakistan - Balochistan, KP, Punjab and Sindh - as well as an overview of ECE developments in the region.
Participants	Information was gathered from a range of stakeholders, including UNICEF and other UN staff, multi-laterals, government actors, education specialists, civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), private sector schools, Primary/ECE school heads, ECE teachers, community leaders, and parents and guardians of ECE-aged children.
Target Audience	UNICEF Pakistan, but with findings relevant and accessible for implementing partners like the national and provincial governments, CSOs and NGOs.
COVID-19	The extent to which COVID-19 has impacted ECE programmes, as well as perceptions around COVID recovery will be included in the study.

1.4 Structure of the report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 presents the methodology, including the final research design, ethical considerations, and data quality assurances.

Chapter 3 situates ECE in Pakistan within the broader context of South Asia and its development nationally and provincially.

Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 present findings for each province, considering the enabling environment and core functions as detailed in the UNICEF Build to Last framework (inclusive of planning and budgeting, curriculum implementation, family and community engagement, quality assurance, and workforce development) while also considering the four levels of analysis (policy level, systems level, classroom/school level, and child/parent/guardian level). The provincial chapters are not comparative; the sections address the core functions as presented in the framework in terms of strengths and weaknesses. These chapters also include the top three priorities for the province.

¹⁴ Private sector, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other providers were engaged to understand the broader environment, but their programming was not assessed in the study, which focused on public / government ECE models.

Chapter 8 uses the Build to Last Framework to synthesis findings from across the provinces to understand the broader enabling environment and five core functions needed for an effective ECE system, along with conclusions to frame recommendations on ways forward in ECE.

Chapter 9 provides recommendations structured to inform a comprehensive UNICEF strategy on ECE, while also highlighting specific provincial-level recommendations and an initial Theory of Change for UNICEF.

2. STUDY METHODOLOGY

This section summarises the final research design, including ethical considerations and data quality assurances. The methodology adhered to the plan outlined in the Inception Report with limitations and challenges faced and mitigated as noted in Section 2.6.

2.1 ECE Conceptual Framework

Equitable access to quality ECE is critical in supporting the development of children’s early social and academic skills and preparing them for primary education. A ‘whole systems’ approach to equitable and quality ECE systems can be achieved through the development of a strong enabling environment, which encompasses ministerial leadership, policies and legislation, and financing and public demand. A strong enabling environment requires all levels of government to work collaboratively to support and enhance the ECE subsector. (See Figure 2, with additional information on the UNICEF-designed framework provided in Annex 6).

Figure 1 ECE systems approach as adopted in this study

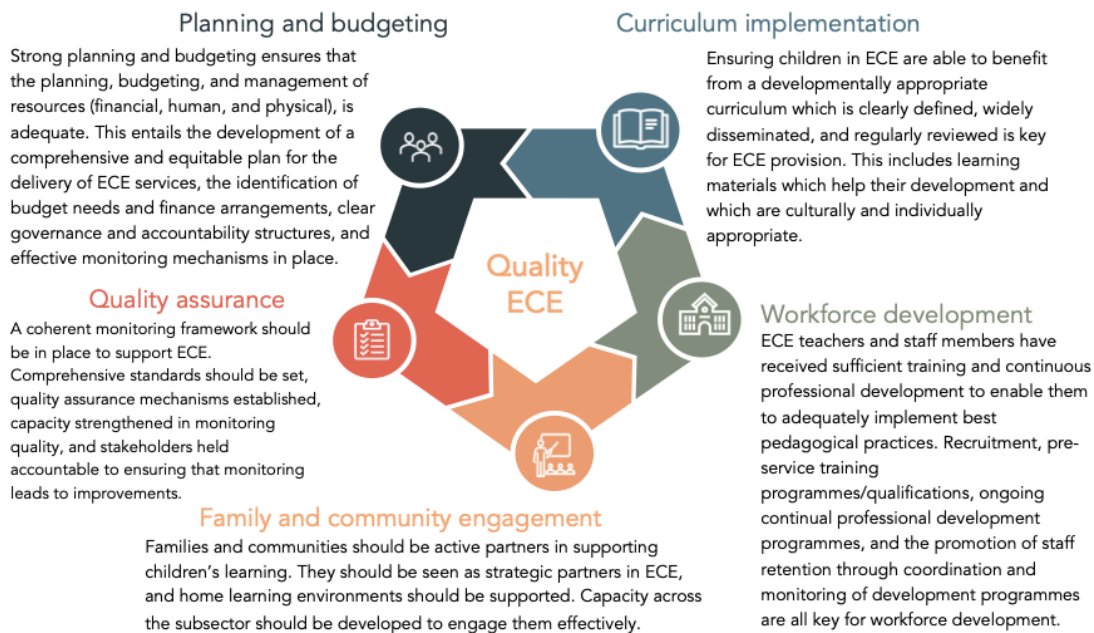


Source: adapted from UNICEF. (2020). Build to Last. pp.6-7

The development of an effective ECE subsector requires a strong and supportive enabling environment, as well as the strengthening of five specific interconnected areas, or core functions.¹⁵ These core functions include planning and budgeting, curriculum development and implementation, workforce development, family and community engagement, and quality assurance. A whole systems approach to a successful ECE implementation takes into consideration the need for these five components to function cohesively and in synergy with the enabling environment.

¹⁵ UNICEF (2020). Build to Last.

Figure 2 What quality ECE looks like, across the five core functions



Source: Adapted from UNICEF. (2020). Build to Last.

This research utilised UNICEF's Build to Last Framework to map and understand the ECE system in Pakistan, namely in the four provinces of Sindh, Balochistan, KP, and Punjab.¹⁶ This conceptual framework is used globally by UNICEF to guide efforts towards the establishment of ECE systems, as well as support ECE expansion and strengthening; the framework includes an examination of both the enabling environment as well as the core functions of the ECE subsector.¹⁷

In line with UNICEF standards, this study employed a (child) rights-based approach. By examining all functions through a rights-based lens, this research addressed inequalities including gender, language of instruction, and accessibility that can weaken the system, thereby hindering a child's development. The application of this approach will support UNICEF Pakistan in developing strategic planning and interventions based on a Rights and Results-Based Management (R&RBM) framework.¹⁸

As outlined in the TOR, this study takes into consideration the following four levels of analysis in the research design and analysis: ECE Policy Level, Policy Implementation Level, Classroom/School Level, and Child/Household Level, acknowledging the impact each level of a child's environment (including family, community, and society) can have on a child's development.

Situating the issues, challenges, gaps, needs or opportunities within the 'system' allowed for the identification of bottlenecks and barriers, as well as strengths and weaknesses within the system. Table 2 provides the framework for the data collection and analysis based on the five core functions of an effective ECE education sub sector across the four levels of analysis, which feed into a broader enabling environment for ECE:

¹⁶ ibid

¹⁷ ibid.

¹⁸ UNICEF. (2017). Results-based management handbook. <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/10356/file>

Table 2 Systems approach and analytical framework

Level of analysis	Core function in pre-primary education	Component of analysis for this report (as stipulated in the TOR)
ECE Policy Level	Planning and Budgeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provincial design, development, and dissemination of ECE curriculum ECE service ECE's standards ECE finances
Policy Implementation Level	Quality Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring mechanisms incorporating ECE data (EMIS) Teacher monitoring/qualifications/accreditation ECE quality supervisory mechanisms
	Workforce Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Definition and implementation of programme structure Professional development on ECE (pre- and in-service training) Institutional incentive and motivation mechanisms for ECE teachers
Classroom/ School Level	Curriculum Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provincial design, development, and dissemination of ECE curriculum Organisation of classroom / centre (e.g., learning corners) and facilities (playground, toilets, handwashing facilities, etc.) and accessibility to them Other classroom / school components related to ECE including pedagogy and resources
Child/Household Level	Family and Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Type of learnings / changes experienced by children / parents / guardians due ECE programs Beliefs about main learnings outcomes achieved by children Motivations for sending children to ECE programs (including gender differences) Beliefs of quality of ECE programmes

Annex 4 provides the full list of research questions guiding this research.

2.2 Research tools

The qualitative research used five separate research tools, aimed at both different but overlapping groups and research questions. The following tools were used to contextualise and triangulate findings and provide more adapted recommendations to UNICEF. All tools were reviewed by UNICEF and piloted in the field by national researchers. A report was shared with UNICEF following the piloting phase.

- Systems Mapping/Literature Review:** An initial literature and desk review of project documents, education policies, research studies and assessments on ECE were part of the first phase of the study. Systems mapping, focused on relevant policy documents, data, and existing research on ECE in Pakistan in order to create a clear mapping of the ECE system at national and provincial level and to pinpoint the different models used in each province as well as their implementation and related challenges.
- Semi-Structured Interviews (SSI)/Key Informant Interviews (KII)** were conducted with a variety of respondents, including education authorities, education specialists, local CSOs, education NGOs, UNICEF staff and staff of other organisations active in education, ECE school principals and teachers, and community leaders.
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)** engaged with four key groups in each province, including school principals, ECE teachers, representatives of local CSOs, education NGOs, and parents and guardians. The FGDs not only served to triangulate information received through the Literature and Desk Review and SSIs but also captured the interactions of participants around the same topic, highlighting perspectives, priorities, and attitudes at different levels.
- Case Studies** targeted families of parents and guardians of children of ECE going age (0 to 6 years old), allowing for the collection of individual life histories and to obtain further information on the status, standards, materials, and barriers of ECE models in each province. Participants included both parents with students enrolled in ECE, as well as parents with children of ECE age who are currently not attending ECE.

- **Teacher/Classroom Observations:** ECE teachers in selected ECE schools, classrooms within study communities. (See Annex 3 for summary of results)

All enumerators participated in a detailed training on all tools, which included quality-control procedures and evaluation ethics and safeguarding, with extensive opportunities for practice and a real-world pilot. All data were verified using audio recording. For details on research ethics and safeguarding, see Annex 4. Note that all tools were translated into the local languages (Urdu, Sindhi, Pashto, and Punjabi) from English.

2.3 Sampling

The research focused on the four provinces of interest to UNICEF: KP, Punjab, Balochistan, Sindh. The limited scope of this study required careful consideration of selected communities of interest and sample sizes to allow for an in-depth examination of specific locations. While this provided a deeper examination of local experiences with ECE, it should not be considered a representative picture of the province at large as discussed in Section 2.5.

2.3.1 Selection of research locations

The districts were selected in close coordination with UNICEF provincial staff as well as district and provincial-level education departments, particularly considering the following:

- Enrolment rates (low/high)
- Relevance in terms of ECE models of focus as decided by the mapping phase
- Geographic relevance for future programming (urban/rural settings)
- Socioeconomic factors
- Accessibility and security concerns

In two provinces, (Sindh and Balochistan) the districts selected are categorised by high and low enrolment rates. Districts in Punjab and KP have similar enrolment rates, but were selected in consultation with UNICEF, taking into consideration security issues, access, and planned and existing UNICEF interventions.

Figure 3 Map of Pakistan and the research locations in each province



Table 3 Research Locations by Province

Criteria	Province			
	KP	Sindh	Balochistan	Punjab
Low percentage of enrolled children (3-5 years)	Peshawar (30-40 per cent) ¹⁹ Malakand (30-40 per cent) ²⁰	Sukkur (below 30 per cent) ²¹	Mastung (below 30 per cent) ²²	Rajanpur (below 30 per cent) ²³ Toba Tek Singh (below 30 per cent) ²⁴
High percentage of enrolled children (3-5 years)	N/A	Badin (61-70 per cent) ²⁵	Quetta (51-60 per cent) ²⁶	N/A

2.3.1 Qualitative sample

The qualitative sampling approach was targeted and purposive.²⁷ Participants were selected to allow researchers to capture a wide-ranging perspective on the ECE situation in Pakistan. All targets were met or exceeded.

¹⁹ ASER Pakistan. (2021). Fact Sheet Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. <http://aserpakistan.org/document/aser/2021/reports/KP.pdf>

²⁰ ibid

²¹ ASER Pakistan. (2021). Fact Sheet Sindh. <http://aserpakistan.org/document/aser/2021/reports/Sindh.pdf>

²² ASER Pakistan. (2021). ASER National Report. http://aserpakistan.org/document/aser/2021/reports/national/ASER_report_National_2021.pdf

²³ ASER Pakistan. (2021). Fact Sheet Punjab. <http://aserpakistan.org/document/aser/2021/reports/Punjab.pdf>

²⁴ ibid

²⁵ ASER Pakistan. (2021). Fact Sheet Sindh. <http://aserpakistan.org/document/aser/2021/reports/Sindh.pdf>

²⁶ ASER Pakistan. (2021). ASER National Report. http://aserpakistan.org/document/aser/2021/reports/national/ASER_report_National_2021.pdf

²⁷ This particular sampling approach was chosen in close coordination with UNICEF provincial staff to ensure coverage of areas of high enrolment and low enrolment rates, relevance in terms of ECE models of focus as decided by the mapping phase, geographic relevance for future

Table 4 Sample Size (target in parentheses)

Tools		National	Punjab	KP	Sindh	Balochistan	TOTAL
SSIs/KIIs		11	17	13	14	14	69 (60)
FGDs:	Education providers / stakeholders	N/A	5 3 male, 2 female	4 2 male, 2 female	4 2 male, 2 female	4 2 male, 2 female	19 (16)
	Parents/guardians of ECE-aged children attending ECE	N/A	4 2 male, 2 female	5 2 male, 3 female	5 2 male, 3 female	5 2 male, 3 female	19 (16)
Case Studies	Parents/guardians of ECE-aged children attending ECE	N/A	3	2	3	3	11 (8)
	Parents/guardians of ECE-aged children not attending ECE	N/A	2	3	2	2	9 (8)
ECE Teacher/Classroom Observations		N/A	2	2	2	2	8 (8)

2.4 Analysis

Qualitative analysis was done with industry standard qualitative analysis software called Dedoose, utilising an inductive qualitative analysis approach to draw findings from collected data using thematic coding.²⁸ The research team developed and internally piloted a codebook (including sub-codes for each research question) to ensure the relevance of the coding structure and consistent code application by the analysts. Findings were disaggregated by location.

2.5 Ethical considerations

The study was designed and carried out with ethics prioritised, ensuring a rights-based approach throughout. In particular, care was given towards respect for dignity and diversity, right to self-determination, fair representation, compliance with codes for vulnerable groups, confidentiality, and avoidance of harm, in line with UNICEF's core considerations in research. For more information on how this study considered ethics throughout, please see Annex 5.

2.6 Limitations and challenges

As highlighted throughout this report, the implementation of ECE in Pakistan is operating in a complex and multifaceted environment. As such, capturing the full nuance needed to adequately assess and understand the current context was an expected challenge. This study sought to capture a detailed understanding of the status and implementation of ECE at the time of research within a relatively small set of sample locations and in contexts where information and knowledge on ECE is sparse. **This study has highlighted the fact that data gaps on ECE currently exist in Pakistan**, and as such, this study does come with limitations. **Throughout this report, text and footnotes will identify areas where data gaps exist**; these gaps are understood by UNICEF Pakistan and despite the research team's best efforts to obtain the information, some information was not made available or does not exist. This does not mean that the report is inherently flawed or invalid. Rather, it further outlines the dearth of information on ECE in Pakistan and the critical need for more research, sharing, and collaboration among all relevant stakeholders.

The data collection itself was an opportunity to collect community-level perceptions often excluded from broader policy-only analysis and thus an important set of stakeholder perceptions to capture. When collecting

programming, socioeconomic factors, and accessibility and security concerns. The chosen sampling for the semi-structured interviews, case studies, focus group discussions, and classroom observations was most adequate for fulfilling the requirements of the study. Other strategies within the timeframe and budget provided would likely not have enabled the research team to glean adequate information.

²⁸ See Annex 8, where the qualitative codebook is outlined

data with stakeholders, including parents, teachers, headteachers, other community-level stakeholders, and government and UNICEF stakeholders, inherent bias, particularly selection (sampling) bias and implicit bias (i.e., whereby the stakeholder's perceptions could be mistaken for accurate generalisations of the wider community) could manifest. Through the triangulation of results across interviews and research tools, and ensuring that results were only reported when triangulated, these biases have been largely mitigated. However, this means results can be considered indicative only and not necessarily reflective of the situation at large. Respondent bias in this sense was mitigated through careful training of enumerators, the development of tools by qualitative research experts, and the verification of the research tools by UNICEF staff prior to the fieldwork.

During the course of fieldwork, additional challenges were encountered:

- **Mapping during Ramadan:** The early mapping phase of research, including key informant interviews, took place during Ramadan. As a result, many participants - particularly government officials - took extended leave and interviews were cancelled or postponed resulting in delays.
- **Political instability:** On March 8, 2022, opposition parties submitted a motion of no confidence against then Prime Minister, Imran Khan. This situation escalated in April when multiple events at the federal and provincial level culminated into a constitutional crisis. There were subsequent country wide protests, which resulted in road blockages and closures. In several cases fieldwork was delayed due to road blockages preventing access to schools or meeting locations. In addition, the uncertain political situation hindered our ability to contact and coordinate meetings with government officials.
- **Delays in research permissions:** The narrow window of time between approval of district-level research locations and data collection limited the ability of the field researchers to coordinate interviews in advance. Teachers were often unavailable because of end-of-year responsibilities.
- **Climate-related school closures:** Research took place during a period of unprecedented heat waves throughout Pakistan. With limited infrastructure available to provide safe learning environments for children, many schools chose to close early, or operate on shortened schedules.
- **Team composition changes:** One local enumerator was unable to further continue after training and was replaced, and the team added a core research member.

Perhaps the most prevalent challenge encountered was the marked lack of knowledge and awareness related to ECE at the community level. Beyond the federal and provincial level government respondents, respondents across provinces struggled to reflect, even in very limited ways, on ECE in their schools. The team decided to include additional interviews beyond the original scope of research and further triangulated with other sources of data to build and expand on the perspectives collected.

Figure 4 Fieldwork in KP (Source: KP research team)



3. ECE IN PAKISTAN: CONTEXT ASSESSMENT

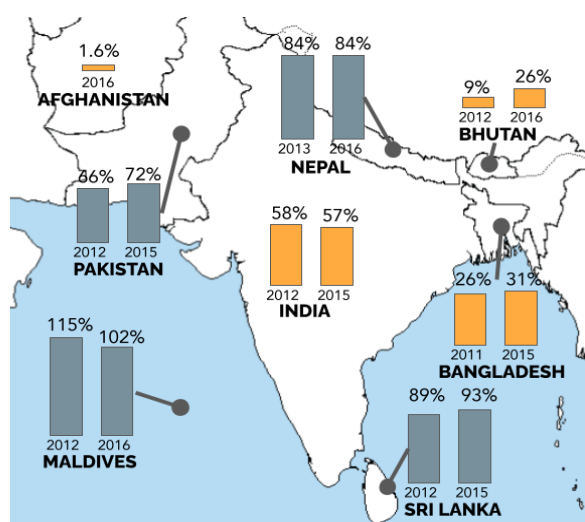
3.1 Early Childhood Education in South Asia

UNICEF defines early childhood as the period from conception up to school entry. It is a “unique window of opportunity for children’s cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, which occurs as the result of the interaction between the environment and the child.”²⁹

Within the broader South Asian context (including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka), ECE policy adoption and implementation is varied and ECE data limited. However, available data indicates that only two-thirds of early childhood education age children in South Asia are “developmentally on track.”³⁰ Pre-primary enrolment rates are equally varied, indicating wide discrepancies in uptake.

The governments of Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka have approved national policies on early childhood education, all of which aim to implement a “holistic, integrated vision” of early childhood education.³¹ Afghanistan and the Maldives are countries where national policies on ECE have not yet been articulated. Figure 6 outlines the pre-primary gross enrolment rates while Table 5 provides a brief overview of the status of ECE policy and implementation in the seven South Asian countries.

Figure 5 South Asia Pre-Primary Gross Enrolment Rates³²



Data source: UNICEF ROSA, 2018

Table 5 ECE in South Asia

Country	ECE Situation
Afghanistan	Afghanistan’s education laws commit to free and quality education for all families and children. ³³ An estimated 0.5 per cent of children aged 3-5 in rural locations were enrolled in ECE while 4 per cent of those in urban areas are, with little difference between the genders. ³⁴ The previous government planned to further support ECE and Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) provisions, but its

²⁹ UNICEF. (2018). *Early Childhood Development in the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2018–2021*.

https://www.unicef.org/media/48126/file/UNICEF_Strategic_Plan_2018-2021-ENG.pdf

³⁰ Kaul, Venita. (2019). *A Mapping of Early Childhood Development Standards and Good Practices: Lessons for South Asia*, United Nations Children’s Fund Regional Office for South Asia, Kathmandu.

³¹ *ibid*

³² UNICEF. (2022). *Early learning and early childhood development*. UNICEF South Asia. <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/what-we-do/education/early-learning-childhood-development#:~:text=Not%20all%20countries%20in%20South,on%20trade%20in%20South%20Asia.>

³³ World Bank. (2021). *A Rapid Review of ECE Regulatory Frameworks and Policies for the Afghanistan Ministry of Education*. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/134301623217480617/pdf/A-Rapid-Review-of-ECE-Regulatory-Frameworks-and-Policies-for-the-Afghanistan-Ministry-of-Education-ECE-Regulatory-Analysis-Final.pdf>.

³⁴ UNICEF. (2021). *Global Initiative on Out-Of-School Children: Afghanistan Country Study*. <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/media/2471/file/afg-report-oocs2018.pdf%20.pdf>

	<p>implementation remains to be seen with the current government.</p> <p>Relevant policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Constitution of Afghanistan (2004) • 2008 Education Law • Third National Education Strategic Plan (2017–2021) • Girls Education Policy (2019)
Bangladesh	<p>Pre-primary education (PPE) enrolment rates in Bangladesh have increased from 24.7 per cent in 2011 to an estimated 43.5 per cent in 2020.³⁵ The government has developed a national curriculum for PPE, a one-year programme which is academic in nature (as opposed to play-based). More is to be done to push Bangladesh towards global standards with regards to reporting, qualified teachers, and child development outcomes.</p> <p>Relevant policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Plan of Action II (2001-2015) • Operational Framework for Pre-primary Education, 2008 • National Education Policy, 2010 • National Children Policy, 2011 • Comprehensive Early Childhood Development Policy, 2013 • Early Learning Development Standards, 2015
Bhutan	<p>In Bhutan, ECCD programmes are recognised and supported through the 12th Five-Year-Plan and the Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014-2024. Bhutan is also developing a National ECCD Multi-Sectoral Plan, with plans for incorporating a wider range of stakeholders. As of 2018, PPE enrolment was at 25.3 per cent, despite the National Education policy stating that “all children from 0 to eight years of age shall have access to ECCD programmes and services.”³⁶</p> <p>Relevant policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood Care and Development Policy, 2010 • Guidelines for Establishment of Private Schools • Early Learning Development Standards, 2010
India	<p>India adopted the National Early Childhood Care and Education policy in 2013. Its National Education Policy (2020) recognises the importance of ECE, laying out plans for a National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), with the goal to ensure universal access to high-quality ECCE. A high level of enrolment, nearly 80 per cent, is reported in India, though there are large regional variations in enrolment rates.³⁷</p> <p>Relevant policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Plan of Action for Children, 2005 • National Policy for Children, 2013 • National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy, 2013 • National Plan of Action, 2016 • Early Learning Development Standards (in process)
Maldives	<p>The Maldives Education Sector Plan 2019-2023 commits to providing equal opportunity for free and compulsory education from preschool to grade 10.³⁸ This includes two years of schooling in the pre-primary years, Lower and Upper Kindergarten. This builds upon the Administration of Pre-School Act 2012, which recognises the importance of pre-school education for young children and mandates the monitoring of all pre-schools in the country. The net enrolment rate for PPE is 92.6 per cent for girls and 92.7 per cent for boys, as of 2019.³⁹</p>

³⁵ World Bank. (2020). *The Landscape of Early Childhood Education in Bangladesh*. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/720311583471084983/pdf/The-Landscape-of-Early-Childhood-Education-in-Bangladesh.pdf>.

UNICEF. (2022). *More opportunities for early learning*. <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/more-opportunities-early-learning>.

³⁶ Ministry of Education Bhutan and UNICEF Bhutan Country Office. (2020). *An Evaluation of the Early Childhood Care and Development Programme in Bhutan*. <https://www.unicef.org/bhutan/media/1761/file/ECCD%20Evaluation%20Report.pdf>.

³⁷ UNICEF. (2022). *Early childhood education: For school readiness and to build a foundation for lifelong learning*. <https://www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/early-childhood-education#:~:text=In%202013%2C%20the%20Government%20of,and%20breaking%20the%20intergenerational%20cycle>

³⁸ Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education: Republic of Maldives. (2019). *Education Sector Plan 2019-2023*. https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/maldives_education_sector_plan_2019-2023.pdf.

³⁹ Ibid.

	<p>Relevant policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education Sector Master Plan (1995-2005) • Administration of Pre-School Act 2012 • National Education Sector Plan for 2019-2022
Nepal	<p>Nepal has a long history of supporting ECE/ECD services, and formally recognised one year of ECE as part of its national basic education in 2016 and confirmed in the Free and Compulsory Education Act passed in 2018. ECE centres were to have been established within 2km of all households by 2022, and all parents are able to enrol their children for this one-year programme when they are four years of age. An additional year is available as an option if demanded by the local community, while private schools regularly provide 3-4 years of PPE (UNICEF, 2020).⁴⁰ The ECD gross enrolment ratio was 84.1 per cent in 2017, while inequality, particularly gender inequality, persists in enrolment rates.⁴¹ Nepal's constitution establishes ECD as a fundamental right for all, and the National ECD Strategy 2077-2088 outlines how the multi sectoral programme is to work.⁴²</p> <p>Relevant policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECD Strategic Plan, 2004 • Early Childhood Development Programme Implementation Guideline, 2005 • National Strategy for Early Childhood Development 2077–2088 (2020-3031)
Pakistan	<p>ECE in Pakistan has traditionally been carried out in Katchi classrooms, with Katchi formally recognized in the 1999 - 2010 National Education Policy. ECE was included as one of the three priority areas selected by Pakistan for its 15-year National Plan of Action to achieve Education for All Goals. The first National Curriculum for ECE was developed in 2002, followed by the National Education Policy 2009, which includes a section devoted to ECE. Following this, an ECE curriculum was introduced as part of the National Education Policy 2017. In 2010, following the adoption of the 18th amendment, primary education in Pakistan was devolved as a provincial responsibility, including ECE. Since then, the provinces have seen varying levels of ECE policy implementation.</p> <p>Relevant policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Education Policy 2009 • National Plan of Action 2001-2015 • National Education Policy 2017 • National curriculum Single National Curriculum (2020)
Sri Lanka	<p>Sri Lanka's first policy on ECCD was signed in 2004, and its National Policy on ECCD (2019) better integrated services and sectors related to ECCD.⁴³ This said, the country does not have universal ECD/ECCE, and the quality of centres remains a challenge (World Bank, 2020). The enrolment rate of three to five-year-old preschool children in Sri Lanka was 55.6 per cent in 2017.⁴⁴</p> <p>Relevant policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Policy of Early Childhood Care and Development, 2004 • Early Learning and Development Standards, 2013 • National Policy on Preschool Education, 2019

Within the existing limited data on ECE in South Asia, available evidence points to universal challenges in enrolment, quality, workforce development, and quality assurance. South Asia has the largest number of out of school children in the world, with less than half the children attending early learning programmes. South Asia also has one of the highest rates of stunting; multiple studies have demonstrated the link between malnutrition

⁴⁰ UNICEF & The World Bank. (2020). *Costing Study on Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) in Nepal*. <https://www.unicef.org/nepal/media/9486/file/Nepal%20ECED%20Costing%20Study.pdf>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Government of Nepal, National Planning Commission. (2020). *National Strategy for Early Childhood Development 2077–2088*. https://npc.gov.np/images/category/ECD_Strategy_2077-88.pdf

⁴³ Sri Lanka Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and Dry Zone Development. (2019). *National Early Childhood Care and Development Policy (2019)*. <https://www.childsec.gov.lk/resources/105/English%20Policy%20Draft.pdf>.

⁴⁴ World Bank. (2020). *Integrating Early Childhood Care and Education in Sri Lanka*. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/34646/9781464816185.pdf>.

and poor cognitive development. This, in turn, impacts school enrolment, participation, and retention. South Asia has among the highest levels of repetition and dropout.⁴⁵

While evidence points to the strong link between access to quality ECE and improved retention and learning outcomes, South Asia faces multiple challenges related to ECE workforce development, including a poorly trained workforce, teacher-centred pedagogy, and low teacher retention. UNICEF’s recent work in South Asia has focused on providing policy, advocacy, and technical assistance, including curriculum development, teacher training, and implementation support.⁴⁶ Table 6 summarises recent UNICEF ECE interventions in South Asia, highlighting multiple opportunities for growth in all core functions.

Table 6 Regional ECE UNICEF Support⁴⁷

Country	UNICEF ECE Interventions
Bangladesh	Early Learning for Child Development Project (ELCDP), Development of PPE curriculum, Development of Teachers training module and Teachers Guide; Development of Activity Books and storybooks and story books for pre-primary students
Bhutan	ECCD Investment Case Study; Opening early learning centres for urban vulnerable groups; minimum quality standards for ECCD centres
India	Strengthening Early Childhood Education
Nepal	Advocacy around early childhood development; Integrated district ECD plans; developing ECD materials; training to ECD facilitators; strengthening socio-emotional learning in ECD centres
Pakistan	Policy advocacy on ECE; demonstration of ECE models + systems strengthening; monitoring of ECE indicators
Sri Lanka	Support in developing a common national Early Childhood Education curriculum framework; multisectoral implementation mechanism for ECD; support in drafting national ECE standards for pre-school facilities, curriculum and teaching standard, and school readiness rapid assessment toolkit

3.2 Overview of ECE in Pakistan

ECE was first introduced in Pakistan in the 1970s through the Katchi class system (pre-primary), which was offered to children between three and six years of age.⁴⁸ Katchi classes (see Box 1 in Section 3.3) were officially recognised in the 1999 - 2010 National Education Policy, although no separate budget was allocated to these classes. While ECE was included as one of the three priority areas selected by Pakistan for its 15-year National Plan of Action to achieve Education for All Goals (and the corresponding National Plan of Action 2001-2015),⁴⁹ Katchi educational facilities and services were inadequate with limited appropriate materials or resources.⁵⁰ The first National Curriculum for ECE was developed in 2002, followed by the National Education Policy 2009, which includes a section devoted to ECE. Following this, an ECE curriculum was introduced in 2017 as part of a new National Curriculum.

Following the adoption of the 18th amendment in 2010, primary education in Pakistan was devolved as a provincial responsibility. Article 25-A, added to the Constitution through the 18th Amendment, mandates the state take responsibility for providing free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of 5 to 16.⁵¹ The national government maintains responsibility for the coordination of provincial governments and of

⁴⁵UNICEF. (n.d.) Early Learning and Early Childhood Development <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/what-we-do/education/early-learning-childhood-development#:~:text=Not%20all%20%20countries%20in%20South,on%20trade%20in%20South%20%20Asia>

⁴⁶ UNICEF (2019). Improving Education Quality in South Asia. [https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/6991/file/Improving%20Education%20Quality%20in%20South%20Asia%20\(I\)_30Aug_019_Web.pdf.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/6991/file/Improving%20Education%20Quality%20in%20South%20Asia%20(I)_30Aug_019_Web.pdf.pdf)

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Mumtaz, Ahmad. (2011). Early Childhood Education in Pakistan: an international slogan waiting for national attention. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.2304/ciec.2011.12.1.86#:~:text=ECE%20was%20officially%20organised%20in,officially%20suspended%20during%20the%201980s>.

⁴⁹ Government of the Punjab (2017). Punjab Early Childhood Education Policy 2017. <https://pctb.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/Punjab%20ECE%20Policy%202017.pdf>

⁵⁰ Mumtaz, Ahmad. (2011). Early Childhood Education in Pakistan

⁵¹ Hussain, A. (2021). Primary education in Pakistan. PIDE. <https://pide.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/par-vol2i11-10-primary-education-in-pakistan.pdf>

curriculum standards development. The provincial governments therefore have autonomy and responsibility to define the ECE strategy for service delivery in their respective provinces. Following the adoption of this amendment, provinces became responsible for all aspects listed below.

At the federal level, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training's role is to assist provinces with curriculum development, accreditation and research and development.⁵² However, the 'pre-primary' budget constitutes only 1-3 per cent of the total education budget across provinces and federal areas.⁵³ While overall pre-primary enrolment rates are steadily rising and the gap between boys and girls enrolled in pre-primary remains small yet consistent over time, there are insufficient ECE classes in the country to support universal access and budget allocation to ECE is unclear.⁵⁴

Pakistan is ranked amongst the top three countries in the world for rates of out-of-school children, and levels of school readiness, retention, and learning outcomes are areas of national concern as well.⁵⁵ As a result, there have been numerous efforts made to strengthen the ECE landscape in Pakistan. This has been done with multi-stakeholder collaboration by organisations such as UNICEF, federal and provincial governments, and other local and international development actors. At present, UNICEF Pakistan is the country's Education Sector Working Group co-lead, and supports the federal and provincial governments with technical and financial support on ECE.⁵⁶

3.3 Education providers - Katchi and ECE classrooms

While in Pakistan there are many terms used to describe the range of ECE programmes for children, including Katchi, pre-primary, pre-school, ECE classes, kindergarten, nursery, pre-1, ECD centres, and classes for the 3-5 age group in Madrassas, this study focuses on the ECE programmes specifically delivered by the Ministry of Education at the federal level and the provincial level departments of education for children between the ages of 3 to 5.

Box 1 Katchi Classes in Pakistan

Historically, pre-primary education existed in schools with varying names like 'Katchi Class' or 'un-admitted' children.⁵⁷ Katchi classes allowed children to attend school, but there were no standardised facilities for the provision of proper early childhood education.⁵⁸ The lack of facilities including having no separate classroom or full-time exclusive teachers.

Figure 6 Exterior of Katchi classroom in Sindh
(Source: Sindh research team)



ECE is categorised under the 'pre-primary' umbrella in Pakistan, and there are multiple pre-primary education providers in Pakistan:

- **Public schools.** Public schools run by the government of Pakistan are the largest providers of free education. The Katchi school model is widespread at the pre-primary level, and there are efforts underway to establish new infrastructure, train teachers, and transition to a formalised ECE system.

⁵² Hussain, A. (2021). Primary education in Pakistan

⁵³ UNESCO. (2021). National Education Policy 2021 & Recommendations for Early Childhood Education. (2021) Policy Consultation. https://itacec.org/document/2021/1/NEP/ITA_Policy_Recommendations.pdf

⁵⁴ UNESCO. (2022). Country Dashboard. <http://sdg4-data.uis.unesco.org/>

⁵⁵ Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2021). Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey. Government of Pakistan. https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/pslm/publications/pslm_district_2019-20/PSLM_2019_20_District_Level.pdf

⁵⁶ UNICEF. Pakistan Humanitarian Situation Report No. 34. 2022. <https://www.unicef.org/media/119876/file/Pakistan-Humanitarian-SitRep-March-2022.pdf>

⁵⁷ Government of Punjab (2017). Punjab Early Childhood Education Policy 2017.

<https://pctb.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/Punjab%20ECE%20Policy%202017.pdf>

⁵⁸ Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training Government of Pakistan. (2017). National Education Policy 2017.

<https://pbti.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/National%20Education%20Policy%202017.pdf>

- **Private schools.** The private sector has organised pre-primary education systems in place in Pakistan. Teachers are generally trained in ECE, with access to appropriate and adequate materials.
- **Deeni Madrassas.** These religious schools do not offer early years education in the way that ECE classes are organised. Some Madrassas offer nursery classes, with an emphasis on providing Islamic and Quranic instruction.⁵⁹

Pre-primary education in Pakistan is typically delivered through one of the following three models detailed in Table 7 below.

Table 7 Pre-Primary Education in Pakistan⁶⁰

	Model	Key features
Pre- primary models of education in Pakistan	Katchi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-grade classroom, shared spaces • Materials and teacher time shared with students of other grades • Typically, rote learning • Limited to 3-4 hours instruction daily • Often limited classroom space: children sit in an ad-hoc manner, sometimes outside the classroom under trees
	Improved Katchi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated classroom • Trained teachers • Age and developmentally appropriate materials and facilities proper material and facilities have been provided by the government. • Very limited implementation (small-scale projects supported by UNICEF and other development actors/stakeholders)
	ECE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated classroom • Trained teachers • Age and developmentally appropriate materials and facilities proper material and facilities have been provided by the government. • There are no dedicated ECE budget lines

Pakistan typically implements pre-primary education through the traditional Katchi system. Historically, communities and families have recognised Katchi as a legitimate form of pre-primary education. Although traditional Katchi classes often lack a formal curriculum, they are a strong starting point for the ECE system to build upon, improve, and strengthen. Traditional Katchi classes are generally based on rote learning, focused on memorising rhymes, poems, and verses from the Quran.⁶¹ In contrast, “quality” ECE classes, as well as improved Katchi classes, typically offer theme-based, decorated classrooms and activity corners, play-based learning, interactive classroom materials, trained teachers, and, ideally, a classroom caregiver.⁶²

At the federal level, the Ministry of Federal Education and Training is involved in coordinating across provinces and national curriculum matters while the provincial level education departments are responsible for overall planning, regulation,

Figure 7 ECE classroom Punjab (Source: Punjab research team)



⁵⁹ Adapted from Farooq, M. S., Feroze, N., Kai, Y. T. (2017). Public vs Private Quality Education At Primary Level In Pakistan. International Online Journal of Primary Education, 6(2). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1243624.pdf>

⁶⁰ Adapted from Education Department, Government of Balochistan (2010). Provincial Early Childhood Education Plan 2011-2015. https://www.pafec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Provincial_ECE_Plan.pdf

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

implementation, and coordination. At present, there are no formal ECE Ministries in Pakistan, nor departments at the central or provincial levels.⁶³

3.4 Education and ECE budgets

Pakistan’s education system is funded primarily through federal and provincial government funding (see Table 8). The ECE budget constitutes only 1-3 per cent of the total education budget across provinces and federal areas.⁶⁴ Despite increasing enrolment, recent trends in spending highlight the decrease in funding which is being allocated to education overall, which has led to insufficient investment in ECE in the country.

In addition to this regular education funding, the federal government has initiated a range of education development projects in line with its Public Sector Development Programme. Provincially, governments are prioritising areas of intervention in the education sector through their provincial Annual Development Programmes. During 2020-2021, these were primarily utilised towards school education, including primary education (of which ECE has an unknown allocation of funds);⁶⁵ ECE and the strengthening of the various provincial institutes for teacher education were noted to be areas of budget allocation.

Table 9 Expenditure on Education in Pakistan (PKR in millions)⁶⁶

	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020 (provisional)
Federal	119,161	108,029	126,923	125,567	114,566
Punjab	251,471	260,642	340,803	371,815	217,994
Sindh	135,008	146,732	166,003	162,602	170,455
KP	112,231	136,121	142,643	152,711	46,249
Balochistan	45,485	47,698	52,780	55,327	61,751
Pakistan	663,356	699,222	829,152	868,022	611,015
Per cent of GDP	2.3 per cent	2.2 per cent	2.4 per cent	2.3 per cent	1.5 per cent

3.5 National level policy mapping

Until 2009, educational opportunities were limited to a ‘Katchi’ class where children were allowed to come to school, but there were no standardised facilities for the provision of proper early childhood education.⁶⁷ **The National Education Policy (NEP) 2009** was the first time that the state committed to the provision of at least one year of pre-primary education in all public schools, with specialised training for teachers as well as additional budget allocations. The policy committed to providing age-appropriate learning to children of three to five years.⁶⁸ However, with the **18th Amendment brought into effect in 2010**, and provinces assigned responsibility for education, this policy was unable to be fully actioned. Following varying levels of action from provinces in establishing ECE models in the years since, the federal government developed a national curriculum, the **National Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum (2017)**, along with its corresponding **Minimum Standards for Quality Education in Pakistan (2017)**. These guidelines led to varying levels of adoption across the provinces, and in 2020, Pakistan’s federal government established the **Single National Curriculum (SNC) 2020**, which **explicitly mandates ECCE for ages 4-5** (while suggesting an expansion to include ages 3-4). This SNC for ECCE is established under the **National Education Policy 2017-2025** (working document currently in draft form). For more information on the national level policies described above, please see Annex 9.

⁶³ World Bank. (2021). A Rapid Review of ECE Regulatory Frameworks and Policies for the Afghanistan Ministry of Education. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/134301623217480617/pdf/A-Rapid-Review-of-ECE-Regulatory-Frameworks-and-Policies-for-the-Afghanistan-Ministry-of-Education-ECE-Regulatory-Analysis-Final.pdf>

⁶⁴ UNESCO. (2021). National Education Policy 2021 & Recommendations for Early Childhood Education.

⁶⁵ Government of Pakistan. (2021). Pakistan Economic Survey 2020-2021. www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters_21/10-Education.pdf

⁶⁶ *ibid*

⁶⁷ Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training Government of Pakistan (2017). National Education Policy 2017.

⁶⁸ Khan, N., Bhatti, M. A., Hussain, K. S., Bano, S. S., Academy of Educational Planning and Management (Pakistan), & Pakistan. (2017). *Early childhood education in Pakistan: A research study*.

3.6 Provincial ECE comparison

The table below summarises below provides an overview of existing ECE policy and limited information summarising the situation in each province across the policy, system, classroom and school level, and child/parent/guardian level.

Table 10 High-level ECE overview at the provincial level

		Sindh	Balochistan	KP	Punjab
POLICY LEVEL	ECE Policy Structure (status of ECE policy adoption and notification)	<p>ECCE Policy drafted and ratified in 2015.⁶⁹ The purpose of the policy is to outline provincial strategy for guiding early childhood education development in Pakistan.</p> <p>Sindh ratified its ECCE standards in 2017.⁷⁰</p>	<p>The Balochistan Education Sector Plan (2020-25) (BESP) focuses on early childhood education quality.</p> <p>The Balochistan Early Childhood Education Policy Framework (2015), which has not been made available in full to review, is reported to be notified and in place, as is the National Education Policy 2009.⁷¹</p> <p>Though these are in place, the BESP notes that there is a fragmented policy framework, comprising a “mix of political decisions, sector plan, acts and written documents.”⁷²</p>	<p>The draft KP ECE Policy is reported to be endorsed by the Minister of Education, the Secretary of Education, and Local Education Group members. It is currently under review by the Law, Finance, and Planning Department. After approval, the final version will be shared with the Provincial Cabinet for approval.⁷³</p> <p>Pre-primary education is provided based on the KP Education Sector Plan (2021/21-2024/25).⁷⁴</p>	<p>The Punjab ECE Policy ratified in 2017⁷⁵ established a vision that enshrines the fundamental importance of early childhood education for children ages three to five in Punjab.</p> <p>The Punjab Education Sector Plan (2019/20-2023/24) also defines ECE as a provincial priority in formal and non-formal schools.</p>

⁶⁹ Sindh Education and Literacy Department. (2015). Early Childhood Care and Education Policy 2015. https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/pakistan_ecce-policy-sindh-2015.pdf

⁷⁰ Ministry Of Federal Education & Professional Training, Islamabad Government Of Pakistan (2017). Curriculum For Early Childhood Care And Education; School Education and Literacy Department. (2018). Early Childhood Care & Education Standards for Sindh - 2018. http://dcar.gos.pk/BoC_Other_Pages/Sindh-Curriculum/ECCE%20Standardred.pdf.

⁷¹ Email evidence provided by government and UNICEF stakeholders

⁷² Secondary Education Department, Government of Balochistan. (2020). Balochistan Education Sector Plan 2020-2025. <http://emis.gob.pk/Uploads/BESP2020-25.pdf>.

⁷³ Email communications, UNICEF staff.

⁷⁴ Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Elementary & Secondary Education Department. (2020). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Sector Plan 2020/21-2024/25. <https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/pakistan-khyber-pakhtunkhwa-esp.pdf>

⁷⁵ Government of the Punjab (SED/PMIU-PESRP). (2017). Punjab Early Childhood Education Policy. <https://pctb.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/Punjab%20ECE%20Policy%202017.pdf>

		Sindh	Balochistan	KP	Punjab
	Single National Curriculum (SNC) adoption <i>(whether or not provinces have adopted the SNC as the provincial curriculum)</i>	Has not adopted the SNC and is using a curriculum developed on a provincial level - Sindh ECCE Curriculum 2018.	Has adopted the SNC curriculum. ⁷⁶	Has adopted the SNC curriculum; implementation framework being formulated; ECE primer developed by the Directorate of Curriculum and Teacher's Education.	Has adopted the SNC curriculum – the first province to do so.
	Target Ages	3–5 years	4-8 years, with two definitive categories: 4-5 years and 5-8 years (Katchi-class 2) ⁷⁷	The draft ECE Policy focuses on provision of one year of ECE for ages 4-5. ⁷⁸	3-5 years
	Compulsory ECE grades	2 years	1 year	1 year	1 year
	ECE Training Institution	Provincial Institute of Teacher Education	Provincial Institute of Teacher Education Secondary Education Department responsible for training of Master Trainers and CPD of ECE teachers	Directorate of Professional Development School leaders' recruitment completed by the Directorate of Elementary and Secondary Education Department, KP. ECE to be included in the training manual of schools' leaders. ⁷⁹	Training: Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development Punjab (QAED) Monitoring: Programme Monitoring and Implementation Unit (PMIU)
POLICY IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL	ECE/Pre-primary Enrolment	37,841 ECE enrolments ⁸⁰ (Katchi enrolments are around 210,989)	31 per cent in 2021 in rural Balochistan. ⁸¹ A baseline for ECE enrolment was set at 50 per cent in the BESP,	24,214 ECE enrolments ⁸³	66,390 ECE enrolments ⁸⁴

⁷⁶ Policy Planning & Implementation Unit, Secondary Education Department, Government of Balochistan (2015). Early Childhood Education Policy Framework.

⁷⁷ *ibid*

⁷⁸ Email communications, UNICEF staff; Elementary & Secondary Education Department Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (2022). Early Childhood Education Policy (Draft).

⁷⁹ Email communication, UNICEF staff

⁸⁰ Email communications, UNICEF staff

⁸¹ ASER. (2022). Annual Status of Education Report.

⁸³ Email communications, UNICEF staff

⁸⁴ Punjab Education Sector Reforms Programme. (2021). PMIU Data, Enrolment, <https://www.pesrp.edu.pk/publications>

		Sindh	Balochistan	KP	Punjab
			though there is limited evidence to support this. ⁸²		
	ECE Policy coordination (pathways required for policies to be approved and adopted)	Policies are passed after consultation with a technical working committee established to provide technical inputs. ⁸⁵	Policies are passed after consultation with a local education group and a high-level oversight committee, followed by more formal approvals, including notifications. ⁸⁶	Coordination between the Directorate of Professional Development, Directorate of Curriculum & Teacher Education, Directorate of Elementary and Secondary Education, KP and the Education Management Authority (EMA).	Policy passed after consultative sessions and desk review.
CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL LEVEL	ECE Classrooms ⁸⁷	Around 4,000 (mainly in district headquarters). ⁸⁸	There are 1,430 schools offering ECE. ⁸⁹ Around 1,100, funded by the Global Partnership for Education ⁹⁰ , with around 15,890 primary classrooms requiring ECE classroom conversion.	1,100 ECE classrooms are established in six districts with 2,700 ECE classrooms to be established in this fiscal year, of which UNICEF has established 100 ECE centres and plans to set up 1600 ECE centres in the next four years) ⁹¹	Conflicting accounts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18,751 schools with ECE⁹²; • 12,531 with the support of UNICEF and 7,625 with government funding (for a total of 20,251 ECE classrooms)⁹³; • Nearly 17,000 schools with ECE classrooms⁹⁴; and • Over 5,000 ECE classrooms set up by the Government of the Punjab.⁹⁵

⁸² Robust data reported to be in place through EMIS and RTSMI systems, though not made available to the research team - email communications, UNICEF staff

⁸⁵ School Education and Literacy Department. (2019). School Education Sector Plan And Roadmap for Sindh (2019 – 2024). <https://assets.globalpartnership.org/s3fs-public/document/file/2020-19-Pakistan-Sindh-ESP.pdf?VersionId=YGOkeOm40Wz7aZUGyl.kOXwNm16PMH8>

⁸⁶ Email correspondence, UNICEF staff

⁸⁷ ECE classrooms are separate from Katchi classrooms because they have a dedicated ECE room

⁸⁸ KII, Government stakeholder, Sindh

⁸⁹ Email correspondence, UNICEF staff

⁹⁰ KII, Education officer, Balochistan

⁹¹ Email communications, UNICEF staff

⁹² Email communications, UNICEF staff

⁹³ Email communications, government stakeholder

⁹⁴ KII, UNICEF staff

⁹⁵ World Bank. (2021). A Rapid Review of ECE Regulatory Frameworks.

	Sindh	Balochistan	KP	Punjab
ECE Teachers/ECE Trained teachers	<p>Training has taken place with 1,500 teachers from Katchi plus a recruitment of 652 ECE dedicated teachers⁹⁶</p> <p>Special cadre and career ladder to be developed.⁹⁷</p>	<p>Around 50,000 teachers trained.⁹⁸</p> <p>31,230 sanctioned posts of Junior Vernacular Teacher (JVT) (BPS-09) in the School Education Department. Almost all teachers trained in ECE were trained through the Global Partnership for Education - Balochistan Education Project (2015-18), UNICEF, or other development partners.⁹⁹</p> <p>Primary teachers recruited at grade 12 and move up to grade 15 (head teacher)</p>	<p>Total: 1,320 teachers are trained¹⁰⁰</p> <p>Primary teachers recruited at grade 12 and move up to grade 15 (head teacher)</p>	<p>Teachers trained: 18,931 Headteachers trained: 17,671 Caregivers trained: 15,660 Master Trainers trained: 234 Others trained: 3,541¹⁰¹</p> <p>(Another account estimates the total teachers at around 15,000¹⁰²)</p> <p>Formal ECE teaching cadre to be set up by the SED.¹⁰³</p>
ECE Curriculum Development Institution	Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority is responsible for issuing NOC for any teacher training manuals.	Curriculum and Extension Centre (BOC&EC), part of the Secondary Education Department	Directorate of Curriculum & Teacher Education	Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board is responsible for the development of the curriculum QAED is responsible for development of teacher guides

⁹⁶ KII, UNICEF

⁹⁷ Government of Sindh. (2015). Early Childhood Care and Education Policy 2015

⁹⁸ ibid

⁹⁹ Email communications, UNICEF staff

¹⁰⁰ Email correspondence, UNICEF

¹⁰¹ Email correspondence, government stakeholder

¹⁰² Email correspondence, evaluation reference group member

¹⁰³ Government of the Punjab. (2017). Punjab Early Childhood Education Policy 2017.

		Sindh	Balochistan	KP	Punjab
	Medium of Instruction (MOI)	<p>Typically, Sindhi as the first language (though local languages are respected and supported), Urdu as the second language and English as the foreign language.</p> <p>The Government of Sindh aims to support students whose spoken language /mother tongue is other than the languages stated above in an early childhood classroom in any particular locality (urban/rural) in the Sindh province.¹⁰⁴</p>	<p>With SNC adoption, the medium of instruction is vague, but allows for mother tongue learning, followed by English and Urdu: "At the start, the language used in the programmes for all six areas of development, could be in mother tongue, based on local culture and it can then gradually and progressively be further developed to acquire competence in English. Children should be helped gradually to acquire competence in Urdu, making use where appropriate, for developing understanding and skills in languages. The outcomes focus on children's developing competence in talking and listening and becoming readers and writers."¹⁰⁵</p>		
CHILD/ HOUSEHOLD LEVEL	Additional Staff (Caretakers) officially supported	No	Yes	No	Hired for a non-salary budget and given PKR 4000
	Parent Engagement (how parents are meant to be engaged through schools in support of ECE)	SMCs aim to be present in each school that engages parents in promoting ECE school attendance.	Data lacking, though parent-teacher school management committees (PTSMCs) and wider community engagement described in ECE Policy Framework.	At the school level, the Parent Teacher Council (PTC) is the forum for school level planning and decision making.	The School Management Committee (SMC) comprises school members and the parents of students enrolled in community schools. Each SMC is a 5–7-member committee and its members are trained to manage and monitor the schools effectively.

¹⁰⁴ Sindh Education and Literacy Department. (2015). Early Childhood Care and Education Policy 2015.

¹⁰⁵ Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (2020). Single National Curriculum: Early Childhood Care and Education. p.18

3.7 Cross-cutting issues

Multiple challenges exist related to access to education in Pakistan, including vast differences between rural and urban ECE enrolment. In addition to these challenges, there are a number of important cross-cutting issues identified which should be considered for ECE programming in Pakistan: disability, COVID-19, and climate change induced events.

Disability

In Pakistan, children with disabilities are marginalised and vulnerable to exclusion from education. At present, only 18% of government primary schools and 13% of private primary schools have children with disabilities enrolled in them.¹⁰⁶ On top of this, a gender gap exists among children with disabilities, with girls with disabilities less likely to attend school than boys and students with special needs are often segregated from their peers.¹⁰⁷ Respondents in this study pointed to the fact that provision for students with special needs is currently a major issue.

Children with disabilities have special schools in particular places, and they are not available everywhere. There is no place where special needs children get education with all other students. - KII, community leader, Balochistan, May 2022

While some progress has been made in terms of training teachers on inclusive education and included in ECE teacher training in Punjab and in the UNICEF-supported Teacher Training Manuals in KP, in Sindh and Balochistan, there do not appear to be any support for teachers in providing education for children with disabilities.

COVID-19

COVID-19 had a tremendous impact on education in Pakistan, with 70% of schools across the country unable to provide learning material for students, effectively placing education on hold during COVID lockdowns.¹⁰⁸ Respondents in this study in all provinces pointed out that schools were closed and there were no financial allocations provided to ECE classes, nor incentives or benefits given to teachers to attract or retain teachers. Data and monitoring systems were impacted, with schools unable to regularly report data to district level as typical. Parents and headteachers expressed dissatisfaction with the government response as they felt there was not enough support for ECE classes during the lockdowns.

Some poorer parents ended up putting their children to work as child labour, while richer parents hired tutors. The differences between rural and urban were exacerbated by the pandemic, with rural families suffering much more setback relating to their children's education. One teacher in KP explained in an FGD, "COVID-19 badly affected the children's education, the parents picked the children up from schools and put them to work, and those children never came back to schools. Those children who were sharp and brilliant before COVID, when they came back to school, they became very weak in school." Despite the effect on both students and teachers, there is no policy in place to address learning loss.

Students with disabilities were also affected more during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the majority of students were able to continue learning to some extent, students with disabilities, who best learn through face-to-face activities using audio-visual aids, were not effectively able to continue learning of any type.¹⁰⁹ Special education is not currently supported by politicians, parents, or community members, in part due to a lack of awareness on the needs of children with disabilities.¹¹⁰ In Punjab, awareness campaigns have been taking place to help motivate parents to enrol their children with disabilities in ECE learning with some reported success through improved enrolment.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ ASER. 2021. Disability and functioning.

http://aserpakistan.org/document/aser/2021/reports/disability_and_functioning_report_card_National.pdf

¹⁰⁷ ibid

¹⁰⁸ ASER. 2021. Impact of COVID-19. http://aserpakistan.org/document/aser/2021/reports/impact_of_COVID_19_report_card_National.pdf

¹⁰⁹ KII, Special education specialist, government stakeholder, Punjab, May 2022.

¹¹⁰ ibid

¹¹¹ ibid.

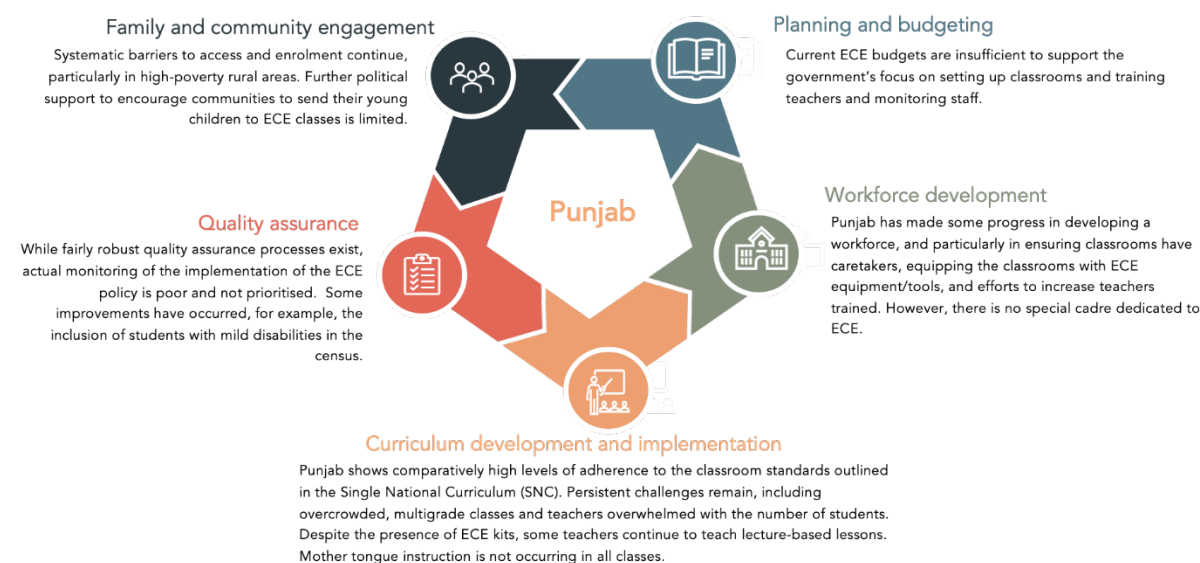
Climate change induced events

In 2022, Pakistan experienced climate-induced flooding which led to a humanitarian situation affecting 33 million people, of whom 9.6 million are children.¹¹² The widespread flooding affected all sectors, including health, nutrition, WASH, education, and child protection. At least 7,062 schools in the flooded areas are being used as shelters for displaced persons, and UNICEF and other local actors are working to dewater/clear schools, set up temporary learning centres, and build capacity of teachers to help mitigate the significant learning losses from these events.

The effects of climate change are being felt in the education sector in Pakistan. School infrastructure, already severely limited, does not have the capacity to address the devastating impact of severe climate-change related weather events, including severe flooding and extreme heat. Heat waves, while common in some areas of Pakistan, are not effectively planned for nor mitigated, disrupting ECE learning. COVID-19 served as a warning, highlighting the need to develop long-term and sustainable solutions to address these challenges. As yet, there is no evidence that any policy-related changes are being planned.

¹¹² UNICEF. 2022. Humanitarian Action for Children: Pakistan. <https://www.unicef.org/media/129756/file/2022-2023-HAC-Pakistan.pdf>

4. PUNJAB: PROVINCIAL ECE PROFILE & KEY PRIORITIES



Punjab has developed an official ECE Policy, adopted in 2017.¹¹³ This policy is premised on the Punjab Education Sector Plan (PESP) which proposed the establishment of quality early childhood programs in all primary schools of the province, with key strategies to:

1. Institutionalise pre-primary ECE through the development and notification of a policy;
2. Create awareness and training education managers, head teachers, and teachers on ECE; and
3. Plan and implement the expansion of pre-primary ECE programs to 5,000 primary schools.¹¹⁴

The current PESP (2019/20 - 2023/24) highlights ECE strengthening and scaling-up as a priority, calling for further developing of ECE appropriate learning materials, ECE classrooms, and teacher recruitment and training models.¹¹⁵ This represents an expansion of the Punjab ECE Policy, and remains the primary ECE policy in Punjab.

Box 2 Punjab – ECE Policy 2017¹¹⁶

Punjab's ECE Policy 2017 aims to be grounded in Punjab's educational context, setting out measures and actions that reflect best practices but with a strategic focus on what is practical and achievable. It is a living document and applicable for an indefinite period, subject to revisions as and when required by the Government of Punjab in consultation with relevant stakeholders. It was created in an iterative and consultative manner and aims to enshrine the importance of ECE for children ages three to five, develop a comprehensive ECE programme, define quality standards for the provision of ECE, identify the relevant institutions and their roles and responsibilities, and define quality standards and quality assurance mechanisms.

4.1 Planning and budgeting

4.1.1 Policy coordination

The implementation of the ECE system in Punjab has been relatively widespread.¹¹⁷ Punjab's Compulsory and Free Education Act in 2014, the National Education Policy 2009, and National Education Policy 2017-2025 set out mandatory free education from 3-16 years. Despite this, of the 7.4 million children in Punjab, only an estimated

¹¹³ Government of the Punjab, School Education Department. (2017). Notification: No.SO (Trg)1-24/2017. (Policy notification shared via email communications, UNICEF staff)

¹¹⁴ Government of Punjab (2017). Punjab Early Childhood Education Policy 2017. <https://pctb.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/Punjab%20ECE%20Policy%202017.pdf>

¹¹⁵ Government of the Punjab. (2019). Punjab Education Sector Plan 2019/20 - 2023/24. <https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/document/file/2020-19-Pakistan-Punjab-ESP.pdf>

¹¹⁶ Government of Punjab (2017). Punjab Early Childhood Education Policy 2017.

¹¹⁷ UNICEF (2017). UNICEF's Programme Guidance for Early Childhood Education. <https://www.unicef.org/media/107616/file/UNICEF-Programme-%20Guidance-for-Early-Childhood-Development-2017.pdf>.

37% are enrolled in pre-primary education.¹¹⁸ (For a comprehensive list of policies supporting ECE in Punjab, see Annex 2). Table 10 below details key ECE Policy stakeholders and their roles in Punjab.

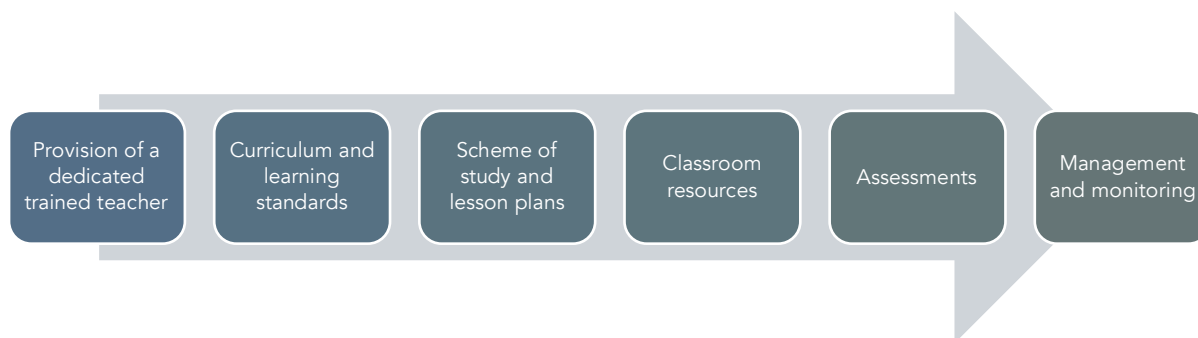
Table 11 Coordination of ECE Policy in Punjab

ECE Activity	Responsible Authority
Program Implementation and Coordination	
Development of detailed implementation plan and overall responsibility of program implementation	School Education Department (SED) and Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development Punjab (QAED)
Overall programme monitoring and coordination with sub departments involved in delivery of the ECE program	SED
Establishment of ECE Classrooms	
Coordination with district governments and disbursement of funds for existing and new classroom construction for establishment of ECE in public schools. Coordination with the district government on the establishment of ECE classrooms	SED and QAED
Recruitment for ECE appointment of existing teachers	SED
Training for ECE	
Revision on training modules for teachers and school council members and ensure alignment with the prescribed Quality Standards Training of AEOs on monitoring ECE and providing constructive feedback to ECE teachers and caregivers Procurement and distribution of teachers' guide	QAED
Monitoring and Feedback	
Data collection at the school level and provision of feedback to ECE teachers and caregivers	Assistant Education Officers (AEOs)
Data analysis and identification of implementation gaps	Programme Monitoring and Implementation Unit (PMIU) and SED
Coordination with schools to address implementation gaps identified in AEO data	District Government
Community Engagement	
Information campaigns for parents and development, procurement, and distribution of parent activity guides	QAED

The coordination of the ECE policy allows for a more robust ECE implementation model to be developed. The Punjab Education Sector Plan (PESP) clearly breaks this down (Figure 9). Each step is managed and monitored by a separate entity. The PESP also details the specific steps required to establish an ECE room, inclusive of the responsibilities of the various stakeholders in the implementation and monitoring of ECE quality.

¹¹⁸ World Bank. (2021). A Rapid Review of ECE Regulatory Frameworks.

Figure 8 ECE implementation in Punjab



Source: Adapted from PESP, p.44

Coordination of the ECE policy has been done largely through a collaborative effort by UNICEF, QAED and the education department. However, each department has a different mandate and timelines, resulting in an inconsistent approach.

4.1.2 Financing

The Punjab Government has allocated approximately Rs. 442 billion for the education sector, just under 4 per cent of the total provincial budget.¹¹⁹ However, accurate information on how much of the actual budget is allocated to ECE is not made publicly available.¹²⁰ The PESP 2019-2024 states that “while education has been a priority in the agenda for the Punjab government during these years, the share of resources allocated to the education sector does not reflect this. Punjab allocates to education a lower portion of its resources than Sindh and KP.”¹²¹ Despite this, a senior government respondent in this study noted that financing for ECE is significant and comes from a variety of sources, including the non-salary budget, the Annual Development Programme budget, and Development budget, all of which are reportedly readily available to schools should they wish to use it.¹²² In contrast, another government official states that there is no government budget at all for ECE but donors such as UNICEF and the World Bank (through project-based approaches) are providing funds for ECE’s scale up.¹²³ In terms of the ECE implementation, the Early Childhood Education Policy calls for the use of a combination of development schemes and donor initiatives.¹²⁴

ECE budgets in Punjab are not listed separately to budgets for primary education, presenting a challenge to determine how much money is actually being spent on ECE. With this opaque budgeting for ECE nestled within primary education budgets, stakeholders expressed confusion in terms of the actual ECE spending and conflicting accounts of sources of financing were found. Multiple respondents described the ECE budget as being insufficient for improvements in long-term ECE planning, including for example, the salaries of ECE caregivers, the establishment of separate ECE classrooms, and recruitment or appointment of additional ECE teachers. No detailed budget plan showing the allocation and use of resources was found through this study.

4.1.3 Political support

Political support for ECE in Punjab is relatively strong, according to many respondents, with policies in place to ensure increased provision of ECE for all children. Setting up ECE classrooms and training teachers and monitoring staff remain priorities in the province, with QAED and other supporting organisations playing a major role in the implementation of ECE classrooms. However, eventually the district department must take over, in particular AEOs, who reported a lack of training on this.¹²⁵

To address decreased enrolment due to COVID-19 between 2020-2021, and children dropping out of the education system, the Punjab government has expressed support for increasing ECE enrolment, launching a campaign in February 2021, which significantly increased Katchi enrolment rates. This shows that adequate

¹¹⁹ Academia Magazine. (2021). Punjab government increases education budget by 12.9 per cent. <https://academiamag.com/punjab-government-increases-education-budget-by-12-9-per-cent-allocates-rs-448-bn>

¹²⁰ In addition to the lack of publicly available data, governments officials and other key informants either did not have access to this information or were unwilling to share with the researchers.

¹²¹ Government of the Punjab. (2019). Punjab Education Sector Plan 2019/20 - 2023/24., p.101

¹²² KI, government respondent, Punjab. May 2022.

¹²³ Email communications, government respondent, Punjab. November 2022.

¹²⁴ Government of Punjab (2017). Punjab Early Childhood Education Policy 2017.

¹²⁵ Key informant interview, Education Officer, Punjab

political support is present in order to develop adaptations to reduce the OOSC rate, but in terms of capacity and management, the results of the adaptive measures are yet to be seen.

4.2 ECE workforce development

4.2.1 Workforce recruitment, professional development, and retention

Recruitment

There is no special cadre dedicated to ECE, which means that there are no ECE specific teachers, rather primary teachers who are assigned to ECE classes. Some respondents noted that the development of ECE cadres is limited by budgetary constraints, including the requirement to provide pensions and other benefits.

According to the School Census Report, 7,644 caregivers are appointed in Punjab, enough for 55 per cent of the ECE classrooms. Fieldwork findings indicate that caregivers are hired part-time and are paid only around USD18 per month for their services.¹²⁶ This is for three hours a day, with a minimum qualification of a post-secondary, 2-year degree programme.¹²⁷ This salary comes from the schools' non-salary budgets. As there is no separate cadre for caregivers, the recruitment is done locally, at the school level.¹²⁸

Professional development

Teacher training remains one of the issues that was raised by multiple stakeholders during fieldwork in terms of quantity and length. Training of teachers, head teachers and alignment with quality standards is the responsibility of QAED.¹²⁹ According to the School Census Report by PESRP, of the 9,798 nominated teachers for ECE, 8,669 were trained through QAED.¹³⁰ On completion of the QAED training, teachers received a certificate speaking to their expertise in ECE.¹³¹ This training, however, is limited: primary teachers are meant to receive a basic five-day training (described by a respondent as a two-to-three day training, however), and sometimes a refresher training is also provided, though this is not a regular feature.¹³² Some teachers expressed concerns related to the quality of training, as well as a general lack of follow-up. Many noted that one training session was insufficient.

There has been a significant increase in ECE training of primary school teachers, which is the module upon which the current system is functioning, from 681 ECE teachers trained before 2016 to 10,903 in 2020.¹³³ As of the time of writing (August 2022), there have been an estimated 18,931 teachers trained.¹³⁴

Retention

The lack of prestige given to ECE, along with the difficulty in teaching it, limits teacher interest. Respondents frequently noted that teaching ECE is much harder than teaching older grades; consequently, only the most committed teachers stay in ECE. Further, respondents claim that incentives, including salary, are low, with trained teachers often leaving when better opportunities arise, leaving schools with few trained teachers.

ECE requires a teacher who is properly engaged, and the salaries are too low for the teacher to cover the entire concept of ECE. Also, because the teachers come from the private sector, whenever they get a better opportunity, they leave. The new [replacement] teacher is not trained because the training is organised after a long period so that's where the time of the students is lost. - FGD, Male Teachers, Punjab, May 2022

4.2.2 Capacity, management, and implementation

Once implementation is complete, stakeholders such as UNICEF and QAED delegate the responsibility of implementation to the education department, who in most cases do not have ECE trained employees.¹³⁵ This

¹²⁶ Key informant interview, Education Officer Punjab.

¹²⁷ Key Informant Interview, Additional Secretary Punjab

¹²⁸ Key Informant Interview, Additional Secretary Punjab

¹²⁹ Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development (2022). Early Childhood Education. <http://qaed.edu.pk/pages/subpages/10>

¹³⁰ Punjab Education Sector Reform Programme (2020). School Census Report.

https://www.pesrp.edu.pk/downloads/school_census/2020_21/School_Census_Report_2020_21.pdf, p. 26

¹³¹ Key Informant Interview, Education Department, Punjab

¹³² Evaluation reference group member, email; Key Informant Interview, Additional Secretary, Punjab

¹³³ Punjab Education Sector Reform Programme (2020). School Census Report. p. 56

¹³⁴ UNICEF staff, email

¹³⁵ Key Informant Interview, Education Officer, Punjab

creates challenges, in terms of fragmented implementation, as there is no evidence of coherent service delivery coordination.

Despite challenges, Punjab has experienced a shift in the way ECE is being offered. The province has developed improved facilities, which include basic infrastructure to support health and wellbeing needs in most schools. **Through innovative methods including designating ECE as a “missing facility,” Punjab has unlocked additional funding reserved for missing facilities.**¹³⁶ By shifting ECE into the missing facility category, authorities were able to use additional funding from donors and partners from this particular budget line - for example, the Annual Development Programme in Punjab¹³⁷ allocated PKR four billion to Punjab for missing facilities.

Punjab’s private ECE providers comprise nearly 50% of the total ECE schools, and it remains a challenge to ascertain the level of regulation and oversight over these providers by the provincial government.¹³⁸

4.3 Curriculum development and implementation

4.3.1 Curriculum

Most respondents claim ECE in Punjab is largely meeting all three key points in the approach taken to providing quality ECE, including providing young children with a supportive, sensory-filled environment where they are supported to learn through play. In Punjab, Katchi classrooms will be replaced by ECE classrooms, province-wide. The ECE classrooms are to differ from Katchi classrooms in three ways:

- They have child-friendly, theme-based, decorated classrooms with different activity corners;
- They involve play-based learning through the use of fun and interactive teaching-learning materials provided in an ECE kit; and
- They are managed by an ECE teacher who has received a four-day ECE training along with a part-time caregiver who has also received ECE training and supports the teacher in ECE activities.¹³⁹

The provision of child-friendly classrooms and ECE materials appear to be prioritised in Punjab, at least superficially. The two classroom visits to schools in Punjab provided some evidence of friendly, engaging classroom facilities, with child-friendly resources, play-based learning, and a trained teacher and a trained caregiver. **The ECE classrooms are enticing to parents and children, and enrolment is reported to have increased in the province as a result.** While there are gaps, Punjab generally shows the impact of a committed public sector which has enacted change with clear accountability mechanisms.

4.3.2 Pedagogy

Generally, findings indicate that most schools in Punjab claim to have adopted the central pedagogical practices, including prioritising play. However, there is some contradiction between what respondents claim, and what was evidenced in practice. In Punjab, ECE teachers are mandated to teach using the SNC. The Punjab ECE Policy (2017) lays out the central pedagogical practices to be taught in an ECE classroom, and the SNC, which represents a shift from ECE to ECCE, clarifies the role of the teacher in setting up the classroom and delivering lessons.

Teachers are typically aware of the role of the teacher as laid out in the Quality Standards of the ECE Policy (2017) and PESP (2019). Additionally, teachers claim they are aware of and use the tools available to them to teach in an engaging manner, including the ECE kits and learning corners.

Figure 9 ECE Classroom (Source: Punjab Research Team)



¹³⁶ KII, government official

¹³⁷ Run through the Planning and Development Board, Punjab

¹³⁸ World Bank. (2021). Rapid Review of ECE Regulatory Frameworks.

¹³⁹ Government of the Punjab (2019). Punjab Education Sector Plan 2019/20 - 2023/24. p. 41

However, these policies and the SNC are not understood and implemented everywhere. In some schools, the SNC's directives on ECE being play-based are not practiced. According to one government stakeholder, the majority of schoolteachers do not know how to teach the SNC, resorting instead to outdated pedagogical approaches.¹⁴⁰ In addition, some respondents described challenges facing schools, including overcrowded, multigrade classes, no caretaker support, and teachers overwhelmed with the number of students—sometimes more than 200 students in only two classrooms.¹⁴¹

In the two schools visited during data collection, the teaching style was authoritarian and lecture-based, with little play-based learning taking place, despite the provision of ECE kits. Through the classroom observations in Punjab, this ECE classroom's Science Corner (Figure 11), was shown to have manipulatives, counting blocks, a colour wheel, and coloured cut-outs. The teacher in the class used examples from daily life and asked students questions throughout the lesson. Although the classroom had these learning corners and general ECE resources, it was a cramped environment with little space for children to spread out. The teacher and the assistant spent much of the class aiming to correct misbehaviour, dismissing student questions with gestures and facial expressions.

The language of instruction in the classes was not understood by the vast majority of the children in both schools. The assistants were noted as being unable to control the classes, often shouting at the students. In general, the quality of teaching and learning appeared to be secondary, priority-wise to the establishment of the classroom and provision of resources.

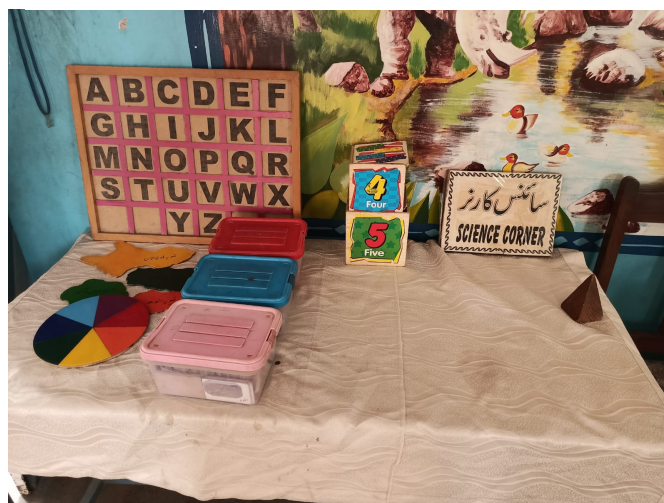
4.3.3 Resources

In Punjab, many classrooms are receiving ECE materials/kits. For example, some government, teacher, and parent respondents noted how ECE kits are reaching the classrooms and students receive materials like copies, pencils, and books for free. Teachers who were consulted described how the materials, including posters and manipulatives, are being used in some classrooms across the province. The classroom observations further verified this. In UNICEF-supported schools, UNICEF's cost per school for ECE activities is USD 290. This includes capacity building sessions, the provision of and transportation of ECE kits, and room decorations.¹⁴² However, according to QAED reports, costs are much higher—approximately USD 870 to set up an ECE classroom.¹⁴³ This points to inequity and fragmentation from different external stakeholders.

Despite evidence pointing to successful delivery and uptake of ECE materials and kits, there were a number of respondents who disagreed, elaborating that the materials are insufficient, do not reach the classrooms in time, materials are not provide to the children, and even in some cases, claiming that schools receive the ECE kits but not using them in school.¹⁴⁴

Although the government provided ECE materials/kits, Head Teachers and ECE Teachers feel hesitation in using them and do not allow ECE children to play freely with the toys in the kit. ECE students come to the ECE class and sit there with limitations. Teachers are afraid of breaking toys, knowing that they are responsible to replace broken toys. So, the main problem is the proper utilisation of available resources. – KII, SED, Punjab. May 2022

Figure 10 ECE Classroom (Source: Punjab Research Team)



¹⁴⁰ KII, government stakeholder, Punjab, May 2022.; KII, government stakeholder, Punjab, May 2022.

¹⁴¹ FGD, male teachers, Toba Tek Singh

¹⁴² UNICEF, 2022.

¹⁴³ Quaid-e-Azam Academy for Educational Development. (n.d.). Early Childhood Education Initiatives in Punjab.

<http://qaed.edu.pk/images/content-images/ece/Early%20Childhood%20Education%20Initiative%20in%20Punjab.pdf>; Punjab Education Sector Reform Programme. (2020). Annual School Census 2020-2021. <https://www.pesrp.edu.pk/publications>

¹⁴⁴ KII, School Education Department, Punjab

4.3.4 School environment and infrastructure

Currently, there are 18,751 ECE classrooms in Punjab, with 86 per cent of the classrooms possessing ECE equipment/tools and more than 93 per cent of the classrooms having ECE trained teachers.¹⁴⁵

Despite the provision of child-friendly decorations, multiple challenges remain related to infrastructure. Classroom observations pointed to key issues; these came through in the interviews as well: classrooms are often congested, unclean, and non-inclusive, especially to those children living with disabilities.

Table 12 School ECE infrastructure¹⁴⁶

Level	Schools with ECE Room	Schools with ECE Kits	Schools with ECE Room Painted	Schools with ECE Trained Teachers	Schools with ECE Room Wall Posters	Schools with age-appropriate furniture	Schools with ECE curriculum guide	Part time caregiver appointed
Primary	7.332	5.973	6.954	6.788	5.338	3.866	4.769	3.777
Middle	2.864	2.659	2.706	2.679	2.267	2.013	2.124	1.696
High	3.36	3.02	3.106	3.164	2.736	2.508	2.522	2.014
H.Sec.	224	181	199	215	179	157	162	157
Total	13.78	11.833	12.965	12.846	10.52	8.544	9.577	7.644

4.4 Quality assurance

According to respondents, fairly robust data systems are set up and a range of data is being collected.

Respondents in this study describe data being collected on ECE profiles, ECE student records, the maintenance of ECE infrastructure, the quality of caregivers, ensuring a child-friendly environment is in place, ECE room paint work, training of ECE teachers and caregivers by District QAED officers, the provision of ECE kits, the transition rate of Katchi to ECE, the enrolment of students on the school information system, and the follow-up on training and mentoring of teachers. The PMIU website shares data on such topics as schools with first-aid kits, play facilities such as handball equipment, and facilities such as electricity and drinking water. This is in line with what respondents have mentioned as being collected as data during monitoring visits.

While the policies related to coordination and setting up ECE classrooms appear to be strong, some respondents claim that the monitoring of the implementation of the ECE policy is poor and is not prioritised. According to respondents, this has contributed to the failure to meet the monitoring and evaluation goals and objectives, particularly in the rural areas of Punjab.

In Punjab, quality assurance in ECE is meant to be carried out through various means:

1. School quality and enrolment is monitored by the Assistant Education Officers (AEOs) - School Education Department (SED) oversees this. An ECE provincial database has been developed with statistics on ECE provision, infrastructure, enrolment, and human resources. AEOs also monitor teacher practice and classroom quality.
2. Monitoring and Evaluation Assistants (MEAs) monitor teacher practice and classroom quality independently from the AEOs in all 36 districts. They carry out spot visits to schools, where they collect data on teacher presence, student enrolment, and attendance as well as availability of facilities such as clean drinking water, electricity, and toilets. This reporting data is sent to the PMIU.
3. The PMIU leads on measuring children's school readiness using the Measuring Early Learning and Quality Outcomes (MELQO) in a sample of schools. MELQO aims to measure both child development and learning and quality of early childhood education.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Evaluation reference group member, email; Punjab Education Sector Reform Programme (2020). School Census Report.

¹⁴⁶ Punjab Education Sector Reform Programme. (2020). Annual School Census 2020-2021. <https://www.pesrp.edu.pk/publications>

¹⁴⁷ Source: adapted from Government of the Punjab (2017). Punjab Early Childhood Education Policy 2017.

Monitoring and quality assurance is, as outlined in the PESP, the shared responsibility of the SED, PMIU, Punjab Curriculum & Textbook Board, QAED, Punjab Education Foundation (PEF), Punjab Education Initiative Management Authority and district education departments.¹⁴⁸

A number of teachers and other education stakeholders elaborated on the monitoring visits, and explained that while monitoring takes place, the lack of ECE background for many AEOs makes this primarily a box-ticking exercise.¹⁴⁹ Further, others acknowledged that data from PMIU was not easily accessible, the quality of data was unclear, and it was not clear how the data was being used to improve the quality of services¹⁵⁰.

Punjab has for the first time in 2021 included indicators for students with mild disabilities in the census, which is a major step in how monitoring and evaluation take place.¹⁵¹ These indicators included the number of students with mild visual, hearing and movement disabilities. There is currently no specific disaggregated information, but overall, there are 1.2 per cent students who wear glasses, 0.2 per cent have hearing aids, and 0.2 per cent have a walking aid.¹⁵²

4.5 Family and community engagement

There was insufficient evidence of coordinated efforts to ensure that all levels of government are fully aware of the benefits of ECE and actively support ECE in their communities.¹⁵³ That said, when engagement with parents and the communities happens, the efforts have met with success.

Normally the custom is to send them to school at age 5. But recently we heard about the concept of early childhood education, then we came to know what it was and how children younger than 5 can go to school; they play with toys & learn as well. It wasn't like this back in our days. A new era has new ways of life. – Case study, mother of girl studying ECE, Rajanpur. May 2022

The 2017 ECE Policy prioritises parental and community engagement as this was an identified challenge in ECE provision in Punjab; parental and community engagement was developed into one of six quality standards which schools must meet to operate. This requires regular parent-teacher meetings, school council involvement with parents, and the provision of information to families around community services and resources around parenting and child development.¹⁵⁴ **Parents and the community in Punjab are also engaged in the School Management Committees (SMCs), whereby awareness of ECE is shared among community members.** The SMCs are organised to engage the parents and to involve them in school activities. These were confirmed in schools where study respondents are based. While respondents noted that in many communities, schools have implemented policies to promote parent-teacher communication and regular feedback on student progress, some parents reported challenges. Despite the engagement processes in place, teachers sometimes face challenges to engage parents, and parents are interested in or engaged in their child's ECE education.¹⁵⁵

Urban parents interviewed are more likely to send their children to school than rural parents. Rural parents appear to be more likely to not send their children to school because of limited access to services, work commitments, lack of knowledge about ECE, or the ability to send children to school at such a young age. Finally, parents and community members describe how there is little difference between the genders with regards to education, with both boys and girls able to access education, suggesting gender-linked barriers may be less common than in other provinces.

Those parents who send their children to ECE classes report positive behavioural and learning changes in their children:

I feel a big change in my child. She knows that if she makes any mistake, she says sorry, she washes hands before eating and also asks siblings to wash their hands. She keeps herself clean, and if she is doing homework and she sharpens her pencil then she picks up the trash and puts it in the dust bin. This is how she has changed in a positive way. - Case study, father of ECE child, Toba Tek Singh

¹⁴⁸ Government of the Punjab (2019). Punjab Education Sector Plan 2019/20 - 2023/24, p. 43

¹⁴⁹ KII, UNICEF

¹⁵⁰ KII, QAED

¹⁵¹ Punjab Education Sector Reforms Programme (2020). School Census Report.

¹⁵² Ibid

¹⁵³ KII, teacher, Rajanpur

¹⁵⁴ Government of the Punjab (2017). Punjab Early Childhood Education Policy 2017, p. 21

¹⁵⁵ FGD, male teachers, Toba Tek Singh

Box 3. Case Study - Transition from Private to Public ECE Programme

One respondent from a FGD with male parents in Rajanpur was extremely happy with his decision to switch from a private school to a government school. This switch came because of strong community engagement by the headteacher:

My children came from private schools. We were always told that government schools don't pay attention to kids and that they have a big number of students, and they can't manage it. My children didn't get any results from the private school, however. Then, I met the headmaster of the (public) school, and he convinced me to try the school for one month and then see the results. Then, I sent my children here (to the government school) for a month and I felt a drastic change in the child's progress.

I have studied at a government school. On the other hand, private schools are just a name, but we prefer sending our children to private schools because government schools were not in a good condition a few years back. Now this school has everything that a private school with a good standard has. ECE is an amazing project. Every child is given the due attention by the teachers. We get feedback through the children. The teachers are qualified and humble.

I am a little relieved financially because the school provides everything, even the pencils. The burden has lessened on us.

The way our children have accepted the school and enjoy the environment here (is the main value of ECE). When they see other people out of school or family, they share the benefits of ECE so this can help increase the enrolment of the school. Now parents who have not seen the ECE class by themselves, once they visit, they will definitely bring their children here. - FGD8, male parent, Punjab

4.6 Key priorities for ECE

Punjab has a strong foundation for the development of a well-functioning ECE system. There has been a large-scale effort within the province to ensure that ECE classrooms are set up and functional, and that there is an institutionalisation of ECE in the province. While policy is often quite ahead of on-the-ground realities, and there is limited coordination at varying levels, Punjab has all of the pieces in place for ECE to be run successfully. Much greater financial prioritisation (and transparency) will need to be provided to ECE by the federal and provincial governments, as Punjab is largely reliant on external funding for ECE. Doing so may help to better implement quality assurance processes and empower government stakeholders at all levels to emphasise the importance of ECE.

Based on the findings outlined, the following provides key priorities for Punjab:

Priority 1: Scale up ECE funding from provincial and national education budgets, and increase transparency on funding flows and financing

Responsible: Government of Punjab, with technical support from UNICEF

Funding for ECE is opaque at present, with no clear accounting of expenditure. It appears that the majority of funding for ECE comes from external donors, and in many cases, financial bookkeeping and management of funds is guided by donor requirements, with the government acting as custodian.¹⁵⁶ Decisions about ECE allocations happen at the school level, resulting in inequity. **Therefore, more centralised and clear allocation for ECE needs to be advocated for. The Government of the Punjab should prioritise ECE by establishing ECE as its own budgeted set of funds which draw from the provincial education budget.** Doing so would ensure that ECE is not seen by stakeholders as being of secondary importance and would ensure that spending is in line with provincial needs through clear accountability frameworks. Further, addressing ECE underfunding is of critical importance going forward, financing progressively to 10% of the provincial education budget.

Priority 2: Strengthen the systems delivering teaching and non-teaching human resources, clarify expectations for teachers/headteachers/ caretakers and commit to enhanced professional development.

Responsible: Government of Punjab, UNICEF

¹⁵⁶ Email communication, UNICEF staff, 2023.

In addition to insufficient human resources, there exists a mismatch between the professional development provided and the level of care/responsibility expected of educators and school administrators. Roles and responsibilities should be clarified to address the persistent issues with overcrowded, multi-year classrooms. In addition, while aiming to embed the standards and principles of ECE learning into staff through widespread training, the training (and its follow-up on implementation) is insufficient to prepare staff for a transition from traditional teaching methods to the desired play-based learning.

UNICEF, with its vast experience in training teachers and administrators, should technically support the Government of the Punjab in developing an enhanced training course which includes means of teacher follow-up and monitoring for quality implementation. The government should commit financially towards these training interventions, aiming to deliver enhanced training to each ECE teacher in the next five years.

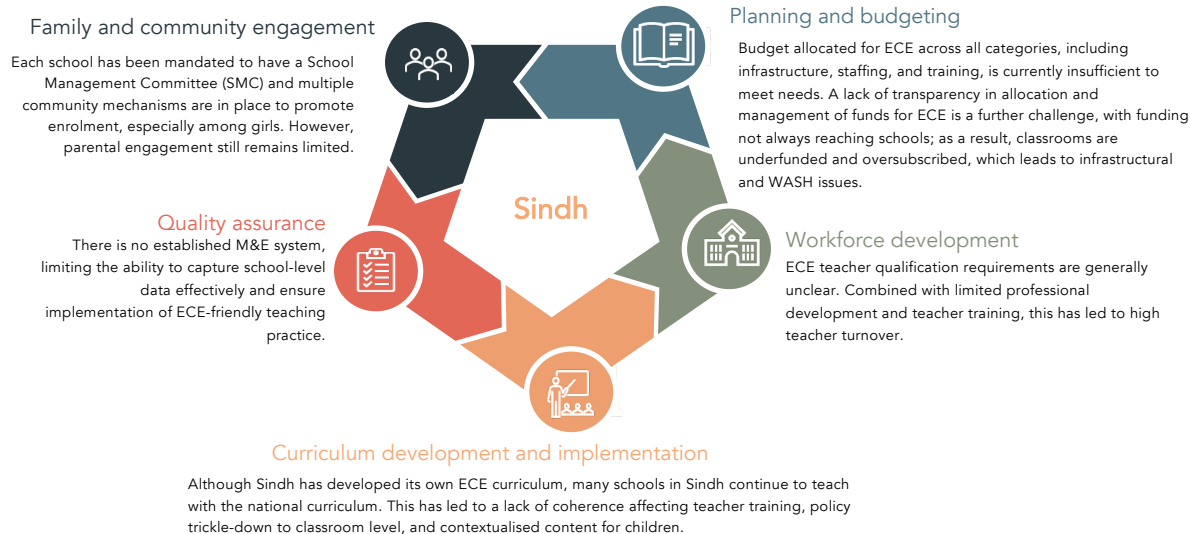
Priority 3: Establish a robust system for quality service delivery of ECE

Responsible: Government of Punjab, UNICEF

While the current PESP (2019/20 - 2023/24) prioritises ECE strengthening and scaling up as a priority, challenges remain with regards to ensuring a robust system to allow for quality service delivery. In order to strengthen the system, several steps need to be taken, including establishing an ECE cadre, and professionalising the role of ECE teacher. Further, clear pre-service and in-service professional development should be aligned with Punjab's vision for what quality ECE delivery is, and ongoing support and mentoring should be provided, to continuously improve service quality.

In addition, the government should strengthen the quality assurance system by improving data quality from trained monitoring staff; making data easily available; and establish a regular system for data to inform policy decision making and teacher training and other improvements in the ECE service delivery.

5. SINDH: PROVINCIAL ECE PROFILE & PRIORITIES



Sindh developed its own ECCE policy and curriculum in 2015, in contrast to Pakistan’s other provinces which all use the SNC (or the previous National ECE Curriculum).¹⁵⁷ Mandating ECCE enrolment for students from 3-5 years of age, the Sindh ECCE policy emphasises the care component, prioritising a holistic approach to ECCE (a summary of the policy is presented in Box 4 below). The province also laid out comprehensive standards for ECCE in the province with its Early Childhood Care & Education Standards for Sindh (2018), further providing specifications, procedures, and guidelines for quality ECCE.¹⁵⁸ Sindh is also distinguished by the existence of a formalised ECCE curriculum, the Sindh Curriculum for Early Childhood Care and Education (2018). This is built upon with the Teacher Guide on Early Childhood Care and Education (2019).¹⁵⁹ At a national level, Sindh is forging its own path on ECCE.

Box 4. Early Childhood Care and Education Policy Sindh (2015)¹⁶⁰

This ECCE policy was proposed as a “living document,” designed to be continuously improved upon by the Government of Sindh. The purpose of the policy is to chart out a provincial strategy for guiding early childhood education development in Pakistan. Policy implementation concentrates on the following areas:

- 1) Policy and Advocacy
- 2) Curriculum and Textbooks
- 3) Learning Standards and Assessments
- 4) Teachers Education and Training
- 5) Parents and Community

The ECCE policy was designed to provide developmentally appropriate pre-primary ECCE that will support the transition towards primary school and improve child outcomes in Sindh. It is broadly applicable to all ECCE settings, programs and services in public, private and voluntary sectors catering to the early childhood population in Sindh.

5.1 Planning and budgeting

5.1.1 Policy coordination

Broadly, the policy’s goals of transitioning Katchi classrooms to ECE classrooms, recruiting and training teachers, and building infrastructure are understood among the majority of government and education

¹⁵⁷ Abbas, Adeel, Dr Iffat Basit, Muhammad Akhtar, Umair Mehmood, Dr Quratulain, and Dr Farina Nazim. 2022. ‘Single National Curriculum at School Level in Pakistan: Expected Challenges, Merits and Demerits.’ *PJAE* 19 (3): 18.

¹⁵⁸ School Education & Literacy Department, Government of Sindh (2018). *Early Childhood Care & Education Standards For Sindh - 2018*. http://dcar.gos.pk/BoC_Other_Pages/Sindh-Curriculum/ECCE%20Standard.pdf

¹⁵⁹ AKU-IED and SELD in Collaboration with UNICEF (2019). *ECCE Teacher Guide*. [https://rsu-sindh.gov.pk/contents/publications/ECCE%20Teacher%20Guide%20\(English%20Final%20Version%2006-01-21.pdf](https://rsu-sindh.gov.pk/contents/publications/ECCE%20Teacher%20Guide%20(English%20Final%20Version%2006-01-21.pdf)

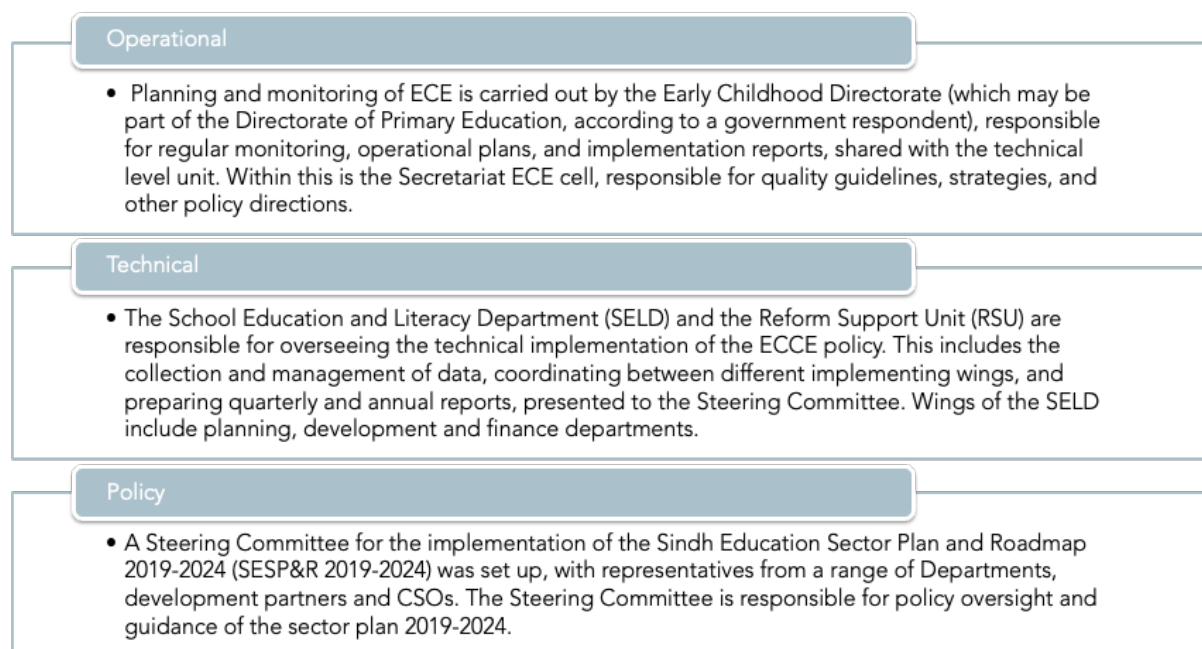
¹⁶⁰ Education & Literacy Department Government of Sindh Pakistan (2015). *Early Childhood Education Policy Sindh*. <https://rsu-sindh.gov.pk/contents/ECCE/4th/ECCEP%20Policy%20Final.pdf>

stakeholders (parents aside). However, these have not, according to many interviewees in Sukkar and Badin, reached the ground level.

The ECE policy which is introduced by the government of Sindh is very comprehensive and good, but I think the gap is that it's just paper or documents which are saved on the shelves of government offices rather than shared with the teachers. I think that document did not reach them and never will. The Sindh government policy documents or federal government policy documents or curriculum documents and education policy, unfortunately, in the history of 75 years of Pakistan, no document reached schools and I'm not thinking that they will reach them. – KII, Government Official, May 2022

At the provincial level, Figure 12 below summarises the planned coordination around ECCE:¹⁶¹

Figure 11 Coordination of ECCE in Sindh¹⁶²



Sindh has prioritised the expansion of facilities for ECE as part of its implementation framework for the Sindh ECCE Policy 2015.¹⁶³ This was further elaborated in the School Education Sector Plan and Roadmap for Sindh (SESP&R 2019-2024), which lays out plans for increased access to ECE through incorporating ECE in pre-service training at all Teachers Training Institutes (TTI), training the existing Primary teachers for ECE classes, and transforming the existing Katchi classes into ECE classrooms.¹⁶⁴

The SESP&R 2019-2024 prioritises demand-driven ECE centres in schools, then the scaling-up of modern Katchi classrooms, which are to be done through annual school profiling and demographic analysis.¹⁶⁵ A further 2000 new classrooms dedicated to ECE are targeted in the SESP&R 2019-2024 in addition to the establishment of the aforementioned.

With assistance from UNICEF and the Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development, Pakistan, the ECE Directorate and RSU developed key resources aimed a) to train Master Trainers on teaching teachers in a cascade model and b) to provide teachers with an evidence-based resource to use in their classroom practice.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ For a complete breakdown of the administration, leadership, implementation, and documentation for the ECCE Policy 2015, please refer to pages 37-38 of the ECCE Policy 2015.

¹⁶² Adapted from School Education and Literacy Department (2020). School Education Sector Plan And Roadmap. & qualitative data collection

¹⁶³ Education and Literacy Department, Government of Sindh (2015). Early Childhood Care and Education Policy 2015.

https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/pakistan_ecce-policy-sindh-2015.pdf

¹⁶⁴ School Education and Literacy Department (2020). School Education Sector Plan And Roadmap for Sindh (2019 – 2024).

<https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/document/file/2020-19-Pakistan-Sindh-ESP.pdf>

¹⁶⁵ School Education and Literacy Department (2020). School Education Sector Plan And Roadmap.

¹⁶⁶ School Education and Literacy Department, Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development, and UNICEF (2020). Teacher guide on Early Childhood Care and Education. [https://rsu-sindh.gov.pk/contents/publications/ECCE%20Teacher%20Guide%20\(English%20Final%20Version%2006-01-21.pdf](https://rsu-sindh.gov.pk/contents/publications/ECCE%20Teacher%20Guide%20(English%20Final%20Version%2006-01-21.pdf)

These materials were overseen by the School Education and Literacy Department and authorised by the Sindh Teacher Education Development Authority.¹⁶⁷

The reality of this policy coordination is less clear: key informants interviewed ranged from claiming that the coordination of the ECCE Policy 2015 is effective, to expressing it to be non-existent. While a governance structure is recognised by some respondents, one noting “in the case of implementation of the ECE policy, teachers, headteachers, educational authorities and others are part of the main governance structure”, it seems that this theoretical structure, like the policies, has yet to be translated to action.¹⁶⁸

If no structure has been implemented in schools, then how can we be accountable for that? District governments and other stakeholders have communication gaps among them, that’s why they have gaps (in implementation). ECE teachers are appointed in schools, but they are not working in ECE classes. First of all, there needs to be a strong main governance system in place.¹⁶⁹ - KII, Government Official, Sindh, May 2022

5.1.2 Financing¹⁷⁰

ECE in Sindh is not currently given its own budget line, rather, it is included with primary budgeting.¹⁷¹ This reflects the undifferentiated approach in planning documents – for example, in the SESP&R 2019-2024, Katchi and Primary education are combined, with the yearly projected financial allocation across education expenditures presented in Table 12 below. Respondents consulted were unsure of exact figures set aside for ECE in the province. This means stakeholders cannot hold effective – and realistic – discussions around resource allocations.

Table 13 Sindh projections of associated costs – recurrent expenditures (million PKR, constant prices as of 2017)

	Type of expenditure	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
Katchi and Primary education	Wage bill	64,232	67,230	70,787	74,472	78,322
	Goods and services	2,053	2,268	2,516	2,784	3,220
	Sindh Education Foundation	5,681	5,778	5,891	5,999	6,112

Source: SESP&R 2019-2024

As can be seen in the table above, wages constitute the bulk of the projected costs. With the transition of schools from Katchi to ECE classrooms, there appears to be a gap in funding. The study was unable to ascertain, at the time of writing, what this means in terms of being able to implement ECE in Sindh. However, in Sindh, and according to a UNICEF respondent, governmental funds are supplemented by significant donor funding, including from UNICEF, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and the European Union.¹⁷² This could account for the funds required for development-related work and for classroom materials.

Findings indicate contradictory perceptions around budget allocation. High-level respondents generally report believing the overall budget is adequate to achieve targeted outcomes, though a number questioned where these resources go. The previously mentioned lack of specificity around resource allocation breakdown makes it even more difficult to assess where and how finances are being used. As noted by one teacher, the money that is distributed at the school level is insufficient for any practical use.¹⁷³

At a school level, ECE funding is perceived to be insufficient. A number of educators and principals, and some government stakeholders, raised concerns about the need for more resources, such as furniture, solar electric systems, and ECE kits. Teachers reported paying for classroom supplies with their own money.

There is no budget provision for ECE. We have to purchase the material by ourselves.¹⁷⁴ - KII, Female Teacher, Sindh, May 2022

¹⁶⁷ KII, government stakeholder, Sindh

¹⁶⁸ KII, government stakeholder, Sindh

¹⁶⁹ KII, principal, Sukkar

¹⁷⁰ NB financial details have not been verified by UNICEF.

¹⁷¹ KII, provincial government stakeholder

¹⁷² KII, UNICEF stakeholder

¹⁷³ FGD, male teachers, Badin

¹⁷⁴ FGD, female teachers, Badin

An additional financial issue that could provide a partial explanation for the contradictions in the budget is the phenomenon of ‘ghost’ teachers, or teachers who are employed but do not teach. According to Sindh Minister for Education and Culture, Syed Sardar Ali Shah, there are currently over 100,000 ghost teachers in Sindh.¹⁷⁵ The overall implementation of ECE in Sindh thus remains hampered by the lack of clear budgetary allocations and spending data.

5.1.3 Political support

Stakeholders interviewed underlined an ancillary but ultimately low-priority approach to ECE at the political level. With education free for all children in Sindh, the main ECE stakeholders in Sindh are the Sindh Education Foundation (SEF), the National Commission for Human Development (NCHD), the School Education and Literacy Department and a large number of donors, including international organisations and NGOs, who support schools. This range of stakeholder supporting anywhere from one-to-many schools – means that there can be, in one village, a number of schools competing for resources, as one respondent explains:

To achieve those targets, they are going in the wrong direction because all departments work with the same data. Suppose a village has 100 ECE children: there can exist a government primary school, a Sindh education school, a NCHD school, a NGO non-formal school, and some learners are enrolled in three of these without any tracking or data followed to clean up this data. -KII, Government Official, Sindh, May 2022

This can at least partially also explain the continued teaching to the SNC, rather than the Sindh Policy -fracturing a system whereby provincial curriculum control was meant to be had (see Section 4.3.3).

5.2 ECE workforce development

5.2.1 Workforce recruitment, professional development, and retention

Recruitment

Sindh’s ECE workforce is characterised by a mixture of Katchi teachers who have been trained in ECE and teachers specifically trained in ECE. The ECCE Policy of 2015 stipulates that teachers should hold specific qualifications, but not what they are (although a government stakeholder reported that the SEF will decide on these shortly).¹⁷⁶ This is reflected in the range of options evidenced by study respondents on needed ECE teacher qualifications, ranging from Matric Pass holders to others believing teachers should hold specialised ECE degrees. With the role not regularised, there is less incentive to become an ECE teacher.

For the recruitment of teachers, the Sindh government introduced a new cadre of ECE teachers at grade 15¹⁷⁷, though they are not regularised.^{178 179} This is different from other teachers, where junior elementary school teachers are recruited in grade 14. This is also different from other provinces, where specific ECE teachers are not hired, rather primary teachers are given training.

Professional development

Respondents described the training on the new curriculum, particularly if short, as not being inadequate to teach the essential concepts of ECE. This training has been led through the ECCE Teacher Training Project, developed with Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development, Pakistan faculty. This follows a training of trainers approach, which has been documented in all provinces in Sindh.¹⁸⁰ The Teacher Training varies in length from a reported four to 18 days (with four most frequently reported). One respondent described a fairly simplistic training as follows: “One day was Introduction, the other day was activities, next day was a party and it went on. This is not the way to train.”¹⁸¹ However, not all teachers are eligible for trainings:

¹⁷⁵ Academia Magazine. (2021). 100,000 Ghost Teachers Employed In Sindh, Education Minister. <https://academiamag.com/ghost-teachers-in-sindh/>

¹⁷⁶ KII, government stakeholder, Sindh

¹⁷⁷ In Pakistan, the basic pay scale is determined by what grade you are appointed at. The lowest is grade 1 and the highest is grade 22. The grade one is at determines minimum pay, annual increment, and maximum pay

¹⁷⁸ Government of Sindh, School Education and Literacy Department. (2018). Office order: Monitoring/vigilance written test for recruitment process of early childhood education teacher (ECT-BPS-15) at 6 divisional headquarters.

<http://www.sindheducation.gov.pk/Contents/Notifications/mne%20teams%20for%20ECE%2028102018.pdf>

¹⁷⁹ Key Informant Interview, Sindh Government

¹⁸⁰ KII, government stakeholder, Sindh

¹⁸¹ FGD, male teacher, Badin

The first day, they asked about my experience and age, and they said they wanted young teachers. I was told I am too old for the training. My heart broke at that moment. They don't accept us as a part of the system. -KII, Male Teacher, Sindh, May 2022

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a lasting impact on trained teachers' learnings, with a monitoring officer noting that on re-assessment, trained teachers were scoring below 50 per cent in the standard assessment used. While some respondents have been trained as many as four times, others have not had refresher training.

Retention

Teacher turnover is a concern frequently raised, attributed to insufficient support, salary, and personal reasons, such as challenges with work and travel after marriage. ECE teachers face a demanding role with little support and large class sizes. In Sindh, caregivers are not budgeted for nor normally present in ECE/ECCE classrooms. The ECCE Policy does not account for caregivers. With caregivers not present in Sindh schools, an additional burden is placed on classroom teachers and can significantly distract them from teaching. With reported classroom sizes of up to 100 students, it is not feasible for a classroom teacher to also take children to the toilet and deal with washing them, among other caregiver responsibilities. Many respondents spoke openly about salary-related frustrations, which is said to be around USD130 per month (while Secondary teachers are reportedly earning USD 450-900 per month).

Everybody knows university teachers, everybody knows the college teachers, everybody knows the primary teachers, but no one knows the ECE teacher. Teachers are not respected all over Pakistan. It has been observed in Sindh province that the salary of a school guard is more than the salary of an ECE teacher. – KII, government stakeholder, Sindh. May 2022.

5.2.2 Capacity, management, and implementation

The implementation of the Sindh ECCE Policy 2015 has correlated with significant changes in the province, particularly on the roll-out of around 4000 ECE classrooms (many converted from Katchi). 70 Master Trainers have been trained by the Professional Institute for Teacher Education and the Teachers Training Institutes TTI and are now themselves implementing trainings. Additionally, 652 teachers were hired and trained, in addition to the roughly 1500 Katchi teachers who were trained by the Master Trainers on ECE.¹⁸² The ECCE Standards (2019) provides teachers with a comprehensive teaching and learning manual. However, as the following sections detail, material gaps remain in translating policy to reality.

While a detailed policy and supporting documents and frameworks thus exist around ECE in Sindh, practically speaking, workforce and infrastructure limitations severely challenge its implementation.

5.3 Curriculum development and implementation

5.3.1 Curriculum

Uniquely among the four provinces assessed, Sindh has developed its own curriculum. The ECCE Policy 2015 and the Teacher Guide detail Sindh's ECE curriculum and how to teach it. However, respondents vary significantly in their opinions on the curriculum, with some very pleased with it and its impact on children, and others finding it too challenging to teach. Implementation challenges include both the practical – multi-level classes, a lack of additional staff in classes, insufficient infrastructure – but also the conceptual – new pedagogical approaches which teachers struggle to adopt (such as active learning), policies not reaching the classroom level, schools using the SNC instead, and content which is not contextualised.¹⁸³

5.3.2 Pedagogy

Teachers, parents, and government officials across the province react positively to the impact that ECE is having, but the transition requires further attention and planning, and in particular teacher training on these new instructional approaches.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² KII, government stakeholder, Sindh

¹⁸³ KII, government stakeholder, Sindh

¹⁸⁴ This is similar to the transition from rote learning to play-based pedagogies as seen in multiple contexts. For an example, please see Samuel Hall's previous work on strengthening ECE in Afghanistan here: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cfe2c8927234e0001688343/t/6077ef91cfc5f621be24ef54/1618472863511/SECE-A-Final-Report-for-publishing.pdf>

ECE, as it is replacing Katchi, is meant to be transforming the way that pre-primary children are taught. What was once taught in a rote manner is now being taught through engaging, play-based learning strategies. Of the two schools visited as part of the fieldwork, neither school's pedagogy resembled ECE, with rote book learning taking place, authoritarian teachers, and disengaged students.

*The difference between Katchi and ECE is that; Katchi's children are taught according to books, they get homework and do classwork and no manual is followed for it. For ECE you have to teach by playing only and have to follow the module. The main difference is that an ECE teacher has to become a child herself while in the ECE class.*¹⁸⁵ - KII, Male Teacher, Sindh, May 2022

ECE teachers in Sindh are supported through the provision of teaching materials including the ECE Teaching Manual. The teaching manual provides a lesson-by-lesson breakdown of the curriculum, inclusive of learning outcomes according to the age of the students. The lessons in the manual allow ECE teachers to understand the activities in relatively good detail. At the same time, the manual emphasises the development of advanced comprehension and understanding of pedagogy and can be less effective with teachers unable to comprehend the material.

Box 5 Case Study: ECE Pedagogical Practices

I like teaching younger children. It gives me satisfaction and I am very much attached to them. I like teaching through play. You don't get to use that methodology [on older children]. The best way to teach ECE children is through activities.

Children are attracted the most to sound and colour; teaching in rhymes makes the learning quick. I have memorised 30-50 poems. Senior teachers think we just play and dance all day long. We clap and appreciate them. I once used the methodology to make the child observe the colour of my dress. All the children learnt that colour through this practice. I would ask about other things I'd carry like my purse, cooler and stuff in the surroundings. This way children learn colours. For sensory learning we made children trace the letter **A** on sand. There are similar activities that we manage to perform with our limited resources.

We would like to get some financial facilitation, more training should be conducted, and material for activities should be provided in order to practise the activities. We have no budget for material, and we don't have enough salary to purchase it on our own. By facilitation I mean that the majority of the activities are possible with colours, toys and other things that enhance the gross motor skills of children. The amount of material that we receive is adequate for 10 students, how will the other 30 students learn? We need facilitation as per the strength of the class

We use the materials we were given on a daily basis like colours and blocks. Daily. Blocks are a reusable item, but the consumable items should be [re] supplied on a regular basis. Children get bored using one item in four different ways, and after that we have to repeat the same techniques.

When suddenly the teaching approach shifts from care to anger and strictness the child gets upset. The issue of not having a helper/maid in ECE is essential. I was in ECE class when one of the students urinated in the class, who would have cleaned that? At that time more than 50 students were present in the class, so I washed it myself. The rest of the area was also washed. We need a helper in ECE. The teacher has to be a teacher and a cleaner both; there is no wash facility, no ayah, no financial support. - FGD Female teacher, Sindh, May 2022

¹⁸⁵ FGD, male teacher, Badin

Through the classroom observations, the application of ECE pedagogy was not apparent: teachers in both classes expected students to stay still and quiet while reading from books. In one school, there were a few minutes of play with blocks, these were abruptly taken from the children with no warning. In this class, 10 learners were engaged in listening to a Sindhi poem, while 43 other students were ignored and not engaged.

In the other classroom observation, shown in the picture to the right, the teacher taught a class of 31 students, all of whom were over the age of 5, despite it being an ECE class. The medium of instruction was Sindhi, the mother tongue of all children. The class was like a lecture, with the teacher telling a story at the front of the class, without any questions or prompts, then walking around to check on learners' work in their books. Very low levels of discussion, interaction, critical thinking, feedback, and facilitation of learning took place in this observed lesson, and there were very few learning materials aside from the chalk and white boards. On top of this, the classroom was a dangerous 48 degrees Celsius with just one ceiling fan, a challenging learning environment for any child.

Figure 12 ECE Classroom (Source: Sindh Research Team)



5.3.3 Resources

The Sindh government, with the help of UNICEF, has provided ECE material kits to a number of schools. These kits include decorations, posters, and manipulatives to make the classroom more engaging to young children. Learning corners are meant to be set up in line with the ECCE Policy 2015. Of the two schools visited in Sindh as part of this study, neither had suitable resources (posters, toys, books, other resources) for an ECE classroom, though one of two had learning corners. In addition to the Provincial ECE Plan 2011-2015, the following two education sector plans provide guidance on ECE implementation, financing, curriculum, and implementation.

Teachers frequently reported being hesitant to open the kits, for fear that the materials would be damaged by the students or that the consumable materials would run out, in part due to lack of clarity on when these would be renewed. Further, many teachers noted that the quantity of materials received in the kits were inadequate for the number of students in most classes— often more than 40 students.¹⁸⁶ In classrooms visited as part of the study, there were minimal resources, with one class of two having learning corners, and learning materials such as stationery not available.¹⁸⁷

Worsening the financial situation of ECE teachers is the fact that they are frequently reliant on their own finances to purchase learning materials, especially those who have not received kits. Positively, from an engagement perspective, teachers report resorting to creative methods to extend the ECE materials, including using low-cost/no-cost materials to supplement what is provided. Teachers also noted that well-trained colleagues were more adept at engaging in creative strategies to supplement and extend the existing ECE resources.¹⁸⁸

5.3.4 School environment and infrastructure

Practically, infrastructure limitations also challenge implementation. The ECCE Policy 2015 states, “ideally Primary schools have 6 classrooms, 5 for Primary and 1 for Katchi.”¹⁸⁹ The fact that the ECCE Policy continues to refer to the ECE classrooms as Katchi is ambiguous, and clarity on this could strengthen monitoring and implementation. In practice, having a separate classroom for ECE/Katchi is sometimes the case in urban areas, but not often seen in rural schools. Other infrastructure issues which are commonly reported are a lack of potable water, washroom facilities which are inadequate, buildings and rooms dangerous and in need of repair, and

¹⁸⁶ KII, female teacher, Badin

¹⁸⁷ FGD, female teacher, Badin

¹⁸⁸ FGD, male teachers, Badin

¹⁸⁹ Education and Literacy Department, Government of Sindh (2015). Early Childhood Care and Education Policy 2015. p.15.

lacking furniture and play equipment. The classroom observations verify these findings, with a lack of stationary and learning materials in the classrooms. Some respondents mention the poor school infrastructure as the single most important gap in delivering ECE in Sindh. In one classroom observed, the classroom temperature reached an estimated 45 degrees Celsius, with one single fan for over 50 students. The SEF currently oversees the basic facilities in schools in Sindh.¹⁹⁰

Respondents reported barriers to enrolment with a particular focus on school oversubscription – worsened by the reported provincial regulations allowing for children older than five to enrol in ECE classrooms – and the lack of access for learners with disabilities, in particular in rural areas.

Now, in the province, students under the age of 8 are also allowed to enrol in ECE. Under such a scenario, planning should be according to the age of students because planning for students between the ages of 5-8 will be different from planning for 3–5-year-old students and the requirements of students change with their age.¹⁹¹ - KII, Government official, Sindh, May 2022

Respondents asked about the cost of setting up an ECE classroom indicated it to be nearly USD900, provided there is infrastructure already present.¹⁹² Infrastructure would need to include items like solar electricity backup systems, hygienic WASH facilities, and safe drinking water.

5.4 Quality assurance

Current monitoring and evaluation activities in Sindh are incomplete. While the SESP&R 2019-2024 calls for specific data collection around low participation and retention, out of school children and low literacy rates among youth, and equity and infrastructure-related challenges, this data – crucial to planning – has not sufficiently been captured, and existing data lacks sufficient means of disaggregation.

Planned activities range from M&E officers who are to visit schools and provide feedback on the reality observed, communicating the results to the provincial authorities, to biometric teacher attendance checking and exams held by third parties. Yet the overwhelming majority of respondents who discussed M&E focused on the lack of M&E system. Government stakeholders explained that while quality assurance is supported in primary education, there is no current system in place for ECE.¹⁹³

5.5 Family and community engagement

On one hand, many parents respond seeing the benefits of the new pedagogical practices in their children's behaviour and abilities, while others prefer the 'traditional' Katchi approach. Engaging the family and community is a priority in the Sindh ECCE Policy 2015. The extent to which the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the families and communities are equitable towards education and supportive of ECE is somewhat divided among the community.

The parents tell us to teach their children the way we were taught. They think ECE has no particular benefit. They think rhymes and playing are of no use. They have asked us many times to teach them like before and give them piles of homework. This attitude was very challenging for us, especially with the pandemic. The parents like to see the notebooks filled up with written work. When they find them empty, sometimes they get furious that we are wasting our kids' time. The illiteracy in this area has given us a pretty tough time on awareness of ECE among parents.¹⁹⁴ - KII, Male Teacher, Sindh, May 2022

Gender inequality in ECE enrolment remains a concern in many communities in Sindh. Parents consulted in this study reported that many families are against sending their children, and especially their girls, to school. There remains a prevailing attitude that girls will not bring the family money and will be married off. One interviewee noted, "They despise sending girls to school. We do not think that way, but mostly our community does not like this. I think if they study then they may get better (opportunities) in life" (Mother of ECE-enrolled child, Sindh). Educators and SMCs are doing their part to change this situation through community outreach including door-to-door activities.

¹⁹⁰ KII, government stakeholder, Sindh

¹⁹¹ KII, Government official, Sindh

¹⁹² NB. This figure has not been confirmed by UNICEF provincial office.

¹⁹³ KII, government stakeholder, Sindh

¹⁹⁴ FGD, male teachers, Badin

Well actually, their staff and teachers used to come door to door and bring awareness about sending the children to school. They made us realise that education is important. We came to know about the school through their door-to-door campaign - FGD16, female parents, Sukkur, Sindh

Parental engagement thus requires additional support to be consistently drawn out. To address this, each school has been mandated to have a School Management Committee (SMC). These groups help to make decisions on school affairs. Additionally, many schools are actively aiming to involve parents in school activities and events and wish to involve parents more in the children’s educational lives. **To date, however, this has yet to translate to active parental engagement, even where SMCs are implemented.**

5.6 Key priorities for ECE

By adopting its own Early Childhood Care and Education policy, Sindh has shown its determination to forge its own path with regards to education. The Government of Sindh should demonstrate the political will to adequately embed quality frameworks, standards, and curriculum across all schools, in addition to investing heavily in infrastructure; this will require extensive finances and a multisectoral approach. By doing so, they can show that having provincially differentiated ECE systems is possible and beneficial.

Based on the findings outlined, the following highlights key priorities for Sindh going forward:

Priority 1: Improve quality of system of delivery

Responsible: Government of Sindh with technical support from UNICEF

The Government of Sindh has established that it wants to have its own provincially contextual ECE (and education in general). Despite this, there is insufficient coordination to ensure that the policies, strategies, and curriculum reach the schools and are being taught and implemented. **Urgency is required in improving an effective system of delivery, coordination and dissemination/ implementation of provincial curriculum, strategies, standards, and training on ECE.**

The government should urgently set up a task force which aims to ensure the full and complete dissemination of the ECE policies and curriculum to schools across the province. This will enable stakeholders across the system to be working coherently on ECE and will particularly enable schools across all districts to be utilising the provincial curriculum. The task force should set accountabilities and responsibilities and include follow-up mechanisms for which administrators are responsible.

Priority 2: Strengthen political will and financing

Responsible: Government of Sindh with technical support from UNICEF

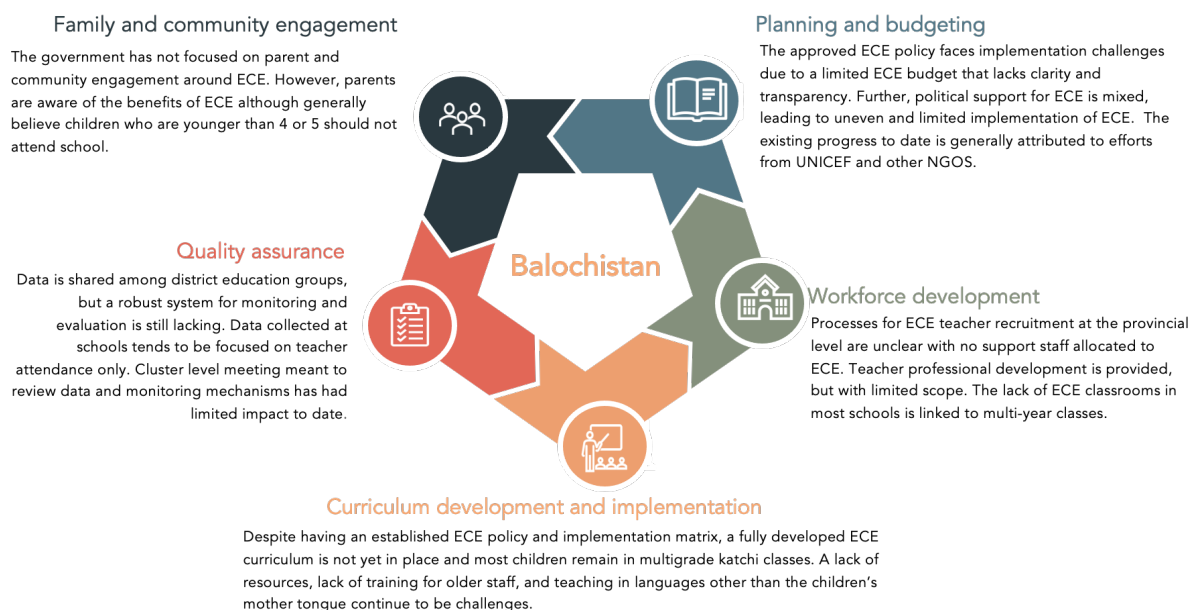
ECE is currently not successfully implemented in the province and **infrastructural issues are one of the significant and persistent factors which hinder successful implementation.** Efforts should address increasing political will and financing, to ensure that the Government of Sindh prioritises infrastructural improvements to ECE classrooms to ensure that overcrowding and multi-year classes are minimised and so that ECE classes can benefit from electric, WASH facilities, and adequate and suitable resources.

Priority 3: Improve quality assurance system

Responsible: Government of Sindh with technical support from UNICEF

ECE data needs to be better captured so as to identify strengths and gaps, and to improve the provision of ECE across the province. The current quality assurance systems are in need of strengthening, through stronger government oversight and prioritisation. The technical aspects, including the inclusion and capture of disaggregated data, can be supported by UNICEF to enable the government to effectively manage quality assurance through the province.

6. BALOCHISTAN: PROVINCIAL ECE PROFILE & PRIORITIES



The Second BESP¹⁹⁵ is the most recent policy mechanism through which ECE implementation is directed. Around 3,000 stakeholders were engaged in the development of this sector plan,¹⁹⁶ which includes ECE quality as a key intervention to ensure equity in terms of the learning capacity of children. The goal of ECE is to serve as preparation that 'compensates' disadvantages in early years. The plan also calls for support in the preschool years on vaccines, nutrition, diseases, and treatment by family and community.

Prior to the introduction of a formal ECE policy, early childhood education in Balochistan was offered either as traditional Katchi, or improved Katchi. The sector faces challenges due to limited infrastructure: while there are 12,317 primary schools in Balochistan, there are only 1,100 ECE rooms.¹⁹⁷ In 2010, UNESCO supported the development of the first formal early childhood education policy in Balochistan, the Provincial ECE Plan 2011-2015.¹⁹⁸ Since then, there have been multiple interventions through various development organisations aimed to scale up ECE throughout the province, including the development of an ECE policy and implementation matrix valid until 2025. However, Balochistan has faced significant challenges in terms of consistent, systematic implementation, with the majority of ECE programmes implemented by external development partners discontinued soon after the interventions end.

Through reform agendas and sector plans, the aim of the province is to scale up and improve the primary education sector. Initially, ECE classrooms were established in Balochistan through the support of development partners in a handful of schools.¹⁹⁹ There has since been a scaling up of this initiative, and now there are 1,000 schools through the Global Partnership for Education, which provided funding in 2016. These funds were implemented through the Sector Plans. However, quality ECE is limited with only 7 per cent of the teachers trained in ECE, 9 per cent separate ECE teachers and separate ECE classrooms in only 14 per cent of government schools.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁵ Secondary Education Department, Government of Balochistan. (2020). Balochistan Education Sector Plan 2020-2025.

https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/pakistan_balochistan_besp2020-25.pdf

¹⁹⁶ KII, Balochistan Government

¹⁹⁷ KII, Balochistan Government Official

¹⁹⁸ Government of Balochistan Education Department (2011). Provincial Early Childhood Education (ECE) Plan 2011-2015.

https://www.pafec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Provincial_ECE_Plan.pdf

¹⁹⁹ KII, Balochistan Government

²⁰⁰ *ibid*, p. 120

6.1 Planning and Budgeting

6.1.1 Policy coordination

Policy movement relating to ECE in the province is lagging; an increase in political will is needed to push forward with much-needed reforms and achieve ECE ambitions. Despite the development and endorsement by partners of the BESP (2020-25), which calls for significant reforms and improvements relating to ECE quality, the province still relies on the 2015 Early Childhood Education Policy Framework and the 2007 ECE National Curriculum. The BESP provides insight into the factors challenging this acknowledging the importance of “quality” ECE programs versus the traditional Katchi classes and recommending the expansion of the former; it also points to both the scarce financial resources allocated to ECE as well as limited appetite for “research to support an ECE program ... [designed] on the knowledge of the child’s needs.”²⁰¹ Consequently, there is a dichotomy between acknowledged need and actual appetite for implementation.

Figure 13 ECE Classroom (Source: Balochistan Research Team)



According to multiple key informants, there has been very limited engagement between the national and provincial levels to take the next step and coordinate and develop ECE policies, both nationally and specific to Balochistan. Recently, this has resulted in significant confusion in terms of implementation as the SNC was developed without any input from the government of Balochistan, and its adoption in the province is as well a point of confusion, suffering from the lack of clarity in implementation around the status of Katchi classes and where they may overlap with ECE. One education program manager, referring to the confusion between Katchi and ‘improved ECE’ in Balochistan, described the situation thusly, “suppose we consider Katchi class as ECE, then there will be a numeric gap between class one and Katchi. On the other hand, Katchi class cannot be considered ECE because 5 years old is the minimum age to enrol in Katchi class while the age bracket for ECE children is in the range of 3- to 4-years-old.”

Implementation of ECE in Balochistan also suffers from a rigid approach to following age recommendations in frameworks - which in doing so may cut off access to ECE for children between three and four years old:

The [ECE policy] framework recommends the age bracket for ECE should be from four to eight years, and that is in keeping with the context of Balochistan. So, that policy framework is being developed and is also approved by the government. Now, we see that we have to...align it with constitutional obligations as well. Because our constitution under Article 25 states that there is a specific age bracket five to 16 years that needs to be given education. So, if we want to provide ECE facilities, we have to look at that grid – the age formula. If we want to talk about children at the age of four, there is no constitutional need to provide the ECE facility. We have to formulate the policy along with the legislation components so that it is part of the Constitution or the legal mechanism. – KII, Education department official. May 2022.

6.1.2 Financing

The BESP 2020-25 includes a proposed budget (Table 13) for the implementation of ECE. This proposal exceeds current budget allocations and assumes that development partners will continue to provide financial support and technical assistance to cover the gap, in addition to the continued support from the Federal Government.²⁰² Currently, UNICEF, the World Bank, European Union, UNESCO, and JICA have committed to a

²⁰¹ ibid

²⁰² Balochistan Education Sector Plan 2020-2025.

total contribution of 5.996 million Rupees for the five-year span. The BESP notes that with a primarily donor-driven funding landscape, concerns exist around sustainability in funding.²⁰³

Table 13 BESP 2020-25 ECE Budget (in billion PKR)

	Year 1 2020-2021	Year 2 2021-2022	Year 3 2022-2023	Year 4 2023-2024	Year 5 2024-2025	Total 2020-2025
ECE Budget	1.21	1.48	1.90	2.15	1.99	8.75

As in other provinces, stakeholders underlined the lack of precise information around actual budget allocation and its breakdown, as well as top-down budget allocations which ignore local realities. As one ECE administrator noted:

We are told that a budget of 15 to 20 per cent is being kept for education. But the problem is it is never being delivered to the schools...people sitting in air-conditioned rooms decide the budget for such underserved areas where schools have no shelter, where teachers can't reach due to improper transport mechanisms. You can imagine, how will the funds reach here, and things will start working out for these places? They make decisions for citizens of this place sitting in an entirely different and developed federal capital. – KII, ECE administrator

Specifically, Balochistan suffers from a population-based funding distribution. While geographically, Balochistan accounts for 44 per cent of Pakistan territory, the population is only 6 per cent of the country. As federal funding and resource allocation are based on population criteria, the resources distributed are insufficient to meet the funding needs.

Notably, while respondent responses varied widely as to whether there is sufficient budget allocated for ECE, there was an overall lack of confidence that the budget was being accurately and efficiently managed and distributed. This finding was widespread, regardless of position, seniority, or location (provincial or district-level). One district education officer explained that the budget is allocated at the cluster level, and then disbursed to linked primary schools. However, he noted that the budget was not sufficient to meet the requirements for ECE. Conversely, a school head in Quetta explained that the allocated budget is sufficient, but the distribution is mismanaged, with limited oversight or checks and balances and poor implementation.

6.1.3 Political support capacity, and management

Poor governance framework and weak management capacity at all levels of education (including schools) is arguably the most serious problem of education service delivery in Balochistan. Key governance and management challenges include but are not limited to weak policy, regulatory and legal frameworks, ad hoc and centralised planning, inefficient HR management system, lack of clarity over mandates, unavailability, and opacity of data on performance, low accountability, and lack of sustained political support.²⁰⁴

Most respondents underline mixed political support for ECE; although they do not always agree on how this has evolved. According to a community activist in Quetta, when NGOs first introduced ECE programmes, they were threatened by some political parties. However, he explained, as awareness has increased, the importance of early childhood education has been recognized, and political will has increased. Conversely, another respondent noted that “in the beginning, politicians praised the ECE program” but more recently, there has been limited high-level political support for ECE within the department of education.

Participants frequently described limited engagement and support from the government at both the provincial as well as national levels. “We have had meetings with the government to mobilise, but the government has made zero commitment to ECE. And the model SNC put in needed materials replenished, the government did not give anything,” one high-level stakeholder explained. This has contributed to a fractured and unsustainable approach to ECE at the provincial level.

Critically, the lack of engagement between high-level decision makers and community-level stakeholders marginalises the people most impacted by the policies. One respondent, working at the local level, further highlighted this, explaining, “The biggest problem I see is that they [the government] do not take primary-level

²⁰³ ibid. p. 172

²⁰⁴ ibid. p. 10

decision makers on board. It is important to do so, and that will fill the gap that is present. You can sit and talk about this, but the people who are impacted are not taken on board. Like you speak about civil society - they should be also included in the process so that there is better implementation.” KII Community Activist Quetta

6.2 ECE Workforce development

6.2.1 Workforce recruitment and professional development

Recruitment

Further compounding enrolment and retention challenges are issues including insufficient dedicated classrooms and lack of qualified teachers– 95 per cent of schools lack ECE rooms and ECE trained teachers.²⁰⁵ There is currently no systematic process for ECE teacher recruitment at the provincial level, despite an ongoing push at the national level. This is further challenged in Balochistan, according to an education officer, by the many schools which are single teacher schools - in which there is no option for the teacher to teach just one class based on qualification. Reportedly, in other schools, due to political transfers there are classes with multiple teachers – unnecessarily.²⁰⁶

Professional development

Findings related to teacher training highlight limited availability and scope, and challenges related to content and quality. According to a key informant at the government level, there are two types of training provided, namely pre-service and in-service training. However, the pre-service training was described as poor quality, and not adequately preparing teachers for the workforce. In-service training has usually been provided by donor organisations, typically offered in short sessions of a few days, and limited in scope. In one case, respondents spoke of a UNICEF- supported six-day training session for ECE teachers in 11 districts in Balochistan. The training was based on a hands-on, participatory, and play-based approach.²⁰⁷ Participants were trained in all relevant ECE themes and also provided with a full resource kit to ensure they could continue implementing the skills in their classrooms. However, participants spoke of the challenges in retaining and applying the information shared in such a short amount of time.²⁰⁸

One respondent highlighted the pedagogical training needs of older members of the teaching force, explaining, *“There is no refresher course or training for the teachers from that time. They are unaware of all the new research and discoveries of modern teaching. They promote teachers on a seniority basis who are naïve when it comes to recent teaching methodologies.”*²⁰⁹

Retention

Challenges to scaling up the ECE workforce include financial constraints, no support staff, limited teacher training, as well as the rural location of many schools. Retention issues is the common compounding factor, echoed by teachers across all provinces, that the salary is not commensurate with the amount of work required to teach a large class of ECE students.

No, our salary is not according to our work. We do work a lot but get limited salaries. The handling of ECE children is not an easy task. We take care of ECE children for 7 hours. We face children having different types of nature and learning styles. Some children are too talkative, and some are stubborn. Teaching higher classes is easy as children of those classes are mature but unfortunately, the salary of teachers dealing with higher classes are also high as compared to our salaries. - FGD, Female teacher, Balochistan, May 2022.

6.2.2 Capacity, management, and Implementation

Implementation of ECE has been uneven and limited, despite having an approved ECE Policy for the province in place. Any attempt to implement ECE continues to face challenges:

- Only 7 per cent of government schools have teachers trained in ECE
- 9 per cent have separate ECE teachers
- 14 per cent have separate ECE classrooms

²⁰⁵ KII, UNICEF staff, Balochistan. May 2022.

²⁰⁶ KII, UNICEF staff, Balochistan

²⁰⁷ KII, ECE trainer/curriculum developer, SED, Balochistan

²⁰⁸ KII, ECE trainer, Balochistan

²⁰⁹ KII, ECE administrator, Balochistan

- Less than 10 per cent of ECE is based on the required curriculum and delivered as per the requirements of quality ECE
- As of 2019, 9 per cent of children aged 3-5 in rural Balochistan were out-of-school.²¹⁰

6.3 Curriculum development and implementation

There remains significant confusion related to the adoption of ECE and its place within the current Katchi system. Although ECE programmes have been introduced by various NGOs and other organisations, the traditional Katchi class is still widely considered the official preparatory class, with enrolment strictly limited to students 5 years or above. As one key informant explained, although criteria for ECE classes, teacher training, and facilities are detailed in the Balochistan Education Sector Plan 21-25, in reality, ECE classes have not been established by the government in accordance with the policy, the policy is just a formality, with limited implementation.

That being said, through the 2016/17 to 2020/21 ECE implementation plan, ECE classes were established, teachers across 11 districts were trained, and materials and ECE kits were provided. The financial limitations flagged earlier, however, limit the scope of this. One provincial-level education official explained, “without the resources, you can’t do anything in the plan. So, the implementation plan is very clear; part of the policy implementation, which is the financial component, is missing.”²¹¹

While the support of NGO and UN organisations in ECE has been significant in Balochistan, it comes with a clear sustainability limitation:

The government [should have] taken ownership of the system when the project was over. Unfortunately, when the government did not take over, those ECE rooms became storerooms. In short, negligence of the Government is the main cause of failure of the ECE system in the province. At the same time, some competent and skilled heads of schools continued functioning of ECE rooms smoothly. [The] functioning of any system depends upon interest and competency. – KII, ECE trainer, Balochistan, May 2022.

Finally, from a practical perspective, implementation is challenged by the remoteness of many parts of the province. As one respondent noted, students often have to travel three kilometres or more to reach school; for children of ECE-going age, this is particularly difficult during extreme weather conditions. In addition, the distance between schools is approximately 25 kilometres, which creates challenges for monitoring and data collection.

6.3.1 Curriculum

At present, the province’s ECE delivery, including the curriculum, guidelines on CPD, and ECE classroom and environment standards, are based on the National ECE Curriculum 2007. The ECE Plan 2011-2015, National Education Policy 2009, the Balochistan Education Sector Plan (BESP) 2013-2018 and the Draft Provincial School Education Policy of Balochistan all emphasise ECE in line with the Education for All initiative. The BESP describes the challenges in implementing ECE curriculum when most children are enrolled in multi-grade Katchi classes. Currently, less than 10 per cent of early childhood education being implemented in Balochistan is based on the requirements of quality ECE.

6.3.2 Pedagogy

Multiple respondents noted that teaching methods have changed vastly in recent years; many were able to identify best pedagogical practices in ECE and articulate what should be occurring in the classroom. However, they noted that what is practised is far different, due to lack of separate facilities, poor infrastructure, single classroom teachers and mixed grades, and limited resources.

In one of the ECE classrooms visited, a conducive learning environment was apparent, with no safety hazards, inclusive seating arrangements, colourful walls and tables, and three teachers, who worked with the children in a responsible and positive manner. However, this classroom lacked opportunities or resources for play; only books were provided as resources. As pictured to the left (faces blurred for anonymity), a large age gap existed between students. Some students were significantly older than typical ECE students, though all were taught the same curriculum.

²¹⁰ ASER Pakistan (2021). ASER National Report.

²¹¹ KII, Provincial official, Balochistan

Figure 14 ECE Classroom (Source: Balochistan Research Team)



ECE does not have any proper infrastructure and they are taught arbitrarily. Suppose a parent is bringing their child at 4 years, the other brings a child at 7 years. It's not like the older grades which have a separate class. He/she will have to sit with the little children. Younger children are unable to understand sometimes or find it difficult to understand a lesson. – KII, DEO, Mastung. May 2022

To build on this, the classroom observations showed that teachers were teaching in Urdu while the students did not understand as Urdu was not their mother tongue. Still, the students were engaged and regularly volunteered themselves, were treated respectfully, sat in a gender-equal manner, and were asked open-ended questions. There were minimal examples, in the two schools visited, of play-based learning, with both teachers engaging in traditional teaching practices encouraging book work.

6.3.3 Resources

As noted previously, the majority of resources and teaching materials are donated by NGOs and linked to specific projects, like the six-day training described in the previous section. Other interventions geared towards resource distribution have met with limited success, largely due to challenges with large, multi-grade classes and

limited space.²¹² The government provision of resources including textbooks and materials is limited and is not a government policy priority.²¹³ In the schools visited, the classrooms were inadequately resourced for play. Books were provided in both classrooms, however.

6.3.4 School environment and Infrastructure

Respondents focused on the lack of appropriate infrastructure for ECE in Balochistan with single-teacher schools and outdoor schools/ classrooms. Reportedly more than half of the approximately 12,000 primary schools are single teacher²¹⁴ - which means they cannot run a separate ECE classroom, nor are they usually provided. One district education officer noted that 61 schools in his district are shelter-less (open air).²¹⁵ 72 per cent of all primary schools are multigrade.²¹⁶ Where appropriate ECE classrooms do exist, they were largely attributed to the efforts of UNICEF and other NGOs.

The classroom observations found poorly equipped classrooms which, while clean, offered nothing for children to play with. Both schools, one in Quetta, one in Mastung, provided only workbooks, with little else in the classrooms which could engage students.

6.4 Quality assurance

Currently, there is limited data collected on ECE in schools. However, according to one key informant, the monitoring body collects data from schools on nine indicators and performance of each school is evaluated on the basis of these indicators each quarter. They include: teacher and student attendance, basic facilities, fund utilisation, teaching practices, learning practices, and trainings and community involvement. Monthly reports are generated on the Monitoring Dashboard and are shared in the District Education Group (DEG) chaired by the Deputy Commissioner and decisions are taken accordingly. Teachers' attendance is the only indicator currently

²¹² Jaffer, R. & Jaffer R. (2013). Early Childhood Development Project (ECDP) Balochistan Aga Khan Foundation (Pakistan) Mid Term Review. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/pak-ecdp-midterm-review-feb2013.pdf>

²¹³ Secondary Education Department, Government of Balochistan. (2020). Balochistan Education Sector Plan 2020-2025.

²¹⁴ KII, government stakeholder, Balochistan. May 2022; KII, UNICEF staff, Balochistan. May 2022.

²¹⁵ KII, government stakeholder, Balochistan. May 2022

²¹⁶ Balochistan Education Sector Plan (BESP), p. 7

being closely monitored. Respondents frequently noted challenges at the local level with the school-level management structure, including around monitoring.

[The effectiveness is] 10 per cent. Actually, it would be better to establish a separate Department having a focal person at the district level who handles the [community's issues] and evaluates the performance of the PTSMCs by resolving their issues. - KII, UNICEF staff, Balochistan. May 2022

At the district level, regular cluster level meetings are scheduled to review data and monitoring mechanisms; however, participants noted little evidence of improved outcomes resulting from these meetings. In sum, at this point Balochistan lacks a robust system for monitoring and evaluation beyond tracking teacher attendance.

6.5 Family and community engagement

Parents interviewed in Balochistan nearly universally acknowledged the benefits to both children and families of ECE. However, the definition of ECE – or at least who it applies to – is not universally agreed. Although some recognised the benefits of early schooling, others expressed that children younger than four or five should remain at home, because the teachers could not provide the best care for them.

I think children should go to school at the age of four so that they get interested in the school and attach their good feelings with school from the beginning. When a child starts talking, he/she should be enrolled in the school. If we lose their age in the beginning and let them enrol in school at the age of eight, ten or above, they will not succeed in future. – FGD, male parent, Balochistan. May 2022.

Box 6 The need for a supportive community for ECE to succeed

A parent in Balochistan describes how important raising a child in a supportive community can be:

Personally, being a mother, my role is very important to support my children in education. As you know, children spend more time with their mother after school, so they will reply/react with the same tone as their mother, for example if the mother uses a harsh tone, they will answer with the same tone, and if she talks with a soft tone, they will also answer with soft tone. At the same time, the status in the community also affects the lifestyle of children. If there are literate people in society, children will be impressed, and they will also strive to become high profile personalities. For example, we live in such an area where most of the people are doctors. That's why we live in a good environment and our children are encouraged. Nobody is involved in bad habits like abusive gossip.

If we talk about the role of my husband, I will say that the role of my husband is limited to support the education of my children because he is a male and most of the males stay out of home for earning purposes. He comes back home late at night and gives limited time to his children. So, only mothers can play the best and major role in supporting the education of children.

In the past, our elders did not like co-education. But nowadays, thinking of people has changed and they have become broad minded. Similarly, co-education has been allowed in primary sections of government schools. As co-education is not considered a bad trend now, girls and boys are given equal opportunity to get childhood education and hurdles are being overcome day by day in this regard. All community members are interested and agree that their children should be educated and should be literate. A few years ago, transport issues were the main hurdle relating to education, but now schools have been opened in all villages and children can go there easily to get education.

Parents will not agree to send their children to an ECE program until they know its importance. No doubt, the ECE program is a good initiative and has been securing the prosperity and success of children for the next 30 years. That's why there is dire need to give awareness to the illiterate parents regarding its importance and also to highlight upcoming challenges that would be faced by their children in upcoming life. Parents should observe the learning environments and send their children after communication/consultation with other school-going children. The school environment should be so attractive and impressive because children are the best ambassadors of school, and they can motivate their friends who are OOSC (out of school children). We as parents also discuss the educational progress of neighbourhood children and get motivation to make decisions (to help them). In short, parents should agree with the importance of childhood education that is also known as basic education. A child will not be able to do well in higher classes if he/she does not get early childhood education properly.

- Case study, female parent, Balochistan. May 2022.

Although UNICEF has initiated programmes to engage local community members and parents, respondents pointed to insufficient government support to promote community and parents' engagement in ECE. They did note, however, that at least in Balochistan, despite these minimal interventions to promote community and parental engagement, parents seemed to indicate a clear understanding of the importance of maintaining positive and sustained connections between parents, schools, and the community. As one male parent explained in a focus group discussion,

To check the quality of education, we get information from our child (daughter) and ask her "what she read today." We also visit the school and ask teachers "how our child's education is going on? Does she understand their teaching methods etc.?" Of course, our community members also know the importance of education. So, they are involved and support the education of their children by the same method, for example, they verify from their children as well as from the teachers. – FGD, male parent, Balochistan. May 2022.

In general, parents indicated that they make decisions regarding education jointly, although because the father controls the finances, he ultimately has the last say in decisions. However, most parents acknowledge the mother is the most active in their children's education, supporting in schoolwork and participating in school-related activities as well as parent-teacher communications. Parents also noted that gendered practices related to girls' enrolment have changed for the better.

Yes, I want to share that positive change has come in the education system. In the beginning, little girls were not sent to school as there was no trend but nowadays, all community members are motivated, and they agree to educate their girls. In the school of our village, overall enrolment has increased due to the establishment of an ECE room as well as the provision of many other facilities. – FGD, male parent, Balochistan. May 2022.

Box 7 Thoughts on ECE from a male parent of an ECE-Enrolled child, Balochistan

We are thankful to our government. A separate children's room (ECE room) has been established in our village school which has a wonderful environment. This room has tables, chairs, and a toy kit. Each child is very happy and is studying there with great interest. So, the provision of such an environment develops interest in children for childhood education and ensures quality in early childhood education.

Teachers teach young children with love and morality. Children of early childhood education age play at school when they go to school. They play with their friends and also learn from their teachers. I believe that the children are receiving a quality education. They go to school happily and show full interest in it. They feel comfortable in the environment. Teachers teach them with love, care, and morality. Children wake up early in the morning and are happy that they have to go to school and get to play there freely. We all are happy and satisfied that our children are receiving quality childhood education.

In the beginning, my child (daughter) played at home and spent the whole day in such activities. When she was enrolled in school, I noticed positive changes in her attitude and habits. Now, when she comes back home from school, she opens her bag and starts her homework right away. She often remains busy writing on wooden tablets (Takhti) and notebooks. She does not pay attention to what is happening around. She does not use the mobile phone and she prefers to do schoolwork. As she has learnt moralities from schoolteachers, she also guides her mother in daily matters.

- Case study, male parent, Balochistan. May 2022

6.6 Key priorities for ECE

Balochistan is keenly aware of its shortcomings with regards to education - the BESP makes it clear around the state of infrastructure, teaching quality, and political coordination. With this acute sense of the reality on the ground, the province requires significant political will to make ECE interventions at scale and sustainable. Funding is inadequately set aside and managed for ECE, and this results in a province, already challenged to equip with a trained and skilled workforce and adequate infrastructure, chronically lagging behind its peers with regards to ECE provision.

Based on the findings outlined, the following highlights key priorities for Balochistan going forward:

Priority 1: Increase political will and support policy-level championship and financing

Responsible: Government of Balochistan, UNICEF

As in other provinces, there is insufficient coordination to ensure that the policies, strategies, and curriculum reach the schools and are being taught and implemented. A coordinated effort should be made to ensure the **delivery, coordination and dissemination/ implementation of provincial curriculum, strategies, standards, and training on ECE**. In order to support system coherence and transition from Katchi classes to ECE, **financing needs to be prioritised and mechanisms put in place to properly manage ECE budget allocation**. This is critical as the province is in dire need of adequate infrastructure to support the transition from Katchi to ECE.

Priority 2: Improve coherence of ECE system

Responsible: Government of Balochistan, UNICEF

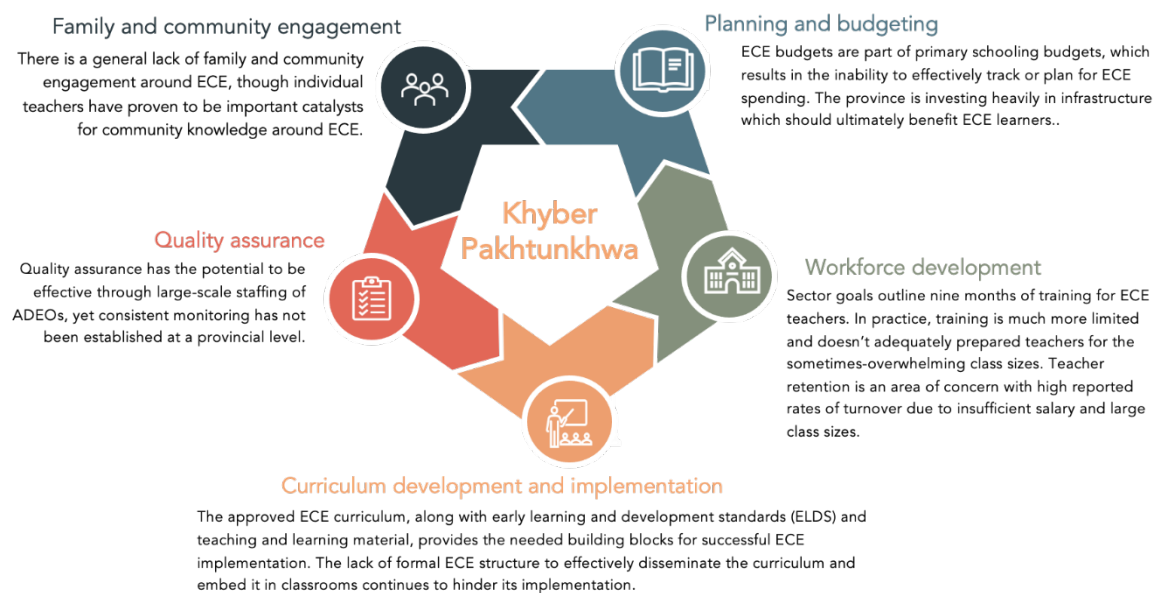
One of the biggest hurdles to ECE engagement is the lack of clarity and distinction around Katchi classes and ECE. This creates confusion on a variety of issues, including age of attendance, promotion from ECE to primary, and teacher training and compensation, among others. In order to improve system-level coherence, clear definitions need to be established, policies to ensure a smooth transition from Katchi classes to ECE need to be developed, and a **public awareness campaign should be launched to sensitise parents and encourage ECE enrolment**. While infrastructure improvements will be a drawn-out process, these more immediate measures can be taken to support the transition.

Priority 3: Establish a robust system for quality service delivery of ECE

Responsible: Government of the Balochistan, UNICEF

System level coherence cannot occur without an effectively trained ECE workforce –at all levels—to support quality ECE delivery. Balochistan should also establish an ECE cadre and provide training in developing quality ECE and how to continuously improve service quality. Quality assurance processes need to be strengthened, by improving data quality from trained monitoring staff; making data easily available; and establishing a regular system for data to inform policy decision making and teacher training and other improvements in the ECE service delivery.

7. KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA: PROVINCIAL ECE PROFILE & PRIORITIES



KP has the largest sub-national education system in Pakistan.²¹⁷ With an estimated 1.9 million children aged 4-5 (the targeted ECE age group), there are more than 700,000 students enrolled in pre-primary education with a 50% gender split.²¹⁸ Education efforts have been in line with Article 25-A, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Free Compulsory Primary and Secondary Education Act, and SDG-4 of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030. KP has prioritised early childhood development and pre-primary education in its most recent Schools Sector Plan (2015/16 to 2019/20). To facilitate this, it allocated 23 per cent of the total provincial budget for education in 2020-21, the highest among the four provinces.²¹⁹

With UNICEF as a key actor, a technical working group was established, leading to a provincial situation analysis as well as the province's first policy formulation in 2019. The Directorate of Elementary & Secondary Education Department was technically supported to implement 1,000 ECE classrooms as well as develop ECE materials, standards, training manuals, and guidebooks. There are reportedly 27,638²²⁰ government schools in KP, of which 22,006²²¹ are primary schools – but only 2,000 ECE classrooms in the settled areas, and a further 722 in the newly merged districts. Total enrolment for pre-primary classes in settled districts went down from 705,734 to 597,612 from the 2019-2020 to 2020-2021 school years.²²²

The ECE policy, currently in the draft stage, will also include linkages with other sectors, such as health and hygiene. KP has also ensured that basic facilities are to be provided, such as latrines, basic medical devices, and boundary walls.²²³

Box 8 KP Education Improvement Program (KP-EIP)²²⁴

UNICEF and the government of KP are working together to:

- 1) Improve access, quality, and efficiency of the education system in the province.
- 2) Increase enrolment of out-of-school children in low performing districts

²¹⁷ UNICEF on behalf of the Elementary and Secondary Education Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (n.d.). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Improvement Program, Program Document for Education Sector Program Implementation Grant for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. <https://assets.globalpartnership.org/s3fs-public/document/file/2021-09-khyber-pakhtunkhwa-program-document.pdf?VersionId=GJyCd4XnzRgcCeRCUJQFQYC4XGr.qpvm>.

²¹⁸ Elementary & Secondary Education Department Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (2022). Early Childhood Education Policy (Draft).

²¹⁹ ibid

²²⁰ Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (2021). Annual School Census Report. 175.107.63.45/NewIMUSite/images/reports/ASC_Report_2020-21_Final.pdf

²²¹ ibid

²²² ibid

²²³ KII, government official, KP. May 2022.

²²⁴ UNICEF on behalf of the Elementary and Secondary Education Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (n.d.), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Improvement Program, Program Document

- 3) Improve literacy of the students in supported ECE classrooms

7.1 Planning and budgeting

7.1.1 Policy coordination

KP has put forth a range of ECE commitments. These include the KP Education Sector Plan 2010-2015, the KP Education Sector Plan 2015-2020, the KP Education Blueprint 2018-23, the KP Early Learning & Development Standards 2019, and the KP Education Sector Plan 2020-2025. All of these plans help to specify expectations and guidelines and institutionalise ECE. They also provision the building of new schools and transformation of existing Katchi classrooms to ECE classrooms.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Reform Blueprint 2018-2023 outlines plans to introduce “quality pre-primary ECE in government schools in the province.”²²⁵ As part of this strategy, 10,000 government schools have been prioritised for the provision of ‘quality ECE.’²²⁶ UNICEF has been working directly with the provincial education department since 2019 to develop an ECE policy. The implementation thereof is pending the endorsement of the provincial cabinet, with the draft policy already approved by the provincial Secretary and Minister of Education.²²⁷ This development process has brought together a range of government stakeholders, including the Directorate of Professional Development, Directorate of Curriculum & Teacher Education, Directorate of Elementary and Secondary Education Department as well as the education management authority (EMA). This policy centres on four pillars, namely governance, quality, access and community engagement.²²⁸ Despite the lack of ECE policy today, findings from interviews with KP government officials indicate a strong willingness to support ECE; according to one provincial official,

“When the KP government came to power in 2018, the education advisors announced the five-year education plan in KP. The government made it clear that it was keen to introduce ECE – 2000 ECE rooms were to be introduced. For the last year 1000 rooms have been established, and there is a mandate to establish 2733 more. So, they are keen to implement this.”

Bottlenecks nonetheless remain:

- There is a gap in governance mechanisms as no formal structure for ECE exists at this time.
- Existing efforts have been ad hoc rather than sustainable. One respondent explained, “ECE was started in 2015 at Malakand and teachers were trained. ECE classes were also established, and a nominal fund was given to head teachers to buy ECE materials. Then, the project was stopped, and no follow-ups were made after that.”²²⁹
- The Education department is starting from limited technical and human resources. A UNICEF stakeholder explains, “It needs to do a lot of work to develop a structure. It might be difficult to develop governance mechanisms. An ECE teachers’ cadre does not exist in the current education structure. It will take time to introduce and regularise ECE teachers’ cadre in KP, it will need a lot of budget and it also needs a consistency in advocacy by the education department for implementation of ECE policy. But the good news is that political wills and governmental struggles have now been involved in the formulation process.”
- A large proportion of ECE students remain in private schools in the province. As of 2017, this number stood at 53 per cent. More recent data was not available for this study.
- The dissemination of plans and policies (relating to ECE) down to the district-level is not taking place.

7.1.2 Financing

There is no current budget allocation for ECE in KP, with the draft ECE policy noting that ECE budgetary allocations are merged with the primary education budget.²³⁰ As part of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Education Improvement Plan 2021-2026, the following table represents the proposed budget for implementation of the five-year quality pre-primary ECE project, supported by UNICEF and financed through the GPE grant.

²²⁵ Ibid

²²⁶ Ibid

²²⁷ KII, UNICEF Focal Point

²²⁸ Ibid

²²⁹ KII, DEO, KP

²³⁰ Elementary & Secondary Education Department Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (2022). Early Childhood Education Policy (Draft).

Table 14 Proposed budget allocation for Provision of Quality Pre-Primary ECE 2021-2026

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
\$110,000	\$691,000	\$683,438	\$683,437	\$691,000	\$2,858,875

As with other provinces, respondents evidence varied knowledge around financial planning and resource allocation, and those presenting figures are not always in accord; information sharing between the provincial and district levels appears to be lacking. For example, one provincial-level government official explained that the financial plans for the ECE policy have been drafted and expressed confidence in approval. "Once the policy is agreed then it will be accepted and implemented." However, respondents at the district level report limited knowledge of financial planning or budgeting, indicating a marked lack of transparency and information sharing between government sectors. No financial plans to increase allocation of funding for ECE at the district level has been shared with the education department.

When it comes to costs for the establishment of ECE classes, the Directorate of Education and Special Education has emphasised standardisation for ECE centres as part of an approved prototype/piloting plan at a cost of PKR 520,000 (USD 2,300) from the provincial budget.²³¹

7.1.3 Political support, capacity, and management

As previously noted, government officials at the provincial level indicate broad support for ECE. According to a UNICEF focal point, "the good news is that political wills and governmental struggles have now been involved in the formulation process. In parallel, UNICEF has been advocating it since 2018." This was also reiterated at the district level. One DEO noted,

The Ministry of Education is fully supporting ECE, and they decided to expand ECE to other districts of KP and newly merged districts (NMDs). – KII, DEO, KP. May 2022.

Political support does not necessarily carry over into successful capacity or management of the implementation of the policy, however. There is little evidence pointing towards a cohesive, collaborative push from the public sector on ensuring ECE is provided as a standard in the province. As detailed in the KP-EIP, the education management team structure, in its current form, lacks the capacity and skills necessary to manage the implementation of a quality ECE program²³²

7.2 Workforce development

7.2.1 Workforce recruitment and professional development

Recruitment

At the time of the research, there were no ECE cadres in KP, severely limiting plans to scale up the program at the provincial level. However, at present, 1,320 teachers have been trained by UNICEF using a teacher training manual, handbook, and guidebook, all of which were approved by the Education Department.²³³ According to the draft ECE policy, all ECE teachers will undergo a 9-month induction training guided by the Directorate of Curriculum & Teacher Education (DCTE) and delivered by the Directorate of Professional Development (DPD).²³⁴ One respondent claimed, however, that the goal of establishing an ECE cadre was well within the government's capabilities if they choose to invest.

We need to have an ECE cadre established in KP and have one ECE teacher in each school. So, we will need to recruit 27,000 teachers, which will be very expensive. But this is nothing for the government and they can do it and they need to put a system in place.- KII, government stakeholder, KP. May 2022

Teachers interviewed described low salaries as one of the primary challenges to the creation of a dedicated ECE cadre.²³⁵

²³¹ Email communications, UNICEF staff

²³² "There will be a need to rethink the administrative structure of the provincial as well district teams to make it relevant to the needs of ECE and in accordance with the local context." UNICEF on behalf of the Elementary and Secondary Education Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (n.d.), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Improvement Program, Program Document. p.30.

²³³ Email communication, UNICEF staff

²³⁴ Elementary & Secondary Education Department Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (2022). Early Childhood Education Policy (Draft).

²³⁵ FGD, male ECE teachers, Peshawar

Compared to other provinces, and according to a government official, KP has a well-defined plan in place to develop school leadership systems in order to improve monitoring and evaluation and provide additional support to teachers. One government official described the system thusly:

One school leader will be responsible for seven government primary schools. The purpose of the school leader is to promote the quality of education in KP schools. His/her aim and objective will be to go to the schools to observe the teaching methodology of the teachers, and if there are some improvements required in the teacher's methodology then he or she will help with the lessons or will present one or two activities for smooth learning. They will also observe the teachers and students, they will assist the students, and then they will sit with the teachers, and with the help of the teacher guides and handbooks and whatever materials are available in the schools, they will finalise the lesson plans and checks. So, it will be on a regular basis. So, the teaching methodology will be increased and improved, and new things and new activities will be included. So, this will be more beneficial professional support for the teachers. So, we help develop the draft policies and so the system will be strengthened more. - KII, government stakeholder, KP. May 2022.

Professional development

The data show that teacher training and recruitment protocols are said to be in the piloting phase. To build on this, multiple respondents claim that ECE teachers must have a BA, B.Ed., and attend a 9-month specialised induction programme for teachers. There are also training sessions for teachers transitioning from Katchi to ECE, meaning that pre-service and in-service training is in place in some places. However, some teachers claim to be unspecialised and unqualified and not appropriate to teach ECE.

It was reported that teacher training manuals were developed in collaboration with the Directorate of Curriculum Teacher Education (DCTE) and the Department of Professional Development (DPD). Included in the manuals are classroom interventions for children in need of additional support. According to a UNICEF focal point, piloting is ongoing in Mardan, Swat, Swabi, Kurram, and Orakzai²³⁶, with an anticipated roll-out planned within the next two years.

In Peshawar, UNICEF is reported to have trained existing PST teachers who were assigned to ECE classrooms. In 2021, 1,000 ECE teachers (500 male, 500 female) were trained in 2021. UNICEF provided financial and technical support. However, in terms of teacher recruitment, plans are still underway.

In general, teachers expressed interest in participating in regular training to improve their teaching skills. However, teachers interviewed in Peshawar explained that they had only received five days of training, emphasising that additional training is necessary to fully develop their skills. Training is further said to be somewhat unrealistic, however, with training scenarios teaching educators to work within a 25-30 child classroom, when in reality, teachers sometimes must teach 200+ students at a time.

Retention

Without an ECE-specific cadre, retention is a challenge to assess. Existing ECE teachers are said to be highly qualified, many have had ECE-specific training, and they appear to be motivated. However, respondents note the challenges in teaching overwhelmingly large classroom sizes. Further, they describe the salary as being insufficient, with some teachers forced to work secondary jobs to make ends meet. Teachers have expressed frustration with budgetary constraints, resulting in low wages and minimal benefits and reflective of lack of priority given to building an ECE cadre.

Teacher 2: I am a senior level teacher and spent around 20 years in this profession, but the salary scale is still 15 and did not raise with the passage of time.

Teacher 3: I am a heart patient but there is no medical insurance scheme from the government and with my salary, I cannot afford heart surgery advised by the doctor.

Teacher 4: There must be a housing scheme for teachers, I am living on rent, and I have to manage with other expenses as well which are hardly managed with [my] salary. - FGD, male teachers, Malakand, May 2022

²³⁶ Email communications, UNICEF staff

7.2.2 Capacity, management, and implementation

The current education management team structure at the district level lacks capacity and skills to manage the introduction of a proper early childhood education. There will be a need to rethink the administrative structure of the provincial as well as district teams to make it relevant to the needs of ECE and in accordance with the local context. – KII, education programme manager, KP. May 2022.

Without a notified ECE policy, and a hesitation from officials to fully endorse the SNC, implementation of ECE in the province is stunted. New ECE classrooms are being built, some Katchi classes are being converted to ECE classes, and training is taking place among teachers, but there is a lack of unified direction as to what ECE will look like in the province. UNICEF-supported schools are reported to be some of the only ones in the province with ECE embedded. Respondents in Malakand report little to no ECE progress in terms of policy implementation, while Peshawar has shown some. The difference between districts shows the extent to which ECE varies in the province.

7.3 Curriculum development and implementation

7.3.1 Curriculum

KP follows the SNC and has developed its own locally contextual early learning and development standards (ELDS) to support the curriculum. The DCTE has developed ECE primers, which have already been printed for the 2022-2023 academic year.²³⁷ However, respondents note that the SNC ECE curriculum has had limited implementation. In addition, there is also the perception that “SNC is the agenda of the current government, and it might be changed by the next government, so we should do limited investment for its implementation.”²³⁸ UNICEF has supported the Implementation Unit (of the Directorate of Education and Special Education) to ensure compliance with the quality of ECE material at the request of the Education Department, strengthening the ELDS and curriculum with best practice.²³⁹

The taught curriculum in KP varies by school. Some schools appear to be teaching the SNC, some are still using a Katchi curriculum, others still are using the previous National Curriculum, and some teachers described not being aware of any curriculum whatsoever. An ECE programme manager in Peshawar described the curriculum as being “based on activity-based learning and a curriculum and modules of Development in Literacy (DIL)”. This said, the SNC is reportedly meant to be used throughout the province. The inconsistencies in what is being taught point to a gap in the ECE provision and introduction of ECE to the province. As one male ECE teacher noted in a focus group discussion, early child education is a relatively new concept in education in Pakistan,

In previous education systems, we had heard and learnt about the Montessori and kindergarten learning methodology and the use of materials in those systems. Now, since the last two years, we have introduced early childhood education in our province, this is a totally new concept. - KII, government stakeholder, KP. April 2022

7.3.2 Pedagogy

In KP, teachers vary widely in their pedagogical approaches to ECE teaching. Some do not follow specific pedagogical approaches due to frequent curriculum changes. Others incorporate interactive and play based ECE-specific pedagogical practices, including the joyful learning environment approach. In an example of good practice, in Peshawar, a headteacher described how parent-teacher councils were involved to ensure a joyful learning environment, being engaged in the learning process.

Respondents also varied in their pedagogy due to training. Some teachers in an FGD explained how they use approaches which were taught to them during their pre-service training. Others explain how the training did not really prepare them for teaching, or that they are unqualified to teach, never taking specialised training.

²³⁷ Email communications, UNICEF staff

²³⁸ KII, UNICEF staff. May 2022.

²³⁹ Email communications. UNICEF staff

In the classes observed, both classes had the genders split. Both teachers were very polite and gentle with the students, and in one class, resources were used to assist teaching, such as charts and flashcards. In one class, the

Figure 15 ECE classroom (Source: KP research team)



teacher started class by putting a maths question on the blackboard, asking the students to find the answer (see picture below). Eventually, the teacher was seen using the pencils in the classroom to demonstrate subtraction and using the blackboard as well to show how subtraction works.

7.3.3 Resources

Many respondents noted that ECE resources have undergone significant changes over the years.

ECE materials have changed over the last six years. The old material was just flash cards and alphabet blocks made of plastic material and they are replaced by new material purchased recently and this new material is according to the corners. – KII, social worker, Peshawar. May 2022.

Respondents indicated initial challenges in the early phases of implementation related to inadequate training in ECE resources and materials. This provided the impetus for education officials to develop training manuals and teachers guides. While participants acknowledged the need for the materials and resources, they were also quick to point out that without adequate training in classroom and resource management, the allocation of resources in and of themselves was not

sufficient to establish a functional ECE classroom. While the classrooms observed in this study were largely unsatisfactory in terms of room condition and infrastructure, one had ECE resources including counting blocks, writing utensils, and educational toys. The other classroom was only equipped with government-provided textbooks.

Box 9 Classroom observation vignette from Government Girls Primary School Zaryab Colony

This ECE class was a small class, with only 11 students of various ages. With annual exams concluded, class sizes across the school were much less than during the regular school year. In this ECE class, the teacher was using material such as charts, flash cards and models to teach children about their five senses, with the children showing interest in the lesson. The teacher clearly described the learning objectives and linked the senses to the students' daily lives. The teacher asked the children about when they drink tea or eat sour things, how they feel and through their tongues what they sense. The teacher also asked about, when their mother cooks food, what do the children sense through their nose, with the children replying that they smell. Connecting the lesson with daily life and using a variety of resources shows good practice.

In the same classroom, however, the teacher, even with a small class size, had to deal with students fighting over ECE materials such as toys. The teacher did her best to redirect their misbehaviour by encouraging them to adopt positive behaviours, playing together with toys. Still, this shows that even with 11 students, much less than typical, classroom resources are insufficient so as to engage all learners.

7.3.4 School environment/infrastructure

Multi-grade classes and teaching have a long history in KP, primarily due to a lack of teachers and lack of classrooms.²⁴⁰ **While infrastructure for ECE classrooms in KP has long been a barrier, the provincial government has begun to implement a strategy to construct a separate ECE room in each new school²⁴¹ being**

²⁴⁰ UNICEF on behalf of the Elementary and Secondary Education Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (n.d.), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Improvement Program, Program Document. p.34.

²⁴¹ The Education Department, KP has adopted a policy decision to build six rooms in each primary school. This decision supports ECE interventions recommended in the ECE Policy.

built and now, KP leads Pakistan in terms of infrastructure provision for primary schools.²⁴² KP has made great progress in this regard in recent years, and whilst ECE classrooms are not provisioned separately to primary classrooms, infrastructure is improving, especially with the notification of the 'six classrooms policy' which states that all new schools will have six classrooms, one of which being ECE.²⁴³

According to one government official, "99.9 per cent of the basic facilities are [already] available including latrines, rooms, basic medical devices; now we have big rooms. We have selected an ECE room and then it is decorated according to the specifications of the ECE materials."²⁴⁴ A procurement process has been initiated to build 2,732 schools in seven districts. However, in schools visited as part of the data collection, researchers reported conditions in both schools as hazardous to children. It was observed that floors were broken, furniture was broken, and infrastructure, including walls and washroom facilities were broken. The classrooms were noted as being unclean, and not particularly inspiring places to learn. Classrooms are often reported to be overcrowded and under-resourced.

The number of students in the ECE class is more than 200 and they are hardly accommodated in the room. There is no space to use other ECE material, so the teacher uses only the white board, books, copies, and stationery. - FGD, father, Peshawar, KP, May 2022

7.4 Quality assurance

Quality assurance and monitoring have been limited in recent years, with conflicting accounts in this study surrounding the extent to which ECE is being monitored or overseen. Some respondents, including teachers and government officials, assert that monitoring teams from the Directorate of Education, Education Monitoring Authority including DEOs and ADEOs regularly monitor ECE classes, including through COVID. Others claim that no monitoring has taken place to their best knowledge, and that classes completely stopped during COVID.

Monitoring in KP is ramping up, however, with around 3000 ADEOs being hired at present for quality assurance.²⁴⁵

There were no provincial standards for ECE In the past six years and no monitoring system existed particularly for ECE even during COVID period. – KII, DEO, KP. May 2022.

Despite limited implementation at present at a provincial level, improvements are planned through the process described below:

Box 10 Pathways towards improved monitoring in KP²⁴⁶

Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes (MELQO) modules will be introduced in the second year to establish a baseline for both children's development and the quality of their learning environments, creating a more holistic picture of influences on early childhood development. In the fourth year of implementation, the MELQO modules will be utilised to gauge the effectiveness of the ECE spaces/learning environment and learning outcomes along with recommendations for ECE scale up in the province.

With UNICEF as the designated grant agent for education across KP, they are responsible for "fiduciary oversight, monitoring, quality assurance and provision of technical assistance to implementing units including advisory support and capacity building to ensure quality and effectiveness of the program outcomes and achievement of results".²⁴⁷ This means that UNICEF is responsible for the monitoring of programme activities with various government agencies and beneficiaries in UNICEF supported schools.

7.5 Family and community engagement

Both UNICEF and KP government stakeholders noted that the lack of awareness of parents and the general community regarding ECE is the most important challenge in the current pre-primary system.²⁴⁸ One FGD highlighted the ongoing debate on parental engagement even within one community:

²⁴² Elementary & Secondary Education Department Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (2022). Early Childhood Education Policy (Draft).

²⁴³ *ibid.* P.30; email communication, UNICEF staff.

²⁴⁴ KII, government official, KP. May 2022.

²⁴⁵ KII, DEO, KP

²⁴⁶ UNICEF on behalf of the Elementary and Secondary Education Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (n.d.). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Improvement Program, Program Document. p.31

²⁴⁷ *ibid.* p.57

²⁴⁸ *ibid.*

Respondent 5: Parents do not contact school for a follow up, they have no interest in parent's meetings, and this has a negative impact on the raising of the students.

Respondent 3: In our area, most of the parents are educated and when we call them for a parent's meeting, they are always available.

Community attitudes towards ECE are generally positive. One ECE teacher attributed this to the strength of the existing Katchi programme: "They [Katchi classes] have specialised teachers. Teachers have planned training on behaviour, development, and learning. The government is providing a safe and friendly environment to the Katchi students. That's why parents are motivated and trust government schools and enrol their children."

However, barriers to full participation remain. One ECE teacher explained that harmful practices, including child labour interfere with children's enrolment and participation in ECE.

It can also be a barrier most of the children are involved in child labour, when they came to class they wear two shirts, after school they took off clean shirt and go for labour wearing dirty one. – FGD female teacher, May 2022.

7.6 Key priorities for ECE

KP has the foundational prerequisites for successful implementation of quality ECE learning across the province. Its substantive internal funding for education shows that it takes education seriously, and infrastructural development commitments further demonstrate its willingness to invest in human capital. It is held back by insufficient coordination and transparency on ECE and requires stronger political will and leadership in approving and coordinating the dissemination of its ECE policy, currently in draft.

Based on the findings outlined, the following highlights key priorities for Balochistan:

Priority 1: Improve existing infrastructure to meet demand

Responsible: Government of KP, with support from UNICEF

At present, the KP government has plans to build ECE classrooms in each new school. However, this is unlikely to be a rapid process. Although the KP Education Sector Plan 2020-2025 sets out the conversion of these classrooms, little conversion has apparently taken place thus far. **The government should rapidly convert existing Katchi classrooms to ECE classrooms as an intermediary step, ensuring that children are able to participate in ECE classes in places where new school buildings are not under construction.**

Priority 2: Develop a coherent professional development system

Responsible: Government of KP, UNICEF

Despite the goal of providing nine months of training for all newly recruited teachers, most current teachers receive only around five days, leaving them unprepared for realities, including overwhelming class sizes. **A coherent, quality professional development system for teachers should be created to provide them with consistent and adequate pre- and in-service training.**

Priority 3: Prioritise the inclusion of ECE in Article 25-A to position ECE as a standalone budget and policy item

Responsible: Government of KP

There is no current budget allocation for ECE in KP, with the draft ECE policy noting that ECE budgetary allocations are merged with the primary education budget. Insufficient separation of ECE budgets from primary schooling budgets results in the inability to effectively track or plan for ECE spending. If standalone, ECE will have greater exposure to decision makers and will likely be provided the focus and attention it needs to scale up. **In a similar vein, ECE budgets should be separated from primary education budgets so as to effectively plan ECE spending, avoiding ad hoc provincial spending.**

8. SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSIONS

This section uses the Build to Last Framework to synthesise findings from across the provinces to understand the broader **enabling environment** – the specific interrelated factors of ministerial leadership, policies and legislation, public demand, and financing which are catalysts for advancing the subsector – and the **five core functions** that are the building blocks of an effective ECE system. It ends with a brief conclusion to frame the final chapter on recommendations and ways forward for the ECE sector in Pakistan.

8.1 Enabling environment

A strong enabling environment, in which all levels of government to work collaboratively to support and enhance the ECE subsector, is necessary to achieve an equitable and quality ECE system. The following pulls together findings from the provincial level to understand opportunities and gaps that exist to create such an enabling environment.

8.1.1 Ministerial leadership

A competent and visionary leadership in ECE is important, as is the ability of a country to develop a broad, shared, and realistic vision for pre-primary education that government authorities can embrace. In Pakistan, there is a ‘ministerial anchor’, though this lead ministry, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, does not have oversight of the results of the subsector nor the devolved provincial Ministries of Education. The provincial Ministries are technically responsible for ECE, but **without prioritisation in national plans, it is a challenge to ensure that provincial Ministries are operating in a coherent manner** with the other relevant ministries, providers, and stakeholders.

The present state of ministerial leadership in Pakistan requires strengthening. **Policymakers need to better separate ECE from primary education and prioritise it through strong policy coordination and financing.** The fact that in KP and Balochistan, there are no publicly available ECE curricula, and that across the country, there is a national curriculum for ECE, but few are using it, speaks to the responsibilities being diluted through the national-provincial transfer of responsibilities. Ideally, the governance structure will strengthen between the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training and provincial levels of government, with a strong base of expertise in ECE within the lead ministry staff. The sub sector should be continuously drawing on expertise in ECE by working collaboratively and sharing resources with academics, universities, civil society, and research institutes.

8.1.2 Policies and legislation

Quality ECE services require strong, specific policies and legislation which are able to establish pre-primary education within the government’s oversight, showing the vision and commitment from the government. These documents should also detail how ECE will reach remote or hard-to-access areas, how various levels will coordinate in ECE provision, and how these efforts will be sustained in time.

In Pakistan, policies and legislation, at the provincial level, show some promise. With each province explicitly mentioning ECE in their Education Sector Plans, and Punjab and Sindh having a fairly comprehensive set of policies and curricula for ECE, some successes are in place. However, as previously mentioned, KP and Balochistan have shown less adequate policy creation and adherence, making it more likely that financial resources will be opaquely directed towards this subsector. There needs to be explicit and clear mandates in terms of governmental coordination on ECE, and while the existing documents outline the importance of ECE, they don’t always describe *how* the government is going to work to ensure that the quality ECE they describe is in place. For example, the SNC has no explicit mention in provincial policies and yet there is an expectation that it will be adhered to and rolled out with ease. This short-sighted approach to policy shows a lack of responsibilities directives which are able to articulate a long-term vision for ECE, and which will require costed action plans guiding the implementation and accountability across all levels of government.

8.1.3 Public demand

In order for ECE to truly be implemented successfully in a country, the public²⁴⁹ needs to understand its importance and support it in all aspects of civil society. ECE should be widely understood as a public good for all children, especially among parents. Generating demand for ECE is an important task to be undertaken as well, and social policies to promote ECE should be in place. Media and individuals, groups, and CSOs should be actively engaged in discussing ECE, sharing across the country, and there should be particular focus on ensuring the most marginalised are especially aware of ECE.

In Pakistan, the research found that there are some community-driven mechanisms in place to help engage community members, such as the SMCs. These are important and valid as tools to be used in engaging the public on ECE. **However, much more can be done, particularly from the government's side, to ensure that the media are engaged, the most marginalised are informed and made aware of ECE, and the mindsets of local people and community leaders are clear on the importance of ECE, particularly for girls.**

Similarly, limited parental interest and engagement in ECE has been cited as an issue across provinces, resulting in significant impediments to children's learning. As one teacher in Sindh explained,

The parents tell us that it's our job to teach our children why they want us to come to school. Parents lack ownership; they send the child to school to get rid of the child for some time. The child gets neglected, we also do the parenting job for them as well as a teacher's job. We have invited parents multiple times to share the child's progress but they don't even care. – FGD, Teacher, Sindh. April 2022

8.1.4 Financing

Public investment is essential for advancing the ECE subsector. **In Pakistan, government budgets are lacking transparency regarding ECE, and it has proven to be extremely challenging to ascertain the actual federal and provincial investments in ECE.** With policies on ECE but no explicit financing for it, ECE is pushed aside as a secondary issue within the larger issue of education in Pakistan.

Adequate financing for ECE should be secured through a number of sources, but importantly, through the central government budgets. Other sources for finances, such as through international aid and private enterprises, should be better leveraged in Pakistan to ensure the building blocks of quality ECE are in place, and prior to the government's full ownership of the funds. Further, there needs to be efficiency improvements in funding utilisation, with spending mechanisms established to prevent misuse or misdirection of funds. Accountability should be strong, with access to information on spending available for all. Finally, it should be ensured that public resources are equitably reaching all and that remote/rural children are not left out. To do so would require adequate vision and oversight on teachers and teacher training, schools being built, resources and materials shared, etc. to all regions in Pakistan.

8.2 Core functions across provinces

A whole systems approach to a successful ECE implementation needs five components – planning and budgeting, quality assurance, curriculum development and implementation, workforce development, and family and community engagement – to function cohesively and in synergy with the enabling environment. Each of these components was discussed in detail in Chapters 4-7 at the provincial level. This section brings together those findings to provide a more comprehensive, country-wide perspective, highlighting important opportunities for cross-provincial learning.

8.2.1 Planning and budgeting

There are numerous gaps in the current ECE system preventing the translation of the ECE policies into reality. At the policy level, ECE in Pakistan evidences structural and practical limitations which prevent the translation of ECE policies into reality. For example, the infrastructure and human resources are insufficient as they currently stand. In addition, the evidence suggests that the country's ECE policies are regularly changed and updated, and as such are 'living' documents, highlighting the dynamic and ever-changing nature of ECE as a component of the education system in Pakistan.

²⁴⁹ The public, as defined in UNICEF's Build to Last Framework, refers to national officials, subnational governments, civil society, media champions, education and health-related institutions and caregivers and families who use and need ECE services.

Provinces and areas are at different stages in terms of conceptualisation, policy development and implementation. This has led to vastly different provincial strategies on the roll-out of ECE, widening regional inequalities. Further, the lack of an implementation plan linked to an ECE policy means that a financial commitment to ECE cannot be guaranteed nor sustained.

Policies are often ambitious yet unable to successfully lead to implementation. In Sindh, for example, the ECE policy and the SESP&R 2019-2024 lay out an ambitious future for ECCE. The most frequently reported gap relating to policy which came out from the qualitative research was that of implementation: respondents regularly expressed concerns relating to the fact that the plans and policies do not match the on-the-ground realities experienced at classroom level.

Policy coordination is limited. Limited coordination of implementation also means that ECE teachers and administrators are frequently unable to access and understand the curriculum and policies. With teachers and administrators not always aware of or receiving these documents, little progress in terms of implementing a province-wide curriculum and set of standards can be made. This include coordination efforts to facilitate linkages within the broader ECD landscape, including existing Katchi classes and early childhood care, and ensure clarity around age of ECE enrolment.

Policies at both the national and provincial level make little reference to inclusive education or supporting children with disabilities. Consequently, children with disabilities are systematically excluded from education, with limited to no provisions for their equal inclusion in learning.

Funding for ECE is unclear and needs to be separated from Primary schooling budgets. Throughout Pakistan, there is no discrete funding allocated for ECE, and stakeholders (and documentation) fail to understand precisely how much money is set aside for ECE per year. ECE should have separate budget lines, and the allocation of funds should be clear, planned well in advance, and respond to the needs of local areas. UNICEF can support the federal government by providing technical assistance in terms of sharing best practice in effective management and allocation of funds, and in increasing transparency throughout the pathways the funds take.

School capacity and infrastructure limitations challenge implementation. Though policies may say that ECE classrooms are to be separate classrooms from other grade levels, and because of lack of infrastructure, this does not always occur, and ECE is often taught in multi-grade classrooms instead. This is conflated by human resource bottlenecks. In KP, where there is a long history of multi-grade classrooms, as previously noted, one of the key challenges in transforming Katchi classes into ECE is the lack of dedicated separate spaces.

In all four provinces, the number of children who are within the ECE age bracket (three to five years) is significantly higher than the number who are actually enrolled.²⁵⁰ Oversubscription to ECE classrooms is also common across provinces, with ages up to 8 are permitted into ECE classrooms, overburdening the already crowded education system.

ECE is not yet distinct from Katchi. Another critical engagement is clarifying the relationship between Katchi classes and ECE. Katchi classes exist in a huge range across districts and provinces. Some have separate classrooms and teachers; others are informal and part of grade one. Regardless of their format, across the board there was confusion about Katchi vs. ECE in terms of the data (sometimes children were double counted), enrolment, teacher training and compensation, curriculum, pedagogy, and how they are different from ECE classes. As part of the "definition" setting exercise outlined above, it may be worthwhile for UNICEF to help facilitate a strategy development process for how Katchi classes can be transitioned to ECE by improving the existing classes. It may be helpful to see Katchi as a part of the larger ECE system given that it has a long history in Pakistan, and work on raising the standards of the Katchi classes such that they are meeting the development needs of young children.

The rate at which schools are being built and classrooms converted from Katchi to ECE is promising, but not equal among provinces. Sindh and Punjab have had relative success compared to Balochistan and KP. There is an opportunity for sharing best practices through provincial collaborations to speed up the progress.

Classrooms are often multi-age, crowded environments which are not inclusive. School infrastructure is often inadequate, with crumbling walls, a lack of toilet facilities, and a lack of safe drinking water. In KP, parents are taking their children out of ECE classes because the facilities are inadequate, and the home is better set up to care for children. This is a big gap in all provinces - the quality of infrastructure needs to improve in terms of

²⁵⁰ This is exacerbated by urban-rural differences in enrolment, with high rates of out of school rural children across the provinces.

safety, security, hygiene, accessibility, and quality. ECE classrooms should better include children with disabilities and other vulnerable persons.

8.2.2 Quality assurance

Weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at the system level are in place across all provinces. This results in weak implementation in areas where children do not have adequate resources, such as in rural communities. Because significant gaps exist in available data, disaggregated data on ECE in the province is essential.

Private schools are regularly perceived as of higher quality than public schools. In Punjab, access and enrolment are primarily impacted by the common perception of the difference in quality of education between private and public schools. Regarding the difference in private vs. public schooling quality, the gap between them has been long understood by the Pakistan government, as this was an identified gap in the ECE Policy 2017. Parents interviewed in this study also described how much better private schooling is and how private schools take care of their children better.

8.2.3 Workforce development

Human resource capacity challenges were one of the key system level gaps identified through this research. Specifically, teacher recruitment and retention were noted by respondents as calling into question the feasibility of ambitious recruitment targets. Current training - both pre- and in-service - were also flagged as too short and insufficient; these do not address the needed professional development to effectively put into play early childhood education practices called for.

Further, unclear requirements in terms of qualifications for ECE, and a nomination system for the position rather than application based on qualifications in some situations showcase a gap in terms of understanding what an ECE teacher's skill set should look like. Recruitment of teachers needs to improve, with accredited diploma/degree programmes for ECE teachers prioritised. Along with this, incentives should be in place to recruit and retain teachers to the ECE classroom.²⁵¹

Caregivers are essential to an ECE classroom, and particularly when classrooms are crowded. Punjab is leading the way among provinces with a mandate to include a caregiver in each ECE class, while other provinces lag in allocating any portion of the budget specifically for caregivers.

Significant gaps at the school and classroom level exist related to pedagogical knowledge and practices, teacher capacity, and access to and application of ECE materials and resources. Teacher training is taking place in each province, but the quality of training needs to be improved and the rate at which teachers are trained needs to be improved as well. What did come through in the study is that teachers are keen to build capacity and engage with ECE. School leaders fail to capitalise on this and do not regularly follow through with what was taught in the training sessions.

8.2.4 Curriculum implementation

Challenges related to curriculum design, training, and dissemination were widely reported. Gaps in coordination resulted in limited and uneven dissemination; in some provinces, some teachers were unaware of an ECE curriculum. While Punjab shows promise with teachers and schools using ECE practices with some effectiveness, overall, the provinces in this study show mixed results, with a lack of capacity among teaching staff and school administration to adequately implement child-focused learning through play noted. Rote learning, with authoritarian teaching styles and reference to workbooks and textbooks, continues to be very common. Out of the schools observed as part of this study, none scored high with regards to teaching and learning.

Curricula are grounded in good practice, but teachers are not equipped to use them. The respective provincial curricula are largely based in good practice, with a focus on psychomotor and cognitive skills. However, the curricula (and the teaching manuals) are lengthy (or unclear or non-existent, in some cases), and teachers may not be equipped to understand their respective curricula let alone teach it. The training that has taken place is mostly far too short to be impactful and with little follow up. Rather than brief training, more in depth and consistent professional development is required.

²⁵¹ Consistent with extant research, respondents also noted that ECE is well-known to be more challenging to teach than Primary, therefore often more difficult to recruit teachers.

ECE resources, such as material kits, where provided and used effectively, have been a positive element to many ECE classrooms, notably in Punjab. However, guidance is lacking around these - for example, there were fears among some educators that should a child break a toy, the teacher would be responsible for paying for it. In such situations ECE kits are not going to be used. To build on this, it appears that the majority of schools are ill-equipped for ECE classes, with a lack of resources for play and a lack of other support materials. Teachers could be better equipped to create low-cost/no-cost resources should finances be a barrier to the provision of teaching and learning resources.

Mother tongue learning is inconsistently found across provinces. The SNC prioritises English as the medium of instruction; this was highlighted as a key challenge to ECE implementation due to limited teacher capacity in English as well as a lack of English medium resources. Further, many children of ECE going age speak a language other than Urdu as their mother tongue; introducing English at this stage would be detrimental to their linguistic and academic development. This came out in the classroom observations whereby in Punjab and Balochistan, the children's mother tongue was not the medium of instruction.

8.2.5 Family and community engagement

ECE is still widely misunderstood. One of the key gaps identified was the limited knowledge of ECE by many at the household and community level, particularly related to purpose, age of enrolment, and benefits. Often, parents conflate ECE with Katchi classes, or day care. For poorer households, ECE or Katchi classes merely serve as a free day care where parents pick up and drop children at their own convenience, without conforming to official school schedules. As one parent noted, "Before school our child was very irritating and now is behaving very decently."²⁵² As a result, teachers are often forced to repeat lesson plans and activities multiple times before children are able to achieve expected outcomes.

A lack of ECE knowledge in Pakistan has a detrimental effect on enrolment and participation. Parents cited a lack of trust in the ability of ECE teachers and schools to care for their young children; without a clear understanding of the benefits of ECE, particularly for children between the ages of three to five, parents are sometimes reluctant to enrol their children, particularly the youngest, in new and unfamiliar ECE programs.

There are insufficient community-based awareness efforts to target parents of children with disabilities and raise awareness of the [limited] inclusive education programs and services available. Parents are often unaware of the services that do exist, particularly for children of ECE going age. One education official in Punjab argued that increased community-based awareness of the need for enhanced inclusive education could drive the government's efforts to expand services and improve access for all children.

Despite clear evidence of the importance of the home-school connection, gaps in community and home engagement have been linked to limited and inconsistent policies at both the local and provincial levels. Despite programmes initiated by UNICEF to engage local community members and parents, many respondents pointed to a marked lack of effort by the government to support community and parents' engagement in ECE. At the same time, at the school level, there are often few policies or practices in place to support and engage with members of the community to promote ECE, and few champions within the community to work collaboratively to enhance school-home participation. One education officer in Sindh did explain, "parent-teacher meetings are an effective way to involve parents in schools; we have arranged [quarterly] meetings to share the learner's progress, but on the government side, there is no concept to involve parents in schools or their children's activities, it was maybe in documents but practically [does not] seem to exist."

8.3 Conclusions

This report clearly outlines efforts to improve existing ECE policies and strategies, as highlighted in the previous chapters. The Government of Pakistan has integrated an ECD framework into its National Education Policy since 2009, explaining that, for a child to develop in a healthy way, it is important not only to meet the basic needs for protection, food and health care, but also interaction, stimulation, affection, security and learning.²⁵³ More recently, various ECE initiatives have been implemented both at federal and provincial level in Pakistan in collaboration with UNICEF and other international development actors. At the federal level, the new curriculum acknowledged the importance of a comprehensive early childhood development, which includes physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and moral development. At the provincial level, a wide range of policy

²⁵² Focus group discussion, parents, KP

²⁵³ Government of Pakistan, National Education Policy 2009

documents on ECE were drafted and specific programmes developed, prioritising access and quality improvements in ECE, through the establishment of ECE classrooms, and specific standards for teacher training, teaching and learning materials, within a process aimed at achieving a better institutional coordination, community participation and constant monitoring.

Despite the developments made, very few policies are being actively and comprehensively implemented, reaching the communities, schools, and children effectively and equitably. Gaps still exist in a systematic approach on ECE – both at the national and provincial level— along with well defined, measurable indicators of what a successful and effective ECE system looks like (See Annex 10 for list of gaps across provinces). **This study highlights that the various disparate ECE components and progress made is an opportunity for a broader systems approach around how to better institutionalise and implement existing ECE models.** This is in line UNICEF Pakistan Country Programme 2018-2022, which aims at increasing the number of children in school and learning at the pre-primary education level, with policies and plans that are more equity focused.

The recommendations that follow highlight this opportunity – to build a comprehensive ECE system that incorporates all levels from setting consistent definitions of what ECE is each provincial context to building a comprehensive ECE professional development framework. While the provincial level findings highlight differing progress and frameworks as ECE currently stands, the fundamental aspects of building an ECE subsector remain consistent. Particularly as highlighted in the synthesis above, many of the challenges and opportunities are similar. Provincial-level adaptation should be in the form of working closely with appropriate actors at all levels, from the ministerial down to the community, to build both structures and ownership from the ground up.

9. PROGRAMME STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS

UNICEF is very well regarded for its contributions to advancing ECE in Pakistan, with some calling UNICEF a “pioneer of ECE.”²⁵⁴ Over the last decade, UNICEF has provided significant leadership on advancing the ECE agenda by providing technical support to the government, implementing ECE centres, providing capacity building and engaging in advocacy, standards-setting and policy development and coordination efforts. As a result, the case for ECE has been made and ECE has taken root, albeit in varying degrees, in the four provinces. It is now time for UNICEF to shift gears and begin to play a catalytic and strategic role in moving the ECE sector from a collection of ECE centres in each province to establishing an ECE system that will be expanded, strengthened, and sustained over the long term so that it can deliver on its promise of development for all of Pakistan’s young children. Going forward, UNICEF Pakistan has the opportunity to incorporate these recommendations into their new UNICEF Country Programme planning.

UNICEF needs to move beyond making the case for ECE and supporting demonstration projects to playing a catalytic role in the building of an ECE system that will be expanded, strengthened, adapted to provincial priorities and needs, and sustained over the long term so that it can deliver on its promise of development for all of Pakistan’s young children. This will require a strategic shift for UNICEF to secure gains for young children. UNICEF should prioritise its strategy to move forward on three key fronts:

1. Champion ECE sub-sector coherence and agreement across provinces and nationally
2. Support a systems-level vision and capacity for quality ECE
3. Promote and advocate for ECE financing and political will

To this end, recommendations are structured around these three core outcomes to keep the larger picture in mind – improving the ECE system for all children in Pakistan, while also identifying specific actions to take forward at both the national and provincial levels for a comprehensive UNICEF strategy. This is followed by provincial-level recommendations directed at specific actors and an initial theory of change for UNICEF’s efforts to continue to support and implement ECE at the provincial level in Pakistan. It posits that if more children, particularly girls and the most disadvantaged, benefit from equitable and appropriate Early Childhood Education in each province, then the national and provincial governments must have adapted current policy, frameworks, workforce, and budgets and demonstrated the ability to implement and monitor these.

9.1 UNICEF recommendations

Recommendation 1. Champion sub-sector coherence and agreement across provinces and nationally

- **Advocate for standardised definitions and expectations to ensure a solid understanding of ECE.** ECE in Pakistan is currently characterised by significant differences in terms of children’s age of participation, style of pedagogy, resource requirements, graduation from ECE to primary school, teacher training, data collection and more. It varies across implementation and definition of Katchi, pre-primary and ECE classes. This has far-reaching impacts on successful implementation of ECE policies, frameworks and curricula, moving away from ad hoc implementation at the local level.
- **Focus on ECE sensitisation and awareness raising with parents, communities and teachers.** Developing a multi-sectoral awareness strategy/campaign to influence perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes towards ECE would lower the structural barriers that have hindered the adoption of positive practices relating to ECE. Aligned with the point above, this supports a broader institutionalisation of ECE standards, including enrolling children at appropriate ages or demanding developmentally appropriate learning. Components of the strategy could include a C4D campaign as well as a social and behaviour change (SBC) component. This should emphasise both the role of parents and ECE teachers and classes in child development, working to improve the perception of the ECE teacher profession.
- **Build coordination and knowledge sharing mechanisms within and beyond the ECE sector to ensure coherence in services from birth to age 8.** Poor policy communication and coordination across the different levels of the system emerged across provinces from community to school to district to province to national, as many stakeholders at lower level were either not aware of policies or had limited

²⁵⁴ Key Informant Interview, Additional Secretary, Punjab

understanding thereof. UNICEF can play an important role within the broader ECE movement to ensure strong linkages and knowledge exchange across development actors.

Recommendation 2: Support system-level vision and capacity for quality ECE in Pakistan

- **Support implementation of quality standards across public and private ECE providers through a clear regulatory framework.** At the provincial level, there is a gap between policy directives and what is implemented; existing accountability mechanisms are either very limited or seemingly not checked regularly. Building on the establishment of clear understanding of quality ECE at all levels of the system noted in recommendation 1, a clear regulatory framework must be designed to ensure these are applied consistently across all providers of ECE.
- **Build strong system to support ECE professional development.** While some provinces have a dedicated ECE cadre (Sindh) and others have mixed approaches to developing ECE capacity of existing schoolteachers, there was a strong consensus across all provinces that significant work needed to be done to develop the ECE workforce and the systems to support them if significant progress to scaling ECE is to be sustainable. Professional development should incorporate several key components:
 - **Establish cadre that is linked to the early grades of primary school** to ensure common training for teachers from pre-primary to Grade 3 to facilitate coherence in early years education and smooth transitions across grades
 - **Link ECE capacity building to the education sector’s teacher training** to move away from one-off trainings to an adequately capacitated, resourced and mandated ECE institution to deliver systematic pre-service and in-service training
 - **Support ECE teachers** through adequate compensation, access to teaching and learning materials, opportunities for career development and quality supervision and mentorship
 - **Foster cross-provincial knowledge exchange and collaboration** to learn from best practices, such as the ECE cadres in Sindh, to strengthen the ECE workforce
- **Work with the Government to create a robust quality assurance system with a clear governmental agency in charge and with the necessary capacity to coordinate data collection.** Without transparent, quality, and timely data on both process and impact indicators for all aspects of the ECE system including workforce capacity, children’s learning, administrative effectiveness and efficiency, and parent and community engagement, it is challenging to have an accurate understanding of the health of the ECE system, and thus impossible to make evidence-based decisions to improve it. A centralised quality assurance system, paying attention to the quality, transparency and access to data for all stakeholders, will support the systematic use of data for decision making at all levels.

Recommendation 3: Promote and advocate for financing and political will for ECE

- **Promote accuracy and transparency around ECE costs.** At this time, ECE is lumped in with primary education, making it challenging to determine actual costs and expenditure, and the source funding, whether public, donor, or private. Without an accurate assessment of spending, a correct assessment of actual gaps is impossible. Advocating for clear ECE budget lines at the provincial and national levels will ensure that spending decisions are not left to the school.
- **Build high level of political will around ECE.** Without strong champions both within the government at the national, provincial, and district levels, and outside of the government by influential public figures, there is a risk that the progress in the ECE sub-sector will stagnate or even decline without adequate funding. UNICEF is well-positioned to facilitate the cultivation and continued engagement of public, private, and civil society champions for ECE, even facilitating governmental visits to other countries to understand and explore ECE models and supporting broader public demand for services.
- **Advocate for increased ECE funding to 10% of the education budget.** The research clearly highlights that one of the biggest barriers to a reinforced provincial level ECE is insufficient financing. UNICEF should lead on this through advocacy efforts; a range of advocacy efforts to address this can include campaigning to expand the fiscal space for ECE in the Ministry of Education budget allocation; exploring potential funds from other ministries (e.g., health for WASH and nutrition inputs for ECE); private-public partnerships; tax credits / subsidies; philanthropy and development aid.
- **Conduct necessary research to evidence the impact of ECE in Pakistan.** Develop a large-scale study across all provinces demonstrating that investing in quality ECE results in a high return on investment (ROI) in addition to the more immediate physical, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional benefits to

the child. Solid evidence of significant ROI will strengthen advocacy campaigns and increase political will. In addition, anchoring awareness raising campaigns on these findings will support public buy-in.

9.2 Provincial-level Recommendations

With a provincially devolved ECE system in Pakistan, it is important to ensure that future interventions approach ECE in a targeted manner, able to ensure provincially appropriate contextual application of recommendations from this study. However, the provinces in Pakistan have similar experiences with ECE and thus many recommendations apply to multiple provinces. To best operationalise the recommendations at provincial-level, the five core functions of equitable access to quality ECE services are presented with a series of recommendations, some of which apply to more than one province, and which target various stakeholders, including UNICEF and the provincial governments and others which are specific to the provincial context.

9.2.1 Planning and budgeting recommendations

Strong planning and budgeting entail the development of comprehensive and equitable plans for the delivery of ECE services, identifying budget needs, establishing clear governance and accountability structures, and implementing effective monitoring systems. The study found better coordination around planning than budgeting, and clearer financing was seen as a challenge and opportunity across all provinces. In line with this, provinces should work to make ECE funding more discrete and transparent. Further, plans and policies require strong political will to ensure effective coordination on the implementation of the plans/policies, and while this study found that the political will generally exists, the mechanisms to implement around ECE could be tightened, more clearly articulating how resources (human, financial, and physical) are utilised in support of ECE.

Recommendations for all provinces

Responsible	Recommendations
Provincial government	Implement budget lines specific to ECE. Mirroring the support given at the national level, advocating for, and implementing budget lines specific to ECE at the provincial level were highlighted as a topmost priority. This will promote better transparency around funding – and should be translated from the provincial to lower levels to allow for a better understanding of what is feasible, of governmental policies, under current funding – and how activities can be prioritised.
UNICEF	Help address fragmented implementation of ECE through improved coordinated service delivery and consistent financing. Some key actions that could support improving policy communication and coordination include incorporating best practice on multi-ministerial cooperation, strong collaboration and coordination with development actors, stakeholder analysis of ECE actors and the identification of the government institutions to lead various policy implementation tasks; development of clear and precise accountability mechanisms for the implementation of ECE in each province; where policies are not in place, catalyse processes to finalise ECE policies; and finally ensure implementation is coordinated in accordance with policy directives including workforce development, curriculum implementation, quality standards and assurance processes, and parent and community engagement.

Province-specific recommendation

Responsible	Punjab	Sindh	Balochistan	KP
Provincial government	Create more centralized and clear decision-making on ECE allocations. Most funding decisions are happening at the school-level resulting in children across Punjab receiving inequitable access.	Strengthen the efficiency in allocation of ECE budgets to ensure funding is equitably reaching all schools.	Build accountability mechanisms to ensure funding for ECE (and education in general) is reaching targeted schools. Infrastructure is an area of significant concern, with inadequate care to	Amend Article 25-A to include ECE and separate ECE budgets from primary education budgets. If standalone, ECE will have greater exposure to decision makers and will

			eliminate hazards from children in the classroom, and a lack of basic facilities	likely be provided the focus and attention it needs to scale up.
UNICEF	Support coherence of the ECE system by addressing how Katchi and ECE related to teach other, managing graduation into primary, setting age guidelines to improve systemization and reduce multigrade classrooms.	Focus on increasing political will and financing. This includes specifically targeting spending on infrastructure and resources to close the current ECE resources gap.	Support increasing political will and finding policy level champions to achieve ECE ambitions. ECE-focused policies and plans are in place yet not effectively implemented, resulting in a system unable to properly deliver ECE across the province. Greater ministerial leadership is required to coordinate an effective effort at scale and across sectors to improve ECE provision.	Build on strong ministerial support for ECE to convene and coordinate various stakeholders to expedite its implementation

9.2.2 Workforce development recommendations

A strong ECE workforce is one which has been offered sufficient training and CPD to implement best pedagogical practices, and which is supported by support mechanisms to promote retention and strong resourcing for classrooms. This study finds that the provinces are at varying levels of workforce development, with the expectations of and qualifications of the ECE workforce at different stages. Punjab is found to have a suitable and effective model for workforce development which other provinces can learn from, especially around processes for recruitment, CPD, and the provision of caregivers. Ensuring the scope and breadth of pre-and-in-service teacher training is sufficient to equip the ECE teachers with the required pedagogical skillset, along with ensuring that ECE classrooms are established, resources, and not overcrowded, will help the provinces to better develop the ECE workforce

Recommendations for all provinces

Responsible	Recommendations
Provincial government	Develop the potential for additional actors / champions of ECE within the educational system. While turnover of ECE teachers is high, the turnover rates of non-frontline personnel such as AEOs, SED, MEAs and school principals / head teachers is much lower and remains relatively stable. Building their understanding of ECE is essential as they are responsible for the training of new teachers and ensuring quality and continuity of ECE implementation. Doing so could be done via relatively brief training and the provision of clear guidance materials. A more knowledgeable and responsible workforce will be instrumental to push the transformation required to expand and embed ECE.
UNICEF	Support capacity across all levels of the ECE systems, specifically around both the professional development of teachers and the ability to deliver consistent pre- and in-service training that is aligned with what quality ECE is defined as in each province. UNICEF, globally, has significant experience in supporting the development of teacher training institutions and workforce development that can be of significant contribution to the efforts in Pakistan. Current training models are insufficient. Support the design and implementation of a professional development system at the provincial level to establish ECE cadre, with clear pre-service and in-service professional development that are aligned with the provincial vision for what quality ECE delivery is and provide ongoing support and mentoring. There is an opportunity to develop new models of pedagogical support ranging from mentoring programmes to leveraging technological innovations to support workforce development from the COVID-19 pandemic such as WhatsApp groups, online training, and other open-source resources.

9.2.2 Curriculum implementation recommendations

ECE learners require a developmentally, culturally, and individually appropriate curricula which is clearly defined, widely disseminated, and regularly reviewed. The study finds that while ECE curricula is generally established at a policy level across the provinces, in-class implementation remains mixed: many ECE teachers teach within the constraints of multi-grade, overcrowded Katchi classes, and often in languages other than the children’s mother tongue. Provinces need to ensure that the positive work being done on curriculum development is supported by a formal ECE structure to widely disseminate curricula and embed it into classrooms. Further, from the provincial down to the school level, more needs to be done to ensure that children are learning in their mother tongue and that quality and appropriate ECE resources are made available in classrooms.

Recommendations for all provinces

Responsible	Recommendations
Provincial government	<p>Develop multi-grade strategies for learning, and when ready, promote effective pedagogical implementation This requires the development of a multi-grade strategy to support teachers until the system is adequately able to have ECE classrooms targeted for children between 3 to 5. This is also an important factor in transitioning Katchi classes to ECE classes. Incorporated in this should be a clear ‘transition’ strategy for graduating children, beyond an age-based transition, to contribute to strengthened retention. When ready, provincial governments should ensure that class sizes are reduced, that ECE classes are properly resourced, and that learning is in line with the values and content of the new curriculum.</p> <p>Develop guidance for single room schools. A recurring challenge, especially in Balochistan but also in other provinces, was how to support ECE in schools where many are single classrooms. In the short- to medium- term, then, there is need for guidance to frame ECE efforts in contexts where the needed infrastructure may not yet exist, specifically considering how and under which conditions ECE can be taught within these. When ECE is bundled with other grades, the research would suggest a prioritisation of blocking ECE with lower grades – seeing ECE and grades one and two as a block of education, facilitating transitions from ECE to primary school. Teachers responsible for teaching these multi-year classes require extensive support and training, and a guidebook or formal guidelines on how to effectively manage a single room school, based on best practices and evidence, would go a long way.</p>
UNICEF	<p>Support equitable and universal access to ECEC materials and resources. UNICEF’s ECE kits were widely appreciated. However, teachers expressed concerns about not knowing when – or if – these would be replenished, as well as sometimes having to use their own funds to replace materials. As a result, in some cases kits were not opened to avoid ruining them or running out. A system is need on specific data on each province with regards to ECE materials and resources, access, dates of provision, and usage. Following up on use with local education officers will help identify where materials are required, where they are not being used properly, and how to improve the instructions or content.</p>

Province-specific recommendation

Responsible	Punjab	Sindh	Balochistan	KP
Provincial government	<p>Support dissemination of policy and curriculum. The government should work to ensure proper dissemination of policy and curriculum to school administration and teachers.</p>	<p>Establish a task force on policy and curriculum roll-out. The government should create a task force which aims to ensure the full and complete dissemination of the ECE policies and curriculum to schools across the province. This will enable stakeholders across the system to be working coherently on ECE and will particularly</p>	<p>Support coherence of the ECE system by addressing how Katchi and ECE related to teach other, managing graduation into primary, setting age guidelines to improve systemization and reduce multigrade classrooms.</p>	<p>Convert Katchi classrooms to ECE classrooms as soon as possible, ensuring that children are able to participate in ECE classes in places where new school buildings are not under construction</p> <p>Build ECE structures to effectively disseminate curriculum and teaching</p>

enable schools across all districts to be utilising the provincial curriculum.

and learning materials and embed in the classrooms

9.2.3 Quality assurance

Effective quality assurance involves a coherent and comprehensive monitoring framework, inclusive of standards, QA mechanisms, and the developed capacity of stakeholders involved in monitoring. All of this helps ensure that stakeholders are held accountable and that monitoring leads to improvements. The study finds that there is a consistent gap between policy, whereby QA mechanisms are generally articulated, and implementation, whereby varying levels of quality monitoring and feedback are seen across provinces. Provinces need to better prioritise the monitoring and implementation of QA mechanisms and ensure that collected data is comprehensive and used to make programmatic shifts. Comprehensive training of the monitoring workforce will help to ensure that collected data is accurate and indicative of the reality in ECE classrooms.

Recommendations for all provinces

Responsible	Recommendations
Provincial government	Develop provincially-adapted quality assurance mechanisms. At the provincial level, there is a gap between policy directives and what is implemented; existing accountability mechanisms are either very limited or seemingly not checked regularly. Feedback loops were notably missing, and teacher attendance stands out as the key indicator monitored. Existing efforts thus require review and consolidation – for example, in some places, there seem to be cluster level meetings scheduled monthly to review data and monitoring mechanisms, but the outcomes of the meetings are not clear, and participants indicated little evidence of improved outcomes resulting from these meetings. As provinces do not face all the same challenges, in addition to the national level QA system recommended above, it is important to develop provincially-adapted indicators for quality assurance.
UNICEF	Support quality assurance system to inform decision-making by improving data quality through trained monitoring staff; making data easily available; and establishing a regular system for data to inform improvements in the ECE service delivery. Quality assurance has the potential to be effective through large-scale staffing, yet consistent monitoring has not been established at a provincial level.

9.2.3 Family and community engagement

As strategic partners to ECE, families and the wider community play an important role in education (both in school and at home), enrolment, and shifting societal norms. The study finds generally high demand for ECE among parents and communities, though the active engagement of them by government and school officials was found to vary both within provinces and between provinces. Opportunities exist in each province to better coordinate efforts of engaging parents and community members in school management and children’s learning.

Recommendations for all provinces

Responsible	Recommendations
Provincial government	Strengthen mechanisms for local-level coordination around ECE. The research highlights several opportunities for building parental and community engagement with ECE by strengthening relationships between ECE parents and teachers and managerial structures. Namely, in most communities, ECE parents and the wider family (including grandparents) are not included in the SMC and therefore advocacy for ECE children is not present there. Thus, there is no systematic protocol for ECE teachers to engage parents. This could be strengthened through parent education or parent/community volunteers or other myriad of successful ways that parents have been engaged in their children’s early childhood education.

UNICEF	<p>Develop an awareness campaign with parents and communities. Developing a C4D campaign to influence perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes towards ECE would lower the structural barriers that have hindered the adoption of positive practices relating to ECE. This should have a particular focus on the importance of play-based learning education in early years. This can address challenges around coherence within the ECE system, such as enrolment age and transitions, and, importantly, build parental engagement with early years education to find solutions for managing classroom sizes and other constraints at the school-level.</p>
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Province-specific recommendation

Responsible	Punjab	Sindh	Balochistan	KP
Provincial government	<p>Strengthen political support to encourage communities to send their young children to ECE classes. This is most urgent in high-poverty rural areas, where there are additional systemic barriers to access and enrolment.</p>	<p>Ensure family and community engagement is prioritised as outlined in Sindh ECCE Policy 2015. Strengthen the engagement of the existing School Management Committees (SMC) through additional trainings.</p>	<p>Capitalise on existing strong parental support for ECE and promote community and parents' engagement through enhanced efforts to develop sustained connections between parents, schools, and the community.</p>	<p>Build upon success of teachers as catalysts for community knowledge around ECE, and ensure schools and teachers are equipped with requisite skills to engage communities.</p>
UNICEF	<p>Support the provincial government to eliminate structural barriers preventing family engagement, particularly in rural areas that have hindered the adoption of positive practices relating to ECE.</p>	<p>Support programming to combat gender inequality in ECE enrolment. Develop collaborative strategies with educators and SMCs to address this issue through community outreach including door-to-door activities.</p>	<p>Focus on ECE sensitisation and awareness raising with parents, communities and teachers through C4D campaigns.</p>	<p>Develop programming to combat harmful practices at the community level that interfere with children's enrolment and participation in ECE, including child labour.</p>

9.3 Theory of change

The below lays out an initial theory of change for UNICEF Pakistan’s efforts (including at the provincial level) to continue to support and implement ECE at the provincial level in Pakistan. It posits that if more children, particularly girls and the most disadvantaged, benefit from equitable and appropriate Early Childhood Education in each province, then the provincial governments must have adapted current policy, frameworks, workforce, and budgets and demonstrated the ability to implement and monitor these.

In line with the UNICEF Pakistan CPD 2017-2022 and the CO’s Education Section’s Programme Strategic Note (PSN), the overarching vision and Outcome statement of the current Education Programme is that “By 2022, more children, particularly girls and the most disadvantaged, benefit from equitable and appropriate Early Childhood Education /basic education services.”²⁵⁵ The 2023-2027 CPD further focuses on education with Outcome 3, “(the) Education system in Pakistan has improved capacities to deliver inclusive, equitable, gender - responsive and resilient quality education and skills development, including transferable skills, especially to children , youth, and particularly to girls,” aiming to ensure that all provinces have improved provision of quality ECE.²⁵⁶

The ToC presented below builds on this outcome to propose an ECE-specific, multi-year change pathway, designed in light of study findings. By providing a nationally coherent ToC based on common needs across provinces, the proposed ToC will enable UNICEF Pakistan, at a country-level, to develop strategies particular to individual provincial contexts yet aligned with one another. These provincial strategies should be in alignment with the provincial recommendations listed in the previous section. While there are differences across provinces in terms of priorities for quality ECE implementation, the solutions are the same, considering the preliminary stage of ECE implementation in each. Corresponding proposed indicators can be found in Table 16.

The proposed ECE-specific Theory of Change stipulates that,

- if the ECE subsector is championed by UNICEF towards greater coherence and agreement across provinces and nationally; and
- if support is provided at system-level within provinces for a vision and capacity for quality ECE; and
- if UNICEF promotes and advocates for financing and political will for ECE,

... then all children, across all provinces, particularly girls and the most disadvantaged, will access high-quality ECE between ages three to five, remain in school, and successfully transition to primary with improved learning in line with international best practice.

Based on this ToC, the main assumptions are: the provincial governments are willing and able to better coordinate on ECE; systems for quality standards, professional development, and quality assurance are prioritised by government stakeholders; policies and budgets are able to commit to the vision of further detailing ECE definitionally, financially and programmatically; capacity and resource commitment are sufficient to implement a broader vision for ECE system reinforcement, with adequate technical knowhow for sustained support to this vision; there is no major crisis that would affect governmental priorities or the ability to fund remaining needed ECE development; government, INGO / NGO, and private sector stakeholders are willing to commit to a coordinated, transformative approach to ECE within provinces; budgetary disbursements and resource allocation are transparent; coordination is possible among national and provincial level policy stakeholders where necessary; and funding can be identified which is not dependent on aid givers such as UNICEF.

The logic behind this is detailed below:

²⁵⁵ UNICEF Pakistan (2018). UNICEF Pakistan Country Programme 2018-2022 Education Programme Strategy Note. <https://open.unicef.org/sites/transparency/files/documents/2017%20PCO%20PSN%20Education%20TOC.pdf>

²⁵⁶ United Nations Economic and Social Council (2022). Country Programme Document (Pakistan) 2023-2027. E/ICEF/2022/P/L.36

Table 15 Proposed Theory of Change

Outcome	All children, particularly girls and the most disadvantaged, benefit from equitable and appropriate Early Childhood Education across all provinces		
Output 1	ECE sub-sector coherence and agreement is increased across provinces and nationally		
	IF	THEN	ASSUMPTIONS AND RISKS
	<p><i>if the Pakistan government, at national and provincial levels, are supported to create standardised definitions relating to ECE, and if campaigns are undertaken within provinces which aim to sensitise and raise awareness around ECE with parents, communities, and teachers, and if coordination and knowledge sharing mechanisms within and beyond the ECE sector are built...</i></p>	<p><i>...then</i>, ECE policies, frameworks, and curricula will have greater levels of coherence, then communities will have increased demand for ECE, a broader institutionalisation of ECE standards will take place, and parents and teachers will better work together towards healthy and complete child development, then policy communication and coordination across the different levels of the system will improve through enhanced linkages and knowledge exchange.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Capacity and resource commitment are sufficient to implement a broader vision for ECE system reinforcement, with adequate technical knowhow for sustained support to this vision. ● Government policies and budgets are able to commit to the vision of further detailing ECE definitionally, financially, and programmatically. ● UNICEF is able to proactively lead on advocacy, C4D, and coordination efforts. ● There is no major crisis that would affect governmental priorities or the ability to fund remaining needed ECE development. ● Government, INGO / NGO, and private sector stakeholders are willing to commit to a coordinated, transformative approach to ECE. ● Coordination is possible among national and provincial level policy stakeholders.
Output 2	A systems-level vision and capacity for quality ECE is developed		
	IF	THEN	ASSUMPTIONS AND RISKS
	<p><i>If</i> quality standards across public and private ECE providers can be implemented through a clear regulatory framework, and <i>if</i> a strong system to support ECE professional development can be built, and <i>if</i> a robust quality assurance system can be established with clear governmental accountability and capacity...</p>	<p><i>...then</i>, quality standards will be applied consistently across all providers of ECE, improving accountability, then professional development will be improved through an established cadre with common training for teachers from pre-primary to Grade 3, a linked ECE systematic pre-service and in-service training, greater support for ECE teachers, and improved cross-provincial knowledge exchange and collaboration, then transparent, quality, and timely data on process and impact indicators can be collected through a centralised system, improving effectiveness and efficiency and allowing evidence-based decisions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cooperation across public and private ECE systems is facilitated (and welcomed) by the provincial governments, UNICEF, and ECE service providers. ● Existing ECE teachers and others wishing to become ECE teachers have the necessary capacity to be trained on ECE pedagogies. ● Provincial governments are willing to commit funding to ECE teachers and caregivers. ● Provincial governments establish opportunities for exchange of best practice and collaboration. ● Provincial government support and funding for standardised QA mechanisms is strengthened. ● The provincial governments are willing to develop a credible data quality assurance system and making data public.
Output 3	ECE financing and political will are increased		
	IF	THEN	ASSUMPTIONS AND RISKS

<p>If ECE financing is more accurate and transparent with separated budget lines, and if political (and public) will around ECE is improved, and if provincial spending on ECE is increased...</p>	<p>...then, gaps in ECE financing will be accurately identified and actioned, with spending decisions in line with actual needs, then public, private, and civil society champions for ECE will be engaged to better support ECE and improve the public's demand for ECE services, then budgetary barriers to ECE will be removed, while cross-sectoral avenues for collaboration will be increased.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The provincial governments must be willing to commit to transparent budgetary disbursements and resource allocation for ECE. ● Political will can be leveraged to increase public will. ● Funding can be identified which is not dependent on donors such as UNICEF ● There is no major crisis that would affect governmental priorities or the ability to fund remaining needed ECE development. ● Coordination is possible among national and provincial level policy stakeholders on budget-related decision making.
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Table 16 Proposed Indicators

Expected results	Output	Specific objectives	Indicator	Data Source
<p>Outcome</p> <p>All children, particularly girls and the most disadvantaged, benefit from equitable and appropriate Early Childhood Education across all provinces</p>	<p>Output 1</p> <p>ECE sub-sector coherence and agreement is increased across provinces and nationally</p>	<p>Specific objective 1.1</p> <p>The government of Pakistan, at national and provincial levels, is supported to create standardised definitions relating to ECE</p>	<p>Output Indicator 1.1</p> <p>Number of provincial governments supported by UNICEF which adopt standardised definitions for ECE</p> <p><u>Numerator:</u> Number of provinces adopting standardised definitions</p> <p><u>Denominator:</u> Number of provinces (four, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh)</p>	<p>Provincial government education reporting</p> <p>EMIS systems</p> <p>Sectoral reviews</p>
		<p>Specific objective 1.2</p> <p>Campaigns are undertaken within provinces which aim to sensitise and raise awareness around ECE with parents, communities, and teachers</p>	<p>Output Indicator 1.2</p> <p>Number of ECE awareness and sensitisation campaigns established (per province)</p>	<p>UNICEF routine programme monitoring: UNICEF internal (provincial) data</p> <p>Procedural framework documents</p>
		<p>Specific objective 1.3</p> <p>Coordination and knowledge sharing mechanisms within and beyond the ECE sector are built</p>	<p>Output Indicator 1.3</p> <p>Number of new or revised mechanisms for the enhanced sharing of knowledge and information which are influenced by UNICEF support</p>	<p>Provincial government education reporting</p> <p>Sectoral reviews</p>
	<p>Output 2</p> <p>A system-level vision and capacity for quality ECE is developed</p>	<p>Specific objective 2.1</p> <p>Quality standards across public and private ECE providers can be implemented through a clear regulatory framework</p>	<p>Output Indicator 2.1</p> <p>Number of provincial regulatory frameworks established which harmonise quality standards across public and private ECE providers</p>	<p>Provincial government education reporting</p> <p>EMIS systems</p>
		<p>Specific objective 2.2</p> <p>A strong system to support ECE professional development can be built</p>	<p>Output Indicator 2.2.1</p> <p>Number of provinces establishing teacher cadres with a common (within province) and linked ECE systematic pre-service and in-service training to</p>	<p>Provincial government education reporting</p> <p>EMIS systems</p>

			<p>teacher professional development programmes</p> <p>Output Indicator 2.2.2</p> <p>Number of provinces establishing caregiver cadres with a common (within province) and linked ECE systematic pre-service and in-service training to caregiver professional development programmes</p>	
		<p>Specific objective 2.3</p> <p>A robust quality assurance system can be established with clear governmental accountability and capacity</p>	<p>Output Indicator 2.3</p> <p>Number of provinces with quality, standardised ECE data captured through a centralised system</p>	<p>Provincial government education reporting</p> <p>EMIS systems</p>
	<p>Output 3</p> <p>ECE financing and political will are increased</p>	<p>Specific objective 3.1</p> <p>ECE financing is more accurate and transparent with separated budget lines</p>	<p>Output Indicator 3.1</p> <p>Number of provinces with ECE budgets separated from primary education budgets</p>	<p>Ministry of Finance annual budget</p> <p>Provincial education budgets</p>
		<p>Specific objective 3.2</p> <p>Political (and public) will around ECE is improved</p>	<p>Output Indicator 3.2</p> <p>Number of public, private, and civil society champions for ECE engaged by UNICEF and provincial governments to support ECE publicly (per province)</p>	<p>Provincial government education reporting</p> <p>Sectoral reviews</p>
		<p>Specific objective 3.3</p> <p>Provincial spending on ECE is increased</p>	<p>Output Indicator 3.3</p> <p>Percentage of provincial budgets allocated specifically towards ECE (Increase from baseline)</p>	<p>Ministry of Finance annual budget</p> <p>Provincial education budgets</p>

ANNEX 1. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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ANNEX 2. PROVINCIAL LEVEL POLICIES

Punjab

Table 17 Early childhood education policies in Punjab

Punjab Early Childhood Education Policy 2017	The policy is in place and approved by the competent forum. It has been approved by the Chief Minister of the province and notified by the relevant authorities.
2013-17 Punjab Education Sector Plan	This proposes the establishment of quality early childhood programs in all primary schools of the province, with key strategies to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutionalise pre-primary ECE through the development and notification of a policy • Create awareness and train education managers, head teachers, and teachers on ECE • Plan and implement the expansion of pre-primary ECE programs to 5,000 primary schools
Punjab Compulsory and Free Education Act 2014	This mandates that the government will provide free preschool education and early childhood care for children above the age of three until they join a school. ²⁵⁷
The New Deal (2018 - 2023)	This policy mandates the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop ECE-appropriate learning materials, and teacher training model in line with official policy and international standards to help transition Katchi into a formal level of ECE. • Provide separate learning spaces or classrooms for ECE/Katchi to accommodate an anticipated increase in pre-primary enrolment. • Develop ECE teacher recruitment and training model. Induction and training processes will be revisited to ensure recruitment of specialised teachers and to develop specialised skills to teach ECE.
Education Strategy Plan (ESP - 2020)	This provincial strategy plan defined ECE as a provincial priority in formal and non-formal schools with the aim to increase enrolment, develop infrastructure, build a competent workforce, and prioritise ECE funding.

Sindh

Table 18 Early childhood education policies in Sindh

Sindh Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2013	Within this, Provision 9 is relevant which states “the Government may make necessary arrangements for providing free preschool education and early childhood care for the children above the age of three years until they join school”
ECCE Curriculum (2017)	National Curriculum of Early Childhood Education caters to the need to streamline the guidelines to develop a road map for designing activities and scheme studies for pre-schoolers under the notion of developmentally appropriate practices. This is aimed to foster children’s overall well-being and ensure best conditions for growth and development
School Education Sector Plan and Roadmap for Sindh (2019 – 2024)	This policy aims to develop school readiness skills of young children through teachers and community engagement on issues of health, nutrition, education, and childcare
Early Childhood Care and Education Standards (2018)	Standards are categorised according to key domains of the early childhood care and education which includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Easy to understand and consistent domains and builds on current national and provincials standards 3) Align with current expectations for schooling and includes content and knowledge application 5) Evidence-based for progressive and informative assessment

²⁵⁷ Government of Punjab (2017). Punjab Early Childhood Education Policy 2017. <https://pctb.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/Punjab%20ECE%20Policy%202017.pdf>

Balochistan

Table 19 Early childhood education policies in Balochistan

Provincial Early Childhood Education (ECE) Plan 2011-2015	This ECE Plan was the precursor to the 2015 ECE Policy Framework. Developed by the Education Department, Government of Balochistan in collaboration with the Policy Planning Implementation Unit and the Society for Community Support for Primary Education Balochistan. It is in line with the international commitments Pakistan was a signatory to and explains the concept and strategy for ECE implementation in Balochistan.
Early Childhood Education Policy Framework (2015)	Viewed as the current provincial ECE policy, this framework is valid until 2025. It was developed in collaboration with the Australian DFAT, Australian Aid, and Aga Khan Foundation. The framework was not made available to the research team in its entirety and is not publicly available online.
Balochistan Education Sector Plan 2020-25	The BESP, developed by the Secondary Education Department, Government of Balochistan, lays out key areas of focus for the province relating to education. It is a comprehensive plan which calls for ambitious improvements to the education system as a whole, inclusive of ECE.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Table 20 Early childhood education policies in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Free Compulsory Primary and Secondary Education Act (2017)	This act acknowledges the fact that Article 25A of the Constitution sets forth free compulsory education to all children aged 5-16 years and mandates the same.
Schools Sector Plan (2015/16 to 2019/20)	By the Secondary Education Department, this Plan identifies barriers to reform, lists priority policies, provides development partners with an overview of the planned transformation, and guides the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with a clear indication of how education fits into the broader reform in the province.
KP Education Sector Plan 2020-2025	Informed by the Education Sector Analysis, this Plan puts forth commitments to education transformation, including identifying all aspects where systematic improvements are required.
KP Education Blueprint 2018-23	Lays out seven core areas of intervention: (i) reforming primary education; (ii) closing the gap in secondary education; (iii) partnering with the private sector; (iv) improving education management in the districts; (v) engaging the community; (vi) special reforms for newly merged districts; and (vii) selected special initiatives
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Improvement Program (KP-EIP)	A programme with the goals to improve access, quality, and efficiency of the education system in the province. Funded by UNICEF for five years, (2021-2026).

ANNEX 3. CLASSROOM OBSERVATION SUMMARY

	Punjab		Sindh		Balochistan		KP	
	Rajanpur	Toba Tek Singh	Badin	Sukkar	Mastung	Quetta	Peshawar	Malakand
Demographics								
Students present	42	45	63	31	40	72	11	33
Type of class	Multi-age	Multi-age	Multi-age	Multi-age	Age 4	Multi-age	Multi-age	Multi-age
Teachers	1	1	2	1	1	3	1	1
Assistants/ Caregivers	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Language of Instruction	Urdu	Urdu	Sindhi	Sindhi	Urdu	Urdu	Pashto & Urdu	Pashto
Do the children speak this language at home?	10 per cent speak Urdu at home	10-15 per cent speak Urdu at home	Yes	Yes	No	25-50 per cent speak Urdu at home	Yes	Yes
Classroom culture								
Supportive learning environment	Medium	High	High	Low	High	High	Low	Medium
Positive behavioural expectations	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	High	Low
Guided learning								
Facilitation of learning	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	Low

Checks for understanding	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	Low	Medium	High	Medium
Feedback	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Medium	Low
Critical thinking	Low	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Medium
Socioemotional skills								
Autonomy	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Perseverance	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low
Social and collaborative skills	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Low
Learning environment								
Learning resources (i.e., writing utensils, art, fantasy play, blocks, educational toys/math materials, storybooks)	ECE kit, plenty of resources	ECE kit, science, and maths corners	No stationary, chalk board and learning corners only, no learning materials	Chairs and tables only, no materials present	Some resources, nothing for play	Only books given	Most ECE resources present	Only textbooks and workbooks, nothing else
Safety hazards	No hazards	No hazards, but congested	No hazards	No hazards because class was empty	No hazards	No hazards	Dangerous classroom with broken floor, walls, and furniture	Unsatisfactory, old, broken infrastructure
Seating arrangement conducive for equal participation (including those with disabilities)	Very congested, not inclusive for children with disabilities	Very congested, not inclusive for children with disabilities	Inclusive	Boys and girls separated	Inclusive	Inclusive	Boys and girls separated, no accommodation for children with disabilities	Boys and girls separated, no accommodation for children with disabilities
Classroom cleanliness	Not clean	Not clean	Clean	Clean	Clean	Clean	Not clean	Not clean
Is there evidence the teacher received training	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No

on gender responsive pedagogy?								
Is there evidence the teacher received training on inclusive classroom practices?	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

ANNEX 4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

<i>Objective 1. To provide an overview of the current national and provincial planning and implementation of ECE</i>		<i>Section(s) where question is answered</i>	
<i>RQ1. What are the current national and provincial level plans for ECE, and how is ECE being implemented?</i>			
RQ1.1. What are the current national and provincial frameworks on ECE?	<i>I.e., policies, plans, measures, statistics, budget, providers, implementers</i>	3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.6, 4	
RQ1.2. What are common ECE challenges and opportunities in Pakistan at national and provincial level?	<i>Education sector analyses</i>	3.5	
RQ1.3. How was ECE affected by COVID-19 at national and provincial level?		4.1.1, 4.2.2, 4.4.4, 5.1	
<i>Objective 2. Analyse the ECE situation in Pakistan at four levels: policy, system, school, and child</i>			
<i>RQ2. What is the ECE situation in Pakistan at policy, system, school, and household level, in particular in terms of gaps, challenges, needs and opportunities?</i>			
POLICY / GOVERNANCE	RQ2.1. How has ECE been regulated, institutionalised, and operationalised in each province in the last six years, and how has this changed (if at all) in that time, including due to COVID-19 and climate change?	<i>Policy Structure Official provincial regulations, changes in norms, ECE positioning, institutionalisation, operational instruments / measures, existent ECE policies oriented to children with disabilities, modification due COVID-19.</i>	3.1-3.3
	RQ2.2. Does existing ECE policy engage or address adequately the needs of children with disabilities?		5.1, 5.3

	RQ2.3. What have been the trends in terms of allocation of financial resources to ECE in the last six years, in terms of ECE priorities, linkages to planning tools, and support in recent budgets? How has this changed due to COVID-19?	<i>Financial Resources</i> <i>Financial resource allocations, prioritisation, planning linkages, budget share.</i>	3.3, 3.5
	RQ2.4. What are the key provincial standards for ECE in the past six years, how well do they meet the needs of children with disabilities, and how have these been monitored, or adapted for COVID-19?	<i>ECE Standards</i> <i>Provincial standards and their definitions, monitoring, ability to meet needs of CWD, and adaptations due to COVID-19.</i>	3.5, 3.6, 4.1.1, 4.2.1, 4.3.1, 4.4.1
SYSTEM	RQ2.5. What type and level of coordination and resources exists at and between national and provincial level to manage, implement and support ECE?	<i>National / provincial ministries and departments related to ECE, their staffing, capacity, effectiveness, resourcing.</i>	4.1.1, 4.2.1, 4.3.1, 4.4.1
	RQ2.5. Is a separate ECE teacher cadre established within each department? What qualifications are required to be an ECE teacher, and what kinds of certification or accreditation are available?	<i>Professional development in ECE</i> <i>Qualification requirements, certification / accreditation, institutionalisation of training, development, and characteristics of ECE training curricula, forms of support to ECE teachers</i>	3.3, 4.1.2, 4.2.2, 4.3.2, 4.4.2
	RQ2.6. How was the ECE training curriculum developed, and what does it entail?		4.1.2, 4.2.2, 4.3.2, 4.4.2
	RQ2.7. What kinds of pre-service, in-service, and supervision supports are available to ECE teachers?		4.1.2, 4.2.2, 4.3.2, 4.4.2
	RQ2.8. What form have any existing incentive and motivation mechanism for ECE classroom teachers taken in the last six years, including benefits to ECE classroom teachers, and were any efforts made to attract and retain teacher made in the context of COVID-19?	<i>Institutional incentives / motivation mechanisms for ECE teachers</i>	4.1.2, 4.2.2, 4.3.2, 4.4.2
	RQ2.9. How were ECE curricula defined and approved, what pedagogical approaches were these based on, and how have they changed over the last six years including due to COVID-19?	<i>Design, development, and dissemination of ECE curriculum</i>	4.1.3, 4.2.3, 4.3.3, 4.4.3

	RQ2.10. What are the quality assurance / supervisory mechanisms for ECE over the last six years, and how has this changed over time including due to COVID-19?	<i>Quality assurance systems I.e., supervision mechanisms</i>	4.1.4, 4.2.4, 4.3.4, 4.4.4
	RQ2.11. What are the existing ECE school leadership mechanisms, and how have they changed over the last six years including due to COVID-19?	<i>Development of ECE school leadership, i.e., promotion mechanisms</i>	3.5, 4.4.2
CLASSROOM / SCHOOL	RQ2.12. What ECE pedagogical practices have been used by ECE teachers in the last six years and how have these changed, including due to COVID-19?	<i>ECE Pedagogical Practices Practices (and changes) in last six years, including best practices, COVID-19 modifications, assessing and addressing learning loss post-COVID, practices for individual differences, strategies for effective emotional needs of children, policy/strategy on upscaling?</i>	4.1.3, 4.2.3, 4.3.3, 4.4.3
	RQ2.13. What approaches are being used to address learning loss after preschool reopening, including use of assessment tools, and what are practices and strategies used for individual differences or effective emotional needs of children?		4.2.2, 4.4.4
	RQ2.14. What strategies or policy level decisions were taken for upscaling of ECE?		3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.6, 4.1.1, 4.2.1, 4.3.1, 4.4.1
	RQ2.15. How is ECE classroom planning defined and implemented in the last six years in each province, and how has this changed over the last six years including due to COVID-19?	<i>ECE classroom planning Implementation, changes in definition / implementation, COVID-19 impacts.</i>	4.1.3, 4.2.3, 4.3.3, 4.4.3
	RQ2.16. What kinds of ECE materials have been designed and used in the last six years, what are their key characteristics, and how have they changed including due to COVID-19?	<i>ECE materials – design and use Design, elaboration, and use, changes over last 6 years.</i>	4.1.3, 4.2.3, 4.3.3, 4.4.3
	RQ2.17. What is the quality of school environments in terms of necessary infrastructure, facilities, and accessibility, and what gaps exist?	<i>School environments Infrastructure, facilities, accessibility, etc.).</i>	4.1.2, 4.2.2, 4.3.2, 4.4.2
HOUSEHOLD	RQ2.18. What are the enrolment levels for ECE in the last six years, disaggregated by age, gender, location, and disability, and what changes have been visible in these rates over time?	<i>Type of changes experienced in children / families/caregivers Enrolment by gender, age, location, disability; parental engagement and support; effects of COVID-19.</i>	3.1

	RQ2.19. How are parents and communities engaged or supported in ECE in each province, and what are their beliefs, motivations, concerns, and attitudes towards ECE, and how were these affected (particularly access and attendance levels) by COVID-19? How do these differ by gender?		4.1.5, 4.2.5, 4.3.5, 4.4.5
<i>Objective 3. Profile the ECE models in the four provinces studied</i>			
<i>RQ3. What are the characteristics of ECE models in each province?</i>			
RQ3.1. What are the main characteristics of ECE in each province and what common and/or distinctive components do they have? How similar or different are these models? Which providers are most prevalent?	<i>Mapping of ECE system</i>	3.3	
RQ3.2. What are the strengths and weakness of these provincial ECE models, and what opportunities and threats / challenges do they face?		5	
<i>Objective 4. Propose the main components of a strategic and evidence-based intervention for improving ECE's implementation and institutionalisation</i>			
<i>RQ4. What forms of intervention can UNICEF support or implement to improve ECE and address national and regional challenges?</i>			
RQ4.1. What problems, challenges or barriers currently exist in providing ECE at provincial level that UNICEF Pakistan could support on or contribute to addressing, and what underlying factors and/or root causes of these challenges can be identified?	<i>Causal and stakeholder analysis of ECE systems</i>	6	
RQ4.2. Who are the key stakeholders in ECE in Pakistan, and what levels or types of participation, interest and influence do they have?		3	
RQ4.3. What changes can UNICEF Pakistan support or implement to improve provincial ECE models, and how can UNICEF Pakistan plan to achieve, monitor and evaluate these changes?	<i>Proposal of results chain, theory of change, indicators, sources of information.</i>	6	
RQ4.4. What operational approaches or strategies can UNICEF Pakistan implement to contribute to planned / desired changes and improve ECE outcomes at provincial level?	<i>Main components of suggested implementation strategy</i>	6	

ANNEX 5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Samuel Hall Ethics and Safeguarding

Ethics and safeguarding concerns are in all research a primary consideration. In this study, given the circumstances of risks related to COVID-19 and associated ethical challenges, as well as the involvement of children and youth in the data collection, these considerations must be at the forefront of decision making, planning and research development. As noted in the initial research proposal, Samuel Hall upholds the highest possible ethical standards and embeds ethical considerations at all stages of research from design to field research and data handling.

This is of particular relevance for in-person field research during the COVID-19, and considerations on how to undertake such research ethically are central to our fieldwork planning and will be regularly re-evaluated given the rapidity with which the situation is evolving in each of the countries of focus (i.e., school closures).

These represent critical areas for research to address through design, methodology and implementation. As noted above, not only have these ethical considerations informed the design of research, but, as the following section outlines, they will be addressed through a comprehensive internal risk assessment prior to fieldwork.

Confidentiality and Data Security

As per its internal data collection policy, data which is provided to Samuel Hall will be used in accordance with Data Protection legislation. This principle means that Samuel Hall staff and research participants will know who is collecting the research data, where it will be kept, and what will be done with it. Privacy notices will be included on consent forms or associated documents so all parties are aware of how data will be processed. Data will be processed in a manner that ensures appropriate security of the personal data, including protection against unauthorised or unlawful processing and against accidental loss, destruction, or damage, using appropriate technical or organisational measures ('integrity and confidentiality'). Personal data will be kept securely so that no unauthorised access can occur. To ensure the security and quality of its data, Samuel Hall utilises a dedicated data management system on its own proprietary cloud, hosted on Google's cloud architecture. All Samuel Hall software and collected data reside in Frankfurt, Germany, subject to German and EU privacy laws. The data management system will further remain isolated from all other Samuel Hall systems by default. Samuel Hall's Data Protection Policy can be found in the Annex of the Inception Report. This includes:

- Regular deletion of data from phones during fieldwork (once uploaded)
- Backing up of data
- Secure storage (physical or digital) of data collected, in particular where identifying information is included

Safeguarding and Child Protection

Samuel Hall believes that any form of child abuse and exploitation is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the universal foundation for children's rights to protection. Samuel Hall's understanding of child safeguarding is centred on it.

- All children, without discrimination, have equal rights to be protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation
- Samuel Hall has zero tolerance for any form of sexual abuse and exploitation.
- It is our duty of care as an organisation to take reasonable steps to ensure that children and other vulnerable individuals in our program areas are safe from harm directly or indirectly linked to our work or staff. This concept is also called the principle of Do No Harm.
- At all times, the best interests of the child will be used to make decisions.

Safeguarding is the responsibility of all staff; all Samuel Hall staff and partners shall adhere to this policy. Samuel Hall as an entity commits to making sure that they are aware of their responsibilities. Samuel Hall will act in compliance with host country legislation related to child welfare, keeping in mind the Do No Harm approach and making decisions that are in the best interests of the child.

Requirements of this Child Safeguarding Policy operate in conjunction with any other applicable legal requirements, such as those provided by partners and donors.

Safeguarding should include training on ethical, child friendly and gender responsive approaches to data collection as well as informed consent and asset processes for minors (including married minors) and mechanisms to ensure the safety and security of data collection teams and respondents, including privacy for data collection via surveys or FGDs, community entry processes, and responses in case of an incident or report.

ANNEX 5. QUALITATIVE CODING FRAMEWORK

ECE Model/system

- Governance, Policy & Financing
 - School councils
 - Current policies, frameworks, laws
 - Policy Coordination - National, Provincial & District levels
 - Planning & Budgeting
 - Financing
 - ECE types/definitions
 - Linkages with ECD/other sectors
 - Political will & champions
 - Equitable access to ECE services/enrolment
 - Scaling up ECE
 - Governance, Policy & Financing Challenges and Gaps
- ECE Workforce
 - ECE Workforce description
 - ECE Teacher Training
 - ECE Workforce Challenges & Gaps
 - ECE Teacher Support & Supervision Infrastructure
 - Incentive and Motivation Mechanisms
 - ECE Workforce recruitment and retention
- ECE Curriculum, Standards, Materials, & Pedagogy
 - ECE curriculum and standards
 - ECE materials access & quality
 - ECE classroom planning
 - Pedagogical Practices
 - School environment/infrastructure - Quality
 - Challenges & Gaps: ECE curriculum, standards, materials, and pedagogy
- ECE Quality Assurance/M&E
 - Existing M&E systems and tools
 - Addressing learning loss
 - ECE Data availability, quality, and use
 - ECE Quality assurance/M&E challenges & gaps
- Parent and Community Engagement
 - Parent/community demand for ECE
 - Benefits to children/families
 - Parent and community support
 - Parenting programmes and parent engagement
 - Community leadership and participation in ECE
 - Parent and Community engagement barriers
 - Knowledge, attitudes, practices (KAP)
 - Gendered decision making/participation in children's education

Cross-Cutting

- Recommendations and ways forward
- COVID-19
- Barriers to access
 - Conflict/humanitarian
- Public v Private
- Key quotes
 - Parents
 - Practitioners
- Medium of instruction
- Climate change
- Inclusion & disability
- Gender

Strengthening ECE Systems: Recommendations for UNICEF

- Changes UNICEF can support - National/provincial
- Operational/system-strengthening approaches for UNICEF
- Problems/barriers UNICEF could support - National/provincial

ANNEX 6. BUILD TO LAST FRAMEWORK

The building blocks of an effective pre-primary subsector

Enabling environment

An effective and equitable pre-primary subsector requires a strong and supportive environment. Within the enabling environment, the framework focuses on four catalysts that are vital for advancing the subsector's development – ministerial leadership, policies and legislation, financing and public demand.

Core functions of the pre-primary subsector

An effective subsector develops and nurtures five core functions: (1) planning and budgeting, (2) curriculum development and implementation, (3) workforce development, (4) family and community engagement and (5) quality assurance. Systems-strengthening requires the establishment of robust implementation and governance mechanisms for each of the core functions. The sustainability of interventions and potential reforms requires commitment and cooperation at all levels of government, among all types of service providers, and with international and national development partners.



Principles

When a country is building or strengthening its pre-primary education subsector, applying a set of basic principles will increase the likelihood that this work will endure over time, despite shifting conditions or crises. The framework recommends the use of five overarching principles:

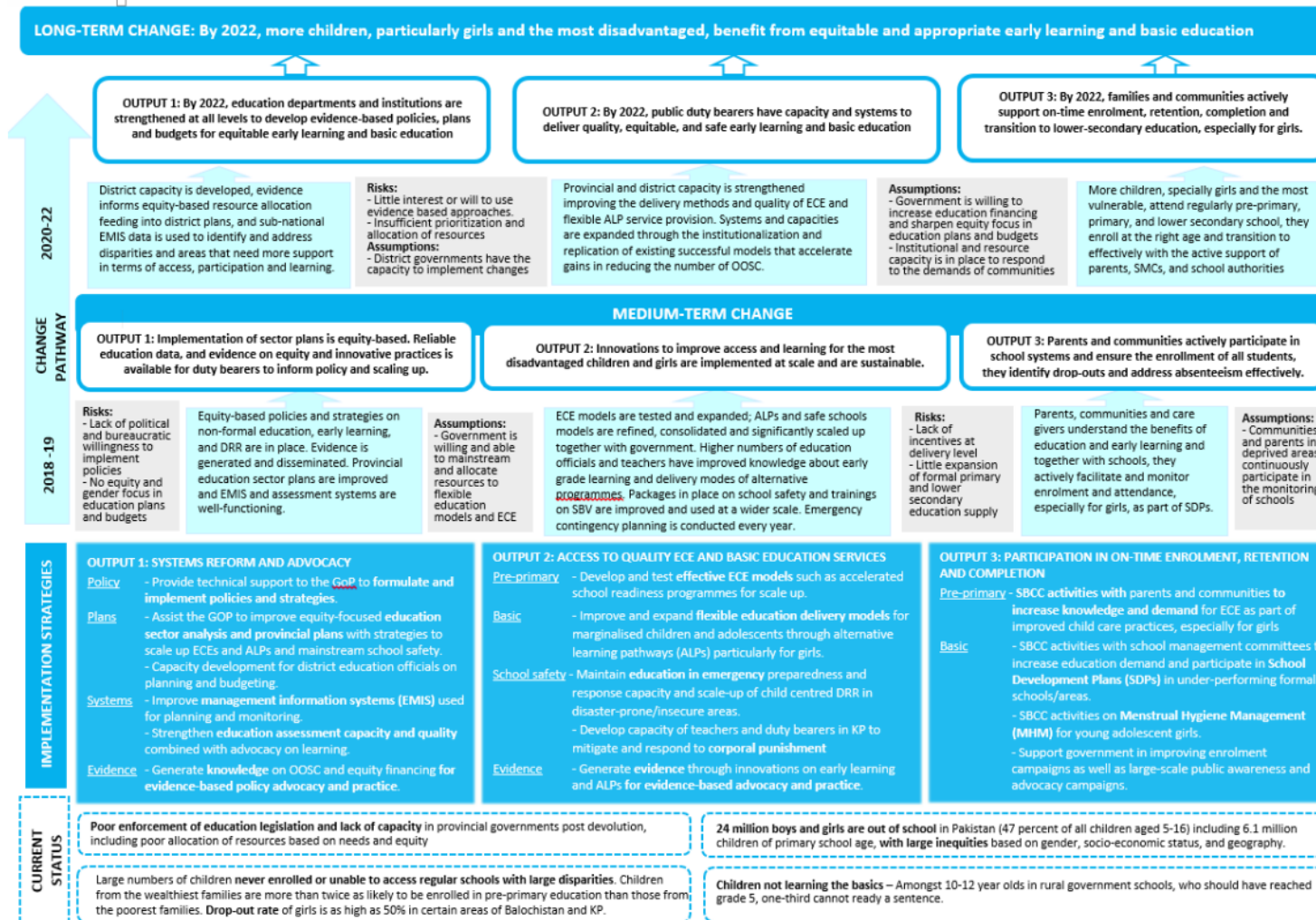
- **Equity.** Decisions about pre-primary services ensure fair access for all children.
- **Efficiency.** Thoughtful, evidence-based decisions consider how to create the greatest benefits within the available resources.
- **Responsiveness.** The design of pre-primary systems and services takes the likely changes in national and local contexts, cultures and needs into account.
- **Coordination.** The process reflects dynamic, ongoing interactions between sectors beyond education, as well as the pre-primary subsector and other education subsectors.
- **Flexibility.** While anchored in the authority of a central government ministry, the pre-primary subsector recognizes the full range of programme approaches and engages with multiple providers, including public, private, not-for-profit and for-profit service delivery.

Subsector levels

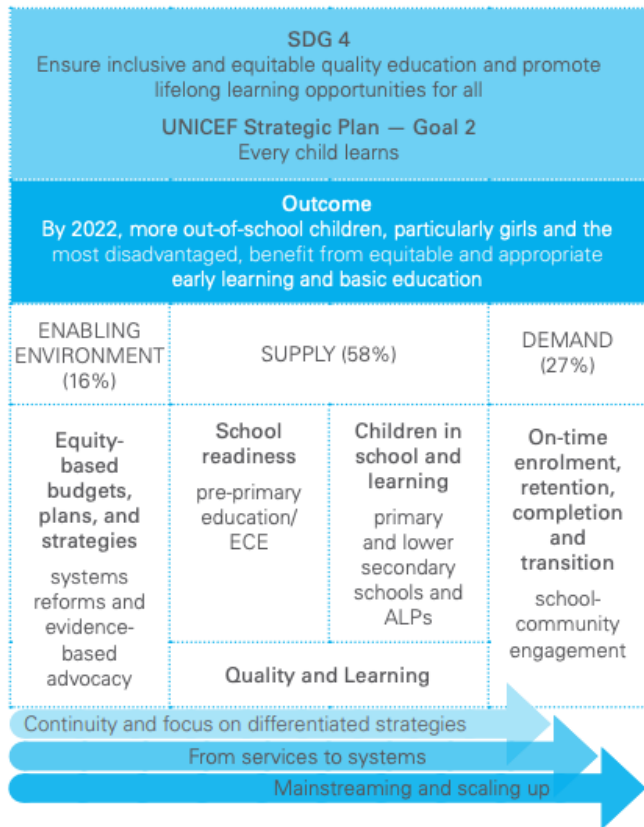
Although discussions of systems-building often concentrate on the national level, a strong pre-primary subsector is only as strong as its district- or local-level implementation. This framework considers the dynamic relationships between different levels of government as they influence each other. It is important to consider, for example, not only how policies at the national or subnational levels affect what happens at the local level, but the reverse as well.

Source: UNICEF. (2020). Build to Last Framework. pp. 6-7

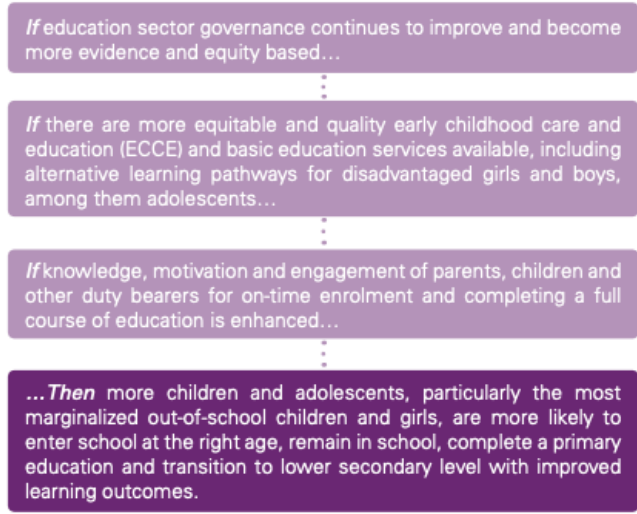
ANNEX 7. UNICEF PAKISTAN EDUCATION THEORY OF CHANGE



Source: UNICEF. 2018. UNICEF Pakistan Country Programme 2018-2022. p.12. <https://open.unicef.org/sites/transparency/files/documents/2017%20PCO%20PSN%20Education%20TOC.pdf>



THEORY OF CHANGE



Source: UNICEF. 2018. *Every Child Learns: Country Programme of Cooperation between the Government of Pakistan and UNICEF 2018-2022*. <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/media/1731/file/Every%20Child%20Learns.pdf>, p.6

ANNEX 8. QUALITATIVE CODEBOOK

The qualitative data for this study was analysed using the codebook below in Dedoose, a leading qualitative research software.

Governance, Policy, & Financing		
	Current policies, frameworks, laws	What are the current national and provincial frameworks on ECE? How are they implemented?
	Policy Coordination - National, Provincial, & District Levels	What is the current coordination situation at the different levels to implement the ECE policy?
	Planning & Budgeting	What have been the trends in terms of allocation of financial resources to ECE in the last six years, in terms of ECE priorities, linkages to planning tools, and support in recent budgets? How has this changed due to COVID-19?
	Financing	What are the current sources of financing the ECE system? Are the funds equitably reaching all children, especially those who do not have access to services, remote geographies, urban / rural, refugees etc.?
	ECE types / definitions	What are the different types of programs that 3–5-year-olds access? How are they different? (e.g., Katchi vs. ECE vs. preschool etc.)
	Linkages with ECD / other sectors	
	Political will & champions	Is there sufficient political will and champions to advance the ECE agenda?
	Equitable access to ECE services / enrolment	What are the enrolment levels for ECE in the last six years, disaggregated by age, gender, location, and disability, and what changes have been visible in these rates over time?
	Scaling up ECE	What strategies or policy level decisions were taken for scaling up of ECE?
	Governance, Policy, & Financing Challenges, Gaps	What are common ECE policy, governance, and financing challenges and opportunities in Pakistan at national, provincial, district levels?

	ECE Workforce	
	ECE Workforce description	Who is part of the ECE teacher workforce? Is there a separate workforce? Descriptions of the different types and roles and responsibilities. What qualifications are required to be an ECE teacher, and what kinds of certification or accreditation are available?
	ECE Teacher Training	What pre-service and in-service teacher training system is available? Who is responsible? What is the training curriculum?
	ECE Teacher Support & Supervision Infrastructure	What kinds of pre-service, in-service, and supervision supports are available to ECE teachers? What mechanisms are in place to provide support to the ECE workforce? What are the existing ECE school leadership mechanisms, and how have they changed over the last six years including due to COVID-19?
	ECE Workforce recruitment and retention	Are there sufficient teachers for the number of students? Are ECE teachers paid adequately, fairly, and on time?
	Incentive and motivation mechanisms	What form have any existing incentive and motivation mechanism for ECE classroom teachers taken in the last six years, including benefits to ECE classroom teachers, and were any efforts made to attract and retain teachers made in the context of COVID-19?
	ECE Workforce Challenges, & Gaps	What are common ECE challenges and opportunities in Pakistan at national, provincial, district levels?
	ECE Curriculum, Standards, Materials, & Pedagogy	
ECE curriculum and standards	How were ECE curricula defined and approved, what pedagogical approaches were these based on, and how have they changed over the last six years including due to COVID-19? What are the key provincial standards for ECE in the past six years, how well do they meet the needs of children with disabilities, and how have these been monitored, or adapted for COVID-19?	

		ECE materials access & quality	What kinds of ECE materials have been designed and used in the in the last six years, what are their key characteristics, and how have they changed, including due to COVID-19? Are they sufficient?
		ECE classroom planning	How is ECE classroom planning defined and implemented in the last six years in each province, and how has this changed over the last six years including due to COVID-19?
		Pedagogical Practices	What ECE pedagogical practices have been used by ECE teachers in the last six years and how have these changed, including due to COVID-19?
		School environment/infrastructure-Quality	What is the quality of school environments in terms of necessary infrastructure, facilities, and accessibility, and what gaps exist?
		ECE Curriculum, Standards, Materials, & Pedagogy Challenges, & Gaps	What are common ECE Curriculum, Standards, Materials, & Pedagogy challenges and opportunities in Pakistan at national, provincial, district levels?
ECE Quality Assurance / M&E			
		Existing M&E System and Tools	What are the existing tools and mechanisms by which teacher quality, classroom quality, curriculum implementation, and child development outcomes are measured? Who does it? How frequently? What are the quality assurance / supervisory mechanisms for ECE over the last six years, and how has this changed over time including due to COVID-19?
		Addressing Learning Loss	What approaches are being used to address learning loss after preschool reopening, including use of assessment tools, and what are practices and strategies used for individual differences or effective emotional needs of children?
		ECE Data Availability, Quality, and Use	What type of ECE data is available? Who owns it? How is it used? Is it used to improve the ECE system?
		ECE Quality Assurance / M&E Challenges, & Gaps	What are common ECE Quality Assurance / M&E challenges and opportunities in Pakistan at national, provincial, district levels?

Parent and Community Engagement		
	Parent / Community Demand for ECE	Do parents / communities clearly understand and value ECE and demand for it? What is the current view on ECE?
	Parenting programs and parent engagement	Are there specific parenting programs? Do ECE teachers engage with parents? How are parents engaged in the ECE system? Did parents contribute to the ECE program in any way like materials, curriculum etc? Were parents consulted in the development of the ECE program?
	Community leadership and participation in ECE	Are there any ways for community structures / leadership to participate in ECE programs?
	Parent and Community Engagement Barriers	What are the barriers to strong buy-in and participation by parents and communities in ECE?
Cross-Cutting		
	COVID-19	How has ECE changed (if at all) due to COVID-19? How was ECE affected by COVID-19 at national and provincial level?
	Climate Change	How has ECE changed (if at all) due to climate change?
	Inclusion & Disability	Does existing ECE policy and services adequately address the needs of children with disabilities?
	Gender	Are existing policies and services gender sensitive and equitable?
	Conflict / humanitarian	Are existing policies and services responsive and adaptable for conflict and humanitarian situations?
Strengthening ECE System: Recommendations for UNICEF		
	Changes UNICEF can support - National / Provincial	What changes can UNICEF Pakistan support or implement to improve provincial ECE models, and how can UNICEF Pakistan plan to achieve, monitor and evaluate these changes?
	Operational / system-strengthening approaches for UNICEF	What operational approaches or strategies can UNICEF Pakistan implement to contribute to planned / desired changes and improve ECE outcomes at provincial level?

	Problems/barriers UNICEF could support - National / Provincial	What problems, challenges or barriers currently exist in providing ECE at provincial level that UNICEF Pakistan could support on or contribute to addressing, and what underlying factors and/or root causes of these challenges can be identified?
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ANNEX 9. NATIONAL LEVEL POLICIES

Table 21 Federal Education Policies and Curricula in Pakistan²⁵⁸

Policy	Description
The National Education Policy (NEP) 2009	In this policy, the first time in Pakistan's history, ECE was included as a component in the Education Sector Reforms programme and funding was provided to the provincial and district governments. ECE was also included in the National Plan of Action of Education for All.
National Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum (2017)	The National Curriculum of Early Childhood Education (NCECE) details guidelines to develop a road map for designing activities and schemes of studies for pre-schoolers, from age 4 to 5. ²⁵⁹ The following are the key goals of the curriculum: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster children's overall well-being and to ensure the best possible conditions for growth and development in a conducive, child friendly and all-inclusive environment where they can experience choice and freedom of actions in a safe, guided, and healthy environment. • Help children develop into individuals who are able to learn through play, discovery, experimentation, and collaboration. • Develop indicators in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to cultivate an environment where children learn pro-social behaviours helping them to learn through collaborative processes, cooperation, sharing and caring for others, and to be confident in not feeling threatened by the debilitating effects of continued competitive environment. • The focus of the curriculum framework is on the provision of an environment where development of skills like research/probing, decision making, inquisitive learning and leadership with increased emphasis on practice of values like patience, tolerance, empathy, and civic education can take place and become part of a child's personality.
National Education Policy 2017-2025 (working document currently in draft form)	The policy includes the following provisions ²⁶⁰ (selected list): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) ECE class will be an integral part of primary school. All ECE aged children, both boys and girls, will be provided easy access to quality pre-primary education. 2) One year pre-primary education for the children of age group 4 – 5 will be free and compulsory. 3) Existing pre-primary education/'Katchi' classes will be transformed, upgraded to quality ECE by providing the required infrastructure, facilities and services including separate classroom, exclusive teacher, and playground etc. 4) Degree programmes and certificate courses for ECE will be started in universities and teacher education and training institutions. 5) Research on various aspects of early childhood education will be conducted, disseminated, and utilised for promotion of ECE in the country. 6) New and innovative programs for promotion of ECE will be launched. 7) Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) will be used for promotion of early childhood education and teacher training. 8) Holistic development of child pertaining to Physical Development; Social and Moral Development; Emotional Development; Language Development and Cognitive Development on the basis of ECE Curriculum and Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS) will be ensured.

²⁵⁸ There is an important difference between policies and curricula; ECE curricula guidelines help to provide a road map for the design of activities and scheme of studies, whereas the policies more directly target other broader implementation strategies.

²⁵⁹ Government of Pakistan (2017). Curriculum for Early Childhood Care And Education. <https://www.pafec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ECCE-22-09-17.pdf>

²⁶⁰ Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (2017). National Education Policy 2017.

Policy	Description
	<p>9) Child friendly, inclusive, attractive, friendly, and playful school environment will be provided to all ECE children (both urban and rural children).</p>
<p>Minimum Standards for Quality Education in Pakistan (2017)</p>	<p>These standards were developed in consultation with multiple stakeholders and provincial governments.²⁶¹ The standards are designed to support improved learning outcomes and enhance school effectiveness. They provide guidelines for the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Standards for Learners 2) Standards for Curriculum 3) Standards for Textbooks & Other Learning Materials 4) Standards for Teachers 5) Standards for Assessment 6) Early Learning and Development Standards and 7) Standards for School Environment. <p>According to the policy document, the standards aim to ensure uniformity in the provision of access to quality education to meet the challenges that have arisen following the adoption of the 18th constitutional amendment, as well as to address global education trends.</p>
<p>Single National Curriculum (SNC) - 2020²⁶²</p>	<p>The SNC is premised under the <i>One System of Education for All</i>, in terms of curriculum, medium of instruction and a common platform of assessment. The policy aims for standardisation across all education providers and aspires to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All children have a fair and equal opportunity to receive high quality education • Social Cohesion and National Integration • Alleviation of disparities in education content across multiple streams • Equal opportunities for upward social mobility • Equality in education • Holistic development of children in the light of emerging international trends and local aspirations • Smooth interprovincial mobility of teachers and students <p>The SNC of Early Childhood Care and Education 2020 sets the parameters and provides a road map and guidelines for designing activities and a scheme of studies for pre-schoolers, for the age group 4 to 5 years, with a keen eye on the inclusion of developmentally appropriate practices for this age.²⁶³ The curriculum is designed in a way to allow for both options (1 and 2 years) as per need.²⁶⁴</p>

²⁶¹ Government of Pakistan. (2017). Minimum Standards for Quality Education in Pakistan (2017). https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/minimum_standards_for_quality_education_in_pakistan.pdf

²⁶² The SNC is also referred to as the Pakistan National Curriculum

²⁶³ Government of Pakistan (2020). Early Childhood Care And Education Grade Pre 2020. www.mofept.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/ECCE%2012th%20August.pdf

²⁶⁴ ITACEC. Single National Curriculum 2020- Early Childhood Care and Education. https://itacec.org/document/2021/8/ECCE_in_Single_National_Curriculum.pdf

ANNEX 10. GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS PROVINCES

Through policy analysis, examination of provincial guidelines, curriculum and practices, as well as interviews with national and provincial level experts, and other key informants, the research identified commonalities across provinces, districts, classrooms and households. Table 14 summarises some of the consistent gaps across provinces, highlighting key opportunities for UNICEF and other ECE stakeholders

Table 22 Consistent gaps and opportunities at each level across provinces

Level of analysis	Core function in pre-primary education	Consistent gaps and opportunities across provinces
ECE Policy Level	Planning and Budgeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links or integration between ECE, Katchi, ECCE and ECD with a plan to streamline into a coherent approach • Policy on workforce development for ECE • Implementation of constitutional provision for ECE in the provinces • Implementation of local languages included in the SNC medium of instruction mandate • Provision for inclusive education/support for children with disabilities • Accounting for shocks, including pandemics, disasters, conflict, and climate change within policies. Learning losses resulting from COVID-19 and flooding were extreme, with 9.6 million children currently in need of humanitarian assistance.²⁶⁵ • Clear and transparent budgets • Separate ECE budget from Primary to increase prioritisation
Policy Implementation Level	Quality Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and evaluation, and data quality assurance processes • Accessibility of data to stakeholders at different levels of the system to inform decision-making and improvements in service delivery
	Workforce Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development policies and coherency across provinces, to include pre- and in-service training • Human resources, including teaching staff, classroom assistants, and government staff working on ECE • Pedagogical knowledge and practices with connection between the curriculum and teacher ability to use the curriculum
	Curriculum Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent ECE materials and resources provision to ECE classrooms. • School and classroom infrastructure • School capacity, including insufficient space and a lack of classrooms • Access barriers
Classroom/School Level		
Child/Household Level	Family and Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent parental engagement • Knowledge related to ECE among communities • Awareness regarding inclusive education communities

²⁶⁵ UNICEF. 2022. Humanitarian Action for Children: Pakistan.

ABOUT SAMUEL HALL

Samuel Hall is a social enterprise that conducts research in countries affected by issues of migration and displacement. Our mandate is to produce research that delivers a contribution to knowledge with an impact on policies, programmes and people. With a rigorous approach and the inclusion of academic experts, field practitioners, and a vast network of national researchers, we access complex settings and gather accurate data.

Our research connects the voices of communities to change-makers for more inclusive societies. Samuel Hall has offices in Afghanistan, Kenya, Germany and Tunisia and a presence in Somalia, Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates. For more information, please visit www.samuelhall.org

