



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

We aim to make sure that all children enjoy early learning opportunities.

Transforming early years

China is home to one in seven of the world's pre-school age children and, in recent years, the country has transformed its provision of early years services.

Access to quality activities and experiences in kindergartens for children aged 3–6 years influences how they become intellectually curious, socially confident and equipped with a solid foundation for lifelong learning. Investment in the early years helps children overcome disadvantage and break the cycle of poverty. It prepares them for the future.

Recent prioritization has resulted in an increase in the gross national enrolment rate in kindergarten from 45 per cent in 2007 to 79.6 per cent in 2017 with a target of reaching 85 per cent by 2020.

Yet, there is a need to focus on improving quality provision, targeting the most disadvantaged children especially in rural areas, and teacher training.

Our programme

UNICEF's early childhood development programme focuses on the 'whole child' – the physical, social, emotional, thinking and language progression of every child.

Through our close partnership with the Ministry of Education, we focus on improving the quality of early years development by testing models and approaches, particularly for kindergartens in rural areas and for urban poor and migrant children.

UNICEF supported pilot projects have helped to inform the development of guidelines, models and strategies which are being operationalized at scale to improve early years education for millions of children.

We work with the Ministry of Education and provincial and county education bureaus to gather evidence on the impact of Early Childhood Development centres.

UNICEF supports the Ministry to develop high quality teacher training models and strategies which are incorporated into the national training programme.

What works in early childhood development

UNICEF's pilot projects in 332 early childhood development centres demonstrate how quality services can be designed and delivered to cater to the needs of 3-6 year old children in rural areas, migrant and urban poor children, and ethnic minority children.

Our projects provide safe, healthy, non-discriminative and effective teaching and learning that are proven to best enable child development and learning. The learning from these pilots has resulted in resources created for national use including a set of child-friendly kindergarten curriculum guidebooks and a storybook-based school-readiness curriculum.

Through ongoing monitoring and evaluation, the pilot projects provide evidence to inform policy and advocacy, and, in cases where models have proven to be effective, adopted by the Ministry of Education to reach children at scale.

Raising awareness

UNICEF seeks to raise awareness, knowledge and skills among parents and caregivers. We work with the Ministry of Education on National *ECD Advocacy Month* dedicated to focusing attention and commitments on early years.

Unlocking early years potential

It is critical to improve the way parents and teachers are equipped to interact with young children. With practical information and training, parents and teachers are moving from rote learning to more creative ways to engage and stimulate children through play and interacting with nature, friends and adults.

As a key technical partner for the Ministry of Education, UNICEF has supported the development of high quality teacher training models and strategies for the national training programme. We are supporting the development of three national guidelines:

- Kindergarten quality assessment guidelines
- National Early Childhood Education supervision guidelines
- Kindergarten teachers' professional competency assessment tools.

Underpinning all this has been continued efforts to ensure that these guidelines are informed by proven international research and expertise.

Every dollar invested in quality early childhood development programmes for disadvantaged children from birth to five years can produce a 7–13 per cent return.

Garcia, J. L., Heckman, J. J., Leaf, D. E., & Prados, M. J. (2016). *The life-cycle benefits of an influential early childhood program* (NBER Working Paper No. 22993). Retrieved from National Bureau of Economic Research website: <http://www.nber.org/papers/w22993>

In 2017, through on-site support and workshops, approximately 2,300 teachers have improved skills and knowledge to provide quality early years education which benefited 56,118 children. The national Early Childhood Development expert team provided technical support to provincial and county level experts in five disadvantaged counties, serving 291 pilot child friendly kindergartens.

