



REGIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND LEADERSHIP AGENDA FOR CHILDREN IN THE CEE/CIS REGION

INDEPENDENT MULTI-COUNTRY EVALUATION OF RESULTS AREA 3

INCREASING ACCESS AND EQUITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN CEE/CIS

FINAL REPORT
November 2014

Education for Change Ltd

John Wood
Laetitia Antonowicz
Jake Grout-Smith
Prof. Helen Penn
Dr. Anise Waljee



Document Information

Title	RKLA3 multi-country evaluation: increasing access and equity in early childhood education – final evaluation report
Version	Volume 1: final report
Date	20 November 2014
Circulation	M&E Facility, Regional Advisor, M&E Unit, RKLA Chair, M&E external consultant, Country Offices, RO management, UNICEF Head Quarters
Authors	<p>John Wood (j.wood@efc.co.uk)</p> <p>Laetitia Antonowicz</p> <p>Dr. Anise Waljee</p> <p>Prof. Helen Penn</p> <p>Jake Grout-Smith (j.grout-smith@efc.co.uk)</p> <p>Sophie Tanner (s.tanner@efc.co.uk)</p>
Timeframe of evaluation	September 2013-July 2014
Geographical scope of evaluation	Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo ¹ , Kyrgyzstan and Moldova
Copyright	UNICEF
Contract details	<p>43147309</p> <p>UNICEF contract with Education for Change Ltd.</p> <p>23 September 2013</p>

¹ UNSCR 1244

Contents

Abbreviations	iii
Terminology	v
Executive summary	vi
Background	vi
Objective, scope and methodology	vi
Equity focus	vi
Key evaluation findings	vii
Conclusions	xii
Main recommendations	xiv
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Overview of the evaluation	1
1.2 Context	1
1.3 Theory of change (TOC)	11
1.4 Stakeholders involved	18
2 Evaluation Purpose, Objectives and Scope	22
2.1 Purpose	22
2.2 Objectives and scope	23
2.3 Evaluation questions and framework	25
3 Evaluation Methodology	27
4 Findings	31
4.1 Relevance of UNICEF's approach	31
4.2 Impact: changes in the lives of children	44
4.3 Effectiveness of system changes for equitable preschool provision	55
4.4 Efficiency of UNICEF core roles in contributing to system changes	83
4.5 Sustainability of results, system changes and UNICEF contributions	95
5 Conclusions	100
5.1 The Theory of Change	100
5.2 Relevance	107
5.3 Impact	109
5.4 Effectiveness	110
5.5 Efficiency	112
5.6 Sustainability	113
6 Lessons learned	114
6.1 TOC	114
6.2 Relevance	114
6.3 Impact	114
6.4 Effectiveness	114
6.5 Efficiency	115
6.6 Sustainability	115
6.7 Innovations and good practices	116
7 Recommendations	118
7.1 TOC	118
7.2 Policies and strategies	119
7.3 Knowing more	123
7.4 UNICEF roles and organisation	124

Abbreviations

CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEE/CIS	Central and Eastern Europe / Commonwealth of Independent States
CO	Country Office
CRC	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	(Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) Development Assistance Committee
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECDC	Early Childhood Development Centre (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)
ECE	Early childhood education
EFA	Education for All
ELDS	Early Learning and Development Standards
ELSR	Early Learning and School Readiness
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EQPR	Education and Quality Relevance Project
EU	European Union
FTI	Fast Track Initiative
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GMR	Global Monitoring Report
GPE	Global Partnership for Education (formerly FTI)
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HDI	Human Development Index
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
IDS	International Development Statistics (OECD database)
ISSA	International Step by Step Association
KAP	Knowledge, Attitudes and Practice
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection
MLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

MoRES	Monitoring Results for Equity Systems
MTSP	Medium-term Strategic Plan
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics (Moldova)
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSC	National Statistical Committee (Kyrgyzstan)
NSS	National Statistical Service (Armenia)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Coordination and Development
OOSC	Out-of-School Children
OSFs	Open Society Foundations
RKLA	Regional Knowledge and Leadership Area
RO	Regional Office
ROOSCAI	Regional Out-of-School Children and Adolescents Initiative
SITAN	Situational Analysis
SMIS	School Management Information System
SSO	State Statistical Office (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)
TA	Technical Assistance
TOC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
TransMonEE	Transformative Monitoring for Enhanced Equity
UIS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics
UNCRPD	UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNEG	UN Evaluation Group
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WB	World Bank

For ease of reference and space within the Findings section, where countries and territories have been cited as examples, a short country/territory coding has been used as follows:

- *Ar = Armenia*
- *BH = Bosnia and Herzegovina*
- *FMa = the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*
- *Kg = Kyrgyzstan*
- *Ko* = Kosovo (UNSCR 1244)*
- *Mo = Moldova*

Terminology

There is a very complex landscape of activities and associated terminology in early childhood education that is not used consistently internationally or across the six countries/territory involved in this evaluation. For clarity the following terms are used in this report:

Early childhood: the stage of life that spans the 0-8 age range

Early Childhood Development (ECD): all areas of development including cognitive, language, emotional, behavioural, social, fine and gross motor development during the early childhood period

Early Childhood Education (ECE): All types of educational arrangements for children in the age group 3-6 years: formal and non-formal, home or centre-based, and led by qualified or moderately trained providers or parents.

Early childhood education and care: The EU refers to care and education services for children in the age group birth to school entry. These services may be provided through a variety of modalities and are organized as a means to support children's cognitive, social and emotional development and to enable parents (especially women) to reconcile better family and work responsibilities.

Early Learning and School Readiness (ELSR): Refers specifically to UNICEF's approaches in early childhood education that encompass all the activities, processes and systems that enable young children aged 3+ to participate in structured learning opportunities that make them developmentally ready for school (see also "school readiness" below).

Kindergarten: Refers to institutions providing structured care and education for children in the age range 6 months to 6 years, often on a full-day basis, and mainly serving children from privileged, urban families at highly subsidized rates. (Kindergarten is also used in official data classification in these countries and territory to indicate institutions offering education and/or care services to children aged 3-6 years old, as distinct from nurseries and kindergarten-nurseries (see below). This definition of the term is used in the report in relation to discussion of official statistics).

Nursery: Term used in the official data classification of the six country/territory cases of this evaluation to mean institutions that provide predominantly care services to children aged from 0-3 years old.

Nursery-kindergarten: Term used in the official data classification of the six country/territory cases of this evaluation to mean institutions that provide both care and educational services to children aged from 0-6 years old.

Pre-primary education: Services in educational institutions that offer structured learning opportunities of a year or less during the year immediately preceding entry into primary education. These are often referred to as "Grade Zero" services.

Preschool education: All services provided in educational institutions that offer structured teaching-learning opportunities for the age group 3-6 years (incorporating pre-primary education)

School readiness: Refers to UNICEF's definition of the term, based on the three pillars of the child's readiness for school (including not only cognitive but also physical, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, and cognition and general knowledge), the family's readiness to support learning, and the school's readiness for children.

Territory: Used in this report to refer to Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) rather than sub-national units

Young child well-being: Refers specifically to UNICEF programming aimed at the age range 0-3.

Executive summary

Background

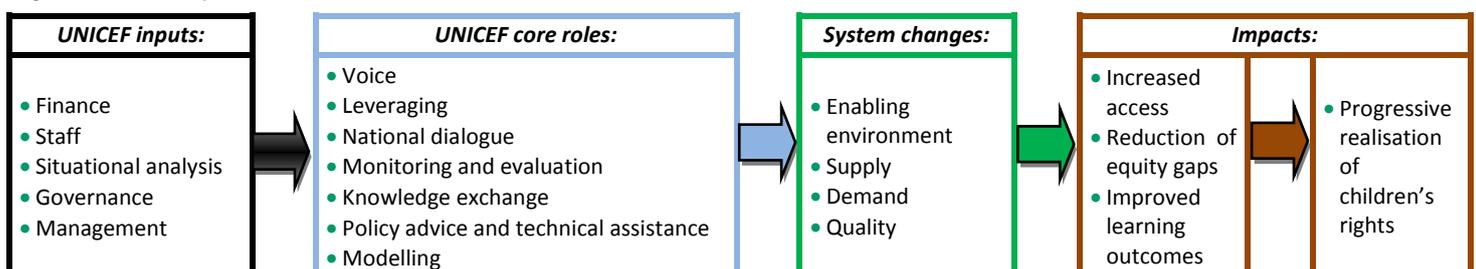
Across the CEE/CIS region many countries share traditions of state-funded care and education of preschool children under former Soviet Union or former Yugoslavia systems. Following the collapse of these systems and the loss of social subsidies, many countries were unable to sustain their early childhood education and care services because of lack of funds, structure and political will. The residual kindergartens are concentrated in urban areas and cater for the wealthy, leaving much of the population without access to early childhood education or care. Over the past decade governments have gradually started to rebuild national and decentralised systems for early childhood education but coverage in many cases remains low with significant equity gaps in access.

UNICEF has been working in the region at a national systems level to support transition to sustainable, quality preschool education, able to reach all children aged 3-6. It has supported approaches that prioritise early learning and school readiness (ELSR) in contrast to the legacy of care-driven provision for working parents.

Objective, scope and methodology

This evaluation of UNICEF’s ELSR work was commissioned by UNICEF CEE/CIS Regional Office (RO) in 2013. It is one of five multi-country evaluations, each on a different thematic area, which were commissioned to test the validity of UNICEF’s regional generic Theory of Change (TOC). This TOC articulates UNICEF’s programming shift to contributing to systemic change as the most effective route to the progressive realisation of children’s rights.

Figure 1: Summary TOC for ELSR



The specific objectives of this evaluation were to assess: i) whether changes in national ELSR systems have led to increased access and reduced equity gaps in ELSR; and ii) the contribution of UNICEF to these system changes and the validity of the generic TOC to UNICEF’s ELSR work.

The evaluation covers the period 2005-2012 and focuses on the six cases of Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova.

The UNICEF generic TOC sets out four areas of system changes and examines UNICEF’s contribution through seven core roles. This was adapted to the ELSR sector (Figure 1) and used to guide the evaluation analysis. Extensive document and data reviews were carried out for each of the six cases. These informed two week visits to each country/territory for consultations with a broad set of ELSR stakeholders at national, district and community levels. The independent evaluation was conducted by Education *for* Change Ltd. between 2013 and 2014.

Equity focus

In many countries and territories in the region, the majority of 3-6 year old children do not have access to early childhood education. Even where national enrolments are high (such as in Moldova), these figures mask significant disparities across different groups of children and between sub-national regions. Whilst disaggregated data is often limited, at a broad level young children living in rural areas make up a significant proportion of those unable to access ELSR services, with other factors of poverty, disability, ethnicity, migration, language and gender interacting to marginalize young children from accessing and participating in ELSR.

Equity is a primary focus of the evaluation: impacts, system changes and UNICEF contributions are examined not only in relation to marginalised groups, but also in relation to whether equity gaps in the sector as a whole have grown or decreased between the most and least marginalised children. Gender equality and human rights considerations are mainstreamed in the evaluation.

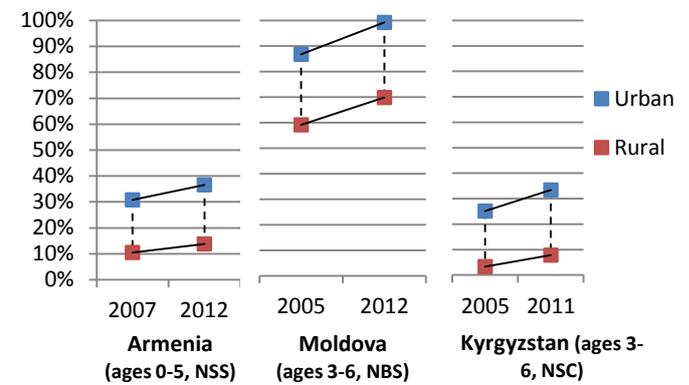
Key evaluation findings

Changes in the lives of children and equity

Data are inconsistent and complex across the six cases, but in each case there have been increases in the number of children aged 3-6 who have access to ELSR (Figure 2). Moldova, starting from a high position of 68% net enrolment in 2005, reached 81% by 2012. Despite low enrolment rates in other cases, in terms of numbers of children enrolled the expansion of services has been impressive: in Kyrgyzstan, from 2005 to 2011, annual enrolment has increased by 38,625 children aged 3-6, an increase of 89% of the total preschool population. In several cases (including Armenia and Kyrgyzstan) these increases will be even larger as data does not capture rapid expansion provided by a short course in the year before school, sometimes referred to as ‘Grade Zero’, which is intended to become a free, universal offering. The figures for Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) in Figure 2, which only represent this Grade Zero year, demonstrate the

high coverage this type of provision can bring – 75% enrolment of 5-6 year olds by 2011.

Figure 3: Trends in rural and urban preschool enrolment rates

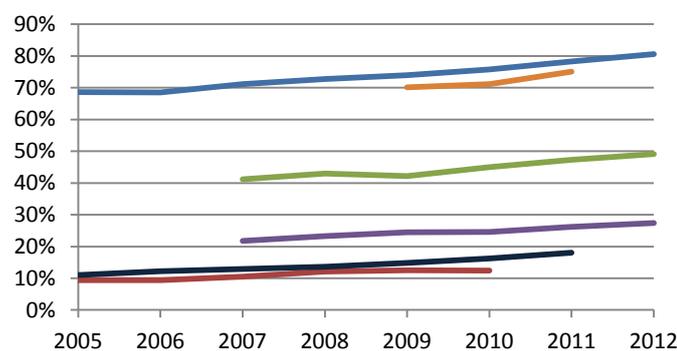


Whilst access to ELSR has opened up for many in the large group of previously excluded children, available data show that equity gaps remain (and increased in some cases during the earlier part of the evaluation period). Children from urban and wealthier backgrounds in some cases have increased enrolment faster than those from rural (Figure 3), poor and ethnic minority backgrounds. The number of children with disabilities who are enrolled is gradually increasing, although levels remain very low and qualitative information indicates that children with disabilities still face significant access barriers to preschool. It should be noted that in a number of cases existing data collection systems do not capture the effect of more recent interventions in the evaluation period (such as pre-primary expansion, or other forms of provision), which were intended to tackle some of these gaps.

In most cases national figures show higher preschool enrolment rates for girls than boys, but gender intersects with other factors of exclusion (such as disability or ethnicity) to prevent girls from certain groups attending. MICS data from 2011 in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, for example, shows Roma boys had preschool attendance levels of only 6.5%, but Roma girls had an even lower attendance level of 1.1%.

There are very limited data on the impact of ELSR on children’s lives, although participation in ELSR has reportedly eased transition to primary school and produces children who are better socialised and more ready for formal schooling. There are concerns, however, that increased access has been achieved at the

Figure 2: Preschool enrolment trends



Legend:

Country	Ages	Source
Moldova	3-6	National Bureau of Statistics (NBS)
Kosovo UNSCR1244	5-6 (pre-primary)	Ministry of Education Science and Technology
Armenia	3-5	National Statistical Service (NSS)
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	3-5	State Statistical Office (SSO)
Kyrgyzstan	3-6	National Statistical Committee (NSC)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3-5	TransMonEE

expense of the holistic child-centred nature of early childhood education.

Relevance

UNICEF has understood the particular system challenges to ELSR in each of the six case countries/territory. Analysis has supported relevant programming to build understanding, political commitment and a regulatory framework for flexible and cost-effective ELSR services able to extend access. However, investigation of the gaps in the implementation of frameworks is less developed, as are approaches to the complex demand factors and the impact of the private sector which has been mushrooming in urban areas.

UNICEF has mediated its interventions through a strong grasp of the political, social and economic contexts in which it operates, using a range of its core roles to seize opportunities to progress ELSR.

UNICEF has sought increased access across broad categories of marginalisation (such as rural location) before addressing more complex inequities and vulnerabilities. A nuanced understanding of the needs of the most marginalised has only recently started to emerge. As a result, there has been little attention given to equity at a systemic level. The rights-based framework for ELSR has not yet been effectively articulated with other stakeholders or in programmatic implementation.

Quality of provision has, until recently, been a secondary focus of UNICEF's work. However, UNICEF is now starting to match its priority on access with concern for quality of inputs, services and learning outcomes.

Strategic decisions have been taken by UNICEF in the region to separate programming for 0-3 year olds and 3-6 year olds. This is a risk to coherence and continuity of services across the 0-6 age range. It also conspires with the separation between ELSR and early grade primary education to put at risk a coherent approach to early childhood development defined as covering the 0-8 age range. The division of education-driven ELSR from childcare support to parents, regarded as a private matter, has left an important gap in UNICEF's analysis and programming around early childhood services as they relate to issues of equity and women's rights to work.

System level changes

Enabling environment

Social norms. Social norms have increasingly recognised the importance of early learning and school readiness. However, expectations of integrated education and care provision remain strong, with education-driven half-day models often seen as the 'poor relations' to traditional full-day kindergartens.

Social norms (both within marginalised groups and within wider communities) around children from marginalised groups' access to, and participation in, preschool remain a bottleneck to inclusive, equitable ELSR services. Coordinated approaches to changing mindsets about inclusion are needed with families, communities, ELSR staff and wider society.

Legislation, policy and budget. The evaluation period has seen legislative frameworks for preschool education established in all six cases, providing a significant step forward. New legislation has usually been complemented by preschool-specific or broader education policies strongly directed at rural, remote and underserved areas. Some cases have demonstrated political commitment at senior governmental levels to fill the preschool provision gap quickly, such as in Kyrgyzstan where the President's Road Map highlights the importance of early childhood education which is supported by the ex-President's Foundation. The establishment of legislative and policy frameworks have usually been followed by the development of Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) as a foundation for coherence and quality in provision. The translation of these frameworks into local level policies and practices, however, has been constrained because of diverse provision, decentralised responsibilities and limited and uneven budgets.

Overall, national budget allocations to ELSR have been gradually rising, supported by significant external funding in several cases, such as the Global Partnership for Education in Moldova and Kyrgyzstan and the World Bank in Armenia. However, budgetary responsibility for preschool has been decentralised (e.g. to municipalities or local authorities) in all six cases, and efforts to ensure more equitable allocations have only recently started to emerge, leaving a very uneven landscape of services.

Management & coordination mechanisms. Coordination mechanisms for ELSR at the national level have been developed, such as in the National ECD task force set up in 2005 in Armenia for the development of the legislative framework. In some instances, (Kyrgyzstan, Armenia) parliamentarian groups with responsibilities for education or children’s rights have promoted the preschool agenda to secure increased political commitment. Where early childhood education has been incorporated into wider national or education sector plans, management and monitoring of the preschool sector has benefited from the broader coordination mechanisms attached to these plans, such as the Joint Annual Review Meetings led by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244).

Yet challenges remain for cross-sectoral policy development and planning, and at the critical decentralised level where ELSR delivery is managed. Decentralised authorities lack the capacity to deliver on their responsibilities for preschool education and struggle to transfer national system changes into local service delivery. The resulting uneven level of implementation and resourcing has important implications for equity and points to systemic weaknesses for preschool education that are part of broader government-wide decentralisation bottlenecks.

Lack of data is a critical barrier to planning and management of the ELSR sector, with weak data collection and analysis systems and responsibilities that have struggled to keep up with the expansion of the sector and the diversity of provision. The continuing lack of adequate and disaggregated data and the complexities of the management of the sector constrain the extent to which priority areas and groups can be identified and limit the evidence base for planning or monitoring.

Supply

There have been substantial increases in preschool facilities, particularly in rural areas under large-scale, often externally-funded programmes. The UNICEF-supported *Magic Journey* TV programme in Kyrgyzstan, along with the *Sesame Street* translation in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), are a notable successes in relation to the development and expansion of early childhood

educational materials. The daily *Magic Journey* TV programme, which was found to be watched by 95% of 5-6 year olds surveyed across the country, provides a means to deliver educational content, life skills and inclusive messages to a broad swathe of the preschool-age population, only 18% of whom are enrolled in preschool provision.

Staffing levels and qualifications have also risen although the preschool workforce remains overwhelmingly female and representation of minority groups in the workforce is low. There are concerns over the use of either unqualified or primary education-qualified teachers in some programmes.

Demand

Despite the expansion of low-cost or officially free ELSR models of provision, affordability of ELSR services remains a barrier for many families because of informal fees and costs arising under intense competition for places. A 2010 survey in two districts of Armenia, for example, highlighted that 25% of parents reported that they were unable to afford the costs associated with preschool services.

Growing recognition of the importance of early learning, has, in some cases, been accompanied by stronger home/preschool links with parents understanding their role as ‘co-educators’ of their children. However, these are limited examples, and more generally early learning has been identified as the realm of the ‘expert’ with parents not feeling equipped to engage with their children’s learning. This is particularly so in the case of children with special needs where the status of the role of specialist support (such as speech therapists or psychologists) can limit both teachers’ and parents’ confidence in engaging with the development of these children.

Internal and international migration of whole families or parents (amongst the Roma and more widely) also creates shifting populations of children that under-resourced municipalities and institutions struggle to address.

Quality

In all six country/territory cases the focus on the expansion of access has been paramount, but there has been an increasing range of work on the quality of

provision at national and local levels. Play- and child-centred approaches are increasingly recognised and implemented, although pre-primary programmes often draw on more formal approaches from primary models. ELDS are providing a basis for a more coherent approach to early learning quality, although their application at local levels remains challenging. In some cases it remains unclear how these standards can be applied within shorter pre-primary programmes.

Increasing work around improving teacher pre- and in-service training has emerged. However, systems around the ELSR workforce, including the status of the profession, licensing and certification, career structures and quality assurance and support (through inspection and supervision), remain weak.

One significant gap is a lack of understanding of how different types of preschool provision (kindergarten, community-based centres, pre-primary etc.) affect the quality of children's ELSR experience and outcomes. Apart from one comparative UNICEF study undertaken in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, little research is available on this critical issue.

UNICEF's contribution

UNICEF has played a key role in many of the system changes that have occurred over the evaluation period, using a combination of its seven core roles.

Voice for children. UNICEF has been a strong advocate and voice for early childhood education, contributing significantly to bringing the sector onto the agenda of government and other stakeholders. UNICEF's close relationship with multiple ministries and some parliamentary groups contributes to the identification of pertinent entry points for lobbying, advocacy and interventions. UNICEF has joined with other stakeholders (including OSFs, International Step by Step Association, the World Bank, World Vision, Save the Children, the Aga Khan Foundation) to advocate, communicate and facilitate awareness of young children's, particularly marginalised children's, needs for ELSR. It has a strong network of national and regional partners with whom to work to influence policies on their behalf. This has often been achieved through less tangible, but time-intensive efforts of ongoing dialogue with government officials (or multiple governments in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina).

However, there is little evidence to date of UNICEF having progressed to promoting the voice of children in its ELSR work (i.e. facilitating the inclusion of children's voices and views in ELSR service design, delivery and evaluation).

Policy advice and technical assistance. UNICEF has been an important player in the development of the legislative and policy frameworks for preschool education over the evaluation period, which has been a critical first step in moving the sector forwards. Given the complex nature of policy development, a large proportion of UNICEF policy advice is opportunistic, responding quickly to evolving political agendas, changes in governments and funding opportunities. It has also been a consistent driving force behind the development of ELDS and the acceptance of alternative, low-cost modalities through its instrumental role in modelling such provision.

Weaker areas have been UNICEF's technical assistance in the area of cross-sector collaboration for ELSR and supporting decentralised systems. Whilst there are emerging good examples in these areas (such as cross-sector municipal teams in Moldova, and models for equitable ELSR financing in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), UNICEF is generally constrained in its opportunistic policy-advice functions by the complexities of multi-sector policy development and budgeting in decentralised contexts, as well as its own lack of technical expertise in these areas.

In all cases, UNICEF has contributed to strengthening individual capacities of staff from ministries, the agencies with responsibilities for curriculum and material development and teacher training, and local communities. At the decentralised level, however, the scale of capacity-development needs (not just at the individual, but also at the organisational and institutional levels) is greater and the short-term training and advice provided by UNICEF for municipalities have not been sufficient to contribute to system change at this level. This has been identified as an area where UNICEF will need more sustained, in-depth, systematic approaches to capacity development.

Modelling. A significant amount of UNICEF's financial resources for ELSR has been allocated to developing alternative, low-cost models for ELSR provision. These

have included community-based kindergartens/ECD centres, parenting education programmes, summer school-readiness programmes for refugee children, and other ECD interventions such as the TV *Magic Journey* series in Kyrgyzstan and preschool mobile buses in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Detailed financing studies that have accompanied a number of these models have been instrumental in helping governments accept alternative preschool models that are more affordable (for government and for families) and are reaching children who were previously excluded.

However, there are indications that the tide of pre-primary programmes and the scale of the funding that they have attracted, may be sweeping aside some of these alternative models for preschool provision and eroding their advantages in covering the full 3-6 age range and as sites for developing stronger child-centred methodologies.

Leveraging resources. Leveraging funds has been a particularly strong and successful aspect of UNICEF's work across the six cases. It has been an important supporting factor in ensuring that ELSR has not only been pushed onto the agenda of governments and agencies, but that tangible work and implementation has been possible to keep up the momentum for sectoral development. UNICEF has been one of the lead agencies in securing ELSR components in major national funding mechanisms including World Bank loans (Armenia), multiple rounds of GPE grants (Kyrgyzstan and Moldova where ELSR was the sole focus for the grant) and, recently, the EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) grant (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). UNICEF has been seen as a reputable and reliable conduit for donors seeking to work in this area and other smaller organisations look to it for help in carrying out ELSR activities. In many cases UNICEF has not only been instrumental in securing these additional resources for the sector, but also in ensuring that resources are channelled towards more marginalised areas, and, increasingly, to aspects of quality. The third GPE grant in Moldova, for example, has quality in the ELSR sector as a priority, with UNICEF as a leading implementer, and in Armenia UNICEF has played an important role in incorporating a training element alongside the infrastructure development of a World Bank funded programme.

Monitoring and evaluation. UNICEF has supported and contributed to reform agendas for ELSR by generating evidence and formulating recommendations through a growing collection of studies and reviews. These include sub-sector reviews, evaluations and fiscal studies of various preschool models, and knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) studies. UNICEF has also collected data on ELSR access for specific groups such as children with disabilities (in Armenia) and Roma children (in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).

UNICEF also conducts child rights monitoring and Country Offices (COs) have demonstrated efforts to develop the capacities of government stakeholders to conduct child rights and child poverty analyses. Although this is work in progress, the evaluation recognises that it is part of a broad rights agenda to which ELSR belongs.

However, in terms of ELSR sector monitoring, although UNICEF has increasingly been involved with education management information systems over the evaluation period, it has usually prioritised data collection for basic education and, as previously discussed, challenges to preschool and ELSR data coverage remain significant. Changing modalities of provision challenge existing data collection systems and there have been only limited attempts by UNICEF to address these issues.

Facilitating national dialogue. UNICEF draws on a range of activities to promote dialogue on child-friendly norms and standards for ELSR. In all six cases respondents recalled consultation roundtables, workshops, publication launches and training and confirmed that UNICEF had been instrumental in bringing these topics to the highest levels nationally (and in some cases regionally). UNICEF also has the capacity to bring a wide range of actors around the table to discuss matters relevant to children's rights. Most notably, UNICEF has been supporting the strong involvement in all cases of NGOs and CSOs working with children. This has resulted in policy makers being exposed to a range of views and perspectives, particularly relating to child poverty, marginalisation, disability and diversity. More interlinkages between UNICEF's own internal sectoral programmes, however, could strengthen this by highlighting the importance of alignments between, for

example ELSR and primary education, or ELSR and child and social protection.

Knowledge exchange. UNICEF has been flexible in responding to *ad hoc* needs and demands from governments for knowledge exchange activities. UNICEF has used its position in the sector to broker exchanges of knowledge amongst different types of organisations and across sectors and carried out several influential regional and international study tours for government partners in the first half of the evaluation period. Some good experiences of cross-country/territory sharing within UNICEF (Kosovo UNSCR1244 and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) highlight the potential for more exchange between COs (and even between sectors within COs) concerning good practices and approaches of other countries/territories, particularly amongst UNICEF staff who only work part time on ELSR.

Overall, UNICEF has had limited budgets and human resources for ELSR but through effectively combining its core roles (e.g. modelling provides credibility for policy advice and leveraging resources) it has been one of the most important partners for ELSR in all six cases. It has utilised its position and relationships to progress its agenda in a complex and evolving sector. However, progress has largely taken place without a clear and articulated longer-term UNICEF vision for ELSR. As both the sector and UNICEF's own programming have developed, the need for a strategic framework has grown.

Sustainability

In some cases there is evidence of necessary financial commitments and in all six cases the development of legislative and regulatory frameworks has been important to embed the sector into government systems and thinking.

There are, however, concerns that in prioritising expanded access, attention has been diverted from ensuring the coherence of multiple forms of provision and their alignment with 0-3 services and primary education. Similarly, concerns surround the integration of equity considerations in approaches and strategies for expansion, and the loss of focus on quality drivers such as inspection and career development.

Conclusions

Interventions have increased the numbers of children receiving preschool education: over the evaluation period there has been expanding provision in rural areas in order to help correct the imbalance with wealthier urban areas. This has mitigated the growth of equity gaps to some extent but has had limited impact on children from the most marginalised groups, including those with disabilities, from ethnic minorities and those in extreme poverty, factors which are often compounded by gender.

System-level bottlenecks have been addressed in a number of areas at national levels, most significantly in areas of the enabling environment and supply, with an emerging focus on quality. UNICEF contributions have been significant and impressive, given the limited budgets and resources available. However, decentralised systems remain challenging and require support to the institutional, organisational and individual capacities of decentralised entities.

UNICEF can make a niche contribution in this regard: whilst other agencies bring a background in public administration and institutional reform, UNICEF's ELSR expertise and equity agenda give it a role in informing the design, implementation and management of institutional reform so as to safeguard and progress quality and equity for ELSR. Whilst UNICEF often provides technical assistance of very good quality, it will need to engage with capacity development based on analysis of institutional and organisational capacity constraints in order to respond effectively to the challenges of decentralisation. This will require the strengthening of UNICEF's access to skill sets in capacity analysis and institutional reform, and the development of new partnerships to bring such support to decentralised authorities.

An important feature of middle income countries is that governments are less dependent on donor funds and, in many cases, have well established national institutions. UNICEF has to analyse and work effectively in these situations, targeting different stakeholders and being strategic about how and when it is able to leverage influence into system processes and ongoing sectoral development. UNICEF has the mandate and position in many countries to exercise this role: it may need to

adapt and define approaches to its core roles better to reflect the regional context.

There has been inadequate analysis of the needs of, and the appropriate and practical system response to, different groups of marginalised children. Whilst efforts have been made to focus on broad areas of marginalisation, there is insufficient differentiation of the factors of marginalisation or understanding of how these interact.

A stronger systemic approach to responding to needs and equitable provision is also required, including systems for identifying, assessing, budgeting and administering support to those with special educational needs, those from isolated communities or those facing other marginalisation factors. If preschool systems expand without a core equity focus, gaps will grow and are likely to become institutionalised and more difficult to address in the long-term.

UNICEF has struggled to promote the human rights agenda in ELSR beyond the “right to access”. Whilst espousing the rights of children to early learning opportunities, it has little practice of facilitating the rights of children in programming: to include support for children’s autonomy and voice in their learning, for example, or to make explicit an agenda of respect for young learners and their protection from intimidation. A rights-based drive for safety and respect is of particular importance to children with special needs or from stigmatised marginal groups.

From a broader women’s rights and equity perspective there are reasons for concern arising from UNICEF’s separation of education and childcare in early childhood services for 3-6 year olds and their programmatic focus only on the former.

The simple-sounding concept of “school readiness” of a child has no shared definition in the region nor, critically, measures. UNICEF global concept of ELSR is strongly rooted in the assumption that appropriate preschool provision will enable timely primary enrolment, enhance primary retention and improve learning outcomes. The other components of school readiness as defined by UNICEF global guidance (readiness of schools and of parents as well as of children) have yet to be fully explored. In particular, the alignment of preschool and primary education systems, approaches and services,

and the management of the transition between the two, are critical to the realisation of the benefits of ELSR but have so far been limited.

UNICEF advocates for integration and cross-sector policies such as those for comprehensive social protection that will address preschool exclusion. Yet UNICEF’s internal structures do not facilitate integrated cross-sector working in terms of programmes, staff allocation, reporting structures, budget lines and, possibly, staff skills.

Collecting data on preschool services for reporting, planning and administration has proved difficult because of the diverse provision and different data reporting routes. Strengthening the collection, analysis and use of data through appropriate, integrated data systems will be a critical aspect for further progress in the sector.

The burgeoning private sector has largely remained overlooked, and needs to be subject to adequate quality assurance and child protection systems.

The tide of Grade Zero provision has expanded access but, to some extent, side-lined provision for the full 3-6 year age range. The implications of Grade Zero on the scope and quality of children’s preschool experience has not been fully analysed—actors might usefully consider whether universal Grade Zero constitutes an advance in equitable preschooling or is simply lowering the school enrolment age: how different might these two perceptions be?

ELSR quality is an emerging focus for UNICEF and addressing system bottlenecks in terms of teacher career structures, management, inspection, training and professional development will be important as UNICEF emphasises sustainable progress in quality as well as access. A better understanding of what quality entails will need to underpin this. There has been limited opportunity for longitudinal research and the best research examples have been comparative reviews of modalities. There is a need for evaluation of quality and of the outcomes of different types of provision to inform future programming.

Overall, the TOC is a useful tool to inform strategies, analysis and planning and has been validated by the evaluation as a workable framework for understanding how activities drive results and impacts from *core roles*

to *system changes* to (medium and longer term) *impacts*. The evaluation has revealed some gaps, however, with regard to how the TOC recognises decentralised systems and the need for institutional and organisational capacity. COs will need more support to use the TOC as intended and to ensure that it better reflects contexts in CEE/CIS as it is transferred into country/territory-relevant TOCs. Analysis of how findings validate the links in the TOC is presented in the conclusions of the report.

Main recommendations

Further detail on each recommendation, and indicative actions for the RO and COs are included in the main report.

Recommendation 1: Amend the TOC to:

- (i) include ‘institutions able to deliver their function’ as a system determinant in the enabling environment, with the RO providing guidance on those core roles that support capacity development, notably Policy advice and TA, in line with UNDP guidelines;² and
- (ii) show system determinants at sub-national levels to help focus on the chain from national to sub-national systems (and hence to impact for children) in planning interventions.

Recommendation 2: UNICEF, headed by the RO and working with all COs, develops a long-term vision and strategy for ELSR in the region. Equity should be at the core of this strategy, with priority given to the most marginalised children and ways to understand and respond to their different preschool needs (see main report for key recommended elements of this vision and strategy).

Recommendation 3: UNICEF COs review the possible risks to quality arising from rapidly increasing access, with short national research studies.

Recommendation 4: UNICEF deepens its approach to teacher training and professional development and work on children’s ways of learning and respect for children’s rights.

Recommendation 5: UNICEF develops guidance and tools for child participation to ensure children’s voices are heard and integrated into the general reflection on ELSR quality.

Recommendation 6: UNICEF RO provides further support to institutionalising the development and dissemination of quality children’s TV.

Recommendation 7: Where there are standards in place that do not articulate with the start and end points of the main modalities of provision (multiple-year/single year, full year/limited hours, full-day/half-day etc.), an additional guideline should be prepared to allow the standards to be used within provision that has limited age coverage and timing.

Recommendation 8: UNICEF strengthens its ability to navigate decentralisation and support sustainable capacity development at national and sub-national levels. UNICEF COs may need to reconfigure and develop different working relationships with partners to bring technical support and institutional capacity development to sub-national units. This should be based on a capacity development strategy for system institutions, informed by an institutional and organisational mapping of those involved in the sector as part of UNICEF country/territory planning for ELSR, taking account of both national, sub-national, field institutions and (where relevant) the private sector.

Recommendation 9: UNICEF RO publishes an open call for consultants with a range of expertise, including on system change and management, such as in finance, legislation, education decentralisation and public administration, and maintains a roster of specialised consultants upon which COs/RO can call.

Recommendation 10: UNICEF supports the development of a stronger framework for data collection in ELSR through:

- (i) an extended technical document on the desirable data for the sector and the COs working with national (and increasingly sub-national) agencies, to improve data on ELSR; and
- (ii) UNICEF RO and COs taking opportunities to support the development of integrated information systems for preschool and onwards

² [Capacity Development | UNDP](#) (referenced April 11, 2014)

that take the individual child as the unit of data, not aggregated data at school/centre level.

Recommendation 11: UNICEF supports and, if necessary, drives a regional research agenda on:

- (i) a medium-term understanding of school readiness, its impact on children’s schooling and life chances and those aspects of ELSR that have the most impact on the lives of children and their families;
- (ii) child learning outcomes (including across different types of provision);
- (iii) parental attitudes to ELSR; and
- (iv) issues pertaining to increasing equity and quality.

To support this agenda UNICEF should develop research partnerships with other agencies including NGOs and universities.

Recommendation 12: UNICEF reviews how it handles inter-sectorality at regional and national levels in both its own internal programming and organisation, and in the linkages it supports at system level to ensure the adoption of a strategic, joined-up approach to preschool. COs should explore how linkages across sectors can be made with regard to issues of: (i) early identification and referral of disability, special needs and families in

difficult socio-economic circumstances; (ii) identification and case management of out-of-pre-primary children (particularly where pre-primary is compulsory); (iii) benefits and other safety nets for the poorest and most marginalised families and young children at risk of poor outcomes; (iv) services to deal with emotional needs (and not just the physical needs) of children with disabilities or those left behind when their parents emigrate.

Recommendation 13: UNICEF promotes comprehensive professional development for ELSR staff that, in addition to “learning”, also includes minimum knowledge on health, development, child protection, parenting and socio-economic vulnerabilities and comprehensive assessments.

Recommendation 14: UNICEF RO works with COs to strengthen the definition of core roles, identifying challenges and opportunities as well as good practices for each role. UNICEF could specify what constitutes good TA, good knowledge brokering etc. and what standards UNICEF should aim at when engaging in each core role.

Recommendation 15: UNICEF RO and COs strengthen partnerships with the EU in accession candidate countries/territories so as to coordinate policy support with the accession agenda and align practice.

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview of the evaluation

This report presents the findings from the multi-country evaluation on early learning and school readiness (ELSR) commissioned by the UNICEF CEE/CIS Regional Office (RO). The Terms of Reference (TOR) developed for the evaluation by the UNICEF Regional Knowledge and Leadership Area 3 (RKLA) Reference Group set out the specific objectives as:

- assessing if changes in national (regional, local) ELSR systems have led to increased access and reduced equity gaps in ELSR
- assessing the UNICEF regional generic theory of change and actual contribution of UNICEF to system level changes that had an impact on access and the reduction of equity gaps in ELSR

As a central aspect of the equity focus in both of these objectives, the evaluation has given specific attention to gender and human rights considerations in its analysis of both system changes and UNICEF contributions.

The evaluation covers the period 2005-2012 in six CEE/CIS countries/territory: Armenia (Ar), Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH), Kosovo³ (Ko*), Kyrgyzstan (Kg), the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FMa) and Moldova (Mo). The evaluation's focus on assessing change at a system level reflects UNICEF's regional position that the progressive realisation of children's rights and reduction of equity gaps are best achieved through changes in systems at national/regional/local levels and that UNICEF programming should be targeted to contribute to these system level changes. The evaluation therefore examines the combined efforts of UNICEF in each country/territory to contribute to access and equity in ELSR rather than any individual project or programme.

The evaluation took place between September 2013 and July 2014 under UNICEF's contract with Education for Change Ltd.

1.2 Context

Over the past decade early childhood education and care has received increasing attention, drawing on a range of child development, health and psychology research, econometric analyses and frameworks of rights, social investment and human capital. These point towards the importance of cognitive, physical, social and emotional development in the period of 0-8 years old in influencing the trajectories of individuals throughout their life, overcoming inequalities and contributing to productive societies. Early childhood services are also an integral part of efforts to provide equitable access to the workforce for parents, and especially mothers who carry much of the burden of care.

Although access to early childhood education is increasing worldwide, huge inequalities remain in terms of coverage and quality. The development of early childhood services raises numerous challenges in terms of governance (with services spanning health, welfare, education and protection sectors involving complex relationships of responsibility and decentralisation), financing, the labour market situation and gendered divisions of labour, and the cultural and social norms and traditions

³ UNSCR 1244

around child upbringing and expectations of early childhood service provision. Context is therefore an important consideration in the assessment of early childhood education services, and this is particularly the case in the CEE/CIS region in its transition from Soviet and Yugoslavian systems.

1.2.1 Transitions in early childhood education in the CEE/CIS region

The CEE/CIS region comprises countries and territories that were part of either the former Soviet Union or the former Yugoslavia, and many of the countries and territories share some common traditions of social organisation and provision that arose within these systems, including state-funded support for the care and education of preschool children. This was often provided through the workplace and consisted of a full day of care in kindergartens that allowed mothers and fathers to work. Many of the institutions were well equipped for care, with facilities for children to sleep during the day and be fed. The practice reflected Soviet ideology to socialise, teach and inculcate values and was integrated from kindergarten right through to tertiary education.⁴ Whilst coverage was wide spread, there were still notable disparities between some Republics (coverage in former Yugoslav Republics and Central Asia was relatively low) and within Republics (for example along the lines of urban/rural locations).⁵

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia and the loss of social subsidies, many of the countries and territories of the region were unable to sustain this level of provision (many of the cooperative workplaces were closed or changed ownership) and there was a crisis of transition for early childhood education and care because of lack of funds, structure and political will. Many kindergartens were closed, with those remaining often concentrated in urban areas and reliant on informal payments to compensate for state under-funding and low salaries, throwing up additional barriers to access for poor and marginalised groups. This was accompanied by a dramatic decline in women's participation in the labour force, leading to a 'refamilialisation' of childcare in the region. In some countries and territories a private sector has developed to serve those parents who can afford to pay market prices, but many people have been left with no access at all to preschool education and care.⁶ This means that in most countries and territories children have only been exposed to education from the age of seven, when entering primary school.

The legacy of Soviet and Yugoslav provision established expectations of kindergartens providing full day care and education. As countries and territories in the region have attempted to make the transition from the collapse of former systems, this legacy has biased efforts towards the maintenance and restoration of the old infrastructure of kindergartens and the use of much reduced budgets on programme models that are unaffordable for widespread, equitable access and delivery at scale.⁷ As a result many children's rights to preschool education are not being met across the region. Table 1 shows changes in gross enrolment ratios and private provision for the two main constituent parts of UNICEF's CEE/CIS region in comparison to other global regions; it should be noted that these regional data obscure wide disparities amongst countries and territories within those regions. The very low rate of private enrolment in Central and Eastern Europe (and the *Global Monitoring Report* (GMR) Central Asian region which had rates of 0.1% in 1999 and 1% in 2010) reflects the tradition of public provision and lack of information about a private sector that operates informally in much of the region.

⁴ UNICEF CEE/CIS (2008), *Early Childhood Development in the CEE/CIS Region: Situation and Guidance*

⁵ UNICEF Innocenti (2009), *Innocenti Social Monitor 2009: child well-being at a crossroads*

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Table 1: Preschool enrolment in CEE/CIS and other regions

		Enrolment in private preschool as % of total (median)		Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in preschool %							
				1999				2010			
		1999	2010	Total	Male	Female	GPI	Total	Male	Female	GPI
UNICEF Region	CEE countries/territories covered by UNICEF Regional Office [†]			34	34	33	0.97	50	51	50	0.98
	Central Asian countries covered by UNICEF Regional Office [‡]			19	19	18	0.92	29	29	29	1.00
GMR regions	Central and Eastern Europe*	0.6	2.1	51	52	50	0.96	69	70	69	0.98
	North America and Western Europe	26	24	76	77	76	0.98	85	85	86	1.01
	East Asia	57	47	39	39	39	1.00	57	57	57	1.01
	South and West Asia	-	48	21	22	21	0.93	48	48	49	1.02
	Sub-Saharan Africa	53	55	10	10	10	0.95	17	17	18	1.01

Source: UNESCO (2012), Global Monitoring Report (GMR)

[†] Author estimates from GMR data. CEE countries/territories covered by UNICEF Regional Office are: Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey and Ukraine. The Russian Federation is excluded from this as, whilst the country is covered by the Regional Office, there is no UNICEF country programme there.

[‡] Author estimates from GMR data. Excludes Mongolia.

*GMR CEE grouping includes a number of countries with relatively high 2010 GERs which are not part of the UNICEF CEE/CIS region, namely: Czech Republic (106%), Estonia (96%), Hungary (85%), Latvia (84%), Lithuania (74%), Poland (66%), Slovakia (91%) and Slovenia (86%). Russian Federation (90%) is part of UNICEF CEE/CIS but does not have a UNICEF Country Office. Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) is part of UNICEF CEE/CIS and has a UNICEF programme but is not included in GMR data.

1.2.2 Early childhood education and equity in CEE/CIS region

The CEE/CIS region is considered a middle-income region with only two of the countries, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, categorised as low income.⁸ However, this middle-income label hides substantial, and in many cases expanding, inequalities both between and within countries /territories, with the social, political and economic changes experienced in the transition from Soviet and Yugoslav systems as well as the more recent economic crisis of 2008, deepening poverty and vulnerability for various groups within society.⁹

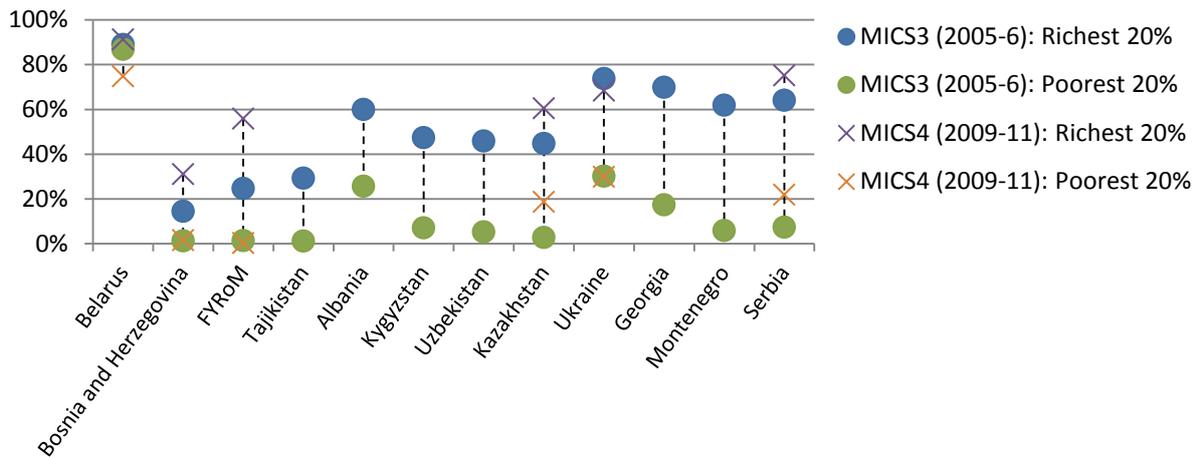
Existing evidence on early childhood care and education indicates that children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the most to gain from attendance in early childhood programmes and that inclusive early childhood services can have a strong impact on equitable life chances.¹⁰ Yet it appears that it is these very disadvantaged children who are most excluded from current services. Figure 4 indicates the disparities in preschool access across the region according to wealth and the changes in these disparities over time where we have the two most recent Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey reports (MICS3 (2005-6) and MICS4 (2009-12)) available for specific countries:

⁸ Based on World Bank classifications of Gross National Income per capita < US\$1,035.

⁹ World Bank (2010), *The crisis hits home: stress-testing households in Europe and Central Asia*; UNICEF CEE/CIS (2008), *Early Childhood Development in the CEE/CIS Region: Situation and Guidance*

¹⁰ OECD (2006), *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*

Figure 4: Percentage of children aged 36-59 months attending early childhood education, by wealth (MICS3 and MICS4)



Countries and territories in the region are home to many minority communities identified by language, ethnicity, and/or religion. Children of these minority communities are often under-represented in formal educational provision, including in preschools.¹¹ The recent MICS4 included specific surveys on Roma populations in some countries, for example, and reported the percentage of children aged 36-59 months old attending early childhood education programmes to be 13.1% for the general population and 1.5% amongst the Roma population in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and 21.8% and 3.9% respectively in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.¹²

These ethnic minorities are among the most likely not to register births or have proof of residence and therefore face difficulties in accessing basic services. The period of transition and recent economic crisis, as well as conflicts and natural disasters in the region, have also increased migrant and internally displaced populations, increasing the vulnerability of children to exclusion from services not adapted to incorporate and respond to the needs of mobile populations.

Rural locations have also suffered from lack of provision, with former Soviet and Yugoslav networks of kindergartens shrinking to concentrations in urban areas. This has been compounded by geographically uneven levels of capacity and budgets for municipalities, to whom responsibilities for early childhood education have often been devolved: urban municipalities usually have access to better resources than rural municipalities as they are able to raise more taxes and have larger budget allocations from central government if these are made on the basis of population. As a result, rural areas lag significantly behind urban areas in early childhood education enrolment in many countries and territories; in Kyrgyzstan for example, there was a gross enrolment ratio in preschool education of 33.4% in urban areas compared to only 7.8% in rural areas in 2011.¹³

The Soviet tradition had systems for identifying children with physical, mental and emotional learning needs (based on the so-called science of “defectology”) and for caring for them separately in institutions. The countries and territories that inherited this tradition are at various stages in the paradigm shift towards social and educational inclusion and in adapting systems to facilitate the

¹¹ UNICEF, OSF and Roma Education Fund (2012), *Roma Early Childhood Inclusion: Overview Report*

¹² The Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2013), *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2011–2012, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Roma Survey, Final Report*; Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Science and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia (2011), *MICS 2011*

¹³ National Statistical Committee (NSC), Kyrgyzstan (2012), *Education and Science Report 2008-2011*

inclusion of children with special needs. The numbers of children who are institutionalised in specialised care (and in orphanages) remain a concern in many of the CEE/CIS countries and territories as a risk to children's rights, development and protection. Data on access of children with disabilities to early childhood services are often difficult to compare owing to different practices in early identification and inconsistencies in recording across the region. In Armenia, however, a recent study showed that only one in three children with disabilities attend or have attended preschool, with lower rates in rural areas.¹⁴

Whilst there is near parity between girls' and boys' enrolment across the region, gender does intersect with many of these other factors, such as in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia where Roma girls are five times less likely than Roma boys to attend early childhood education programmes.¹⁵ This intersection of multiple factors has produced complex forms of exclusion that vary in detail from country to country and area to area.

1.2.3 Structure of current early childhood education services

The inherited institutional structures for preschool education vested responsibilities in local municipalities and cooperatives and upwards to ministries other than education (such as health and social welfare). Transition has required difficult shifts in institutional arrangements, with new responsibilities for education ministries, new career structures and new accountabilities.

Many of the countries/territories in the region are engaged in decentralising service delivery functions and establishing clear understandings of national and sub-national responsibilities. Early childhood education has been caught up in this tidal flow of changing governance as decentralisation has often put the responsibility for early childhood services at local authority level. However, as mentioned above, the budget and capacities necessary at local levels to deliver effectively on those responsibilities have not been present, creating an uneven patchwork of provision and services within countries/territories. This is complicated by the mushrooming private sector in some countries/territories providing services to those able to afford market prices but with minimal public oversight. In some cases, there has been an introduction of grant funding of educational institutions, often on a per capita basis or linked to institutional development planning.¹⁶

The region has also seen some major shifts in pedagogy and curriculum at all educational levels, with early childhood education witnessing the introduction of learning and pedagogical standards and efforts to upgrade and extend teacher training. However quality assurance and supervisory systems to support the implementation of these reforms within the early childhood education sector has often lagged behind.

An important driver of change over the last decade has been the identification and introduction of forms of provision that are more affordable than the traditional full-day, state-funded nursery / kindergarten in partnership with parents and, in some instances, private sector providers. Legislative reform and policy change to legitimise alternative forms of early childhood education provision have been underway in many countries/territories in the region, including attempts to incorporate a more

¹⁴ UNICEF (2012), *It's about inclusion. Access to Education, Health, and Social Protection Services for Children with Disabilities in Armenia*

¹⁵ Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Science and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia (2011), *MICS 2011*

¹⁶ UNICEF Innocenti (2009), *Innocenti Social Monitor 2009: child well-being at a crossroads*

inclusive framework for the early childhood education sector, although substantial gaps between laws and policies and their implementation remain.¹⁷

There is also a growing focus on school readiness through the introduction of ‘Grade Zero’ programmes in a number of countries/territories in the region. Such programmes extend the formal educational methods of primary schooling into a preparatory year, although even where this is officially free, associated costs (transport, clothing, food etc.) and informal costs induced through the competition for limited places has expanded equity gaps in access. These Grade Zero programmes add another type of early childhood education provision into an already complex sector, with the transitional arrangements between primary, Grade Zero and preschools requiring further attention to ensure that the benefits of early childhood education can be realised through smooth educational progression.¹⁸

1.2.4 UNICEF’s ELSR approach in the CEE/CIS region

Within the early childhood period (0-8 years old) UNICEF approaches in the region have been largely organised into three programming areas:

- Young Child Well-being covering ages 0-3 years old and focused on working with health and social systems to support parents and families to provide more cognitive, emotional and developmental support at home
- ELSR covering ages 3-6 years old and working with education systems (the focus of this evaluation)
- Education, incorporating the early years of primary education (7-8 years old) and focused on access, equity, quality and financing of education

As the terminology of ELSR indicates, UNICEF’s focus for the 3-6 year old period of early childhood has concentrated on the importance of preschooling to prepare children for timely and successful entry into the formal primary education system. The achievement of children’s rights to basic education, lifelong learning and the fulfilment of their developmental potential continues to be restricted by persistent inequities in basic education enrolment, attendance, retention, learning outcomes and achievements. The research that is available¹⁹ indicates that school readiness is linked to learning, cumulative skill development and school completion. Ensuring children, particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged children, are ready to learn and are able to make the transition into the basic education system successfully has thus become an important strategy for UNICEF in overcoming equity and learning gaps in education and, ultimately, success in adulthood.

Globally, UNICEF’s conceptualisation, position and guidance on early childhood education, and ELSR specifically, has remained relatively under-developed (a reflection of the limited number of early childhood development staff in UNICEF HQ). However, UNICEF has recently articulated its definition of school readiness based on three main dimensions:

1. *Ready children, focusing on children’s learning and development* [incorporating not only pre-academic skills and knowledge, but also a wider set of behavioural, social and emotional

¹⁷ Open Society Foundation, Roma Education Fund and UNICEF (2012), *Roma Early Childhood Inclusion: Overview Report*

¹⁸ UNICEF CEE/CIS (2008), *Early Childhood Development in the CEE/CIS Region: Situation and Guidance*

¹⁹ This research mainly arises from the USA, see UNICEF (2012), *School readiness: a conceptual framework* for a summary of this research

skills and attitudes developed during the early childhood period that children need to succeed in education and beyond].

2. *Ready schools, focusing on the school environment along with practices that foster and support a smooth transition for children into primary school and advance and promote the learning of all children.*
3. *Ready families, focusing on parental and caregiver attitudes and involvement in their children's early learning and development and transition to school.*²⁰

1.2.5 UNICEF strategic approach to programming in CEE/CIS

Across all sectors UNICEF CEE/CIS has made a strategic shift in the focus of its programming from more traditional service-delivery to a systemic approach to sustainable change. This is based on a consensus within UNICEF in the CEE/CIS region that the progressive realisation of children's rights and the reduction of equity gaps are best achieved through changes in systems at national, regional and local levels. This also reflects the global UNICEF refocus on equity since 2010 in response to persistent disparities in children's development and the imperative to reach those marginalised groups with the greatest needs who are often overlooked in national aggregates of progress.²¹ As part of this equity refocus UNICEF has developed the Monitoring of Results for Equity Systems (MoRES) as a conceptual framework to help guide effective planning, programming, implementation, monitoring and managing of results for equitable development. MoRES, operationalised in UNICEF in 2012, draws on a determinant analysis approach²² that outlines enabling and constraining system-level factors to equitable development and facilitates the identification of cross-sectoral and multi-dimensional bottlenecks as the basis for UNICEF programme development and monitoring.²³

To contribute effectively towards sustainable change, in the CEE/CIS region UNICEF has thus consciously sought to direct its programming to system level issues of the enabling environment, supply, demand and quality. This has not meant abandoning service delivery all together, but rather ensuring that this is used strategically as one of several roles to inform UNICEF's approach to system bottlenecks and to influence other stakeholders within system change dialogues and processes (in ELSR this has involved modelling new low-cost alternative models for ELSR provision to inform how the sector may expand access and meet the needs of marginalised groups as discussed in the findings section below). The shift to a systemic approach has thus involved a substantial adjustment in how UNICEF positions itself, its understanding of how change happens, and how it manages and focuses its analysis, programming and relationships with stakeholders within this context. The period under evaluation (2005-2012) therefore covers a time of transition for the Regional and Country Offices in exploring and articulating how and what it means to make this shift.

1.2.6 Regional Office support to the ELSR agenda

The UNICEF CEE/CIS RO, and specifically the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Section, has a number of roles in relation to UNICEF's ELSR approach. The ECD Section, in collaboration with

²⁰ UNICEF (2012), *School readiness: a conceptual framework*, p.7; see also UNICEF (2012), *School readiness and transitions: a companion to the Child Friendly Schools Manual*

²¹ UNICEF (2010), *Progress for children: achieving the MDGs with equity*, Number 9

²² This determinant analysis approach draws on the 'marginal budgeting for bottlenecks' tool jointly developed by UNICEF, the World Bank and WHO in the context of child and maternal mortality in 2008 – see UNICEF (2007), *The state of the world's children 2008*, p.70

²³ See MoRES determinant framework set out in Annex d of the Terms of Reference (Volume 2, annex 1 of this report)

Country Offices (COs), provides the directional framework for its ELSR work through the development of regional policy and position papers, and engages with international and regional structures and agencies to develop regional agreements and complement, enhance and supplement the CO interventions in influencing country/territory-level policy and practice. It also plays an important role in stimulating, supporting and coordinating the development of evidence and research on ELSR in the region, particularly around issues of marginalisation, through facilitating multi-country/territory studies such as the Roma Early Childhood Inclusion reports. More directly with the COs, the regional ECD Section supports programming across the region particularly for learning and sharing lessons, but also in providing advice and support on the implementation and management of programmes.

In 2012 the UNICEF RO established the RKLA groups to provide a framework for greater RO-CO engagement and cross-country/territory collaborative development and leadership of regional approaches, principles and research in different thematic areas. The RKLA groups provide a more formalised structure and platform to share learning across the region and bring more visibility to UNICEF's work in specific areas. A Reference Group for the RKLA on Early Learning and School Readiness (RKLA 3), consisting of CO and RO ECD advisers and chaired by the UNICEF Representative in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), has been established to drive forward the UNICEF ELSR agenda in the region. This Reference Group led the development and provided the oversight of this evaluation to contribute to better understanding of the ELSR work of UNICEF CEE/CIS between 2005 and 2012.

1.2.7 Case country/territory contexts

The case countries/territories for the evaluation share a legacy as parts of the former Soviet Union or Yugoslavia but bring very different contexts and experiences since the early 1990s.

Republic of Armenia

Armenia is a densely populated middle-income country in the South Caucasus, ranked 87th in the Human Development Index (HDI) in 2013. 32% of the country's population of 2.9 million live below the national poverty line and unemployment sits at 19%. Armenia experienced a severe economic decline in 2008-2009 with a fall of more than 15% in its GDP: it has been slowly recovering since 2011.

Since 1988 there has been conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan around the area of Nagorno-Karabakh (a ceasefire was signed in 1994 but conflict and tension has continued up to today), and border closures with Azerbaijan and Turkey have affected the economy of the country. The population is mainly of Armenian ethnicity with 3% of non-Armenians, of which Yazidis are the largest group.

Provision of early childhood education declined significantly after the fall of the Soviet Union as state kindergartens closed. The Government of Armenia launched large-scale reform efforts in the mid-2000s to improve the education system, including early childhood education, which was included in Armenia's Second Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper in 2008.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina, a middle-income country situated in the Balkans, currently ranks 81st in the HDI. 18% of the population lives below the national poverty line, but many more live only just above this line and are thus vulnerable to even small changes in economic growth. There is an

unemployment rate of 28% and 50% youth unemployment. National economic growth has stagnated in recent years and current GDP remains lower than in 2008.

Since the war (1992-95) Bosnia and Herzegovina has faced significant challenges to function as a state. Many issues arising from the war and subsequent division of the country are unresolved and a source of bitterness: in 2014, during this evaluation, there were anti-government protests. The population consists of three main ethnic groups – Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats – with a number of other minority groups including the Roma who face significant social and economic exclusion.

The country of 3.8 million people has a complex administration, comprising of the National Council of Ministers (who have no powers of implementation), two entities (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (split into ten cantons) and Republika Srpska) and the separate administrative unit of Brcko District, and 142 Municipalities. The Office of the High Representative, an internationally constituted oversight body, oversees the implementation of the civilian aspects of the Peace Agreement that ended the war. Vertically and horizontally in this system there is friction and lack of co-operation. The country wishes to join the EU, but negotiations have stalled because of the fragmentation and polarization which characterizes political and economic decision making.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has the lowest rate of preschool access in Europe and the second lowest in the CEE/CIS region (after Tajikistan) at 12.4%. The Framework Law on Preschool Upbringing and Education was introduced in 2007 that envisages a mandatory year of preschool before primary, but this has yet to be endorsed by all cantons, and preschool systems and access varies widely across the administrative and political units. There is a substantial private sector which accounts for 21% of preschool provision.

Kosovo (UNSCR 1244)

Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) is a middle-income territory ranked 87th in the HDI, with 30% of its population of 1.8 million living under the national poverty line. The economic position is challenging, with dependence on external support, serious inflation and unemployment at around 35% and 60% youth unemployment.

All public institutions were lost in the war (1998-99) and the territory has gone through substantial changes since the conflict in reconstructing state structures and systems. In February 2008, the Kosovo Assembly unilaterally declared independence from Serbia. However, the UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) is still in force and binding for UN Programmes and Funds. The European Union Rule of Law Mission became operational in 2008 and there are on-going discussions on the transfer of powers and responsibilities to the Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) authorities and to the EU.

The area around Mitrovica in the north of the territory has greater challenges because of its position, demography and history. In this area and in other enclave administrations with Serbian majorities there are separate administrative structures, creating a highly complex, dual system of services and structures. It is estimated that approximately 20,000 to 40,000 members of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian minority groups live in the territory and that over 90% of their children live on extreme or absolute poverty.

Preschool systems and structures have had to be built from scratch since the war with substantial increases in enrolment for 5-6 year olds resulting from a pre-primary, Grade Zero year of provision that aims to be universal by 2016 according to the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan. Enrolment for 3-5 year olds, however, remains much lower.

Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan is one of only two low-income countries in the CEE/CIS region (with Tajikistan) and is ranked 125th in the HDI. Income inequality in the country is high (Gini coefficient of 0.30), and 38% of the population of 5.7 million live in poverty. The economy has been steadily growing over the past decade, but there are high numbers of labour migrants working abroad.

Kyrgyzstan has suffered from political instability and uprisings since 2001, with the toppling of ruling regimes in 2005 and 2010, and the political situation is still potentially unstable. There is a political division and economic disparities between the North and the South of the country and in 2010 there was civil conflict in the South between Uzbek (who constitute 14% of the country's population) and Kyrgyz (65% of the population) ethnicities.

Since Kyrgyzstan gained independence, the system of preschool education has significantly reduced in size because of the widespread closure of kindergartens affiliated to enterprises as they became insolvent or unprofitable. The number of preschool institutions dropped from 1,604 in 1990 to 448 in 2005. Rural preschool institutions suffered most. Since then, however, access to preschool (and particularly through limited hours pre-primary programmes) has been gradually expanding.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia ranks 78th in the HDI, with 27% of its population living below the national poverty line. Unemployment remains high at 31% and the Gini coefficient is at 0.39, suggesting that inequities persist. Previously steady growth in GDP has slowed since the economic crisis in 2008.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has a population of about two million comprising of two main ethnic groups, Macedonians (64%) and Albanians (25%), and other smaller minorities such as the Roma (3%) who remain marginalised with the poverty rates for Roma people being three times higher than the national average. Since conflict between the two main ethnic groups in 2001, political and constitutional amendments have been carried out to develop a multi-ethnic civil state, but tensions remain between these two groups that have slowed political reform and worrying trends include the increasing segregation of education systems.

Preschool enrolment has been gradually expanding from a low base. In 2007 the pre-primary year of preschool (for ages 5-6) was transformed into the first grade of primary education, so preschool currently covers up to the age of five.

Republic of Moldova

Moldova is a densely populated country of 4.2 million, ranking 113th on the HDI and is the poorest country in Europe. 17% of the population live below the national poverty line. The country has an aging population: in education this is reflected in a declining school age population and school closures. Migration to other countries for work has skewed the labour supply and demographics and contributes to narrowing the pool of expertise in the public sectors (health and education for example) as well as a shortage of labour for other industries. Whilst at national level there has been high economic growth and a decline in poverty, at sub-national level these trends have been very uneven with a significant rural-urban divide and a strong need for greater social inclusion.

Since its independence, Moldova has experienced political instability and *de facto* territorial disintegration: in 1992 the Transnistria region broke away from the newly independent Moldova but

remains unrecognised by the international community. The unresolved political situation has posed significant development challenges for the country. Around 70% of the population are of Moldovan ethnicity alongside Ukrainians (11%) and Russians (9%) and a number of smaller minority groups such as the Roma (0.4%).

Preschool enrolment has increased at a rapid rate since 2000, reaching over 80% in 2012, although rural/urban inequities remain significant.

1.3 Theory of change (TOC)

1.3.1 Purpose and process of constructing the regional TOC for ELSR

This evaluation uses a TOC approach to understand and assess the contribution of UNICEF to increasing access and equity in ELSR. It takes as its starting point UNICEF RO's understanding and expectations (both implicit and explicit) of how positive change towards the progressive realisation of children's rights happens and how UNICEF contributes to this change, as recently articulated in its regional generic TOC. It then seeks to test the validity of this theory in the specific case of ELSR over the period 2005-2012.

UNICEF's regional generic TOC is built around the principle that progress in any sector is most effectively brought about through changes in systems at national, sub-national and local levels and thus UNICEF programming should focus on contributing to these system changes. System change outcome areas are defined using the MoRES determinant analysis framework that identifies four main categories of determinants. In relation to ELSR these categories incorporate:

- **Enabling environment:**
 - **Social norms** – the social rules and attitudes that inform how ELSR is perceived and valued, the expectations of what it should provide, the status accorded to it and to ELSR personnel, the basis on which it should be provided (state funded, fees, etc.) and who should access it (particularly around the inclusion of marginalised groups such as Roma or children with disabilities)
 - **Legislation and policy** – the frameworks that establish the basis of ELSR provision (as a right, as a selective service, etc.), the roles, responsibilities and regulation of those managing and providing ELSR services and the commitment to inclusive, equitable services
 - **Budget/expenditure** – the available levels of funding, budget commitments and levels of execution, methods for budget calculation and channels for resourcing ELSR services
 - **Management and coordination mechanisms** – articulation between ELSR policies, plans and implementation practices, capacities to fulfil responsibilities at all levels, coordination amongst ELSR stakeholders within and across levels (national, sub-national, local, etc.), structures/processes for and availability of ELSR data, and frameworks and capacities for monitoring and evaluating the sector
- **Supply**
 - **Availability of essential commodities** – how teaching and learning materials are selected and distributed to ensure quality and availability, including consideration of the needs of different groups (such as learners using a different language or with disabilities)

- **Adequately trained staff, facilities and information** – coverage and accessibility of ELSR facilities to all children, levels of ELSR staffing, representativeness of ELSR staffing (from marginalised groups, language groups, etc.)
- **Demand**
 - **Financial access** – financial barriers (direct and hidden costs) for parents in sending their children to ELSR services
 - **Social and cultural practices and beliefs** – social and cultural barriers that may hinder children from specific groups attending ELSR, either through the incompatibility of ELSR services with beliefs or practices (e.g. language, child-rearing practices, gender discrimination within families in who attends ESLR) or discrimination towards these groups from majority groups or within ELSR services
 - **Timing and continued use of services** – enrolment, attendance and drop-out according to official ages for ELSR (and the knock-on effect to age of enrolment in primary education), capacity of ELSR services to meet the needs of migrant and mobile groups
- **Quality**
 - **Quality of services** – standards (e.g. Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS)) and curricula, regulatory and supervisory systems for ELSR, quality of ELSR personnel training (including inclusive and child-centred pedagogical content), levels of qualified ELSR personnel available, teaching and learning practices in ELSR, quality of ELSR infrastructure (playgrounds, toilets, etc.), extent to which ELSR provides a seamless link to primary schooling

UNICEF programming activities and outputs that feed into these system changes are framed within the seven core roles of UNICEF, with gender mainstreaming and human rights based approaches cutting across all of them.²⁴ Table 2 sets out these core roles against examples of the types of activities they include in relation to ELSR programming:

Table 2: UNICEF core roles and types of activities they relate to in ELSR

Core role	Examples of activities for ELSR
Being the ‘voice’ for children and adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advocacy, particularly for marginalised groups of children ● Raising children’s issues in policy forums
Ensuring monitoring and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Evaluations and research studies ● Support to EMIS or other national monitoring of ELSR
Providing policy advice and technical assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Direct support to policy making ● Technical advice to laws and regulations ● Technical assistance (consultants or internal) for training and other capacity development
Leveraging resources from public and private sectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Finding resources (money or in kind) ● Influencing funds towards UNICEF aims (e.g. Global Partnership for Education (GPE))
Facilitating national dialogue towards norms and standards for early childhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Media events ● National forums

²⁴ These core roles come from a UNICEF regional “consensus that...[they] are indispensable for a sustainable UNICEF engagement and its universal presence in support of results and the realization of the rights of children everywhere” – UNICEF CEE/CIS RO (2013), ‘Regional Knowledge and Leadership Agenda: generic theory of change underlying UNICEF’s approach in CEE/CIS region’, p.6

that are child friendly and respectful of children’s rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion papers and documents to stimulate dialogue
Enabling knowledge exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional or international seminars • Exchanges of personnel
Modelling/piloting of new services to inform policy making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing new forms of ELSR provision • Trialling curriculum or pedagogy • Providing new forms of material (e.g. TV)

As these frameworks are relatively recent developments within UNICEF, ELSR programming and analysis has not been explicitly conceptualised or framed in these terms for the majority of the period under evaluation. Nor has the regional generic TOC been adapted specifically into a detailed UNICEF regional TOC for ELSR. Drawing on initial document reviews for the six countries/territory involved in this evaluation, therefore, the evaluation team used the regional generic TOC template to construct country/territory TOCs and then a consolidated regional TOC for ELSR (see Annex 3 for further detail on the methodology of this process). These TOCs were necessarily constructed by retro-fitting UNICEF programming and ELSR system changes in 2005-2012²⁵ onto the dimensions of the MoRES and UNICEF core role frameworks. The consolidation of specific country/territory TOCs into a regional, overarching TOC also involved a significant degree of generalisation and it is important to recognise that the relationship between these specific and overarching TOCs has to remain dynamic in order to reflect the varying contexts in which UNICEF is working. The overarching regional TOC for ELSR therefore focuses on the overall trends of UNICEF programme strategies rather than specific details of individual initiatives. It is also important to note that the TOC reflects the evaluation team’s understanding of how UNICEF has perceived and designed its programmes around system change and that this was approved as part of the Inception Report for this evaluation.

1.3.2 The regional TOC for ELSR

The regional TOC for ELSR is shown in Figure 5. The arrows between each of the levels in the TOC indicate the expected pathways by which each leads to the next, while the width of the arrows represents the relative emphasis of UNICEF programming and expected contributions to system changes and impacts.²⁶

As shown on the right hand side of the TOC, at a general level, UNICEF’s ELSR programming in the six country/territory cases has been focused on contributing to the progressive realisation of children’s rights on the basis that ELSR supports children’s educational achievement, school completion, children’s development and learning and ultimate success in adulthood. Strengthening ELSR therefore contributes to children’s rights to basic education, lifelong learning and the fulfilment of their developmental potential. In order to do this, impacts are sought in three main areas of the ELSR sector: increased overall access to ELSR, reduction in the equity gaps in ELSR access and a growing focus on improving the learning outcomes from ELSR.

Moving to the left, the diagram indicates drivers (the arrows connecting the two levels) from the system changes to these impact areas. It is important to note that all system determinants are likely

²⁵ Given the longer-term nature of system change, the analysis also considered a wider timescale in which to place this 2005-2012 period in context

²⁶ The weighting of arrows was necessarily a relatively crude process (based on the incidence of programme interventions in each area – see Annex 3 for more details), but it does provide indicative trends over the six countries.

to contribute to access, equity and quality, but this TOC has been developed based only on the data and information available from the UNICEF strategy and programming documentation reviewed.²⁷ As such, only the main drivers identified by UNICEF within this documentation for the country/territory cases are shown where these address known constraints.

The consolidated regional TOC for ELSR suggests the following regional priorities:

- Providing policy advice and technical assistance (TA) has been the most important and substantial core role, expected to contribute to policy and regulatory changes (standards, career structures etc.) deemed necessary for transition, particularly to provide the basis for different models of ELSR provision
- Similarly, and often in related programmes, UNICEF has focused on facilitating knowledge exchange and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity and practices to inform the public and government
- UNICEF has pursued its mandate as a voice for children in this region, particularly to build awareness of the developmental importance of ELSR and on behalf of groups of children who have been marginalised
- Modelling, although on a small scale, has been used in all six cases to demonstrate organisational models and practices of quality provision. Through the selection of intervention sites such models may also contribute to more equitable access

The “demand” grouping of system changes has not been prioritised: there are only a few actions addressing specific types of demand obstacles in minority communities. This reflects a general analysis by UNICEF that there is significant unmet demand in these countries/territories.²⁸ The TOC identified no intervention specifically seeking to address issues of continuity of use or progression from ELSR into primary school, and only very few focused on financial access issues.

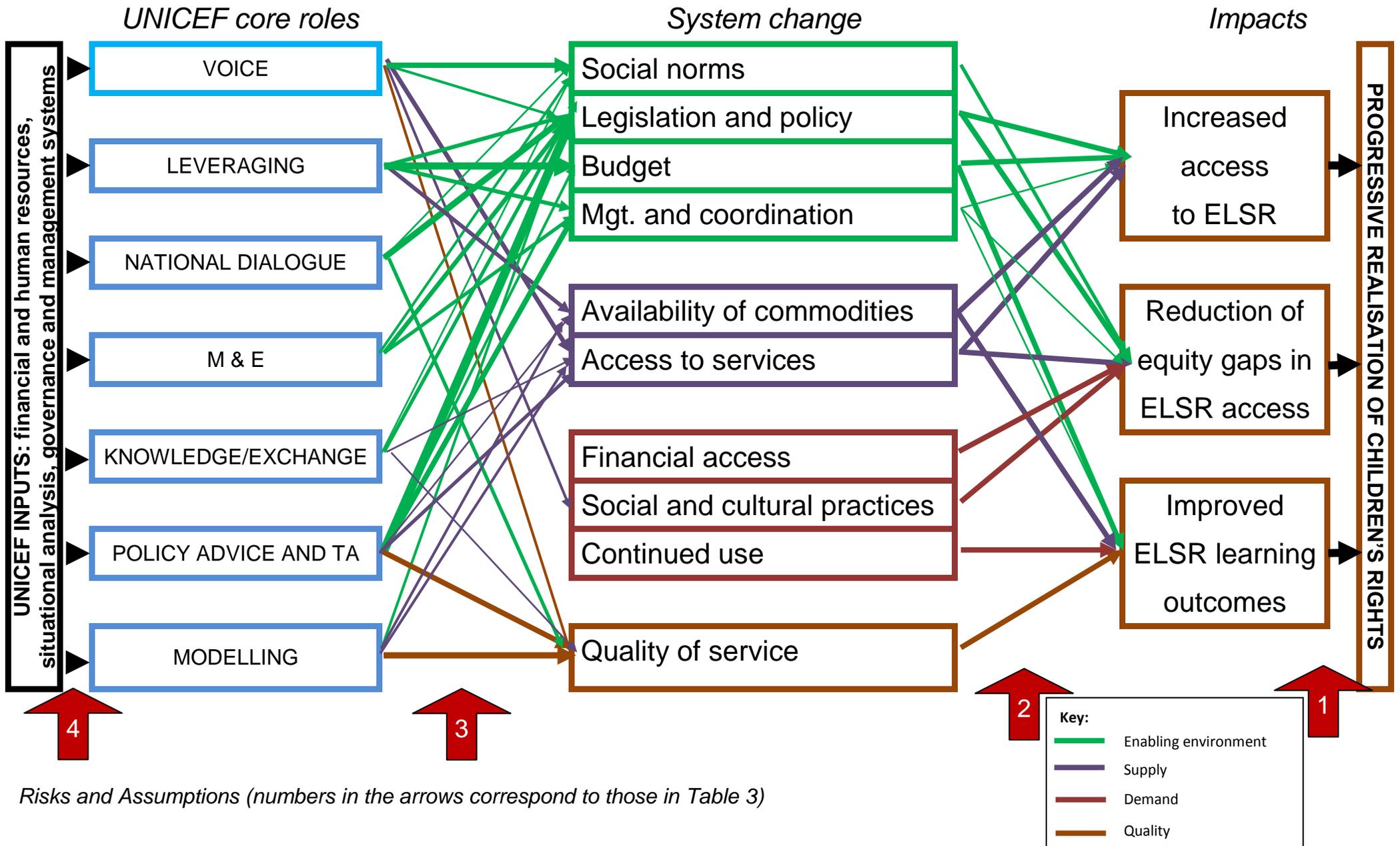
All of the UNICEF core roles are supposed to have gender and human rights considerations embedded in them. The core roles are also underpinned by the capacities of the UNICEF COs and RO in terms of the ELSR budgets available, the human resources committed to ELSR programmes, the organisational and governance arrangements for ELSR programming, both within each CO and between the COs and the RO, and the UNICEF programming, monitoring and reporting processes that are in place to support programme development and implementation.

Between each level there are a number of risks and assumptions that feed into how one level leads into the next, which are outlined in Table 3. The inclusion of all ten MoRES determinants and all seven UNICEF core roles in the TOC, even though some of these have not received significant direct UNICEF attention, was important for the evaluation in testing the structure and elements of the TOC. Equally important to assessing the validity of the arrows that link the TOC levels was assessing the validity of the absence or weakness of arrows around other areas. Retaining all elements in the TOC (and so in the evaluation framework) ensured that the evaluation maintained a broad perspective that looked not only at how effective individual strategies were in respect to their own pathways of change, but also at whether the analysis and strategic choices around the targeted system-level outcomes were valid in each context for the longer-term impacts sought.

²⁷ This documentation was mainly: Situational Analyses, Country Programme Documents, Country Programme Action Plans, Annual Reports, Annual Work Plans and programme evaluation and monitoring reports

²⁸ See Volume 2 of this report, Annex 1: Terms of Reference, p.5

Figure 5: Regional Theory of Change for ELSR Diagram



1.3.3 Risks and assumptions

Many of the identified risks and mitigating assumptions relate to country/territory contexts. However, there are generalisable risks and assumptions for the six case countries/territory that were identified through the analysis of UNICEF documentation and the evaluation team’s knowledge and understanding of the early childhood education sector. These are mapped against the different levels of linkages within the TOC in Table 3:

Table 3: TOC risks and assumptions

Level	Assumptions	Risks
Access, equity and learning impacts to progressive realisation of children’s rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That investment in ELSR is an effective and efficient strategy to reduce exclusion and break intergenerational cycles of deprivation. • That attending ELSR programmes has a positive impact on children’s transition to primary school, their educational progress and their long-term social adjustment. • That ELSR aimed at children aged 3-6 can be integrated as a coherent part of an approach to early childhood and therefore articulates with early years (0-3) and first years of schooling (6-8). • That attending ELSR contributes to the realisation of children’s rights to education and maximum development and is in the best interests of the child. • That the types of ELSR available (focused on education) are complementary to parents’ roles in children’s development, well-being and care and do not impinge on other aspects of children’s and their parent’s rights (e.g. parents’, particularly mothers’, ability to enter the labour market and provide income to the family that supports children’s well-being and development). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary education system is unable to provide levels of equity and quality that enable continuity and progression in the realisation of children’s rights as children make the transition from ELSR to primary schools. • Quality does not keep up with levels of access leading to potentially negative impacts on children’s rights within ELSR (overcrowding, unsafe environments etc.). • Equity does not keep up with expansion of access, widening the gaps between those able to access the expanding services and those who remain excluded.
System changes to access, equity and learning impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and parents will eventually support moves to a different practice in ELSR based on human rights based approaches (HRBA) and child-friendly preschooling with more child-centred approaches and inclusion of all children. • Demand for preschool provision exceeds supply and, for the foreseeable future, demand is not a constraint on children (including children from marginalised groups) attending ELSR. • Working at the system level will produce more sustainable, longer-term improvements in ELSR access, equity and learning than direct service provision and project-level programming. • Free provision of ELSR can be funded to satisfy national demand. • The private sector is serving only the wealthy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political changes or instability threatens political will for ELSR policies. • There is lower economic growth than predicted and reduced national funding for ELSR. • Intransigence or even exacerbation of discrimination towards certain marginalised groups hampers the reduction in equity gaps in ELSR access and learning outcomes within ELSR. • Nationally-funded free (or subsidised) provision that is dependent on external funding (such as the GPE) is not sustained when that external funding ceases.

Level	Assumptions	Risks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is unmet demand for short forms of ELSR on the basis of their educational benefits (i.e. forms of provision that do not cover the full working day and thus may not meet potential childcare needs). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents eschew new models of ELSR and seek something different, particularly that which provides full childcare and thus facilitates both parents being able to work. • ELSR may not receive the same priority in local level politics and administrations when significant responsibility is decentralised and these bodies may have insufficient capacity to fulfil system demands and less engagement with international partners. • Vesting ELSR decisions increasingly in parents/communities may impact negatively on equity considerations. • Equity is threatened where a private sector for ELSR serves only those who can afford it and there is a second class public service.
<p>UNICEF strategies to system changes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is sufficient political will and interest in ELSR provision (both amongst competing education sub-sector and other sectoral priorities, and from other drivers for service provision for this age group such as childcare for working parents) to engage in system changes both amongst government and non-government stakeholders. • UNICEF has sufficient influence, position and reputation with key stakeholders, particularly governments, to influence system changes, promote ELSR models and leverage resources and commitment to ELSR. • Processes for the development of policy and practice in ELSR prioritise an evidence basis for decisions that can utilise M&E information. • Processes for the development of ELSR policy and practice incorporate channels for non-government stakeholder inputs and thus can be influenced by national dialogue with NGOs and CSOs. • Demand for preschool provision exceeds supply and, for the foreseeable future, demand is not a constraint on children (including children from marginalised groups) attending ELSR. • Knowledge exchange, advocacy, lobbying and campaigns will have sufficient traction with those they target in order to progress from increasing knowledge to changing attitudes to changing behaviour around ELSR, supporting the most 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political changes and instability negatively affect UNICEF's influence and access to system change processes. • Political changes, new funding sources and agendas and new stakeholders divert attention away from ELSR to other sub-sectors. • UNICEF's influence and stakeholder interests in ELSR varies at different levels (national, sub-national, local) leading to disjointed system changes.

Level	Assumptions	Risks
	vulnerable groups and challenging discrimination, within communities, government and non-government organisations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governments and other stakeholders are open to examining examples of alternative ELSR models and demonstrating the success of these models through pilots is likely to receive greater attention from policy makers. 	
UNICEF inputs to UNICEF strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNICEF has access to and has allocated sufficient funding and appropriately skilled human resources to carry out multiple strategies to a level that can influence system level changes. • UNICEF has sufficient contextual knowledge and understanding of various excluded groups to inform appropriate strategies and identify system changes required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources are not available to take advantage of or respond to sudden opportunities and rapidly changing system contexts. • Changes in internal regional or corporate UNICEF agendas and structures divert support away from existing ELSR programming.

1.4 Stakeholders involved

UNICEF’s focus on contributing to national and sub-national system level changes for ELSR means that UNICEF’s interventions are relevant to, and may affect, all stakeholders working within the early childhood sector in each country/territory. Table 4 sets out these stakeholders and their role, interest and inter-relationships in the ELSR sector.

Table 4: Stakeholder analysis

Stakeholder	Role, interest and inter-relationships
INTERNATIONAL & REGIONAL	
UNICEF	Role in ELSR: interested in policy and social norm changes, children’s best interests and rights and enduring improvements in their lives Interest in robust data collection processes to ensure policy advice is evidence based
UNICEF HQ UNICEF RO UNICEF COs	Critical positioning vis-à-vis UNESCO on policy and upstream work in ELSR High stake partnerships with the World Bank and other GPE members, with the EU and with other development partners Potential “conflict” between HQ, RO and CO on programming and implementation strategies
Other UN	UNESCO works on upstream early childhood education support and policy advice/TA, including on data; could be potential for divergent approaches with UNICEF, although UNESCO not very present/active in the region on early childhood education WFP: complementary work, no real overlap in mandate/interventions
World Bank (WB) Asian Development Bank (in CIS)	WB: high stake partnerships at international, regional and country/territory level with UNICEF entities Expectations that UNICEF delivers and shows results on agreed interventions Interest in UNICEF model testing to inform future loans/grants/TA Interest in overall increase in preschool enrolment as contributing factor to economic and social development

Stakeholder	Role, interest and inter-relationships
	Interest in UNICEF's proven strengths on policy/modelling/TA & training to pursue collaboration ADB: Potential divergence on overall approach to early childhood education
GPE (formerly EFA-FTI)	Funding of ECE activities often managed through UNICEF or the WB. GPE grants with focus on preschooling in Moldova and Kyrgyzstan Interest in preschool results/impact - accountability
Foundations and private sector (Dubai, Ikea, LEGO etc.)	Funding preschool activities through UNICEF or other implementing partners Interest in results, visibility Expectation that UNICEF is a good/strategic partner
Key partner NGOs: OSFs (ECP) ISSA Aga Khan Foundation	UNICEF implementing partners Common advocacy interest with UNICEF on early childhood education and marginalised groups Interest in UNICEF's potential for replication of their tested preschool models Interest in pursued partnerships with UNICEF on preschool
Other NGOs/partners (national/local level)	UNICEF implementing partner Interest in partnerships with UNICEF
<i>EU (3 CEE/CIS countries are EU members, 4 are candidates and 2 are potential candidates for membership)</i>	Provides a European agenda and targets for early childhood education (ET 2020) and good policy practices EACEA funding for projects on early childhood education (Comenius etc.) EuropeAid large scale education reform programmes covering preschool particularly for marginalised groups Partnerships with UNICEF at country/territory level (e.g. Situational Analyses (SITANs)) Joint in-country/territory advocacy with other partners and UNICEF on preschool
OECD	Researches early childhood education and care in member states, publishes good practices and policy recommendations Possible interest in identifying good practices Possible divergence on recommended approaches regarding the integration of childcare and education and the gendered implications for parental engagement in the labour market
NATIONAL: Government	
Parliament	Key role in legislation strengthening and strategy/policy approval on preschooling Interest in addressing constituents' demand for early childhood services Interest in immediate and longer-term economic benefits of preschool, both to enable parental engagement in labour force and longer-term productivity of children in adulthood
Ministry of Education	Lead role in policy development and setting priority areas Budget allocation and expectations that investments result in impact, performance management Interest in educational outcomes Want alignment with EU and international standards (for most countries/territories)
Ministry of Finance	Role in budget allocation to ministries, local governments etc. Role in supervision of budget expenditure/audit

Stakeholder	Role, interest and inter-relationships
	Critical relationship with donors' communities/GPE Potential conflict with other Ministries including Ministries of Education on budget allocation and budget cuts
Ministries for Health, Social Welfare, Family etc.	Role in cross-ministry coordination, benefits/incentives allocations, early identification of disabilities, child protection, key role in 0-3 year old services Expectations that early childhood services significantly contribute to children's well-being and development and to the management of the gendered burden of child care
Ministry of Local/Self-government	Role in enacting legislation and ensuring harmonisation with sector legislation and policy High risk of conflict with central level ministries during decentralisation when there is a mismatch/overlap of responsibilities and budget allocations for preschools Interest in harmonisation/clarification of legislation and increased local budget
National statistical offices	Role in data collection (population and preschool), drawing on sector management information system Interest in professionalisation, tools and alignment with international or EU standards.
NATIONAL: Education bodies	
National academies /institute etc.	Typically work on curriculum frameworks, syllabuses and ELDS Role in teacher training or teacher training content development Interest in professionalisation
Certification/ licensing providers (licensing of teachers and facilities)	Role in licensing public and private preschool institutions Role in providing teachers' certification Interested in alignment with EU or international standards (both for teachers and facilities) Interest in legislation strengthening and regulation of private sector (both for facilities and teachers)
Teacher training institutions and CPD providers	Role in developing/implementing training of teachers Interest in professionalisation of preschool staff Interest in funding and TA
SUB-NATIONAL: There are two levels in some countries/territories in regard to local self government: a) municipality and local self government; and b) district. Some countries also have a regional level (oblast type). The extent to which central level ministries have representatives at the lowest administrative level varies (while social workers tend to be in place, there are often no education representatives).	
Local government leaders (elected bodies)	Often responsible for preschool provision (but not legislation) High interest in increased funding, infrastructure, equipment and low-cost models. May be responsible for payment of preschool staff. Possible responsibility for benefits/incentives disbursement Possible conflict with local education authorities on roles and responsibilities and budget issues including teachers' salaries
Local government education officials (ministry representatives)	May have role in monitoring, data collection and inspection of ECE provision Interest in high enrolment rates Interest in ensuring transition to Grade 1 and enrolment in Grade 1 at the correct age Interest in professionalisation of preschool staff and safety of children

Stakeholder	Role, interest and inter-relationships
Local government social and health (ministry representatives)	<p>Possible conflict with local government (above) on roles and responsibilities, including funding and payment of teachers</p> <p>Role in 0-3 years provision and parenting support</p> <p>Role in identifying children at risk (child protection or overall vulnerability) and early identification of health conditions and disabilities</p> <p>Possibly role in identifying children/families eligible for benefits and disbursement of these</p> <p>Interest in overall well-being of children and their development</p> <p>Interest in clarification of roles with regards to children with specific needs when in preschool facilities. Possible conflict with other sectors (education mostly) and central or lower administrative levels</p>
Early childhood INSTITUTIONS	
Governing bodies	<p>Role in establishing and running institutions</p> <p>Role in fundraising to sustain institutions</p> <p>Interested in funding, equipment, infrastructure, support and training</p> <p>Role in liaising with parents</p> <p>Interest in parental support and high enrolment. Overall interest in children's well-being</p>
Staff	<p>Critical day-to-day work with children</p> <p>Possible role in parenting support/parenting classes</p> <p>Interest in regulations and clarity on the payment of personnel</p> <p>Interest in training</p>
Parents	<p>Demand for access to quality provision</p> <p>Informal (usually) oversight role</p> <p>Interest in gratuitous provision</p> <p>Interest in parenting support</p> <p>Interest in services that can also facilitate opportunities to engage in the labour market (i.e. childcare provision)</p>
Children	<p>Interest in quality provision, child-centred approaches, safety and learning</p>
PRIMARY SCHOOLS	
Entity	<p>Role in ensuring transfer from preschool to Grade 1. Interest in intake of children (and parents) with preschool experience</p> <p>Sometimes a role in providing preschool services</p> <p>Possible interest in expansion and provision preschool services</p>

2 Evaluation Purpose, Objectives and Scope

2.1 Purpose

This evaluation is one of five multi-country evaluations commissioned by the UNICEF CEE/CIS RO on five of the RKLA's key result areas.²⁹ These evaluations were initiated as part of the launch of the RKLA framework in order to produce robust evidence and learning from UNICEF's past work, to inform future development under the respective RKLA key result areas and the Reference Groups that now lead them. The evaluations also provide a means of testing and refining the appropriateness and validity of the regional generic TOC in specific areas of UNICEF work. UNICEF's strategic approach in focusing on system level changes situates UNICEF's contributions within a very complex environment, as interactions of multiple actors, agendas, influences and events all feed in to how systems operate and develop, and a direct attribution of change to individual agencies' initiatives is rarely possible. Gauging programme progress and success through more traditional monitoring systems of outputs and attributable outcomes is often inappropriate in this context. Developing robust sector-specific TOCs from the generic TOC through these evaluations is thus important for providing the framework for future programme design, monitoring and evaluation.

The evaluations also make a timely contribution to the renewed UNICEF corporate priority of equity and its basis in human rights and gender. By assessing the extent to which UNICEF's programming has been equity-led, the evaluations help to inform on how UNICEF can strengthen its equity agenda in the region. This is a particularly important issue in the CEE/CIS region, whose middle-income status obscures significant sub-national inequities that require explicit and targeted support through human rights-based approaches to programming.

ELSR is considered to be an effective strategy for reducing social inequities and inequalities and thus has a significant role to play in regard to UNICEF's equity agenda.³⁰ This evaluation integrated an equity focus throughout, looking not only at whether UNICEF's ELSR work has contributed to greater access for marginalised groups,³¹ but also at whether equity gaps have been reduced within overall changes in access levels (i.e. the gap between the access rate of the most and least marginalised groups decreases). It brings lessons and perspectives to UNICEF globally about strategies that can address its equity agenda to service the needs of marginalised and vulnerable children beyond the context of low-income, developing countries.

Within this wider context and rationale, the evaluation has an important part to play for both accountability and learning on ELSR in the region. To date, assessment of UNICEF's ELSR work has been limited to evaluations of individual initiatives at a country/territory level, and there has been no larger scale, independent assessment of the overall approach and strategies of UNICEF to ELSR in the region. This multi-country evaluation is therefore important in taking stock of UNICEF's ELSR approach to date and providing a basis for regional discussion and development of ELSR under RKLA 3.

The primary audience for this evaluation is UNICEF senior management at regional and international levels, middle management at regional level and the COs involved in the country/territory cases of the

²⁹ The other evaluations are focused on: supportive and caring family environment; access to justice; inclusive quality education; and health.

³⁰ UNICEF (2012), *School readiness: a conceptual framework*

³¹ In this evaluation we are conceptualising 'marginalisation' around an inclusion/exclusion framework where exclusion relates to both exclusion from access to ELSR services and exclusion from learning within ELSR services.

evaluation. Other COs in the region constitute a secondary audience. The evaluation recommendations are UNICEF-specific: this evaluation is not directed at governments or other external stakeholders involved in ELSR in the region. Knowledge products based on the report may, however, be of wider interest to governments, CSOs and UNICEF's partners.

2.2 Objectives and scope

The specific objectives of this ELSR multi-country evaluation, according to the TOR, were to:

- Assess if changes in national (regional, local) ELSR systems have led to increased access and reduced equity gaps in ELSR in the period 2005-2012
- Assess the TOC and actual contribution of UNICEF to system level changes that had an impact on access and the reduction of equity gaps in ELSR

The evaluation also assesses the extent to which the system changes and UNICEF's contributions articulate with a human rights-based approach to ELSR and integrate considerations of gender equality both as part of the equity focus of the evaluation and as part of UNICEF's corporate commitments to rights and gender.

This is not a 'regional' evaluation as it does not consider the whole region or the diversity of contexts beyond the six country/territory cases. Nor is it a country/territory 'case study' evaluation with separate in-depth evaluations in each of the six cases resulting in recommendations and lessons specific to each country/territory. Rather it applies the regional generic TOC to UNICEF's approach to ELSR and assesses its validity in whether and how UNICEF has contributed to increased access and equity in ELSR in six distinct country/territory cases. This report synthesises the lessons emerging from the six cases in regard to how the regional TOC for ELSR can best be developed and operationalised to maximise UNICEF's contribution.

It is important to note that because of the complexity and multiple influences and actors involved in system level changes, direct attribution between UNICEF interventions and those changes could not be sought through this evaluation. The evaluation focuses on a *contribution* analysis of the part UNICEF interventions played in the diverse processes and influences that led to the system changes identified. The evaluation findings are therefore discussed in terms of the strength of contribution that UNICEF interventions have had rather than any direct attribution of UNICEF activities to changes. It is also significant that the system categories and core roles of the TOC and evaluation framework have had to be retro-fitted onto UNICEF programmes that were designed and implemented before the MoRES, core roles or TOC approaches were developed. This provides an important context for the assessments made by this evaluation against these criteria.

2.2.1 Geographical focus

The geographical focus of the evaluation is limited to the six countries/territory selected by UNICEF: Armenia; Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo (UNSCR 1244),³² Kyrgyzstan and Moldova.³³ The selection process for these was undertaken by the RCLA 3 Group prior to the contracting of the evaluation team, through a process of internal dialogue and analysis of existing programmes, the extent of these programmes' development over this period, and their evaluability. The

³² Parallel systems of preschool provision and missing data means administrative divisions with a Serbian majority in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) were not covered by the evaluation.

³³ The Transnistria autonomous territorial unit with special legal status was not covered by this evaluation due to the absence of official data and the logistical challenges of gaining access to the region.

countries are not, therefore, representative of UNICEF's work in the CEE/CIS region as a whole.

2.2.2 Thematic field of intervention

The evaluation is focused on the thematic field of early childhood education for children from the age of three until the age six or seven (depending on the official age when children begin grade 1 of primary education in each country/territory). This includes both formal and non-formal provision, in both the public and private sectors, over the period 2005 to 2012.

The wider context of early childhood development (ages 0-8) in which early childhood education operates is not a focus of this evaluation. However, the transitions between young child well-being (ages 0-3) and preschool, and preschool and early primary education are considered in terms of how UNICEF's ELSR programming articulates both operationally and conceptually within a wider ECD approach.

Similarly, childcare provision for the age group 3-6 is not a focus as the evaluation is centred on ELSR with a distinctly educational rationale. However, childcare concerns are considered in terms of how UNICEF has engaged with the social norms around provision for this age group (given the legacy of traditional kindergartens) and the way they shape demand for and acceptance of alternative types of services, as well as the gendered implications of care for families as part of UNICEF's broader focus on equity and gender.

2.2.3 Impact focus and measures of impact

The ultimate aim of UNICEF's ELSR programming (indeed all its programming) is the progressive realisation of children's rights. How ELSR affects children's lives, particularly the most marginalised, could not be measured directly within the remit of this evaluation as that would require substantial, longitudinal studies from rights-based baselines. This evaluation only goes as far as assessing the robustness of the basis on which UNICEF links ELSR to children's rights, and the awareness and understanding of this rationale and their rights and responsibilities around ELSR amongst stakeholders.

Within the field of early childhood education, the evaluation focuses specifically on children's access to services as measured at impact level by enrolment in formal preschool education over the period 2005-2012 in each country/territory. We recognise that this indicator only provides a narrow perspective on access, given the range and types of early childhood education services. However, enrolment data are the only robust, national data available that can show changes in access over the period concerned. Changes in the equity gap between identified marginalised groups and majority groups in preschool enrolment figures are also used where available, although the extent to which this can be assessed is limited by the levels of disaggregation and time spans of the data available.

It is important to note that in the CEE/CIS region the majority of the preschool age group remains excluded from preschool in many countries/territories. The 'marginalised' label could therefore be applied to a large proportion of that population. Whilst this scale of marginalisation provides an important context when considering broad equity and access issues, it is also vital to recognise the varying degrees and factors of marginalisation within this overall group. Without disaggregation there are risks that new provision may not meet the needs of those facing multiple forms of marginalisation and that, in the longer term, systemic issues for these groups remain unresolved whilst the sector develops, increasing equity gaps for the most marginalised.

A secondary focus for the evaluation is the quality of early learning education services over the same period. Ideally, an impact measure for this would be changes in the learning outcomes of children

attending early childhood education, but no such assessment systems are currently operational in any of the six country/territory cases. As with some aspects of equity, therefore, quality assessment can only go as far as systems level outcomes that may contribute to quality learning outcomes (such as teacher to child ratios, Early Learning and Development Standards in place etc.).

2.2.4 Levels of systems analysis

UNICEF's work in ELSR in the region is specifically targeted at contributing to system level change, framed by the application of the four categories and ten determinants of the MoRES framework to the context of ELSR (see section 1.3.1 above). The evaluation examines the change that has occurred in each of these ten determinant areas, the extent to which each of these system changes has contributed to the identified changes in access and equity, and how aligned these pathways are with the TOC system-to-impact pathways (as far as data and qualitative inference have allowed).

2.2.5 Interventions to be evaluated and unit of analysis

The evaluation covers all UNICEF interventions related to early childhood education services carried out in the six countries/territory from 2005 to 2012,³⁴ including both CO and RO supported programmes and initiatives aimed at formal and non-formal service provision. The unit of analysis for these interventions is at the level of 'main groups of activities' defined by the seven core roles of UNICEF (see Table 2 above). These are assessed both in terms of their efficiency of implementation (the enabling capacities of human resources, finance, governance and management within UNICEF that underpin interventions, and how these have been used to design and implement interventions that met general criteria of good practice relevant to those kind of roles), and their effectiveness in contributing to targeted system changes. This efficiency/effectiveness division is based on the understanding that system changes involve such a wide range of influences and actors that even if the design and implementation of an intervention are of high quality according to criteria of good practice, we cannot assume that it will have the desired effect within the shifting, complex level of systems.

2.2.6 Human rights and gender

Human rights based approaches to development and gender mainstreaming are foundational normative principles for UNICEF.³⁵ As such, the extent to which these principles have been realised by UNICEF in its ELSR work was integrated across the evaluation. This included not only UNICEF's conceptualisation, objectives, strategies, planning and implementation of its programming in ELSR but also how it has contributed both to influencing its partners' consideration of HRBA and gender and to system changes that produce equitable impacts on children's lives and the progressive realisation of their rights.

2.3 Evaluation questions and framework

The evaluation has used the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria of relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability as the main organising principle in its evaluation framework. The additional criteria of coverage, coordination and coherence that were requested in the

³⁴ These dates do not necessarily correspond specifically to the time frame of UNICEF interventions and thus where major interventions overlap these start and end dates, the evaluation took these into consideration over a longer time period.

³⁵ These can be found in: UNICEF (2007), *A Human Rights-Based Approach to Education for All* and UNICEF (2010), *Working for an equal future: UNICEF policy on gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women*

TOR were incorporated under the evaluation questions on these other criteria, and so were not drawn out as separate elements in the framework.

In order to ensure that the OECD-DAC criteria covered the scope of the evaluation, they were mapped against the MoRES framework and the TOC, and evaluation questions and areas of enquiry were drawn up to test the ‘boxes’ and ‘arrows’ at each level of the TOC as presented in Figure 6 and Table 5. Please refer to Annex 2 for further explanation and details of the evaluation questions and framework.

Figure 6: Coverage of TOC elements through OECD-DAC evaluation criteria

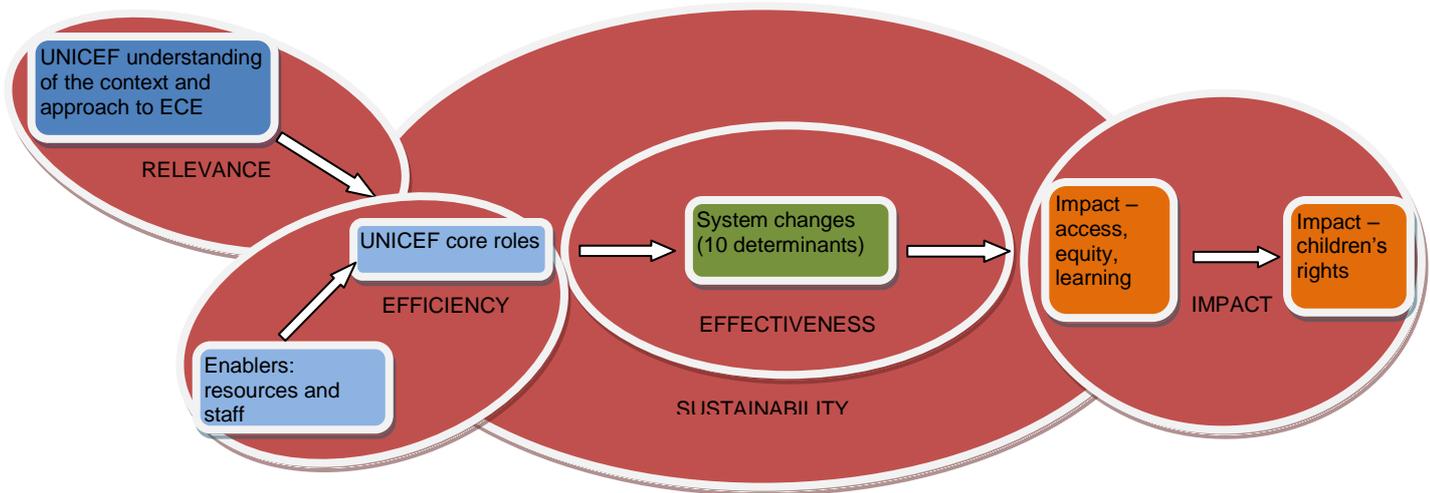


Table 5: Coverage of TOC elements through OECD-DAC evaluation criteria

Evaluation criteria	Elements of TOC the evaluation criteria tests	HR and Gender
Impact	The impact ‘boxes’ and ‘arrows’ between the two levels of impact (UNICEF’s theory of how ELSR relates to child rights)	Human rights and gender integrated across all criteria
Effectiveness	The systems to impact ‘arrows’ (did the system changes produce impacts and how) The systems ‘boxes’ (what system changes have happened) The core roles to systems ‘arrows’ (did UNICEF interventions contribute to system changes)	
Efficiency	The core role ‘boxes’ (how well the core roles were implemented by UNICEF according to general criteria of good practice) The enabler ‘boxes’ and enabler to the core roles ‘arrows’ (levels of inputs and how they were used for good quality interventions)	
Relevance	UNICEF’s contextual understanding and approach to ECE The contextual understanding to core role ‘arrows’ (how the context and approach to ECE informs their strategies)	
Sustainability	The threats to the sustainability of system changes and impacts Whether UNICEF core roles have incorporated sustainability in their design and are leveraging sustainability in the system changes	

3 Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation methodology consisted of two main sets of activities: documentation and data review, and country/territory consultations. The document and data review were intended to provide an understanding of UNICEF's strategic approach, plans and programmes in each country/territory over the period of evaluation and place these within the context of the national policies, frameworks, priorities and progress of early childhood education services in each case. The country/territory consultations were intended both to triangulate this information and extend it by tracing the different pathways of UNICEF contribution to impact through the perspectives and experiences of stakeholders at national, sub-national, local and institutional levels. These evaluation activities are summarised below, with further details in Annex 3. Given that this evaluation was considering system level changes that impact across a country/territory, it was not possible to create control groups in either the data or stakeholder consultations. However, within the resource and time constraints of this evaluation, the methodology sought to analyse and compare the different experiences of those system changes within a country/territory (by stakeholder group, location, engagement with UNICEF interventions etc.) in order to understand the pathways by which UNICEF interventions contributed to system changes and system changes led to impacts.

3.1.1 Document and data review

An initial documentation review was undertaken for each of the six cases and the Regional Office, incorporating all UNICEF documentation relating to the design and implementation of ELSR programmes (including Situational Analyses, Country Programme Documents and Action Plans, Annual Reports and Annual Work Plans, evaluation and monitoring reports, policy and advocacy publications) and country/territory policy and legislative documents that provide the framework for national and sub-national implementation of early childhood education services. This review formed the basis for drawing up the country/territory-specific TOC for ELSR that was discussed with each Country Office and used as the framework of reference for the country/territory consultations. Specific gaps and ambiguities in the documentation were identified for follow-up in the consultations and further documents referenced during the evaluation activities were also analysed (see Annex 6 for a full list).

Available datasets for each of the six countries/territory were also mined for their coverage of ELSR indicators (including levels of disaggregation), time and geographical range, and data collection, preparation and analysis methodologies used. The system level focus of this evaluation meant that only those datasets that could show system level impacts would be appropriate for inclusion in analysis (i.e. those that had national coverage rather than data on individual programmes or projects, unless these related to modelling initiatives). Such datasets that were able to provide national level changes in relevant indicators over the time period for this evaluation were thus selected and analysed, identifying their constraints and mapping their figures against the specific indicators in the evaluation framework to show trends in each country/territory. Where possible this involved carrying out additional analyses on the official data to provide further levels of disaggregation than were available in published reports. Data summaries were produced to inform the country/territory consultations, highlighting areas of particular change in the data for further investigation in the consultations and providing a basis for triangulating the data with qualitative information collected.

3.1.2 Country/territory consultations

Visits of two weeks were carried out in each of the six countries/territory by an international member of the evaluation team and a national consultant. These visits consisted of consultations with stakeholder groups that covered the different levels of the TOC, from UNICEF interventions to national ELSR system changes, their mediation into sub-national implementation and the actual experience of users of ELSR local services. Meetings and interviews were arranged with UNICEF staff and a range of national early childhood education stakeholders (government, funders, INGOs, NGOs, CSOs, training agencies), at least two sub-national authorities responsible for preschool services and teachers and parents (male and female) in four or more preschool facilities and primary schools. This provided a range of different perspectives and a means to triangulate reported information between stakeholders and with the document and data reviews.

Selection of the national stakeholders for consultation was made through an iterative process of discussion between the national and international consultants and the UNICEF office, ensuring that all stakeholder groups were covered within the constraints of the time and logistics available. Whilst drawing on UNICEF's knowledge and links within the sector, the final decision on who to consult was taken by the national and international consultants.

Similarly, the sub-national field sites visited were selected through discussion between the consultants and the UNICEF office. Sites were chosen according to coverage of one area where UNICEF had on-the-ground presence (through modelling alternative types of ELSR facilities for example) and one area that has only experienced national level interventions by UNICEF (i.e. only at the systems level), with a spread of different communities served (urban/rural, ethnic groups etc.). Given the limited time available and thus the limited number of places that could be visited and stakeholders consulted, these visits were not intended to be representative of the diversity within each country/territory, nor of the diversity in each community (it was not feasible for example to set up discussions with separate groups of male and female parents, different ethnic groups, parents of children with disabilities etc.). Rather, the site visits provided specific cases from which to triangulate other data collected in the evaluation and draw insights and perspectives from decentralised levels of administration, local ELSR providers and communities on what system level changes have been experienced and the nature of UNICEF contributions to these changes at these different levels.

The country/territory consultation methodology was piloted in Kyrgyzstan and lessons fed into the tools and methodology used in the remaining five countries/territory. Annex 4 presents a list of all stakeholders consulted and site visits undertaken across the six cases.

3.1.3 Analysis and reporting

At the end of each country/territory visit the consultant team prepared a fact sheet (see Annex 5) that summarised findings and emerging conclusions from the visit. This fact sheet was presented to the UNICEF CO for validation and discussion before the international consultant left the country/territory, and any corrections or comments addressed in a revised version. These fact sheets were expanded into more detailed visit reports which were consolidated and reviewed by the international evaluation team alongside the data and document reviews. Common trends, findings and conclusions were identified and taken into the development of this final evaluation report. The first draft of this report was then shared with the RO and six COs for comment and a one day workshop held with these stakeholders to validate findings, clarify conclusions and refine recommendations to ensure that they were appropriate, realistic

and actionable by identified parties within UNICEF. Wider participation of stakeholders (e.g. other COs in the region or stakeholders consulted in the country/territory visits) in the development of recommendations was not possible due to logistical and budgetary constraints, and, given the primary audiences and UNICEF-specific nature of the recommendations of this report, may not have been appropriate. However UNICEF plans to repackage appropriate elements of this report for dissemination and discussion with other stakeholders.

3.1.4 Ethical considerations

EfC has established standards for consultation, drawing on the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) standards and ethical guidelines for evaluations,³⁶ which were applied during all consultation activities in this evaluation. These standards are based on the following principles (see Annex 3 for further details):

- Hold in confidence all information given to us by the Client and research participants;
- Explain the rationale, objectives and the methodology used to institutions and / or individuals taking part in the research and consultation;
- Listen and value all participants' views during interviews and focus groups;
- Respect the values of the Client for whom the research is undertaken;
- Reflect on our own bias due to previous experience, education background, gender, ethnicity and other factors;
- Respect the anonymity of individuals when analysing data;
- Cross-check and triangulate all results, wherever feasible;
- Feedback on the research results to the participating institutions or individuals, where the Client approves;
- Prohibit use of the research data for other studies without Client and participants' permission.

The evaluation did not directly consult with children but did consult with parent groups and community based organisations that included individuals from vulnerable and marginalised groups. Participation was agreed and organised in advance through the early childhood institutions visited. All evaluation team members signed their adherence to EfC's children and vulnerable adults protection policy as part of their contract with EfC.

3.1.5 Limitations

There are significant data limitations in the early childhood education sector on account of a lack of consistency and coverage in preschool indicators, limited capacities of data collection and analysis agencies, a widespread inconsistency in the terminology and definitions, and the levels of disaggregation that are feasible or even legitimate in the data. Issues include:

- sensitivities around the collection of data based on ethnicities;
- varying combinations of institutions (often not specified), even within individual reports, of nurseries (targeting 1-3 year olds), nursery-kindergartens (1-6 year olds) and kindergartens (3-6 year olds) being combined under the label of preschool education;
- limited age-specific population data that align with preschool age ranges; and

³⁶ UNEG (2012), *Standards for evaluation in the UN system*; UNEG (2008), *UNEG ethical guidelines for evaluation*

- the anomalous position of ‘Grade Zero’ students between preschool and primary education with changes in how this model is incorporated over time.

This leaves a very uneven picture of the situation across the six cases, particularly in terms of changes in equitable access. Where such data gaps exist, the evaluation has only been able to go as far as system level outcomes, both qualitative and quantitative, that may contribute to the reduction of equity gaps for specific groups as identified in the evaluation matrix (for example equity considerations integrated into preschool policies and legislation, funding mechanisms that recognise and support marginalised groups). Given the unevenness of the data both within and across the six cases, the data presented in the findings of this report are not intended to be comparisons across the six countries/territory, but rather indicate national or sub-national data trends for each country.

Time and logistical constraints limited the range of consultations possible within each country/territory visit; the international and national consultants were required to prioritise respondents for inclusion according to their role and influence in the sector and existing information gaps, and securing timely access to some respondents (particularly those in other sectors who did not consider their role in early childhood education as significant, such as government finance staff) was not always possible. However the evaluators are confident that, within these constraints, the range of perspectives, contexts and experiences required to address the evaluation’s objectives was achieved through the stakeholders covered.

In the selection of field sites in each country/territory, the evaluation team was to some degree constrained by logistical arrangements and reliant on UNICEF contacts and sub-national authorities’ and specific preschool personnel’s support to identify and arrange sub-national and preschool visits and consultations. Whilst the criteria for selection was made clear to all parties, there was a tendency in some cases, particularly at local levels, to guide the evaluators to more ‘successful’ or better resourced facilities. Direct negotiation on the ground mitigated this bias as far as possible. As mentioned above, however, information from site visits should not (and was not intended to be) seen as representative of the sector as a whole but rather as specific examples in particular contexts.

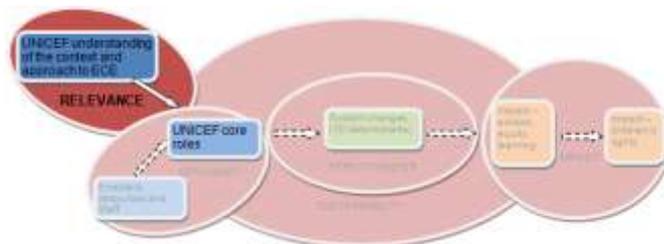
4 Findings

For ease of reference and space within this Findings section, where countries/territories have been cited as examples of a particular point, a shortened country/territory coding has been used as follows:

- Ar = Armenia
- BH = Bosnia and Herzegovina
- FMa = the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
- Kg = Kyrgyzstan
- Ko* = Kosovo (UNSCR 1244)
- Mo = Moldova

4.1 Relevance of UNICEF's approach

Relevance criteria within the TOC



This section refers to UNICEF's understanding of the social, economic, cultural and political context in which it operates in the six cases, both in general and in relation to early childhood education, and how this informs appropriate programming responses by UNICEF in its core roles (as indicated in the highlighted areas alongside). It also examines the

relevance of those responses in relation to UNICEF's commitments to equity, rights and gender equality and in relation to international principles of early childhood education.

Key findings for relevance:

UNICEF has understood the particular system challenges to ELSR in these transitional countries/territory, many of which are of middle income status. Analysis has supported relevant programmes to build understanding, political commitment and new regulations and standards for flexible and more cost-effective ELSR provision, able to extend access. UNICEF has also mediated its interventions through a strong grasp of the political, social and economic contexts in which it operates, using a range of different core roles to seize on opportunities to build momentum around ELSR as they have arisen.

UNICEF's analysis and programme responses have focussed on broad categories of marginalisation such as rural location, with an implicit staged approach to expanding access for large swathes of the excluded population before moving towards addressing the most complex inequities and vulnerabilities. As such it is only in more recent years that a more nuanced understanding of marginalisation and the needs and barriers of the most marginalised has started to emerge, with systemic interventions for equity a key focus needed for the future.

UNICEF's analysis and programming is embedded in a rights-based framework, however this has not been articulated very explicitly with other stakeholders or in implementation. Its approach has been explicitly centred on education-focussed ELSR that has not explicitly engaged with the interconnected issue of childcare support to parents and thus raises questions over wider issues of gender equality, women's right to work and the equity implications for the most marginalised families.

4.1.1 UNICEF's analysis of national contexts and its programmatic responses

UNICEF demonstrates a good understanding of the situation of preschool access and its change over the evaluation period. It is important to note that in 2005 the preschool sector in most of the studied cases was in a relatively embryonic state, but carrying a heavy legacy of former provision. Available documentation points to a strong understanding of this position and history by UNICEF in all six cases, with the complexities of the preschool landscape well articulated.

UNICEF's analysis has been particularly strong in those more visible, framing aspects of the sector (political will, regulatory frameworks, institutional arrangements and budget constraints), reflecting the stage of preschool education sectoral development in most cases and the priorities of government stakeholders. As a result UNICEF's programming over the evaluation period has tended to prioritise system bottlenecks around an enabling environment and the supply of early childhood education opportunities in an effort to establish firmly the basis of the sector and its importance within the overall education system. UNICEF has moved, over the evaluation period, from service provision in selected locations to programmes that address more systemic issues or that have a higher potential strategic impact, particularly on marginalised communities. Typically this has been approached with a combination of UNICEF core roles, including:

- **Policy advice and technical assistance:** working with governments on legislative instruments, new policies, standards and structures (preschool laws, ELDS standards)
- **Being the 'voice' for children:** advocating around key national policies, social issues and attitudes (around inclusion, social norms with regard to disability, children's rights to ELSR)
- **Leveraging resources:** working with agencies and partners to leverage funds and political will (work with GPE, the World Bank, the EU, foundations and the private sector)
- **Facilitating national dialogue towards child friendly norms:** advocating for preschool preparation on educational, developmental and a human rights basis and encouraging local or community mobilisation around preschools (ELDS standards, parenting education)
- **Enabling knowledge exchange:** at all levels (study tours for ministry officials, facilitating meetings of professionals at sub-national level to exchange experiences)
- **Modelling/piloting of new services to inform policy:** designing, setting up and supporting low-cost alternative ELSR services (community-based kindergartens, school-based pre-primary classes, community-based ECD centres) as models that demonstrate the feasibility of cost effective provision whilst providing the social and educational preparation needed, unpicking the traditional, expensive Soviet and Yugoslav models
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** (assessments of ELSR access for some marginalised groups, general monitoring of children's rights)

However, the focus on the regulatory aspects of the enabling environment has tended to sideline systematic investigation of gaps in the implementation and enforcement of these regulatory frameworks and of decentralised capacities (although this has started in some cases, such as FMA). Budget allocations for early childhood education are not systematically analysed or monitored; although it is understood that detailed financial reviews cannot be conducted when decentralised budgets are not earmarked for preschool services, and that decentralised budget allocation and local budgets can be opaque, it seems that scrutiny of trends in Ministry of Education budgets themselves could be strengthened and there is potential for using these as indicators of progress.

Similarly, whilst access and supply issues have been well examined over the period, thorough analyses of demand (including understanding of the complex social norms around early childhood services, particularly amongst the marginalised), quality and systemic components such as teachers' certification, recruitment, promotion, management, professional development and inspection have only started to emerge more recently. A commonly neglected area across the six cases is private preschool provision, including the enabling environment within which it operates, its quality and how it responds to demand-side factors. Little consideration has been given to the implications of a thriving private sector (BH) or to the constraints private providers face in order fully to be able to contribute to the supply side of preschool education (Kg).

The MoRES framework has, however, been a useful tool in supporting COs to conduct analysis spanning more systemic dimensions. As a result the most recent situation analyses, and the programmatic responses to these, have been more thorough and have provided more balanced inputs across the four main determinant areas (enabling environment, supply, demand and quality). More work has been done for instance on social norms around children with disabilities (Ko*, FMa, Ar) and on the demand side of ELSR provision (Mo, Kg).

UNICEF programming has also been mediated through a strong grasp of the political, social and economic context of the countries/territory in which it operates (demonstrated in Country Programme Documents) and UNICEF is careful of ethnic issues where these are significant in the political context (Ko*, Kg, FMa, BH). UNICEF's programming shows fluidity, striking a balance between planned interventions and room for manoeuvre to follow changing political agendas. UNICEF has also been adept at seizing opportunities to maximise the results of previous or current projects or models, and responding to change by constantly re-assessing its TA work and opportunistic advice to support governments. Across the six cases UNICEF has adapted to the rise of pre-primary classes and Grade Zero, by supporting the reorientation of previous preschool centres towards Grade Zero (Ko*) or by addressing curriculum development for this level (Ar, FMa). In Kyrgyzstan UNICEF has been responding to the government's will to move from a 100-hour school readiness programme to a 240-hour programme and a 480-hour programme. UNICEF has also moved away from parenting education programmes to address formal preschooling. Other examples of adapting and maximising opportunities for advancing the preschool agenda include the implementation of Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) II funds on inclusive preschools and schools in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, complementing the World Bank Education Quality and Relevance Project (EQPR) loan with training for preschool teachers in Armenia, securing substantial funds for the implementation of pre-primary programmes in Bosnia and Herzegovina from Dubai Cares, advocating for all GPE funds to be directed to pre-primary in Kyrgyzstan and Moldova, and joining DIPECHO (Disaster Preparedness, EC Humanitarian aid and Civil Protection Directorate General) funding rounds to promote disaster risk reduction in preschools in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan.

UNICEF has been able to address political complexities as well as navigating political agendas, often at the investment of substantial time and energy (in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, where UNICEF staff must maintain relationships and negotiation at all levels from the State, the entities, the cantons and the municipalities, and similarly in the complex administration of Kosovo (UNSCR 1244)). This has been important to sustain momentum around the sector: the difficulties and efforts required are considerable and reduce the speed at which change can occur. Such levels of engagement with government structures constitute an important aspect of the shift from service delivery to system-focused interventions for UNICEF, and where these systems are politically and administratively fragmented and still developing (as is the case for the decentralised preschool sector as well as for specific countries/territories), this

represents a significant capacity challenge for UNICEF to contribute to system changes. The frequent change of governments/ministers poses another challenge as relationships have to be forged afresh with new personalities, new perspectives and new degrees of experience at the Ministerial level.

Flexibility has also enabled programme implementation to respond to unexpected changes directly or indirectly caused by crises, for example in Kyrgyzstan after the civil conflict in the south and in Armenia following the influx of Syrian Armenian refugees. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNICEF constantly navigates political crises and works with all parties to resolve issues directly affecting children, such as the blockage in birth registrations or parents not sending their children to school because of perceived biases from management towards one ethnic group or another.

UNICEF's strategic programming in EU pre-accession countries/territories has, however, been constrained by its lack of experience in facilitating these accession processes for early childhood education. There is little evidence of programming for ELSR being qualitatively different in the EU pre-accession cases of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) or Bosnia and Herzegovina to that in non-EU pre-accession countries in the region. A more detailed analysis and understanding of the implications of EU pre-accession processes for the conceptualisation of early childhood education and care services and national expectations of the quality and standards of preschool provision would be valuable to inform UNICEF programming and approaches to ELSR. Some government and NGO stakeholders in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, suggested that the 300-hour programme might have underestimated the educational sophistication of the country/territory and the extent to which people were looking at other models more closely aligned to EU common practice.

4.1.2 Analysis and programmatic responses to marginalisation in preschool access

With low national preschool enrolment rates there are commonly identified broad categories of children excluded from services: the rural poor (all cases), children from remote and border areas (Kg, Ar), children with disabilities (all cases), Roma children (FMa, Mo, Ko*), children from other ethnic minorities (Ko*, Kg³⁷, Ar) and children of external and internal migrant parents, including seasonal migrant parents (all cases). The effect of migration on family responsibilities for child care has been recognised particularly in Moldova and Kyrgyzstan.

There has been a tendency, given the high levels of marginalisation from preschool services, to analyse marginalisation only at the level of these broad categories, with a resulting over-simplification of the root causes of marginalisation that can hamper in-depth investigation of barriers to access for the most marginalised children. A more nuanced recognition of the diversity within these groups, and of the intersections and complex effects of multiple factors of marginalisation, has been emerging within UNICEF analysis in some areas across the evaluation period, but is still limited in others. UNICEF has deepened its understanding of the structures and mechanisms for the identification and referral of children with disabilities and for the decision-making processes leading to their integration in preschool (FMa, Kg, Ar, Ko*). Although there is a general trend towards increased consideration of how children's functioning intersects with the environment in the description of barriers for, and needs of, children with disabilities, such thinking is not yet widespread across UNICEF staff and even less so at government level. There is, at present, little analysis of the challenges faced by different children with disabilities and their families across the six cases. This is restricted by the lack of definitions, for instance around what constitutes "light" and "severe" disabilities and around disability versus children with special educational needs.

³⁷ It should be noted that in Kyrgyzstan the Russian ethnic minority has a higher than average enrolment rate

Gender is not often recognised as a marginalisation factor for access to preschool given national gender parity levels, but this masks great inequalities between groups and geographical areas. Gender disaggregated data are not always used in the documentation reviewed, even in key documents such as SITANs. Where gender analyses do exist they tend to be minimal, resulting in limited understanding of patterns of exclusion for boys and girls affected by multiple vulnerabilities. For instance, while Armenia's SITAN does not provide sex-disaggregated data for preschool despite data being available, the *It's about inclusion* report clearly shows a gender gap in enrolment of children with disabilities in preschools to the disadvantage of girls in urban but not in rural areas.³⁸

The constraining social norms that contribute to marginalisation have been an area of growing analysis in regards to prejudice towards children with disabilities, with supporting data and evidence collected by UNICEF. However prejudice against the Roma and other minorities remain only broadly described, largely overlooking the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the Roma population and how clans and family ties affect patterns of migration and socialisation. Other groups experiencing complex multiple marginalisation factors are also missing within the analysis, such as children suffering from abuse in families affected by substance use disorders, Roma street children, children with disabilities from traditionally excluded minorities, refugee children and young children living in institutions.

UNICEF's thinking on marginalisation has also been constrained at times by conceptual or language issues. "Inclusion" for instance both refers to inclusive education (with a focus on children with disabilities) and education systems that are inclusive (inclusion being here more broadly understood and referring to systems that are responding to the needs of all children regardless of their sex, ethnic or socio-economic background). This has resulted in children from linguistic minorities being forgotten in some analyses of barriers to access (Ar, Kg) and to differences between integration and inclusive education not being adequately captured everywhere (Mo, Ko*, BH).

Whilst undertaking such detailed disaggregation and analysis of marginalised groups is a complex task, it is a critical area for ensuring the relevance of approaches to increasing access for the most marginalised in relation to UNICEF's equity agenda. UNICEF does have a unique understanding of child poverty, social policies, rights and well-being principles and how these intersect with preschool contexts, which provides it with a strong basis to undertake such analysis. The extent to which this understanding has been transferred into robust research in each country/territory has been limited, although a number of country and regional reports (such as *It's about inclusion* in Armenia, *Fair Play* in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the *Roma Early Childhood Inclusion* regional and country reports³⁹) indicate a growing capacity and emphasis on such analysis.

The limitations of the broad categories of marginalisation that have been used are reflected in the programmatic response to marginalised groups' needs. Access has been a paramount concern but the ways to address specific needs of children in the preschool sector have been less apparent. For example, there has been limited response to: the need for sufficient language expertise to help children who do not speak the national language; services to deal with emotional needs (and not just the physical needs) of children with special needs or those left behind when their parents emigrate; representation or role models for children with disabilities in their preschool experience; services that enable children with disabilities to function as independently as possible; and diversity and representation within preschool

³⁸ UNICEF (2012), *Its about inclusion*

³⁹ Ibid; UNICEF and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (2010) *Fair Play: A financially feasible plan for equal access to Early Childhood Programs in the Republic of Macedonia*; UNICEF, OSF and Roma Education Fund (2012), *Roma Early Childhood Inclusion Overview Report and Macedonian Report*

materials (dolls in all ethnic dresses, pictures depicting all types of homes and men and women in different roles, decoration/patterns from all ethnicities etc.). Strengthening areas such as these would also enable a firmer foundation for quality provision that is able to identify and respond to individual needs.

In addition, despite recognising the need for better integration, UNICEF’s programming remains developed in sectoral silos: health, education, child protection, social protection. Addressing equity in ELSR requires programming to address countries’/territories’ operations at the highest level and to take into consideration, in addition to legislation and norms, issues of fiscal space, labour market structure, care economy and social institutions.⁴⁰ While it is recognised that it is beyond UNICEF’s mandate to tackle all these issues, greater integration across UNICEF sectors would enable programming for the most marginalised and equitable access to ELSR to be conceived and designed more coherently and consistently. To maximise the investment in early childhood education, both in terms of outcomes for children and their families and for cost savings for different sectors in the long term, cross-sectorality is necessary both within and across sectors, and across research, policy and practice. By working on continuity and progression between services for 3-6 year olds and the first few grades of primary education, the education sector would maximise the learning and social and emotional development of children. By combining survival with development, the health sector would better contribute to the developmental outcomes of children in terms of physical (nutrition, prevention and response to chronic diseases⁴¹) but also mental well being. An integrated early childhood education approach would enable the identification not only of children at risk of poor outcomes as early as possible, but also their families. This is particularly the case for children with disabilities and child victims of abuse when only social protection or child protection programmes address their needs: their rights to and through ELSR are often not prioritised in such programmes despite the returns from early identification and response to their specific needs. Comprehensive screening and assessment (covering health, development, protection) would support more holistic and effective support and response services. Referral for social protection, parenting guidance or additional medical and psycho-social support would help to tackle complex health, development and social needs faced by the most vulnerable children. Ultimately, this would also contribute to the identification of children not benefiting from one service or another, be it education, health, protection or social protection.

‘Early identification remains a big issue. Parents lack knowledge on these issues. The cooperation between preschools, polyclinics, schools and local authorities is weak and there is no referral system’.
NGO staff, Armenia

4.1.3 Equity analysis and programming for equity

UNICEF’s understanding of, and focus on, equity within its ELSR analysis has been variable. There appear to be multiple interpretations of what equity implies, with some perceiving it as a synonym for equality, others understanding it as reaching the marginalised and still others seeing it as the need for affirmative action or redistributive justice. Nor does there appear to be a shared definition of what constitutes an equity baseline. The terminology of “equity gaps” has tended to focus attention only on outcomes rather than the importance also of inputs and processes when addressing equity. Efficiency considerations have also constrained the thinking on this issue, prioritising maximum results in access to preschooling within a

⁴⁰ Jones, N., Shahrokh, T. (2013) *Social Protection Pathways: shaping social justice outcomes for the most marginalised now and post-2015*, ODI Background Note

⁴¹ Young, M. (2010), ‘Early Child Development: A Framework for Collaboration’, *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy*, Vol. 4, No.2, pp.25-32

context of scarce resources rather than addressing equity concerns in the basis of programme design and resource allocation, distribution and utilisation. Beyond discrepancies in access to ELSR for specific groups or regions, “equity gap” analyses should also investigate broader issues around redistribution of wealth, social protection and accountability mechanisms supporting ELSR in order to examine the extent to which they are addressing a range of potential ELSR exclusion factors and more general power imbalances.

A key constraint around equity is data availability both for access to preschool for marginalised groups and disaggregated data on access to preschool per community. All six cases present data for sub-national regions and even municipalities, but nearly always as absolute numbers rather than proportions of local populations, making comparisons and identification of marginalised areas very difficult both across and within regions. In many cases these data are available (Ko*, Kg), but are often not processed by governments on the grounds of cost or lack of capacities. Some countries do not collect data on ethnicity (Mo), which constrains the identification of discrepancies between groups, and disaggregation by levels of wealth is very rarely available. As a result systematic analysis of preschool data at sub-national levels, poverty levels and for ethnic and linguistic minorities is usually not presented in SITANs or other UNICEF planning documents. MICS data, when available, have been an invaluable source of information on access to preschool for Roma children (FMa, BH) and for snapshots of poverty indicators in preschool attendance. UNICEF has been committed to improving and disaggregating data and is working with government counterparts to achieve this. As well as the work under MICS, there are emerging efforts by UNICEF COs to collect data and publish studies on ELSR access for marginalised groups (Ar, FMa).

The development of UNICEF’s analysis and programming indicates that UNICEF has implicitly adopted a staged strategy in most cases of reaching broadly defined marginalised areas or groups where quick wins could be made first (typically rural areas) and gradually moving towards addressing the most complex inequities and vulnerabilities in a second phase. Getting the sector established through general wider access is partially pragmatic because UNICEF works within the constraints of UN priority regions or districts in given countries/territories.⁴² The lack of detailed analysis of community income, family income, child poverty and access to social services at the lowest administration unit also make it hard to identify and target the most marginalised until those data systems are in place, and UNICEF works in partnerships with governments and decentralised authorities which lack readiness in addressing equity issues.

More recently COs have started to focus on intervention modalities for the most excluded, such as children from very small communities in border areas (Ar), the enrolment and inclusion of children with disabilities (Ar, FMa, Ko*) and of children from ethnic minorities (Ko*, FMa, BH). It has also started to get involved more closely with funding allocation mechanisms and social protection (Ar, Mo, FMa).

This staged approach, starting from a broad push to increase access then considering the most marginalised, has its risks for equity. There is limited effect on the most marginalised in the first stage and a key opportunity is missed to ensure equity considerations become embedded within the initial growth of service expansion. Without addressing key barriers for the most marginalised early on, there is thus a risk of widening and entrenching equity gaps as services grow, potentially making these gaps more difficult and complex to address further down the line. Furthermore, little research has been done in the six case countries/territory (with the exception of one recent report in FMa, see section 4.2.2) on the quality and outcomes of the varying types of alternative preschool or pre-primary provision being targeted at marginalised areas, potentially creating a tiered system between those able to afford full-day kindergarten services and those only able to attend the much shorter pre-primary programmes.

⁴² In alignment with UN Country Team agreements and the UN Development Assistance Framework in each country.

4.1.4 Human rights

Within UNICEF documentation there is an articulation of the rationale for ELSR services in terms of the progressive realisation of children's rights. In line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Article 29.1) early childhood education is linked to development and a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach to ELSR is endorsed. UNICEF has fully responded to the guiding framework of the CRC General Comments No. 1 on the aims of education and No.7 on implementing rights in early childhood particularly when working with governments on legislation development for preschool and with practitioners on developing skills, competences and other capacities among young children. UNICEF aligns with the CRC principles when promoting education programmes to enhance parents' understanding of their role in their children's education and development. UNICEF's interventions have been particularly relevant in cases where pre-primary education is compulsory despite the supply shortage (Mo) as UNICEF could simultaneously support duty bearers to fulfil their obligations and rights holders to enjoy their rights.

UNICEF demonstrates an increased focus on accountability mechanisms for the rights of children. Analysis of responsibilities of duty bearers has improved over the evaluation period particularly as the equity agenda has become more central to UNICEF's work. More attention has been paid to the necessary structural changes in governance, financing and social norms to sustain results of interventions and how UNICEF could actively support those, hence strengthening the relevance of UNICEF's approach. The shortcomings identified in the analysis of rights holders pertain to the above mentioned issue of understanding of marginalisation and equity and how complex factors of exclusion overlap. Common shortcomings in the analysis of duty bearers are teachers' attitudes and behaviours towards multiple factors of exclusion, teachers' attitudes and behaviours with regard to early learning and development and national and local governments' lack of equity-focused policies and financing modalities.

There is a distinct difference, however, between the strong rights-based language and approach within UNICEF documentation and that apparent in the dialogue and rationale being used in implementation. It is, of course, necessary to recognise the pragmatic choices of achieving programme acceptance and progress within national contexts where rights terminology and discourse are not well developed or used amongst stakeholders. However, stronger efforts to introduce such discourse would reflect UNICEF's foundational normative principles of rights. A human-rights-based approach to programming is also grounded in genuine involvement of beneficiaries from the situation analysis to the evaluation stage. There is a surprisingly weak children's participation component in UNICEF's ELSR analysis and programming. There was no evidence of systematic and constructive consultation of young children with regard to ELSR provision in any of the countries/territory visited. This particularly misses opportunities in the area of pre-primary and school readiness programmes, where children at the older end of the early childhood age range could easily articulate their opinions.

Whilst there is evidence of parental consultation at local level in all six cases, mobilisation of parents at national level on more complex issues such as legislation, norms and strategies is less common. Parents from "non-project sites" therefore have few opportunities to voice their concerns and to be heard. However, by increasing preschool provision and consulting parents and local authorities, UNICEF indirectly contributes to developing the capacities of communities to claim their rights to ELSR. There is also evidence of UNICEF engaging with NGOs and CSOs that speak on behalf of marginalised groups, particularly children with disabilities and ethnic minorities.

4.1.5 Gender, employment and childcare

As mentioned above, gender analysis within preschool access is generally limited to national gender parity rates, and therefore overlooks some important multiple exclusion factors that make girls from specific groups amongst the most vulnerable children. There are additional concerns about the gender imbalance in ELSR. UNICEF is not active in advocating for an increased proportion of men working in ELSR to contribute to attitudinal change towards gender equality, to reduce gender segregation in the labour market and the feminisation of the preschool teaching force, and to provide positive role models of both sexes for young children (an underpinning principle of European provision).

Early childhood services also affect much broader gender issues around women's equality and the labour market because of their implications for childcare responsibilities. UNICEF's ELSR focus on preschooling separates the educational priority from the childcare function of early childhood services. In this way UNICEF positions itself within a consensus of other agencies, including the World Bank, that has shaped programming across a range of middle- and low-income countries. In many cases this approach supports the development of more 'affordable' part-day public ELSR services often targeted at specific disadvantaged groups. In the CEE/CIS region it has also been an intentional approach for UNICEF to emphasise the importance of education and child development to counter-balance the strong legacy of childcare to working parents as the driving force in traditional kindergarten provision. In scenarios of limited public resources and low employment rates, this approach has also been based on a rationale of rebalancing the substantial amount of public resources that go to supporting full-day kindergarten services that largely serve the wealthier sections of the (employed) population, with supporting shorter, education-driven services for broader sections of the population.⁴³

This approach has been challenged for downplaying the critical role of early childhood services in women's (particularly marginalised women's) participation in the labour market and right to work, and potentially reinforcing gendered divisions of labour.⁴⁴ CEDAW states in Article 11 that in order to prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of maternity and to ensure their effective right to work, State Parties shall encourage "the provision of the necessary supporting social services to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and participation in public life, in particular through promoting the establishment and development of a network of childcare facilities". Despite CEDAW and the shift towards integrated services being encouraged in General Comment No. 7 of the CRC, UNICEF conceptualisation and programming for ELSR has not yet engaged with the rights and gender equality implications of promoting separate rather than integrated care and education services, nor the modalities of how both care and education might be managed for 3-6 year olds.

The UNICEF ELSR approach also contrasts with the stated policies of the EU and OECD, which explicitly posit the importance of the provision of childcare to all women and, particularly, to low-income and migrant families as a key equality and equity issue, as well as an economic issue in expanding the productive labour market through facilitating the entry of mothers into paid employment. This has fed into the prioritisation of approaches by the EU and OECD that seek to integrate rather than separate childcare and educational provision for 3-6 year olds.⁴⁵

⁴³ A useful discussion of this is included in UNICEF (2010), *Fair Play: a financially feasible plan for equal access to early childhood programmes in the Republic of Macedonia*, pp.49-50

⁴⁴ Razavi, S. (2011), 'Rethinking Care in a Development Context', *Development and Change*, 42(4) pp. 873-904

⁴⁵ European Commission (2011), 'Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow'; OECD (2006), *Starting Strong II*

Gender analysis in terms of gendered family responsibilities across sub-national areas, wealth quintiles and ethnicity is absent from UNICEF’s documentation and the impact of the structure of preschool (full or short day etc.) on households and gendered care responsibilities is not being addressed. UNICEF ELSR analyses also rarely disentangle parental demand for early childhood education and development and the demand for care. There is little understanding of how employment and unemployment of men and women potentially affect demand for, and expectations of, both early childhood education and care services.⁴⁶ Similarly little is mentioned about the care economy and how it affects men and women in households and childcare provision. There is a default focus on mothers for developmental stimulation at home and very little analysis of the role of men in the education of their children although the MICS does collect data on fathers’ participation in child upbringing and UNICEF has been including components on fathers’ and male carers’ education in parenting programmes (FMa, Ko*), in some research studies (Mo) and in some instances in teacher training (Ar). There are indications of some of these issues being taken up in the young child-wellbeing programming and social policy programming of UNICEF but not consistently, and there is no agreed internal position or strategy on these issues that would enable a coordinated and coherent approach to the interconnected issues of care and education across UNICEF programming.

4.1.6 ELSR approach within the wider early childhood development context

Linkages between ELSR and 0-3 programming vary in relevance and strength depending on the type of intervention and the set-up of programmes within COs. Parental education programmes in the early and mid 2000s tended to be holistic, covering the 0-6 age group (Ar). Strategic UNICEF decisions have been taken across the region to separate programming for 0-3 year olds (largely working through health systems) from services for 3 to 6 year olds (largely working through education systems), based on a pragmatic approach to existing institutional arrangements and opportunities to reach each level. However, the loss of coherence in the continuity of services offered to children and families across the 0-6 age range has yet to be addressed systematically within a strong long-term vision for early childhood development. As pre-primary programmes have become more popular, much of the focus in the sector has shifted further to 5-6 year old children. This has been a practical and financially feasible approach rapidly to expand some form of preschool service to the population with a specific school readiness focus. However, there seems to have been little analysis of how this could potentially alter the continuum of development between 3 to 6 and the lost opportunity provided by preschool to identify families in difficulty at an early stage (child protection), to pick up children lagging behind in terms of developmental and educational outcomes and to identify children with disabilities or impairments (health, social protection). A further issue that has not been considered is to what extent school readiness/pre-primary programmes, which vary across and within countries/territories in length, content and quality, draw more from a school tradition rather than a learning-through-play approach and thus draw traditional teaching and learning methods into the early childhood sphere.

UNICEF globally has recently defined its approach to school readiness as based on three dimensions – ready children, ready schools and ready parents.⁴⁷ However, a shared understanding or definition of “school readiness” is generally lacking within the UNICEF approaches to the links between ELSR and

⁴⁶ One exception is the 2012 ‘Study on the Demand and Supply of Early and Pre-school Education Services from the Perspective of Women’s Employability’ undertaken by UN Women in collaboration with UNICEF in Moldova that informed the drafting of the Law on Child Care and Education and UNICEF’s modelling of services for children under 3.

⁴⁷ UNICEF (2012), *School readiness: a conceptual framework*, p.7; see also UNICEF (2012), *School readiness and transitions: a companion to the Child Friendly Schools Manual*

primary school in the six countries/territory concerned, and the coverage and links between these three dimensions have remained weak. There are examples of explicit attempts to bridge this gap: in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, for example, a current programme on literacy and numeracy in early grades provide a continuum for the child-centred methods promoted in ELSR. However, identification and referral of OOSC and monitoring interventions that address child protection, social protection, health, education and ensure a continuum of services from preschool to primary school, is generally absent.

4.1.7 Relevance to UNICEF targets and global principles

UNICEF's Medium-Term Strategic Plan (MTSP) 2006-2013⁴⁸ identifies one result directly related to ELSR: "improve children's developmental readiness to start primary school on time, especially marginalised children". UNICEF has, in all six cases, worked towards achieving the MTSP targets. The strong focus on ELSR and particularly on Grade Zero and other pre-primary provision are relevant to the objective of increasing the proportion of children starting school at the prescribed age. By promoting universal access to school readiness programmes, UNICEF increases the chance of identifying potential barriers to primary schooling, such as lack of birth certificates. It also supports changing attitudes in communities around identification of school age children. The MTSP identifies "areas of cooperation" to guide UNICEF's work. As shown in Table 6, UNICEF programming has aligned with the MTSP guidance in most aspects.

UNICEF has also both contributed to and followed evolving international standards and expectations for early childhood education and has embraced and supported many of the basic principles outlined in the Dakar Education for All (EFA) Framework for Action and the Moscow Framework for Action (Table 7).

UNICEF interventions include, and build on, standards that derive from international practice, focusing not only on cognitive development but also on linguistic, emotional, social and physical development. This said, in the CEE/CIS region many countries/territories are looking to the EU and the OECD for standards of provision and strategic directions. By supporting half-day and short ELSR programmes, UNICEF has not aligned with the EU commitment to provide full-day places in formal childcare arrangements to at least 90% of children aged between three and the compulsory school age.⁴⁹ Arguably, UNICEF is advocating for flexible provision in order to emphasise the developmental aspects of early childhood services (as opposed to the care-driven services of traditional kindergartens) and to boost both supply and demand sides from which more extensive programmes can be progressively built, yet longer-term strategies for this are currently lacking.

⁴⁸ The MTSP was originally for the period 2006-2009 but was twice extended to 2011 and 2013.

⁴⁹ European Commission (2011) 'Early Childhood Education and Care: Providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow.'

Table 6: Relevance of UNICEF programming towards MTSP 2006-2013 guidance

Area of cooperation	Country/territory programming characteristics
Establishing safe spaces and early learning centres in communities	In all six cases - through a range of modalities, be it resource centres for parenting education, ECE/ECD community centres, community-based kindergarten or school-based pre-primary classes.
Promoting parental education programmes particularly for marginalised groups	Parental education programmes prominent in some cases a decade ago (Ar, Ko*), filling a gap in communities with no preschool provision. UNICEF has discontinued most of its traditional parenting education work, but parents have remained the targets of C4D activities including Roma parents (Mo, FMa).
Supporting 'child-to-child' programmes to promote transfer of knowledge and practices on good health	No evidence of UNICEF ELSR programmes having adopted a child-to-child approach. Peer learning is rarely mentioned even in centres with multi-age groups.
Developing and supporting national standards to monitor school and developmental readiness	A cornerstone of UNICEF work in all six cases has been the development of ELDS. This approach was relevant to country/territory contexts and was an attempt to influence the quality of provision at systemic level. Only in FMa, are the ELDS already used for monitoring purposes and in inspections, although in Mo the mentoring programme is aimed to increase the daily use of ELDS by ELSR teachers.
Linking ELSR with primary school through continuity in curriculum, teacher training, medium of instruction etc	Linkages with the primary school curriculum were negotiated differently in countries/territory. Whilst in some there has been a mismatch between the 0-6 years old coverage and curriculum development for Grade Zero, in others the standards have been translated into "education programmes" for all age groups from 3 to 6 years old (Ar, Ko*). The ELDS for 5 to 6 years old are a good basis for a holistic, formal Grade Zero curriculum, although how these can adapt to varying lengths of programmes is unclear.
Linking different service providers together for effective ELSR and transition to primary education	UNICEF ELSR interventions are limited in linking service providers together, particularly in formal education settings where ELSR has been managed by school directors and taught by existing teachers. There is however a recent shift towards more joint programming with social services, coming from the work done on inclusive education and holistic provision for children with disabilities.

Table 7: UNICEF alignment with EFA and Moscow Framework for Action

Principles	Origin	Focus*	UNICEF ELSR interventions
Mobilizing stronger political commitment	Moscow	◆◆◆	Across the six cases UNICEF has ensured interventions mobilised political commitment through supporting legislation and policies addressing both the specifics of early childhood education as well as broader cross-sectoral issues.
Comprehensive programmes encompassing health, nutrition, hygiene, cognitive and psycho-social development	EFA	◆◆	Both parenting education and alternative provision programmes have been comprehensive and have encompassed health, nutrition, hygiene, cognitive and psycho-social development in all cases. School readiness programmes are less holistic in nature.
ELSR services supported by national, multi-sectoral policies and adequate resources	EFA	◆◆◆	Over the period, UNICEF has moved from an imperative for securing national commitment and funding towards more complex multi-sector agreements around social policy and benefits and allocation of decentralised funds.
Increasing budget allocations	Moscow	◆◆	UNICEF interventions have emphasised the need for increased national resources.
Strengthening assessment, research and M&E	Moscow	◆	Varies across the six cases and is often constrained by national capacities in challenging areas. There are pockets of

			work done on assessment and research and of support to national agencies to do so (Ko*, BH, Mo). In other countries, however, assessment and research have not been priorities (Kg, Ar). Only one country (FMa) has engaged with research on learning outcomes (forthcoming work in BH too).
Scaling up access and strengthening pathways of transition between ECCE phases	Moscow	◆◆	Access has been scaled up, sometimes dramatically, largely through support to national grade zero programmes, but also through alternative models piloted in marginalised areas. Little attention has been shown to strengthening pathways of transition to primary, particularly for the most vulnerable children. Transition pathways between 0-3 and 3-6 are not articulated in all cases, although the ELDS have tended to cover 0 to 6 years old, providing a solid basis for a consistent approach to evolving skills and competences.
Ensuring equity and inclusion	Moscow	◆◆	Although UNICEF has recently been focusing its work on children with disabilities and inclusion, interventions from the evaluation period lack mechanisms for identifying children with disabilities and responsive support for children with special needs. This is a common trend across all cases, although some have made more progress (Mo, Ar) than others (FMa, Kg). UNICEF has not yet fully articulated how inclusion of children with special educational needs in preschool could pave the way for increasing inclusion in primary schools. Provision in children's mother tongue was emphasised in some cases (Ko*, FMa) more than in others (Ar, Kg). Provision in Roma languages has been lacking (Mo, FMa, BH).
Provision of services in child's mother tongue	EFA	◆	
Identification and support for care and education of children with special needs	EFA	◆	
Creating safe and caring environments for all young children to become healthy, alert, secure and able to learn	EFA	◆◆◆	Child-friendly spaces promoted in all cases. Healthy habits and safety issues are high on the agenda, including through recent work done on DRR in preschools (Ar, Kg).
Improving the quality of ELSR	Moscow	◆◆	ELDS have provided a basis for quality practices in ELSR. Teacher training builds on ELDS (Mo, Ar, Ko*, Kg, FMa). Curriculums for early childhood education are derived from ELDS (Ar, FMa)
Supporting capacity development of personnel working in ELSR	Moscow	◆◆	UNICEF's interventions have been relevant to ECE professionals but primary school teachers, particularly those for early grades, have rarely been targeted. There has been Integration of best international practices in more recent professional development activities for ELSR teachers, which include mentoring and traditional workshop modalities (Mo, Ar).
Partnerships between governments, NGOs, communities and families around ELSR services centred on the child, focused on the family and based in the community [Moscow includes partnership with the private sector with the necessary regulations]	EFA Moscow	◆◆	UNICEF interventions have promoted partnership working between governments, NGOs, communities and families. NGOs have been active in running provision (Ko*, FMa), supporting preschools and kindergartens (Ar, BH, Kg, FMa), strengthening capacities of teachers and managers (Ar, Mo, FMa) and supporting national advocacy and influencing efforts. UNICEF has sought local partnerships when working on parenting education programmes (Ko*, Ar).
Strengthening cooperation and exchange amongst ELSR partners	Moscow	◆◆	To a certain degree, but not including private sector providers.

* Focus of UNICEF ELSR programming: ◆◆◆high; ◆◆medium; ◆low.

have been made in all the data presented below to focus on the 3-6 year age range with which ELSR is concerned, but where this has not been possible this is explained in the footnotes.

National enrolment

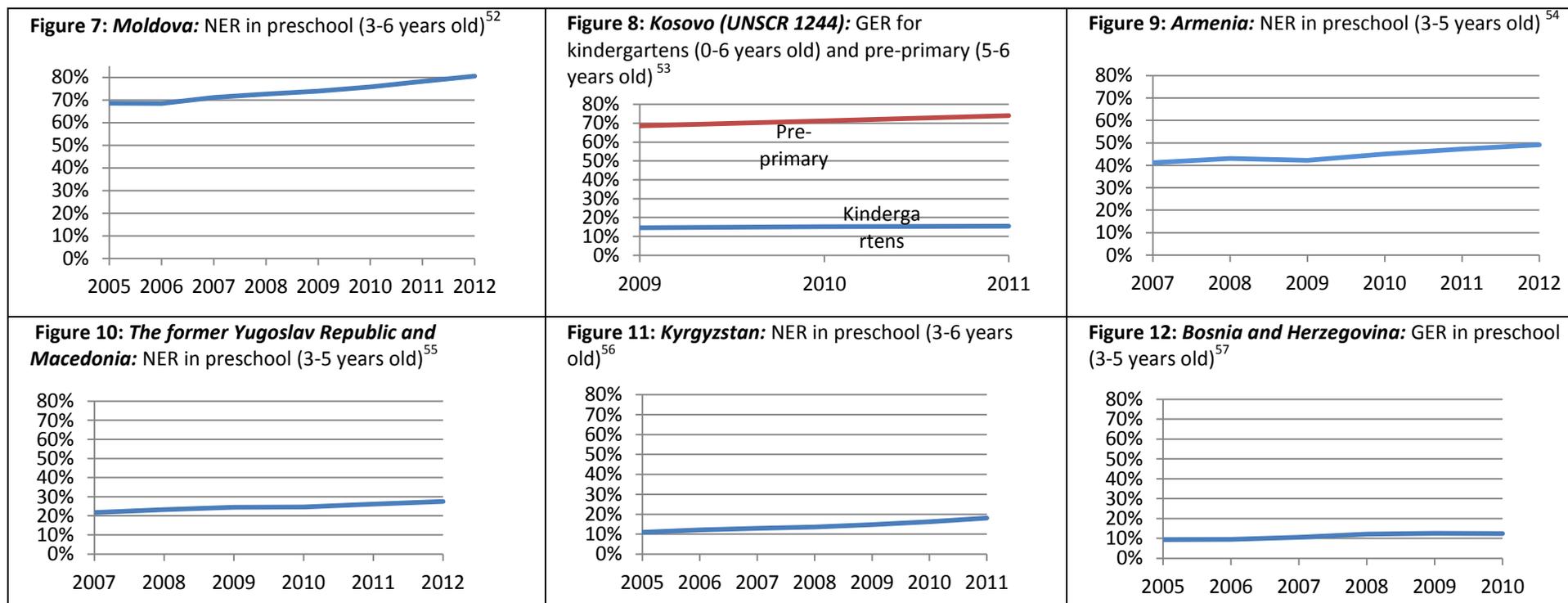
Given these caveats to the data, it is clear that overall preschool enrolment has shown an upward trend across all six cases over the period 2005-2012 (see Figures 7-12). Moldova, for example, starting from a high position of 68% net enrolment (3-6 year olds) in 2005, reached 81% by 2012.⁵¹ In terms of numbers enrolled (as opposed to gross or net enrolment rates), the expansion of the system in some cases has been impressive: in Kyrgyzstan, from 2005 to 2011, an additional 38,625 children aged 3-6 have been enrolled, an increase of 89% of the total preschool population; and in Armenia an additional 18,867 children aged 3 or over have been enrolled between 2005 and 2012, representing a 46% increase in the preschool population. In both countries it should also be noted that data from pre-primary programmes for 5-6 year olds are, at best, only partially captured in the official statistics.

National preschool systems have thus succeeded in expanding access, but enrolment rates are still low in a number of cases. Whilst additional enrolment from pre-primary programmes may boost overall figures, low enrolment remains for those outside these programmes (usually 3-5 year olds) as indicated in the pre-primary and kindergarten data for Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) (Figure 8). It should also be noted that these figures do not allow us to distinguish between the different types of preschool provision, from the full day traditional kindergarten services to the newer, shorter, educationally focused programmes. Access figures thus obscure a variety of types of services with different approaches, timings, quality and resources, and often reaching different sections of the population.

These national enrolment figures also obscure a range of disparities about *who* is accessing preschool services and benefiting from their expansion. In environments where general enrolment rates are low, a large swathe of the population is excluded. However, varying degrees of exclusion (intersections of gender, wealth, location, ethnicity etc.), and UNICEF's emphasis on reducing equity gaps, make it important to recognise and respond to equity issues in both programming and analysis of results. The levels of disaggregation in the data are limited, but the fragmentary evidence available indicates that, whilst some marginalised groups have benefited from the expansion of services, there has been little progress in reducing equity gaps with other groups; in a number of cases these gaps have actually increased because of higher improved attendance by wealthier quintiles and in urban areas. Increased access in national preschool systems thus appears to be disproportionately by less disadvantaged groups.

⁵¹ Moldova's increase in gross enrolment rates for preschool education (70.7% in 2005 to 82.1% in 2012) has meant that the country has already exceeded its 2015 nationalised MDG 2 target for preschool education by four percentage points.

Preschool enrolment trends across the six countries/territory for ages 3 and over:



⁵² Moldova National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) online database: <http://statbank.statistica.md/>

⁵³ Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MEST) (2013), *Kosovo Education Indicators 2009/10, 2010/11 DHE/ I/AND 2011/12*. Kosovan data usually only provides numbers of children enrolled in preschool education; only this publication provides enrolment ratios, but it is not possible to isolate the 3-6 year old range from the 0-6 year old kindergarten statistics.

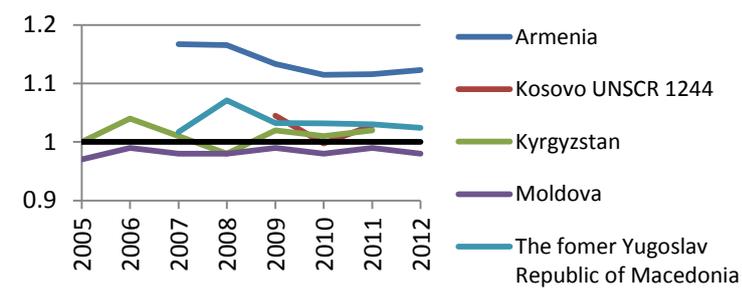
⁵⁴ National Statistical Service (NSS) of Republic of Armenia (2013), *The social situation 2012 and time series 2007-2012*. Whilst we have absolute numbers of children enrolled in preschool education in Armenia for 0-7 year olds, net enrolment rates are only given in the 2012 version of the 'Social Situation' series, and only for the age group 3-5 years old. It is important to note that the expanding primary school-based pre-primary services for 5-6 year olds (under the World Bank funded Educational Quality and Relevance Project) are not yet captured in the NSS data.

⁵⁵ Authors' calculation from State Statistical Office (SSO) of the Republic of Macedonia (2008-2013), *Public Institution for Children Care and Education- Kindergartens* (annual reports for 2007-2012), and *Estimations of the Population by Sex and Age, by Municipalities and by Statistical Regions* (annual reports for 2007-2012). 6 year olds have been excluded from these calculations as, from 2007, grade 1 primary education officially started from the age of 6. However, net enrolment of 6 year olds in preschool education has continued to rise from 4% in 2007 to 11% in 2012. Prior to 2007, preschool enrolment was close to 40%.

⁵⁶ Authors' calculation from NSC, Kyrgyzstan (2008), *Education and Science Report 2002-2007*; NSC (2012), *Education and Science Report 2008-2011*; and population data from online databank (www.stat.kg). It should be noted that the NSC has not yet started to include statistics from the 240 hour pre-primary programme in its preschool statistics, and thus actual preschool enrolment is likely to be significantly higher than these figures show.

⁵⁷ TransMonEE 2013 database: <http://www.transmonee.org/>. Education data from the Federal Office of Statistics provides only absolute numbers of children enrolled rather than enrolment rates. It should be noted that the pre-primary programmes instituted since 2011 are likely to have had a significant impact on enrolment, but the process of data analysis and publication has not yet provided official figures which incorporates the impacts of these programmes in the last 3 years.

Figure 13: Gender Parity Index (GPI) in preschool enrolments⁵⁸



Gender

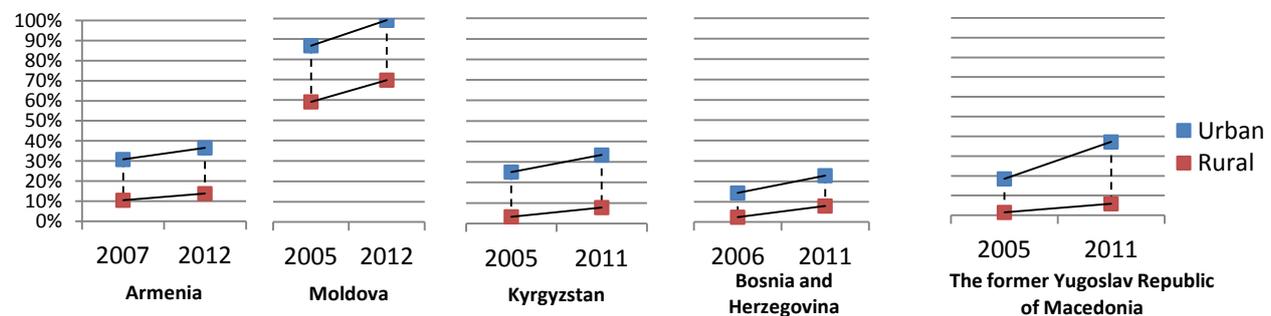
Figure 13 indicates that gender disparity in preschool enrolment has largely been in favour of girls in the country/territory cases where data are available, with the exception of Moldova where the GPI has fluctuated just below 1. Bosnia and Herzegovina does not

provide figures to calculate a gender parity index, but boys have consistently outnumbered girls in enrolment figures in both the Federation and Republika Srpska since 2009.⁵⁹ As mentioned below, however, there are numerous indications of gender intersecting with other factors of exclusion (disability, ethnicity) that prevent girls from certain groups attending preschool services.

Urban / rural

Data on rural and urban enrolments suggest not only continuing low access in rural areas, but also that, in some instances, the gap between urban and rural areas has increased over time (Figure 14). In some cases this equity gap may not be growing at the rate indicated in these official figures on account of missing data from pre-primary programmes targeted at rural areas (Kg, Ar). Nevertheless, these figures indicate that the improvements leading to the growth in preschool enrolment are, overall, benefiting urban areas more than rural.

Figure 14: Rural/urban rates of preschool enrolment (Ar, Mo, Kg) or attendance (FMa, BH)⁶⁰



⁵⁸ A GPI value of 1 indicates gender parity, under 1 represents disparity in favour of boys

Armenia: calculated from NER for 3-5 year olds, in NSS (2013), *The social situation 2012*

Kosovo (UNSCR 1244): calculated from pre-primary GER for 5-6 year olds, in MEST (2013), *Kosovo Education Indicators*

Kyrgyzstan: calculated from GER in preschool for ages 3 and above, NSC (2008), *Education and Science Report 2002-2007; (2012), Education and Science Report 2008-2011*; and population data from online databank (www.stat.kg)

Moldova: calculated from GER in preschool for ages 3 and above in Moldova NBS online database:

<http://statbank.statistica.md/>

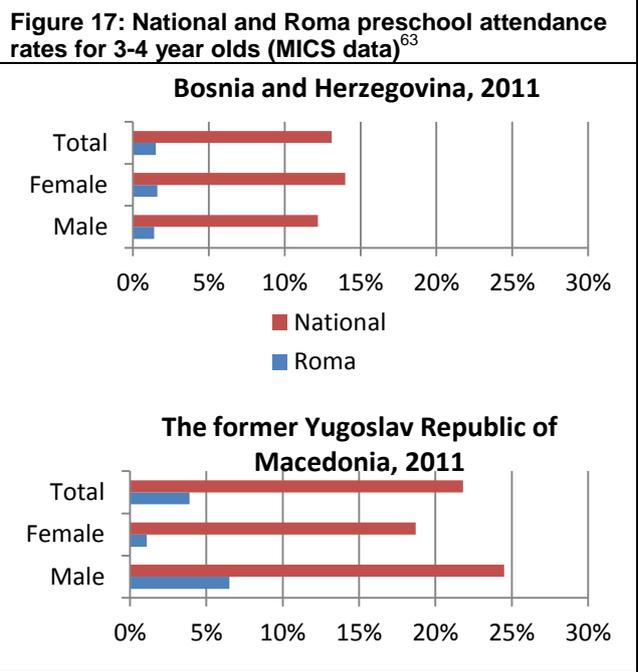
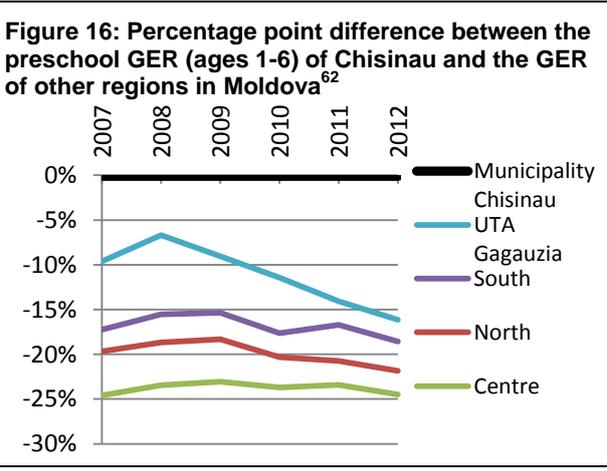
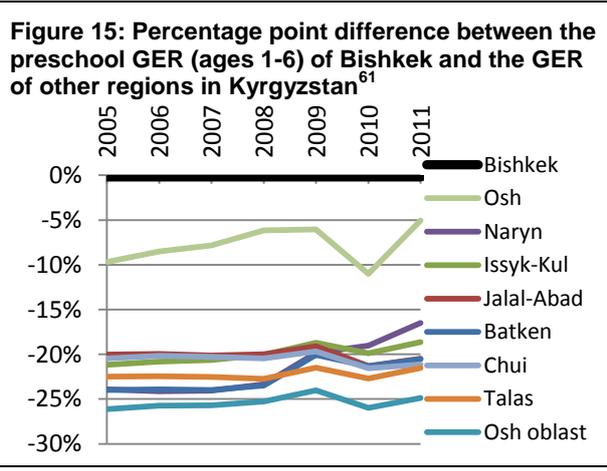
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: calculated from GER in preschool for ages 3 and above in SSO (2008-2013), *Public Institution for Children Care and Education- Kindergartens* (annual reports for 2007-2012), and *Estimations of the Population by Sex and Age, by Municipalities and by Statistical Regions* (annual reports for 2007-2012)

⁵⁹ Federal Office of Statistics, *Statistical Bulletin: Pre-school education* series; Republika Srpska Institute of Statistics, *Statistical Bulletin: Pre-school education* series

⁶⁰ Armenia: GER in preschool 0-5 years old (NSS (2013), *Statistical yearbook of Armenia 2012*); Moldova: NER in preschool 3-6 years old (NBS, *Education in the Republic of Moldova* series); Kyrgyzstan: GER in preschool (NSC, *Education and Science Report* series); the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: attendance data for 3-4 year olds (State Statistical Office (2007), *MICS 2005-6* and Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Science and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia (2011), *MICS 2011*); Bosnia and Herzegovina: attendance data for 3-4 year olds (Directorate for Economic Planning of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Republika Srpska and the Ministry of Health of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2007), *MICS 2006* and the Federal Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of the Republic of Srpska and the Institute for Public Health of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2013), *MICS 2011-2012*). No rural/urban data available for Kosovo (UNSCR 1244).

Sub-national regions

For the countries where we have sub-national enrolment rates, the equity gaps between regions vary. In Kyrgyzstan all regions have experienced an increase in enrolment over the period, with Bishkek retaining significantly higher preschool enrolment rates (for ages 1-6) than other regions in the country. This gap between Bishkek and other regions, however, has gradually been closing since 2005, except in Chui where the gap has grown, potentially related to the high levels of internal migration in this region (Figure 15). By contrast, in Moldova, despite all regions increasing their enrolment levels, the gap between Chisinau and all other regions has grown since 2007 (Figure 16).



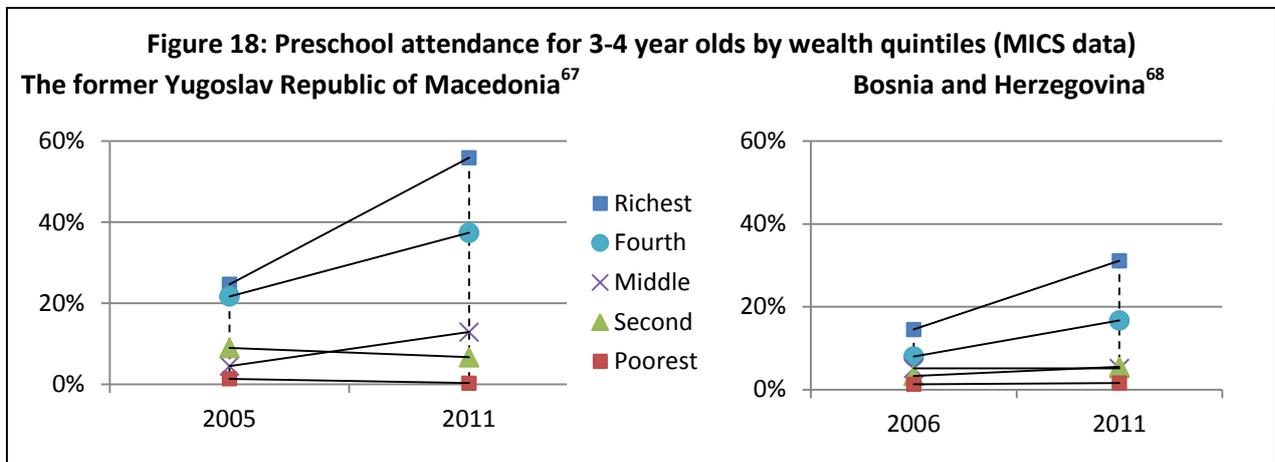
Ethnicity

Data on the changes in preschool enrolment rates for different ethnic groups are very limited across the six countries/territory. The most recent MICS data from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, however, do provide us with a snapshot of the situation of the Roma in these countries. Whilst we cannot see changes over time from this data, Figure 17 shows that there is still a very considerable equity gap for the Roma in terms of preschool attendance.⁶⁴ In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, this also intersects with gender disparities as Roma girls lag behind Roma boys in attendance.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Calculated from NSC (2008), *Education and Science Report 2002-2007*; (2012), *Education and Science Report 2008-2011*; and population data from online databank (www.stat.kg)
⁶² Calculated from enrolment and population data in Moldova NBS online database: <http://statbank.statistica.md/>
⁶³ The Federal Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of the Republic of Srpska and the Institute for Public Health of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2013), *MICS 2011–2012* and the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2013), *MICS 2011–2012: Roma Survey*; Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Science and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia (2011), *MICS 2011*
⁶⁴ It should be noted that MICS data is based on reported current attendance of 3-4 year old children in early childhood education programmes rather than official enrolment for ages 3 and over – hence the discrepancy between the GPI for FMA in Figure 13 and male and female attendance rates in Figure 17.
⁶⁵ The disparity between Roma girls' and boys' attendance may not be statistically significant.

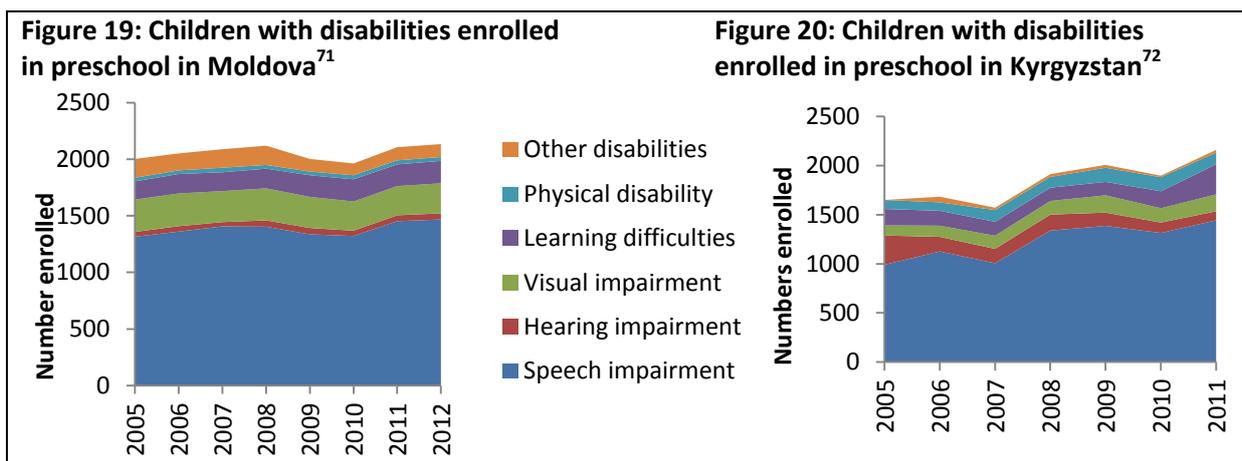
Poverty

Our only data source on attendance levels by wealth also comes from the MICS surveys (BH and FMa). In both these countries the equity gap between the richest and poorest quintiles increased between 2005/6 and 2011,⁶⁶ and the richest quintile continues to pull ahead of all other quintiles (Figure 18).



Disability

The inclusion of children with disabilities in preschool services is captured in a number of official statistics indicating increased numbers enrolled (Kg, FMa, Mo, Republika Srpska), with the increase largely coming from those with speech impairments in Moldova and Kyrgyzstan (Figures 19-22).⁶⁹ However in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Republika Srpska numbers remain very low overall and qualitative information from country/territory visits (see Effectiveness section below) indicate that children with disabilities still face significant access barriers to preschool. The research study in Armenia, *It's about inclusion*, highlights how these are complex, multi-faceted barriers, with the overall attendance rate of 28% (amongst 2-6 year olds) containing disparities in favour of both boys and urban areas.⁷⁰



⁶⁶ In FMa the top three quintiles increased between the MICS3 and 4 with significance ($p < 0.05$). In BH the top quintile increased with significance ($p < 0.05$) and the lower three quintiles show no significant change.

⁶⁷ SSO (2007), *MICS 2005-6* and Ministries of Health, Education and Labour and Social Policy (2011), *MICS 2011*

⁶⁸ Directorate for Economic Planning of BH *et al* (2007), *MICS 2006*; Federal Ministry of Health *et al* (2013), *MICS 2011-2012*.

⁶⁹ None of the official data in any of the countries/territories presents gender disaggregated disability data for preschool.

⁷⁰ UNICEF (2012), *Its about inclusion*

⁷¹ NBS (2008-2013), *Education in the Republic of Moldova series* (annual reports)

⁷² NSC (2008), *Education and Science Report 2002-2007*; (2012), *Education and Science Report 2008-2011*

Figure 21: Children (aged 3+) with disabilities enrolled in preschool in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia⁷³

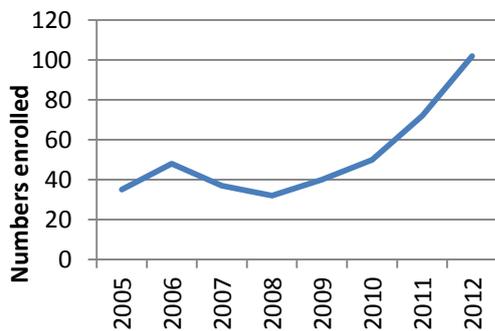
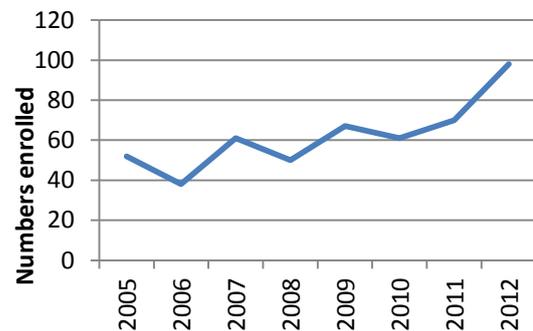


Figure 22: Children (aged 3-6) with disabilities enrolled in preschool in Republika Srpska⁷⁴



4.2.2 Changes in children's lives

As the phrase suggests, ELSR objectives include preparing children for timely entry into primary education and improving learning outcomes from education in the longer term, thus realising children's rights to education and the fulfilment of their developmental potential. Data do not provide us with a very complete picture of the increase in school readiness as a result of rising preschool enrolment; however it is fair to assume, particularly for the expanding pre-primary programmes in most cases, that school readiness (the proportion of children attending grade 1 with preschool experience) is rising. The data we have on this indicator support this: in Bosnia and Herzegovina the proportion was 10.7% in the 2006 MICS data and 16.3% in the 2011/2012 MICS,⁷⁵ whilst in Kyrgyzstan the proportion of those enrolled in grade 1 at the start of the year⁷⁶ who had attended preschool rose from 21% in 2007 to 29% in 2011, although this varied across different regions (Bishkek increased by 37 percentage points whilst Talas dropped by 13 percentage points).⁷⁷ Data from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia highlight the effects of a gradual expansion of preschool services from the pre-primary year down (5-6 years old in most cases). Whilst school readiness was at 75.7% in 2005, by 2011 this had dropped to 40% as a result of the incorporation of the pre-primary programme into the primary education system as the first grade in 2007.⁷⁸

The effect of preschool experience on children as they progress into primary education is an area that generally lacks research and evidence in the countries/territory covered.⁷⁹ This is an important gap given the range of types of provision available and the possible variation in quality; furthermore, the lack of comparative data between types of preschool provision limits the equity analysis of

⁷³ SSO (2008-2013), *Public Institution for Children Care and Education- Kindergartens* (annual reports for 2007-2012)

⁷⁴ Republika Srpska Institute of Statistics (2009-2013), *Statistical Bulletin: Pre-school education* (annual reports 2009-2013)

⁷⁵ Directorate for Economic Planning of Bosnia and Herzegovina *et al* (2007), *MICS 2006* and the Federal Ministry of Health *et al* (2013), *MICS 2011-2012*. There are slight differences in how this indicator was calculated in MICS3 and MICS4: in MICS3 only those children of the age for starting primary school were selected (6-7 year olds); in MICS4 all children attending the first grade of primary school were selected regardless of age. When the MICS4 definition is applied to the MICS3 data, the rise in the school readiness indicator is significant ($p < 0.05$).

⁷⁶ As opposed to currently attending grade 1 used in MICS data collection

⁷⁷ NSC, Kyrgyzstan (2008), *Education and Science Report 2002-2007* and (2012), *Education and Science Report 2008-2011*

⁷⁸ State Statistical Office (2007), *MICS 2005-6* and Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Science and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia (2011), *MICS 2011*. This drop is statistically significant whether the MICS3 or MICS4 definitions are applied to the MICS3 data.

⁷⁹ PISA results for Kyrgyzstan do suggest that attendance in preschool education can have a significant impact on reading levels of students – however the evidence is from 15 year old students so would refer to preschool provision in 2000 or earlier, and does not provide us with information on differences produced by the quality of that preschool education: UNICEF (2012), *Equity in Learning? A Comparative Analysis of the PISA 2009 Results in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, pp.84-86

preschool outcomes that can be undertaken to a very broad enrolment/exclusion basis only. One good example of evidence that is available in this area, however, is a study on the developmental outcomes of children attending UNICEF-supported, pilot kindergartens and early childhood development centres (ECDCs) in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.⁸⁰ This report indicated that children attending ECDCs achieved higher levels of language and literacy development, socio-emotional development and cognitive development than those attending kindergartens (over 5% higher than both UNICEF-supported and non-supported kindergartens) and those not attending any preschool programmes (over 20% higher on all indicators). These results improved the longer children were enrolled in the programmes and provide a useful evidence base from which to build future strategies for quality preschool services in the country.

'We don't just get the children ready for school: we prepare them for life.' Teachers and head teacher at a preschool, Moldova

Anecdotal evidence from all six countries/territory supports the positive impacts of any preschool provision on children. Parents and preschool and primary teachers noted the social, emotional and cognitive benefits whether children were attending kindergartens, pre-primary programmes or other provision. These included children's increased interest in play-centred learning activities, their increased ability to focus on tasks and adapt to primary school classroom environments and their recognition of letters, shapes, counting etc. The benefits of socialisation, increased confidence and politeness were stressed by many parents (BH, Ar, Ko*, FMa (particularly amongst Roma parents)) as an important aspect of preschool attendance for their children, as was the development of particular languages (for the Roma in FMa, and in Kg). Improvements in the health and hygiene practices of children were also noted by parents and some local health authorities (Ar, Kg, FMa).

'Our children ask us to do with them what they do at school, painting, making things. They bring the activities home.' Parents in FMa

'Our children have changed their behaviour. They do not play in the dust, they help younger ones, they know how to hold a pen and they always tell us what they did during the day'. Mother in South Kyrgyzstan

'The point of preschool is not education/learning or care, it is socialisation'. Official in the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Armenia

'My five year-old corrects the language of my 3 year-old and she tells him to drink in his cup, not the one of others, and to wash his hands'. Parent, Armenia

4.2.3 Changes in how preschool education is seen within a rights framework

Across all six cases there is a general disconnect between children's rights and the benefits of preschool education. Most stakeholders acknowledge the importance of preschool as central to children's development, but the framing and implementation of preschool services within a 'rights' discourse has not yet expanded beyond the documentation of stakeholders such as UNICEF and ISSA into the approaches of either higher government level or the field level.

In all cases the development of legislation and policies for preschool since 2005 has generally articulated children's rights and inclusive education principles in relation to preschool. The decentralisation agenda places much of the practical burden of achieving the fulfilment of these

⁸⁰ Lameva (2013), 'Report on the assessment of the progress of UNICEF Early Childhood Development programme based on the Early Learning and Development Standards of preschool children' (draft version)

rights (i.e. in providing access to quality early childhood services) in the hands of decentralised authorities charged with the responsibility for service provision. Yet the evolving nature of the decentralised structures and mechanisms, with significant financial and resource disparities, has produced an uneven ability to meet the needs of all children, although the responsibility to do so is well understood. The combination of these resource constraints with the priority of expanding provision has marginalised considerations of equality and equity of provision (with the maintenance of traditional kindergartens for those able to afford them, for example), and the rights considerations in the process of providing services, that are integral to a rights-based approach.

In some instances, largely in the provision of community-based centres in a number of cases (Kg, Ko*, FMa), parental and community consultation has been undertaken through piloting initiatives and seeking feedback from parents. In Kyrgyzstan there is a deliberate link made between early childhood education and rights that enables parents to initiate, and the wider community to mobilise, around their requirements for preschool education, as local authorities have increased financial responsibilities for community centres and kindergartens. In most cases, however, parents are not consulted over the design of programmes and, in some instances, this can raise concern over the extent to which child and parental well-being is overridden by securing preschool attendance (such as in the scheduling of pre-primary classes in the evening in one example in Bosnia and Herzegovina). Meetings, parental committees and councils do, however, maintain a degree of engagement. Usually this is to seek funding (a 2009 survey in Moldova, found that parents and kindergarten directors reported that while partnerships with parents had increased, the content of these partnerships rarely went beyond material and financial support⁸¹), or to enquire as to why children are not attending and, occasionally, to seek parental views of the interaction with staff over the children (one kindergarten in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). Some municipalities/local authorities are better at this than others, usually those that are in urban areas and serve middle income populations, and preschool provision now forms a part of urban expansion or re-generation in some areas (FMa). Yet for some marginalised groups, such as the Roma, programming to meet their rights can be limited to access to pre-primary services only and tends to be project funded, raising concerns about sustainability beyond the project period.

Community responsibility is often interpreted in financial terms and is uneven. Some communities are unable (because of poverty) to contribute towards preschool provision while recognising its value; most communities will contribute something financially towards infrastructure or food as the service or programme demands. Others contribute 'in kind', building playgrounds or helping with events.

In all six cases, children are the subject of observations, of studies, of programming, but rarely of direct enquiry into what *they* think, feel and want. If they do get asked it is usually to assess them rather than seek their opinions; there is an implicit assumption that children aged 3-6 years old are not capable of taking or articulating decisions about and around their own issues. They do not participate in the design of their own experiences except for 'free play' time, which, in rare cases, may extend to facilitating children's planning of their activities (seen in one Moldovan kindergarten), but this is the exception rather than the rule. Yet there is strong evidence that children can make decisions, reach consensus and make choices about what they want and what should be available to

⁸¹ Centre for Sociological, Politological and Psychological Analysis and Research CIVIS (2009), *Assessment study of knowledge, attitudes and practices at institutional level related to early childhood education*

them. There is a paucity of tools to support the implementation of a rights-based approach to preschool programming that would facilitate such child participation.⁸²

4.2.4 Unintended impacts

There are a number of important unintended impacts related to the transition period between preschool provision and primary education. It was noted by some parents that children who had attended preschool tended to be bored in the first year of primary education as teachers struggled to deal with children's different levels of development (FMa). Some parents and primary teachers also commented that differences between those who had attended preschool and those who had not tended to even out after some time (Ar, FMa). Whilst this is only anecdotal evidence, it does point to the challenges around the preschool-primary transition in environments where preschool enrolment remains relatively low, and to the need for both the child and the school to be ready at grade 1 to build on the benefits of preschool experience.

'We have 2 groups of children doing the 240 hour school preparedness programme. One group is then mixed with other children to form several G1 classes, the other group stay together. I want to keep my 240 class in Grade 1 because they are prepared'. Primary school teacher, Batken, Kyrgyzstan

'It depends on children. Sometimes children with preschool experience do not cope in Grade 1 and some without pre school experience cope very well'. Grade 1 teacher, Armenia

The degree to which methodologies and approaches are aligned between preschool and primary can also raise concerns. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, for example, a programme that promoted conflict resolution and diversity saw children flounder at primary school where the discourse of negotiation was so different as to be hostile. In Moldova, the 2009 KAP survey indicated that one of the reasons 62% of primary teachers thought children's preparation for primary school had not improved or even worsened between 2007 and 2008 was the lack of continuity between preschool and primary education.⁸³ In contrast, where pre-primary programmes have been primary school-based, some primary teachers did report increased confidence and capacities to engage with young learners through more child-centred methodologies (FMa, Mo).

'We share the premises with the primary class. So in the morning the room is arranged for group work in early childhood education and development and then, before the primary class begins the chairs are all put back in a row.' Teacher, FMa

'Before, I was a primary school teacher and after having a child I was asked to work at the community-based kindergarten. At the beginning I thought I would go back to primary school when my child would be older, but now I do not want to leave the community-based kindergarten. I have learned a lot about teaching practices and it is more interesting here'. Teacher, Kyrgyzstan

A discontinuity in environments and services is particularly significant for marginalised groups such as children with disabilities, who, having been integrated in preschool may be relegated to special

⁸² Examples and tools for meaningful participation of young children in decision-making and the development of their learning experience and environment can be found in: Clark (2010), *Transforming children's spaces: children's and adults' participation in designing learning environments*; Lansdown (2005), *Can you hear me? The right of young children to participate in decisions affecting them*; Clark, McQuail and Moss (2003), *Exploring the field of listening to and consulting with young children*: <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8367/1/RR445.pdf>; Save the Children (2000), *Children and participation research, monitoring and evaluation with children and young people*: http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/publications/hrbap/SCUK_participation.pdf; and the numerous materials developed by the Child-to-Child Trust: <http://www.child-to-child.org/>

⁸³ Ibid

education after transitioning to primary education, and, as a result, there is some anecdotal evidence of parents fearing this transition phase for children with disabilities (Mo, FMa, Ar). The lack of clear responsibilities and roles for the support of children with disabilities across local services, and a strong medical approach to disability, also means that opportunities are missed within preschool provision to identify and respond to disabilities at an early age. Armenia represents a positive example in this area, with stakeholders indicating that preschool provision has had an impact on early detection of health and abuse issues but the continuum of services is still weak.

'We are concerned that we will not have the same level of support in primary school. We are scared about this'. Mother of a child with disabilities enrolled in a kindergarten, Armenia

There may also be longer-term unintended gender impacts on the families of preschool children. Many of the alternative forms of preschool provision and pre-primary programmes offer much shorter days than traditional kindergartens. Care for children during most of the day thus lies with the family (and chiefly women). This restricts women's right to work and may, in the longer-term, place constraints on women's entry into the labour market as employment opportunities expand. Given the targeting of these alternative types of preschool services to marginalised areas and groups, it particularly affects marginalised women for whom access to the formal or informal labour market (limited as it is) is especially important. Placing preschool services within this wider rights and gender framework would require a re-evaluation of the types of preschool provision being expanded or engagement with other modalities for the provision of care services (such as partnerships with private sector schemes).

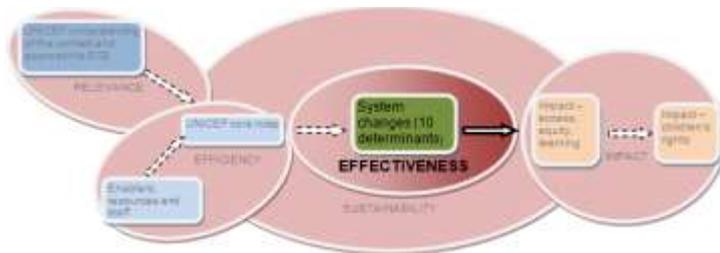
'It would be good if children could attend only 3 hours and the rest of the time stay with parents but we work and children cannot stay at home, so longer days would be good'. Mother, Kyrgyzstan

'There has been pressure from parents on community leaders to open kindergartens. The real reason is more that parents need care when they are busy in the fields than because they are caring about ECE'. NGO staff, Armenia

4.3 Effectiveness of system changes for equitable preschool provision

4.3.1 Changes in the MoRES system determinants and their contribution to impact

Effectiveness (system to impact) criteria within the TOC



This first sub-section on effectiveness addresses what changes have occurred over the period of evaluation in each of the ten MoRES system determinant areas, and how those system changes have contributed to impact on access, equity and learning. Changes in systems are complex, involving

multiple actors, agendas, influences and events. UNICEF interventions are only one strand within this arena, but where their contribution has been particularly significant they are mentioned in this sub-section and are expanded upon in sub-section 5.3.2 in relation to the seven UNICEF core roles.

Key findings on effectiveness of system changes:

Social norms around early childhood services have increasingly recognised the importance of early learning and school readiness and have increased demand for and engagement with Grade Zero programmes (in which UNICEF have played an important role). However, expectations of integrated education and care provision (along the lines of traditional kindergartens) remain strong. Social norms around the involvement of marginalised groups (e.g. children with disabilities, the Roma) within preschool remain a bottleneck to inclusive, equitable access to preschool provision. In some cases UNICEF interventions are providing in roads into addressing this.

The evaluation period has seen the legislative and policy frameworks for preschool education established in all six cases, with strong UNICEF support, providing a significant step forward for the sector. These have generally been followed by the development of comprehensive Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS), again with substantial UNICEF support. The translation of these frameworks into local level policies and implementation practices, however, has been challenging in the context of decentralised responsibilities and limited and uneven budgets at local levels. Overall, budget allocations to early childhood education have been gradually rising but efforts to ensure more equitable allocations for decentralised provision have only recently started to emerge, leaving a very uneven landscape of preschool services.

Data remain a critical barrier to planning and management of the ELSR sector, with weak data collection and analysis systems and responsibilities unable to respond to the plurality of types of provision (particularly pre-primary).

There have been substantial increases in the preschool facilities available, particularly in rural areas under large-scale, often externally-funded programmes. Staffing levels and qualifications have also risen over the period, although representation of minority groups remains low and there are areas of concern over the use of either unqualified or primary education qualified teachers in some programmes. Despite the increase in facilities that are lower cost or free, financial access remains a major barrier because of informal fees and costs arising under intense competition for places.

Quality is a growing focus as the sector has developed and access expanded. How standards are implemented at local levels, the quality implications of different types of preschool provision and the quality of training and career structures for teachers remain important areas in need of attention.

Social norms

There has been a legacy of Soviet and Yugoslav kindergarten services built around a strongly integrated education, care and labour market model. This has provided a challenge to the conceptualisation of preschool services as a chiefly educational service. However, the recognition of the importance of preschool as a ‘development’ rather than a ‘care’ service (which UNICEF has had a powerful voice in promoting) has become more evident within national institutions and at municipal/local level, although less evenly so. There is also a growing understanding and acceptance of the importance of school readiness amongst parents and communities and increased demand for widespread access and engagement with Grade Zero programmes.

‘There is now parental demand for preschool and community-based kindergartens. Parents of those children attending were showing off to the neighbours who then also wanted to enrol their children’. Batken City official, Kyrgyzstan

‘There are long waiting lists in cities. More and more parents are willing to enrol their children in preschool because the facilities have become better and parents understand the importance of socialisation at a young age’. Staff member at National Institute of Education, Armenia

At community and municipality levels, the care component of services retains a varying degree of importance in what is expected of preschool provision. In some countries (Ar, FMa), alternative, non-kindergarten provision has moved from modelling to a more structured implementation, accompanied by parental education that has supported the importance of services focused on educational development. UNICEF has been a key actor in these cases in both the provision of models and their transition into more structured provision. In this way, whilst viewed as the ‘poor relation’ to traditional kindergartens in terms of resources, these services have become recognised and valued as quality services in their own right. In contrast community-based centres in Moldova, set up to reach rural areas and expanding quickly, have lacked the same extent of accompanying work around the social norms for preschool services. As a result, they are largely viewed within communities as a pre-cursor of kindergarten-type provision (an area recognised by UNICEF and education authorities as in need of more focused work).

A social norm that is now in evidence is the trend to ‘buy’ places at what are considered excellent or desirable kindergartens and where the pressure on places is acute. A system of ‘informal’ contributions or what are called ‘voluntary’ contributions by parents is developing. The over-subscription of places can also lead to preference being given to working parents and hence work against the equity agenda (Ar). Whilst these factors are perhaps an unsurprising product of expanding but still insufficient supply, the growing norm for securing entry through making contributions serves to increase the gap between the high/middle income parents and those who are not as well off.

‘The waiting time for a Kindergarten place is 4 years, unless you pay a lot’. Parent, Kyrgyzstan

The general attitude towards children with disabilities continues to pose a huge barrier to inclusion. A KAP survey of communities in Moldova in 2010 indicated that there has actually been an increase in the reluctance amongst parents of other children to having inclusive preschools (rising from 34% in 2003 to 41% in 2010), with a rise in those supporting the placement of children with disabilities in special institutions and only 5% supporting their inclusion in community kindergartens.⁸⁴ Close to

⁸⁴ UNICEF and the Government of Republic of Moldova (2010), *Early childhood care and development: family knowledge, attitudes and practices*

half the teachers also reported they lacked the training to support children with disabilities.⁸⁵ These findings were supported by anecdotal evidence from parent and preschool interviews in the other countries/territory visited, with a strong preference for using the medical model of disability to determine their ‘educability’. However, there is an increasing awareness of the need to address these barriers and emerging examples of good practice (including from UNICEF) where children with disabilities have been integrated (if not fully included) in kindergartens and community centres.

‘It is not the children who are prejudiced against other children with disabilities; it’s the parents.’
Head teacher in Moldova

Social norms around the Roma and their participation in early childhood services have also moved very slowly over the evaluation period. Stereotypical views around the capacity and attitudes of Roma groups to utilising public services remain common at all levels, constraining attempts at more systemic engagement with the Roma community and adaptation of services to meet their needs. This links to the limited change in social norms about what inclusion means for children with disabilities, ethnic and linguistic minorities and children with special educational needs. There has been a shift towards securing the enrolment of certain groups within preschool programmes (in which UNICEF has played an important part), but the more detailed dialogue around how they are included remains underdeveloped (for example, exploring whether separate classes in the same premises, with all children coming together for lunch or specific events constitutes ‘inclusion’).

Legislation and policy

Significant changes have occurred in legislation for the preschool sector over the evaluation period, pointing to a stronger political will and commitment not only from ministries of education but also from national and local governments and parliaments. Some cases have demonstrated political commitment at senior governmental levels to fill the preschool provision gap quickly (Ko*, Kg where the President’s Road Map highlights the importance of early childhood education and is supported by the ex-President’s Foundation).

In all cases new or revised early childhood education and preschool legislation has been passed since 2005. This has been a critical step forward in establishing the framework for the sector and typically legitimises different models and providers of preschool services that recognise the need for a move away from more traditional provision in order to expand access and reach marginalised areas and groups. In some instances legislation also makes pre-primary education compulsory (Mo, FMa, Kg). As mentioned previously, principles of children’s rights and non-discrimination are usually well embedded while inclusive education principles are often more prominent in the recent legislation (FMa, Ko*). New legislation has usually been complemented by policies or strategies strongly directed at the rural, remote, underserved areas, whether preschool specific strategies (Ar) or broader education sector plans (Ko*). UNICEF contributions through TA and advice have often played an important role in the development of these frameworks as discussed in section 4.3.2.

Other normative documents have developed alongside laws, particularly norms and standards for facilities, number and type of staff and nutrition. Developing, revising, approving and disseminating Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) has been a common feature across all six cases and in which UNICEF has been heavily involved. ELDS have promoted a holistic approach to ELSR

⁸⁵ Centre for Sociological, Political and Psychological Analysis and Research CIVIS (2009), *Assessment study of knowledge, attitudes and practices at institutional level related to early childhood education*

and, as standards for 0 to 3 year olds have complemented standards for 3 to 6 year olds, ELDS have provided a common basis and language for understanding development and early learning from birth to primary education. ELDS are comprehensive, covering a range of cognitive and non-cognitive competences for children at various stages (communication and language, physical development, personal, social and emotional development, but also literacy and numeracy, understanding and being aware of the immediate environment, aesthetic and creativity development). In some cases the ELDS have directly informed the development of curriculums or syllabuses (Ar, FMa) and of teacher guidance (Ar, Ko*, Mo, FMa).

Country examples of ELDS development, delivery and management

In *the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the development of ELDS standards brought together a variety of stakeholders including from the Institute of Pedagogy (who had previously not been involved in decision-making processes on early childhood education despite their role as pre-service educators), parents and teachers. The ELDS were meticulously piloted before being enshrined in legislation and they were the subject of a sound communication strategy that paved the way for their acceptance within the education sector and the wider community. There was a good feedback mechanism and teachers and head teachers are now ready to help with refining and revising them in the light of their experience. The standards touch all aspects of a child's development: they represent a shift away from an information giving/teaching focus to a 'domains' of learning approach that allows the teacher to look at the child holistically as well as to track progress and competences individually for each child. Teacher guides help the teacher to plan for each individual and focus on those areas of development that need particular attention. Parents are aware of the standards and they can interact with the teacher on their child's progress and are able to reinforce at home what is done at school.

The resulting portfolio goes with the child during transition to primary school. The (legal) adoption and implementation of the ELDS are linked to the systems for pre-service and for in-service training and, for the first time in the country, so is the licensing of teachers so as to maintain quality. The Bureau for Curriculum Development has, with UNICEF's help, produced teaching /learning materials in line with the ELDS and these are awaiting ratification by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP). The country is now looking to revise the standards and keep them up to date as well as to align them even more closely to good practices.

In *Armenia*, the ELDS (0 to 6 years old) have been developed following a thorough consultative process at both national and local level, involving both international and national expertise. Led by the Ministry of Education, the first draft of the standards was then extensively piloted in different regions by the National Institute of Education before finalisation and approval. A syllabus (called "programme") was developed for each year group from 3 to 6 based on the ELDS. Specific programmes were also developed for non-full-day provision based on the same principles. Alignment with the early grades of the primary curriculum was also ensured through the inclusion of experts from the State Pedagogical University and the National Institute of Education in the development process. Teacher guidance complements both the ELDS and the curriculums. The ELDS were distributed to all institutions included in the EQRP and benefiting from UNICEF funded training. However, although copies were seen in preschools, only the most confident teachers were using them to guide their lesson planning and the monitoring of children's progress. For most teachers the ELDS need more mediation and time to become embedded in practice.

As this impressive set of legislative, policy and normative frameworks develops, there are a number of gaps that will require further attention. Whilst most laws touch upon staffing issues, this dimension has tended to be under-regulated and in many cases certification, career path, promotion and professional development have yet to be adequately defined and structured (Mo, Ar, Kg, BH, Ko*). In a number of cases the issue of private provision is insufficiently addressed within legislative and policy frameworks; in Kyrgyzstan the legislation has been criticised for setting unrealistic criteria for private providers, most notably concerning space requirements for outdoor play in urban areas.

'The ELDS are a minimum requirement but we do not know if the private sector is following those'. Staff at the Kyrgyz Academy of Education

The legislation in most cases has not been able to address fully the articulation between 0-3, 3-6 and primary services, or between differing types of preschool provision, often because the expansion of alternative provision has been faster than the legislative review process. This articulation has also been variable in regards to the ELDS: whilst in Armenia clear alignment between the ELDS and the primary curriculum was achieved through a (UNICEF-led) consultation process that involved the State Pedagogical University and the National Institute of Education, in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), the ELDS for 5-6 year olds overlap the curriculum framework that includes a Grade Zero, but the two have been developed separately.

In addition, national policies and strategies have rarely been able to link early childhood education expansion with social safety nets, social protection measures and child protection systems that could support enrolment for the poorest children or for children with disabilities. Such mechanisms have tended to be developed separately under the responsibilities of other line ministries.

The key constraint on the contributions of these legislative, policy and standards frameworks to impact directly on access, equity and learning has been the translation of policies into practice through decentralised structures. There has been a lack of consistent and systematic translation of national goals and targets into concrete local policies for equitable expansion of preschool services (further compounded in Bosnia and Herzegovina by the process of cantonal government ratification of national policies – three of which have yet to ratify the 2007 National Framework Law on Preschool). The uneven capacities and resources of decentralised units have also presented critical challenges in the implementation of this growing framework for preschool provision. These issues are covered further in the sections below.

Budget/expenditure

Consolidated data on budget allocation to the sector are limited; only Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova have reported to UIS in the period and those only partially. However the data show steady increases in budget allocation over the period (Table 8).

Table 8: Government expenditure on pre-primary education (taken from UIS data)

	Government expenditure on pre-primary ⁸⁶ as percentage of GDP	Change	Expenditure on pre-primary as percentage of education budget	Change
Armenia	0.27% (2008) to 0.29% (2012)	7%	8.42% (2008) to 9.15% (2012)	8%
Kyrgyzstan	0.30% (2005) to 0.58% (2011)	93%	6.18% (2005) to 8.50% (2011)	37%
Moldova	1.19% (2006) to 1.84% (2012)	55%	15.84% (2006) to 21.92% (2012)	38%

⁸⁶ Pre-primary defined by UIS as ISCED 0.

There have been some important changes in the national budget allocations to the preschool sector, most notably by taking teaching staff from pilot interventions onto national budgets (Kg), even if only for a short period of time (Ar),⁸⁷ with such changes often leveraged by external capital funding such as the GPE (Kg in which UNICEF is the lead coordinating agency for the GPE grant, and Mo in which UNICEF is the lead donor agency of the GPE grant). In some cases, demographic change has made the fiscal space within education budgets to allow re-allocation of staff budget (and staff) from primary to preschool.

Budgetary responsibility for preschool has been decentralised (e.g. to municipalities or local authorities) in all six cases. The details of mechanisms for transfer of funds, data and calculation for formulae, accountability and transparency vary from country/territory to country/territory. In some cases (FMa) block grants are made to municipalities based on number of kindergartens, which undermines alternative preschool provision (the MLSP recognises this perverse incentive and is seeking a different formula with advice from UNICEF). In others (Ko*, Mo), grants are based on the total number of children in a locality: the money can be spent at the municipality's discretion and not necessarily on services for children.

Budget allocations for preschool at municipality level depend on the tax raising power of municipalities and their leadership and implementation capacities, creating very uneven resourcing of the sector across local levels. This has proved problematic for the roll-out of alternative models of preschool provision. Such models have tended to be supported, at least in the first phase, by donors (World Bank loan in Armenia, GPE funds in Kyrgyzstan and Moldova, bilateral programmes in Kyrgyzstan, donor pool in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) and private donors in Bosnia and Herzegovina). Once these external funds have been withdrawn, however, the financial and organisational capacities of municipalities that take over have been limited, unless national ministry contributions are forthcoming (Ar, Kg). There is some evidence of budget allocation increasing at sub-national levels, for example by increasing an allocation for staffing: this may show local political responsiveness to parental demand.

There has been some improved budget and expenditure reporting for the sector over the evaluation period but the complex arrangements under decentralisation mean that many obstacles remain. Transparent and consolidated financial information covering government allocations, grants, and local budgets for preschool remains incomplete in all visited countries/territory. Financial reporting to central level on preschool budget execution is constrained by the varied financial systems used across municipalities, particularly where there is no earmarked budget allocation for preschool or when the total budget combines national ministry sources (typically as teachers' salaries or formula funding), local sources and parental contribution. Preschool directors' financial management capacities were reported to be very low across the case countries/territory.

Significant shifts are in progress, however, around financial mechanisms for preschool in a number of cases, pending decisions on financial devolution (Mo), allocation of per capita funding for pre-primary children (Ar, Kg, Ko*) or adequate funding formulas for budget allocation to reflect equity and access in the urban/rural divide (Ar, FMa, Mo). These emerging revisions of financial allocation mechanisms and the incorporation of considerations of equity in some cases are critical points from which to address equity gaps in the future. In addition, there is some evidence of increased cross-

⁸⁷ These examples refer to the teachers in community-based kindergartens in Kyrgyzstan and project sites under the World Bank EQPR project in Armenia, rather than nationwide changes to teacher costs.

sector budget headings in medium term expenditure frameworks (supported by UNICEF in Ar) which could become an entry point for cross-sector budgeting for early childhood development in the medium and long term.

'We want a budget allocation formula that is equitable, more rational and more efficient'
Budget coordination and reporting unit, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, FMa

Management and coordination mechanisms

Sector coordination and management

Coordination mechanisms for ELSR have been created, particularly around legislation, policy and standards development and revision (in all of which UNICEF has been a key driving force). Typically these mechanisms have been at national level, such as in the National ECD task force set up in 2005 in Armenia for the development of the legislative framework. In some instances, (Kg, Ar) parliamentarian groups with responsibilities for education or children's rights have taken on the promotion of the preschool agenda to secure increased political commitment. Where early childhood education has been incorporated into wider national or education sector plans (Kg, Ko*, Mo) and through GPE grants (Kg, Mo), management and monitoring of the preschool sector has benefited from the broader mechanisms attached to these plans, such as the Joint Annual Review Meetings led by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), or the GPE Project Steering Committee and Advisory Group incorporating ministry, civil society, academia and donor agencies. However, challenges remain for joint policy development, joint planning, shared budget allocation and joint monitoring in many cases. Ministerial complications in some cases (early childhood development sits under the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for instance) particularly affect vulnerable groups such as children with disabilities, whose needs span various compartmentalised child protection, social protection, health and education sectors.

The critical layer of sectoral management, however, lies at the municipality level where responsibilities for preschool education provision have been decentralised in all six cases. As noted in the previous section, financial resources at municipality levels vary hugely, and the decentralisation process in all cases has not yet been accompanied by equivalent strengthening of these authorities' capacities to fulfil their responsibilities in early childhood education as well as other sectors. As a result, the implementation of national frameworks for preschool education (including their translation into local legislation and practice) at the decentralised level of management tends to depend heavily on the individual priorities and capacities of specific staff members within municipalities and local (mayoral) political commitment to early childhood education.

Whilst local governments have had opportunities to apply to a programme that would support expansion (Kg, Ar), there is little evidence that they have the capacities and agency to translate national goals into local interventions (Ko*, Ar, Kg, Mo). There is evidence of municipalities also lacking capacity to experiment with different models of provision, particularly in urban areas where leaders appear more reluctant to provide non-traditional provision (FMa, Kg, Ar). However, where there has been local political support and individual capacity and interest in preschool education, municipalities have been successful in leveraging local resources and building strong relationships with communities around preschools with good examples observed in a number of countries (Mo, FMa, Kg). This uneven level of implementation and resourcing has important implications for equity

and points to weaknesses at a system level for preschool education that are part of broader government-wide decentralisation system bottlenecks.

In some cases, there has been a recent trend for line ministries or their deconcentrated entities to take back responsibilities with regard to preschool teachers, either in terms of salary disbursement (Kg, Ar) or inspection (Kg). This shifting of responsibilities points to attempts to reach a balance between alignment of regulations harmonising provision and ensuring consistency in implementation across sub-national levels, with acceptable minimum standards for preschool provision that are not detrimental to small operations in remote localities.

At the local institutional level, preschool heads and staff have sought, in some places, to improve their governance processes and mechanisms. The need for communities to contribute financially and in kind to the operation and up-keep of community-based preschool facilities (encouraged under UNICEF models of alternative provision) has encouraged a closer relationship between education providers and parents (Mo, Kg, FMa, Ar). In some kindergartens in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (supported by UNICEF), 'then and now' surveys were being used to assess and improve outreach to parents; kindergartens have also cleaned up their registers to ensure that children enrolled but not attending (reportedly used by some parents as an insurance for when they needed care services) were moved out of the register to make room to meet the real demand for places.

Financial management

Financial management in most cases is being re-organised as responsibility for preschool is devolved to the sub-national levels. Factors to be taken into account include not only the financial allocations and mechanisms for calculation and accountability etc., but also local capacity for managing best use of funds, which has not, as yet, received sufficient attention. The need to ensure that services expand in coverage, are equitable and of good quality, is a debate that has been deferred until the processes and mechanism for budget transfers become clearer.

Ability to manage, transparently, community contributions to service provisions, as well as informal 'fees' and payments (see 'Financial access' section below), also need to be developed at these levels.

Data

As noted in section 5.2.1, there are significant challenges in the collection and analysis of data for the preschool sector, including the complex variety of provision, the range of providers and the speed at which alternative provision has been established in the region. Consistent categorisation of the variety of provision and providers remains problematic. Data collection for school readiness programmes (pre-primary) has typically been overlooked (Kg, Ar, BH), and roles and responsibilities for the collection and collation of preschool data (including pre-primary) remain unclear or duplicated in some cases between the ministry and national statistics agencies (Kg, Mo, Ko*). EMIS systems have often been introduced recently without including all preschool provision, although there is hope for improvement in the future (Ko*, Ar, Mo). Data often lack disaggregation by sub-national levels, which constrains effective planning for equitable provision of early childhood education. Demographic data are also an issue in most of the cases affected by conflict (e.g. first census conducted since the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was in 2013, refugees and returnees in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) and southern Kyrgyzstan, and the special status of Transnistria in Moldova and the Serbian administered parts of Kosovo (UNSCR 1244)) and high levels of migration (Mo, Ar, Kg).

There have been improvements over the evaluation period however. Following requests from UIS, most countries are now disaggregating data for the 0-3 and 3-6 year age groups (Ar, Mo, FMa). Pre-

accession countries/territories have also improved forms and calculation methods to comply better with European standards (BH, Ko*, FMa). Yet the continuing lack of sufficient and disaggregated data and the complexities of the management of the sector constrain the extent to which priority areas and groups can be identified and limit the evidence basis for planning or monitoring purposes. Moreover, lack of capacity and data coordination at both sub-national and national levels mean that even when data does exist, it is not necessarily being disaggregated to the extent possible nor analysed and used to prioritise interventions.

Inspection

Responsibilities for preschool inspection vary across countries/territory and usually rest with the body in charge of disbursing funds or teachers' salaries. In Kyrgyzstan this is a new responsibility for the inspectorate, which does not have specialists for the preschool sector. In Armenia, preschools, municipalities and deconcentrated Ministry of Education services are unsure about inspection responsibilities and mechanisms, particularly over teaching and learning, and at municipality levels there are no staff with the capacity to conduct inspection of teaching and learning.

The inspectorate is often not included in the changes to preschool, and is thus not in line with developments in child-centred methodologies nor with the ELDS that have been developed (Ar, Kg). Inspection of teaching and learning in preschool tends to be overlooked in regulations and legislation, which focus on compliance over nutrition and facilities' norms, and this creates either vacuums or overlaps of responsibilities. This means teachers, even when trained in child-centred methodologies (often supported by UNICEF), are likely to teach to the more formal cognitive standards that the inspectors demand which undermines the local implementation of the ELDS. There are, however, good examples where efforts are being made to address this, such as the mentoring programme supported by UNICEF in Moldova that accompanies on-site support to preschool teachers with orienting the inspectorate to changing its role, making it more supportive and in line with ELDS and practices. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia recent legislation has also defined the ELDS as the basis of quality support and quality assurance mechanisms, including the inspection framework and the professional development and licensing of teachers.

Availability of essential commodities

Official data on the provision of teaching and learning materials, toys, furniture and other preschool materials are not available in any of the six cases and, with the decentralisation of the preschool sector, supply of such items often depends on the sub-national authorities or on irregular one-off supplies accompanying larger national projects. Supplies of teacher guides, standards, curriculums and associated basic teaching and learning materials were observed and reported to be sufficient in all cases. In Kyrgyzstan curriculum guides and basic learning materials are provided as part of the set-up package provided for community-based kindergartens and the 240-hour pre-primary programme; in Armenia preschool curriculums were reportedly available in most institutions, as well as additional teacher guidance and ELDS provided to those preschool staff who had attended UNICEF and Step by Step training. In Moldova, the UNICEF partnership with LEGO supplied cognitive toys to 517 preschool institutions, largely targeted at those in rural areas. Materials available in minority languages are, however, very limited and remain a constraint for linguistically marginalised groups. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, learning materials reflecting the ELDS have been developed and are awaiting Ministerial approval for distribution: ELDS tools for tracking children's progress, planning activities and creating children's profiles are already in use.

There is a discrepancy in the equipment, infrastructure and materials available between different types of preschool services. State kindergartens in all cases (often catering to less disadvantaged, urban groups able to pay fees) are generally well resourced in terms of space, infrastructure, toys, books and other learning materials. In some instances (FMa, Mo) expectations of ‘properly’ equipped provision are still informed by such state kindergartens, with new community-based preschool or pre-primary programmes perceived as the ‘poor relations’ in resource terms. Inevitably, to ensure financial viability and coverage, community-based preschool services will be unable to match such resourcing levels, unless they are run by NGOs and well supported by the local community. These continued disparities between kindergartens and other types of provision targeted to marginalised groups, run the risk of reinforcing a two-tier system of preschool.

The UNICEF-supported *Magic Journey* TV programme in Kyrgyzstan, along with the *Sesame Street* translation in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), are a notable successes in relation to the development and expansion of early childhood educational materials. The daily *Magic Journey* TV programme, which was found to be watched by 95% of 5-6 year olds surveyed across the country,⁸⁸ provides a means to deliver educational content, life skills and inclusive messages to a broad swathe of the preschool-age population, only 18% of whom are enrolled in preschool provision. Alongside support to local publishers, the TV programme has also stimulated increased availability of children’s books and a growth in other TV programmes targeting children, and offers the potential for successful spin-off educational toys and games.

Availability of adequately staffed services, facilities and information

Across all six countries/territory, there has been an expansion of preschool facilities since 2005, with a sharp rise since 2008 in nearly all cases (see Figures 23-28) as new legislation has come into force and pre-primary programmes have started. Where we have data on the rural/urban distribution of preschool facilities (Kg, Ar, Mo), the expansion has generally been in favour of rural or under-served areas, following specific targeting of new provision (in which UNICEF has played an important part), sometimes dramatically so (Kg, Figure 26). In Armenia there has been a gradual closing of the rural-urban disparity in preschool facilities (taking the nursery kindergartens and kindergartens together), and the EQRP’s pre-primary programme (not captured in this data), increasingly focused on rural areas, has reached around another 270 communities. In Moldova, the rural kindergartens have largely accounted for the increase in facilities; these have mainly been focused on the North and Centre regions of the country where enrolment levels have been lowest. Although we only have data for 2011 on rural/urban divisions in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), this also indicates that the vast majority of the pre-primary institutions are rural (462 of the 562 recorded by the Kosovo Agency of Statistics) and chiefly focused in the districts of Pristina and Prizen, whilst 35 out of the 50 kindergartens are in urban locations, and again chiefly centred in Pristina district.⁸⁹

‘The provision in rural communities is more important for us as they are poorer and cannot organise preschool services without the support of the State’ Official in the Ministry of Education, Armenia

⁸⁸ Eakin and Connolly (2011), *A formative evaluation of the animated children’s television series Kermet Koch, Kyrgyzstan*

⁸⁹ Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS) (2012), *Seria 5: Statistikat Sociale. Statistikat e Arsimit për Çerdhe dhe Parshkollor 2011-2012*

Expansion of preschool facilities across the six countries/territory:

Figure 23: The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (all preschool institutions)⁹⁰

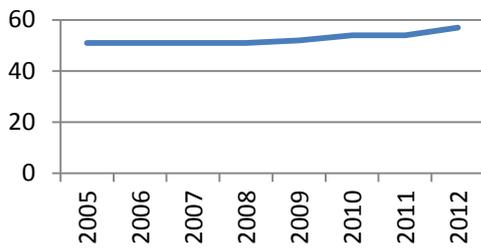


Figure 24: Bosnia and Herzegovina (all preschool institutions)⁹¹

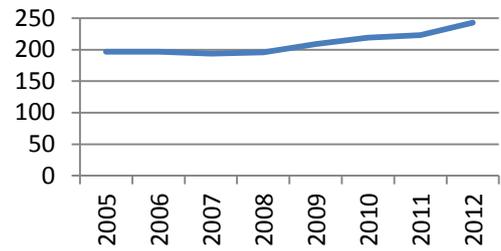


Figure 25: Armenia⁹²

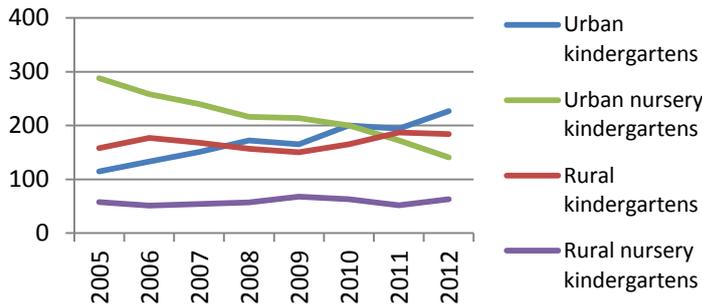


Figure 26: Kyrgyzstan⁹³

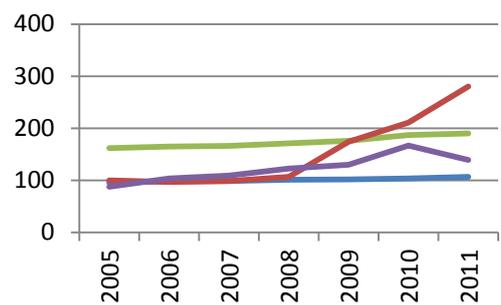


Figure 27: Moldova⁹⁴

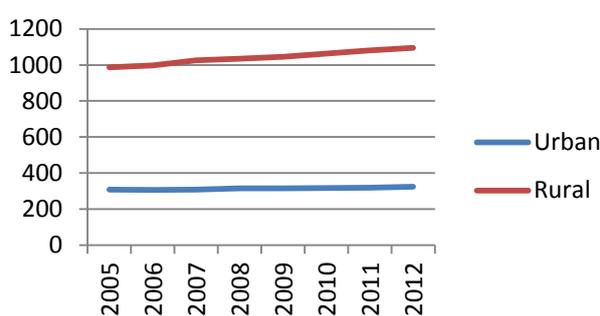
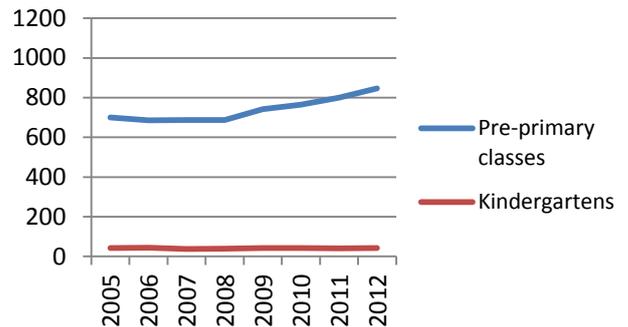


Figure 28: Kosovo (UNSCR 1244)⁹⁵



These figures thus indicate a concerted effort to expand provision in marginalised areas. However, as mentioned above, the equity gaps between rural and urban areas are still growing. This suggests that whilst new facilities may be focused on rural areas (generally enrolling smaller numbers because of lower population density than in urban areas), existing facilities in urban areas have been increasing their capacity at a greater rate. The Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) figures also highlight the differences in the type of provision being supplied across the sector, which are presented together under the label 'kindergartens' in most of the official statistics across the six countries/territory. Much of the expansion has come in the form of lower cost, shorter ELSR programmes that enable broader access within financially feasible limits and that have been adapted to the resourced rural areas and municipalities. There exists a wide range of models within this across the six cases, often modelled and supported by UNICEF, including pre-primary courses of varying lengths, community-based centres and kindergartens and even mobile bus-based provision (FMa).

⁹⁰ SSO (2006-2013), *Public Institution for Children Care and Education- Kindergartens* (annual reports for 2005-2012)

⁹¹ Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2005-2012), *Education Statistics* (annual reports)

⁹² NSS (2006-2013), *The social situation* (annual reports)

⁹³ NSC (2008), *Education and Science Report 2002-2007*; (2012), *Education and Science Report 2008-2011*

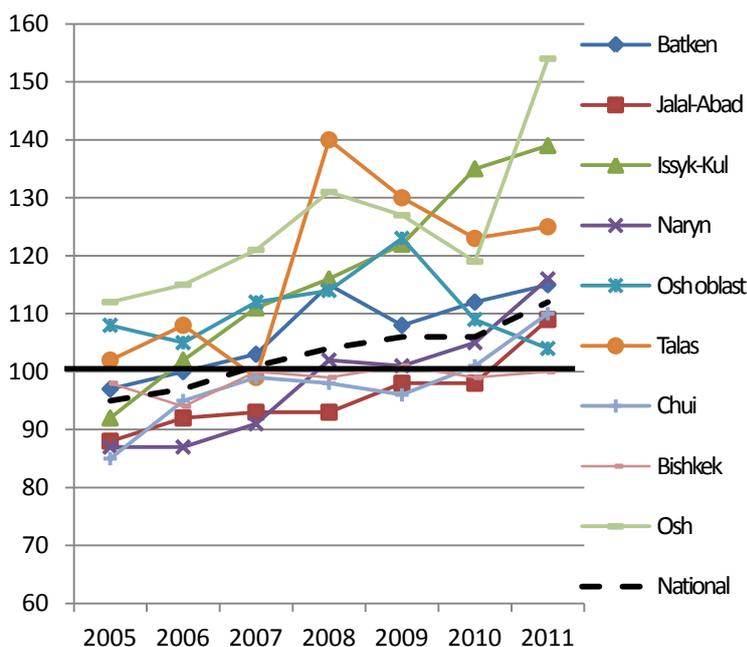
⁹⁴ Moldova National Bureau of Statistics online database: <http://statbank.statistica.md/>

⁹⁵ MEST (2006-2013), *Education statistics in Kosovo* (annual reports)

There is little research on comparisons between these types of preschool services within the six cases, other than the UNICEF study previously cited from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, but there are obvious differences around hours (and years) of educational provision, the full-day care provided by traditional kindergartens, and levels of resourcing. This makes it important from a quality and equity perspective to recognise this diversity of provision within overall preschool institution statistics and the different experiences and developmental outcomes that may arise from various types of provision targeted towards different groups. The ability to develop good infrastructure has also depended on funding: EU pre-accession status or ambitions for this has been a factor (FMa, BH, Ko*, Mo), as has FTI and GPE (Mo, Kg). This has pushed the development of supporting infrastructure (buildings, water supplies, roads) much further there than elsewhere. Reliance on community contributions for some of the community-based programmes (Mo, Kg) has also led to wide divergences in the physical quality of facilities, disadvantaging marginalised groups.⁹⁶

The scale of demand for preschool places has put immense pressure on these new expanded services, resulting in some instances (FMa, BH) in the rotation of preschool classes amongst the

Figure 29: Kyrgyzstan, numbers of children enrolled per 100 places in all preschool institutions, by region⁹⁷



community, with children receiving very few hours of preschool time each week. That demand outstrips supply is reflected in the data on preschool capacities in Kyrgyzstan, which show a gradual increase in overcrowding, particularly in Osh, Jalal-Abad and Talas (Figure 29); waiting lists for entrance into preschool facilities were reported in both rural and urban areas in all six cases. Given the low levels of existing enrolment, such pressure on new facilities is inevitable, but raises opportunities for patronage and informal financial incentives. Anecdotal evidence in Kyrgyzstan indicates that some primary

schools may be using the 240-hour pre-primary programme to select the best students for primary enrolment, whilst the demand for Russian language schooling had led to very strong competition for pre-primary places attached to Russian language primary schools.

Mitigating the risks of informal payments within these contexts of high demand and low (although growing) supply, requires sufficient capacity within governance structures of the preschool sector. The private sector is another important aspect within this situation of high demand and low supply.

⁹⁶ It should be noted that in the case of Moldova, the community-based centres met minimum national quality standards for civil works. The point being made here is the difference in infrastructure and facilities between these and other public ELSR services serving less remote and wealthier populations.

⁹⁷ NSC (2008), *Education and Science Report 2002-2007*; (2012), *Education and Science Report 2008-2011*

Official statistics (where they are available) indicate that both the proportion of private preschool facilities and the proportion of preschool enrolment they represent are increasing (BH, Ar, Ko*) (Figure 30 and Figure 31). These figures are likely to be much higher in reality, given that official statistics only capture registered private institutions. This mushrooming private provision may become an important player, and given the current focus of private provision to wealthier groups who can afford the fees, there are equity considerations around how this expansion occurs and quality considerations for the type of services it provides.

Figure 30: Percentage of total preschool enrolment that in private preschool institutions⁹⁸

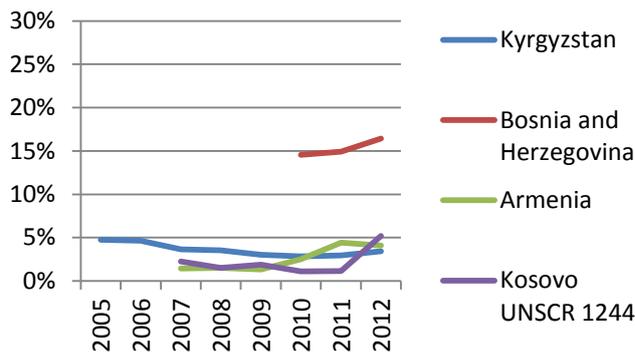
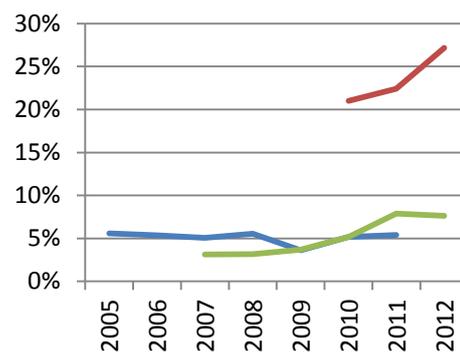


Figure 31: Percentage of total preschool institutions which are private



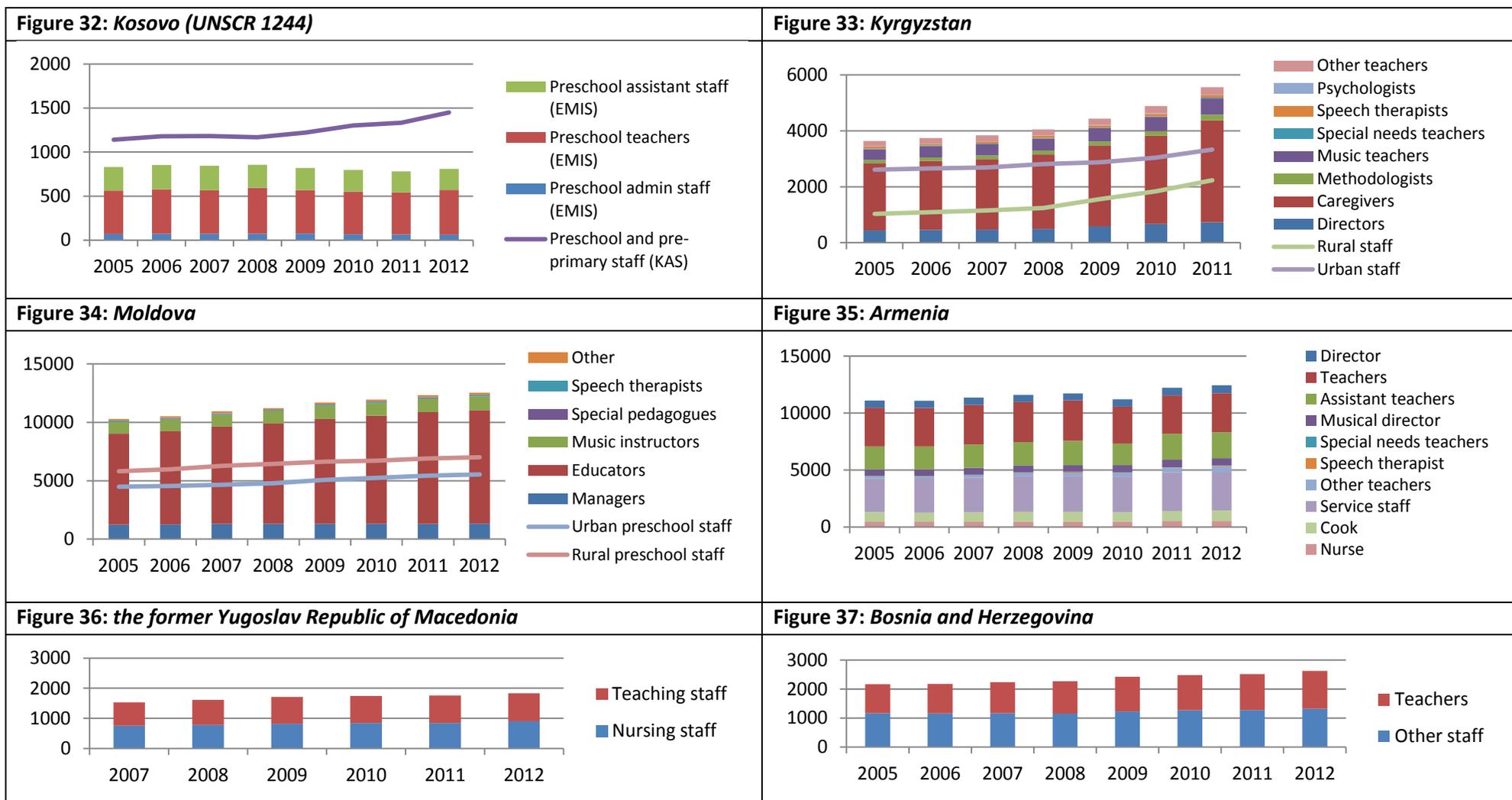
Improvements in levels of preschool facilities have been matched by increases in preschool personnel across all six cases (except for preschools in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), where staff numbers have declined although pre-primary programme staff have increased). The increases have been gradual in most cases, apart from in Kyrgyzstan where there has been a rapid increase since 2008, thereby decreasing the urban/rural gap in preschool staffing levels (Figures 32-37).

The degree to which this increase in teaching staff levels in preschool institutions has kept pace with growing enrolment rates has varied across the six cases. In some, there has been an upward trend in the ratio of enrolled children per preschool teacher over the period (Mo (14.5 by 2012), FMa (23 by 2013), Kg (18 by 2012)) with a convergence of urban and rural ratios in Moldova, but widening regional and urban/rural differences in Kyrgyzstan. In Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), however, the ratio of enrolled children per preschool teacher has decreased from 23:1 in 2005 to 18:1 in 2013. Whilst all districts apart from Mitrovica have closed the gap on Pristina, the district with the best ratio, there is still (by 2012) a spread of ratio levels from 15 to 28, indicating that further work is required to allocate the teaching force equitably across the territory.

Across all cases, the preschool workforce is overwhelming female (over 99% in FMa, over 90% in BH and over 95% in Kg) with little change in this gender balance over time. In a number of cases we also have data on teacher ethnicities, which demonstrate only a very slight increase in teachers from ethnic minorities; in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, for example, Albanian preschool teachers have increased from 4.1% to 6.4% of the workforce between 2007 and 2012, although there were still only four Roma preschool teachers in 2012. In Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), apart from the dominant Albanian preschool workforce, only the Serbian ethnic group represents any more than 1.5% of the workforce.

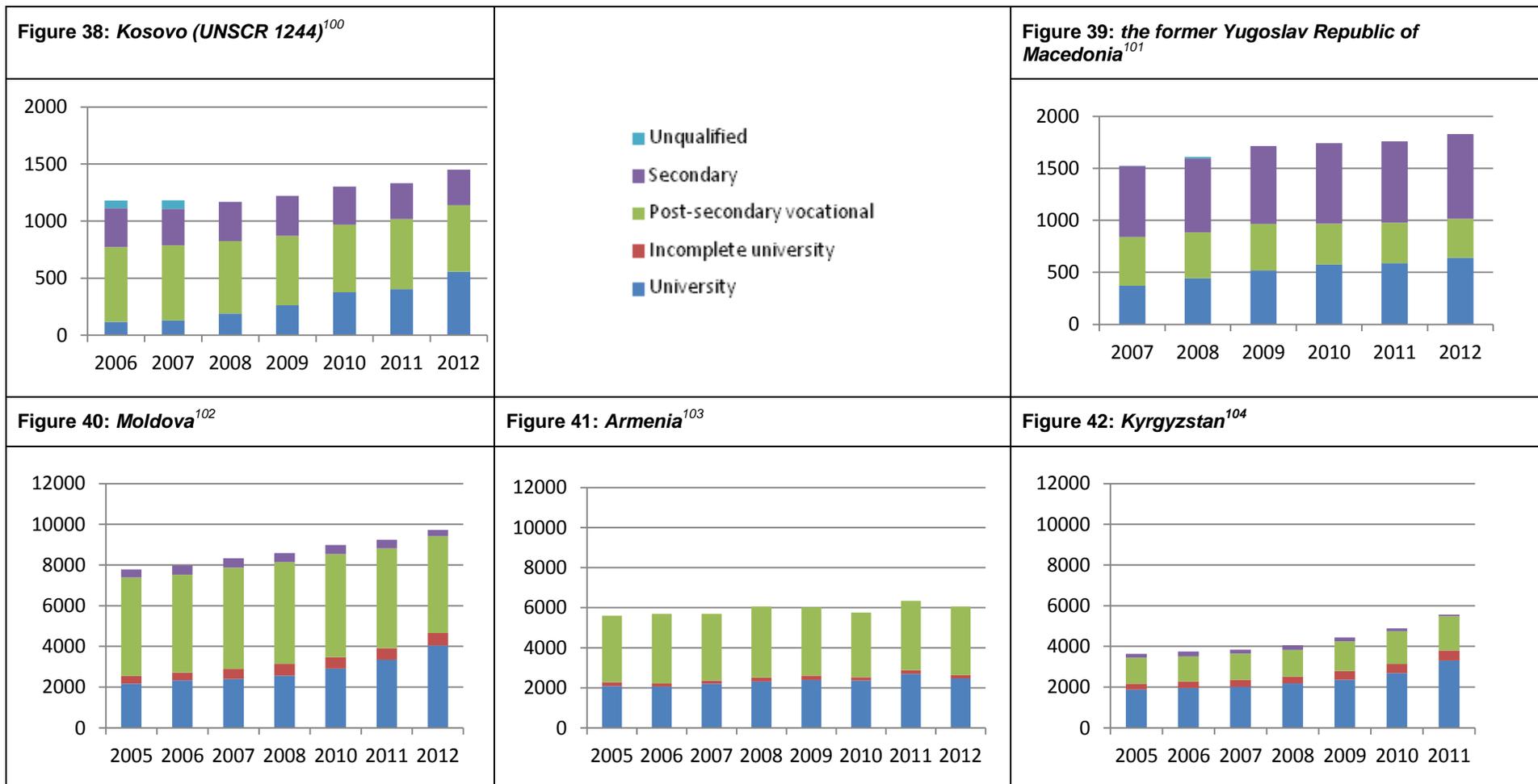
⁹⁸ Armenia: NSS (2008-2013), *The social situation* (annual reports); Bosnia and Herzegovina: Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2010-2012), *Education Statistics* (annual reports); Kyrgyzstan: NSC (2008), *Education and Science Report 2002-2007*; (2012), *Education and Science Report 2008-2011*; Kosovo (UNSCR 1244): KAS (2007-2012), *Series 5: Social Statistics. Education Statistics* (annual reports)

Preschool staffing levels across the six countries/territory: ⁹⁹



⁹⁹ Kosovo (UNSCR1244): KAS (2007-2012), *Series 5: Social Statistics* and MEST (2013), *Kosovo Education Indicators*; Kyrgyzstan: NSC (2008 and 2012), *Education and Science Report*; Moldova: NBS (2008-2013), *Education in the Republic of Moldova*; Armenia: NSS (2008-2013), *The social situation*; the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: SSO (2006-2013), *Public Institution for Children Care and Education- Kindergartens*; Bosnia and Herzegovina: Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2010-2012), *Education Statistics*.

Preschool teaching staff qualifications:



¹⁰⁰ KAS (2007-2012), *Series 5: Social Statistics. Education Statistics* (annual reports)

¹⁰¹ Includes both pedagogical and nursing staff in kindergartens. SSO (2006-2013), *Public Institution for Children Care and Education- Kindergartens* (annual reports for 2005-2012)

¹⁰² NBS online database: <http://statbank.statistica.md/>

¹⁰³ Includes all teaching staff in kindergartens. NSS (2006-2013), *The social situation* (annual reports)

¹⁰⁴ NSC (2008), *Education and Science Report 2002-2007*; (2012), *Education and Science Report 2008-2011*

In the five countries/territory where we have data, the levels of qualification of the preschool workforce have also improved across the period (see Figures 38-42). In all cases there has been an increase in the proportion of the workforce with university level education, particularly in Kyrgyzstan (where it made up 59% of the workforce in 2011), Moldova and Kosovo (UNSCR 1244). In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the majority of the teaching workforce has secondary education, whilst in Armenia, Moldova and Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) the majority have post-secondary vocational education.

However, the relevance of this education to the preschool sector is not clear: in Moldova, declining primary and secondary school enrolments have led to those teachers finding jobs in the preschool sector whilst in sites observed in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia lack of employment in their own field found lawyers engaged in teaching or being head teachers in kindergartens and ECD centres. In all cases the career path for preschool teachers remains poor, although Moldova is in the process of creating such a trajectory through its UNICEF-supported mentoring programme. It was also reported in the former Republic of Macedonia and Moldova, that ECD at university level is a recognised way of acquiring an ‘easy’ degree, allowing graduates to move on to, or move up in, other professions.

Financial access

Detailed data are lacking in each country/territory to establish changing costs to parents for children attending preschool since 2005. A common trend is the wide difference in fees and charges depending on the type of preschool facilities attended and the lack of regulation around those. Kindergartens charge much more in all cases than any other provision but they provide a full day of education and care (30US\$/month in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, from 3US\$ to 17US\$ in rural Armenia). Yet prices varied significantly between and amongst rural and urban areas and kindergarten fees have risen over time.

‘When we ask Roma parents [about reasons for not attending school or pre-school] they say it’s the cost’. Head of Roma, Ashkali preschool centre, Kosovo (UNSCR 1244)

Governments have made significant efforts in recent years, however, to reduce the cost of school readiness programmes (including the Ministry of Education taking on recurrent and salary costs of school-based pre-primary programmes in Armenia and teachers’ salaries in Kyrgyzstan). Positive changes have been achieved across the region in terms of increased availability of low-cost provision and there is some form of alternative and pre-primary provision that is officially free of charge in all six cases, with possible financial contributions for items such as food and consumables. Support schemes have also been introduced by municipalities in a number of cases (Mo, Ar, Ko*, BH): reducing fees for large families, waiving food costs for the poorest children or supporting transport costs for Roma families from far away settlements. These funds have struggled to meet the high demand for support, but nevertheless indicate increased recognition of financial access barriers at local levels.

Despite increased availability of low-cost provision, however, affordability remains a key barrier to access in all six countries/territory, particularly for the poorest and most marginalised groups. Indirect costs such as transport, supplies, clothes and shoes and informal fees such as one-off contributions for teachers’ days or preschool events remain a barrier to access; between 2003 and 2009 in Moldova one UNICEF study has suggested that monthly expenditure related to preschool attendance (including transportation, clothing, contributions to preschool furniture, infrastructure

and teachers' salaries) have doubled, with the largest rise being in contributions to salaries.¹⁰⁵ A 2010 survey carried out in the *marzes* (provinces) of Lori and Tavush in Armenia also indicated that financial costs remained a barrier to many families, with 25% reporting their inability to pay for preschool services.¹⁰⁶ As mentioned previously, despite the officially free status of programmes, lack of supply has also led to payment of unofficial fees or contributions to secure places in oversubscribed institutions (Kg, Mo, FMa) or prioritisation of places to families with both parents working (Ar). A number of community-based programmes also involve a requirement for (sometimes significant) community contributions (e.g. up to 15% of infrastructure costs in Moldova). As a result, communities with low financial levers can struggle to engage with these alternative programmes (Ar, Kg, Mo).

Social and cultural practices and beliefs

As mentioned in the social norms section above, amongst communities and parents there has been a growing recognition of the importance of educational stimulation and development for 3 to 6 year olds, including both cognitive and social and emotional development. In some countries (Armenia, and to some extent Kyrgyzstan where UNICEF's *Magic Journey* is televised), there are also examples of a better 'home/school' link with parents understanding their role as 'co-educators' of their children, and in a number of countries (Kg, Mo, FMa) children's increased engagement with learning at preschool has reportedly stimulated greater parental involvement at home in learning activities. In general, however, recognition of the importance of education at preschool has been accompanied by an identification of this as the realm of the 'expert' and parents do not feel they are equipped to engage with their children's learning. This is particularly so in the case of children with special needs where the status of the role of specialist support (such as speech therapists or psychologists) can limit both teachers' and parents' confidence in engaging with the development of these children.

Amongst Roma families the importance of preschool education is reportedly growing but they remain less regular attendees (FMa, Mo). Their seasonal migration disrupts the children's preschool access under current models. Internal and international migration of whole families or parents (amongst the Roma and more widely) also creates shifting populations of children that under-resourced municipalities and institutions struggle to address.

Timing and continued use of services

Net enrolment rates for the countries/territory (Figures 7-12) all indicate an increased proportion of 3-6 year olds being enrolled in preschool services since 2005. It is clear from the growth of pre-primary programmes, however, that once these are captured within official preschool figures, enrolment within the 3-6 year old age range will increasingly be skewed to 5-6 year olds. Whilst the introduction of pre-primary programmes (often implemented or supported by UNICEF) appears to have greatly expanded ELSR services, it is unclear how these integrate or align with existing preschool provision that also caters for this age group, particularly when the number of hours of provision varies so significantly. Nor is it clear what strategies are in place to expand from the focus on 5-6 year olds to cover the full 3-6 year old range.

¹⁰⁵ UNICEF and the Government of Republic of Moldova (2010), *Early childhood care and development: family knowledge, attitudes and practices*

¹⁰⁶ Communities Finance Officers Association/UNICEF (2010), *Survey of Child Focused Public Finances in Armenia (Tavush and Lori marzes)*

In terms of attendance, concerns about drop out were reported for those parents unable to afford increases in kindergarten fee rates, whilst a more widespread issue was the risk of children with disabilities and of children whose mother tongue was not the language of instruction dropping out of the education system (Ar, Ko*). This was noted in all six cases, with concerns over the lack of support available to these children when moving to primary education.

More generally, as noted in section 4.2.2, preschool is reportedly supporting a smoother transition for children to primary education in terms of their cognitive, social and emotional skills, although the alignment of frameworks, methodologies, approaches and programmes between preschool and primary is still an area that requires further attention in all cases.

Quality of services

Apart from the comparative UNICEF study undertaken in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, little research is available to provide an in-depth assessment of quality within different types of preschool provision. In all six country/territory cases the focus on the expansion of access has been paramount, but there has been an increasing spectrum of work on the quality of provision at national and local levels. Play- and child-centred approaches are gaining recognition and wider implementation (often assisted by UNICEF-supported training) in all cases (although pre-primary programmes tend to extend a more formal approach from primary models in many cases). UNICEF-supported ELDS have also been developed in all six cases and are facilitating both a coherent as well as a more holistic approach to child development across the 0-6 age range. In some cases this has also included the development of specific standards for disaster risk reduction (DRR) within the ELDS alongside DRR teaching and learning materials (Ar).

'I use the standards when I am talking to the Roma centre to help me assess the children's readiness. Roma children do find the transition hard when they don't speak Macedonian well. The standards are really useful for my work.' Psychologist in FMa at primary level

The application of standards and associated curriculums is a challenge, however. In Moldova, for example, only 50% of teachers reported an understanding of how to apply the standards and only 30% of preschools had sufficient copies of the standards to give each teacher, although further targeted training has sought to address this issue.¹⁰⁷ In all six cases there was a need for further/better training for teachers on the use of the standards. How those standards articulate with shorter pre-primary programmes has also not been resolved in some cases (Ko*, BH) and the rapid expansion of pre-primary has led to concerns about overcrowding (FMa, Mo), approaches and resources (in Bosnia and Herzegovina teaching staff are drawn from the unemployment register for the pre-primary programme).

Pre-service and in-service training vary by country/territory, with some providers being active partners in the revisions to sectoral standards and approaches (Ar), whilst in others they remain disconnected from these attempts at quality improvement (Kg). The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is in the process of reviewing the pre-service training curriculum with the MLSP; Moldova is working on a (UNICEF-supported) mentoring programme that provides on-site and on-the-job training and support to teachers as well as ensuring they use the standards as tracking rather than evaluative processes; in Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, the training is there but in the form of short,

¹⁰⁷ Centre for Sociological, Politological and Psychological Analysis and Research CIVIS (2009), *Assessment study of knowledge, attitudes and practices at institutional level related to early childhood education*

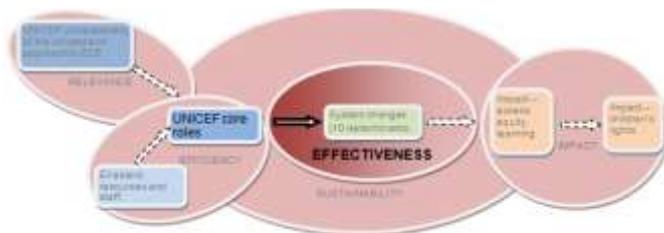
sometimes ad hoc courses. Being able to pay for teachers to attend courses is a barrier in most cases. Inclusive education is only now beginning to be part of pre-service and in-service training but the hours/depth of training remains inadequate.

‘The quality of ECE is a key challenge and a key component of sustainability. Traditional teacher training is not effective anymore. Teacher education and training should be more job-based, on-site and teachers should observe good practices. We need to support teachers, when they come back from training onto how to implement their new knowledge and skills in their school’. NGO staff, Armenia

Certification as a preschool teacher also varies across the six cases; in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia there is now a licensing law in place that requires preschool staff to be assessed every five years and for all staff to have that licence before they teach, or soon after they begin. Older staff face the same requirements unless they are close to retirement age. In Moldova, the previous Soviet ‘every five-year top-up’ system is in place but the mentoring programme also encourages self-assessment and reflective practice amongst the teachers and is itself a career path for teachers.

4.3.2 Effectiveness of UNICEF interventions and contribution to system change

Effectiveness (UNICEF core roles to systems) criteria within the TOC



This sub-section presents findings on the second half of effectiveness in the TOC: the contribution of different UNICEF core roles to system changes. As well as expanding on the references to significant contributions to specific system changes discussed in the previous sub-section, it examines findings

systematically against each of the seven UNICEF core roles.

Key findings on effectiveness of UNICEF core roles

UNICEF has played an important role in many of the system changes that have occurred over the evaluation period. It has remained a strong advocate and voice for children’s access to early childhood education and has contributed significantly to bringing the sector onto the agenda of government and other stakeholders as a critical aspect of education and national development. UNICEF has provided policy advice and technical assistance to support the translation of increased political commitment into the development of legislative, policy and quality standard frameworks to establish the overarching architecture of the sector. In so doing, it has utilised its capacity to facilitate national dialogue and knowledge exchange amongst key stakeholders in the sector to promote issues of marginalisation, innovate provision and emphasise the importance of early learning, although cross-sectoral partnerships (with child protection, social protection, health) to achieve more holistic policies and services have remained challenging.

UNICEF has worked to take advantage of opportunities presented by political shifts, or interests of potential partners, to increase public and political commitments to the sector and, importantly, to leverage budget commitments from government, donor and (more recently) some private sources. In a number of cases it has also been a key actor in the implementation of programmes arising from these funding commitments, supporting the rapid expansion of facilities and access in rural areas, often through Grade Zero programmes. It has also been instrumental in modelling various alternative forms of provision to reach other under-served areas, using these experiences to

advocate at national levels for the financially feasible expansion of services and to change practices and norms within early childhood education.

However, UNICEF has not engaged effectively with system changes to increase equity in provision. An emerging body of research and evaluations examining specific groups of marginalised children are providing an evidence base for UNICEF to develop its equity focus in ELSR interventions. This needs to be strengthened with regard both to better differentiated needs and further understanding of the quality and social norms surrounding different types of provision that it is supporting.

A particular challenge has come from the continuing decentralisation of ELSR provision and the aim of developing adequate systems to manage and coordinate ELSR provision. Whilst UNICEF has used many of its core roles to move the sector forward at a national level (a necessary first step), similar contributions to translate this progress at decentralised levels on a systemic basis are now required; more strategic and holistic approaches to institutional and organisational as well as individual capacity development are currently lacking.

Voice for children

The core role “voice for children” refers to UNICEF’s advocacy and influencing activities to ensure that national policies, strategies and interventions consider and address children’s needs and that ELSR stakeholders’ knowledge, attitudes and practices are supportive of children’s rights and child-friendly norms in early childhood education. The role is closely linked to policy advice and to national dialogue support. In all six cases UNICEF has acted as a voice for children, contributing to system changes in the area of legislation and policies, budgets, social norms, social and cultural practices, financial access and quality.

UNICEF has played a lead role in ELSR in all six countries/territory. In Kyrgyzstan UNICEF is the coordinating agency for the implementation of the GPE grant and it has significantly contributed to the decision to allocate the full grant to pre-primary education. In cases where no donor education group was active over the evaluation period, UNICEF has been the main government partner for ELSR (Ar, Ko*, Mo, FMa). This unique place has enabled UNICEF to shape national agendas and actively influence policies on preschool, early childhood development and social norms. UNICEF’s close relationship with multiple ministries and some parliamentary groups contributes to the identification of pertinent entry points for lobbying, advocacy and interventions. UNICEF has joined with other stakeholders (including OSFs, International Step by Step Association, the World Bank, World Vision, Save the Children, the Aga Khan Foundation) to advocate, communicate and facilitate awareness of young children’s, particularly marginalised children’s, needs for ELSR and it has a strong network of national and regional partners with whom to work to influence policies on their behalf. As a result, over the period of the evaluation, UNICEF (both through the RO and COs) has played a critical role in establishing the importance of ELSR as a sector in each country/territory, drawing political attention and commitment (often at the highest levels and in national PRSPs or similar national road maps (Ar, Kg)) to the need for expanded access and a growing recognition of the needs of marginalised groups. This has often been achieved through less tangible, but time-intensive efforts of ongoing dialogue with government officials (or multiple governments in the case of BH).

‘UNICEF was instrumental in pushing ECE issues on the national agenda and in making stakeholders realise the importance of the learning environment for young children’. National Institute of Education, Armenia

'In Kyrgyzstan it is UNICEF that has made us aware of ELSR and helped the politicians get behind it', Ministry of Education official, Kyrgyzstan

UNICEF's modelling work (see below) has also provided it with a strong basis and credibility for using its voice to promote greater flexibility and diversity within the sector to reach more marginalised groups. UNICEF has strongly advocated for changes in social norms around disability and ethnic diversity (FMA, Mo, Ar, Ko*). All communication materials for and around ELSR include visuals that reflect and support a diverse society. C4D campaigns have also targeted parents of young children to support them to give their children the best start (Mo, FMA, Kg, Ko*). UNICEF has promoted children's right to play and to learn-through-play in the ELDS and other interventions such as the *Magic Journey* and *Sesame Street* TV programmes. All partners recognise the contribution that UNICEF has made in promoting a child-friendly agenda through its various interventions, and, through its work with non-governmental partners, it has also developed their capacities to become more effective voices for children, holding governments to account around preschool issues. However, there is little evidence to date of UNICEF having progressed to promoting the voice of children in its ELSR work (i.e. facilitating the inclusion of children's voices and views in ELSR service design, delivery and evaluation).

Policy advice and technical assistance

In all six cases UNICEF policy advice and technical assistance (TA) has significantly contributed to system change, particularly in the areas of legislation and policy, availability of essential commodities, availability of adequately staffed facilities and quality.

In all cases UNICEF has been an important player in the development of the legislative and policy framework that has developed for preschool education over the evaluation period and which has been a critical first step in moving the sector forwards. Given the complex nature of policy development, a large proportion of UNICEF policy advice is opportunistic, responding quickly to evolving political agendas, changes in governments and funding opportunities. Although not well captured in documentation, UNICEF is providing (at the request of government partners) constant inputs and feedback to ministries on legislation reviews, strategic plans and policies. It has also been a consistent driving force behind the development of ELDS and the incorporation of alternative, low-cost models within legislation frameworks through its instrumental role in developing such provision. Low-cost-scenario financial studies and reviews that provided evidence for more equitable access (Ko*, Kg, Ar, FMA, Mo) have directly fed into legislation changes legitimising alternative provision and expanding ELSR provision in rural areas. This is evidenced by both references to UNICEF inputs in national documentation and policy makers' acknowledgement in all six cases.

UNICEF has initiated and supported ministries and practitioners to develop, test and implement ELDS, curriculums and learning and teaching materials in all cases (including materials such as the successful *Magic Journey* in Kyrgyzstan), which have directly benefited providers and practitioners in kindergartens, ECD centres and school readiness programmes. There is strong evidence that outputs and materials are used in all cases, although strengthening the focus on how to procure low-cost materials would help to ensure greater sustainability. UNICEF has also been instrumental in supporting the design of in-service teacher training courses and their implementation (such as for the EQR project in Armenia, where the incorporation of a training component was heavily influenced by UNICEF). This training has disseminated methodological approaches and has contributed to laying the foundations for inclusive and child-friendly learning environments in all six

cases. Ministry officials and other partners have confirmed UNICEF's leadership role in influencing preschool practices (Ar, Kg, FMa, Mo).

A weaker area has been UNICEF's technical assistance in the area of cross-sector collaboration for ELSR. As discussed in section 4.1.2, cross-sectoral work is vital to maximise the potential life-long benefits of ELSR in terms of the basis it can provide for learning outcomes, health and well being, and the opportunity ELSR provides for the early identification, referral and response to the needs of vulnerable children and their families through coordinated education, health, social protection and child protection services. Although UNICEF does make the case for this (Mo, Ar, FMa, Kg), it is constrained in its opportunistic policy-advice functions by the complexities of multi-sector policy development and budgeting in decentralised contexts. Stronger contributions to system change within this context would require long-term robust technical assistance from experienced experts rather than quick fixes by UNICEF staff (such as one-off trainings or sharing example guidelines).

'There is a big difference if a child attends school at 5 or 7. Health issues can be identified more easily when children are at school and neglected children can be identified earlier too'. Child protection official, Marz, Armenia

Similarly UNICEF has limited technical understanding of budget allocation mechanisms and formula in decentralised contexts, which can constrain its capacity for influence in this area although its contribution to the recognition of the need for more equitable allocation mechanisms has been important. In some cases there have been useful links made with other UN agencies that have stronger technical capacities on these issues (such as with UNDP in FMa), but this has been relatively limited. UNICEF's own internal sectoral and compartmentalised organisation (child protection, social policy, ELSR, young child well being etc.) also hinders the ability of UNICEF to draw on relevant cross-sectoral expertise (such as the expanded cadre of Social Policy Advisers recruited across the region) and to 'walk the talk' of cross-sectoral collaboration that it is promoting for others.

In all cases, UNICEF has contributed to strengthening individual capacity of staff from ministries, specific agencies with responsibilities for curriculum and material development and teacher training, and local communities. UNICEF has also played a role in the capacity development of the NGO staff who are often able to make the most of training opportunities. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, UNICEF has played a significant role in the development of the professional capacities of the implementing partner NGO for the Community-Based Kindergartens programmes, to complement the political and organisational skills that the NGO brings to implementation. At the decentralised level, however, the scale of capacity-development needs (not just at the individual, but also at the organisational and institutional levels) has meant that the types of short-term training and advice provided on ELSR by UNICEF for municipalities have not been sufficient to contribute to significant system change in the bottlenecks of implementation at this level; this has been identified as an area where the system-level work for UNICEF will need more complex, systematic approaches to capacity development.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)

UNICEF's M&E work has three complementary strands: general children's rights monitoring, general ECD M&E and M&E for ELSR. The core role has contributed (though to a lesser degree than some other core roles) to system changes in policy and legislation, budgets, continuous use of services and in some limited contexts, to social norms and social and cultural practices and beliefs.

UNICEF has supported and contributed to reform agendas for ELSR by generating evidence and formulating recommendations through a growing collection of studies and reviews. These include sub-sector reviews (Ko*¹⁰⁸), evaluations and fiscal studies of various preschool models (Kg, Ar, FMa, Mo¹⁰⁹), and knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) studies (Mo¹¹⁰). UNICEF has also collected data on ELSR access for specific groups such as children with disabilities (Ar¹¹¹) and Roma children (BH, FMa¹¹²). In some instances (KAP, MICS) the data generated will enable monitoring of access or attitudes over time as it is likely that there will be repeat studies. For sub-sector reviews or one-off study reports, the support to longer-term monitoring of change is less clear, although such studies do provide a high profile to issues that need to be addressed and reinforce UNICEF's advocacy messages.

Although UNICEF has increasingly been involved with EMIS systems over the evaluation period (Ko*, Ar, Mo, Kg), it has usually prioritised data collection for basic education and, as previously discussed, challenges to preschool and ELSR data coverage remain significant. Changing modalities of provision challenge existing data collection systems and there have been only limited attempts by UNICEF to address these issues at system level (Kg, Ar).

UNICEF also conducts child rights monitoring and COs have demonstrated efforts to develop the capacities of government stakeholders to conduct child rights and child poverty analyses. Although this is work in progress, the evaluation recognises that it is part of a broad rights agenda to which ELSR belongs. There is some reported evidence that UNICEF has contributed to strengthening national authorities' and selected regions'/municipalities' responsibilities for data collection (generic indicators on health, nutrition, poverty, access to preschool) and regular data analysis on children from 0 to 6 (Ar). UNICEF has also supported social assessments of the impact of the economic crisis on family income, child poverty and access to services, including preschool (Ar). These inputs have contributed to some extent to developing the local capacities of researchers, public providers, national statistical offices and governments on M&E issues related to ages 0-6 and preschool.

One area to which UNICEF's M&E has contributed little so far is generating data on learning outcomes and the impact of preschool provision on children and their communities, with the exception of the learning assessment conducted in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Similarly there is no evidence of UNICEF assessing the quality of teacher training (including its own supported interventions) or of teaching and learning in preschool institutions. This is a large but recognised gap that hampers system change in terms of quality as well as providing a more informed basis for ensuring equity and equality in sector expansion. A range of study topics, including the impact of various types of preschool provision on children facing various vulnerabilities and challenges, the impact of child-centred methodologies on learning outcomes for different groups and the impact of various safety nets and support mechanisms for timely and increased enrolment in deprived areas, would all generate valuable knowledge to inform the preschool agenda nationally.

¹⁰⁸ UNICEF (2011), *Joined hands: better childhood*

¹⁰⁹ UNICEF (2009) *No wolves along the way: towards a national early childhood development model for Kyrgyzstan*; UNICEF (2008), *Scenarios for early childhood development in Armenia*; UNICEF and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (2010), *Fair Play: a financially feasible plan for equal access to early childhood programs in the Republic of Macedonia*; UNICEF (2007), *Financial and Legal Analysis of Community-based Child and Family Centres in Moldova*

¹¹⁰ UNICEF and the Government of Republic of Moldova (2010), *Early childhood care and development: family knowledge, attitudes and practices*

¹¹¹ UNICEF (2012), *It's about inclusion*

¹¹² The Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2013), *MICS 2011–2012: Roma Survey*; Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Science and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia (2011), *MICS 2011*; UNICEF, OSF and Roma Education Fund (2012), *Roma Early Childhood Inclusion Macedonian Report*

Leveraging resources from public and private sectors

UNICEF's role in leveraging resources has contributed significantly to system changes in budgets, availability of services, continuous use of services, financial access and quality.

Leveraging funds has been a particularly strong and successful aspect of UNICEF's work across the six countries/territory. It has been an important supporting factor in ensuring that ELSR has not only been pushed onto the agenda of governments and agencies, but that tangible work and implementation has been able to take place to keep up the momentum for sectoral development. UNICEF has been one of the lead agencies in securing ELSR components in major national funding mechanisms including World Bank loans (Ar),¹¹³ multiple rounds of GPE (and former FTI) grants (Kg,¹¹⁴ Mo¹¹⁵ where ELSR was the sole focus for the grant) and recently the EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) grant (FMa, in which UNICEF will be the lead implementer). These have been highly influential successes, providing substantial external funding in each country, as well as stimulating further domestic resources for the sector. In other cases UNICEF has contributed to increased funding by striving to include ELSR provision in a Sector Plan that is to be supported by pooled donor funds for a coherent sector-wide approach to education (Ko*). Bringing ELSR into the planning and budgeting envelope is an important pre-requisite to ensuring financial support is institutionalised.

Beyond this major sectoral leveraging of funds, UNICEF has also succeeded in leveraging and matching resources from other development agencies on small and large scales. UNICEF's track record and reputation in this area means that it is generally seen as a good and reliable conduit for donors seeking to work in this area and many smaller organisations look to it for help in carrying out ELSR activities. Through leveraging and matching funding UNICEF has been able to draw more resources into the sector through partnerships with DFID and several international NGOs in Kyrgyzstan, or through the substantial funding of Dubai Cares in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the 300-hour pre-primary programme.

Partnerships with private sector funders have also started to develop: partnership with T-Mobile for the expansion of Early Childhood Development Centres and communication campaigns in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and partnerships with Ikea (expansion of facilities, training and materials in fifty marginalised areas) and LEGO (distribution of toys and provision of training to teachers and parents) in Moldova. UNICEF has also helped to leverage resources (in cash or kind) from beneficiary communities and local businesses, for example through matching funding for staffing community-run facilities (Ar, Mo).

In many cases UNICEF has not only been instrumental in securing these additional resources for the sector, but also in ensuring that resources are channelled towards more marginalised areas, and increasingly to areas of quality. The third GPE grant in Moldova, for example, has quality in the ELSR sector as a priority, with UNICEF as a leading implementer, and in Armenia UNICEF has played an important role in incorporating a training element alongside the infrastructure development of the World Bank funded EQRP programme.

¹¹³ This World Bank project (Education Quality and Relevance Project) had a total financial commitment of US\$21million, of which 10% was allocated to preschool activities

¹¹⁴ The first GPE grant (2007-10) to Kyrgyzstan amounted to \$9million, of which 18% was allocated to the preschool sector, the second grant (2011-12) was \$6million of which 100% was allocated to preschool education, and a recently approved third grant (2014) for \$12.7million is allocated solely to preschool education

¹¹⁵ The first and second grants (each \$4.4million covering 2006-10) and the third grant (2012-14, also of \$4.4million) were solely allocated to the preschool sector

Leveraging national budgets has typically been a two step process: firstly, moving ELSR costs into the national budget and, subsequently, making the case (using financial feasibility studies and exploring cost-effective models (typically by reducing or eliminating care costs), Ar, FMa, Kg, Ko*) and providing the drivers to increase the allocation, even in small steps. Several case countries have seen these steps, particularly in increasing the budget allocation needed for ELSR teaching and support staff, training and materials (Kg, Ar). It is important that UNICEF has also started to explore work around budgets at sub-national levels, at which facilities and salaries are increasingly allocated, although, as noted above, the contribution in this area is constrained by both the technical expertise required for detailed engagement and the scope of capacity development needs for decentralisation.

Facilitating national dialogue towards child-friendly norms

UNICEF support to national dialogue has contributed to system changes mostly in the area of legislation and policy and quality. This core role is strongly entwined with policy advice/technical assistance, knowledge exchange and voice for children roles.

UNICEF has been instrumental in keeping early childhood education on the agenda while recently established countries/territories were facing competing priorities in a challenging political and economic context. This was done by building momentum at both political and professional levels through national (and regional) debates and events on preschool provision and through targeted and opportunistic advocacy activities aimed at influencing figures in the political landscape and institutions. Legislation, policies and ELDS have also stemmed from UNICEF's ability to create and stimulate national dialogue around ECD. Across the six cases stakeholders talk highly of UNICEF's role in guiding the development of norms and standards, in facilitating national and local consultation and in ensuring that key UNICEF priorities, such as including children's rights, child friendliness and holistic provision for children, were reflected in country/territory policy documents and implementation strategies. There has been less evidence, though, of stimulating national dialogue on more detailed issues of budgets for personnel and essential commodities, or on the issue of informal fees and financial barriers to parents.

'UNICEF was the only agency that involved us in the ELDS. We had never been consulted before even though we train the teachers.' University /institutes of Pedagogy, FMa

UNICEF's strength (through both RO and CO) also lies in its ability to draw on international and national expertise and to include high level stakeholders, whether national or international, in national dialogue. This raises the profile of events and publications, generates more interest at political level and results in more media coverage, hence also impacting on the general public. UNICEF's access to and work with multilateral agencies, donors, parliamentarians, ministers, academics, NGOs, civil society representatives and technical experts has resulted in early childhood education being considered from different perspectives, indirectly yielding political, financial and technical leverage.

UNICEF's holistic mandate around children's rights, covering educational, health, child protection and social protection aspects, is particularly relevant to implementing a comprehensive ECD agenda. UNICEF has conveyed to large audiences the importance of looking at the multiple facets of ELSR and has facilitated some inter-sectoral dialogue and partnerships across and within ministries and between ministries, professional and civil society organisations, NGOs and donors, by creating and/or supporting national-level working groups and by multiplying other exchange opportunities.

UNICEF has also played a central role in harnessing NGOs' capacity, mostly in the area of inclusive education (Ar, FMa, Mo, Ko*) and inclusion of ethnic minorities (Ko*, FMa). The effectiveness of cross-sectoral work, however, seems to have been constrained so far by the complexities attached to compartmentalised provision at national and local levels and, to some degree, by the compartmentalised organisation of UNICEF itself.

The use of the language of child friendliness varies across the six cases (common in FMa which has been working a lot on child-friendly schooling in basic education, and less so in Mo, Kg or Ar where work on child-friendly schooling has been less prominent). Practitioners are able to articulate the importance of a safe learning environment for children but engaging in national dialogue on issues of respect for children's rights through education has proven more challenging. While there is evidence that UNICEF has been pushing the dialogue on child friendliness, instances of resistance to change were visible in institutions and professionals' discourses with regard to the voice and agency of children (Kg, Mo, Ar, BH) and in entrenched views (particularly amongst older professionals trained under the Soviet or Yugoslav systems) about how children should be taught and looked after. Children's natural learning strategies (investigation through play, freedom of movement, choice of activities etc.) were not fully acknowledged by all practitioners in visited case countries/territory, particularly, but not only, in pre-primary settings. In short, while stakeholders nationally have recognised the right of children to early childhood education, there is not yet a shared understanding about children's rights through early childhood education in terms of voice, agency and identity.

Knowledge exchange

UNICEF's role in knowledge exchange has contributed to system changes in legislation and policies, social norms, access to services and quality.

UNICEF is recognised as being a resourceful agency with a clear knowledge brokering mandate when it comes to ELSR. UNICEF RO and COs support knowledge exchange both formally (organisation of workshops, study tours and the publication and dissemination of regional and national studies, reports and position papers) and informally (TA, meetings, political dialogue). Local stakeholders, including preschool directors and teachers, spoke highly of the opportunities provided by UNICEF (regional meetings, visits to resource centres and classroom observations) to exchange information and share knowledge and practice on how to establish and run alternative preschool provision (Kg, Ar, Ko*), and on how to facilitate learning and play for young children (Kg, Ar, Mo).

UNICEF-driven or supported processes around the development of low-cost preschool alternatives and the ELDS were reported to have been valuable for bringing together different agencies and sharing perspectives and materials that have inspired and stimulated key national and local stakeholders (Ar, FMa). There have also been some good examples of sharing experiences and knowledge between neighbouring UNICEF COs around ELDS, in-service training, expert consultants etc. (Ko, FMa).

There is indicative evidence, however, of countries/territories being more eager to learn about experiences from other countries/territories that are not their direct neighbours, including in other regions. Regional study tours organised by the RO were highly valued and, for some, were cited as a turning point in their thinking (Ar, BH, Kg and Mo) but this modality has not been widely used in the second half of the evaluation period. Similarly at local levels, more targeted knowledge exchange

interventions between municipalities and between communities could support greater peer learning within the decentralised contexts of preschool provision.

'When we started, we had nothing at all. UNICEF kept knocking on the door to say 'let's try this or that. The study tours showed us what other countries in our situation were doing. We thought if they can do something then we can too.' (Former Deputy Minister, Moldova)

The effectiveness of UNICEF-supported knowledge exchange interventions, however, remains constrained by attitudes and capacities for self-learning and implementation. Manuals and how-to guides are in some places under-utilised and inspiring models have limited replication. Challenges relating to maximising the result of knowledge exchange have to be placed in a broader and holistic capacity development perspective, recognising the organisational capacities and environment that are required to support the development of individual capacities.

Modelling/piloting of new services to inform policy making

UNICEF's modelling has contributed to system changes mostly in the area of legislation and policy, availability of commodities, access to services, financial access and quality. As mentioned above, it has also been an important basis on which many of the other core roles (policy advice and TA, national dialogue, leveraging funds, voice) can build.

UNICEF has had major inputs into modelling ELSR models: short school-readiness programmes (BH, Kg, Ar); low-cost community-based kindergartens/ECD centres (Kg, Mo, Ko*, FMa); parenting education programmes (BH, Ar, FMa); summer school-readiness programmes for refugee children (Ar); and other ECD interventions such as the TV *Magic Journey* series in Kyrgyzstan and preschool mobile buses (FMa). UNICEF-supported low-cost models and school readiness programmes are referenced in government policies and strategies and have been scaled-up (fully or partially), for example in Armenia through the World Bank funded EQRP loan, and to a limited extent in Kyrgyzstan where there is anecdotal evidence of some municipalities attempting to replicate the community-based kindergarten model by raising funds from other agencies. UNICEF modelling has also influenced NGOs in some cases, such as in the parenting education programme in Armenia adapted and enriched by Save the Children in its ECE programme.

The financing studies for early childhood education carried out by UNICEF (Ar, Kg, FMa, Mo) have been instrumental in supporting governments in opening up to alternative preschool models that are more affordable (for government and for families) and are reaching children previously excluded from existing provision (all six cases). Where the financial argument was well articulated and well understood by local authorities (FMa, Kg), there has also been support for low-cost alternative models even if interventions were not fully addressing the care expectations of all parents. However, in some cases community-based ELSR centres were regarded as a stepping stone towards a fully-resourced kindergarten (Mo) or as only the 'poor relation' of kindergarten provision (FMa, Kg), demonstrating that alternative provision, even if well accepted, had not yet fully transformed social perceptions of preschool delivery.

However, there are indications that the tide of pre-primary programmes and the scale of the funding being put into these may be sweeping aside some of these other alternative models for preschool provision and the advantages they have in covering the full 3-6 age range and sites for developing stronger child-centred methodologies (Ko*, Kg, BH). In the emphasis on expanding access through such pre-primary programmes, there have thus been concerns that compromises may have been

made in quality, such as the use of people from the unemployment register as teachers within the 300-hour pre-primary programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina with little or no experience in the field and receiving very low salaries in comparison with regular kindergarten staff.

Moreover, there was no indication in any of the countries/territory visited that UNICEF modelling had significantly influenced thinking on traditional kindergarten provision, which remains the accepted standard/target, and no cost-effectiveness gains were reported following revision of norms, standards and programmes in kindergartens. There is also no evidence of models that would have supported kindergartens in providing a wider range of services and in modulating their approaches to fees so that more children from disadvantaged backgrounds could access preschool education.

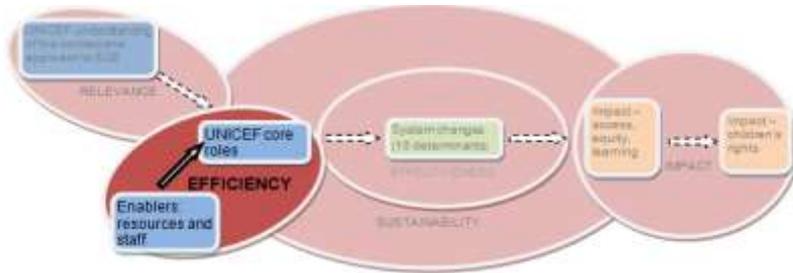
There are, therefore, concerns in some cases that modelling is establishing a potential two-tier provision, with the poorest quintiles accessing shorter programmes whilst the continuing regular kindergartens (albeit a small number) support the wealthiest quintiles (BH, Mo, Kg).

UNICEF is also recognised by all partners as having had major inputs into modelling learning and teaching approaches and materials. This has impacted on all types of provision and providers, including traditional kindergarten and, to some extent, private provision. It has also, in partnership with NGOs, notably ISSA, modelled teacher training schemes (Mo and to some extent in Ar), that include a mentoring component, providing opportunities for follow-up visits, class observation and on-demand support in the medium term. The mentorship programme in Moldova has broken new ground in teacher training approaches and is contributing to changing social norms around how teachers are trained and to increasing quality in preschools. With limited resources, however, training and mentoring schemes are reduced to key topics, which can affect their effectiveness.

By moving away from service delivery to influencing system levels, UNICEF has had to position itself differently in each country/territory and to mediate this change both to governments and to partners. This transition period has seen UNICEF continuing to accept ad hoc requests from governments and partners when it felt it could make a difference, but in some cases this has resulted in UNICEF pursuing its delivery line of work with limited impact (training of tens of professionals for instance). This balance is likely to improve as UNICEF's systemic focus becomes more developed.

4.4 Efficiency of UNICEF core roles in contributing to system changes

Efficiency criteria within the TOC



This section addresses two aspects of efficiency as indicated in its position in the TOC. The first relates to the availability and use of enablers that feed into UNICEF programming (financial and human resources, governance and management systems). The

second relates to the efficiency of UNICEF’s design, approach and use of activities within each of its core roles. This recognises the fact that within the complex landscape of system changes, well designed UNICEF interventions may not necessarily result in effective contributions to system changes due to, for example, sudden changes in political context or changes in other actors’ agendas.

Key findings on efficiency:

UNICEF’s work in ELSR has had small overall budgets and limited human resource inputs over the evaluation period. Many of its important achievements have been through soft power that leverages its reputation, modelling experience and depth of expertise into policy advice, financial commitments, dialogue and advocacy. It has utilised its position and relationships efficiently, and combined its core roles well, to push forward its agendas and make the most of opportunities as they have arisen in a complex and evolving sector. However, as both the sector and UNICEF’s own programming have developed, the need has grown for more strategic frameworks and approaches in regard to equity, holistic early childhood development approaches and quality.

4.4.1 Use of resources for ELSR interventions

Strategic choices of core role approaches to reach objectives

UNICEF programme documentation rarely presents clear strategic rationales for approaching system bottlenecks through specific core roles. This is partly because the development of consistent terminology around determinants and roles is relatively recent for COs. It also reflects the rather fluid and opportunistic nature of working at system level within a particularly systemically complex and evolving sector. As noted in section 5.1.1, UNICEF has been adept at utilising many core roles in a quickly changing situation in order to seize opportunities as they arise to progress its objectives.

This non-linear approach has been useful whilst getting ELSR on government and agency agendas and establishing the frameworks for the sector. However, it risks taking focus away from strategic objectives towards opportunistic initiatives, such as the many pre-primary programmes focusing on 5-6 year olds rather than the whole 3-6 year age range. It also risks over-commitment given the human resources limitations. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, the fragmentary political system and the scale of the Dubai Cares-funded 300-hour programme provides immense challenges for a single UNICEF officer and assistant working only part time on ELSR activities.

The flexibility and ability to respond as opportunities arise will remain important but, as the sector has developed, there is scope for UNICEF to take a more strategic approach to identifying its added value in each context and a more structured approach to its choice of core roles to maximise results.

UNICEF financial resources for ELSR

Data were submitted by four of the Country Offices and the Regional Office allocating programme activities and budgets since 2005 to core roles and system determinants. As neither activity nor budget frameworks have been aligned with the core roles and system determinant frameworks across the evaluation period, this has involved Country Office staff (who have also not been in post consistently across the whole 2005-2012 period) retro-fitting their understanding of activities to their interpretation of the core roles and determinants and how they link together (e.g. one Country Office assigned *modelling* chiefly to *access* to services, whilst another split it across *quality*, *access* to services and *social norms*). The variations in these allocations indicate the difficulty and the different perceptions of UNICEF staff of the core roles and determinants at this relatively early stage in their use in programming terminology.

Further complications arise as, over varying periods in each Country Office, programming for early childhood education has been part of a broader Early Childhood Development programme and ELSR activities and budgets are impossible to separate out (the ECD costs as a whole have been included here). A robust analysis of finances according to the framework was therefore not possible. The figures below (Figures 43-53, which are limited to allocations to core roles) should be interpreted as representing how each Country Office perceives its programming. They should not be used to make comparisons between programmes or to present anything other than a general indication of programming cost against the core roles.

There are a number of findings suggested by these figures however. Firstly, the budgets available for programming in ELSR within UNICEF have been low – not exceeding US\$1.9 million over the nine year period 2005-2013 for any of the COs (or the Regional Office) that submitted data. This highlights the impressive contributions by UNICEF (as discussed above) despite constrained resources, as well as the extent to which much of the system-related core roles rely not on programming costs but staff time and continuous dialogue. Secondly, these amounts have been spread quite unevenly over the period for the RO and the four countries/territory for which we have data, reflecting injections of funding from projects and specific activities (such as the 150- and 300-hour pre-primary programmes in 2012 and 2013 in Bosnia and Herzegovina).

In all cases, modelling and policy advice and technical assistance have taken up most of the programming budget (60% or over). This is unsurprising given the high costs of these types of activities and the focus in all cases on establishing the legislative and ELDS frameworks during the period. It again highlights the less financially resource-intensive nature of some of the core roles (voice, national dialogue, leveraging resources), as a lot of this work involves staff time spent building relationships and dialogue with different stakeholders and partners.

The amounts and proportion of programming costs allocated to each of the core roles each year vary significantly, indicating the opportunistic and flexible nature of UNICEF's work and the changing combinations of core roles.

At the RO a large proportion of budgets has gone towards supporting programme offices in knowledge exchange and technical assistance (68% of the total). This aligns with the expected roles of the RO and the focus on both supporting/coordinating regional events and developing and disseminating information products across COs (such as the *Roma Early Childhood Inclusion* reports).

■ Leveraging resources ■ M&E ■ Modelling ■ Voice ■ National dialogue ■ Policy advice/TA ■ Knowledge exchange

Armenia

Figure 43: Programming cost by core role

Total programming costs 2005-2013:
\$510,900

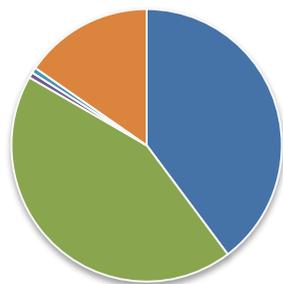
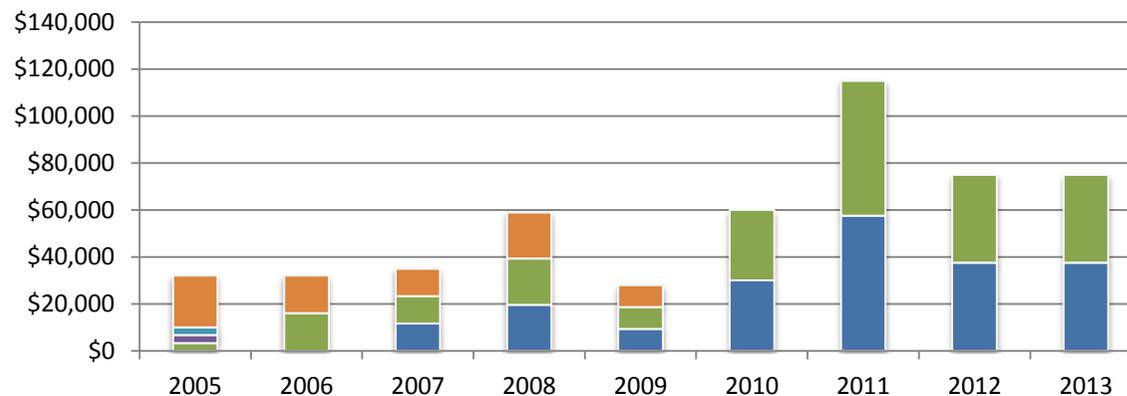


Figure 44: Programming cost each year by core role



Bosnia and Herzegovina

Figure 45: Programming cost by core role

Total programming cost 2005-2013:
\$1,889,813

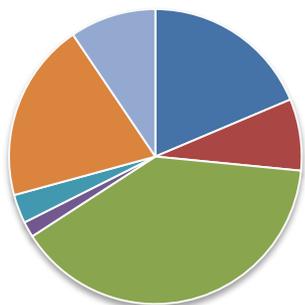
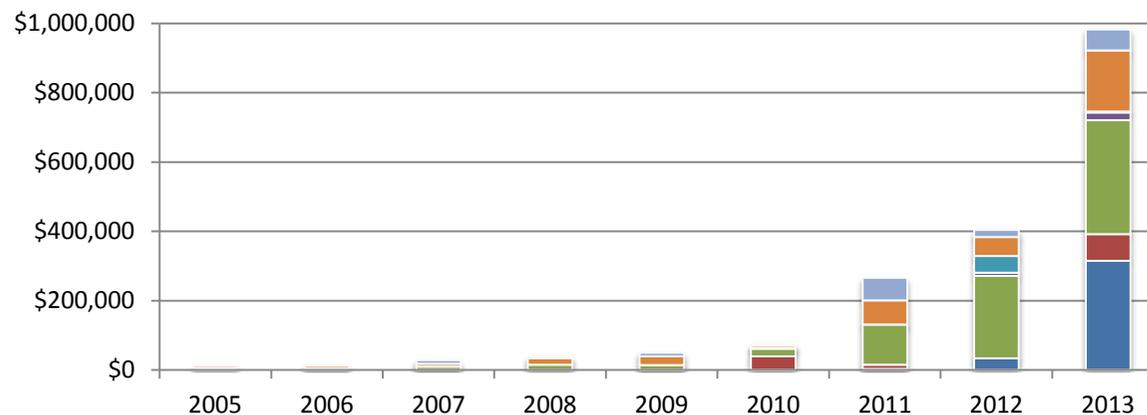


Figure 46: Programme cost each year by core role



■ Leveraging resources
 ■ M&E
 ■ Modelling
 ■ Voice
 ■ National dialogue
 ■ Policy advice/TA
 ■ Knowledge exchange

Kosovo (UNSCR 1244)

Figure 47: Programming cost by core role

**Total programming cost 2005-2013:
\$1,552,000**

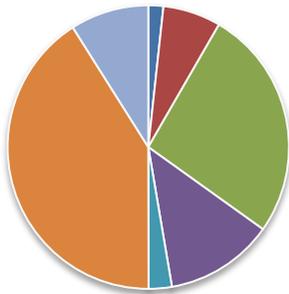
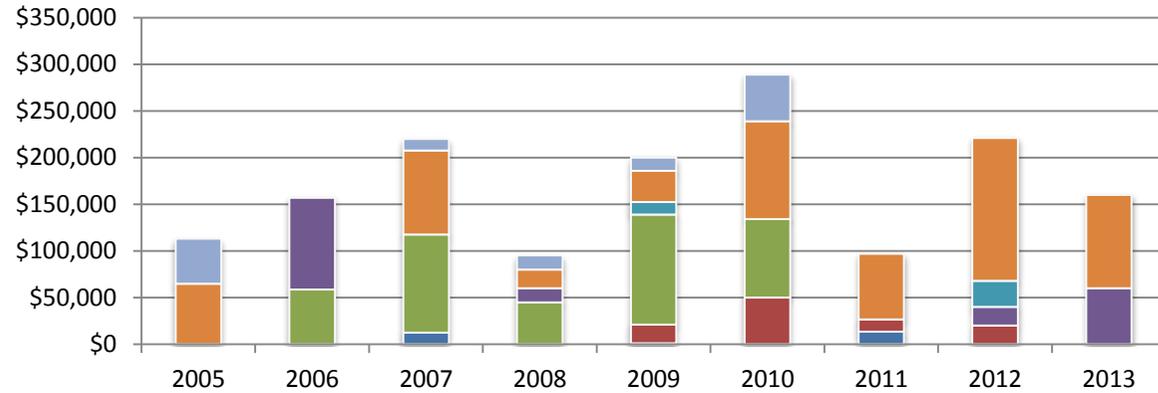


Figure 48: Programme cost each year by core role



Kyrgyzstan

Figure 49: Programming cost by core role

**Total programming costs 2005-2013:
\$1,886,520**

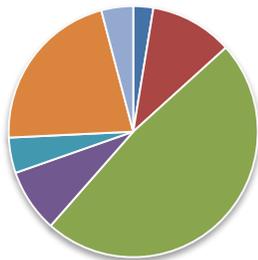
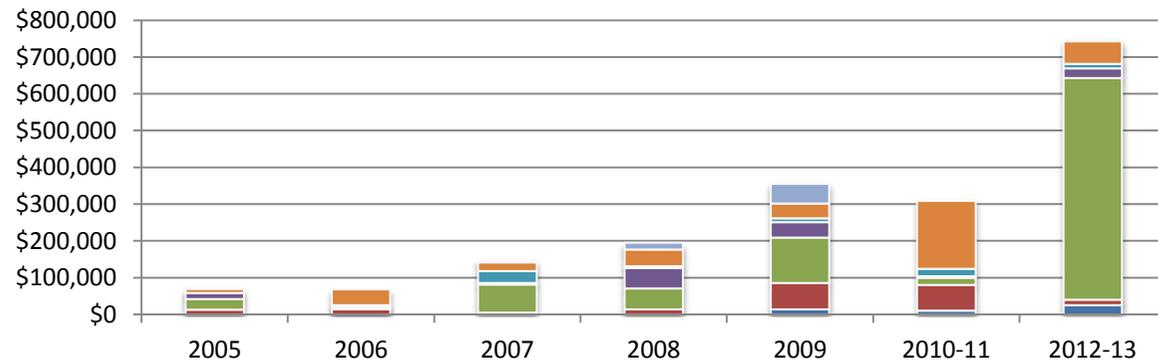
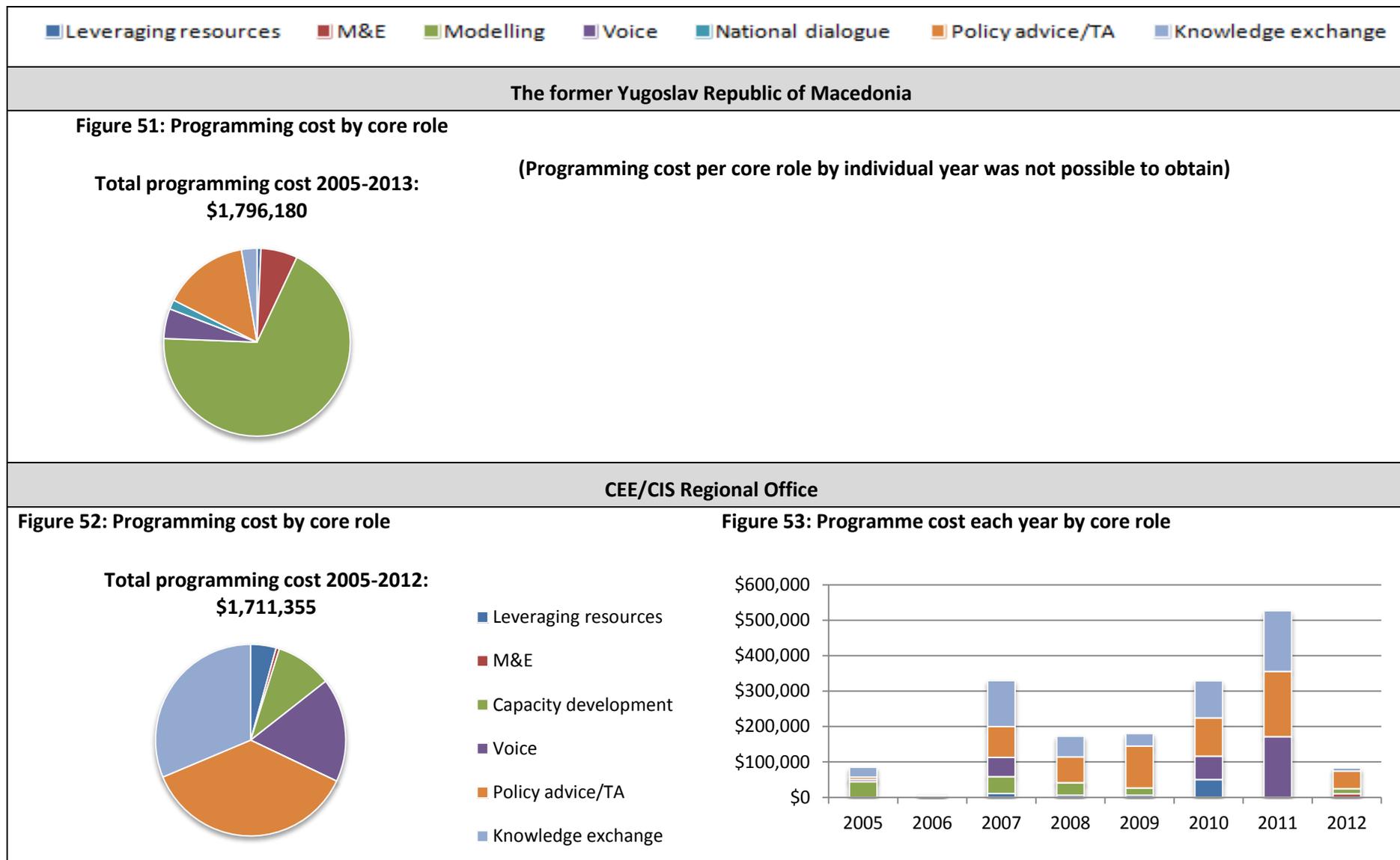


Figure 50: Programme cost each year by core role





Financial data from the Moldova CO was requested, but due to difficulties in accessing past financial systems, the CO was unable to provide this information.

The variability in how early childhood education is categorised as a stream of funding (as a separate sub-sector of education or as part of wider early childhood development under health etc.) makes it difficult to capture full data on other donors' funding compared to that of UNICEF. However, the data available from the OECD International Development Statistics (IDS) database (Table 9) indicates that there are very few multilateral or bilateral donors to early childhood education in any of the six case countries/territory, and that, whilst small, UNICEF funding has been the most consistent year on year of any individual funder. Whilst the variance in figures 43-53 with the figures in table 9 for UNICEF funding in each country/territory demonstrate the problems of capturing funding flows to early childhood education, these figures at least give an indication of the context of external funding to the sector in each country/territory. It should also be noted that some substantial external funding is not captured in this data (due to complications of pooled funding and lack of detailed sub-sector allocations for some funds in this database) – notably the two GPE grants in Moldova (2006-2010, US\$8.8 million, with a third grant agreed in 2012 for a further \$4.4 million), and the two GPE grants in Kyrgyzstan (\$9million 2007-10 (of which 18% went to preschool education) and \$6million for 2011-12 (100% for preschool education), with a further grant agreed in 2014 of \$12.7 million for preschool education).

Table 9: Overseas Development Assistance to early childhood education from OECD IDS database (current prices, US\$ thousands)¹¹⁶

Donor(s)	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Armenia								
EU Institutions	-	-	-	-	47.543	-	-	-
IDA	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,064.621	-
UNICEF	-	28.8	-	23.08	30.39	0.24	23.539	-
Bosnia-Herzegovina								
Austria	-	-	-	212.109	147.189	-	89.39	41.774
Italy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.928
Norway	75.294	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
UNICEF	-	14.88	7.62	3.39	1.44	10.38	103.656	14.14
Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia								
Sweden	-	88.156	147.984	-	-	-	-	-
UNICEF	-	27.33	10	0.33	30.71	62.37	178.632	25.815
Kosovo (UNSCR 1244)								
Finland	-	-	-	-	55.703	-	-	-
Luxembourg	-	-	-	-	103.083	15.99	-	-
Norway	-	-	-	-	261.537	253.293	-7.449	-
United Kingdom	-	-	-	-	-	-	7.823	4.944
UNICEF	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	4.633
Kyrgyzstan								
Canada	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10.839
AsDB Special Funds	-	-	-	-	-	-253.678	-	-
UNICEF	-	34.38	20.47	59.72	48.73	19.98	0.279	-
Moldova								
Austria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	25.707
Czech Republic	-	-	-	-	-	-	187.965	254.654
Greece	49.714	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Japan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	113.886
UNICEF	307.349	26.18	3.27	-	21	-	-	-

Calculating staffing costs across the COs was not possible because of the complex and changing position of ELSR activities within country/territory programmes over time, so that cross-sectoral staff time (Representative, Deputy Representative, Communications Officer, M&E Officer etc) on ELSR

¹¹⁶ <http://stats.oecd.org/qwids/>

across a multi-year Country Programme Action Plan could not be disaggregated accurately. However, looking at those programme staff with a direct focus on ELSR (for the cases where we have that information) shows the limited amount of staff time available for the growing area of ELSR, with each person’s time split across different programmes (Table 10).

Table 10: Programming staff time allocated to ELSR¹¹⁷

Country/territory	Post	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
BH	Education Project Officer (NO)	10%			20%			50%	
	Health/ECD Officer	30%							
	Programme Assistant	10%			15%		20%		50%
Ko*	Education Project Officer	30%							
	Assistant Project Officer	25%							
	Assistant Project Officer	75%							
	Programme Assistant	30%							
	Programme Assistant	25%							
FMa	ECD/Education Specialist	50%							
	Programme assistant	50%							
Kg	Education Specialist	50%						50%	
	ECD Officer	100%							
	Education Officer				25%				
	Programme Assistant	50%							

Monitoring and learning from ELSR activities (internal process monitoring for UNICEF)

The internal UNICEF corporate system of monitoring all programmes with Country Programme Action Plans, annual reports and work plans has developed over the evaluation period and there have been improvements in the use of more specific and nuanced indicators for measuring progress, including around equity. In Armenia, for example, there are specific baselines and targets for the attendance of children with disabilities at preschools in urban and rural areas. However, the monitoring and evaluation of UNICEF activities in terms of their processes and lessons to be learnt has been relatively limited. There is no single monitoring methodology used by UNICEF and intervention monitoring remains ad hoc or linked to other ongoing study areas. This is perhaps indicative of the opportunistic nature of some of the work in this sector as well as the limited resources available. However, there is potential for a more systematic approach to documenting and sharing learning around initiatives within and across the six cases. As both the RCLA reference group and the core role and determinant frameworks become embedded they may provide useful opportunities and ways of stimulating learning and framing analysis of how core roles are used.

4.4.2 Efficiency of UNICEF’s core role interventions

Voice for children

For the most part UNICEF has been efficient in its use of this core role. It has used in-depth studies to provide evidence-based approaches to promote ELSR and highlight barriers to access and equity in existing provision. Messages on child friendliness and child centeredness have been consistent over

¹¹⁷ Based on the estimated or contracted staff commitment to ELSR submitted by Country Offices to the evaluation team. Where staff have to split their focus across different sectors, the reality of day-to-day staff time spent on any one specific area is extremely hard to measure, and so these figures only offer an indication of the situation and must be treated with caution.

the years, enabling actors to appropriate them slowly. UNICEF draws on two complementary tactics for its advocacy work: campaigns (through the media, workshops, publications, etc.) and use of personal channels and one-to-one interactions. The latter plays an important role in influencing and UNICEF calls on technical and senior management staff to complement each other with senior management staff supporting high level political negotiations and blockages.

UNICEF does not, however, have strategic or detailed advocacy plans that span the sectors relevant to ELSR, i.e. health, child protection, social protection, education, M&E and C4D. There is also evidence of UNICEF programmes for children with disabilities being compartmentalised under one sector (education, child protection or social protection), which constrains the efficiency of UNICEF's coherence and coordination around its key messages and dissemination channels.

Policy advice and TA

Policy advice

Policy advice is often mainstreamed in UNICEF interventions by senior and middle management: it is also often opportunistic and complements other core roles to achieve change. For instance UNICEF policy advice on early childhood education reform has been influenced by a programmatic and financial review of preschool provision in the country/territory (Ar, Kg, FMa). UNICEF has been able to mediate its TA and research outputs into policy discourse, building on long-standing relationships with national actors and a trust capital based on its responsiveness to partners' demands and positive reputation. This has allowed UNICEF to identify and capitalise on new entry points at political level, new champions and new regulatory frameworks. Although UNICEF demonstrates a good ability to navigate the political landscape, however, it seems to lack a clear and articulated vision for the long term with regard to ELSR in each country/territory and the implications and opportunities in policy and legislation reviews in relevant sectors, from finances to local governments, and from education to child and social protection. This appears to reflect the compartmentalisation of UNICEF's own internal organisation that can hinder the identification of such cross-sectional opportunities (for example the recruitment of social policy advisors across the countries/territory have not yet provided significant input into support for equitable ELSR-related social provision and welfare strategies). This lack of strategic vision might constrain UNICEF in advising national stakeholders on long-term policies and regulatory priorities.

Technical assistance

UNICEF's TA has the reputation of being timely and there have been examples of good articulation between UNICEF TA on low-cost scenarios for early childhood education and legislative changes or scaling-up of models through partners' funding (Ar, Kg, Mo). Counterparts recognise the quality of UNICEF's TA, which draws on national and international expertise and has been particularly important in the development of the ELDS (FMa, Ar, Ko*). A key strength of UNICEF is its ability to anchor international TA in national processes and to ensure that developments are supported by wide consultation and participation of relevant national entities. Stakeholders acknowledged how UNICEF had secured a strong foundation for the ELDS through consultation events, providing opportunities for national agencies to be exposed to international good practices yet always ensuring national ownership (Ar, FMa).

If UNICEF's TA has mostly focused on modelling and financial simulations of low-cost provision, child-friendly environments and child-centred methodologies, in recent years it has also started to cover budget allocation and per-capita formula for early childhood education. This is a new area of work

for UNICEF, for which it does not necessarily have institutional strengths, compared to other donors, particularly multilateral (including other UN agencies such as UNDP) and bilateral agencies, which have more experience of large-scale public administration and finance reforms in decentralised settings. UNICEF staff do not have this expertise and UNICEF lacks the networks of non-academic experts on these topics. This is partially because UNICEF operates through individual contracts for TA in the ELSR sector rather than securing teams of specialists that combine skills and expertise and that draw from different traditions and approaches to early childhood education and public finance mechanisms. While the financial gain of this operational modality is recognised (UNICEF's ELSR budgets are limited, and the costs of EU or World Bank TA contracts are generally much higher), there is a risk that UNICEF's leadership position will be challenged as policies become more comprehensive and truly cross-sectoral to address the range of barriers to access and equity. For example, while several countries are trying to tackle financial allocations from central to devolved levels, investigating the cost benefits of earmarked allocations, block grants and equitable per-capita formula for preschools, UNICEF has not yet been able to provide strong TA on the issue. There is no mechanism and limited experience for leveraging partnerships (including within the UN Country Team) to address this need to secure TA on public administration and financial management issues in a social policy context.

Capacity development

TA and capacity development are often complementary in UNICEF work, for example in TA interventions that include training of preschool staff. UNICEF has been moving away from one-off training and has recently supported approaches that combine training with mentoring and follow-up (Mo, and to a certain extent Ar). These approaches, arguably more relevant to teachers' needs, remain nonetheless "quick fixes" because countries/territories lack capacity to sustain them.

UNICEF's approach to capacity development is mostly about individuals (teachers, trainers, NGO staff, individual government officials) rather than organisations and their institutional environment: a more holistic approach is needed for capacity development investments to contribute to institutional capacity change. In some cases, such as Kosovo (UNSCR 1244), institution building is necessarily addressed as part of reconstruction.

UNICEF's training is often implemented by NGOs (ISSA in Mo and Ar) with the support, sometimes ad hoc, of official training providers, such as universities (Kg) and institutes of education (Kg, Ar). Partnerships with national stakeholders, such as universities, institutes of education and teacher-training providers, are well established but are often reduced to partners being implementing agents of specific UNICEF activities. These partnerships are not explicitly working towards a shared vision for ELSR and capacity development of the partners has been, at best, a by-product rather than an explicit aim (Kg, FMa, Mo). There is little evidence of UNICEF strategies to support organisational change or work on improving the institutional arrangements of agencies (harmonisation and simplification of processes, clear definitions of roles and responsibilities, coordination mechanisms), their leadership (vision formulation, communication standards, management tools and outreach mechanisms) or their accountability (standards, participatory planning mechanisms, feedback mechanisms).¹¹⁸ In some cases this needs to be placed within the very low starting point of social service structures, where efforts have had to be focussed on the very early stages of institution building rather than more advanced organisational change (Ko). However, the limited institutional

¹¹⁸ This typology is borrowed from UNDP: <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/capacitybuilding/approach/#>

and organisational capacity is one of the main barriers to ensuring that inputs into training can be transformative in the medium to long term.

Monitoring and evaluation

Operating with limited budgets for ELSR, UNICEF has tended to prioritise implementation over M&E. UNICEF is also constrained in its M&E role by the cost of activities and the lack of local capacity in some cases to conduct evaluations and assessments (Kg, Ko*). However, the national and regional studies that have been done are well regarded by governments, development partners and NGOs. They are perceived as quality documents that benefit from good media coverage and discussions during launches and events, which help reach out to the relevant stakeholders at national level.

There have been some changes over the evaluation period in terms of M&E within UNICEF. As the role of the M&E officer has become more consistent, frameworks to increase the quality of M&E outputs have improved and with the equity agenda more prominent UNICEF has become more strategic in this area. Indeed, UNICEF studies now tend to provide data that can be used as baselines, particularly when investigating needs of the most vulnerable children (Ar, Ko*, Mo). As the lead agency for monitoring children's rights, UNICEF has also increased its support to national and local data collection processes on children (Ar) and is increasingly harnessing technology to automate data collection and to ensure that data can be used in accessible formats electronically (Ar).

Despite the complexity of the data collection systems in the country/territory cases, often spanning several ministries, statistical offices and local, regional and national levels, UNICEF's approach to strengthening national M&E systems has lacked a strategic approach, particularly in the first half of the evaluation period. This may well have reflected the state of the embryonic sector at the time, but the continued challenges suggest that a more structured and focused approach to this issue is needed, particularly in regard to the development of national and local level capacities for data collection and analysis.

Leveraging resources from public and private sectors

UNICEF has used its position and track record in the sector to great effect in leveraging additional funding from both domestic governments and external public and private agencies. Its role within GPE mechanisms in Kyrgyzstan and Moldova has enabled it to exert influence on the allocation of GPE grants to ELSR activities, and, similarly, its prominent role in the sector in Armenia has given it credibility and influence in feeding into the design and implementation of the EQRP programme. The same is true in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with respect to pre-accession EU funding. In all six countries/territory, UNICEF's role as one of the leading agencies in the ELSR sector has made it a natural point of reference for others, large and small, considering entry to the sector, and this provides the relationships and positioning to take advantage of opportunities that arise for securing additional resources. An emerging strength is the expansion of these relationships into the private sector.

The ability to use these relationships for leveraging funds has been strengthened by the use of the evidence and research that UNICEF has undertaken across the six countries/territory. This has been used to provide arguments for guiding leveraged resources towards more marginalised areas, such as the expansion of facilities in rural areas in most cases. UNICEF now has a growing literature that it can draw upon about aspects of marginalisation, such as the Armenian 2012 *It's about inclusion* report that highlights issues for children with disabilities, or the regionally funded 2011 *Roma Early*

Childhood Inclusion Macedonia Report. There are important recent efforts to draw on such research to push funding towards addressing these issues.

Facilitating national dialogue towards child-friendly norms

UNICEF draws on a range of activities to promote dialogue on child-friendly norms and standards for ELSR. In all six cases respondents recalled consultation roundtables, workshops, publication launches and training and confirmed that UNICEF had been instrumental in bringing these topics to the highest levels nationally (and in some cases regionally). UNICEF also has the capacity to bring a wide range of actors around the table to discuss matters relevant to children's rights. Most notably, UNICEF has been supporting the strong involvement in all cases of NGOs and CSOs working with children. This has resulted in policy makers being exposed to a range of views and perspectives, particularly relating to child poverty, marginalisation, disability and diversity. More interlinkages between UNICEF's own internal sectoral programmes, however, could strengthen this further by highlighting and acting on the importance of alignments between, for example ELSR and primary education, or ELSR and child and social protection.

In its approach to facilitating national dialogue, UNICEF might have underestimated the challenges of overcoming the historical legacy of young children as passive recipients of care and protection (and possibly teaching), a condition rooted in social norms, traditions and cultural practices. UNICEF has mostly targeted national level professionals to build and disseminate constructs where children are active participants in their own lives and learning: similar support work with practitioners at local level, parents, policymakers, academics and the general public might have increased the impact.

UNICEF's work on norms and standards for care seem to have been less prominent in the discourse around ELSR for 3-6 year olds, though this remains an important aspect for communities in how they perceive early childhood services.

Knowledge exchange

UNICEF has been flexible in responding to ad hoc needs and demands from governments for knowledge exchange activities. UNICEF has used its position in the sector to broker exchanges of knowledge amongst different types of organisations and across sectors. It has supported regional and international exchanges to share experiences and ideas.

Some good experiences of cross-country/territory sharing within UNICEF (Ko* and FMa) highlight the potential for more exchange between COs (and even between sectors within COs) concerning good practices and approaches of other countries/territories (particularly amongst UNICEF staff only working part time on ELSR). The lack of regular, structured opportunities to share details and operational modalities of good practices and approaches of other COs and countries/territories has hampered the transfer of relevant knowledge for both CO staff and governments, but the recent development of the RKLA structure within the region offers a basis for more internal UNICEF knowledge exchange.

UNICEF has been innovative when integrating mentoring into teacher training in Armenia and particularly Moldova. Mentoring schemes have supported teachers in taking up new ideas and in feeling more confident about implementing change. The schemes have capitalised on both regional and local expertise from ISSA and have been implemented in partnership with NGOs and national bodies, providing the latter with opportunities to be exposed to new knowledge. The cost

effectiveness of different approaches has rarely been evaluated, however, to provide evidence that could increase the efficiency of such interventions.

Modelling/piloting of new services to inform policy making

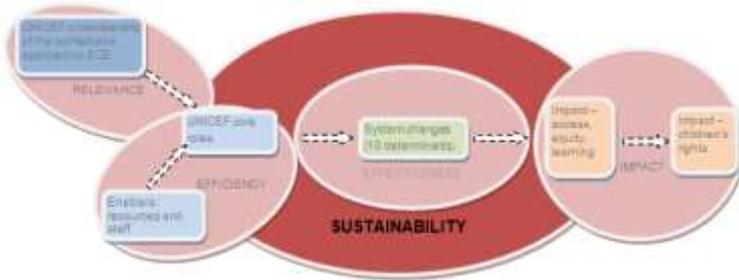
UNICEF ELSR has modelled low-cost, community-based, alternative provision to demonstrate that more children could benefit from ELSR in terms of access, learning and equity in centres that are more affordable, especially in rural areas and poorer communities. Working from this aim, UNICEF has commissioned studies of cost scenarios for early childhood education and has piloted the models (Ar, Kg, FMa, Mo). Studies and piloting made timely contributions to policy reviews in most cases. Although costing was included in some studies, financial information around unit costs and savings that could be made from one approach to another was not always detailed to a point where it could usefully be mediated with local governments.

The pilots lacked baseline data and impact evaluations. There is little evidence of data being collected prior to piloting on communities, children, their parents and teachers, nor of impact evaluations at the end of pilots (Ar, Kg, Ko*). Aspects such as children's learning and development outcomes, parents' increased contribution to the formal or informal economy, parental contribution and sustainability of local budgets have not been analysed before advocating for scaling up, hence reducing opportunities to learn valuable lessons for early childhood education reforms.

UNICEF's approach to piloting has however evolved over time and while pilots conducted in the mid-2000s lacked an M&E framework, more recent interventions such as the Dubai Care programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina are being more carefully evaluated, with baseline and end-line studies planned and conducted. In other cases, there is a clear understanding of the need for a range of alternative provision as one-size-fits-all models have limitations. To this end, Armenia is contemplating modelling interventions that focus on inclusion of children with disabilities and on reaching the most marginalised groups, particularly in very small communities where local governments and parents have no means of securing programmes of even two to three hours per day. However, there is a risk in other cases (Kg, Ko*, BH) that the wave of pre-primary programme investment may overwhelm UNICEF's past emphasis on scaling alternative provision covering the full 3-6 year age range for the foreseeable future.

4.5 Sustainability of results, system changes and UNICEF contributions

Sustainability criteria within the TOC



Sustainability cuts across the central levels and linkages of the TOC. This section therefore relates to: 1) the threats and supporting factors within system changes for sustainable impacts on early childhood education access, equity and quality, and 2) the contribution of UNICEF core roles to sustainability within system changes.

Key findings on sustainability:

Sustainability of achievements in ELSR is mixed: in some cases there is evidence of necessary financial commitments and in all cases the development of legislative frameworks has been important in embedding the sector into government systems and thinking. There are, however, concerns that in prioritising expanded access, attention has been diverted from ensuring the coherence of multiple forms of provision and their alignment with 0-3 services and primary education. Similarly concerns surround ensuring the integration of equity considerations for the most marginalised in the approaches and strategies for expansion, and the loss of focus on quality aspects such as inspection and career development. Decentralisation also presents a particular challenge to institutional development for sustainability.

4.5.1 National and international commitments

Over the evaluation period, a renewed commitment to early childhood has been made by development partners and governments, responding to promises made in Dakar in 2000 and subsequent advocacy. Multilateral agencies, such as the World Bank and the EU, have been increasingly funding preschool programmes and the FTI/GPE has more clearly prioritised early childhood education for both goals of access to primary school and basic skills in the early grades (Kg, Mo). Development partners are also increasingly recognising the longer-term efficiency and equity gains of investing in preschool provision: it most benefits the disadvantaged and has returns in terms of reduced health, welfare and justice budgets, increased gender equality and improved school attendance for older siblings.¹¹⁹ This renewed momentum has contributed to increased national political will, supported by new research evidence on the long-term benefits of early childhood education. CEE/CIS country/territory participation in international assessments, including PISA, has also played a role by highlighting low achievement and recognising early childhood education as one of the factors contributing to better achievements at age fifteen (Kg).

'PISA results made a lasting change in the thinking of the Ministry of Education about preschool'
(official within the Ministry of Education)

At the national level, there have been important steps in embedding early childhood education within legislative and policy frameworks, not only in the education sector, but also within overall national priorities and strategies such as the PRSP in Armenia or the President's Road Map in

¹¹⁹ World Bank (2012) *Towards and equal start: closing the early learning gap for Roma children in Eastern Europe*

Kyrgyzstan. This provides early childhood education not only with an increasingly developed and detailed structure in which to work, but also brings higher visibility through political commitment (as well as external pressures through funding mechanisms such as the GPE) to ensure momentum and progress around this sector. How decentralisation evolves, in terms of capacities, equitable resource mechanisms and clarity around roles and responsibilities, will be critical to how this national level commitment can be translated into effective preschool systems at the local level.

4.5.2 Sustainability and coherence of early childhood education provision

National commitment to early childhood education has seen a shift during the evaluation period towards the promotion of pre-primary/Grade Zero: there is evidence that this is becoming institutionalised, with appropriate and sustainable regulation, structures and budget commitments (Ar, Ko*, Kg). It is likely that those commitments will survive changes in governments. How some countries/territories deal with the shift from major external funding to national resources around early childhood education provision will be a critical transition point for sustainability in future years.

The sustainability of alternative provision for younger sections of the ELSR age range, which UNICEF has widely supported, is, however, more complex (FMa, Ar, Mo, Ko*, Kg). Developments in the past five years show that the models developed by UNICEF and other partners have potential for scaling up, particularly for the 3-5 year old group. This depends both on the national environment and the supportive response from local administrations, notably for buildings, utilities and salaries. Where these are forthcoming, often in response to parental demand and advocacy, then there is reason to hope that the community-based centres will be sustained. Scaling up will, however, need further support in terms of local budgeting and financing, providing local governments with examples of areas for smart savings and smart investments. Working around unit costs, supply chains for procuring equipment, materials and food, concession schemes for the poorest children and fee indexing to family income, appears necessary to replicate existing models. Sustainability of such alternative provision at scale is also dependent on the extent to which national budgets can be mobilised for staff. Staffing norms, and space, are a threat to institutionalisation and adoption of these models, which have often relied on staff who are under-qualified by national norms (albeit well supported and trained under the supporting project).

For some countries/territory, EU targets and norms for early childhood education will also become increasingly important (FMa, BH, Ko*). The Europe 2020 Agenda includes a target of at least 95 percent of children participating in early childhood education between four years old and the compulsory primary starting age. The expansion of pre-primary programmes and their articulation with other preschool provision providing wider age group coverage will be an important aspect for all six cases as they seek to combine age coverage with equitable access. How this provision aligns with both 0-3 year old services and primary education will also be a critical component in ensuring that the benefits of early childhood education build on and are maximised within the whole early childhood development period. The medium-term prospect for early childhood education provision is to remain fragmented as temporary and responsive measures are developed to increase access. However, longer-term visions and more detailed strategies for how sectoral coherence will be managed will be important, and this will include institutionalisation of arrangements for career structure and professional development of early years educators and of arrangements for inspection and quality assurance across all provision, including the private sector.

4.5.3 Sustainability for reaching the marginalised and reducing equity gaps

As discussed in previous sections, provision has certainly been expanded for broadly defined marginalised groups, with pre-primary programmes and community-based centres focused on rural and deprived areas, and the increasing institutionalisation of pre-primary programmes suggests such expansion will continue to be promoted. There has also been a growing acknowledgement of the issues of inclusion for other marginalised groups such as children with disabilities. In countries/territories with large settlements or proportions of Roma within the population (Ko*, Mo, FMa, BH), early childhood education has been included in all national plans developed for the Decade of Roma Inclusion. While this demonstrates a nationwide acknowledgement of the role of early learning for the most marginalised, in most cases the roll-out of the plans is constrained by low funding commitments and a lack of strong accountability mechanisms. There has also been a tendency, particularly in regard to increasing access for the Roma, to rely on project-based funding such as that from the Roma Education Fund (FMa), leaving significant sustainability concerns for the future once project funding is withdrawn.

Trends since 2005 point to a steady expansion over the next decade, with more marginalised children reached by early childhood education programmes; increased evidence of the benefits of early childhood education for the most vulnerable populations and a growing civil society voice around these issues are likely to continue to feed national debates on strategies to reach universalisation of provision. Provision, even in project modalities, also plays a strong role in increasing parental demand for these services, which is likely to impact positively on the sustainability of early childhood education programmes overall. However, the need to go beyond broad categories of marginalisation and develop better understanding and models for the needs of the diverse groups within these broad categories, will be critical to ensuring that equitable provision becomes integrated into the way that the sector expands, and that expansion of access through more facilities moves to a more holistic framework of exclusion that includes both physical lack of access to facilities and exclusion from and within available facilities and systems.

Despite a target on poorer communities by many preschool programmes, particularly in rural areas, serious inequities are likely to remain for the foreseeable future: provision is also increasing in urban areas through the establishment of new kindergartens by the richest local governments and greater private provision for the richest quintile. The richest groups are likely to continue accessing better provision that combines education and care and provides opportunities for children to develop through a wider range of activities including play, individual exploration and social interaction. Equity will need to become more integrated into system-level factors in order to start closing these equity gaps and preventing a two-tier system of provision from becoming institutionalised. This will require equitable financing mechanisms (which are starting to be discussed and acted upon in some cases), significant strengthening of decentralised capacities, stronger and more nuanced recognition of disaggregated marginalised groups' needs and integrated modalities to meet these, including, in the medium term, addressing the childcare needs of working parents more effectively. These developments will need to be articulated around existing preschool provision, offering flexible and innovative models to respond to both parental needs and affordability.

4.5.4 Sustainability of UNICEF contributions

Change at system level, in keeping with the determinants of the TOC, contributes significantly to sustainability, which would normally consider aspects of institutionalisation, political will and public attitudes as well as the financial and human resources to sustain change. These form a large part of the earlier findings and discussion. In all six cases UNICEF's interventions have contributed to the changing social norms, regulatory frameworks, standards and financial commitments that have been important enabling factors for sustainability.

UNICEF programmes have developed and facilitated the expansion of partners within the sector, working closely with government, NGO, civil society, donor agencies and communities to build a sustainable voice and momentum around early childhood education. They have also seized opportunities as they arose to expand and, where possible, entrench the position of the sector more firmly in frameworks and practices at national and local levels. The sector in all cases is still evolving; ongoing and continuous input by UNICEF has been and will continue to be important at the system level to develop further areas of equity and quality. A key bottleneck remains at decentralised levels in terms of implementation of achievements at national system level. UNICEF will need to shift towards a more strategic and holistic approach to its contributions around capacity development and decentralised implementation in order to ensure its contributions to frameworks, political commitment and social norms at national level can be carried down to local levels.

The value of modelling within this is not limited just to the sustainability of the models themselves, but also to their value in informing and providing credibility to UNICEF's more system-level approach. However, there are some elements of sustainability in some of the models that have been promoted by UNICEF. In Kyrgyzstan, for instance, the salaries of community-based kindergarten staff are now covered by the Ministry of Education. In Armenia, the Ministry of Education made a similar commitment over a one-year period for school-based pre-primary teachers from the EQRP project. While such signs are encouraging in terms of continued provision in poorer areas, there is clearly an issue of scalability: how many teachers can ministries cover?

Although it is not always clearly stated, there is an understanding within UNICEF that alternative models may be temporary solutions for a transition period. There is little articulation of what 'sustainability' should mean in this context, however, or whether the situation demands transition planning. Some COs describe it as a UNICEF role to innovate in response to bottlenecks rather than capitalise on models that have become 'mainstreamed', and to focus on access for the most marginalised children including those with disabilities. However, UNICEF does not seem to offer consistent messages about the nature of ELSR provision for countries/territories that are aspiring to greater access in a mixed economy. Some documents advocate for at least two years of preschool for the most marginalised children,¹²⁰ others promote the importance of universal access from age three and advocate for free and compulsory pre-primary education.¹²¹

UNICEF continues to encourage the development of a range of alternative programmes, including TV broadcasting (Ko*, Kg), without addressing the critical issue of how they can be sustained in a context where governments are trying to increase consistency across programmes and to standardise provision. As standards and norms are enforced, there is a possibility that some

¹²⁰ UNICEF (2011) *The Right of Roma Children to Education: Position Paper*

¹²¹ UNICEF (2013) *Education Equity Now: Including All Children in Quality Learning*.

programmes will have to close down for lack of compliance. Countries/territories need support in these areas in order to capitalise on the enrolment gains from these programmes while not discarding quality issues. This also points to the need to distinguish informal and formal early learning opportunities.

4.5.5 Human rights and gender equality issues in ELSR

As previously discussed, the development and articulation of a rights framework for ELSR is still at an early stage for most stakeholders within the sector. There is some evidence of countries/territories trying to address equity considerations in the implementation of ELSR such as through equitable per-capita funding (Ko*, Kg) and workable provision for very small communities (Ar). Such endeavours are in line with the fulfilment of children's rights. Most cases are, however, struggling with equitable per-capita funding and there is still little evidence of directing resources to regions and communities that need them most based on deprivation indexes and other socio-economic measures. This is partially because funding for early childhood education is still seen as an 'education expense' as opposed to a broader investment that should draw from social protection, health and employment budgets.

The potential importance of rights to protection from violence and of voice and respect are not sufficiently present in programming and implementation – these are important pre-conditions of practice, especially for children who are marginalised because of identifiable difference and needs.

Finally, the positioning of early childhood education within a broader framework of rights, gender equality and economic development is also currently limited through the separation of education and care components in many of the expansion strategies being implemented. How the sector develops so that it engages with both these aspects for an equitable, rights-based and sustainable growth in early childhood education and labour markets, is likely to become an increasingly important dialogue, not least in relation to alignment with EU practices and recommendations on early childhood education and care in EU accession processes.

5 Conclusions

It is important to reiterate that these conclusions, and the following lessons learned and recommendations, are based solely on the findings from the case countries/territory in this evaluation and should not be assumed to apply to other national contexts within the CEE/CIS region.

5.1 The Theory of Change

The evaluation substantially validates the generic TOC inasmuch as it provides a workable framework for understanding how activities drive results and impacts from *core roles* to the *system determinants* to (medium and longer term) *impacts*. Retro-fitting of activity-driven programming in each country/territory into the TOC is not a trivial exercise but has revealed only a small number of issues that suggest revisiting the design of the TOC to make it more useful and useable in future.

In reviewing the TOC, the evaluation seeks to facilitate its utility as a tool for UNICEF and has considered the clarity of its elements and the exclusiveness and exhaustiveness of the lists of core roles and determinants as they map onto activities and intended system changes.

5.1.1 The elements of the TOC

The TOC has not captured the importance, at the system level, of decentralised responsibilities. The capacity of critical institutions to fulfil their role has been identified as an important system determinant, which is not properly shown in the current TOC. This exacerbates a tendency to minimise the challenge of institution-building and emphasise individual training rather than capacity development for organisations, their enabling environment and their institutional relationships.

5.1.2 The TOC linkages

The ‘Summary’ tables below indicate the main system changes or UNICEF core role contributions identified, as well as areas for further development. The ‘Links’ tables below indicate how the ‘arrows’ showing the drivers and linkages across the TOC have been validated within the evaluation.

In each ‘Links’ table a darker shade indicates that this determinant has been found to be a more important driver of that impact. Non-italic text within the tables represents findings where changes in the determinants support measured impacts, those in italics suggest where linkages could (and arguably should) be important but have not been evidenced in this evaluation.

Enabling environment determinants and their impact

Summary

System gains include	Areas for further development include
<p>Shift in social norms to favour early learning in preschool services, which has helped provide a context for increasing access to (non-care) provision.</p> <p>Important steps in legislation and policy and standards/curriculum for preschool services.</p> <p>Steady increase in national budgets and, in some cases, ELSR has been prioritised for external budgetary support.</p> <p>Management and coordination at national level boosted by rising visibility of preschool in large-scale national plans and external funding mechanisms</p>	<p>Social norms, at public level and in the profession, have changed less concerning children with special needs or those from marginalised ethnic groups.</p> <p>Policy changes for equitable inclusion are not complete.</p> <p>Policy liberalising private sector is not matched by steps to oversee quality and establish cooperation.</p> <p>Management and coordination remains weak, against a background of decentralisation and changing responsibilities. Data to inform management decisions remain patchy and quality assurance is embryonic.</p>

The table below indicates how strongly individual system determinants in the *Enabling Environment* group drive impact on access, equity and learning outcomes.

Links

System determinants	As a driver of Access	As a driver of Equity	As a driver of Learning Outcomes
Social norms	Reduces reluctance to send children	Some change in professionals' awareness and attitudes Parental resistance (from parents of children with special needs and from parents of children without special needs)	Social demand for improved socialisation and learning outcomes
Legislation and policy	Legitimises flexible provision	Establishes principles only	Standards provide a basis for quality across wider range of developmental areas
Budget	Funds facilities and staff: may reduce parental costs	<i>Funds are needed for special provision and equitable access</i>	Qualified staff and equipment
Mgt. and coordination	<i>To manage enrolment of all</i>	<i>Needs data and local response Coordinated and cross sectoral</i>	<i>For QA and QI inputs</i>

Supply determinants and their impact

Summary

System gains include	Areas for further development include
<p>There is a range of availability of commodities in the case countries/territory, with some very well equipped and others with no more than adequate learning materials. Increasing use of primary school space and staff (in some cases released by demographic changes) and large scale, externally-funded expansion projects have helped improve access to services and staffing. Some success mobilising private funds for resources.</p>	<p>There are very few additional learning materials for those with special needs (outside special schools) and those using minority languages. Lack of physical facilities, especially in rural areas. Broad categories of marginalisation have been targeted in the expansion of facilities, but equity gaps have not yet been reduced. Gender balance of preschool workforce.</p>

The table below indicates how strongly individual system determinants of *Supply* drive impact on access, equity and learning outcomes.

Links

System determinants	As a driver of Access	As a driver of Equity	As a driver of Learning Outcomes
Availability of commodities	Much can be achieved with limited and low/no cost material resources	<i>Needs special material provision</i>	Resources for learning
Access to services	Physical facilities and staff essential for increased access.	<i>Specially qualified staff or support. Better disaggregation and targeting for marginalised children in expansion of facilities</i>	Quality of staff and support

Demand determinants and their impact

Summary

System gains include	Areas for further development include
<p>Financial access is recognised as a barrier for traditional (and private) provision: this has been addressed where Grade Zero and some of the centres are free (or very low cost).</p> <p>Local social and cultural practices are largely positive about education for boys and girls.</p> <p>Difficult to assess continued use of ELSR, but evidence that ELSR has helped ensure timely enrolment in primary school.</p>	<p>Informal costs continue to present barriers, particularly where demand outstrips supply.</p> <p>Some parents resist enrolling their children (children with disabilities, Roma, and intersecting with gender), fearing discrimination or inadequacy of support; some parents remain resistant to inclusive services.</p> <p>Alignment of preschool and primary services needs more attention.</p>

The table below indicates how strongly individual system determinants of *Demand* drive impact on access, equity and learning outcomes.

Links

System determinants	As a driver of Access	As a driver of Equity	As a driver of Learning outcomes
Financial access	Financial demand the main bar to wider access	Poverty constrains equity	Potential inverse driver if quality is a trade-off
Social and cultural practices	<i>Support parental demand for ECE across wealth quintiles and marginalised groups</i>	<i>Parental acceptance of affirmative action to support equitable access to ECE</i>	<i>School practices inform learning at home</i>
Continued use	<i>Consistent access across regions and groups and regular attendance</i>	Important to support continued path of those at risk	ECE driving timely enrolment in primary with better learning outcomes

Quality determinant and its impact

Summary

Quality can only be measured by the outcomes for children. The usual proxies for quality (time-on-task, staff qualification etc.) vary within and between the case countries/territory. There is a significant gap in research and evidence about the quality impacts of different types of ELSR.

System gains include	Areas for further development include
<p>Development of ELDS to provide a coherent framework for the sector.</p> <p>Emerging work on pre-service and in-service teacher training, child-centred methodologies and teacher licensing.</p>	<p>Defining elements of quality for school readiness.</p> <p>Research on the quality impacts of different types of ELSR</p> <p>Implementation of standards in practice.</p> <p>Development of career structures, status and norms of preschool teaching profession.</p> <p>Implementation and monitoring of ELDS within preschools.</p>

Links

System determinants	As a driver of Access	As a driver of Equity	As a driver of Learning Outcomes
Quality of service	Mixed quality does not seem to be a barrier to access owing to scarcity of provision	Quality discrepancies limit equitable access to ELSR: quality has to be for all	By definition

Core roles to determinants 1: Enabling environment

Summary

Core roles of UNICEF contributing to Enabling Environment	Areas for further development
<p>Advocacy for ELSR at public, professional and political levels as a voice for children in improving their preschool opportunities.</p> <p>Unlocking and leveraging funds from budgets, donors and others.</p> <p>National dialogue has complemented knowledge exchange to build understanding and practices for policy, content and standards, budgeting and management.</p> <p>M&E support to national systems and complementary research has started to provide evidence for policy and management.</p> <p>Direct policy advice and TA has provided technical support and international perspectives into new policies and standards.</p> <p>Modelling has shown innovative, diverse and high quality approaches that have helped inform policy and changed attitudes.</p>	<p>Social and professional norms on inclusion of children with special needs.</p> <p>M & E to manage quality in ELSR</p> <p>Decentralised management and coordination.</p> <p>Ensuring the voice of children is heard</p>

Links

Core role	As a contributor to social norms	As a contributor to legislation and policy	As a contributor to budget	As a contributor to management and coordination
Voice for children	Direct advocacy for ELSR to politicians, professionals and the public	To inform the policy environment		
Leveraging			National, local and external funding.	
National dialogue	To build consensus and political will	Consensus and common approaches		Shared practice
M & E	<i>Highlighting areas of continued resistance</i>	Evidence to policy	<i>Informs equitable use and uptake of budgets</i>	Data are central to management.
Knowledge exchange	Increases professional understanding and voice	Regional and international examples into policy	Informs budget makers	Shared practice
Policy advice and TA	Developing capacities of other stakeholders in communications and advocacy	Direct advice	Advice on budget	Technical assistance to management practices
Modelling	Shows new approaches	Demonstrates the importance of flexible policy	Options for financially feasible coverage	Involving managers in new approaches

Core roles to determinants 2: Supply

Summary

Core roles of UNICEF contributing to Supply	Areas for further development
<p>The voice for children within programming agendas to expand access to ELSR.</p> <p>Leveraged private funding to enhance the supply of commodities to community-based centres, pre-primary programmes and kindergartens.</p> <p>Leveraged external funding for expansion programmes (particularly pre-primary) has supported increased access to services.</p> <p>Modelling cost-effective alternatives to kindergartens has contributed to access, particularly in rural and underserved areas.</p> <p>UNICEF's policy advice and TA has helped to increase competence in teaching/learning.</p>	<p>Voice <i>of</i> children in design of services</p> <p>There has been too little national dialogue about increasing budgets for personnel and commodities although child-friendly spaces have multiplied.</p> <p>More policy advice and TA on how to create and procure low-cost materials are desirable and would ensure sustainability.</p> <p>More knowledge exchange at municipal/local levels is needed.</p>

Links

Core role	As a contributor to availability of commodities	As a contributor to access to services
Voice for children		Ensured preschool expansion put on the agenda
Leveraging	Commodities have increased in relation to budgets	Facilities and personnel are the big budget constraints
National dialogue	Child-friendly spaces have multiplied	
M & E		
Knowledge exchange	<i>Production of sustainable, low-cost materials</i>	<i>Ideas transfer between municipalities and countries/territories</i>
Policy advice and TA	<i>Production of sustainable, low-cost materials</i>	
Modelling	Has demonstrated cost-effective learning environments and materials	Provided resourced preschool services

Core roles to determinants 3: Demand

Summary

Core roles of UNICEF contributing to Demand	Areas for further development
<p>Voice for children (through its communication strategies) has contributed to a shift in the perception of the importance of education and learning (as opposed to care) within early childhood provision, amongst policy makers, professionals and the public and generated a demand for ELSR.</p> <p>It has leveraged ministerial budgets to provide free or largely free access to pre-primary programmes, particularly for vulnerable families.</p> <p>UNICEF's support of ELSR for marginalised groups through modelling has helped to shift prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes and reduce fear of the same in such groups.</p>	<p>National dialogue: UNICEF has paid little attention to informal fees/enrolment payments that threaten continued use and widen the gap between marginalised groups and the less well off.</p> <p>UNICEF has not had a clear engagement with continued demand for integrated education and care services and implications for education-specific services.</p> <p>Knowledge exchange: UNICEF has not looked in detail at how to facilitate/enhance parent-to-parent or community-to-community knowledge exchange for shifting social and cultural practices around marginalised groups, and encouraging parental acknowledgement of, and work on, their role as the first educators of their children.</p>

Links

Core role	As a contributor to financial access	As a contributor to social and cultural practices	As a contributor to continued use
Voice for children		Parenting education and C4D are influencing home practices	
Leveraging	Budget has frequently gone to make free provision for pre-primary		Financial constraints threaten continued use
National dialogue	<i>Address issues of informal fees and payments that continue to act as a barrier to access</i>	Increased understanding of child-friendly principles	Greater understanding of the importance of ELSR amongst all stakeholders
M & E	<i>Providing evidence on financial barriers</i>	<i>Highlighting areas of continued resistance</i>	
Knowledge exchange		<i>Enhancing community and municipality exchange of ideas and experiences around inclusive approaches and norms</i>	
Policy advice and TA			<i>Stronger articulation between preschool and primary systems</i>
Modelling	Has enabled low-cost access to provision	Has worked with teachers on inclusion	

Core roles to determinants 4: Quality of service

Summary

Core roles of UNICEF contributing to Quality of Service	Areas for further development
<p>Through leveraging, UNICEF has contributed to quality in-service training programmes and teaching and learning materials. UNICEF's national dialogue has focused attention on quality.</p> <p>Policy and TA have increasingly focused on teacher training and up-grading, using innovative approaches to pre-service and in-service training and bringing coherence to the ELSR provision through the ELDS.</p> <p>UNICEF's knowledge exchange role has helped countries/territories to benefit from international expertise and study tours to help policy makers 'see' what is possible in terms of quality and how it can be achieved. Innovative solutions between regions and districts are shared through experience in exchange visits/seminars.</p> <p>UNICEF's modelling demonstrates how quality can be achieved in alternative provision effectively and efficiently.</p>	<p>The voice of children, about their own needs and wants, needs attention. Participatory approaches remain weak, as is the recognition of the importance of free play as well as to be 'school ready'.</p> <p>More evidence is needed about quality implications of different types of preschool provision through monitoring and evaluation to ensure equity of provision.</p>

Links

Core role	As a contributor to quality of service
Voice for children	<i>Enabling children's voices to be heard and services to respond to their needs</i>
Leveraging	Leveraging additional funding towards quality inputs such as training and materials
National dialogue	Sharing professional experiences
M & E	<i>Understanding the quality implications of different forms of provision, particularly where access is targeted at particular groups</i>
Knowledge exchange	International exchanges on practices
Policy advice and TA	TA to standards and to professional development of teachers
Modelling	Has demonstrated quality services

5.2 Relevance

5.2.1 School readiness

UNICEF has accepted and promulgated the concept of 'school readiness' and it has become the defining rationale of interventions for children between 3 years old and school entry (typically 6 years old). This simple-sounding concept has been differently interpreted and there has been no shared definition or, critically, indicators to measure it. Given the variety of preschool provision, it is important to clarify what matters: self-confidence and self-awareness; socialised behaviour; classroom discipline; holding a writing instrument properly or reading and writing.¹²² The risk is that school readiness becomes a limiting concept on children's preschool experience.

In many of the cases, the ELDS are available and set a standard for achievement at age six across a range of domains. However, in practice, standards are not being used to set the indicators of school readiness; taking the standards seriously would challenge the limited aims of some provision.

5.2.2 Who else is ready?

As well as considering children's readiness the findings suggest the importance of readiness of parents and of the receiving schools, as set out in UNICEF's international guide to school readiness.¹²³ All parents/carers value and seek educational opportunities for their children, including those before compulsory school age. Involvement, particularly in centres and projects that have taken steps to support parenting, has helped them to understand and support children as learners outside school and through the transition to primary education.

UNICEF has given too little attention to how primary schools might be more 'ready' to receive young children. Primary schools should recognise and address the developmental needs of younger pupils and, arguably, learn from good practice in the preschool years. There is no evidence of this happening systematically.

Primary schools do not have strategies for differentiated approaches to children with different previous experiences. As the number of children with some preschool experience is increasing, children with none will become increasingly disadvantaged when entering primary school.

5.2.3 Grade Zero

The move to Grade Zero means that universal provision for younger children (i.e. those aged 3-5) has become a lower priority. The Europe 2020 Agenda has a target of at least 95% of children between 4 years and school age participating in early childhood education. Whilst a universal Grade Zero will ensure that all children entering school have some preschool experience (the MICS indicator of school readiness), that experience is likely to be shorter and later than that implied by the EU target.

Grade Zero is typically offered in a primary school and often uses primary-trained teachers. This has exacerbated the risk that children's only preschool experience is very 'school-like', with a focus on letters, numbers and classroom discipline, and less concern for social and emotional development and personal confidence. The potential disjunction between Grade Zero and early learning from aged three onwards is a threat to coherence and continuity for early childhood education.

¹²² Indicative of the range of responses from children, parents and teachers.

¹²³ UNICEF (2012), *School readiness and transitions*

UNICEF has been a proponent of this form of provision, especially where it has unlocked resources and increased opportunities. However, UNICEF has not reviewed the implications on the scope and quality of children's preschool experience and there is no common understanding of content and implementation modalities: a range of programmes is included under the Grade Zero umbrella.

Actors might usefully consider whether universal Grade Zero constitutes an advance in equitable preschooling or is simply lowering the school enrolment age: how different are the two perceptions?

5.2.4 Equity from the start

Interventions have increased the numbers of children receiving preschool education but have had limited relevance to children from the most marginalised groups, including those with disabilities, from ethnic minorities and in vulnerable families, who remain excluded. Early learning in a supportive environment is particularly important to those with disabilities and those subjected to social discrimination: it is an opportunity to identify and address learning and psycho-social needs, to provide developmental and learning opportunities not available at home and to develop self-confidence in a social environment. It can provide a critical platform to help these children transition successfully to primary school.

UNICEF has not adequately engaged with system determinants that are important for equitable provision for marginalised children – those for identifying, assessing, budgeting and administering special support. If preschool systems expand rapidly and develop institutionally without an equity focus, equity gaps will grow and become increasingly institutionalised. Social norms remain a constraint and will take time and require different strategies, inputs and cross-sectoral partnerships.

5.2.5 Very small communities

There is a trend across the region, because of lower birth rates, internal migration and urban drift, for communities to become so small that most delivery models are unviable. Community-based provision may be of lower quality (in that it is run by volunteers, untrained staff etc.) but it is closer to home and contributes to community survival and empowerment. UNICEF has recognised this in some cases and could play a role in legitimising and modelling innovative provision.

5.2.6 The private sector

Commercial private provision is increasing rapidly, usually in urban settings, serving those parents who can afford it. In most cases new legislation allows the operation of private kindergartens but, beyond that, there has been little effort to understand, regulate and assure their quality or to develop partnerships with private providers both for the provision of education and meeting the continued demand for care.

In most cases both UNICEF and governments have been reluctant to engage with the sector – several respondents dismissed their operators as 'only in it for profit'. However, there are some examples of partnerships including for enforcing national standards and public provision of land.

5.2.7 Care and education

Parents recognise and appreciate a learning focus in ELSR. However, access to adequate and affordable childcare remains important and potentially life changing for families. Formal childcare in

traditional state kindergartens and the private sector is affordable only to richer families, which contributes to inequity for women's work chances and children's development opportunities.

The care of children aged 3-6 outside their time in ELSR, but during the working day, remains important to working families and women's rights to access to the labour market. Adequate provision of safe care allows parents to work and for children to be secure and happy: it can liberate lone parents to support their children. Where UNICEF has prioritised short ELSR provision, working parents have to make informal care arrangements with carers, friends and relatives. UNICEF has yet to engage fully with the rights and equity implications of such provision.

5.2.8 Human rights based approach

HRBA is, of course, conceived as cutting across all of UNICEF's work: the findings suggest that it is spread rather thinly over the top rather than baked into the heart of ELSR programming and practice. HRBA has been used in advocacy and programme planning for ELSR only in pursuit of children's rights to early learning opportunities. However, in most cases, the rights agenda is secondary to concerns for improved achievement through preparation for schooling: it has not been used to prioritise programming to reach marginalised children, where it is a potent argument.

UNICEF has led work on how to facilitate parental and community involvement in the development and delivery of services, but has made limited use of HRBA concerning children in programming, such as to support children's autonomy and voice in their learning, or simply to make explicit the implications of ensuring respect for young learners and protection from intimidation. A rights-based drive for safety and respect is of particular importance to children with special needs or from stigmatised marginal groups. It is recognised that, by tradition, HRBA is not an important driver of policy and practice in the region, but it behoves UNICEF to address that starting point.

5.3 Impact

5.3.1 Access

There has been a steady increase in access to ELSR, particularly where Grade Zero pre-primary programmes have been introduced. In some cases the increases have been significant and provide a firm basis for the sector's development and position within the broader education sector. Starting from a low base, in most cases, there is still a long way to go, particularly to reach those most marginalised groups for whom ELSR provides the most benefit.

5.3.2 Equity

Over the evaluation period, the trend has been to expand provision in rural areas to correct the imbalance with wealthier urban areas. This has mitigated the rate of expansion of equity gaps but, within a rapidly expanding sector, there is still some distance to go to start to close these equity gaps. Issues of equitable budgeting for poorer areas are starting to emerge and may lead to governments developing a vision for ELSR with equitable financing mechanisms.

The case countries/territory demonstrate initiatives to provide ELSR to members of the Roma and other traditionally isolated and stigmatised communities. UNICEF has undertaken important work on understanding how ELSR can bridge the traditions and socio-economic constraints on access and continued use by Roma communities. There is anecdotal evidence that ELSR helps children from

minority communities to socialise and be more prepared to move into schooling. However, the transfer of this work into the practices and social norms of other stakeholders at national and local levels has been limited so far and systemic inclusion of children with disabilities or Roma communities within ELSR systems (rather than project-based support) remains distant.

5.3.3 Quality

UNICEF has introduced the concept and practicalities of child-centred methodologies into all its work, including modelling, professional support, knowledge exchange and, importantly, the ELDS.

The ELDS offer a useful tool for recognising and assuring quality, and provide a basis for a more coherent 0-6 range of services. However, taking methodologies and standards into practice has been challenging and is an increasing focus of UNICEF work. Understanding the quality implications of diverse preschool modalities remains an urgent area for investigation in order to ensure quality becomes linked with the predominant focus on access.

5.4 Effectiveness

5.4.1 Decentralisation

UNICEF has had significant success contributing to the legislative and policy framework for early childhood education. However, moving that into implementation has proved challenging. Many countries/territories are decentralising preschool provision; arrangements differ but, increasingly, sub-national agencies have responsibilities not only for facilities but also for staff management, planning and operational funding of preschool institutions. In many cases budget authority has increased, sometimes alongside tax-raising powers. Inspection and supervisory functions may also be decentralised. In most cases the sub-national body has some democratic accountability, for example through election of a mayor or assembly.

There are common concerns about capacity and responsiveness of the sub-national bodies and the priority that they attach to preschool when facing competing demands on limited budgets. Parental influence at this level can work in favour of elites with political influence. UNICEF is still developing approaches to working with decentralised management, which adds a logistical and conceptual challenge, particularly in some of the complex administrative and political landscapes.

Decentralised institution-building usually falls to other agencies, such as UNDP or, in some of the case countries/territory, the EU. In some instances UNICEF has been able to work with these agencies to ensure that the implications and requirements for preschooling are considered within emerging decentralised systems. UNICEF can make a niche contribution in this regard: other agencies can bring greater financial resources and expertise in public administration and institutional reform but UNICEF's ELSR expertise and equity agenda should inform the design, implementation and management of institutional reform to safeguard and progress quality and equity in ELSR.

5.4.2 Quality assurance

All preschool provision needs to be inspected for compliance, quality assurance and child protection. Inspection systems are weak across the region: they are often under-resourced with overlapping accountability lines and lack up-to-date regulatory frameworks and operational guidelines.

With the ELDS, UNICEF has introduced a tool that could be a basis for inspection in preschools (it has helped inform a self-evaluation tool in Ko* and is being taken into quality assurance in FMA). Beyond this, however, UNICEF's engagement with quality assurance has been too limited.

5.4.3 Understanding and differentiating need

There has been inadequate analysis of needs and of the appropriate and practical system response for different groups of marginalised children. This has been hampered by over-simplified discussion of inclusion (i.e. of children with special needs into mainstream schools). Full inclusion can only be a long-term aim for children with complex support needs. A step-by-step approach may be more practical, by which the many children currently out of preschool who could be included with realistic additional resources, are prioritised for appropriately inclusive provision. The needs, and rights, of children with more complex vulnerabilities, who may be kept at home or who are in special schools, may have to be addressed within those environments.

UNICEF has been working on concrete interventions to support the identification of OOSC across the region. However, to date, the work does not always apply to those aged 0-6 and contributes to the risk that children being held out of school may not get identified by the system.¹²⁴ This would be a basis for prioritising the most vulnerable children for support in preschools (e.g. by waiving fees, subsidised placement, transport, free meals).

5.4.4 Continuum of services

The concept of ELSR is strongly rooted in the assumption that appropriate preschool provision will enable timely primary enrolment, enhance primary retention and improve learning outcomes. However, the alignment of systems, approaches and services between preschool and primary education and the management of the transition are critical to the realisation of these benefits and have particular implications for vulnerable children.

Parents of children with disabilities often fear transition to grade 1 because they have concerns about the quality of services for their children, both in mainstream schools (often characterised by large groups of children and lack of specialised staff) and special schools (which contribute to the marginalisation of children and are located away from home), and over the support they will receive as parents. Involvement in preschooling could mitigate some of the shock of entry to primary, but such gains are lost if the professionals supporting the children and their families (such as psychologists and other specialised staff) change abruptly when children enter a new education institution. Preschools and schools often fall under different authorities, so that support for children, and their families, tends to lack continuity and coherence.

UNICEF has been supporting social service reforms and the adoption of case management systems that would enable authorities to organise services better around children and their families. It could play a role in ensuring such services link both to ELSR and primary education systems.

¹²⁴ The Global Out-of-School Initiative includes, in its dimension of exclusion framework, children of pre-primary age who are out of school. We are not referring to the Out-of-School studies here, but to interventions happening in countries as a result of the initiative.

5.4.5 Knowing more: data and research

Collecting data on preschool services for reporting, planning and administration has proved very difficult. Whilst this is an acknowledged concern across education, preschool has presented some unique problems arising from the diversity of provision (including private provision) and different data reporting routes.

The potential for coordinated data systems is currently not being realised, with data not being used in sector management to understand, for example, where preschool children are going or provide a record for each child entering primary school.

UNICEF has supported the improvement of data collection on child wellbeing and children's rights at national and local levels, but support to preschool data collection has been more limited, reducing the opportunity to articulate data systems.

The evaluation has identified a range of research gaps and needs. To date there has been limited opportunity for longitudinal research and the best research examples have been comparative reviews to inform decisions about ELSR modalities. Studies on learning outcomes have been limited and there is insufficient evaluation of teaching quality or of the outcomes of different types of provision. UNICEF recognises the gap but is constrained by funding and suppliers' capacities. There is sufficient commonality for some research across countries/territories in the region. Particularly important in the circumstances will be to understand the impact of Grade Zero.

5.5 Efficiency

5.5.1 UNICEF in middle income countries/territories

Many of the evaluation questions, reflecting the TOR and background assumptions, are framed as if UNICEF has a powerfully influential relationship with national governments. In middle income countries/territories governments are less dependent on donor funds and, in many cases, there are well established national institutions; across the region there is also a tradition of cautious engagement with international agencies. UNICEF's strength in these contexts is in softer influence, identifying and prioritising opportunities for technical assistance at the highest levels and a longer-term approach to developing capacity and influencing change.

The advocacy elements of the core roles have to adapt to opportunities to influence public and professional opinion, the media and political economy: because of the tradition and history of the region these are unique and difficult. UNICEF has to analyse and work effectively, targeting different stakeholders and being strategic about how and when it is able to leverage influence into system processes and ongoing sectoral development.

5.5.2 Sector integration/cross-sector work

UNICEF advocates for integration and cross-sector policies such as those for comprehensive social protection that will address preschool exclusion. It is particularly important for UNICEF in middle income cases to bring together education, child protection and social protection, working with nascent (or dysfunctional) national structures, across different ministry 'silos'. Cross-sectoral integration is particularly important for building systems that identify, address and follow through the most marginalised children and their families to maximise the benefits of early childhood services in the realisation of children's rights and breaking intergenerational cycles of exclusion.

UNICEF's structure does not facilitate integrated cross-sector working: there is often limited understanding by officers, at regional and national levels, of other sectors and the routes to integrated approaches, bridges and continuum. UNICEF's work is often compartmentalised, in terms of programmes, staff allocation, reporting structures, budget lines and, possibly, staff skills.

5.5.3 Using expertise

There is anecdotal evidence of the difficulties COs sometimes encounter in identifying, contracting and deploying expert staff, especially in areas outside the traditional roles and that engage with system level determinants in areas of public administration, information and legislation.

5.6 Sustainability

5.6.1 The status of the sector

The basis of the ELSR sector has been institutionalised within governments and legislative frameworks not only within the education sector but also in wider national priorities and strategies. Existing momentum, supported by substantial external financial support to the sector, offers hope for the continued development and system changes to meet the outstanding needs for equitable, quality preschool provision. Issues of decentralised implementation, coherence, equity and alignment with EU requirements will be key challenges for the future.

5.6.2 Organisational change

It is a notable characteristic of this region that, in many cases, there are very competent individuals constrained within inefficient organisations and dysfunctional institutional relationships. Many of the case countries/territory demonstrate how this can delay or divert change and, of course, undermine sustainability.

UNICEF has to work with institutions that have limited capacity to respond to their changing roles in the sector: for example, in new sub-national administrations, for professional development or for setting standards. Whilst UNICEF often provides technical assistance (usually of very good quality), it has rarely engaged with aspects of capacity development based on analysis of institutional and organisational capacity constraints.

5.6.3 Teacher certification, training and professional development

There are trends in the case countries/territory for increasing professionalisation and levels of qualification (and of cost) of ELSR staff, balanced against demands for staff in remote areas that are not attractive to qualified professionals. In many cases long-standing staffing norms limit flexibility and locally responsive staffing. Teachers' career structure, including the arrangements for pre-service and in-service professional development, for deployment, staffing norms and assessment, is an important system determinant for quality and sustainability. Central to this is the capacity of the institutions for professional development and monitoring educators.

Progress to institutionalise a career structure for preschool educators has been piecemeal, with a focus on training and support to those in place. There are some examples of innovative approaches, including *in situ* mentoring and internships, which UNICEF has introduced in models or projects.

6 Lessons learned

6.1 TOC

The TOC is increasingly understood as a way to support and clarify thinking about programming within UNICEF. However, COs will need more support to use it as intended and to ensure that it better reflects contexts in CEE/CIS as it is transferred into country/territory-relevant TOCs.

6.2 Relevance

What happens to a child before school, in the name of preschooling and school readiness, is much more varied than what happens in schools: its quality and relevance to the child's needs and rights should not be taken for granted.

Grade Zero has enabled a significant expansion of pre-primary access, providing a potential route to learning opportunities for all children and facilitating timely transition to primary schooling. However, there is a risk that it has reduced options from age three for programmes that contribute to development, perhaps in more child-friendly ways.

It has been unhelpful to prioritise access and, *de facto*, put off action to address equity even where the starting point has been very low enrolment. Leaving the marginalised groups to the end risks institutionalising inequitable provision and misses the opportunity to influence change.

ELSR in the region needs to be open to innovative and responsive modalities of provision, for viability and outreach, which UNICEF has helped to model and legitimise. These modalities, however, need to fit within a stronger long-term vision for the sector to ensure they do not institutionalise a multi-tiered system of provision in terms of quality and access.

Private provision is a growing part of preschool provision: UNICEF should engage with it, at least for quality assurance and child protection.

The articulation of ELSR provision with childcare arrangements matters to parents, is a driver of demand (and in some cases expectations of provision) and contributes to equity and rights. UNICEF will need to engage with this issue internally and across sectoral programmes to decide how it can address these concerns without compromising the importance of the educational and developmental aspects of early childhood service provision.

6.3 Impact

The measurement of long-term impact is difficult: ELSR is essentially an “assumed good” for many stakeholders.

Reaching the most marginalised requires different approaches and actions as the children concerned are not automatically included in a wave of increased access.

6.4 Effectiveness

Working at system level requires flexibility and coordinated, simultaneous work across multiple determinants to ensure the resulting changes remain relevant to the needs and rights of children (e.g. access not outstripping quality concerns or changes in social norms keeping pace with types of

provision). This requires drawing on a wide range of skills that may need to be drawn from other programming sectors and other partners.

The initial work of establishing the frameworks and structures for the early childhood education sector has been very important.

The systems for quality assurance (inspection etc.) are a priority where modalities and approaches are changing. As ELSR falls under sub-national administrative units, inspection needs to work at both national levels, for standards, procedures and sanctions, and at sub-national levels for operations.

Marginalised children can benefit greatly from early intervention and preschooling but the challenges of identifying and addressing their needs, which require special and cross-sectoral approaches, have not been addressed. Planning and action for marginalised groups of children require more detailed analysis and research of needs and of the appropriate and practical system response: analysis and planning have been hampered by over-simplified discussion of inclusion.

Data provide the basis on which to identify, understand, plan for and manage equity, access and quality issues in the ELSR sector. National data systems have not kept pace with the diversification and development of provision so as to support system changes for equitable, quality ELSR provision.

6.5 Efficiency

UNICEF has utilised soft power for much of its work – influencing, facilitating dialogue and knowledge brokering – building on its reputation and mandate. This is difficult to measure and cost.

UNICEF has not kept records of resource utilisation to support a value-for-money analysis. The interdependence of core roles (e.g. modelling providing the basis for policy advice or leveraging), and the flexible way in which different combinations of core roles are required to respond to different circumstances means it is not possible to prioritise or single out individual core roles as more effective or more valuable than others: the full suite of roles must be at the disposal of COs with the accompanying skills required in each to maximise UNICEF's contributions.

UNICEF's ability to contribute to system changes for ELSR is strengthened by better use of the skills, influence and expertise that it has in other sectors, as well as exploring new partnerships within and beyond UN agencies on technical areas beyond its traditional expertise.

6.6 Sustainability

Political and public support for ELSR has been important to drive changes in legislation, responsibilities and recurrent budgets; using this to support equitable implementation presents new challenges for all partners involved.

As many countries/territories in the region look towards EU accession, the implications of EU requirements around early childhood education have become more important.

UNICEF contributes to capacity development in many ways but this is a region in which capacity constraints are often more institutional than individual: individual inputs are at risk without institutional and organisational analysis and partnerships for support.

6.7 Innovations and good practices

Across the region, UNICEF has introduced many innovative approaches and demonstrated good practices that might be adapted and replicated.

6.7.1 Changing perspectives on early childhood education

UNICEF has been instrumental in getting governments to re-conceptualise early childhood education through a combination of sound policy dialogue, leveraging its position and evidence of innovative modelling. Regional and international exchanges have played an important part in inspiring and broadening the scope of what governments and partners have felt is possible within early childhood education. Within the countries/territory, UNICEF's facilitation of broader consultative processes (such as around ELDS in Ar) has drawn in stakeholders and contributed to stronger ownership and collaboration within the sector.

6.7.2 Alternatives to kindergartens

UNICEF has pioneered alternative approaches to ELSR that are more cost effective than the traditional kindergartens, significantly extend reach to the rural poor, and are comparable, if not better, than the traditional kindergartens with respect to child-centred teaching and learning. The establishment of alternative models in their various forms and strategic locations has served to extend reach where it is difficult but most needed.

6.7.3 Use of broadcast media

UNICEF has helped support educational TV programmes for young children, which extends the reach of early learning to children who are not in institutional schools. These are popular and effective, in Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) (*Sesame Street* translations) and Kyrgyzstan (*Magic Journey*) in particular, and offer cost-effective routes to support child development in contexts of low formal provision as well as influencing social norms and practices of families and communities.

6.7.4 Mentoring

In Moldova, a mentoring programme has been running and will be assessed in the coming year. The programme works on the basis of ISSA training by an international expert delivered to national trainers who then work with local teachers through phased training sessions. An 'on call' service is also available to handle day-to-day issues that manifest themselves on-site. The programme allows for consistent support, available at need, and designed with sustainability in mind by incorporating it into the government's proposed revised education legislation.

6.7.5 Towards a more 'joined-up' service

There is a valuable innovation in Moldova to create a local team in each district and community, comprising an educator and social and health assistants to troubleshoot and monitor the well-being of children in the locality. The initiative is to identify problems at an early stage and provide support and mediation towards their resolution.

6.7.6 Knowledge exchange:

The exchange of experience and expertise between COs has allowed countries/territories to draw from each other, avoid re-inventing the wheel and share good practices. In particular the exchange of expertise between Kosovo (UNSCR 1244) and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has helped the former push ahead with reforms and draw on a pool of expertise and experience.

6.7.7 Evidence gathering

The recent exercise in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to measure outcomes of ELSR, and compare them across different types of provision could inform similar research across the region.

Supporting schools to conduct ‘then and now’ surveys on parental perceptions of services and knowledge, attitudes and practice surveys of both parents and teachers (Moldova) is a good practice that, if extended over the region, could yield important effectiveness and impact data.

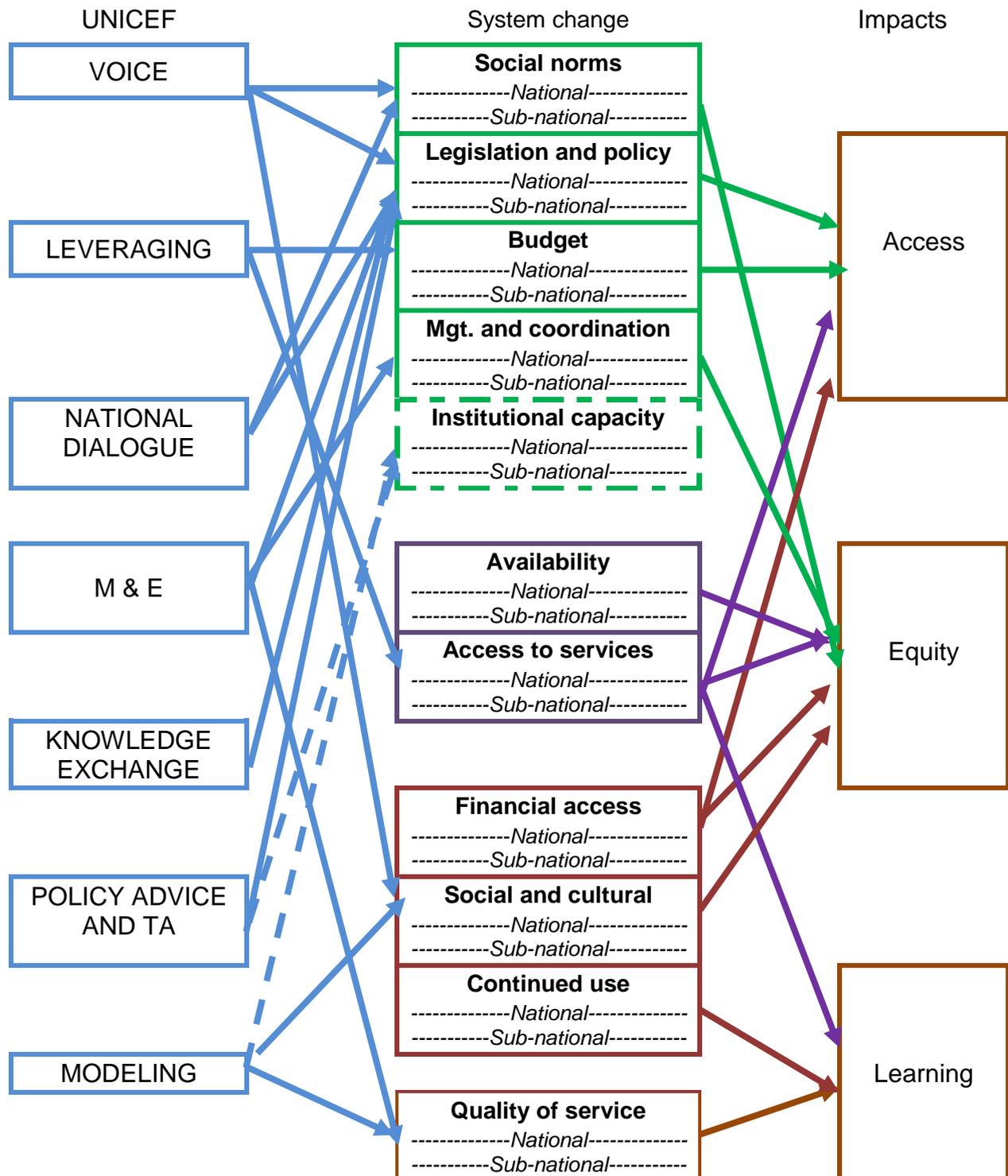
There is useful work in Armenia including studies, surveys and data-gathering exercises on the 3-6 and 5-6 age group, sometimes including preschool attendance (e.g. a child poverty module, survey on the impact of the economic crisis etc.).

7 Recommendations

7.1 TOC

Recommendations are captured in a revised regional TOC diagram (Figure 54) with additional elements highlighted with the dotted lines. Arrows indicate those drivers identified as most important in general, based on tables in section 5.1.2 (i.e. the boxes with the darkest shades there).

Figure 54: Proposed regional TOC for ELSR



Capacity development

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that the TOC is amended to reflect system approaches to capacity development and the importance of system determinants at sub-national as well as national levels. This would involve:

- *Capacity development:* including ‘institutions able to deliver their function’ as a system determinant, with the RO providing guidance on those core roles that support capacity development, notably *Policy advice and TA*, in line with UNDP guidelines.¹²⁵ Analysing institutional capacity at national and local levels should cover the enabling environment of institutions and both organisational and individual capacity.
- *Sub-national levels:* showing system determinants at sub-national levels where these present qualitatively different challenges and have different links to the intended impacts. This would apply to all the determinant areas but would be particularly important on the determinants of *legislation and policy* and *management and coordination*. Being explicit about sub-national system levels within the TOC will help to focus on the chain from *national* to *sub-national* systems (and hence to *impact for children*) in planning interventions.

7.2 Policies and strategies

7.2.1 A long-term vision with equity at its core

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that UNICEF, headed by the RO and working with all COs, develop a long-term vision and strategy for ELSR in the region, with differentiated goals and strategic approaches for low income countries/territories, middle income countries/territories, those with EU pre-accession status and those that are already in the EU.

UNICEF should put equity at the core of its strategy, defining equity in the ELSR context, developing approaches to support equity, and providing guidance on equity baselines, monitoring and evaluation of equity in ELSR and good practices in supporting equity in ELSR. UNICEF has the position and mandate to lead on equitable access to quality early childhood education and should convey its thinking on the issue more clearly. More strategic and specific support on equity would be of great value as countries/territories are transitioning towards mainstreaming Grade Zero and towards a possible universalisation of preschool.

Within the vision, priority must be given to the most marginalised children and children with disabilities and special educational needs even in situations where supply limits access to relatively low percentages of the population. It is neither equitable nor strategic to leave the marginalised 10-20% until ‘we have reached the rest’. This is long-term and complicated work that needs to be started.

Within the overall aim of equity and inclusion, UNICEF should develop more varied ways to understand and respond to children’s different preschool needs, to understand current practices and provide support to improve their impact on children and the overall quality of ELSR provision. Policies and systems to reach the range of children with different needs (including social needs and economic vulnerability) are complex, typically cross-sectoral, and may need new structures or operational mechanisms and professional practices to identify, assess, refer and support children.

¹²⁵ [Capacity Development | UNDP](#) (referenced April 11, 2014)

The vision should therefore:

- address equity concretely in ELSR
- articulate expectations of pre-primary and school readiness and for the whole preschool cycle
- encompass the universalisation of preschool provision from age three onwards
- address the articulation between provision for 0-3 and 3-6 year olds (using existing ELDS as a normative framework) and between care and education in all provision
- address the continuum between preschool and primary education, including in relation to supporting Grade 1 enrolment on time, identification of children out-of-pre-primary and preschool and harmonisation of curricula and teaching and learning approaches
- address the benefits of a cross-sectoral approach to ELSR by articulating the sphere of influence and responsibilities of each sector in both UNICEF and governments and the gains for equity that would result from a strategic cross-sectoral approach
- address the demographics of the region and maximise opportunities to open ELSR facilities in schools and classrooms being closed down as a result of the optimisation of school networks
- include private sector provision and identify options for public-private partnerships and contribution of employers to care provision for children
- address UNICEF's comparative advantage in ELSR in the region
- address gender issues related to the sector including:
 - the role of childcare in equal access to employment for men and women
 - the need for the ELSR workforce to be more gender balanced
 - the role of both mothers and fathers and men and women carers in early years, early learning and school readiness

The vision should be supported by strategies that:

- ensure quality of provision is a central condition for increased access
- address equity in detail, with disaggregation and definition of marginalised categories and concrete equitable financing models for ELSR
- re-energise the HRBA for ELSR towards more specific advocacy, policy support and technical assistance for ensuring CRC within implementation
- address capacity development in a comprehensive fashion, looking not only at individual capacity but also organisational and institutional capacity
- enable cross-sectoral collaboration within and beyond UNICEF
- lay the foundations for public-private partnerships
- seek transparency around fee setting for preschool education
- support quality assurance and protection systems

Indicative actions

RO	<p>Lead the development of the vision and strategy, of the equity framework including overarching taxonomies of additional need and linked strategies for addressing them.</p> <p>Commission/prepare and share research, literature reviews on good practices and position papers on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reaching marginalised children, pro-poor measures for ELSR and equitable financing models for preschool, including learning lessons from EU countries, with a focus on local government budget allocation, earmarked budget allocations to decentralised levels, equitable per capita formulas, local level pro-poor schemes, indexation of fees on family income etc. • universalisation of preschool strategies; cross-sector approaches to preschool and transition to primary; private provision; public-private partnerships for preschool; employers’ engagement in ELSR and care; building institutional capacity for ELSR. Other topics and themes are embedded in the recommendations of this section • opportunities for preschool and ELSR arising from demographic changes and school network rationalisation and challenges linked to both rehabilitation of facilities and re-training of work force for ELSR • actual and opportunity costs of different preschool provision for parents, including different vulnerable and marginalised families and children with disabilities. UNICEF could then articulate its position on fee-setting and issues of free pre-primary and free provision against a background of real costs <p>Consult and prepare drafts for consultation, ensure cross-sectoral inputs and consultation.</p> <p>Develop policy briefs for advocacy purposes.</p>
COs	<p>Contribute and maintain country/territory relevance and perspectives.</p> <p>Prioritise topics for research, reviews and papers.</p> <p>Adapt strategy to local context and ensure that work is conducted with relevant partners in other sectors on system and capacity analysis for different groups of children and responsibilities of various sectors including the private sector and employers.</p>

7.2.2 Quality

Recommendation 3: It is recommended that UNICEF review the possible risks to quality arising from rapidly increasing access, with short national research studies.

Recommendation 4: It is recommended that UNICEF deepen its approach to teacher training and professional development (including teachers’ capacities to identify needs and draw on cross-sectoral support services) and work on children’s ways of learning and respect for children’s rights throughout preschool (identity, integrity, participation and agency).

Recommendation 5: It is recommended that UNICEF develop guidance and tools for child participation from age 4 to 8 to ensure children’s voices are heard and integrated into the general reflection on ELSR quality.

Recommendation 6: It is recommended that the RO provide further support to institutionalising the development and dissemination of quality children’s TV, such as *Magic Journey*. This may need input to commercial channels, rights management etc. that is beyond COs’ capacity.

Recommendation 7: Where there are standards in place that do not match the main modalities of provision (multiple-year/single year, full year/limited hours, full-day/half-day etc.), it is recommended that an additional guideline be prepared to operationalise the standards within provision that has limited age coverage and shorter timing. COs could lead this with experiences shared through the RO.

Indicative actions

RO	<p>Create some common tools for assessing quality of ELSR, operationalising ELDS and promoting ELDS as a tool for harmonising 0-3, preschool and early primary school grades curricula.</p> <p>Consolidate and share lessons on the use of the ELDS.</p> <p>Research the teacher determinant in quality ELSR and improved learning outcomes for children.</p> <p>Develop a pool of master class videos from across the region that could inspire modelling and improve quality interactions in ELSR learning environments (constructive feedback to children, differentiated pedagogy, project-based approaches, positive discipline, learning through play etc.).</p> <p>Undertake study on regional possibilities for sharing TV products, copyright management and language options.</p> <p>Develop toolkit to support consultation and participation of children aged 4 to 8.</p>
COs	<p>Outline next steps to use ELDS to frame approaches for the 0 to 8 age group and use them to guide practice on professional development and inspection work (frameworks, inspection grids, teachers' observation grids etc.).</p> <p>Develop scenarios to increase teachers' language expertise to help children who do not speak the national language.</p> <p>Inform national debate on representation or role models for children with disabilities in their preschool experience.</p> <p>Advocate for a greater gender balance in the preschool teaching force and develop approaches to maximise children's exposures to both male and female role models in their preschool experience.</p> <p>Support reviews of teaching and learning materials to ensure diversity is represented and that a variety of learning and socio-emotional needs are addressed.</p> <p>Promote ELDS in early primary grades, health and child protection sectors to contribute to the development and professionalisation of front line staff involved with 3-6 years old children.</p>

7.2.3 Working with the system

Recommendation 8: It is recommended that UNICEF strengthen its ability to navigate decentralisation and to provide sustainable capacity development support to system institutions at national and sub-national levels. In particular, this would involve:

- Developing stronger partnerships with line ministries in charge of decentralisation and planning, and with sub-national levels to strengthen understanding and influence on budget allocation, disbursement and practices. In different countries/territories and contexts, UNICEF COs may need to reconfigure and develop different working relationships with partners to bring technical support and institutional capacity development to sub-national units.
- Including in UNICEF country/territory planning for ELSR a more detailed institutional and organisational mapping of those involved in the sector, taking account of national, sub-national and field institutions and (where relevant) the private sector. Such mapping should inform a capacity development strategy for sustainable strengthening of system institutions that includes:
 - systems for career development (training, deployment, assessment, management and working conditions) of ELSR personnel and employment norms
 - systems for quality assurance (inspection) and field level support (supervision, mentoring or continuous professional development) around ELSR

- systems for identification and support for children with disabilities and families in difficult circumstances and, where relevant, for reaching other marginalised children
- pathways for organisational change for key institutions or units working on early childhood development and ELSR

Recommendation 9: It is recommended that UNICEF RO publish an open call for CVs of consultants with a wide range of expertise, including on system change and management, such as in finance, legislation, education decentralisation and public administration, and maintains a roster of specialised consultants who could be contacted by COs/RO. This would enable UNICEF to draw from a wider range of expertise and to maximise its chance of timely recruitment of experts in the range of areas required as the sector develops. Regional expertise in these areas can be identified and nurtured.

Indicative actions

RO	<p>Prepare guideline/framework for analysis of decentralised functions and capacities for early childhood development and ELSR, liaising with UN partners (e.g. UNDP).</p> <p>Lead on consolidating and learning lesson on possible support for decentralised functions.</p> <p>Develop options, scenarios and guidelines on professionalization of ELSR staff, improvement of working conditions and career development.</p> <p>Publish call for roster candidates, maintain roster and provide access to CVs to COs.</p> <p>Gather, collate and share with COs links of websites/lists for publication of calls accessible to the UN.</p>
COs	<p>Undertake situation analysis at decentralised levels for pre-school provision.</p> <p>Ensure shared understanding of roles (and of UNICEF’s expertise) of UN and other partners in decentralisation initiatives.</p> <p>Conduct studies on preschool teaching force: transition rates from university to preschools, recruitment pathways, salaries, status, working conditions and training needs.</p> <p>Share good CVs with RO.</p>

7.3 Knowing more

7.3.1 Framework for data collection in the early childhood education sector

Recommendation 10: It is recommended that UNICEF support the development of a stronger framework for data collection in ELSR through:

- Developing an extended technical document on the desirable data for the sector and COs working with national (and increasingly sub-national) agencies, to improve data on ELSR, addressing gaps including:
 - age specific enrolments in all ELSR institutions, including private sector
 - how much ELSR experience individual children are receiving
 - enrolment of children with different categories of special needs
 - paid and unpaid teachers and auxiliary staff
 - level of training on inclusive education received by staff
 - categorisation of types of ELSR provision (full-day care, sessional, care etc.) per type of provider/institution (including state, private and community-based)
 - children out of pre-primary and preschool provision

- UNICEF RO and COs taking opportunities to support the development of integrated information systems for children from preschool onwards, that take the individual child as the unit of data, not aggregated data at school/centre level.

Indicative actions

RO	Produce technical guidelines on improved indicators and data-sets. Learn and share lessons on use of child-centred data system. Learn and share lessons on comprehensive EMIS systems covering the preschool sector (public and private) and transition to primary.
COs	Map data users and sources in country/territory, opportunities and mechanisms for data sharing and consolidation and data protection safeguards.

7.3.2 Research and evaluations

Recommendation 11: It is recommended that UNICEF support and, if necessary, drive a research agenda on:

- understanding school readiness in the medium-term, its impact on children’s schooling and life chances and those aspects of ELSR that have the most impact on children’s subsequent lives and on the lives of their families
- children’s learning outcomes, including comparisons across different types of ELSR provision
- parental attitudes that inform demand side determinants around types of early childhood education provision and inclusive approaches
- issues pertaining to increasing equity and quality

To support such an agenda UNICEF should develop research partnerships with other agencies including NGOs and universities. The RO has a role to play in coordinating and commissioning such research and should also take responsibility for ensuring research is generalisable and comparable across the region.

Indicative actions

RO	Set a Regional research agenda, including for multi-country/territory research with common methodologies. Lead this work: commission research guidance etc. Share research results on key issues in easily accessible formats. Develop partnerships with universities.
COs	Specify and commission national research. Ensure evidence-based programming within UNICEF. Advocate for national evidence-based policy development.

7.4 UNICEF roles and organisation

7.4.1 Cross-sector coordination

Recommendation 12: It is recommended that UNICEF strengthens its cross-sectoral approach towards ELSR, both in terms of its own internal programming and organisation, and the linkages that it seeks to support at system levels. This should include:

- *Internally:* reviewing how it handles inter-sectorality at regional and national levels to avoid compartmentalising its own programmes and to ensure the adoption of a strategic joined-up approach to preschool, which covers education, health, safety nets and social benefits, social policy and child protection. By addressing preschool and ELSR cross-sectorally, UNICEF will be in a stronger position to advocate for and model change in this aspect in countries/territories.
- *Externally:* COs exploring how linkages across sectors can be supported with regard to issues of: (i) early identification and referral of disability, special needs and families in difficult socio-economic circumstances; (ii) identification and case management of out-of-pre-primary children (particularly where pre-primary is compulsory); (iii) benefits and other safety nets for the poorest and most marginalised families and young children at risk of poor outcomes; (iv) services to deal with emotional needs (and not just the physical needs) of children with disabilities or those left behind when their parents emigrate.

Recommendation 13: It is recommended that UNICEF promote comprehensive professional development for ELSR staff that in addition to “learning” also includes training in comprehensive assessments and minimum knowledge on health, development, child protection, parenting and socio-economic vulnerabilities.

Indicative actions

RO	Initiate consultation with all UNICEF sectors to identify possible strategic inter-sectoral programmes and interventions for ELSR and preschool. Identify financial and human resource gains in adopting a more cross-sectoral approach. Provide guidelines and examples of good practice to CO on how to increase cross sectoral programming within UNICEF.
COs	Conduct joined determinant analyses for ELSR and preschool with all sectors to draw priorities for cross-sector programming for ELSR. Develop core messages on cross sectoral approaches for ELSR for advocacy purposes. Maximise linkages between initiatives within and across sectors (e.g. OOSC, 0-3 and 3-6, etc.).

7.4.2 Strengthening core roles interventions

Recommendation 14: It is recommended that the UNICEF RO works with COs to strengthen the definition of core roles, identifying challenges and opportunities as well as good practices for each role. UNICEF could specify what constitutes good TA, good knowledge brokering etc. and what standards UNICEF should aim at when engaging in each core role.

Indicative actions

RO	Consolidate information from COs and develop guidance on quality and efficient core roles for ELSR.
COs	Provide RO with understanding of core role, good practices and key challenges. Reflecting on the efficiency of UNICEF’s core roles for ELSR and learning lessons to inform future practice.

7.4.3 Partnership building

Recommendation 15: It is recommended that UNICEF strengthens its partnership with the EU in accession candidate countries/territories so as to coordinate policy support with the accession agenda and align practice.

Indicative actions

RO	<p>Develop strategic partnership at regional level with the EU to ensure that both UNICEF and the EU can participate to each other's regional events on preschool and ELSR, learn lessons from good practices and different approaches and identify areas of complementarity and comparative advantage.</p> <p>Support COs from candidate countries/territories in developing priorities and programmes that will respond to EU pre-accession requirements and directly contribute to Europe 2020 priorities and targets for education and training.</p> <p>Draw and share lessons on policy documents from the EU and the OECD on early childhood.</p>
COs	<p>In candidate countries/territories, support governments to take concrete strategic steps towards the domestication and adaptation of the Europe 2020 agenda.</p> <p>Advocate for the prioritisation of ECD in IPA negotiations.</p> <p>Identify EU funding opportunities for ECD (IPA, Erasmus+ etc.).</p>

Volume 2 of this report contains the following annexes:

Annex 1: Terms of Reference

Annex 2: Evaluation framework

Annex 3: Methodology

Annex 4: List of stakeholders consulted

Annex 5: Fact sheets

Annex 6: List of documents consulted



Education *for* Change Ltd

17A Christopher Street

London EC2A 2BS

U.K.

www.efc.co.uk