



RESOURCE BRIEF: A REVIEW OF FRAMEWORKS FOR PROVIDING UNIVERSAL CHILDCARE SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AGED 0 TO 3 YEARS

ECDAN Knowledge Fellows
Program Project

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Abbreviations

ECD	early childhood development
ECDAN	Early Childhood Development Action Network
ECCE	early childhood care and education
EU	European Union
ILO	International Labor Organization
LMIC	low- and middle-income countries
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund



Executive Summary

Access to high-quality and affordable universal childcare increases the survival of children and the well-being of parents in all economies. A universal care framework in this research assumes a definition of care guidelines, with references to existing frameworks. The development of this care framework is premised on the idea that standard care for young children 0 to 3 years old should be accessible to all children and parents regardless of their cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.¹ Early childhood development programming at the Early Childhood Development Action Network (ECDAN) focuses on this early age group. These children require stable caregiving and a stimulating environment to thrive.

This framework is intended to facilitate the well-being of parents through ensuring that they have the autonomy to work and recognize the safety, health status, and preprimary school readiness of their children. The ECDAN programming to invest in children 0 to 3 years old aligns well with this framework and promotes continuity for children beyond 3 years old. However, a landscape analysis and critique of the current standard frameworks on childcare postulates four emergent thematic areas that are phrased as questions: (1) What is the current view of the childcare ecosystem regarding gender and the burden of care? (2) Do existing policy frameworks on caregiving support the well-being of parents and family members? (3) To what extent has access to childcare impacted labor and economic ecosystems? And (4), to what extent has childcare promoted early learning and development in young children 0 to 3 years old?

Synthesizing over 34 global literature resources, the review shows that formal childcare addresses neither all the needs of children nor that of parents. This claim is true even when the care provision meet what we term internationally recognized “quality” standards. Factors such as family preferences and circumstances have the likelihood to influence the need for formal childcare. Results from the reviewed sources reveal little evidence about the distinct role of stakeholders in expanding options for childcare provision. Key stakeholders identified as the target audience for this research include governments, employers, care providers, the private sector, nongovernmental organizations, and local advocates. The time to call for increased understanding in these stakeholders of the need to advocate for affordable and accessible universal childcare services for children 0 to 3 years old is right now. The solidarity among these key stakeholders will likely lead to the development of policies that promote expanded childcare services. Addressing these claims through evidence and documented practices globally will make stronger a case for policymakers to increase investment in children 0 to 3 years old regarding childcare provision.



Project Overview

Target Audience

This framework is intended for internal and external use by the ECDAN Secretariat and partners to promote the development and well-being of children 0 to 3 years old. Externally, the framework is intended to benefit caregivers, care providers, employers, parents, partners, and governmental and private institutions working with children. Essentially, this framework provides invaluable resources and information that is consistent with current internationally accepted standards in caregiving practices. The end outcome of this framework is to increase investment and political interest in childcare and ensure every child and parent has access to publicly subsidized formal childcare irrespective of socioeconomic background.

Contents

This framework was developed based on a review of literature on childcare that included major aspects of early childhood development (ECD), and it is divided into five sections:

- **Section 1** outlines the purpose and objective of the framework, gives an overview of the meaning of childcare for children 0 to 3 years old and the meaning of ECD, and links these aspects to child outcomes.
- **Section 2** provides a brief overview of the methodology used in the development of this framework, along with the criteria used to gather, synthesize, analyze, and identify thematic areas of discussion.
- **Section 3** reviews relevant literature on childcare for children 0 to 3 years old. It also provides a synthesis of existing frameworks by international and multilateral organizations such as the World Bank Group, International Labor Organization (ILO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN Women (the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Health Organization, and other national and international organizations. Gaps identified in the landscape analysis on existing childcare frameworks inform the selection of thematic focus areas.
- **Section 4** provides an overarching conceptual framework that summarizes perspectives and unique messages in each to make a stronger case as to why policymakers, local advocates, and key stakeholders should invest in childcare for children 0 to 3 years old.
- **Section 5** provides a discussion of the validated building blocks and overarching principles relevant to policymakers and key stakeholders to strengthen the childcare systems.

The annex provides a link to a spreadsheet that synthesizes the results and associated relevant sources used in the development of this framework.

Limitations

This framework does not cover at the point children 4 to 8 years old, when they begin pre-primary schooling. Nevertheless, it is paramount to note that children in this age group are defined within the early childhood range, operating under a concrete operational thought process. It is important to be mindful that high-quality childcare plays a significant role at this level, as well, and can influence preprimary school readiness and transition.



While informed by literature synthesis and landscape analysis, this framework is not intended to be comprehensive but rather provide brief key messages. The framework is not intended to prescribe expanded childcare but to provide options for stakeholders to make decisions about its key messages. The framework as such is not a prescriptive model but rather a living guideline to be progressively reviewed and updated as new evidence emerges. Even as the ECDAN program team and partners adopt this framework, ECDAN expects that cases of best practices will be documented and new emerging evidence added to it.

Section 1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

Children in the infancy and toddlerhood period (0 to 3 years old) undergo rapid brain development, and thus, investing in them at this stage can yield substantial economic, social, educational, and developmental benefits.² Each dollar invested in closing the childcare policy gap may result in an average increase of US\$3.76 in global gross domestic product by 2035.³ The purpose of this framework is to promote ECDAN's strategic plan to increase advocacy to key stakeholders for universal childcare. This will ensure every young child (0 to 3 years old) has access to government-subsidized formal care and education before the start of school, irrespective of geographical location, family background, and economic status.

Meaning of universal childcare

"Universal childcare refers to a system where every child from a certain age has access to government subsidized formal care and education before the start of school, regardless of where they live, what their parents do or how much their parents earn. There are variations to this across the world and some schemes are not fully universal, meaning access is conditional upon parental employment or the entitlement is means-tested. 'Universal' is often used to mean childcare provision which includes children from all socio-economic backgrounds, and it is contrasted with 'targeted' provision which is focused on children from disadvantaged families or children living in disadvantaged communities."⁴

1.2 Objective

The overall objective of this work is to develop a stronger evidence case for ECDAN's policy and program team, childcare stakeholders, and partners to promote advocacy messages on why universal childcare for children 0 to 3 years old is important and enhance a better understanding of local and international advocates.

As a result of the overarching objective in this framework, the following research questions are intended to guide the discussion:

- What evidence exists about the benefits of childcare?
- What are the most compelling arguments advocates can use to convince policymakers to invest in supportive childcare policies?
- What are examples of internationally recognized building blocks and principles countries should incorporate to strengthen their childcare ecosystems?



1.3 Universal childcare framework overview

The thriving of the whole child—particularly infants and toddlers, in cognitive, social, language, emotional, and spiritual domains—is dependent on the quality and stimulating care of the environment provided at home and in childcare spaces.⁵ Holistic development in children requires a stable, caring, and loving environment that fully supports their unique developmental needs.⁶ Universal childcare not only promote better outcomes in children but also enhance the resumption of mothers and parents back to work more quickly and increase their productivity at workplaces.¹

High-quality and accessible childcare creates numerous economic and socioeconomic incentives for the individual child and family that replicate the national gross domestic income.⁷ Similarly, underinvestment in childcare has prevented most economies from potential growth and deprived children and families of a stable caregiving environment.⁷

Whereas investing in childcare provision promotes child development, promotes women's entry into the labor market, and boosts the economy in the care sector, limited documented evidence exist to justify this claim a predominantly women workforce, adequate evidence to overcome barriers within this space is urgently needed.⁸ These barriers include limited investment by the policymakers, broken system approaches, a lack of standardized childcare provision, and limited opportunities to expand childcare provision in current ECD frameworks.⁸ The structural barriers and fragmented approach to childcare such as lack of interlinked social protection with nurturing care components and nonrecognition of unpaid care, further escalate narrow thinking within the space of childcare.

The linkage between childcare, family, workplace, and society provides a rationale for the advocates in the ECD space to magnify their voices and influence effective care policies. A study conducted to investigate the effects of childcare for children 3 to 6 years old in Germany revealed significant findings. First, the results indicated improved cognitive and noncognitive skills in children. Second, the findings showed increased life satisfaction for mothers in the labor sector who were previously constrained due to lack of childcare.⁹ These findings lead us to a question: what key principles are required in the provision of expanded public childcare globally? Lyons (2024) argues that political ambition and investment in universal and public formal childcare are premised on four claims—namely, that “such an investment will:

1. Help to create a more equitable society by reducing the achievement gap between more and less advantaged children;
2. Boost the economy through increased female labor participation. Children’s opportunities will be improved indirectly as a result;
3. Empower women by enabling them to enter work or increase working hours. This will also lead to greater gender equality;
4. Enhance the educational, social and emotional development of participating children, regardless of their age or background.”⁴

In a large-scale longitudinal analysis conducted in the United Kingdom and 39 other countries, claim number 4 was a center of focus. The narratives provided are linked to one another, but evidence revealed formal childcare does not benefit all children.¹ Multiple other factors, such as family preferences and circumstances, were key determinants of how formal childcare



affects any individual child.^{1,10} This interesting perspective presents us with invaluable findings that will be critical in our extensive review of the literature. Therefore, provision of accessible, affordable, and high-quality expanded childcare can be feasible through the development of a universal framework.⁹ The universal framework provides a comprehensive scenario case while looking into both convergent and divergent arguments for why childcare for children 0 to 3 years old is important. Further, the identification of key stakeholders and policymakers aligned with each perspective substantiates the call for expanded access to public childcare.

Section 2. Methodology

2.1 Design

This research followed a systematic step-wise approach. The first step involved the creation of a spreadsheet with relevant studies. Google Scholar was used with the following search terms: "framework"; "childcare"; "universal"; "children 0 to 3 years"; "provision"; "ECD"; "ECCE" (early childhood care and education); "caregivers"; "families"; and "benefits." Other sources were purposively selected from UNICEF, the UNFPA, the World Bank, the ILO, UN Women, ECDAN, and other international organizations.

2.2 Inclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria were based on the relevancy of the sources that provide arguments and outline rationale for investing in universal childcare for infants and toddlers. A total of 34 global sources were identified and included in the spreadsheet and then independently synthesized.

2.3 Data synthesis and analysis

Following the independent synthesis of different sources, four main emerging perspectives in the childcare ecosystem were selected purposively and identified as major gaps or having the potential to affect childcare for children 0 to 3 years old. These perspectives were then recategorized into four themes, phrased as questions: (1) What is the current view of the childcare ecosystem regarding gender and the burden of care? (2) Do existing policy frameworks on caregiving support the well-being of parents and family members? (3) To what extent has access to childcare impacted labor and economic ecosystems? (4) To what extent has childcare promoted early learning and development in young children 0 to 3 years old?

2.4 Dissemination of the findings

Preliminary results of this research were first presented virtually to the ECDAN's steering committee and at fellowship meetings, after which constructive feedback and suggestions for improvement were considered and incorporated into the draft. A virtual presentation was then made to the ECDAN Secretariat, whose feedback was incorporated into the final version of the framework. The key results in this framework will be presented at a webinar to promote solidarity in the call for investment in universal childcare for children 0 to 3 years old.



Section 3. Literature Synthesis

3.1 Preamble

This section critiques, provides a better understanding of, and provides a landscape analysis of the literature, focusing on the four identified themes (see section 2.3 above). Further, this framework contributes to a body of literature that explains the multifaceted benefits of universal childcare for infants and toddlers. The four themes are not intended to provide prescriptive arguments in the childcare space but to bring these perspectives together and demonstrate their interconnectedness to make a stronger case for investing in childcare for children 0 to 3 years old. Finally, the discussion will center around mobilization of policymakers, local advocates, the private sector, and government/public institutions to demonstrate why investing in such childcare is important, how to better implement it, and what benefits can be expected.

3.2 Gender and burden of care (thematic area #1)

Childcare can be worthwhile investment and is important for advancing gender equity. Evidence reveals that the provision of childcare services promotes well-being, health, and economic opportunities for women, children, families, and communities.⁸ Investment in childcare leads to improved employment of family members, a sector predominantly occupied by women; facilitates women's entry into the labor force; and improves child development outcomes.⁸ As a result, women today have better educational outcomes, political representation, and health outcomes. However, for a majority, these advances have not translated into a proportionate improvement in agency over their lives.¹¹ This analogy is premised on the evidence that women still have to shoulder an unequal share of unpaid care work and domestic responsibilities.¹¹

Gender and burden of care are interconnected thematic areas in the childcare space. Gendered roles and responsibilities that fall predominately to women in societies include washing, cooking, and taking care of the elderly/sick in the family. In most countries globally, women's labor force participation is lagging because of childcare and the disproportionate division of domestic responsibilities.¹² The unequal gender gap in household care and unpaid care work overwhelms women and increases gender inequality. In disadvantaged families where women strain to balance domestic responsibilities and childcare, most of them end up raising children in unstimulating and unsafe environments.^{11,12} The aspect of gender norms and roles also emerges in this discussion. The roles of men in the childcare space, particularly at the family level, are largely linked to the provision of basic needs. Research indicates that eight out of ten children from low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) need childcare, and women take up huge time than men to perform unpaid care work that may impact the transition of young children to preschools.¹³

A situational analysis to better critique and understand the way gender and burden of care impact women relates to those families that are disadvantaged socioeconomically. Parents confronted with these realities, particularly women, are obliged to assume heavy roles in care and domestic responsibilities.¹⁴ “Most of the mothers are forced by circumstance to seek childcare provisions aligned with their circumstances” (a publication of a case review on voluntary childcare journal, January 2024. Women caring for children while in especially



difficult circumstances—including immigrants, widows, and those living in refugee camps, displaced by climate changes, living with children with disabilities, or caring for extended family members—are vulnerable to psychosocial burden.¹⁴ Further, adding the reproductive and domestic roles to the paid work women undertake doubles their burden of care(6).¹¹ The effects of this can be felt in both the short term and the long term and with the potential to magnify mental health challenges. This is a significant point of consideration for employers, caregivers, and policymakers in drafting policy goals that prioritize expanded access to childcare that meets the needs of women in this state.

Another important argument is based on situations in which women with young children are interested in pursuing higher levels of education. Evidence shows that access to childcare subsidies increases educational achievement rates in women with young children.¹⁵ This understanding is common in high-income countries where formal childcare is expensive and the cost of living is proportionately impacted by these effects.¹⁶ Consequently, the provision of family-friendly childcare subsidy policies and benefits in institutions of higher learning promotes the supply-demand chains in childcare, increases confidence in mothers with young children, and substantially reduces the gender gap in women's professional and personal development.^{3,17} These subsidies and family-friendly incentives include paid time off, birth grants for parents, gift vouchers, and reduced childcare costs.¹⁷ These arguments urge policymakers, as well as public and private institutions, to consider policies that promote meaningful options for childcare provision.

Another point of interest concerns men's association of childcare and social gender norms. Society allocates more advantages to men than to women regarding the unequal division of household and care labor, with men expected to take on fewer tasks and a lower burden.¹⁸ As a result, women are subjected to long working hours to meet their family responsibilities, which can cause family tension.¹⁸ These responsibilities overburden women physically and psychologically, as well as amplify stress due to time constraints. Important points of consideration include the consequences of informal care on women. The moment a woman is left to provide sole care for an ill or elderly relative / family member, she loses time for self-care, leisure, and family.¹⁹ This later inhibits her from participating in key decisions at the family level, increases the risk of her leaving work, and if she is an informal caregiver, increases the inequality gap.²⁰ Therefore, it is observed that there is a need to increase men's share of household chores and reduce the burden on women from household chores and care.

The options presented by this framework may encounter resistance, particularly in societies where women experience social constructivism.²¹ This resistance should be investigated further regarding family transformations and cultural interests in societies. The overarching call to a policy goal on gender and burden of care focuses on equipping parents and caregivers, government institutions, and the private sector to present a stronger case for providing expanded universal childcare. This approach will take into consideration cultural, socioeconomic, and context-specific dynamics.

3.3 Parenting support and well-being (thematic area #2)

Parenting support and well-being mean the provision of continuous and timely skill improvement, psychosocial support, parenting guidance, and social protection. The target audience in these support services includes mothers, fathers, center providers, and family/relatives.²² It is important to note that these services are well articulated through early childhood, health, and social protection programs.^{22,23} A better understanding of why, how, and



at what time parenting support and well-being better promote autonomy of caregiving skills is key. This perspective has a likelihood of influencing the health of parents, as well as that of children, and impacting their well-being in their lifetimes.

Parenting support and well-being play many roles in the lives of young children and parents. First, they cultivate opportunities for early stimulation and learning in young children.²⁴ Second, parenting programs offer skills and knowledge about the stable nurturing care children deserve.²⁵ Third, parents with adequate skills in childcare demonstrate resilience during times of stress and record reduced psychological distress.²⁵ Children whose parents are regularly equipped and trained on essential parenting skills have demonstrated greater improvement in cognitive and social-emotional outcomes than those whose parents did not receive training.²⁴ A supportive home environment and positive experiences at the family level are the basis for formal learning in young children.²⁶ Therefore, access to childcare options that promote comprehensive caregiving and nurturing care is likely to increase parental satisfaction. This framework adds to the literature about the need to address the parenting skill gap and promote the well-being of children and parents.²⁵ Policymakers and service providers in the care ecosystem led by governments should develop policies to support this narrative.

A 2010 study on how American parents experience stress from time spent when caring for children revealed that mothers were more impacted than fathers.²⁷ This case study presents typical modern times in childcare and reinforces a need for community-driven childcare interventions targeting mothers. Existing studies focus more on the long-term effects of early childhood education and care on labor supply and child outcomes.^{27,28} Children living with developmental disabilities require special care from parents. For children with disabilities, labor supply is no longer a priority, but access to diagnoses, continuous developmental monitoring, and a stimulating family environment is essential.²²

However, Hong et al. argue that the high cost of childcare services in formal settings and informal economies largely impacts parents' participation and subjective well-being.²⁹ Advocating for universal childcare almost solves issues surrounding parents' subjective well-being in the care ecosystem. Access to options in childcare services implies that parents from all socioeconomic backgrounds, regardless of status, benefit and can respond effectively to the unique needs of an individual child.¹⁷ Therefore, considerations by the relevant stakeholders (e.g., governments, employers, and the private sector) to develop policies that integrate childcare and health, social protection, and ECCE are key in promoting the well-being of children and parents.³⁰

Access to home-based health care services can be an entry point to providing parental support through counseling sessions. This can apply to parents faced with a pandemic or burdened with the care of a sick family member, mainly in LMIC.³¹ Essentially, high-quality community-based childcare should provide optimal physical care and child development services for all children and their parents. These services should be linked to the work of community health workers for ease of administration.²⁶ This service component can include parental education messages on better parenting skills, which rarely occur in LMIC.^{24,32} What will happen in the next five to ten years if most children (8 out of 10) who need childcare and are living in LMIC are deprived of social support?

The literature further suggests that care programs that articulate the principle of the responsive parent-child relationship improve cognitive and language development in children.³³ Parental access to family support services at workplaces, such as maternity and paternity leave,



breastfeeding, and free counseling, may be adopted.³³ Options for accessing these subsidized care services can promote the ability of parents to provide a stable caregiving environment for children.¹⁵ These services could be integrated into subsidized childcare programs that are situated within the community, including free nutrition and immunization awareness.¹⁵ Parents can actively participate in establishing these programs, regularly taking part in quality assurance surveys, and in developing policies to support these initiatives.

In a study conducted in the United States about the effects of parenting interventions for children under 3 years old, better outcomes for parenting care, practices, and mental well-being were recorded in care programs that focused on responsive caregiving than in control ones.³² Whereas the current literature highlights the rationale for promoting parenting support and well-being, it is unclear what framework can support this work. Further, there is a lack of an integrated monitoring framework, tools, and policies to evaluate and sustain such proposed programs in the childcare space. This framework therefore contributes to a better understanding of investing in quality expanded childcare and mobilizes a critical mass of evidence for policymakers and relevant stakeholders to use in developing and localizing policies that can promote and sustain parenting support and well-being within childcare initiatives.

3.4 Labor economy (thematic area #3)

The labor market / economic perspective within the childcare ecosystem presents an interesting debate. Employment of couples in any household attracts the need for childcare, and the situation becomes more demanding for countries with fast-growing economies.³⁴ Improving access to high-quality childcare might have generational ripple effects, including improved businesses, increased participation of women in employment and greater productivity by women, and an improved economy.³⁵ Caring for children under 3 years old can be a potential barrier to women's transition into the formal or informal labor market.³⁶ The interconnectedness between childcare supply and labor economies influences the child, family, and overall gross domestic income of any country.³⁷ Some economists argue that when parents supply labor, they receive income and thus improve the well-being of their households; however, they also lower the amount of time they are available to their children.³⁵ This could be an interesting area for future research.

The availability for childcare in households in which the parents are working improves financial autonomy and provides better job security, particularly for women.¹³ Women's workforce participation is pivotal in the growth and sustainability of more inclusive economies. Nevertheless, the lack of inclusive economies, particularly in LMIC where women are often engaged in informal labor without supportive policies, puts them at risk of social injustices and discrimination.¹⁴ Therefore, the provision of high-quality, expansive childcare that offers options for families and communities that is tailored to their preferences is highly recommended.

Childcare programs for children 0 to 3 years old are essential in the labor industry, allowing active labor force participation and preventing breaks or layoffs in the careers of caregivers, mainly women.³⁷ Further, facilitating women's employment increases labor market attachment and leads to better job security and family welfare.^{13,38} This argument also supports evidence that investment in universal childcare can be an important strategy for countries seeking to build inclusive human capital.³⁹ Regardless of socioeconomic status, race, cultural preferences, and type of job, women's participation in economic activities resulting from childcare services is crucial in modern societies.



Findings from the UNFPA's multi-country-level Expanding Choices project provide another argument for this perspective. The Republic of Moldova's energy sector faced inadequate women's labor supply. After conducting a thorough assessment, the company, alongside its national stakeholders, developed and rolled out a family-friendly workplace strategy.^{40,41} The components of the family-friendly strategy include implementation of leadership development and mentorship programs, the opening of child-friendly rooms to support working mothers with young children, and the provision of flexible work arrangements.⁴¹ In its mission to attain gender equality targets, the company launched an extensive information campaign, which involved printing information about paternity leave to influence the implementation of paternity policies.⁴⁰ This strategy was a game changer because women currently occupy leadership roles at the company and drive its vision of gender equality in the energy sector. The company consequently reached over 900,000 households, an achievement largely attributed to its partnership with the private sector, whose role included resource mobilization.⁴⁰ This innovation shows the power of partnership to transform societal practice, break social norms within the childcare sector, and increase women's participation in the labor market.

At the Asena Textile company located in Moldova, women occupy about 94 percent of the company's positions. With household and child-rearing responsibilities falling to the mothers, the company faced regular absenteeism that often led to women taking extended leave to cope with unpaid care work.^{40,41} As a result, women's productivity declined, which triggered the company to rethink its strategy.⁴⁰ The company eventually provided a gender-responsive and family-friendly workplace centered around responsive strategies such as raising awareness in fathers and encouraging them to take paternity leave, establishing a play area for employees' children, and initiating plans to build a childcare center near its factory. The findings reveal that, as a result of the family-friendly working approach, the company registered positive changes in leave patterns for mothers with young children and an increased number of fathers taking paternity leave, which collectively attributed to increased revenues.⁴⁰

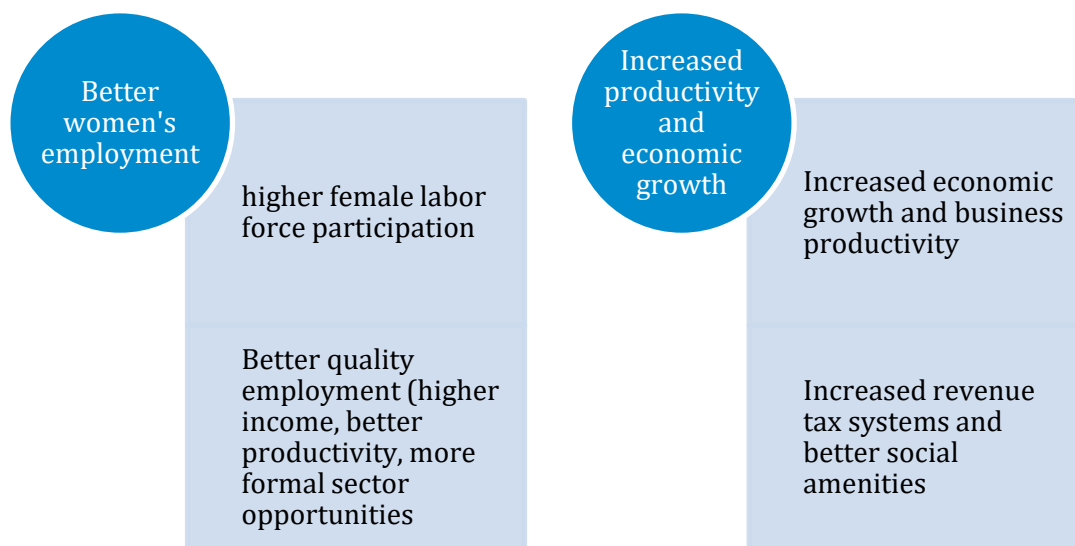
The above results concur with those from an ILO global enterprise survey on empowering women at work that was conducted in 185 countries in 2018 and 2019 using the merits of childcare-friendly policies.⁴² These included workplace lactating rooms, flexible work hours, and part-time work arrangements.^{22,42} The findings revealed that companies or labor sectors that promote work-life balance for working mothers can promote talent acquisition, high productivity at the workplace, retention, and an enhanced company reputation.¹⁴ For most working parents in the formal sector, access to labor and social protection provides them with more disposable income to pay for expensive childcare costs. For women in the informal economy, access to childcare services is limited due to the nature of jobs characterized by reduced working hours, low wages, inconsistent patterns of work, and overall job insecurity.^{42,43} Therefore, the provision of expanded childcare will likely take into consideration families in formal and informal labor sectors.

The findings presented on the labor market and economic perspective provide the need for the development of family-friendly working guidelines and strategies in the childcare space. Whereas ILO demonstrates the value of work-life balance for women with children, there is no data to illustrate the point at which the benefits of all this would directly contribute to positive outcomes for children under 3 years old,⁴² such as improved health, nutrition, and social protection. Further, advocates and duty bearers can join forces to create an integrated monitoring tool or framework to measure the impact of family-friendly working policies or strategies. It is important to recognize the multifaceted benefits of labor in the childcare supply



chain. Finally, public and private sectors should collaborate to provide expanded childcare that would promote better economies, mainly in developing countries. Figure 1 provides an overview of the benefits to the labor industry of increased access to childcare.

Figure 1. Overview of the benefits that accrue from access to childcare: perspective of labor economy.



Adapted from: Devercelli A, Beaton-Day F. The childcare ecosystem: international experience. Presented at: World Bank virtual event to launch *Better Jobs and Brighter Futures: Investing in Childcare to Build Human Capital*; March 4, 2021.

<https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/273201615315203010-0090022021/original/InvestinginChildcaretoBuildHumanCapitaleventpresentation.pdf>

3.5 Early learning and development (thematic area #4)

Access to ECD and education helps build young children's capacity to learn and become productive members of society. High-quality early learning reduces developmental and educational achievement gaps in children, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹⁰ In developed economies, childcare is inseparable from the school education systems. In France, Denmark, and Sweden, the absence of split systems (i.e., separation of childcare and education in the childcare space) has increased parental involvement in promoting stimulating care and learning environments for children.⁴⁴ Frameworks in these developed countries focus more on children 3 to 8 years old. It would be interesting to explore the link between the home environment and mandatory childcare for infants and toddlers up to preschool age.^{2,44} This section aims to critique and present a paradigm shift that promotes expanded and integrated childhood interventions to promote early learning and stimulating experiences in young children.

Childcare for children 0 to 3 years old is critical because it provides opportunities for optimal early care and education and a stimulating environment. The care framework is linked to the five components of the Nurturing Care Framework are (1) access to good health, (2) adequate nutrition, (3) opportunities for early learning and stimulation, (4) safety and security, and (5) responsive caregiving.^{22,23} Each of these components is linked to specific ECD outcomes. It

is therefore important to consider early learning environments, with home being the first one and parents regarded as children's first teachers and thus of primary importance in developing children's competencies.⁴⁵ These competencies promote children's school readiness and life learning.

ECD proponents argue that all children under 3 years old should be exposed to stimulating and high-quality early care and learning experiences. This stage is considered critical in ECD because it has lifelong effects on the well-being of the child and subsequently the psychological well-being of the parents.^{45,46} Child, parental, and contextual factors play key roles in supporting and influencing the outcomes of early exposure for children. For instance, parents with adequate knowledge of ECD are likely to nurture a healthy and stimulating parent-child relationship.⁴⁶ Similarly, working parents in formal and informal economies, particularly mothers, promote children's development more because they can afford to take them to good-quality childcare centers with adequate stimulation.⁴⁷

Access to options in good-quality childcare services for children under 3 years old can be an entry point for other services that impact the outcomes of young children and their families. Public health services such as immunization and health awareness that are integrated with parenting training programs such as playful parenting can greatly benefit children.⁴⁸ The information, education, and communication materials for early learning can be developed on a multisectoral approach comprising public health sectors, organizations, and the private sector.²² These interrelated interventions not only enable children to thrive and achieve their developmental potential but also improve parenting styles to meet the individual needs of families.⁴⁸

Another point concerns understanding better the effect of expanded high-quality childcare on the children's long-term developmental outcomes. This argument is based on piloting the use of an explicit curriculum that provides a systematic framework for care to capacitate caregivers. The package of the curriculum includes socialization and care and early learning and development delivered by trained professionals to care providers.⁴⁹ This framework guides childcare providers to effectively use integrated care approaches to meet individual children's needs, prevailing circumstances, and caregivers' expectations. These integrated services may include access to play materials, availability of picture books, and health and growth monitoring within a care facility.^{49,50} Nevertheless, little is known about the quality assurance measures legal bodies undertake and whether the government has such parameters within the childcare space.

System enablers in a country offering free public childcare services include an approved curriculum with a framework on the roles of parents, center providers, and the private sector.⁵¹ This clarity strengthens essential sectors such as health, early education, and social services in the provision of comprehensive early learning and development opportunities.⁵² Access to these integrated services within a childcare center can stimulate and increase confidence in mothers/fathers to enroll their children. Access to inclusive childcare services is attributed to community-driven and participatory approaches at establishment time points.^{30,51} For example, parents, community members, and civil society organizations that participate in public hearings about the feasibility of setting up a public childcare center are better able to support it.⁴⁹ This public participation can influence decisions to expand childcare options to accommodate everyone.



3.6 Conclusion

A European Union quality framework on ECCE services suggests that governments that promote close collaboration between childcare service providers and beneficiaries achieve more. For example, investing in sectors such as education, health, labor market, and social services can yield high returns on investments in care for children under 3 years old.⁴⁹ Sources from the ILO, UNICEF, UNFPA, ECDAN's Childcare4All campaign, the World Bank, and relevant studies analyzed vehemently recommend an expanded childcare provision. However, there are limited data on linkages in the health, labor, and social protection sectors. Most information available describes childcare programs and associated benefits to educational achievements in children over 3 years old.

The results of the literature synthesis strongly argue for development of publicly subsidized and expanded childcare programs that offer options for all families, regardless of socioeconomic and cultural status. Further, bringing these perspectives together would promote better understanding in governmental policymakers, the private sector, and local and civil advocates, who play significant roles in making evidence-informed decisions regarding investment in childcare for children 0 to 3 years old.

Section 4. Conceptual Childcare Framework (0 to 3 years old)

A key takeaway message is that childcare provides multifaceted benefits that are interconnected but also offer opportunities for stakeholders to promote it using unique advocacy messages. By bringing these perspectives and arguments together, local advocates, governmental policymakers, and the private sector can make a stronger case for why childcare for children 0 to 3 years old is important and better understand the policies needed to support it. These policies can be developed and evaluated to track performance and impact. Table 1 summarizes the benefits, policy needs, and potential stakeholders for a conceptual childcare framework.

Table 1. Conceptual childcare framework for provision of expanded universal childcare.

Perspective on 0-3 childcare	Documented benefits	Policy needs	Stakeholders to target
Child well-being	- Improved cognitive outcomes - Increased social-emotional skills - Integrated services (nutrition, health) - Better coping skills in stressful moments - Better nutritional outcomes	- Publicly subsidized options - Quality assurance - Inclusion policies to address all children - Comprehensive care programs to promote continuity	- Care providers - Health service providers - Education/certification providers - Social protection providers - Grassroots civil society organizations - Parents from all socioeconomic backgrounds

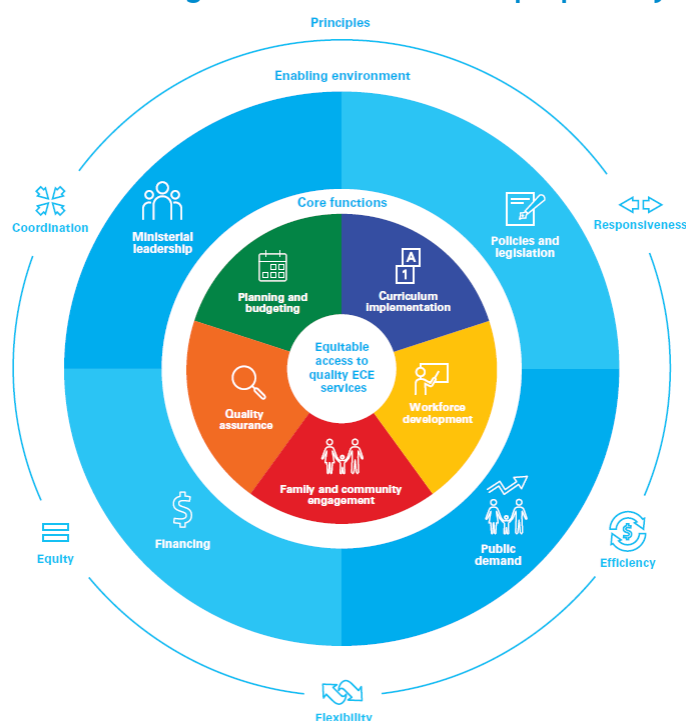
Perspective on 0-3 childcare	Documented benefits	Policy needs	Stakeholders to target
Parenting skills and well-being	- Reduced stress due to reduced burden - Increased household earnings due to ability to participate in workforce - Increased knowledge of child development - Improved parenting satisfaction - Increased resilience during pandemics	- Inclusion of parenting education component in child programs - Childcare options in proximity to workplaces for ease of access - Publicly subsidized childcare options - Inclusion of parenting skill development in health routine monitoring - Emergency parenting skill development programs	- Care providers - Employers - Public service providers (i.e., health, social protection, education) - Private partners - Parents from all socioeconomic backgrounds - Quality assurance sectors and institutions
Gender equality	- Higher educational attainment for women - Greater income for women - Reduced stress at the workplace for couples - Better family-work balance for couples - Increased confidence and empowerment for women - Increased investments in family welfare	- On-site childcare - Family-friendly policies - Child stipends - Mentoring programs - Harmonization of parenting and home learning programs - Subsidized care in educational institutions - Localization of gender social norms	- Labor lawmakers - Employers - Tax/welfare authorities - Education institutions - Organizations giving emergency services - Women's and men's associations and philanthropist groups - Local women's rights groups
Early learning and development	- Increased cognitive outcomes - Improved school readiness - Increased behavioral and social-emotional skills - Improved nutritional outcomes - Better education outcomes and lifelong learning - Improved psychosocial well-being for parents and children	- Publicly subsidized learning centers - Policies on access to integrated care programs - Quality assurance frameworks	- Childcare center providers - Health providers - Parents/caregivers - Legal authorities for quality checks - Preprimary institutions - Private sector - Public training institutions - Employers
Economic growth and productivity	- Reduced labor shortages - Increased number of adults in workforce - Increased number of care providers added to workforce - Increased economic growth and business productivity - Increased tax revenue	- Fair pay policies - Family-friendly policies - Gender-disaggregated data - Skills training - Inclusive labor policies that include disadvantaged populations - Quality assurance policies and framework	- Labor lawmakers - Employers - Education institutions - Other governmental lawmakers - Private-sector partners

Perspective on 0-3 childcare	Documented benefits	Policy needs	Stakeholders to target
	- Reduced burden on government systems (health etc.) - Better job security - Increased workforce retention		

Section 5. Internationally recognized building blocks

Access to expanded childcare services is a step closer to achieving comprehensive early childhood care and education. Family and contextual factors have great implications and can influence the ways children thrive. One significant building block in the ECE framework that also affects the childcare ecosystem is the enabling environment. This component is key in the policy needs and is essential in the development and strengthening of expanded childcare for children 0 to 3 years old.⁵² This framework, therefore, suggests to the policymakers a consideration for the five overarching principles when adapting and strengthening universal childcare in their contexts—namely, equity, efficiency, responsiveness, coordination, and flexibility (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Building blocks of an effective preprimary subsector.



Source: Borisova I, Lin HC, Hyson M. *Build to Last: A Framework in Support of Universal Quality Pre-primary Education*. UNICEF; 2020:16-17. <https://www.unicef.org/media/67191/file/Build-to-last-framework-universal-quality-pre-primary-education.pdf#page=18>

Recommendations

This framework provides a nonprescriptive option for key stakeholders to consider in developing and promoting access to high-quality universal childcare that best suits their contextual priorities in the childcare space. The four themes that emerged relating to childcare for children 0 to 3 years old have been discussed, critiqued, and examined. Each thematic area touched on unique perspectives that, when all are brought together due to their interrelatedness, provide a better understanding and present a strong case for investing in childcare for this age group. Following the synthesis of gender and burden of care, parenting support and well-being, labor economy, and early learning and development, a powerful argument for such interventions can be directed toward governments as vital stakeholders. Public institutions should lead in the development and implementation of childcare policies that expand provision regardless of the children's and parents' socioeconomic backgrounds.

Access to high-quality childcare is justifiable as a human capital investment. The arguments and perspectives discussed in this paper reveal that expanded options for childcare provision directly improve both child and parental outcomes. These benefits are later evidenced in improved economic growth, women's participation in employment, and reduction in gender inequities in societies. This framework offers options for policy considerations by key stakeholders in the childcare space, such as governments, employers, care providers, the private sector, parents, and the quality assurance sector.



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