

# GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

unicef   
for every child



© UNICEF/UN0642842/WW/11009

## A system-wide approach to tackling inequalities from the early years

### Key findings



---

- **Mainstreaming gender within pre-primary education is a priority in tackling gender-related inequalities from the early years.**
- **Such mainstreaming requires the commitment of a variety of stakeholders within the education system and beyond**, such as different units within education ministries, pre-service and in-service teacher training providers and teacher unions, other ministries, academia, and civil society organizations.
- **Advocacy for gender-transformative pre-primary education should centre on the five core components of quality pre-primary education systems:** planning and budgeting, curriculum development and implementation, workforce development, family and community engagement, and quality assurance.

## Context

Pre-primary education can have a transformative power over gender inequalities, tackling them and challenging common gender norms and stereotypes while they are being acquired by the youngest learners.<sup>1</sup> This policy brief aims to support education ministries to advocate with and engage partners within and outside the education sector on how pre-primary education can deliver on this potential. It presents key 'asks' or advocacy points to engage these partners, as well as enabling conditions to achieve them following a system-wide perspective.

## Key asks and advocacy points

Key 'asks'/Advocacy points	Enablers	Key partners to engage
<p><b>1.</b></p> <p><b>Mainstream gender within pre-primary education policy and programming.</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use <b>multiple sources of gender-disaggregated data</b>, to showcase gender differences in access and learning, highlight the need for gender-transformative systems, increase political buy-in and inform pre-primary education sector planning.<sup>2</sup> In addition to EMIS data, national census data, household surveys and administrative data from other sectors can provide information on the intersection of gender and other factors of disadvantage.</li> <li>Involve <b>donors, NGOs, private providers, families and communities</b> in gender-responsive and/or transformative programming to create a shared view of the system and increase ownership. Identify and enable champions among community leaders to pursue and promote gender-transformative approaches and strategies.</li> <li>Apply a <b>gender-responsive lens for pre-primary education budgeting</b> processes to restructure expenditures and redirect funding allocation to promote gender equality.<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ministry of Education, including Education Management Information System (EMIS) unit</li> <li>National Statistics Office</li> <li>Ministry of Finance</li> <li>Civil society organizations and development partners</li> <li>Private pre-primary education providers</li> <li>Pre-primary teachers</li> <li>Families and communities</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.</b></p> <p><b>Improve the working conditions and professionalization of the pre-primary education workforce.</b><sup>4</sup></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyse the <b>feasibility and availability of funds</b> for a progressive increase of teachers' salaries.</li> <li>Involve different <b>stakeholders within and beyond the education sector</b> to design and implement accredited training programmes for pre-primary education teachers according to their needs.</li> <li>Engage <b>teacher unions and organizations working for women labour participation</b> to advocate for continuous improvements in the working conditions of the highly feminized pre-primary education workforce.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ministry of Education, including Human Resources/Workforce Development Unit</li> <li>Ministry of Finance</li> <li>Ministry responsible for civil service/public service</li> <li>Pre-service and in-service teacher training providers</li> <li>Teacher unions</li> <li>Civil society organizations</li> </ul>

Key 'asks'/Advocacy points	Enablers	Key partners to engage
<p><b>3.</b></p> <p><b>Attract more men to teach in pre-primary education, as well as more women to other parts of the education system where they are under-represented.</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement <b>communication campaigns</b> to reinforce the importance of pre-primary education and build the case for male participation.<sup>5</sup></li> <li>• Engage <b>teacher unions and organizations from civil society</b> to advocate for gender-balanced recruitment processes in all levels of education.</li> <li>• Engage <b>secondary schools and pre-service teacher training institutions</b>, including <b>providers of career counselling</b>, to provide gender-transformative information and strategies for teaching career pathways.</li> <li>• Increase <b>research to understand the root causes of the under-representation of men in the pre-primary education workforce and of women in other education levels and/or streams</b> (e.g., science, technology, maths) to develop context-specific recruitment strategies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministry of Education</li> <li>• Pre-service teacher training providers</li> <li>• Career counselling institutions</li> <li>• Media</li> <li>• Teacher unions</li> <li>• Civil society organizations, community leaders</li> <li>• Universities/Research centres</li> </ul>
<p><b>4.</b></p> <p><b>Leverage pre-primary education as a platform to engage fathers and male caregivers in gender-transformative parenting.</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve <b>public and private pre-primary education providers</b> on developing gender-transformative strategies to engage male caregivers.</li> <li>• Engage <b>civil society organizations representing parents and caregivers and parent-teacher associations</b> to support fathers' and male caregivers' involvement in pre-primary education.</li> <li>• Implement <b>communication campaigns</b> on the importance of fathers' and male caregivers' role in early learning.<sup>6</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public and private pre-primary education providers</li> <li>• Media</li> <li>• Civil society organizations</li> <li>• Parent-teacher associations</li> </ul>
<p><b>5.</b></p> <p><b>Design a gender-transformative quality assurance system for pre-primary education.</b></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage a <b>wide spectrum of stakeholders</b> within the education system to develop <b>quality assurance standards</b> that are aligned to the aims of the curriculum, including gender-transformative principles.<sup>7</sup></li> <li>• Involve <b>gender experts</b> in the design of <b>quality assurance indicators and assessment tools</b> to monitor gender-responsive pedagogical practices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministry of Education</li> <li>• Quality Assurance Department</li> <li>• Curriculum Department</li> <li>• EMIS unit</li> <li>• Universities/Research centres</li> </ul>

These key 'asks' or advocacy points are aligned with the five core components of pre-primary education systems: planning and budgeting, curriculum development and implementation, workforce development, family and community engagement, and quality assurance. Following a system-wide perspective, the related enablers should be activated together to contribute towards the progressive mainstreaming of the gender perspective within pre-primary education systems.

Given the impact of pre-primary education in children's development, in tackling social inequalities and in providing a solid foundation for economic growth<sup>8</sup>, the establishment of a strong pre-primary education system should be a national interest. This implies a high level of participation and commitment of a variety of stakeholders within and beyond the education system to ensure the equitable provision of quality pre-primary education services.



## Further reading

*Tackling Gender Inequality from the Early Years: Strategies for building a gender-transformative pre-primary education system.* Nugroho, Anindita, Delgado, M., Baghdasaryan, B., Vindrola, S., Lata, D. and Mehmood Syed, G., UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, 2022.

## References

1. UNICEF, 'Gender Transformative Education. Reimagining education for a more just and inclusive world', UNICEF Education Section, Programme Division, 2021.
2. UNESCO, World Bank, UNICEF, GPE, *Education Sector Analysis Methodological Guidelines. Volume 2*, UNICEF, 2014.
3. Jorge Pescina, Ubaldo Colin, Lucia Fry, and Nora Fyles, 'Spending Better for Gender Equality in Education: How Can Financing Be Targeted to Improve Gender Equality in Education?', United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, New York, 2021a.
4. UNICEF, 'Technical guidance on pre-primary workforce development in low- and middle-income countries', UNICEF Education Section, Programme Division, 2019a.
5. Plan International, 'Promoting Men's Engagement in Early Childhood Development. A Programming and Influencing Package', Plan International, Surrey, 2021.
6. UNICEF, 'Annex 1. Tip Sheets on Gender-Responsive Parenting', UNICEF Gender Section, 2019b.
7. UNICEF, 'Defining, Monitoring and Improving Quality: Guidelines for Stronger Quality Assurance Systems in Early Childhood Education', UNICEF EFE Accelerator Toolkit, UNICEF Education Section, Programme Division, New York, 2019b.
8. UNICEF, 'Build to Last: A Framework in Support of Universal Quality Pre-Primary Education', UNICEF Education Section, Programme Division, 2020.

# For every child, a fair chance

### UNICEF INNOCENTI – GLOBAL OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND FORESIGHT

**UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight** tackles the questions of greatest importance for children, both current and emerging. It drives change through research and foresight on a wide range of child rights issues, sparking global discourse and actively engaging young people in its work.

UNICEF Innocenti equips thought leaders and decision-makers with the evidence they need to build a better, safer world for children. The office undertakes research on unresolved and emerging issues, using primary and secondary data that represents the voices of children and families themselves. It uses foresight to set the agenda for children, including horizon scanning, trends analysis and scenario development. The office produces a diverse and dynamic library of high-level reports, analyses and policy papers, and provides a platform for debate and advocacy on a wide range of child rights issues.

UNICEF Innocenti provides, for every child, answers to their most pressing concerns.

UNICEF Innocenti receives financial support from the Government of Italy, while funding for specific projects is also provided by other governments, international institutions and private sources, including UNICEF National Committees.

This work was supported by the Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange, a joint endeavor with the International Development Research Centre, Canada.

The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of UNICEF, or the IDRC or its Board of Governors.

Extracts from this publication may be freely reproduced with due acknowledgement. Requests to utilize larger portions or the full publication should be addressed to the Communications Unit at: [researchpublications@unicef.org](mailto:researchpublications@unicef.org)

For readers wishing to cite this document, we suggest the following form: *A system-wide approach to tackling inequalities from the early years*; UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, 2022.

Correspondence should be addressed to:

Divya Lata, Education Specialist  
– Early Childhood Education,  
UNICEF Programme Division,  
[dldata@unicef.org](mailto:dldata@unicef.org)

Bella Baghdasaryan, Education  
Researcher, UNICEF Innocenti,  
[bbaghdasaryan@unicef.org](mailto:bbaghdasaryan@unicef.org)

UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office  
of Research and Foresight  
Via degli Alfani, 58  
50121 Florence, Italy

[www.unicef-irc.org](http://www.unicef-irc.org)

@UNICEFINnocenti on Twitter,  
LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram  
and YouTube

© 2022 United Nations Children's  
Fund (UNICEF).

unicef   
for every child