

HOW TO FUND THE
GROWING NEED FOR

**EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION IN
KYRGYZSTAN**

Key points

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a **vital investment in children's futures**: without it, many children may not be ready for school, leading to long-term disadvantage and inequality.

With a growing population, there is a danger that Kyrgyzstan's goal of rapidly expanding ECE will be **financially unsustainable**.

Yet with **more efficient government spending and management**, existing funding can be better used, and more children can be given the quality ECE they deserve.



Giving children the best start in life

UNICEF proposes that Kyrgyzstan government spending on ECE can be made much more efficient, to support the country's objective of rapidly expanding its vital ECE services.

UNICEF is an advocate for quality ECE around the world, as an important investment in children's futures. The foundations of learning are built early in children's lives: investing in early education is cost-effective, as it reduces the need for more costly remedial programmes later on, to address inequalities in learning and poor learning outcomes.

Ambitious targets

Kyrgyzstan has made progress in recent years in expanding its ECE services. Yet with a growing population, the country's ambitious goal (of making ECE services available to 80 per cent of children aged between three and six) will require massive investment in teachers, buildings and equipment.

In the past, the Kyrgyz authorities have relied significantly on donor funding to support the expansion of ECE services. But globally, development aid for middle-income countries is reducing.

There is a risk therefore, that Kyrgyzstan's objective of expanding ECE services might prove financially unsustainable for the country.

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Better support for ECE

UNICEF proposes a rethink of public expenditure around ECE in Kyrgyzstan. Drawing on evidence from a public expenditure analysis on ECE, UNICEF makes a number of recommendations for different Ministries in Kyrgyzstan, as well as policymakers and development partners, to provide better support for ECE by increasing the efficiency, effectiveness and equity of public spending in this area.

These recommendations include:

- linking education budgets more closely to policy delivery, with associated targets and performance measures, to help improve effectiveness
- improving co-ordination between ECE funding streams at the central government and local authority level
- using per capita funding to improve accounting around ECE
- improving the collection of financial data to identify inefficiencies
- changing legislation to allow for proper accounting of parental contributions to ECE.

UNICEF's aim is to contribute to the wider conversation which is currently taking place around Early Childhood Education in Kyrgyzstan, and how it can be supported through better use of funding.

It is also timely in making a case for the value of ECE, at a time when policymakers may be considering a cut in provision, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

If there are financing limitations as a result of COVID-19, it is important that secondary and tertiary education do not become funding priorities, at the expense of ECE.

By making changes in the way that ECE is funded, we can give more children the best start in life.

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The importance of Early Childhood Education (ECE)

There is good evidence that the foundations for learning are largely built in the early years of life, before a child reaches primary school.

Many children who fall behind in these early years never catch up with their peers, leading to underachievement and high dropout rates when they get older. Yet despite the proven and lifelong benefits of pre-primary education, half of the pre-primary school-age children in the world today – at least 175 million children – are not enrolled in pre-primary education during these vital years.

ECE in Kyrgyzstan

There has been some progress in Kyrgyzstan in recent years, in increasing ECE attendance rates. Government efforts have led to greater supply of ECE services, which boosted the enrolment rate of children aged between one and six from 13 per cent in 2011 to 21 per cent in 2018. Yet lack of access to early learning is still a key issue affecting the wellbeing of children in Kyrgyzstan.

A growing population

Between 2012 and 2016, the population of Kyrgyzstan grew by around two per cent every year and this is expected to continue at least until 2035. Between 2011 and 2018, the number of children up to six years old grew by 27 percent.

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Existing underfunding in ECE

Already, despite increased resources being allocated to ECE, the system shows signs of underfunding. ECE classrooms in urban areas have on average of up to 25 per cent more pupils than are prescribed by the state standard. Only 60 per cent of teachers are adequately trained, and 25 per cent of the costs of running ECE institutions are charged to parents.

Kyrgyzstan's goals in ECE

National strategic documents such as the National Development Strategy 2018-2040 (NDS) and the draft Education Development Strategy 2021-2040 (EDS) set out Kyrgyzstan's clear objective: providing three years of ECE to 80 per cent of children aged between three and six, by 2040.

The Sustainable Development Goals, meanwhile, include the goal of providing all children with quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education by 2030.

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UNICEF's proposals

While donors have generously invested to help establish new ECE institutions across Kyrgyzstan, it is unclear whether this situation is sustainable in the long run.

Against a background of a growing population, Kyrgyzstan's ambitious goal of rapidly expanding ECE provision will require a massive investment, to create and equip new facilities and pay thousands of new teachers. There is a danger that achieving the objective, of providing 80 per cent of children aged between three and six with formal ECE services, might prove financially unsustainable for the country.

UNICEF proposes that current spending patterns around ECE in Kyrgyzstan need to be rethought and rationalised. For national authorities to achieve their objectives, the effectiveness of public expenditure needs to be enhanced. Examining the current situation with respect to financing for ECE, UNICEF puts forward several proposals to increase the efficiency, effectiveness and equity of public spending in this area.

UNICEF's proposals are informed by evidence of what works in supporting ECE services in other countries around the world. Based on this evidence, UNICEF makes the case that better planning and coordination in the preparation and execution of the public budget around ECE can generate efficiencies with relatively little effort.

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Recommendations

UNICEF makes a number of specific recommendations for different government Ministries in Kyrgyzstan, as well as policymakers and development partners. Specific recommendations for the Ministry of Education and Science (MOES) and Ministry of Finance (MOF) include:

- » Addressing the disconnect between budgets and strategies, with education budgets previously being based on past expenditure rather than on future policy needs and priorities. UNICEF recommends that **pre-school education budgets should be linked more to education outcomes** in delivering against the National Development Strategy 2018-2040 (NDS) and the Education Development Strategy 2021-2040 (EDS), making spending more effective and efficient to ensure 80% of children benefit from ECE services by 2023. Targets and performance measures should be introduced to help with this.
- » **Better co-ordinating ECE funding streams that are currently split between the MOES and local authorities.** In 2018 the MOES managed 53 per cent of total spending for education, including ECE, while local municipalities managed the remaining 47 per cent. The existence of two different budgets (the MOES covering salary and social insurance, local authorities covering capital investments in restoration and construction, as well as furniture and teaching materials), designed separately and operating according to different timetables, creates significant planning issues for school directors
- » **Using per capita financing (PCF)** as a tool to determine and plan for expenses. PCF has been shown in other countries to be a powerful accounting tool, helping to promote efficiency in education spending and triggering private investments.
- » **Improving the accuracy of financial data collection for education**, to help policy makers identify and address inefficiencies.
- » The MOES advocating revisions to the current legislation to allow for **proper accounting of parental contributions.** Parents' contributions make up approximately 24 per cent of the expenditure of ECE providers, without being properly accounted for.



UNICEF also makes specific recommendations for the Presidential administration, the Prime Minister's Office, Parliament, development partners and education stakeholders. They include:

- » Development partners and education stakeholders promoting changes to laws and government regulations around funding, to help introduce new budget formulas that make it easier to **link funding to the delivery of Kyrgyzstan's long-term strategies.**
 - » Helping to improve the **collection of standardised financial and demographic data**, as well as data which can be disaggregated (by children's age or disability, for example). This data is indispensable for the performance of budget programmes to be monitored and assessed.
- Currently, financial data on education from different sources is inconsistent, making it difficult for stakeholders to analyse the situation and help to define, improve and implement government policies. Education sector stakeholders should work with the MOES to systematise the definitions that are used in data collection, and attempt, whenever possible, to align them to international ones.





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