



## Overall Goal

The World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education (WCECCE) is a UNESCO intergovernmental meeting (Category II) that aims to reaffirm the right of every young child to quality care and education from birth and urge Member States' renewed commitment to and investment in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 4.2 which calls for ensuring that "all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education."

## Building from the achievements

Decades have passed since this simple yet powerful message "Learning begins at birth" was introduced into the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) [Jomtien Declaration](#). As inscribed in the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (1989), young children are holders of the right not only to survive but also to thrive and develop to their fullest potential. It is in this spirit that the international community at the [World Education Forum](#) (Dakar 2000) committed itself to "expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children."

Ten years later, UNESCO [World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education](#) (Moscow 2010) warned that the EFA Goal on early childhood care and education (ECCE) was "at great risk of not being achieved by 2015 unless urgent and resolute action is taken" and posited ECCE as a social, human and economic development imperative.

The [SDG4 - Education 2030](#) marked the first global commitment to early childhood care and education (ECCE) beyond the education community. This was followed by other international and regional initiatives and statements, such as the G20 Initiative for Early Childhood Development (2018 and onward) and the affirmation of universal access to ECD programmes in the African Union's Agenda 2063 (2018), while countries of the Asia-Pacific region have organized several regional policy forums since Moscow 2010, and endorsed the Kathmandu Statement of Action (2018) on ECCE, through adopting the Putrajaya Declaration and the Pasifika Call to Action (2017), the Latina America and Caribbean regional adopted

the "[Buenos Aires Declaration](#) (2017) and Adoption in 2019 of the [EU Council Recommendation on High-quality early childhood education and care systems](#), including a European Quality Framework for ECEC (2019).

## Early childhood care and education and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In 2015, the world's governments adopted 17 SDGs, with 169 targets to achieve by 2030. The SDGs convey a dual vision: to protect our planet from a dangerous and uncertain future and to ensure that we deliver secure, fair, and healthy lives for future generations. Children are at the heart of this vision, with their own needs, rights, perspectives, and contributions. They are the bridge to the future, but also the most vulnerable to the lifelong environmental effects caused by climate change.

The SDG4 aims to “**ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all**” and its target 4.2 draws attention to the importance of building on gains achieved during children's foundational years from birth to five/six through supporting parents and ensuring holistic early childhood care and education. Meanwhile, despite abundant research in neuroscience, developmental psychology and cognitive science revealing the importance of health, ECCE is still given low priority in the public policies and investments in many countries. Countries have yet to address most barriers related to socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender, language, developmental delays and disabilities, and life in remote and marginalised geographical areas.

The SDGs are the agreed-upon global framework for working in the present to leave a legacy of a healthy, sustainable planet and future for children; the UN Human Rights Council sees a clear link between the SDGs and the Convention for Rights of Children. The case for putting children at the centre of the SDGs is based on their rights, sustainable economic development, a life course approach to wellbeing, and the notion of intergenerational justice and fairness.

Recalling that quality education, including early childhood education, is a fundamental human right – one of society's great equalizers and a foundation for tolerance, peace, human rights and sustainability, the UN Secretary-General announced in his report “Our Common Agenda” his intention to convene a [Transforming Education Summit \(TES\)](#) in 2022.

As the world emerges from the COVID-19 crisis, the Transforming Education Summit provides an opportunity to mobilize greater political ambition and commitment to reverse the slide on SDG 4, reimagine education, and accelerate progress on education and the 2030 Agenda more broadly for the remainder of the Decade of Action. In this regard, the WCECCE, in convergence with the TES, will provide a momentum to strengthen work and action on early childhood care and education among Member States, stakeholders and the international community.

## Evidence of the importance of investment in ECCE has been growing for decades

Abundant research in neuroscience, developmental psychology and cognitive science has revealed that serious risks to infant and toddler development must be avoided or reduced to promote healthy development and put protective factors in place. The importance of nurturing care and the roles of families, quality childcare, supportive communities, and enabling policy environments has been well documented (Black et al., 2017). Research regarding accessible and affordable quality childcare is bringing renewed attention to this neglected area (UNICEF, 2019). Intervention science has increased awareness of what works, including understanding implementation issues that are key to effectiveness. Leading economists have provided considerable evidence on the long-term benefits of investing in ECCE/ECD and the costs of inaction (Heckman, 2007). Investing in ECCE/ECD is critically important for improving child development, eradicating poverty, reducing inequality, ending hunger, ensuring healthy

lives, achieving gender equality and promoting peaceful societies (Heckman, 2007; Richter et al., 2017; Black et al., 2017; Hoddinott et al., 2013).

Studies also show that the health, nutrition, and general preparedness for parenting of future mothers and fathers impacts birth outcomes. In addition, adverse experiences, including malnutrition, stress, neglect and abuse and a lack of stimulation during the first months of infancy impair brain development by negatively affecting the number, connections, and organization of brain cells which, in turn, threaten children's health, nutrition, and cognitive and social development (Britto et al., 2017; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2020).

## Persistent challenges before and after COVID-19

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ECCE is facing a myriad of challenges including policy support, financing, and governance. Even though the early years constitute a critical stage of rapid brain development that lays the foundation for good health and nutrition, learning and educational success, social-emotional learning, and economic productivity throughout life, the COVID-19 pandemic response has relatively neglected young children, resulting in them becoming **the greatest victims of the pandemic** due to its lifelong impact on their education, health, nutrition, and well-being. Indeed, evidence from longitudinal studies reports that the benefits of healthy childhood development extend to older ages: birth weight, infant growth, and physical and cognitive capacities in childhood are associated with or predictive of older adults' physical and cognitive capacities, hearing capacity, and life expectancy.

National responses have reportedly given priority to other levels of education when it comes to accessibility, workforce, curriculum, monitoring, governance, and finance of education disruption during the COVID. The Lancet Commission on the Future of the World's Children declared that at-risk young children, including those living in poverty, with disabilities, and from ethnic minorities and migrant populations, are prime casualties of the pandemic.

The crisis of ECCE pre-dated the COVID-19. An analysis, published in 2017, suggests that the cost of inaction for not improving child development through universal preschool and home visits, and reducing stunting, is substantial and could reach more than 10% of gross domestic product<sup>1</sup>.

In low- and lower middle-income countries, fewer than two in three children attend organized learning one year before the official primary entry age, and the average participation gap between the richest and the poorest 20% families is an astonishing 48 percentage points. Children belonging to economically vulnerable communities and other traditionally marginalized communities and groups including children living in emergency and migratory situations have less or no access to ECCE/ECD and ECI services. Such adversities often coincide with the economic level of the family and become cumulative as children grow older (Britto et al., 2017). Consequently, half of the young children in the world, at least 175 million, are not enrolled in pre-primary education programmes. In countries affected by emergencies only 1 in 3 children is enrolled, and in developing countries, less than 1 in 4 (UNICEF, 2019).

In many countries, ECCE policies and practices are fragmented and do not leverage whole-of-government, whole-of-society approaches to addressing the holistic needs and rights of families and their young children.

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<sup>1</sup> Richter LM, Daelmans B, Lombardi J, et al. 2017).

In sum, ECCE systems need sustained transformation and revitalization if ECCE is to realize its enormous potential to impact sustainable development.

UNESCO is among organizations that place ECCE high in the education policy agenda. This high prioritization impels diverse functions and responsibilities, some of which are for UNESCO to promote and lead global debate on this field, to track and analyze critical trends, and to support in the shaping of future directions of ECCE development. The Organization uses its convening power, such as world conferences, to advance such debates.

## Objectives and Scope of the WCECCE

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To further rally policy makers, educators and teachers, families and caregivers, and all stakeholders in pursuit of SDG 4.2, the UNESCO General Conference at its 41st Session approved Uzbekistan's proposal to host a World Conference on ECCE (WCECCE), which will provide an important forum for policy learning and scale-up of proven programmes and innovations on ECCE across all regions and countries. The overall goal of the WCECCE is to renew and expand Member States' political commitment and engagement to 1) develop ambitious, relevant, and culturally appropriate ECCE policies, 2) put in place effective and accountable ECCE systems, multi-stakeholder partnerships and services, and 3) increase and improve investment in ECCE as an essential and integral part of their strategies for attaining lifelong learning societies and sustainable development.

The specific **objectives** of the WCECCE are to:

- take stock of the progress of Member States towards achieving the SDG 4.2 target and other early childhood related SDGs targets.
- exchange knowledge about key enablers, emerging research results, good practices, and innovations to put in place and scale up quality ECCE policies and programmes.
- reaffirm quality ECCE as a right of all children and as the essential foundation for lifelong learning and socio-cognitive development.
- identify opportunities, develop, and agree upon on a set of priorities and strategies to accelerate SDG4.2 progress and increase investment in ECCE on the part of governments and their partners.
- further strengthen global partnership and solidarity for the cause of early childhood to expand and improve ECCE services in all Member States to help all children attain their full potential.

The WCECCE will adopt an outcome document, tentatively called the "Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action for Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education" comprising agreed-upon, concrete and feasible strategies, priorities, partnerships, and benchmarks for financing, actions and results required to achieve SDG 4.2 and other early childhood-related SDG targets. The outcome document will be informed by the conference background report, tentatively called, "**Education starts early: progress, challenges and opportunities**", regional consultations' outcomes, and the findings of the numerous consultations to be organized during the lead-up to WCECCE. The outcome document will be finalized by a drafting committee which will be comprised of representatives of UNESCO Member States and other key stakeholders.

The following **themes and subthemes** have been adopted by the Conference Programme Committee:

- **Inclusion, quality and well-being:** curriculum and pedagogy (including play-based learning); equity and inclusion (including non-state actors); building a strong foundation (health, nutrition, and wellbeing); ECCE in emergencies; school readiness and the role of assessment.

- **ECCE workforce and caregivers:** ECCE teacher and care staff training systems (including attraction, recruitment, and gender disparities); professionalization (certification, licensing, career advancement, coaching); supervision and leadership; ECCE workforce in the non-state sector; parenting.
- **Programme innovations:** taking advantage of neurosciences to advance the ECCE (early brain development); technology and artificial intelligence (including screen time and ethics of AI); designing innovative learning practices and spaces; alternative models of ECCE provision; greening ECCE.
- **Policy, governance and finance:** data, monitoring and evaluation; policy and legal frameworks (formal, non-formal, informal, 0-3/3-6/6-8); financing and partnerships; quality assurance frameworks and systems; whole-of-government approach, multisectorality and coordination.

**Date of the WCECCE:** 14-16 November 2022

**Place:** Tashkent, Uzbekistan

**Duration:** 3 full days including site-visits

**Participants:** Approximately 1,500 participants, including online participants. The Member States delegation shall include head of governments, ministers in charge of education, finance/planning, health, and protection, practitioners, development partners and civil society organizations at national level. At international and regional levels, UN agencies, bi and multilateral organizations, international non-governmental organizations, civil society organization including ECCE networks, youth and parents' organizations among other will be invited.

### **Working languages**

Six UN official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish) and Uzbek will be used for all plenary sessions. For parallel sessions, 2 UN working languages + one (to be defined) will be used for each.

## **How: Preparation and key milestones**

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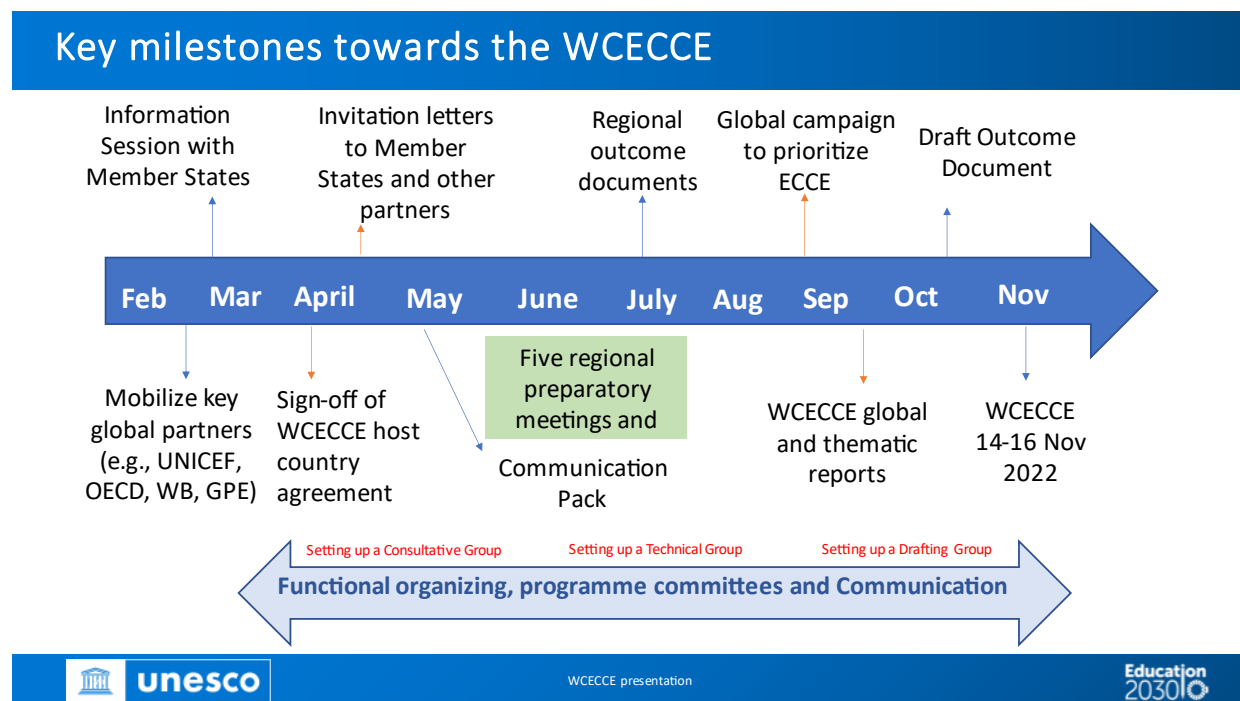
**Preparation:** In collaboration with the host country, the organization of the WCECCE will be led by UNESCO Education Sector in coordination with UNESCO Tashkent and Bangkok offices. The wide UNESCO family, such as Education Divisions, Specialized Institutes, Regional Offices, as well as UNESCO National Commissions and UNESCO Chairs will be mobilized for the technical work and the administrative arrangements. Other UNESCO Sectors (Culture, Sciences, and Communication and Information) will be involved as relevant to promote an inter-sectoral and cross-disciplinary approach.

While the WCECCE is classified as a Category II UNESCO meeting ("Intergovernmental meetings other than international conferences of states"), UNESCO will consult and work closely with—in addition to Member States — UN agencies, international and regional organizations and networks, donors and multilateral agencies, civil society organizations including youth and parents' associations, and other partners and experts in the fields related to early childhood. UNESCO will partner with key organizations and networks involved in the Global Partnership Strategy for Early Childhood launched in December 2021, such as UNICEF, the World Bank, the Global Partnership for Education, OECD, Save the Children, World Health Organization, ECDAN and OMEP. For the organization of the WCECCE a variety of global leaders will be mobilized to support the drafting of key documents, the participation of Member States, and the dissemination of advocacy messages and the "Tashkent Declaration"



A Conference **Organizing Committee** comprising the Government of Uzbekistan as chair and UNESCO as co-chair will be established. A Conference **Programme Committee** will also be established with UNESCO as chair and the Government of Uzbekistan as co-chair. Representatives of Member States and partner organizations will be called upon to be part of and contribute to the work of these committees

## Key milestone through November 2022



- Invitation of Member States (circular letter) and partners: mid-April 2022
- Establishment of the Organizing Committee and Programme Committee (Consultative and Technical Groups): between February and April 2022
- Organization of an information session with Member States
- Signature of the WCECCE host country agreement: March 2022
- Development of the communication pack: May 2022
- Nomination of Member States' delegations to the Conference: June 2022
- Organization of five regional preparatory meetings (remote/hybrid): July 2022
- Agreement on ECCE Flagships: August 2022
- Production of the main WCECCE background paper: ***“Education starts early: progress, challenges and opportunities”***: September/October 2022
- Production of thematic background notes / papers: September 2022
- Establishment of the Drafting Committee for the Tashkent Declaration and its call for commitment to ECCE
- Global campaign to prioritize early childhood in policy and financing: through October/November 2022
- Draft Tashkent Declaration on ECCE: October/November 2022