Strengthening Systems, Securing Futures: Financing Early Childhood Development

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Purpose of the Project

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1. **Understand what has been known and tried related to** early years financing, **with a focus on system infrastructure.**

2. **Provide insights and examples** ahead of the 2026 **Global Technical Financing Forum** and the 2027 **International Finance Summit for Early Childhood.**

Audience:

Policy-makers shaping national funding systems.

Donor agencies and foundations seeking evidence-based investment strategies.

Civil society and research actors advocating for inclusive and sustainable early years financing.

Main Message

Governments must move beyond fragmented efforts and commit to **long-term, inclusive, and accountable financing systems.**

Lessons Learned

- Comprehensive data systems are lacking.
- Multisectoral coordination is weak.
- Innovative financing requires a base of public funding and strong governance.
- Service quality is inconsistent, and delivery is not equitable.

A review of **49 publications (2015-2025)** describing financing approaches for early learning, childcare, and related ECD services **across 50+ countries** showed that **financing challenges persist globally across all income levels.**

Leading Country Examples

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Peru

Institutionalizing ECD Through Legal and Multisectoral Reforms

Strengths: Solid legal mandate ensuring stability, integrated education-health-social protection model, and strong multisector coordination.

Limitations: Persistent regional disparities, workforce shortages and uneven capacities, and fiscal constraints affecting sustainability.

South Africa

Expanding Access Through Targeted Subsidies

Strengths: Expanded access for disadvantaged groups through targeted subsidies, integrated education-health-nutrition support, and social protection mechanisms.

Limitations: Uneven service quality, workforce shortages and limited training, and fragmented institutional coordination.

To learn more about the leading country examples, explore the full brief here.

What Should Governments Do?

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Secure public funding.

Balance expansion with quality.

Institutionalize coordination and governance.

Strengthen data and accountability systems.

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Early Childhood Financing Advocacy Brief

Strengthening Systems, Securing Futures: Financing Early Childhood Development

There is clear evidence that investments in young children yield the greatest returns in human capital. Ensuring every child receives nurturing care—being well nourished, healthy, learning, and safe—in the first years of life drives better outcomes for children, families, and society as a whole in both the short and long term. Planning, securing, and equitably allocating adequate resources for early childhood development (ECD) is therefore a political and financial imperative for governments.

Yet, interventions supporting the youngest children and their caregivers remain chronically underfunded, fragmented, and dependent on short-term funding initiatives (Zubairi & Rose, 2017; UNICEF, 2019). The multisectoral nature of ECD and constrained national budgets present technical challenges, but the upcoming Global Technical Financing Forum in 2026 and International Finance Summit for Early Childhood in 2027 are opportunities for governments to learn, share, and make commitments.

Generating actionable knowledge of effective mechanisms and enabling conditions for early years investment is crucial to building fair, predictable, and resilient systems that benefit all young children and drive long-term progress. This brief provides policymakers with a snapshot of financing pathways being tried in different countries, with promising examples, as well as lessons learned to guide decision making when planning, implementing, and monitoring investments in the early years.

Key Messages:

- **Early investments pay off.** Investing in children's health, nutrition, protection, and learning in the first years of life yields lasting social and economic returns.
- **Coordination drives impact.** Sustainable progress depends on aligned, multisectoral investments within a coherent national framework for young children.
- **Robust public finance is required.** While innovative and complementary financing can be leveraged, the base must be stable, long-term financing from governments that is well monitored and inclusive.
- **Evidence of utilization is key.** Governments need data systems to track spending and ensure that it is fair, predictable, efficient, and meets the needs of every child.

You can access the full brief here.

Call to Action

All commitments require **sustained financing** in early years — this remains the central challenge. **This database and brief** provide **actionable, evidence-based guidance** to identify promising models and **drive transformative investment decisions.**

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