TERMS OF REFERENCE: Evaluation Office

Title	Evaluation of UNICEF work in early childhood development (ECD) and early childhood education (ECE)
Contract Modality	Consultancy: Team Leader, Two Team Members, Two Researchers, and 4 National Consultants.
Location of Assignment	New York
Duration of Contract	9 months (January – September 2024)
Recruiting Officer	Evaluation Specialist, Evaluation Office

I.   Introduction

1.   The Evaluation Office (EO), in UNICEF (New York) provides global leadership and oversight for the evaluation function. EO is responsible for developing an agenda and work plan to evaluate UNICEF programmes and processes. We conduct and/or manage independent, corporate evaluations and evaluation syntheses, provide technical assistance and quality assurance for evaluations commissioned at the decentralized level (country and regional offices), as well as other divisions in HQ offices. EO is also responsible for publishing a global evaluation plan that accompanies respective corporate strategies.[1]

2.   EO seeks to issue a contract to eligible consultants to be part of a 5-person core team that will conduct an evaluation of UNICEF work in early childhood development (ECD) and early childhood education (ECE). The evaluation aims to interrogate whether UNICEF-supported ECD/ECE programmes for early stimulation and learning do achieve intended developmental and school readiness outcomes. The evaluation will assess whether there is clarity in UNICEF country offices about what constitutes inclusive and effective learning programmes for caregivers and children in the early years - from birth to the pre-school year (pre-Grade 1 year). It will also interrogate, with the aid of a *draft theory of change,* whether UNICEF-supported programmes prepare ECD/ECE pre-school centers and schools seek out and engage with the most vulnerable populations of young learners and their caregivers. More importantly, the evaluation will assess whether the choice of an integrated ECD approach has resulted in the intended cohesiveness, efficiencies, and complementarities within UNICEF goal areas, and between UNICEF and partners in the ECD/ECE subsector, to provide holistic developmental support to young children and their families.

3.   This is an invitation to submit technical and financial proposals to provide services to conduct the evaluation, based on the terms of reference (ToRs) described in this document. This evaluation is part of UNICEF Plan for Global evaluation, 2022-2025. The tentative timeline for the execution of the evaluation is December 2023 to August 2024, while submission evaluation report to the UNICEF Executive Board *is estimated to be Feb 2025.*

II.   Global context for early childhood development and early childhood education

4.   **Progress from Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The period of the Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) and their precursor, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) registered tremendous progress in human development, **as it relates to developmental outcomes for**

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[1] For more information about the Evaluation Office, visit the following website: http://www.unicef.org/evaluation. The Global Evaluation Plan is offered at here: https://www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/2018-3-Global_Eval-ODS-EN.pdf

children. The global rate for under-five mortality declined by approximately 59 percent, from 90 deaths per 1000 births in 1990, to 38 deaths per 1000 births in 2021 (from approximately 5.7 million to 2.3 million under five deaths). The proportion of children under the age of five years who are underweight fell by approximately 50 percent in the same period. Progress towards the goal of *achieving universal primary education* (MDG 2), was equally impressive. The primary school net enrolment rate in developing countries increased from 83 percent in 2000, to 89.4 per cent in 2021, while the adjusted net attendance rate reached 87 per cent in 2021. About 4 out of 5 children that enrolled in primary school were able to complete the final grade.[2]

5.   In the meantime, enrolment and participation in pre-primary education, typically 3 years, 2 years or 1 year before entering Grade 1 of primary school, remained disappointingly low, despite decades of evidentiary proof that the right investments in programmes for early stimulation and learning result in highly positive effects on learning outcomes. For instance, it is established knowledge that the relationship between early stimulation and learning, school readiness and learning achievement is predictive – that is, children who attend quality pre-primary education tend to start school at the right age and attain strong foundational skills, are more likely to stay in school and complete primary education, demonstrate better learning and academic performance in both literacy and math, and have higher potential to be productive adults. And yet most governments have not directed enough of their education resources to early stimulation and learning.[3] Also, weakness in data systems (e.g., reporting pre-primary participation only in terms of gross enrolment ratio, and not net enrolment ratio) resulted in most countries not having the information and tools to develop targeted solutions for enhancing participation and learning during the pre-primary years. For that reason, the articulation of SDG4 and the associated target (i.e., SDG 4.2) presents the opportunity for governments to achieve tangible results in pre-primary education.

6.   **Commitment to universal early childhood development and universal pre-primary education**: The SDG 4 commitment to *'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all'* and global pledges to *'leave no one behind'* subsumes another commitment - to *'ensure 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'* (SDG Target 4.2). While the commitment to universal ECD and pre-primary education by 2030 was a bold ambition, this target will not be achieved at the current rate of progress. For instance, the GER for pre-primary education grew from 32 per cent in 2000, to 50 per cent in 2017 as indicated in Figure 1, While this is commendable progress, it is still far below the pace of growth needed to achieve universal coverage by 2030.

**Figure 1: Trends in pre-primary gross enrolment ratios (GER) between 2000 and 2017[4]**

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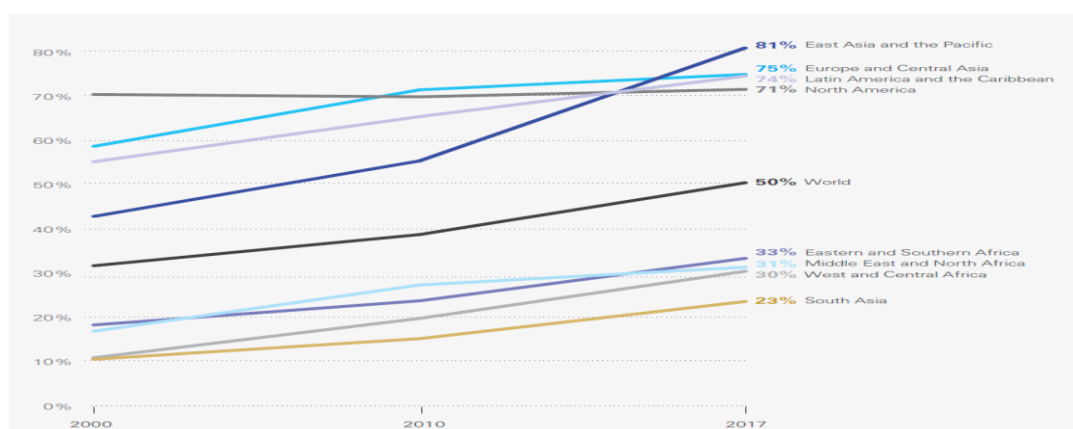
[2] https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/primary-education/
[3] Build to last: a framework in support of universal quality pre-primary education, UNICEF, 2020
[4] UIS global database, 2018

7.   In fact, the GER for pre-primary reached 72.4 percent in 2020 but fell to 52.4 percent in 2021 according to the World Bank[5] - presumably due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, there are wide variations in progress towards universal pre-primary education across regions, across countries, and within countries. For instance, while all regions and countries in all income groups registered substantial gains in enrolment in providing access to pre-primary, the regions that were furthest behind made the smallest gains (e.g., South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa with an increase of 13 percent, compared to Latin America and the Caribbean and East Asia and the Pacific with an increase of 20 and 38 percent, respectively, as indicated in Figure 1).

8.   Furthermore, evidence from a wide range of studies supports the conclusion that investment in early childhood education for children from the poorest households brings returns that far exceed their cost, with the highest returns on investment occurring in the period between birth and 5 years of age, for children from the poorest households.[6] For instance, Figure 2 presents inputs and/or interventions that were shown to be effective in increasing access to education and learning outcomes, and their estimated cost. Some interventions (in green bars) are related to teaching methods, teacher/classroom practices, and teacher incentives, while others (in grey bars) are interventions that support learning - from training of school management teams, to providing students with cash incentives, to having schools in close proximity to children's homes. Of these, children's participation in pre-school was found to have the potential to catalyse the greatest change in the improvement of access and higher learning achievement in developing countries.

Figure 2: Highly effectiveness inputs in increasing access to education and learning outcomes[7]
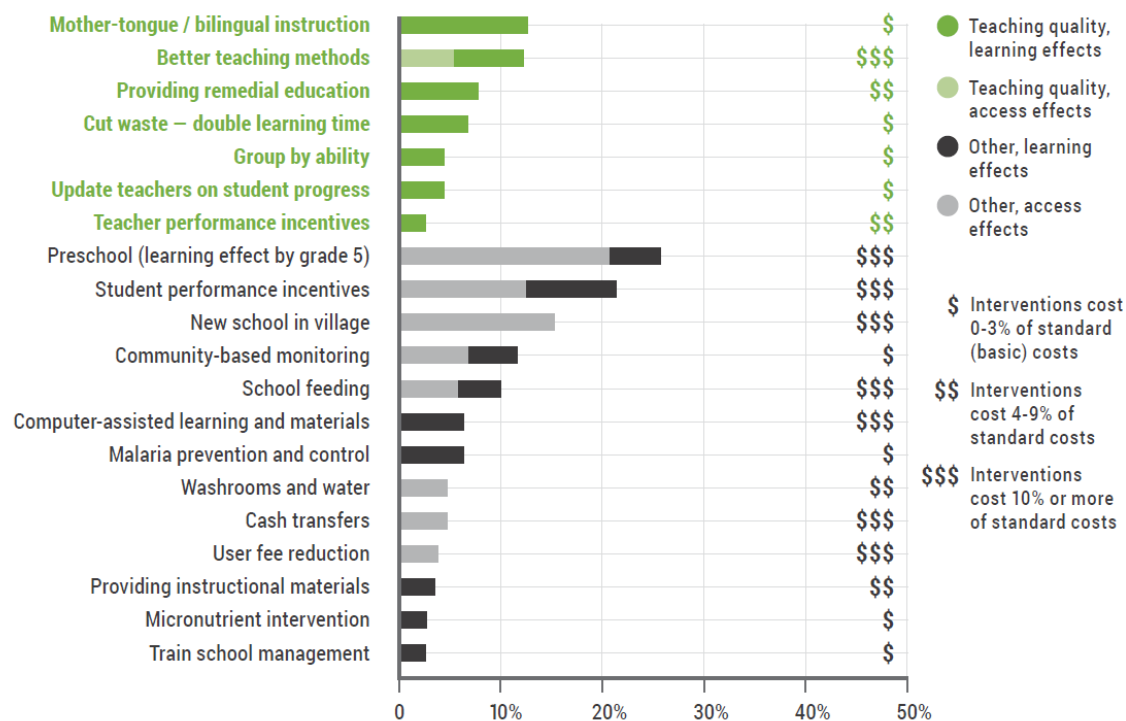
[5] Preprimary school enrollment by country, around the world|TheGlobalEconomy.com. These estimates were calculated 136 and 66 countries that reported on this indicator in 2020 and 2021, respectively

[6] A World Ready to Learn: prioritizing quality early childhood education. UNICEF, 2019

[7] T Conn, K. The effectiveness of education programs worldwide: evidence from a meta-analytic Dataset. Background Paper for the Education Commission. 2016.

9.   While it does come at a higher cost than other measures, Figure 3 shows that increasing funds for pre-primary education can boost access by approximately 20 percent and improve learning outcomes by approximately 15 percent, if coupled with less expensive strategies such as mother-tongue instruction and doubling learning time. This evidence suggests that investment in pre-primary education should be a core strategy to improve education outcomes – for children of all ages. It should also be espoused as a pre-emptive measure to obviate the need to divert resources to address deep rooted learning poverty at a later stage, an undertaking which will be much more expensive and less efficient than providing universal access to pre-primary education in the first place.

10.   As indicated above, SGD Target 4.2 challenges countries to *'ensure 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'*. Where none existed before, this global target has two measurable indicators against which countries can assess their progress towards children's developmental readiness and the goal of universal access to pre-primary education.[8] Where proclaimed, declarations of universal ECD and ECE constitute progress since they establish a commitment by those governments – to assure access to some level of services, including pre-primary education for all children, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnicity, language, disability or remoteness. Also, some progress in policy reform has resulted from these global declarations. For instance, 28 percent of countries reporting on ECD/ECE policy development in 2021 (51 of 184 countries) had also enacted compulsory pre-primary education policies. Of these, 29 of the 51 countries committed to one year of pre-primary; 13 countries committed to two years, while 9 countries committed to three years of pre-primary. However, too many countries across all income levels were not on track to achieve universal pre-primary education in 2018 as indicated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Progress towards universal pre-primary provision by country income level, based on GER data[9]
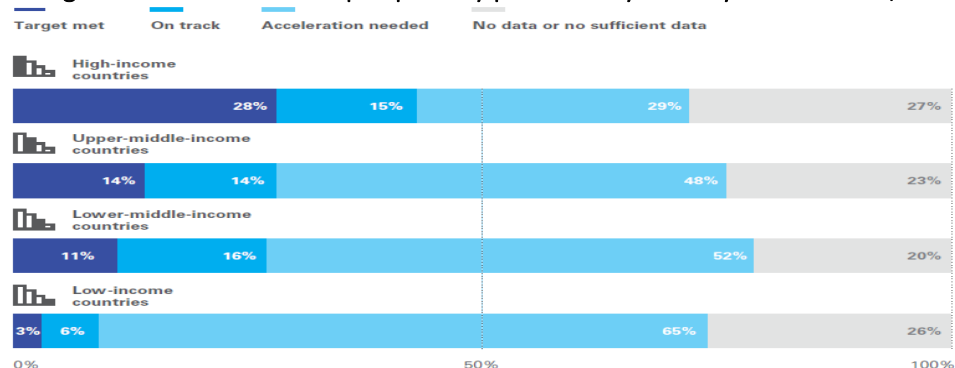
11.   For many of the countries, especially those that do not have the benefit of robust participation of non-state pre-school providers, achieving universal access to pre-primary education may require reorienting their public policy in favour of equity, inclusiveness, an/or pro-poor budgeting and allocation of resources.

III.   UNICEF conceptual frameworks for ECD and ECE and their operationalization

12.   In the past two strategic planning periods (Strategic Plan 2014-2017 and Strategic Plan 2018-2021), UNICEF made notable investments in advocating for the right of children to thrive and learn in the *early moments of life.* That meant, among other efforts, supporting countries to develop investment cases, reorganize and strengthen systems to achieve universal coverage of ECD/ECE. Key developments included partnering with other

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[8] Through the EDCI/EDCI2030, UNICEF is accountable for reporting for **Indicator 4.2.1**, i.e*., proportion of children aged 24-59 months who are developmentally on track in at least three of the four domains of literacy, numeracy, physical development, and social-emotional development*; UNESCO is accountable for reporting for **Indicator 4.2.2**, *proportion of children participating in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age)*.

[9] A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing quality early childhood education. UNICEF, 2019

agencies in 2018, to develop the *Nurturing Care Framework* which outlines the conceptual underpinnings for delivering early childhood development (ECD) services **for children 0-8 years old**. Also, UNICEF spearheaded the development of the *Build to Last Framework,* a systemic vision to ensure long-term sustainability of the ECE sub-sector to support national efforts to provide equitable, high-quality pre-primary education. The two frameworks are described in detail below.

13.   **The Nurturing Care Framework (NFC):** Following the Lancet series entitled *Advancing early childhood development: from science to scale (2017), a* collaboration between UNICEF and other agencies[10] resulted in the development and launch of the *Nurturing care for early childhood development: a framework to help children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential.* **Nurturing care** is described as a set of conditions that facilitate children's health, nutrition, security and safety, responsive caregiving and opportunities for early stimulation and learning as indicated in Figure 4. Nurturing children means keeping them safe, healthy and well nourished, paying attention and responding to their needs and interests, encouraging them to explore their environment and interact with caregivers and others.[11] Two objectives of the framework can be implied, i.e., **creating public policies**, **programmes and services** to enable communities and caregivers to provide children with good health and nutrition and protect them from threats, as well as is **creating opportunities for early stimulation and learning** for young children through emotionally supportive and responsive interactions with caregivers.

Figure 4: Components of learning in the context of early childhood development in NCF
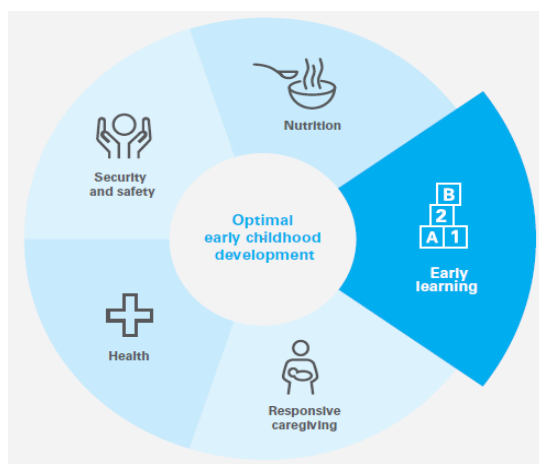
14.   **Build to Last Framework**: Translating the comprehensive set of conditions and priorities outlined in the Nurturing Care Framework for ECD into sectoral roles and commitments, UNICEF spearheaded the development of the *Build to Last Framework[12]* in support of universal, quality pre-primary education, to ensure children's optimal learning and development through early childhood education (ECE) programs. The Framework espouses a systems approach for improving school readiness along three dimensions of (a) **ready children,** gaining preparatory skills and moving into and adjusting to new learning environments from home to preschool to primary school, b) **ready parents and families,** empowered to recognize the value of early learning, support their children's early learning at home and in school and c) **ready schools,** making provisions to foster and support a smooth transition of young learners into primary school.[13]

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[10] WHO, the World Bank Group, Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) and the Early Childhood Development Action Network ECDAN)
[11] Nurturing care for early childhood development: a framework to help children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential. WHO, 2018
[12] Build to last: a framework in support of universal quality pre-primary education, UNICEF, 2020
[13] School readiness: a conceptual framework. UNICEF, 2012

15.   . *Build to Last* identifies the building blocks of an effective ECE system to include **a supportive and enabling environment** and **five essential functions** that are core to the delivery of the system (i.e., planning and budgeting, curriculum development and implementation, workforce development, family and community engagement, and quality assurance). UNICEF offices utilize it as a tool to assist countries to identify the core features of an effective pre-primary subsector and to promote integration of ECE in sector planning, governance, and accountability mechanisms. While not prescriptive in their intent, both the *Nurturing Care Framework* and *Build to Last* converge on the same core components. Both frameworks espouse a whole-of-government approach where there is cross-sectoral coordination and policies from the different sectors contribute systematically to improving care and services for young children. They also converge on a systems-strengthening perspective and a long-term view of building of equitable and inclusive ECD and pre-primary services that can be delivered at scale.

16.   In terms of operationalization in UNICEF, ECD outcomes at all levels of the organization are delivered through the leadership and coordination across key sectoral programs. Health and Nutrition programs follow the "survive and thrive" agenda to support interventions for pregnant mothers and children from birth to the age of 3 years. Education programs advance early learning and development through early childhood education and parenting support to promote transition of young learners to primary school. Program teams also coordinate Child Protection components around children's security, safety and civil registration (birth registration).[14] While acknowledging that a child's health, nutrition, security and safety as well as his/her interactive environment with caregivers in the early years are essential to overall developmental outcomes, the coordination and collaboration to bring these elements together is driven by variations in political will to navigate the policy and fiscal space, sectoral ownership, and the understanding and capacity of key stakeholders to operationalize integrated ECD, among other contextual realities. Analysis of these experiences offer invaluable opportunities to learn what works, and under which conditions.

17.   This evaluation will focus on ECD and ECE programmes that address the policy development, system strengthening and service delivery objectives, and contribute to children's developmental readiness and school readiness for children from 0 to 8 years.[15] The five components of the *Nurturing Care Framework* will be used to interrogate the content of the programmes, and to assess whether there is clarity in UNICEF country offices about what constitutes an inclusive and effective early learning programmes for caregivers and children to achieve the intended developmental outcomes. On the other hand, the evaluation will look to the *Build to Last* framework for the 'how to' – i.e., to tease out the role of the education sector and key components that are necessary to prepare ECD/ECE centers and schools to engage young learners and their caregivers. The ***evaluation draft theory of change,*** provided in Annex 2, attempts to bring these two aspects together. However, more inputs will be required to update the draft theory of change and to provide an exhaustive catalogue of UNICEF-supported programmes, interventions, and/or activities during the inception phase, while the data collection phase will be used to update the theory of change further against the workplans from the countries that will be selected to participate in the evaluation, and to validate it for use in making evaluative judgments.

IV.   Evaluation rationale, purpose, objectives, and scope

Rationale for the evaluation

18.   While ECD was previously viewed as one of many interventions, programmes, or even as a sub-sector in many organizations, there is now wider recognition of ***early childhood development as the intended outcome*** of the work that governments, national stakeholders, UNICEF, and the development community do in the ECD and the ECE sub-sector. Put differently, ***positioning children to reach their developmental potential in the early years***

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[14] Nurturing care framework progress report 2018-2023: reflections and looking forward. World Health Organization and UNICEF, 2023
[15] Readiness is expected to result in facilitation of smooth transition from pre-school and on-time enrolment to the first grade of primary, as well as quality and efficiency of pre-school programmes.

is identified as a key ingredient for enhancing the achievement of almost every child outcome that we can think about. For that reason, many organizations, UNICEF among them, have invested extensive resources to study the relationship between early learning and socialization, school readiness, achievement in school, early childhood development, and the likelihood for children to thrive and become productive adults, and to support countries to adopt policies towards universal provision of early childhood. This evaluation contributes towards that effort.

19.   Second, notable developments have taken place, key of which was the increased visibility of ECD due to being championed by the Executive Director during the period of UNICEF Strategic Plan (2018-2021). This had a positive effect on the early learning agenda. Also, UNICEF has since articulated significant conceptual frameworks around which the ECD and ECE work is organized, namely the *Nurturing Care Framework* in 2018 and the launching in 2019 of the *Build to Last* framework, to support governments in strengthening systems to provide pre-primary education. At best, an examination of these investments is necessary, both through formative assessments of the more recent commitments, and summative assessments of the work that was done from 2018 (underpinned by approved strategic plans, results, operational modalities and staff structures) for ***accountability purposes.***

20.   Third, despite the bold commitment to SDG 4 and associated targets (SDG 4.2) the requisite action of increasing the share of education spending that goes to pre-primary education has not been easy to undertake. If anything, emerging evidence suggests that the ECD and the ECE sub-sector experienced setbacks during the COVID-19 pandemic as governments prioritized higher grades and completing classes in providing access to digital learning or mitigating learning loss, at the expense of children in the earlier years of primary school. Relatedly, with the decline in ECE expenditure from 7 percent of the total education expenditure in 2018, to 4.2 percent in 2021, UNICEF seems to be regressing on its commitment to dedicate 10 percent of the education resources to early childhood education. Consequently, the organization needs to re-examine this and other commitments to determine, through evaluative evidence, what adjustments and/or actions are necessary to meet those commitments, and to create value for the sub-sector through its investments in ECD/ECE.

21.   Fourth, while having benefitted from the evaluation of the Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS) initiative conducted in 2016 and the more recent evaluation of early stimulation and care in 2021, the need for evidence-based decision-making has been highlighted in the past three strategic planning periods. As such, the evaluation will help determine if any changes are needed to increase the capacities of UNICEF and partners to deliver on their objectives and commitments to inform policy and programme management decisions. At the corporate policy level, the evaluation will position the organisation to inform mid-term reviews of the global education strategy - *Every Child Learns, UNICEF Education Strategy, 2019-2030*, and *UNICEF Strategic Plan (2022-2025).*

Purpose of the evaluation

22.   The **purpose of the evaluation** is twofold - to ***enhance organizational learning*** and to ***strengthen organizational accountability***. On the ***learning*** side, the evaluation will interrogate whether UNICEF has leveraged the organization's investments on the integrated ECD approach and used its knowledge resources and experiences to support countries in strengthening their ECD and ECE programmes. The evaluation will also ***advance the accountability*** objectives of the organization by interrogating and/or verifying UNICEF achievement of reported results, aimed to increase access to early childhood education opportunities and the care that supports learning. Evidence from the evaluation will be used to facilitate decision-making, advocacy, and resource mobilization and to contribute to global learning within the ECD and the ECE sub-sector.

23.   The evaluation will pursue **three specific objectives**, namely:
   a.   Assess UNICEF work in support of national policy reform, financing strategies, and budgeting to expand access to opportunities for early stimulation and learning for children from 0-8 years old, including

children in the pre-school grade, and for strengthening the ECE sub-sector in countries of different typologies.

b. Examine the efficacy of UNICEF integrated ECD approach and the adequacy of available capacities (core skills, tools, processes, partnerships, coordination mechanisms, and institutional arrangements) to support countries of different typologies in the adaption, acceleration, and scale-up efforts for providing early stimulation and learning support and services for different profiles of children from 0-8 years old, including children in the pre-school grade.

c. Evaluate UNICEF inputs and outcomes in supporting countries of different typologies to develop effective programmes to increase access to opportunities for early stimulation and learning for children from 0-8 years old, including children in the pre-school grade (the grade before Primary 1) to achieve universal access to pre-primary (SDG 4.2), and to promote school readiness among children and caregivers.

24.   UNICEF subscribes to and embraces the global commitment to "leave no child behind." However, the organization considers *progressive universalism* as a guiding principle to support the mobilization and allocation of resources to expand the provision of quality early childhood education for all, while prioritizing the poorest and vulnerable who are most at risk of poor outcomes, The evaluation will judge UNICEF-supported programmes from this perspective, and on the efforts to adhere to key principles and the organization's values of equity and inclusion.

Scope of the Evaluation

25.   **Temporal scope:** The evaluation time span will be 2018-2023. While seemingly too broad, this period tracks well with key developments in the ECD and ECE sector globally and within UNICEF, including updating and launching the organization's Education Strategy (2019-2030). It covers the period of Strategic Plan 2018–2021 which will be examined for summative judgements of UNICEF contribution against its stated goals and objectives. It also covers the first two years of the current Strategic Plan (2022 and 2023), which will be examined to determine whether the new corporate commitments and UNICEF-supported programmes build coherently on the foundation and seminal work that was achieved in the past few years, and to capture the latest developments, reforms, trends and innovations, and to generate findings and actionable recommendations.

26.   **Geographic scope:** Because of the corporate nature of this exercise, its geographic scope and influence is intended to be global. Countries cases to be selected for the evaluation are those that identify the provision of early childhood education and strengthening of ECD and the ECE subsector as a priority in their CPDs, and where UNICEF-supported ECD/ECE programmes are directly relevant to the thematic scope of the evaluation. However, while not aimed at achieving statistical representativeness of all country programmes and contexts, the analyses and findings of the evaluation will reflect the decentralized nature of the organization, gathering information from a diverse range of country contexts and typologies in which the organization operates, including those facing humanitarian crises.

27.   **Thematic scope:** The evaluation aims to understand aspects of ECD programming that contribute directly to the three pillars of school readiness (i.e., ready children, ready schools, and ready families) and child outcomes for children from 0-8 years old, including children in the pre-school grade (i.e., developmental readiness as indicated by parental estimates of pre-literary skills, on-time enrolment of children in the first grade of school in school, socio-emotional preparedness to engage in learning, etc.) and outcomes for caregivers, all covered in Figure 4 above. To that end, a non-exhaustive list of themes to examine includes: (i) the efficacy of the integrated ECD model and associated coordination mechanisms; (ii) key interventions that UNICEF advocates for, supports and/or implements to promote access to opportunities for early stimulation and learning attainment an indicative summary of which is provided in Annex 1; and, (iii) creating an enabling environment for the ECD/ECE sub-sector (i.e., policy advocacy and development, capacity building, education system strengthening, knowledge creation

and management, etc.). Relatedly, programmes that are sampled for the evaluation will be those adjudged to have depth and maturity to offer substantive lessons on the issues assessed by the evaluation.

28.   **Evaluation uses and users:** Table 1 below presents the uses of the evaluation that should lead to better targeting and tailoring of programmatic activities when developing country programme and planning documents, as well as primary and secondary target users.

Table 1. Primary and secondary users and uses

Primary users	Primary uses
UNICEF HQ, ROs and COs: UNICEF leadership and ECD/education teams at every level, responsible for the strategic choices of education programming and reporting within the organization, and those directly accountable for the design, implementation, coordination, and monitoring-evaluation-learning aspects of education programmes in country offices	Provide evidence to review the strategic and programmatic choices made in support the expansion of opportunities for early stimulation and learning, as well as updates, lessons and further guidance on the unpacking the early learning opportunities component of the *Nurturing Care Framework*, as it applies to children from 0-8 years old, including children in the pre-school grade. The evaluation also aims to inform: (i) the midterm assessment of the Global Education Strategy (2019-2030); (ii) annual results reporting (ARR) on system strengthening for the ECE sub-sector; (iii) development of new Country Programme Documents (CPDs) and strategic moments of reflection, where applicable; and, (iv) lessons from various programming contexts on how ECE programme strategies have worked, and where the need strengthening.
Secondary and other intended users	Secondary uses
Other UNICEF HQ Divisions: UNICEF staff in the Programme Group and other divisions, e.g., Social Policy; WASH; Health and Nutrition, DAPM, among others.	Provide evidence on effectiveness of cross-sectoral approaches to enhance expansion of opportunities for early stimulation and learning, for HQ staff who collaborate and coordinate heavily with education programmes and the ECD cross-cutting programme. This evidence could inform the mid-term review process of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025 across the Program Division and other functions.
External partners: Other United Nations agencies and strategic education partners such as UNESCO, GPE, and the World Bank, Education Cannot Wait, and partners in the ECD subsector such as PMNCH and ECDAN.	Inform partners in the UN system on UNICEF good practices in support of providing universal access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education (SDG Target 4.2)
External partners: UNICEF Executive Board, UN Member States at the international level that support education and ECD programmes with technical and financial resources, and Government counterparts actively involved in SDG Target 4.2 reporting, as well as non-state providers of ECD/ECE services	Inform government and private sector partners on UNICEF good practices in support of providing universal access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education (SDG Target 4.2)

V.   Evaluation questions and criteria to weigh evaluative evidence

29.   The overarching question is meant to addresses ***outcome level results***[16] that is implied in the title of the evaluation, namely: ***What is contribution of integrated ECD approach and UNICEF-supported programmes in expanding opportunities for early stimulation and learning to achieve access to pre-primary education, promoting school readiness for the poorest and most vulnerable children and caregivers, and strengthening of the education system to provide ECD and ECE services?*** Table 2 presents evaluation questions, associated sub-question and

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[16] The results framework of the Strategic Plan (2014 – 2017) specified three levels of results, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. **Outputs** reflect UNICEF contributions most directly; **outcomes** are products of shared action; **impacts** reflect collective action from a variety of partners, typically the State, with the support of development partners, UNICEF included.

evaluation criteria, all of which should be addressed with reference to children from 0-8 years old, including children in the pre-school grade (the year before Primary Grade 1) as determined by the school entry age in respective countries. Also, each question should be addressed to cover differences in programming contexts, including countries implementing humanitarian programmes, and countries characterized by fragility.[17]

Table 2: Evaluation questions and criteria (draft)

Objective 1: Assess UNICEF work in support of national policy reform, financing strategies, and budgeting to expand access to opportunities for early stimulation and learning for children from 0-8 years old, including children in the pre-school grade, and for strengthening the ECE sub-sector in countries of different typologies.	
Evaluation questions	**Sub-questions/evaluation criteria**
1. To what extent was UNICEF support to policy reforms, public budgeting, and financing strategies to expand the access to opportunities for early stimulation and learning for children from 0-8 years old, including children in the pre-school grade, and to strengthen the ECE sub-sector successful?	1.1: What are the key policies, regulatory frameworks, tools, processes, and/or practices that were implemented with UNICEF support across sectors to expand access to opportunities for early stimulation and learning and to strengthen ECD programmes ECE sub-sector? **(descriptive)**
	1.2: To what extent is there policy coherence in the sectors that are responsible for providing ECD and ECE services? **(coherence)**
	1.3: To what extent do UNICEF-supported policies and practices align with national goals and the organizational commitment to progressively reach the poorest and most vulnerable children, including children with disabilities? **(relevance)**
	1.4: To what extent were UNICEF-supported strategies for public budgeting and financing of early childhood education been effective? **(effectiveness)**
Objective 2: Examine the efficacy of UNICEF integrated ECD approach and the adequacy of available capacities (core skills, tools, processes, partnerships, coordination mechanisms, and institutional arrangements) to support countries of different typologies in the adaption, acceleration, and scale-up efforts for providing early stimulation and learning support and services for different profiles of children from 0-8 years old, including children in the pre-school grade.	
Evaluation questions	**Sub-questions/evaluation criteria**
2. To what extent has the integrated ECD approach been instrumental in supporting countries to build capacities to adapt, accelerate, and scale-up its efforts to increase access to opportunities for early stimulation and learning, promote school readiness programmes, and to strengthen coordination across sectors to support holistic development of young children?	2.1: To what extent has the integrated ECD approach been effective in the efforts to increase access to opportunities for early stimulation and learning and promoting school readiness? **(effectiveness)**
	2.2: Does UNICEF have the necessary strategic tools, processes and coordination mechanisms for planning, adaptation, acceleration, and scaling-up efforts to increase access to opportunities for early stimulation and learning, promote school readiness, and to strengthen coordination across sectors to support holistic development of young children? **(internal coherence)**
	2.3: To what extent are UNICEF capacities to increase access to opportunities for early stimulation and learning and promote school readiness meeting the needs of children and caregivers? **(relevance)**
	2.4: Are UNICEF resources (financial and human) well positioned to accelerate and scale-up efforts to increase access to opportunities for early stimulation and learning and to strengthen ECD programmes and the ECE subsectors? Are the partnership arrangements strategic and efficient? **(efficiency)**
	2.5: What adjustments in their support or programming does UNICEF need to make towards strengthening provision of ECD/ECE services in various government departments/ministries? **(external coherence)**
	2.6: To what extent did UNICEF support or implement measures to enhance the sustainability and utility of the *key strategies, programmes, and/or interventions* aimed to expand access to opportunities for early stimulation and learning and *to strengthen the ECD/ECE*? **(sustainability)**
Objective 3: Evaluate UNICEF inputs and outcomes in supporting countries of different typologies to develop effective programmes to increase access to opportunities for early stimulation and learning for children from 0-8 years old, including children in the pre-school grade to achieve universal access to pre-primary (SDG 4.2), and to promote school readiness among children and caregivers.	
Evaluation questions	**Sub-questions/evaluation criteria**

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3. To what extent were programmes, supporting activities and strategies that UNICEF supported, advocated for, and/or implemented to promote access and advance learning in the early years (from 0-8 years old, including children in the pre-school grade,) and to promote school readiness successful?	3.1: What are the profiles of children who do not participate in formal early learning programmes and/or pre-primary school in countries of different typologies?[18]
	3.2 Do countries collect adequate, reliable, and actionable data on children's participation in early childhood education? **(descriptive)**
	3.3: What are the key strategies, programmes, activities and/or interventions that UNICEF has supported or implemented to (i) expand access to opportunities for early and stimulation learning and (ii) promote school readiness among children and caregivers? **(descriptive)**
	3.4: To what extent is there a shared vision and conceptual understanding within UNICEF and between UNICEF and government counterparts on (i) determinants of school readiness learning in the early years; and (ii) the efficacy of UNICEF-supported strategies to expand access to opportunities for early stimulation and learning in different country contexts, and for different profiles of children **(internal coherence)**
	3.5: To what extent were UNICEF-supported strategies effective in (i) expanding access to opportunities for early stimulation and learning and, (ii) promoting school readiness for different profiles of children, and among caregivers? **(effectiveness)**

30. Evaluation questions are intended to contribute cumulatively to the overall outcome level question (stipulated in Paragraph 29 above). They will be refined at two levels. First, evaluators will use their expertise, knowledge of ECD and the ECE sub-sector, and insights from the preliminary review of UNICEF documents during the inception phase to propose the final set of questions, as well as to confirm the scope of the evaluation. Second, the evaluation methodology indicates that theme-based evaluative case studies will be undertaken (see Section VI, Paragraph 41b), hence delimiting the scope of each evaluative case study and customization of the evaluation questions to the theme of each case study may be required.

31. Evaluators are required to provide a clear justification for any replacements or additions to the key evaluation questions as such changes could modify the scope of the evaluation could jeopardize its feasibility within the given budget and timeframe. Final decisions regarding the key questions, areas of inquiry, and potential detailed sub-questions, will be taken in the inception phase, based on the following principles:
   a. Importance and demand/priority: the information should be of a high level of importance for the various intended audiences of the evaluation.
   b. Utility: whether or not the answer to the question is already known, and/or obvious. There should be a clear need for additional evidence to inform decisions, notably in relation to the mid-term review UNICEF Strategic Plan, the mid-term review of the Education Strategy (2019-2030), or country office that will be selected to host the data collection mission, processes such as development of CPDs, conducting CPEs and other strategic documents and guidance in the ECD/ECE sub-sector.
   c. Evaluability and timeliness: whether questions can be answered using available resources (budget, personnel) and within the given timeframe; data and key informants are likely to be available and accessible, and performance standards or benchmarks exist to answer the questions and formulate an evaluative judgment.
   d. Actionability: whether the questions will provide information that can lead to strategic and SMART[19] recommendations.

32. **Related evidence generation initiatives:** UNICEF Offices at all levels commission research studies as part of their evidence generation efforts (e.g., the Gender Transformative Pre-primary Education and the Bright Futures series by the Global Office of Research and Foresight). These resources should be considered in confirming the thematic scope of the evaluation to avoid duplication of existing evidence.

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[18] A compilation of *country profiles on early childhood development education* was first published in 2018, from a collaboration between Countdown to 2030 for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health, UNICEF, and WHO. The 197 country profiles offer indicators on the five components of nurturing care, developed from administrative data on various national databases and publicly available global databases

[19] Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound

33.   The key elements of the methodology that are presented below are the evaluation approach, evaluation design and methods, and evaluation phases, which offers a step-by-step description of the proposed process (i.e., data collection and data analysis methods, reporting, and validation of key findings and recommendations). The section also offers the limitations of the evaluation and perceived mitigation strategies.

Evaluation approach

34.   The evaluation will adopt a **theory-based design** to trace UNICEF contribution towards expanding opportunities for early stimulation and learning, strengthening the education system to achieve universal access to pre-school, and to promote children's developmental readiness for school. In this approach, a theory of change will be used as an evaluation tool – to interrogate and/or verify whether the necessary inputs were made, outputs realized, and the extent to which the intended outcomes were achieved. Originally posited by Kagan and Gomez (2015) for ECCE[20] systems and expanded and further refined by Kagan 2019,[21] a draft theory of change of UNICEF work in ECD/ECE and the corresponding narrative was adapted for this evaluation. It is presented in Annex 2.

35.   The **evaluation theory of change[22]** will be used to analyse how UNICEF inputs (tools, supporting activities, capacities, resources, systems, coordination mechanisms) have been translated into implementation strategies and outputs, and the extent to which UNICEF commitments in the Strategic Plan (2018-2021 and 2022-20250 were understood and used by UNICEF offices to support countries. The evaluation will also assess the extent to which the underlying assumptions supporting the theory of change hold true in different country and programming contexts. The evaluation theory of change will undergo further refinement and validation with a cross-sectoral group of programme specialists and ECD/ECE (e.g., preferably from countries selected for in-country data collection). The evaluation team anticipates that patterns will emerge across countries selected to participate in the evaluation, which will provide the confidence level about the veracity of the proposed theory of change as a good representation of the results chain at the country level, and of the contribution that UNICEF has made to the results.

36.   In term of process, a **contribution analysis approach[23]** is proposed, to examine the elements of the theory of change - how UNICEF inputs were converted to results (i.e., outputs and possibly intermediate outcomes). Contribution analysis explicitly addresses the issue of attribution, which is typically a challenge in multi-actor contexts where it is difficult to identify whether particular interventions or inputs from a particular actor contributed to a result and/or outcome. Adapted from Mayne[24] and modified for the evaluation, the steps to be followed in contribution analysis are presented in Figure 5 and explained in more detail in Annex 3.

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[20] For purposes of this evaluation, ECCE and ECD/ECE will be used interchangeably….
[21] Kagan, S. Ed. (2019) The early advantage 2: building systems that work for young children
[22] A draft theory of change was developed for the purposes of guiding the evaluation inquiry. However, the evaluation team will seek out theories of change that were developed by the ECD/ECE programme teams, including respective theories of change that guide implementation at the country level
[23] https://nonprofitbuilder.org/storage/377/Contribution-analysis-An-approach-to-exploring-cause-and-effect-ILAC.pdf
[24] Mayne, J. (2012). Contribution analysis: Coming of age? *Evaluation*, *18*(3), 270-280.

Figure 5: Contribution analysis process
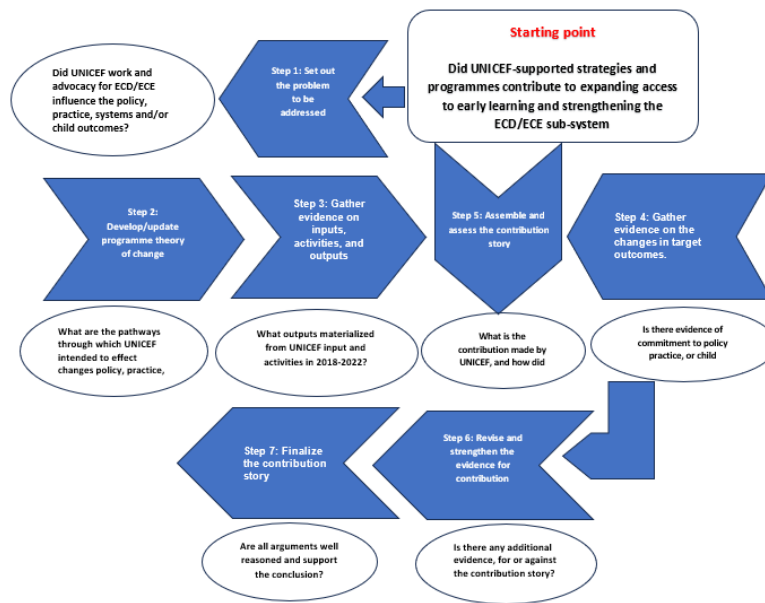
Adapted from Mayne (2012)

37. Contribution analysis addresses the challenge of attribution by searching for a **plausible association** between inputs and outcomes by constructing **a story of influence or contribution,** as evaluators make their judgements, ***for each the normative sub-questions*** in Table 2. The evaluation does not aim to prove causality, but rather to identify a body of evidence that can provide defensible findings about UNICEF contribution to effectiveness in expanding access to opportunities for early stimulation and learning, or the lack thereof.

Evaluation design and methods

38. This will be a ***non-experimental, mixed methods evaluation***, featuring four data collection methods as follows: (i) **desk-based review of** UNICEF documents and data collected from the global, regional and country levels and secondary analyses of existing data sets;[25] (ii) guided self-assessments of the ECD/ECE system against a proposed set of inputs, outputs, and the characterization of the progress made towards universal access to ECD and ECE and school readiness in up to 4 countries (out of 15 selected for the desk-review phase); (iii) **in-country primary data collection missions** in same 4 countries - featuring key informant interviews with UNICEF staff, government counterparts, and different type of partners (e.g., Implementing Partners, key education sector technical partners, donor partners) and, (iv) administration of an **online survey of emerging findings (modified Delphi survey)** to all UNICEF country offices, <u>OR</u> 2-3 focus group discussions (FGDs) with a representative sample of ECD/ECE country teams. The survey/FGDs will be used as an additional opportunity to collect additional data to strengthen the evidence, as well as an exercise to **validate key findings and preliminary recommendations.** The final set of conclusions and recommendations will be triangulated from all these sources.

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[25] The evaluation is expected to conduct a secondary analysis of data on ECD/ECE profiles and to the extent possible, update the profiles for participating countries, and MICS 7 datasets where feasible.

Evaluation process and phases

39.   The evaluation will occur in four phases (i) inception; (ii) desk-based document review and analysis; (iii) field-based data collection; and, (iv) data analysis, reporting and communication of evaluation results. This section offers a proposal for evaluation approach, and evaluation process (see Section XII on how to apply).[26]

40.   **Phase 1-Inception:** The inception face will feature five activities, as described below:
   a.   Search, compile and conduct a preliminary review of UNICEF documents and academic and grey literature: This activity is meant to deepen the understanding of the context of UNICEF ECD/ECE programming, and to develop a succinct synthesis of the global context and UNICEF role in early childhood care and education.
   b.   Conduct a systematic stakeholder analysis: Concurrent with compilation of documents, key groups of stakeholders will be identified (i.e., UNICEF staff members, consultants, international NGO partners, cluster members/partners, donors, researchers/consultancies and other independents subject matter experts, etc.), and a stakeholder analysis will be conducted to determine the role of each key stakeholder and inputs in ECD/ECE, and in the evaluation process. Groups of stakeholders will be judged on three parameters: (i) interest and involvement in ECD/ECE work; (ii) influence/power that they exercise in major decisions about UNICEF work and, (iii) involvement of the stakeholder in the evaluation and expected impact of their involvement. Based on the stakeholder analysis, the evaluation team will articulate an approach for engagement and management of the different stakeholder groups, to be used by the evaluation manager and the evaluation team. ***The stakeholder engagement strategy should be included as an annex of the inception report.***
   c.   Compilation of all elements of the inception report and submission: The inception report will include (i) revised evaluation questions (improved from the ToR version and informed by users as necessary) presented in an evaluation matrix; (ii) expand on the methodology featuring a confirmation of countries to be included in the desk-based review (approximately 15), based on a well-articulated sampling strategy; (iii) a proposal for the case study approach (thematic, country-based, or both), avoiding undue duplication with on-going and/or planned evaluations and/or research studies; and, (iv) draft evaluation tools for piloting. A more detailed outline for the inception report is provided in Section X (Paragraph. 62).
   d.   Convene a 1-day inception workshop: After circulating the draft inception report to the primary users, the evaluation manager will convene a virtual workshop to provide an opportunity for interaction between the evaluation team and the primary users, namely ECD and education teams in New York, and to the extent possible, the counterpart in country offices sampled for in-depth case studies. The focus of the workshop will be to validate evaluation questions, discuss the scope of the evaluation and key technical elements, and to communicate/manage expectations of the primary users. The inception workshop will also be used to familiarize the evaluation team with UNICEF standards, processes, and tools, clarify UNICEF expectations and contractual provisions, and to refine the work plan.
   e.   Presentation to the meeting of the Evaluation Reference Group, and revision of the inception report: The final activity of the inception phase will be to submit and present the inception report to the reference group. The evaluation team will produce a revised inception report, after consideration of the advice of the reference group.

41.   **Phase 2-Desk-based document review and country self-assessments:** This phase will be data collection from secondary sources, featuring three activities:
   a.   Comprehensive search and compilation of documents from 15 country offices selected for the desk-based document review: Continuing from the search described in the inception phase, relevant UNICEF

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[26] Evaluation consultants are invited to interrogate the evaluation approach, refine it and/or update the approach where necessary, anticipate threats to the validity of findings and to demonstrate an approach to mitigation those threats

documentation from the global and regional levels, will be collected. These will include work plans, corporate policies, strategies, programme guidance, position papers, inter-agency and global education cluster documents, studies, reviews and evaluations from UNICEF and other organizations. From the country offices which will be a focus of the desk-based review, the team will collect planning and programming documents; situation reports (SitRep); needs assessments; surveys and statistics; donor proposals and reports; field monitoring reports from UNICEF and partners; country audits and financial data; data and reports. A significant amount of data is readily available from existing UNICEF and non-UNICEF databases. *These must also be reviewed before any requests for data can be made to UNICEF country office staff, government counterparts, or any other key informants*.

b. <u>Conduct a detailed desk-based document review and analysis and light-touch country self-assessments</u>: The focus of this activity is to review and analyse secondary data and other documentary evidence, and data from 15 selected countries. Task for this activity are to: (i) pre-populate the evaluation matrix for the 15 desk review countries; (ii) execute self-assessments by the ECD/Education teams in the countries that will selected for field-based data collection (using and existing/adapted self-assessment tools) to ensure that the evaluators understand the context and the ECD/ECE programmes fully and refine the methodology for the theme-based case studies accordingly; (iii) refine data collection and data analysis tools for Phase 3; and, (iv) orient and inform countries that will be asked to participate in the evaluative case studies and host primary data collection missions.

c. <u>Drafting and submission of the document review report</u>: To be ***reviewed only by the evaluation manager***, the desk review report should present an updated chapter of the global context and UNICEF role in ECD/ECE, with an updated methodology section, and a 3-page summary on the context of each of the 15 countries featured in the desk-based review, confirm the ***themes for the evaluative case studies*** (2-3 themes). The format for this report is discussed in Section X (Paragraph 63) of these terms of reference.

42. **Phase 3: Primary data collection:** The activities proposed for this phase are presented below. However, evaluation consultants are free to augment or propose alternatives data collection approaches.

a. <u>In depth interviews with key informants at the global and regional level</u>: Using the stakeholder analysis generated in Phase 1, a list of key informants will be updated by the evaluation team, in conjunction with the evaluation manager, UNICEF staff, and members of the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG). Primary data will then be collected through key informant interviews, in part to answer a subset of questions for which these informants will be the primary sources, and also to triangulate and/or corroborate some of the data from the desk-based review.

b. <u>In-country visits</u>: Field visits will be undertaken in a subset of countries that were designated for theme-based evaluative case studies (3 or 4 of the 15 countries, depending on the budget), also for the purpose of collecting primary data. The duration for each visit will be up to 10 working days. Each field visit will commence with a briefing meeting with UNICEF country office education teams, where the 3-page summary about the country context can be shared and subjected for review by the country office. Field-based data collection methods will include validation of the self-assessment, a country level stakeholder analysis, field observations, key informant interviews for UNICEF staff and implementing partners, as well as interviews and/or focus groups for beneficiaries. It is recommended to pilot the methodology and data collection tools during the first field mission before proceeding to subsequent missions. Two debriefing meetings will be conducted, one with the UNICEF country office, and another with interested evaluation participants to present key observations from the field missions, and where feasible, preliminary findings. The debriefing meeting will also be used as an opportunity to fill data gaps, and/or correct the record on factual information, were necessary.

43. **Phase 4 - Data analysis and reporting:** The activities proposed for this phase are presented below. However, evaluation consultants are free to augment or propose alternatives data analysis and reporting approaches.

a. <u>Updating the data analysis plan:</u> Accuracy, triangulation and disaggregation of data will be of crucial importance for the comprehensiveness, usefulness and credibility of the evaluation findings. hence data analysis and interpretation methods proffered in the earlier stages will be updated accordingly. Also, the evaluation will seek to identify contextual and structural/systemic factors explaining the evaluation findings – supporting or impeding performance of UNICEF. Some of the bottlenecks may relate to corporate characteristics, system-wide processes and cross-sectoral issues that lie beyond the education sector. These need to be listed but not examined in great depth.

b. <u>Drafting and submission extended outline (zero draft):</u> The data phase will conclude with the submission of an extended outline as described in Section X (Paragraphs 64 and 65), which will be a mock-up of the final report, and if possible, a collection of insights and/or preliminary findings from the field visits, which will be subjected to more systematic and comprehensive analysis.

c. <u>Confirmatory online survey of findings</u>: At the reporting stage, a single round of an online survey using the Delphi methodology, or a comparable technique will be executed to validate preliminary findings, and to establish the extent to which there is consensus and/or generalizability of findings across UNICEF offices. ***All UNICEF country and regional offices will be included*** (approximately 150 offices, which makes this a census approach). Delivered online, the survey will be addressed to the Education/ECD Specialist who will be requested to complete it, ideally with inputs from other programme leads. Each country office will be asked to return only one completed questionnaire.

d. <u>Drafting and submission final report:</u> Based on the outline in Section X (Paragraph 66), the report will be presented in four drafts (completed first draft, revised draft, penultimate draft, and final report). The first draft will be reviewed by the evaluation manager and second reader within the Goal Area 2/5 team, while the revised draft will be presented to ERG for review. To be submitted for clearance by the Director, the penultimate draft should incorporate feedback from the ERG. The final draft will be submitted for copyediting and publishing.

Limitations of the methodology

44. **Limited evaluability:** One of the typical challenges in evaluations that span a relatively wide timeframe is the availability of data and institutional memory. Evaluability issues are particularly likely to occur in emergency settings that are characterized by quick and sometimes undocumented strategies and decision-making, simplified reporting requirements, and rapid turn-over of staff. In cases where UNICEF data are not readily available for review, the evaluation team is invited to generate new evidence through interviews and field observations, make best use of the broader knowledge base outside UNICEF, and make credible, substantiated estimations/inferences when necessary.

45. Related to the point above, availability of staff and partners and lack of readiness to participate in the evaluation should be anticipated, due to heavy workloads, as well involvement in other evaluations and audits – particularly in the emergency countries targeted by this evaluation. A determined effort should be made to conduct a systematic stakeholder analysis and develop a stakeholder management strategy, which includes communicating evaluation objectives, purpose, scope and evaluation processes adequately. Part of the effort in management stakeholder perceptions is adequate preparation of evaluation team members, and a demonstration of adequate knowledge of the context and the issues that are important to evaluation informants.

46. **Generalizability of findings and conclusions:** As is the case with most global level evaluations, it will not be advisable to draw far-reaching conclusions from a limited evidence base, and non-representative sample of countries. However, the evaluation team is expected to rely, to the extent possible, on data collection and analysis methods and tools that have already been tested and validated by experience, and to provide forethoughts on profiles of countries that each of the case studies may garner lessons for.

VII.   Risk management and ethical issues

47.   Ethical concerns: The evaluation will undergo independent ethical review during the inception. Also, evaluation team members will also be asked to sign a number of individual statements/commitments on ethical standards for evaluations and on protection and sexual exploitation and abuse. Also, the **evaluation team is invited to identify anticipated ethical issues** throughout the evaluation project as well as the measures and methods adopted to mitigate them.

48.   Adherence to the *"do no harm"* principle is required when evaluators interact with all groups of informants. Special attention should be paid when interacting with children and young people. Also, standard protocols of obtaining informed consent and assent and/or other relevant protections should be followed and recorded in the final evaluation report. Relevant guidance from the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) and UNICEF are available online: UNEG Ethical guidelines for evaluations, UNEG Code of conduct for Evaluation in the UN System, UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards.

VIII.   Composition of the evaluation team

49.   The evaluation will be carried out by a team of experts that have experience and capacities to execute a global evaluation effort, comprising of a team leader, two evaluators, two researchers, and national consultants recruited from each of the 4 countries that will be asked to host a field data collection mission. The evaluation team will be composed with individuals who meet the requirements below.

50.   **Team leader:** Attributes listed in **a** through **f**, are *required* for team leader role, while **g** will be considered an added advantage.
   a. Strong skills and expertise in evaluation theory and conceptual frameworks
   b. Comprehensive evaluation experience as team leader in evaluations of education or ECD programmes implemented in various contexts, including countries implementing humanitarian programmes, or countries characterized by fragility
   c. Previous experience in conducting global evaluations and/or research a multi-country assignment, particularly in programme countries
   d. Readiness to travel to countries selected for primary data collection, and to undertake domestic travel in the country
   e. Familiarity and satisfactory experience executing a contract with UNICEF evaluation (at any level) is an added advantage
   f. Excellent level of English (oral communication, reading documents, writing complex reports).
   g. Functional proficiency in Arabic, French, and/or Spanish will be an asset.

51. **Team members (ECD and ECE Specialists):** The evaluation team will include two other evaluators, one of which will be and ECD specialist, and the other an ECE specialist. Key qualifications and experience of the ECD and ECE Specialists will be as follows:
   a. Master's degree in education or social sciences, with a specialization in early childhood development or early childhood education, or a related field (e.g., developmental psychology).
   a. Practitioner as a subject matter expert in early child development or early childhood education, with a minimum of 8 years post-qualification work experience
   b. Technical expertise in high-level and high-quality programme and/or significant experience in conducting evaluations of education or ECD programmes implemented in various contexts, including countries implementing humanitarian programmes, or countries characterized by fragility

c. Good knowledge of UNICEF programming strategies, field work, procedures and organizational culture (prior UNICEF employment experience should be declared to enable assessment of possible conflicts of interest)
d. Strong qualifications in quantitative and qualitative data collection methods and analysis
h. Readiness to travel to the countries selected for primary data collection, and to undertake domestic travel in the country
e.
f. Fluency in English (oral communication, reading complex documents, writing reports)
g. Functional proficiency in Arabic, French, and/or Spanish

52. **National consultants:** Working under the supervision of EO and the evaluation team leader, and the purview of the case study leader, the main attribute of each of the national consultants will be their knowledge and experience of the education sector in the country where they are recruited. Key qualifications and experience of each of the national consultants are as follows:
   a. Master's degree in education or social sciences, with a specialization in early childhood development or early childhood education, or a related field (e.g., developmental psychology), and a minimum of 8 years post-qualification work experience
   b. Experience working in the public sector and understanding the history and key developments of the education sector and/or ECD, and the Sustainable Development Goals.
   c. Knowledge of the key actors in ECD and the Education sector, private ECD/ECE providers, and other actors in ECD, Education sector, or ECE sub-sector (e.g., Government officials/employees at national, district or local level, NGOs/CBOs participating in the education sector, etc.)
   d. Familiarity with UNICEF education and/or ECD programming in the country, including experience in research/evaluation of education in emergencies if the country is implementing a humanitarian programme
   e. Experience in qualitative data collection, and interpreting qualitative data
   f. Strong communication skills, verbal and written, and organizational skills
   g. Fluency in one or more of the national languages, and the ability to conduct interviews/FGDs in one or more national languages
   h. Fluency in English (written and spoken)

53. **Researchers:** The two researchers should have the skills that are outlined in a-d below. One of the two researchers will also act as the assistant to the team leader, providing support on the day-to-day management of the project and logistics (e and f).
   a. Research, data analysis, and data presentation/display skills
   b. Strong skills in quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis
   c. Fluency in English (oral communication, reading complex documents, writing reports)
   d. Functional proficiency in Arabic, French, and/or Spanish
   e. Excellent organization, consistency, deadline keeping and follow-up; and,
   f. Strong communication /people /team coordination skills.

54. Former UNICEF staff or consultants that have worked on education and/or ECD programmes may be members of the evaluation team if they meet the technical qualifications for skills. However, any prior involvement with UNICEF should be declared during the bidding/contracting stages so that prospective team can be vetted and cleared of possible conflicts of interest.

55. The duration for the evaluation team is estimated at 9 months, from January to September 2024. Evaluation consultants should propose the total level of effort (in person days), that they will contribute in executing of the evaluation, based on the responsibilities of the position they are seeking, and follow the rest of the guidance provided in **Section XII** in their application process. However, the person days allocated to each team member will

be finalized once the core team has been assembled, depending on each member's role, responsibilities, and accountabilities.

56. **The evaluation team**: The evaluation will be executed by a team of evaluation professionals/practitioners with extensive experience in the evaluation international development programmes. The evaluation team will be external to the Evaluation Office, *but not independent from the EO since all deliverables will be issued by the Director, Evaluation Office.* However, the UNICEF Evaluation Policy guarantees the independence and autonomy of evaluation team in formulation finding and conclusions, as well as independence from the rest of the organization whose strategies and actions will be evaluated.

57. **Responsibilities of the evaluation team:** The evaluation team will be responsible for conducting the evaluation as described in these terms of reference and in their proposal. The evaluation team leader, in particular, will be expected to discharge of the following responsibilities:
   a. In conjunction with the evaluation manager, develop a realistic work plan for the evaluation and meet deadlines for all activities
   b. Execute the evaluation to respond to the questions stipulated in the terms of reference (or subsequent revisions of the evaluation questions as stipulated in the inception report)
   c. Provide technical oversight of the evaluation team, including orienting and training of team members, and local consultants where necessary;
   d. Quality assurance, including ensuring the comprehensiveness of all data collected and deliverables before submission to the UNICEF Evaluation Office, reviewing and harmonizing their format and content, and mobilizing a dedicated quality assurance person or team (senior evaluation subject matter expert not involved in data collection and report drafting) for an additional quality review.
   e. Provide written responses to comments from the reference group, and update report accordingly. A detailed comment matrix will accompany all versions of the key deliverables, describing whether and how earlier comments received have been incorporated, and when they have not been fully included, providing an appropriate justification.
   f. Co-leading the authorship of the deliverables. The team leader will work closely with the UNICEF Evaluation Manager responsible for reviewing and finalizing the evaluation report for publication. The team leader will source and work with a "details oriented" editor able to deliver on UNICEF standards, e.g., a fully proof-read draft report with no evidence of duplication, gaps or disharmony. This should not be a duplicate role for an existing team member.
   g. Designing and facilitating of the final workshop.
   h. Provide regular progress reports to the evaluation manager and manage communications with UNICEF.

58. **Evaluation management:** The evaluation will be managed from the Evaluation Office, by an Evaluation Specialist, who will assume the role of an evaluation manager and *provide conceptual inputs into all aspects of the evaluation (approach and methodology).* The Evaluation Manager will also have responsibility to:
   a. Co-ordinate and manage all activities of the evaluation and its execution.
   b. Be the liaison between the evaluation team and the client section (i.e., Education, ECE and/or ECD Specialists), and provide periodical updates on the execution of the evaluation
   c. Provide oversight and guidance to the evaluation team on UNICEF requirements and standards for evaluative work; and,
   d. Organise and facilitate conference calls with the evaluation team at least every two weeks
   e. Facilitate access to UNICEF data as well as communications and meetings between the evaluation team, the various stakeholders in HQ as well as in the regional and country offices, and the ERG

f. Provide technical input and make final decision regarding the scope, design, methodology, and content of the evaluation, as well as recommendations
g. Provide a first quality review of all evaluation tools and deliverables presented by the evaluation team before they are submitted to the ERG; one to two rounds of comments are to be expected from the evaluation manager and the ERG, depending on the quality of the first draft
h. Approve all final versions of the respective reports
i. Oversee the production of the publishing-ready versions of the reports for issuing by the Director, Evaluation Office.

59. **The Evaluation Reference Group** (ERG): For proper governance of the evaluation, a 13-member Evaluation Reference Group will be appointed by the Director (Evaluation Office) or his designee, to provide expert advice during the evaluation. The Evaluation Reference Group will be constituted as follows:
a. Chairperson, to be provided by the Evaluation Office
b. Four UNICEF staff from HQ and regional offices (e.g., ECD/ECE Specialist, Regional ECD/ECE advisors or their designees)
c. Four UNICEF staff, selected from COs that participated in the evaluation as case studies
d. Three participants that are external to UNICEF - from partner organizations notable academic and/or professional practice in ECD/ECE
e. The evaluation manager from EO, serving as the secretariat for the ERG.

60. **Responsibilities of the Evaluation Reference Group** will be as follows:
a. Participate in the key meetings (remotely or in-person) with the evaluation team during the inception phase and as the evaluation nears completion
b. Facilitate the communication and coordination between their respective section/division/areas of influence and the evaluation team, including gathering inputs to incorporate in draft reports
c. Review all key deliverables (incl. draft inception and final reports) and provide advice
d. Participate in workshop to validate evaluation findings and recommendations (selected members of the ERG)
e. Advise on and support the implementation of the communication and dissemination plan for the evaluation, incl. by suggesting/supporting relevant dissemination events
f. Advise on the management response to the evaluation and ensure that it fully takes on board the findings and recommendations.

X.   Evaluation products and deliverables

61. The evaluation will yield several products: (i) an inception report; (ii); a compilation of summaries from the desk-based document review synthesis for participating countries; (iii) Extended outline (zero draft of the final report); (iv) final report for the evaluation report; and (v) a PowerPoint presentation for the final report (vi) live data and diagrams to be used for publication; outlines and descriptions of each evaluation products proffered in this section are meant to be indicative[27]. The proposed timeframe and expected products will be codified through the inception process.

62. <u>Inception report:</u> The inception report will be instrumental in confirming a common understanding of what is to be evaluated, including additional insights into executing the evaluation. Evaluators will refine and confirm evaluation questions, confirm the scope of the evaluation, further improve on the methodology proposed in the ToR technical proposal to improve its rigor, as well as develop and validate evaluation instruments. The report will include, *inter alia*,

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[27] Proposers are welcome to modify the structure of each deliverable to enhance their coverage and clarity. However, products are expected to conform to the stipulated number of pages, where that applies.

a. Brief summary of the global context for ECD/ECE based on SDG 4 commitments, and UNICEF positioning in the ECD/ECE ecosystem and key initiatives that UNICEF implements/supports in pursuit of SDG Target 4.2

b. Evaluation purpose and scope – confirmation of objectives and topics/themes/areas of inquiry

c. Evaluation criteria and questions – final set of evaluation questions, and evaluation criteria for assessing UNICEF performance

d. Evaluation methodology – stakeholder analysis; a description of data collection methods and data sources; draft data collection instruments; an evaluation matrix that identifies criteria for evaluating evidence; data sources for each evaluation question; the estimated sample size; data collection methods; data analysis plan and data display approach (graph tables, etc); a discussion on how to enhance the reliability and validity of evaluation conclusions; the field visit approach, a description of the quality review process[28]; and, a discussion on the limitations of the methodology

e. Structure for the desk review report

f. Evaluation work plan and timeline – a revised work and travel plan

g. Resources requirements – detailed budget allocations, tied to evaluation activities, work plan, deliverables; and,

h. Key annexes, to be discussed with evaluation manager during the drafting of the report.

The inception report is a deliverable of the evaluation, to be presented at a formal meeting of the reference group, the inception report will be 20 - 25 pages in length (excluding annexes).

63. <u>A compilation of summaries from the desk-based document review and analysis for the 15 participating countries, to be submitted for use in the evaluation:</u> While some narrative, presented as annexes, most elements of this report will be presented in a PowerPoint slides. The report will be packages as follows:

a. **PowerPoint presentation only:** For the desk review countries that will not asked to host a field visit, the PowerPoint presentation will highlight (i) the ECD/ECE context for each of countries; (ii) summary of findings of the self-assessments carried by each country; and (iii) conclusions that correspond to the key evaluation questions.

b. Annex 1: For the **3-4** desk review countries that are also **designated for theme-based case studies;** (i) a narrative on the context of ECD/ECE programming for each country; (ii) the case-study approach, describing the rationale for the selected theme *vis-à-vis* the outcome level question, the purpose, and questions for the case study; (ii) data collection methods and data analysis plan; (iii) updated data collection and analysis tools; and, (iv) updated outline for the theme-based case study reports;

64. <u>Extended outline (zero draft of the final report):</u> At the conclusion of all data collection activities, the evaluation team should prepare and submit a zero draft, essentially a mock-up of the final report, to be reviewed only by the evaluation manager for quality control. The version should present the following:

a. Complete chapter 1 of the evaluation, covering the global context and ECD/ECE programmes in UNICEF

b. Completed approach/methodology chapter

c. Extended outline for the subsequent 'findings' chapters, indicating tables and figures that will be used

d. Extended outline or preliminary conclusion and recommendations; and,

e. Annex 2: Populated evaluation matrix that indicates data sources for each evaluation question, the sample size, data collection methods, data analysis and data display approach (graph tables, etc);

The extended outline (draft zero) is a deliverable of the evaluation.

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[28] UNICEF has instituted the Global Evaluation Report Oversight System (GEROS), a system where final evaluation reports are quality-assessed by an external independent company against UNICEF/UNEG standards for evaluation reports. The evaluation team is expected to reflect on and conform to these standards as they write their report. The team may choose to share a self-assessment based on the GEROS with the evaluation manager.

65.   Summaries for the theme-based case studies, ***to be reformulated as policy briefs:*** The case study/mission leader in each country is responsible for developing a summary for the theme, which will be incorporated into the final report of the evaluation. Based on this indicative outline, the summaries will not exceed 12 pages, and will cover the following:
   a.   The first section, which presents a discussion of what the theme contributes to answering the outcome level question
   b.   A section which presents findings and conclusions, well substantiated by the data and evidence (to be further refined)
   c.   Final section, offering a discussion of conclusions, key messages, and lessons associated with each theme; and,
   d.   Two annexes, i.e., a list of people interviewed, and list of background materials used.
Policy briefs will be a deliverable of the evaluation.

66.   Final evaluation report: The final version of the report will not exceed 50 pages, **excluding** the executive summary and annexes. A complete draft report will include, but not limited to the following:
   a.   analysis of key issues in the ECD/ECE sub-sector (excerpted from the desk review report and desk-based case studies);
   b.   Assessment of the UNICEF contribution to education objectives and intended outcomes of ECD/ECE programmes
   c.   Evaluation findings and conclusions, well substantiated by the data and evidence, cross-referenced against evaluation themes and evaluation criteria;
   d.   A parsimonious set of actionable recommendations that correspond with evaluation conclusions, and a description of how they were validated; and,
   e.   Annexes (evaluation terms of reference; annotated description of methodology; data analysis framework, list of people interviewed, bibliography and list of background materials used, etc.).

67.   This report will be presented in four drafts (completed first draft, revised draft, penultimate draft, and final report). The first draft will be reviewed by the evaluation manager and second reader within the Goal Area 2/5 team, while the revised draft will be presented to ERG for review. To be submitted for clearance by the Director, the penultimate draft should incorporate feedback from the ERG. The final draft will be submitted for copyediting and publishing. **The revised draft and the final report are both deliverables of the evaluation**.

68.   PowerPoint presentation: Initially prepared and used by the evaluation team in their presentation to the reference group, a standalone PowerPoint will be submitted to the Evaluation Office as part of the evaluation deliverables.

69.   Data, live data tables and graphics will be submitted to the Evaluation Office as part of the evaluation deliverables, and to be utilized in the publication process.

70.   Reports will be prepared in English, according to the [UNICEF Style Book,](#) and UNICEF standards for evaluation reports as per GEROS[29] guidelines. The UNICEF Evaluation Office reserves the right to ensure the quality of products submitted by the external evaluation team and may request revisions until the product meets the quality standards as expressed by the Evaluation Office and codified in the inception report.

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[29] The Global Evaluation Report Oversight System (GEROS), is a system for independent quality review of final evaluation reports against UNICEF/UNEG standards for evaluation reports. The evaluation team is expected to reflect on and conform to these standards as they write their report. The team may choose to share a self-assessment based on the GEROS with the evaluation manager
 https://www.unicef.org/evaluation/files/GEROS_Handbook_FINAL_summary.pdf

71. In the event that the submitted deliverables do not conform to the requirements of the contract, (e.g., non-compliance with the norms and standards of UNEG and UNICEF for quality evaluation), or are delivered late or incomplete, without prejudice to any of its other rights and remedies, UNICEF can, at its option, take steps as stated under the General Terms and Conditions of Contract (Annex A, Paragraph 2.8).

XI. Indicative work plan, deliverables

Table 3: Indicative evaluation work plan and timeline

Activity	Timeline
Phase 1: Inception	
Activity 1: Document search and preparation for the inception meeting (virtual meeting)	Begin Jan. 2024 Weeks 1-2
Activity 2: Conducting stakeholder analysis, drafting and submission of the inception report	Weeks 3-4
Activity 3: Drafting and submission of the inception report, and conducting the inception workshop	Weeks 5-6
Activity 4: Presentation to the reference group, finalization of the *inception report (deliverable)*	Weeks 7-8
Phase 2: Desk-based document review	
Activity 5: Review of documentary evidence, secondary data, and populating the evaluation matrix	Weeks 9-10
Activity 6: Adapting tools to facilitate the execution of self-assessments education/ECD team(s) in the participating country office	Weeks 11-12
Activity 7: Conducting country self-assessments	Weeks 12-15
Activity 8: Drafting of the document review report including the updated methodology and data collection and analysis tools for Phase 3	Weeks 14-15
Activity 9: Finalizing and submission of desk-based review report and preparation for country visits	Weeks 15-16
Phase 3: Country based data collection	
Activity 10: Execution of country visits	Weeks 17-22
Activity 11: In depth interviews with key informants; preparing the online survey	Weeks 17-25
Phase 4: Data analysis, reporting, and communication of results	
Activity 12: Data analysis, and drafting and submission of the *extended outline (deliverable)*	Weeks 25-28
Activity 13: Executing the online survey	Weeks 28-30
Activity 14: Drafting of 12-page theme-based case study summaries	Weeks 31-33
Activity 15: Compilation and submission of the *global evaluation report (deliverable)*	Weeks 32-34
Activity 16: Presentation to the reference group, finalization of the global evaluation report, drafting of the evaluation summary PowerPoint	Weeks 35-36 End September 2024
Activity 17: Dissemination event in NYHQ and other dissemination activities	TBD

XII. How to apply

72. The evaluation team will be made up of a team leader, two evaluators, two researchers, and national consultants recruited from each of the 4 countries that will be hosting a field data collection mission. Each prospective evaluator or researcher should submit an application *as an individual.* The application packet should contain the following:
   (a) a letter of expression of interest, stipulating: (i) the specific role for which the applicant wishes to be considered; (ii) expertise in early childhood development and/or early childhood education; (iii) availability to undertake international duty travel; and, (iv) the level of effort (in person days) to be contributed towards each of the deliverables in Table 4, and the proposed remuneration fee;
   (b) updated CV/resume; and,
   (c) a writing sample (i.e., evaluation or research/study reports, etc.).

Table 4: Deliverables, level of effort, and fees

Deliverables	Number of days	Daily fee	Total fees
Deliverable 1: Inception report (see Paragraph 62)			
Deliverable 2: Extended outline and first drafts of global evaluation report and outlines for thematic summaries/policy briefs (see Paragraphs 64 and 65)			
Deliverable 4: Final global evaluation report (see Paragraphs 66 and 67)			
Deliverable 5: Final policy briefs (see Paragraph 65)			

73.   Team applications are encouraged, hence applicants are free to indicate the names of persons that they would like to team up with. However, ***all prospective team members should submit an individual application*** (as indicated in Paragraph 72 above), specific to the role they want to fill in the evaluation team.

74.   As reflected in the indicative work plan (Table 3 above), the evaluation has a timeline of approximately 36 weeks (9 months) from the beginning of the inception period to the submission of the final report. **Adequate effort should be allocated to all evaluation activities to ensure timely submission of all deliverables. Payment will be made only upon acceptance by UNICEF, of the work performed**, in accordance with fulfilment of agreed quality assurance standards, schedule of payment and/or contract milestones.

75.   Upon receipt of letters of expression of interest, the Evaluation Office will revert with instructions to each applicant inviting them to submit a technical task which will be used to assess the applicant's expertise/skill, vis-à-vis the role they wish to be considered for, and a proposed date and time to present the task to an assessment panel. Additional instructions will be issued for applicants who wish to be considered as a team.

76.   Other administrative processes such as travel missions and in-person meetings, accommodation, and incidental expenses will be planned with consultants, and discussed, agreed, and approved by the EO Evaluation Manager, in accordance with UNICEF rules and regulations governing such matters.

Annex 1: Summary of UNICEF supported ECD/ECE programmes, 2006-2021

Early childhood development was one of five organizational priorities that UNICEF identified from as early as 2002,[30] and through the two Medium-term Strategic Plans (MTSP, 2006-2009 and 2010-2013). During that period UNICEF implemented a number of programmes to promote school readiness. The actual commitment to ECD became more consistent from the period of Strategic Plan (2014-2017), as the organization answered the call to clarify its approach to early childhood development[31] and early childhood education and brought a more holistic focus on *early moments of life* and a more coherent approach anchored on the Nurturing Care Framework. Example of key UNICEF-supported programmes during this period are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of programmes for early learning and school readiness

Programme/ initiative	Implementation years	Description /objective
Community-based early learning	Ongoing	Provided training to teachers, parents/caregivers, health workers, and social workers; created new community spaces for learning and refurbished old ones; provide equipment, furniture, play kits, toys and other supplies; facilitated access to basic services such as water and sanitation, etc.
Home-based early learning	Ongoing, popular during the COVID-19 pandemic	Provided structured play, singing, games and other stimulation activities, carried out by the main caregiver (parent) at home, and guided by radio programmes. Parents/caregivers had access to a supply of equipment and materials, and periodic training in designated centres.
Child-to-child approaches to early learning	Pilot in 2008-2009 in Bangladesh, China, DRC), Ethiopia, Tajikistan, and Yemen.	Provided training for teachers, who in turn trained children in upper primary classes to facilitate home-based learning for their pre-school age siblings, building on the natural inclination of older children to care for and play with their younger siblings.
Mobile ECD centres for early learning	Ongoing, popular for ECD/ECE in emergencies	Provided ECD training for teachers, social and medical assistants, and parents, and equipped vehicles as mobile ECD centres. Also provided toys, play kits and learning materials.
School-based early learning		This was a big push to establish 'Grade 0' classes in primary schools (also known as kindergarten), to expose children to pre-literacy, motor and social skills in preparation for entering Grade 1.
Care for Child Development (CCD),	1990s, updated in 2012 – till present	To promote early learning and responsive caregiving and to strengthen early child development outcomes for young children in the first 5 years of life through integration into existing services in the health, nutrition, education, and child protection sectors.
Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS)[32]	2002 – till present in some countries	Statements describing expectations for behavior and performance across multiple dimensions of children's learning and development - to reflect what children should know and be able to do in the physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and language development domains, from birth to 8 years;
Home-grown standards for early learning and development.	From mid 2000s to the present	Developed through local public-private partnerships to articulate expectations or indicators of achievement for the 'school readiness system', and to be used to monitor school readiness at the different stages.

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[30] Operational Guidance Note for IECD, Medium-Term Strategic Plan (2002–2005). UNICEF, 2002

[31] The UNICEF medium-term strategic plan, 2006-2009. Investing in children: the UNICEF contribution to poverty reduction and the Millennium Summit agenda (UNICEF, 2005, para. 11)

[32]In 2014, 64 UNICEF countries offices reported that were supporting implementation in their countries, 18 of which were did not fall under the ELDS banner. 42 country offices were at various stages of the development of ELDS, while 50 countries had no ELDS activity.

UNICEF-supported programmes/activities, 2018-2021[33]

During the Strategic Plan 2018-2021 period, UNICEF global work on **ECD and ECE** was delivered through the "survive and thrive" and "every child learns" agenda for young children, which included advocacy, influencing of key *champions and stakeholders, and system strengthening in regular programming and emergency contexts. Broadly,* ECD and ECE programmes were packaged under three result areas - enabling policy environments, scaling up multisectoral ECD/ECE programme packages, and integrating ECD/ECE interventions in on-going humanitarian responses. Also, the COVID-19 crisis resulted in more than 167 million young children in 196 countries losing access to early childhood care and education services. Indicative programmes that were implemented with UNICEF support and funding from partners such as the GPE are featured in Box 1.

Box 1: *Additional examples of ECD/ECE programmes*

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1. **Policy advocacy and development**
   - Better Early Learning and Development at Scale (BELDS) pilot for an innovative consultative approach to strengthening national capacities to plan, cost and finance ECE programmes (e.g., the Education Development Strategy (2021–2024) **in Kyrgyzstan;** the ECE Policy Framework (2018–2021) finalized in **Ghana,** education sector analysis including in-depth consideration of access to and quality of ECE in **Lesotho;** Education Policy Charter *(Carta de Política Educativa)* and five-year Action Plan completed in **Sao Tome and Príncipe; and a**dditional pilots in Rwanda, Madagascar, Pacific Islands.
   - System strengthening support for policy, leadership and budget; and for the pre-primary teaching and learning environment.
2. **Service delivery**
   - **Care for Child Development package**
   - *Promoting Quality Learning Through Play* (2015-2018), enhancements to the Care for Child Development package to address context-specific needs and gaps identified in three countries (e.g., information on how to stimulate and communicate with children with developmental delays and disabilities and materials that facilitate the engagement with fathers and support their role in co-parenting in Paraguay; develop a *caring for the caregiver* module, featuring self-care, early stimulation, and psychosocial support for pregnant adolescent girls and vulnerable mothers, and practical activities to guide and promote play and quality interactions between caregivers and children, taking into account cultural and local practices in In **Mali** and **Sierra Leone**,
   - Accelerated School Readiness programme for preschool-aged children and early childhood development information provided for caregivers through radio and other communications materials (e.g., **Mozambique**)
   - Coverage of one-year pre-primary education in community-based early learning centres, and Expansion of school-based early learning centers, mostly to reach children in rural and remote areas who had no access to preschool education (e.g., **Azerbaijan and Nigeria)**
   - #Learningathome regional campaigns which provided parents with concrete examples of fun and creative learning activities to do with their young children while isolated at home (e.g., **Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe and Central Asia)**
   - *Every Child Can Read* initiative through reading corners in pre-primary classrooms and mobile libraries in remote areas (e.g., **Thailand**)
   - Training on positive parenting for early childhood development for ECE managerial and educational staff (10,474 individuals, undertook online and individual counselling sessions with parents/caregivers of young children aged 3–7 years (e.g., **Republic of Moldova**)
3. **ECD in emergencies and COVID-19 related interventions**
   - Learning materials for pre-primary schools and early childhood learning spaces to improve access to quality early childhood, including home-based learning kits (e.g., Belarus, Cabo Verde, Sri Lanka)
   - Interactive radio lessons and messages for pre-primary children, and short video lessons were developed for children aged 4–5 years old and delivered through mobile phones (e.g., Malawi and Ecuador)

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[33] In 79 UNICEF-supported countries, only 58 per cent of children received the early stimulation and responsive care that is critical to children's healthy development from parents and/or primary caregivers. In 73 countries covering 30 per cent of the world's children aged 3 to 4 years, UNICEF reported that only 71 per cent of children aged 24 to 59 months were developmentally on track in 2021. For that reason, UNICEF has continued to focus efforts on increasing the proportion of children who are developmentally on track, in terms of their health, psychosocial well- being, learning preparedness, and equipping parents and caregivers with the tools and support they need to give their children the best start in life.

Annex 2: Draft theory of change for the ECD/ECE evaluation

There is consensus in the field of education that systems, programmes and plans are most effective when developed through an inclusive, transparent process, guided by a theory of change and by contextual evidence to ensure they are responsive to needs in the national and local context.[34] Originally posited by Kagan and Gomez (2015) for ECCE systems, expanded and further refined for the Early Advantage study (Kagan 2019), further adaptation the theory of change for the evaluation of UNICEF work in ECD/ECE is proposed to guide the evaluation enquiry.

Draft evaluation theory of change for the ECD/ECE portfolio
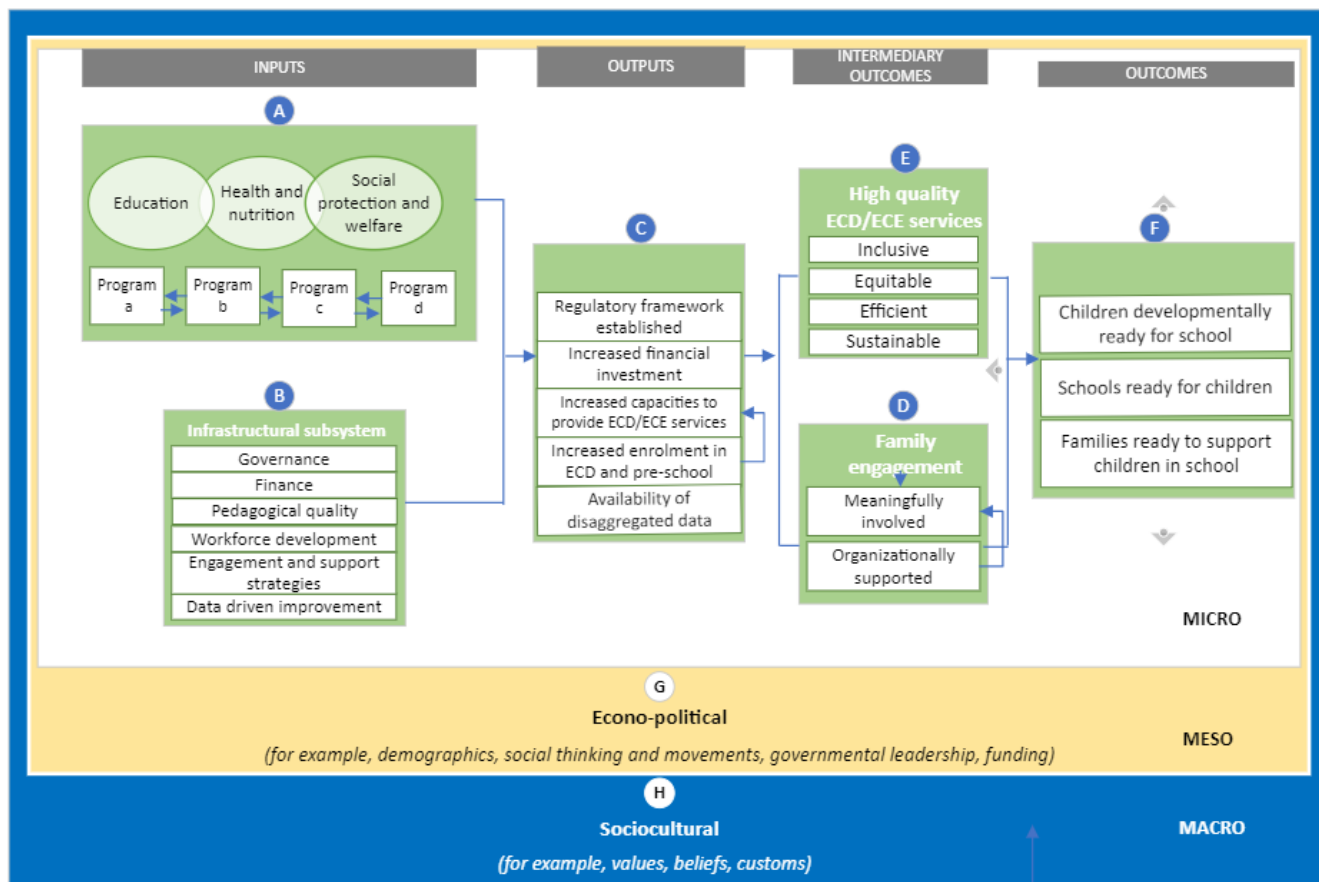
The theory of change suggests that when essential programs and services (A) are supported by an infrastructure subsystem and necessary *inputs* (B), the desired *outputs* (C) will be produced (i.e., establishment of regulatory frameworks, increased investment, capacities, expanded access participation/enrolment in ECD and pre-primary, etc.); *and* the *system will be strengthened* - i.e., produce high-quality, inclusive, equitably distributed, sustainable, and efficient services (E) and support family engagement (D), then *child and caregiver outcomes will improve*, namely, (a) children will be developmentally ready for school; (b) schools will be ready for children; and, (c) families will be ready to support the needs of children in school (F).

Econo-political (for example, demographics, social thinking and movements, governmental leadership, funding) and sociocultural (for example, values, beliefs, heritages, religions) contexts surround and heavily influence

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[34] Build to last: a framework in support of universal quality pre-primary education, UNICEF, 2020

implementation of the theory of change, hence their effect should be interrogated in the development and/or strengthening of ECD/ECE systems.

The draft theory of change is an attempt to articulate a functional pathway, defined boundaries, observable inputs, and achievable outputs and outcomes, hence its central tenets can be applied to both host systems for early stimulation and learning. The theory of change will guide the evaluation of key strategies that promote early stimulation and care and contribute to expanding access to early stimulation and learning for children of 0-8 years, and the achievement of universal pre-school. It will be used as an organizing framework to articulate the conceptual underpinnings of UNICEF-supported programmes for early stimulation and learning and to create a draft of compendium of programmes that are supported and implemented by UNICEF country offices.

Annex 3: Explanatory note on contribution Analysis

Contribution analysis will enable us to elaborate and validate the evaluation theory of change, its application at the country level), and its associated key assumptions, to assess the contribution of UNICEF work in expanding opportunities for early stimulation and learning, promoting school readiness, and strengthening of the ECD/ECE system. The evaluation will investigate whether policies and implementation strategies have influenced programme results and characterize the nature and scale of their contribution. To facilitate this analysis, contextual factors outside the control of UNICEF that influence the outcomes and change should be considered. By identifying and stripping back these possible rival explanations, the evaluation will be able to produce plausible and credible narratives about the effects and impacts on programmes, and to reveal UNICEF contribution to outcomes.

For each of the four normative questions, execute the following steps of the contribution analysis:

Step 1: Set out the contribution problem to be addressed: The starting point for the country contribution analysis. This involves identifying the contribution problem and examining what the context was before inputs were made and describing the observed change after the intervention, to determine whether UNICEF interventions contributed to change at country level. Given different country realities and needs, this may be different in each setting and therefore needs to be executed before the country work starts.

Step 2: Update and elaborate programme theory of change: Evaluators lead the effort to create or update the theory of change *for the programme*, (to be adopted from the **evaluation theory of change** in this case), which illustrates pathways through which UNICEF sought to influence change in planning for ECD/ECE programmes, their delivery and monitoring, and describing the results that were achieved.

Step 3: Gather evidence against key aspects of interest within the theories of change: In this step the evaluators collect evidence on inputs, activities, and outputs. This will be done in two phases; harvesting inputs, activities, and outputs during through a desk-based review, followed by in-country primary data collection from each of the four countries, which will seek to fill gaps in information.

Step 4: Assemble and assess the contribution narrative and possible challenges to it: Evaluators gather evidence of outcomes and impact. At the outcome level, this involves looking at whether there is strengthened commitment to policies, and examines whether interventions and strategies employed in ECD/ECE work have resulted in improved outcome level changes (e.g., enabling environment strengthened, scaling-up of effective ECD/ECE programmes, increased data and evidence for inclusive programming, etc.), and in child outcomes , mainly acquisition of pre-literary skills (age-appropriate language development, socio-emotional skills, motor skills, etc.).

Step 5: Gather additional evidence, and possible challenges to it: Evaluators assess the contribution story by comparing and contrasting the inputs over the period (Step 3) with the outcomes (Step 4) and making a considered assessment of the strength of the 'contribution story'. In essence this looks at the contribution story and whether there is sufficient and plausible evidence of a contribution, and/or rival explanations.

Step 6: Strengthen the evidence for contribution: Evaluators seek additional evidence that might back up the contribution story or otherwise explain the changes that have taken place. In this case the evaluators should also consider the evidence from the Delphi survey.

Step 7: Finalize the contribution story: Evaluators revise the contribution narratives and produce a logical, well-reasoned story for each of the nine (9) normative sub-questions.