

G20 Initiative for Early Childhood Development

Building human capital to break the cycle of poverty and inequality

1. We are convinced that early childhood is one of the most significant and influential phases of life - especially the first 1,000 days. It determines the basis for every child's future health, well-being, learning and earnings potential, and sets the groundwork for young children's emotional security, cultural and personal identity, and for developing competencies, resilience and adaptability.
2. We recognise that investment in Early Childhood Development (ECD), without any discrimination, should be a high priority as it gives all children the opportunity to achieve the full realization of their rights and capabilities. A focus on ECD brings clear benefits both to the individual and society, reducing health and economic problems that children can carry throughout their entire lives. It paves the way for intervening at the most critical stage of human development in order to break the vicious cycle of intergenerational and structural poverty, societal disparities and inequality of opportunities, ensuring that no child, anywhere, is left behind.
3. We are concerned that 43% (250 million) of boys and girls under five years of age in low and middle-income countries are at risk of not reaching their full developmental potential due to poverty, malnutrition, and lack of caregiver attachment, appropriate stimulation and early education opportunities, or access to healthcare, safe water, sanitation, and other basic quality services. They also face other challenges such as insecurity, conflict, violence, poor housing, natural hazards, and pollution. Girls face specific risks arising from gender-based stereotypes and discrimination, sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation and harmful practices. We also acknowledge the special needs of boys.
4. We emphasize the commitments made by the countries that have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which upholds children's rights all over the world and states that Governments must do all they can to ensure children's survival and development to their full potential.
5. We are aware of the indisputable linkages between early childhood and sustainable development, and how ECD can contribute to the overall achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. We believe ECD is a powerful equalizer that can help narrow the wide gaps in outcomes and opportunities that exist between children from higher and lower socioeconomic backgrounds and also the gender gap between boys and girls, consistently with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.
6. We emphasize there is an increasing need for people to possess adaptive learning abilities and skills, notably because of advances in technology. Foundational cognitive and socio-emotional skills are acquired in childhood, further justifying the need for greater investment in ECD as the basis for building human capital and adaptive capacities for the future of work.
7. We acknowledge the strong need for political buy-in by relevant development stakeholders – at both state and non-state levels – to put ECD at the top of their development agendas. We are confident that this will translate into more investments and support for quality ECD programs.
8. We therefore launch the **G20 Initiative for Early Childhood Development**, determined to contribute to ensuring that all children – with an emphasis on their first 1,000 days – are well nourished and healthy, receive proper care, stimulation and opportunities for early learning and education, and grow up in nurturing and enabling environments, protected from all kinds of violence, abuse, neglect and conflict. This is especially urgent in low-income and developing countries, and in emergency and protracted crisis situations, including forced displacement, where the potential for children's development could be at risk.

Early Childhood Development is a multidimensional issue

9. By launching this Initiative, we recognize that ECD is a multidimensional subject that requires a comprehensive approach and is deeply influenced by nurturing care - health, food security and quality nutrition, responsive caregiving, physical and emotional security and safety, and early learning and stimulation. All these dimensions interact and are mutually reinforcing. We acknowledge the Nurturing Care Framework, launched at the 71st World Health Assembly by the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and the World Bank Group (WBG), in collaboration with The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health (PMNCH), the ECD Action Network (ECDAN), and other partners, such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).
10. We believe that access to quality primary, preventive and curative **healthcare**, including the prevention of communicable and non-communicable diseases, and the early identification and assessment of children with the greatest risk of sub-optimal development or development difficulties and disabilities is crucial for all children. In this respect, we must aim at reinforcing social protection and providing access to universal health coverage for all children and women, especially during pregnancy, child-birth and breastfeeding, consistent with national contexts. We affirm the need to provide targeted support for children with disabilities and special needs, and recognize the challenges around young and adolescent mothers. Adequate training of the involved workforce, including frontline workers and service providers in humanitarian settings, should also be sought.
11. We stress the importance of good **nutrition** early in a child's life, and even before birth through improved nutrition of women prior to and during pregnancy, which ensures the foundation for children's brain and body development. We also emphasize the importance of breastfeeding as an essential means of ensuring food security and nutrition for infants. We remain concerned that due to malnutrition, 51 million children under 5 years of age are wasted, and 151 million are stunted, while 38 million are overweight or obese. As stated in the "G20 Initiative for Rural Youth Employment", we reiterate that *"a diversified, balanced and healthy diet at all stages of life, particularly during the 1,000 day window from pregnancy to age two, has a lifelong positive impact on the child's growth and ability to learn and to lead [healthy and] economically productive lives"*.
12. We reaffirm our commitment to work towards the collective goals of ending hunger and achieving food security, improved nutrition, and a sustainable food future in which all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food, building upon the G20 Food Security and Nutrition Framework.
13. We are concerned that today around 70 million children aged zero to six years old have spent their entire lives in conflict zones. We reaffirm that all children should be allowed to develop and thrive in a **secure and safe environment** that is free of condemnation, hostility, exploitation, abuse, neglect, conflict and stress. This includes prevention of child maltreatment and gender-based violence and discrimination, including the elimination of harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage; the promotion of birth registration for every child; the provision of adequate housing and basic services such as safe water, sanitation and hygiene; and efforts to provide environments free of violence, conflict, war, natural and man-made hazards, and pollution.
14. We underscore that **responsive care** is one of the most fundamental elements for optimal child development. We recognize that family is the natural and best environment for the growth, development and well-being of children. However, we understand that ECD interventions can be home, centre or community based, formal or informal, and may not include a parental component. We emphasize the importance of providing community and centre-based organized play-based early programs that complement the parents' role. Parents and all caregivers need to be empowered, engaged and supported to promote and demand ECD services, and public policies need to facilitate and stimulate their knowledge, responsibilities and engagement through access to information and resources to give all children the best possible start in life. Childhood disabilities impose a significant emotional and economic demand on affected families and children, especially in places with inadequate infrastructure and access to services and support.

15. We recognize the necessity for quality and inclusive childcare services. Structural quality in such services depends heavily on the quality of infrastructure as well as on capacity building, decent work conditions and adequate training for caregivers. The capacity of this workforce is central to delivering quality services.
16. We remain concerned about the responsibility for unpaid care work falling disproportionately on women and girls, leaving them less time for education, leisure, self-care, political, social and economic participation, paid work and other economic activities. We therefore underscore the importance of offering quality childcare and ECD policies that promote shared responsibilities between parents in caregiving and domestic work, such as paid parental leave. This would increase women's employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, including greater access to decent employment, and young women's access to education, skills development and completion of their studies. These interventions reinforce our strong commitment to further reduce the gender gap in labour force participation rates in line with the related goal committed to in the G20 Brisbane Communiqué and to implement the policy priorities endorsed by G20 Labour and Employment Ministers, which are necessary to ensure women's economic empowerment.
17. We recognize the critical role that **early learning and stimulation** play during early childhood, promoting social and cognitive development at the stage when the brain is most receptive to stimulation. Quality ECD programs that guarantee effective stimulation, including the enhancement of parents' and caregivers' capabilities to promote development and learning, are a way of preparing children to benefit from all forms and levels of education. Supportive, child-centred, learner-focused and developmentally-staged transitions from home environments to preschool learning opportunities followed by quality education are the essential ingredients for achieving active participation and meaningful learning for all.
18. We acknowledge that a multi-sector and coordinated approach is needed to ensure quality and comprehensive interventions that adequately integrate all ECD dimensions. Government commitment and inter-Ministerial coordination and collaboration between all levels of government are crucial, as well as cooperation between all G20 work streams and initiatives. Other key actors, such as families and communities, civil society, the private sector, international organizations (IOs) and multilateral development banks (MDBs) must be committed towards achieving and sustaining responsive care and a nurturing environment for all children, including newborns and young children with disabilities and developmental difficulties.

To this end the G20 will call all relevant stakeholders to action and lead by example in the following key areas:

Financing and Investment

19. We are concerned that despite evidence that targeted investments in ECD save lives, promote social equity and generate higher economic returns than those made later on in the life cycle, investments in early childhood programs remain insufficient.
20. We, the G20 countries, therefore stand ready to demonstrate our leadership towards strengthening comprehensive and coordinated inter-sectoral strategies delivered through effective, equitable and sustainably financed ECD interventions. We endeavour to look into our countries' investments in ECD in order to better assign and consider increasing resources to quality programs that consider the holistic approach of ECD, comprising interventions in health, food security and nutrition, gender equality and women's empowerment, responsive caregiving, security and safety, early learning and stimulation, and social protection, especially for those in vulnerable situations, poor households and the informal economy.
21. We recognize that there is a need to enhance existing capacities and strengthen institutional ones for designing and implementing quality and evidence-based ECD programs. We call on IOs, MDBs and other financing institutions to identify and strengthen suitable financial instruments, mechanisms and partnerships, including possibilities for new ones but avoiding duplication, and mobilize resources to scale up quality ECD programs in low-income and developing countries based on their national needs and priorities.

22. We are aware that private sector engagement and funding is equally important for ECD, and therefore call for private-public partnerships and other suitable frameworks to enhance the contribution of the private and non-state sector in implementing family-friendly policies and increasing access to funding and improving the quality of and access to ECD services.
23. We emphasize that investment in ECD is especially needed where young children are most vulnerable, in rural or remote areas and within traditional communities and ethnic minority groups, in low-income countries that lack access to basic services, and in areas that experience conflict, crisis, instability, displacement or deprivation. Fragile contexts are usually characterized by conditions that make it difficult to meet the population's basic needs and ensure all children's well-being. We reaffirm that investing in ECD in these contexts can yield the greatest long-term impact in terms of developmental outcomes and positive results in the full realization of children's potential and capabilities while also helping to eliminate conditions of inequality and deprivation.

Data, Monitoring and Evaluation

24. We acknowledge that research on ECD as well as monitoring and evaluating the results and impact of ECD investments, including cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analyses, can help identify existing and emerging needs and where additional resources are required. Effective research and evidence, including tracking investment, is needed to better inform and target policy decisions and program improvements. It also helps governments and development partners increase their ability to monitor and evaluate programs before and while scaling them up.
25. We recognize that there is a data gap in ECD programs that needs to be addressed. In this respect, we will make efforts to support and strengthen existing national efforts to regularly collect data disaggregated by sex, age and other relevant factors according to national capacities and legislations, in order to inform effective ECD programs, particularly in relation to SDG Goal 4.2.
26. We welcome and support international undertakings to capture ECD outcomes in population-based surveys and to strengthen systems that can monitor ongoing child development interventions globally, such as UNICEF's Early Childhood Development Index and the inter-agency Measuring Early Learning and Quality and Outcomes (MELQO), among others.
27. We also welcome the joint work currently underway between UNICEF, WHO and the WBG towards coordinating and harmonizing the metrics to measure the developmental status of children from 0-60 months. We underscore that building capabilities within government agencies at all levels to collect and use data is equally important.

International Cooperation and Knowledge Sharing

28. We renew our commitment to engage in international cooperation as a catalyst for scaling-up and improving the quality and accessibility of multi-sector ECD programs, particularly in supporting low-income and developing countries. To this end, we will coordinate with MDBs, financial institutions and IOs, as well as seek to promote opportunities for collaboration through North-South, South-South and Triangular Cooperation which involve a diversity of actors, resources and instruments.
29. We reiterate that a coordinated multi-sector approach is needed to guarantee effective ECD interventions at the appropriate governmental levels of service delivery, finance and accountability. With this in mind, we call on all stakeholders at the local, national and global levels to coordinate efforts to mobilize resources, share lessons learned, exchange experiences, foster innovation, and improve mutual accountability.
30. We acknowledge the work of different national, regional and global initiatives, platforms and networks that address the different dimensions of ECD. Among them, the ECD Action Network (ECDAN) works towards ensuring that all young children, anywhere in the world, in any circumstances, are safe, healthy and able to learn. ECDAN gathers more than 80 key partners representing UN agencies (ILO, UNESCO, UNICEF, and WHO), financing institutions (WBG and IDB), Civil Society Organizations and Non-

Governmental Organizations, foundations, the private sector, ECD regional networks, academia and think tanks. Its work complements efforts of related global initiatives.

31. We commit to provide ECDAN with experiences and best practices related to our national programs and/or international cooperation among ECD initiatives to foster cross-country knowledge exchange and learning. We call on ECDAN to also identify best practices within non-G20 countries and develop a sustainable platform and communication strategy to enable them to share this knowledge along with technical standards for quality ECD programs, especially for low-income countries. The platform should be operational by 2019.
32. We underscore that information on existing sources of financing and other resources is currently widely dispersed and disconnected. We call on ECDAN to develop a database of available regional and global financing initiatives and approaches that would enhance accessibility of information for all involved stakeholders, and would help avoid duplication of efforts.