REGIONAL REPORT FOR ARAB STATES

Education starts early

Progress, challenges and opportunities

Education 2030

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The Global Education 2030 Agenda

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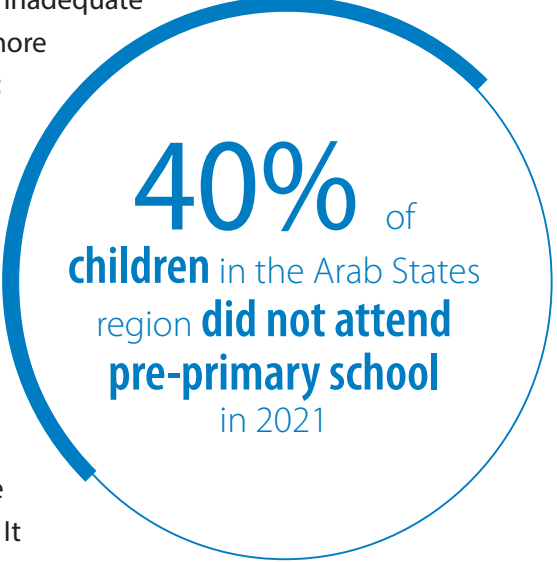Designed by Aurélia Mazoyer and Marie Moncet
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What early childhood care and education looks like in the Arab region

From civil wars to economic crises, the Arab region has faced significant challenges impacting early childhood care and education (ECCE) over the past decade. The Arab Spring and subsequent conflicts have disrupted learning systems and hindered access to quality ECCE programmes. The presence of refugees and internally displaced persons has strained public services. Challenges in the region include inadequate healthcare and a shortage of skilled workforce. In 2021, more than **40% of children in the Arab States region did not participate in any organized learning programme** before the official age of primary school entry.

Despite these challenges, some countries are championing ECCE. This report, one of several regional studies on ECCE, presents the overall context, as well as successful practices that deserve to be scaled up. It concludes with recommendations focused on inclusion, quality workforce, governance, policy, and partnerships. The study emphasizes the need to prioritize ECCE and reimagine learning to adapt to evolving needs. It also highlights the need make strategic investments, and support research efforts.

40% of **children** in the Arab States region **did not attend pre-primary school** in 2021

unesco

"Since wars begin in the minds of men and women it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed"

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Foreword

Early childhood education has the potential to expand life opportunities for all children especially the most disadvantaged. UNESCO has been a strong global supporter of comprehensive early childhood care and education (ECCE) for decades, recognizing its critical importance for human development. This has been emphasized again recently in the Transforming Education Summit and through the Save Our Future Campaign launched by UNESCO and partner organizations to protect and prioritize education as the key to recovery and the best investment for the future.

This report comes at a time where most Member States are at a crossroads. With the significant and complex socio-political changes witnessed across the Arab Region over the last decade, and the threat posed by conflicts and protracted crises, also in light of the impact of the pandemic on young children and their families, it is imperative to continue supporting the development efforts of Member States in a cohesive and comprehensive manner. In the last ten years, countries in the Arab region have achieved significant progress in making ECCE programmes more widely available. However, problems remain and the road to achieving SDG4.2 is stretched. This UNESCO report intends to serve as a reference and baseline document towards progress made between 2010 and 2022; it identifies the region's achievements, challenges, and innovations. The report draws lessons from case studies to highlight successful ECCE policies and programmes, with a special focus on policies, quality, learning recovery, service delivery, and financing.

I hope that the findings and the analysis will help governments resume and fast-track progress towards SDG 4.2, and help countries move towards an inclusive system of ECCE that offers every child the best chance to contribute to the inclusive and sustainable development of their community and society.

The way early childhood education is conceptualized and delivered is changing fast, and the transformation journey will be steep and full of challenges. Governments, donors, partners and the private sector will need to join efforts, to put existing strategies into practice, instituting or enhancing ECCE programmes, accelerating investment levels, and also to build more resilient, effective and inclusive early childhood systems throughout the region.

On behalf of the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States and the Field Offices in the region, we look forward to working closely with Member States and all relevant stakeholders to achieve Agenda 2030 together and put in place accountable ECCE systems and services.

Costanza Farina
Director of UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States

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Introduction

UNESCO defines early childhood care and education (ECCE), as the period from birth to 8 years old whereas pre-primary education offers a more structured learning format for the 3 to 5-year-old. Such distinction is required to cater for more complex competency development needs. A quality ECCE helps the child reach his/her full potential and can lay the foundation for good health and nutrition, learning and educational success, social-emotional learning, and economic productivity throughout life. ECCE presents a holistic approach regarding care (e.g. health, nutrition, hygiene, safety and security, responsive caregiving) and education (e.g. early stimulation, education, developmental activities) of young children from 0 to 8 years of age (UNESCO, 2021a). Additionally, a wealth of research from various fields such as developmental psychology, neuroscience, economics, social sciences, public health, and education, underscores the long-term benefits and importance of ECCE.

Ever since the Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), UNESCO has been committed to providing young children with quality learning opportunities. In later years, UNESCO has emphasized the inclusion of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, particularly during the early years. ECCE is now considered a social, human, and economic imperative. Global attention to the field of early childhood and the expansion of its services and programmes continues to grow. In its 2002 General Assembly Special Session on Children, the United Nations reaffirmed the importance of early childhood services in achieving basic education goals. This led to the launch of the Global Monitoring Report on ECCE in 2007 advocating for a holistic package encompassing care, health, nutrition and education for young children. A brief history of key commitments to advance ECCE over the years appears in Figure 1.

Figure 1. International commitments to ECCE over the years

Jomtien, Thailand — Salamanca, Spain — Dakar, Senegal — New York, USA — Moscow, Russian Federation

1990 — **1994** — **2000** — **2006** — **2010**

World Conference on Education for All (EFA) — World Conference on Special Needs Education — World Education Forum in Dakar — Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities — Moscow Framework for Action and Cooperation-Harnessing the Wealth of Nations

- Broaden the scope of basic education by recognizing that learning begins at birth.
- Prioritize ECCE as a foundation for later learning and development

- Inclusion to be part of ECCE programmes for children aged up to six years.
- Inclusion ought to be developed and/or reoriented to promote physical, intellectual and social development and school readiness.

Expand and improve comprehensive ECCE, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities

- Adopt a broad and holistic concept of ECCE as the provision of care, education. health, nutrition and protection of children from zero to eight years of age.
- Raised concern that EFA goal 1 is at great risk of not being achieved by 2015 unless urgent and resolute action was taken.
- Posited ECCE as a social, human and economic development imperative.

The goals that were set in the Dakar EFA framework were not all met by the 2015 deadline and thus to complete the unfinished agenda, continued action was needed. Beginning in 2012 and up to 2015, extensive consultations from various groups in education, government, interest groups and multilateral organizations took place. The purpose was to create a set of global goals as they relate to environmental, political and economic challenges that face the world. Figure 2 presents the progress in commitments to ECCE in the past decade.

Figure 2. Progress in commitments to ECCE in the past decade

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Muscat, Oman	Incheon, Rep. of Korea	New York, USA	New York, USA
2012	**2014**	**2015**	**2015**	**2016**
Conference on Sustainable Development	Global Education for All-UNESCO The Muscat Agreement	Incheon Declaration	UN Sustainable Development Summit	New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (Art. 82)
• Create a set of global goals as they relate to environmental, political and economic challenges that face the world.	Ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030.	Inclusion and equity in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda.	• UN Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. At its heart are the 17 (SDGs), with 169 targets to be achieved by 2030. • The 2030 Agenda marked the first global commitment to ECCE beyond the education community.	Called on UN Member States to support early childhood education for refugees.

The Education 2030 Framework for Action and the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 4.2 called for countries to provide access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education for all children. With SDGs, the world has set a more ambitious universal education agenda for the period from 2015 to 2030. Every effort must be made to guarantee that this time the goal and targets are achieved. The inclusion of Target 4.2 was spurred by a strong advocacy effort by early child development stakeholders, government ministers and researchers, and this reflected the strength of the science demonstrating the significance of early childhood for lifelong health and well-being (Black et al. 2017).
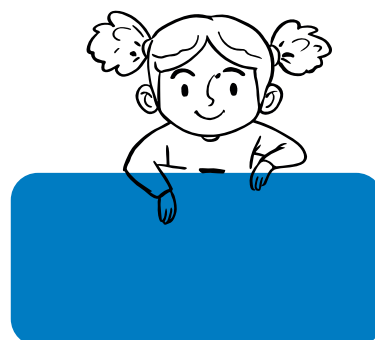
Figure 3. SDGs that relate to SDG 4

How the six SDGs connect to ECCE

SDG 1: Research on brain development and poverty alleviation demonstrates that ECCE is integral to achieving SDG 1, as it ensures children not only survive, but also thrive, thereby breaking the cycle of poverty.

SDG 2: Good nutrition enhances children's health and quality of life. It's important to address forms of malnutrition such as stunting, wasting, and even obesity, particularly in children under 5 years of age.

SDG 3: ECCE interventions early in life can set the children on a path to healthy well-being. Furthermore, providing fun, playful activities helps children social-emotional learning so they develop socio-emotional literacy, learning to manage feelings, to build relationships and to understand others' emotions.

SDG 5: At this level, learners develop the ability to play positively both with boys and girls, and learn about sharing and being kind to everybody. Boys and girls learn to value themselves and others.

SDG 10: Addressing and closing the inequality gap offers children a window of opportunity to a better equal start particularly the most vulnerable, disadvantaged and disabled.

SDG 17: Effective implementation and robust measurement of ECCE can stimulate global partnerships and collaboration, as per SDG 17, by encouraging the sharing of resources, knowledge, and best practices across borders.

The two UNESCO reports "Right from the start: build inclusive societies through inclusive early childhood education" (UNESCO, 2021b) and "Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education: From Commitment to Action!" (UNESCO 2021a) emphasized inclusive, quality ECCE for the most marginalized children. These two reports supported the core objectives by contributed in the framing of the Global Partnership Strategy (GPS) for Early Childhood 2021-2030, which UNESCO coordinated along with more than 40 organizations active in ECCE. The launching of the GPS was in response to a gap in services ranging from pre-primary education to health, nutrition, sanitation, and child protection worldwide.

As a result, UNESCO and the GPS for Early Childhood are urging governments to guarantee at least one year of free and compulsory pre-primary education. A free and compulsory one-year of universal quality pre-primary education is the minimum recommendation for all countries to implement SDG Target 4.2 (UNESCO, 2021c). The GPS for Early Childhood also included inclusion. One of its five "strategies for results" involves scaling up "access, inclusion, equity and quality" with four strategic priorities: access and engagement, tackling inequity and exclusion from services; childhood intervention services systems; early childhood workforce; and child development, early learning and quality service standards (UNESCO, 2022a).

As a reminder, the SDG 4 aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" and its target 4.2 draws attention to the importance of building on gains achieved during children's foundational years from birth to five/six through supporting parents and ensuring holistic ECCE.

The SDG 4-Education 2030 agenda focused on increased and expanded access, inclusion and equity, quality and learning outcomes at all levels, within a lifelong learning approach.

The definitions provided in the UNESCO Guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education (UNESCO, 2017, p.7) are as follows:

- Inclusion is a process that helps overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation and achievement of learners

- Equity is about ensuring fairness, where the education of all learners is seen as having equal importance

The concept of inclusion has recently broadened since the Salamanca conference in 1994. In addition to those with special needs, inclusion now encompasses those who are poor, have learning needs, are migrants, internally displaced, refugees, or remote rural dwellers, gender, ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities (UNESCO, 2020a, 2021b). When it comes to inclusion in ECCE, it shares the same holistic view as that of ECCE regarding care and education of young children from 0 to 8 years of age. This definition of inclusion stresses the importance of children's access to and participation in a variety of learning opportunities, activities, settings, and positive social interactions, regardless of children's characteristics or needs, while ensuring gender equality and recognizing the central role played by the family (UNESCO, 2021b).

As countries moved towards achieving SDGs, they were faced with a global crisis. The World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak initially as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020, and later a pandemic on 11 March 2020. This pandemic affected all segments of the population worldwide. It was much more than a health crisis. It was a human, economic and social crisis as it led to disruption in almost every productive sector in society with far-reaching changes in all aspects of lives.

Social distancing and restrictive movement policies have also significantly disturbed traditional educational practices and created a large disruption of education systems. Closures of schools, institutions and other learning spaces have affected more than 94% of the world's student population. This presented challenges and opportunities for the e-learning that replaced face-to-face learning. Challenges with e-learning included accessibility, affordability, flexibility, and learning pedagogy. Among the opportunities it may have provided is perhaps a stronger connection between teachers and parents than ever before. In addition, teachers had to develop creative initiatives that assisted them to overcome the limitations of virtual teaching.

COVID-19 was detrimental to members of those social groups in the most vulnerable situations, including people living in poverty situations, older persons,

and persons with disabilities, youth, and indigenous peoples with the least access to health, economic, and education services.

Another continuing and expanding crisis is the increase in the number of refugees. According to UNHCR, 89.3 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced at the end of 2021 because of persecution, conflict, violence, and human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order. The Ukraine-Russia war, which started in February 2022, is now "one of the fastest-growing refugee emergencies".

Scope of the report

This report presents, through qualitative and quantitative analysis, an overview of the status of ECCE in 19 Arab countries. It identifies progress, achievements, challenges and major constraints and concludes with recommendations for the concerned parties. It is based on four sources:

a. Data compiled through largely internet and desk-based research of technical and annual reports, published articles, countries' education and social affairs ministries data (whenever available), international reports of organizations engaged in early childhood and inclusive education, policy briefs, local NGOs and INGOs' reports, and country profiles. The literature review covers documents published in English and Arabic mainly between 2012 and 2021 mainly from UNESCO, INEE, the World Bank, and UNICEF, etc. The review includes resources from Arab countries and contexts (e.g. children with special needs, refugees and internally displaced persons and marginalized children). The report draws on over 250 relevant documents.

b. Responses of Arab governments to a survey questionnaire commissioned by UNESCO which addressed issues of access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance in the 19 countries. Only seven countries responded.

c. Feedback from two focus groups: actors and experts

d. Personal interviews with directors, teachers and school principals.

Specific years such as 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2022 are significant upon analysis since they represent defining moments be that in terms of rising conflicts, influx of refugees, greater commitments to ECCE with sustainable development goals, and COVID-19 pandemic that has changed the nature of work and learning, and back-to-school recovery. Furthermore, the past 10 years have also been marked by remarkable technological advances, with an increase in the number of mobile devices, and social media platforms. These advances are bound to be significant and integral when discussing issues of inclusion, digital learning and data platforms as they can transform education.

Chapter 1

Background, context, and regional characteristics

This chapter presents an overview of the situation of ECCE in the region in the last ten years. It also provides pertinent data to highlight the most important and historical background of the region in the past ten years.

The ECCE programmes that serve the age groups (0-8 years) range from nursery/day care, pre-school, kindergarten to early primary grades. These programmes vary not only by the characteristics of the child in each stage, but by purpose, pedagogical practices, and institutional sponsorship. Furthermore, programmes comprise a wide range of part-day, full-school-day, and full-work-day programmes under education, health, and social welfare auspices. These programmes are funded and delivered in a variety of ways in both formal and non-formal or informal settings and in both the public and private sectors. These differences are reinforced by policy, funding and administrative divisions within and between the sectors and at the state and local levels.

Regardless of the term used, the main and vital concern of any early childhood programme should be on an integrated holistic approach to child development that responds to the nurturing of social, emotional, health, nutrition and intellectual needs of the child. Thus, such programmes for children would focus on the early socialization, education and readiness for school, as well as, the provision of basic health care, adequate nutrition, nurturing and stimulation within a caring environment.

There is still huge variations in definitions of pre-primary terms not only between the countries but also within the different ECCE entities within the same country as follows:

Age bracket groups:

- Most of GCC countries use 4-6 years for kindergarten, 0-2 years for infants, 2-4 years for pre-schoolers, and 6-8 for grades 1 & 2.

- In Oman, KG1 children are 3.2 – 4.2 years old, and kindergarten 2 children are 4.2 – 5.2 years old.

- Qatar, and Bahrain, for example, use 1-2 years for infants, 2-3 years for toddlers, and 3-4 years for pre-schoolers.

Service programmes:

- Nurseries, day care, Early-learning centres, kindergartens, pre-schools, early childhood Centres. For example in UAE, Dubai uses "Early childhood centres" for programmes serving children from birth to 4 years while Sharjah and the northern Emirates use Nurseries for programmes serving children from birth to 4 years.

ECCE personnel:

- Teachers, caregivers, early childhood educator, facilitator, supervisor, leader, director, operator, and head teacher.

In the Arab region, not having a common definition within or across countries continues to cause some confusion among stakeholders especially when drawing policies and discussing action plans for implementation and identifying priorities for investment.

It is important to examine how the Arab region has addressed the situation of ECCE in the last ten years and whether the differences in the nature of these programmes for the specific age groups have been reinforced in the national policies, governance, and services. Factors outside the education system— political, economic, and social— formally and informally interact with the education system, shape its outcomes, and affect any progress made or action plans developed by countries.

1.1. Background

For the purpose of this report, when referring to "Arab Region" UNESCO includes 19 Arab countries which fall under the mandate of the UNESCO's Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States.

The Arab region comprises a heterogeneous society with diverse ethnic, social, and religious groupings. These countries vary by income level, income

distribution, geographic location, population size, urbanization level, life expectancy at birth, size of the youth, and political systems (Table A1).

The number of children 0-8 years of age determines the need for early childhood services. Table 1 reveals the wide variation in the extent of need among Arab countries. Whereas the need is highest in countries

that have high fertility (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Mauritania, Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, and Yemen), it is lowest in the GCC countries due to the high percentage of expatriate population that

have no children. The need for ECCE services among the national population in the GCC is definitely strong as their fertility is high, but available statistics do not reveal the population breakdown by nationality.

Table 1. Distribution of the 0-8 population in the Arab region by country: an estimate

Country	Total population (millions)	Population 0-3 (1000s)	Population 3-6 (1000s)	Population 6-8 (1000s)
1. Algeria	43.85	3040 (6.9%)	2978 (6.8%)	2788 (6.8%)
2. Bahrain	1.70	62 (3.6%)	69 (4.1%)	67 (3.9%)
3. Egypt	102.33	7402 (7.2%)	7921 (7.7%)	7436 (7.3%)
4. Iraq	40.22	3192 (7.9%)	3275 (8.1%)	3146 (7.8%)
5. Jordan	10.2	617 (6.0%)	669 (6.6%)	695 (6.8%)
6. Kuwait	4.27	169 (4.0%)	183 (4.3%)	192 (4.5%)
7. Lebanon	6.83	331 (4.8%)	353 (5.2%)	353 (5.2%)
8. Libya	6.87	364 (5.3%)	392 (5.7%)	398 (5.8%)
9. Mauritania	4.65	422 (9.1%)	399 (8.6%)	371 (8.0%)
10. Morocco	36.91	1942 (5.3%)	2081 (5.6%)	2063 (5.6%)
11. Oman	5.11	283 5.5%)	252 (4.9%)	227 (4.4%)
12. Palestine	5.10	413 (8.1%)	419 (8.2%)	404 (7.9%)
13. Qatar	2.88	80 (2.8%)	84 (2.9%)	81 (2.8%)
14. Saudi Arabia	34.81	1759 (5.1%)	1829 (5.3%)	1792 (5.1%))
15. Sudan	43.85	3878 (8.8%)	3658 (8.3%)	3472 (7.9%)
16. Syria	17.50	1203 (6.9%)	1061 (6.1%)	1026 (5.9%)
17. Tunisia	11.82	583 (4.9%)	633 (5.4%)	611 (5.2%)
18. UAE	9.89	292 (3.0%)	312 (3.2%)	308 (3.1%)
19. Yemen	29.83	2477 (8.3%)	2446 (8.3%)	2353 (7.9%)

Note: For each country, a percentage equals the number in an age group divided by the total population x 100, as computed by the author.

Data source: United Nations, Population Division, Department of Social and Economic affairs, World Population Prospects 2022, Standard Projections, Annual and single age data. https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Interpolated/, accessed August, 2022 (Available under CC BY 3.0 IGO).

The Arab region is among the regions with the largest disparities in terms of per capita income. The income level of the Arab countries ranges from low income to high income. About half of the Arab countries are oil-exporting countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates-UAE, Iraq, Libya, Algeria) where oil is a major source of government revenue. Some of the richest (GCC countries) and some of the poorest countries in the

world (Yemen, Sudan, and more recently Syria) are found in the region (Table 2). Since 2015–17, the number of people affected by hunger in the Arab Region continues to rise. The 2019 estimates show that before the COVID–19 pandemic 51.4 million people or 12.2% of the population were hungry – an increase of 1.1 million people from the previous period (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, WHO and ESCWA. 2021).

Table 2. Distribution of Arab countries by income level 2021

Income Level	GNI (the gross national income), converted to US dollars per capita	Countries
High income	More than 13,205 US dollars	Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates
Upper middle income	Between 4,256 and 13,205 US dollars	Jordan, Iraq, Libya,
Lower middle income	1,086- 4,255 US dollars	Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, and *Lebanon
Low income	Less than 1,085 US dollars	Yemen, Sudan, Syria

Note: After Being an Upper-Middle Income Country for 25 years, Lebanon is now a Lower-Middle Income Country with a GNI Per-Capita of $3,450 in 2021.

Data source: New World Bank country classifications by income level: 2022-2023. July, 2022. https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/new-world-bank-country-classifications-income-level-2022-2023. Available under CC BY 4.0. Accessed August, 2022.

Using national poverty lines, the proportion of the poor is 5.5% in Algeria, 14.4% in Jordan, around 27% in Egypt and Lebanon, and over 40 per cent in some least developed countries, reaching 46.5% in the Sudan and 48.6% in Yemen before the current conflict there (UNESCWA, 2020).

The Arab countries also span two continents: Asia and Africa. They can be grouped according to their geographical location:

- **GCC countries:** Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and UAE.
- **Levant or Mashreq:** Jordan, Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria
- **Northern Africa:** Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia.
- **Least developed:** Mauritania, Sudan and Yemen

Such a grouping would further emphasize the disparity and the gaps among countries of the "Arab region".

The GCC countries have enjoyed a rather stable general political situation despite continuous tensions with Iran (Islamic Republic of), the conflict in Yemen with Saudi, the wave of protests in Bahrain, the global decline in oil prices since 2014, the Qatar blockade, and the social and public health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the past decade, the GCC countries began to transform their oil-dependent economic systems and diversify their GDPs to achieve sustainable economic growth. Some worked on a knowledge-based economy where they invested in their human capital, diversified their economies away from oil, and became more competitive regionally and globally. They diversified their economy to include tourism, commerce, finance, renewable energy and telecommunications. For example, Saudi Vision 2030 launched in 2016 introduced the kingdom's long-term goals for diversifying the economy and reducing dependence on oil. This transformation of the economy led to rapid development in all sectors, including health and education.

Furthermore, social changes have shaped the social structures of almost all the GCC countries in the last 10 years. There was a rise of individual family income particularly in the middle and upper classes, the growing trend of locals working especially women entering the force, women driving in KSA and the change in the family dynamic moving from extended family to more nuclear family. They all have affected

childhood education policy and opportunities because children are more likely to be placed in childcare and education programmes or pre-school centres. Consequently, the need for early childhood care and education programmes increased and all of GCC countries began investing heavily in expanding early childhood so all students can enter school ready to succeed (Gahwaji, 2013).

Many of the GCC countries began education reforms and switched from Arabic to English as a language of instruction, not only at university level but also at pre-university level. This instigated an influx of foreign workers, creating a unique mixture of nationalities and cultures. The GCCs' labor market became highly dependent on migrant workers. Currently, UAE nationals comprise less than 12% of the population. However, English-speaking recruits, largely from high-income countries, who are hired under much more favourable terms, were replacing expatriate Arab, mostly Egyptian and Jordanian teachers. This affected the remittances that these expatriate Arabs sent home.

By 2015, All GCC countries have adopted SDGs and have launched their national visions encompassing different pillars and long-term development in the education field along with ECD national strategies & agendas, and strategic priorities. All GCC countries have undertaken enormous efforts to meet the ambitious target of 4.2 and started to invest in three areas: 1) strengthening the policy environment for early childhood development in the country, (2) improving the coverage and scope of programmes and (3) establishing a comprehensive quality assurance system for continuous quality improvement of early childhood development services.

All GCC countries without exception drew national visions 2030 Childhood education integrated in its pillars. UAE, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain developed national strategies for early childhood education for ages 0 to 8. The UAE went further and the latest early childhood vision national strategy includes children from birth to 10 years old (Table A9).

Conflict and war drained some Levant countries as they were building their economies and their infrastructure. For example, Jordan and Lebanon have endured several waves of refugees in different periods in history. Beginning in 1947 and 1967 these countries witnessed an influx of Palestinian refugees. The Gulf war in the 1990s and the war in Iraq in 2003 forced a

large number of Iraqis to seek refuge mainly in Jordan (Al-Hassan, 2018) and to a lesser extent Lebanon. In 2011, the Syrian Conflict forced many Syrians to leave the country and settle in neighbouring countries like Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Turkey. It also forced Palestinian refugees from Syria to resettle in those host countries as well and in Egypt. The same can be said about the countries in Northern Africa where civil war in Libya forced many to flee to neighbouring countries like Tunisia and the conflict between Sudan and South Sudan led to more internally displaced people.

1.2. Contextual issues and regional characteristics affecting ECCE

Political instability and protracted crises in the region

The past decade has witnessed the "Arab Spring" which had caused seismic changes in the Arab region. This created new geopolitical dynamics, regional instability, civil wars, violent extremism, and political turmoil. These changes posed an enormous challenge with a negative impact on national development plans, the economy and more notably the education sector.

In 2011, and starting with Tunisia, a wave of protests began and in different variations, ranging from demands for reforms, to public protests and even violent confrontations with the regimes. This wave of the Arab Spring gained more momentum especially in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. In Yemen, the uprisings that began in 2011 saw a military escalation in 2014, which turned into a full-blown war in 2015. Since then, the country is partially controlled by an Internationally Recognised Government and by De Facto Authorities; public institutions that provide healthcare, water, sanitation and education also collapsed. Since 2015, Saudi military operations began in Yemen. In Libya, there was military instability and a civil war that intensified in 2014. Sudan had its share of political instability and increased tensions between Sudan and South Sudan, which affected social and economic development prospects in the country.

On October 17, 2019, the people took to the streets across Lebanon calling for the downfall of the entire political and economic power structure. The protests came to a halt in March 2020 with the spread of COVID-19 and the lockdown the country had to enforce. The lockdown forced anti-government protesters off the streets, yet made the economic crisis much worse and exposed the inadequacies of Lebanon's social welfare system. Lebanon headed towards economic and social turmoil, probably the third worse economic crisis worldwide in 150 years (World Bank, 2021a). Furthermore, there has been sharp deterioration in basic public services such as education, sanitation, water, electricity and fuel, which would have long-term implications: mass migration, loss of learning, poor health outcomes, and lack of adequate safety nets, among others. On August 4, 2020, an massive explosion occurred at the Port of Beirut in Lebanon. It tore up the city, destroyed residential areas, hospitals and schools, damaging the fabric of the city and changing the lives of its citizens. According to UNESCO, at least 280 schools were damaged in the explosion affecting over 85,000 students.

The sharp devaluation of the Lebanese pound continues its downfall with triple-digit inflation rates since mid-2020. This has led to massive losses in purchasing power, pushed millions into poverty, and prevented a large number of children from attending school. These crises are devastating the livelihoods and well-being of the most vulnerable. All these factors have led downgrading Lebanon from an upper-middle income to a lower-middle income economy according to the World Bank.

Since the beginning of the Syria crisis in 2011, major cities were destroyed, forcing millions of Syrians out of their homes thereby causing the largest major refugee crisis in the Arab region. According to UNHCR as of 2022, there are 6.2 million internally displaced persons, 2.5 millions of those are children, and there are 5.6 million refugees. The influx of the Syrian refugees increased Lebanon's population by more than 25%, Jordan's population by 10%, and the population of border areas of Turkey by 10–20%. In Syria, displacement, destruction of facilities due conflict, and a deteriorating economic situation have put the education system under stress, resulting in an important learning loss. The presence of the refugees has placed significant demands on overstretched public service sectors and has caused tensions in countries that face their own development and stability challenges. It has caused crowding in schools and hospitals; rents have risen in poorer areas; and there are downward pressures on wages or worsening unemployment in economies that already have high unemployment. Public sectors lack needed resources, and educational, health, and other services cannot keep pace. In communities that are

most affected by a significant refugee presence, direct tensions can arise between host country nationals and Syrians, causing concerns for security and social cohesion (Culbertson and Constant, 2015).

In countries like Jordan, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Libya and Sudan, schools were used as shelters for the displaced or as storage areas in war zones. This affected the quality of the education facilities and rendered them unusable when the conflict ended. Lack of access to education left entire generations traumatized, uneducated and unprepared to contribute to the social and economic recovery of their country or region. Refugee children are at a higher risk of high mortality, malnutrition, and limited or no access to education services.

The countries that were directly affected by the political instability and conflict had to face poverty, health, nutrition, and social factors that hampered the development and reform of ECCE programmes as these countries had to readjust their priorities. Provisions for early childhood or education reform took a backseat.

Population movements in the Arab region

The Arab Region is unique in that it hosts both migrants, refugees and Internally Displaced People -IDPs. At the end of 2018, 32% of refugees globally lived in Arab States and 38% of the global population of people internally displaced by conflict (UNESCO, 2019). Table 3 provides details about the types of population movement in the Arab region. The 2019 UNESCO report provided analyses on the impact of these population movements on education systems in the region. Arab countries host the largest proportion of migrant workers globally. They make up 41% of total employment especially in GCC countries. The report also states that migrant workers across the region are socially, economically and politically marginalized (UNESCWA, 2020). These workers often face restrictions on mobility and lack social protection and recourse to representative mechanisms to advocate for their human rights. As for refugees and the internally displaced, they struggle to access basic services such as education and health. Thus, making them more vulnerable over time, with their poverty likely to transfer from one generation to the next. Stateless people in Kuwait like Bidoon and other Gulf countries lack access to public education.

Table 3. Types of population movement in the Arab region

Types of population movement	How it is in the Arab region?
Migrants	■ GCC countries have the highest immigration rates in the world. In Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, immigrants are the majority both in the overall and in the student population. ■ Most students enrolled in private schools in GCC countries are non-nationals. They make up 73% of private school students in Kuwait, 81% in Qatar and 83% in the United Arab Emirates. ■ In Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, at least one out of two secondary school students is a first- or second-generation immigrant ■ Sub-Saharan African migrants increasingly settle in Northern Africa. In Morocco, the government is developing policies and a framework to guide their integration into the education system. ■ An estimated 53,000 school-age refugee and migrant children in Libya needed support for education access. ■ Above the global average of 3.4%, notably in Lebanon (12%) but also in the Maghreb countries of Algeria, Tunisia and especially Morocco (8%) ■ Lebanon and Morocco have the largest highly skilled emigration rates, about one in four.
Internal migrants	■ Rural to urban migration like in Egypt, Iraq
Refugees	■ At the end of 2018, there were 25.9 million refugees, of whom 5.5 million were Palestinian. The Syrian Arab Republic (6.7 million) was the country from which the largest number of people had fled, while Sudan (0.7 million) was also in the top 10. ■ Jordan and Lebanon adopted double-shift systems. ■ Sahrawi refugees in Algeria have a separate education system and curriculum in Arabic and Spanish. While all children attend basic education
Internally Displaced People (IDP) are forced to move within their country, remaining under the protection of their government.	■ Syria has by far the highest percentage of internally displaced people (IDPs) as a share of the population (36%) more than 6 million IDPs, of which 52% are children and 86% live in urban areas, Yemen (8%) and Iraq, Palestine and Sudan (each about 5%) are among the top 12 countries on this list. ■ In Iraq, there are 1.6 million IDPs. ■ In Yemen, there are 2.3 million IDPs. The presence of two ministries, one ruled by the Houthis in Sana'a and another ruled by the internationally recognized government in Aden, poses a challenge for humanitarian actors.

Source: UNESCO (2019a).

According to a UN (July ,2020) policy brief, countries like Sudan, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Egypt, Yemen and Lebanon are hosting a large number of refugees. Of these countries, Jordan has hosted 32% of the refugees in 2019. In 2019, countries like Yemen, Sudan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria hosted IDPs of which Syria had 42% of them followed by Yemen which accounted for 14%. These host countries for both refugees and IDP face continuous pressure on their education and health systems as well as labor markets and creating social tensions at times. Refugees continue to struggle in order to secure their livelihoods.The struggle is compounded by the lack of social protection networks and dwindling humanitarian aid.

According to Karasapan (2022) a decade since the Syrian refugee crisis, Jordan's latest census counted 1.3 million Syrians, while Lebanon claims 1.5 million. Around 80% of Jordan's Syrian refugees fall below the poverty line, and 60% of families are in extreme poverty. These numbers have increased due to the pandemic. Schooling has also been challenging. In 2020, there were 145,000 Syrian refugees in Jordanian schools, most in double-shift schools. In 2017, over 40% of enrolled children were out of school. There has been an increasingly lower enrolment rate. The culprits are poverty, lack of appropriate transportation, poor educational quality, low value of continuing education given Syrians' limited employment opportunities, language of the curriculum, administrative enrolment barriers, and lack of accommodations for disabled children.

Lebanon, with a total population of approximately 6 million, has the highest number of refugees per capita, holding Palestinian and Iraqi refugees as well; it is the host for an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees (Fahed, 2020). In Lebanon, the government developed the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, a multisector plan outlining a targeted response to the refugee crisis and the associated costs. Updated annually since 2015, it includes strategic objectives related to Syrian refugee education that are expanded upon in Lebanon's guiding policy framework for refugee education: Reaching All Children with Education (RACE). RACE I ran between 2014 and 2017; RACE II is to run

until 2021. The framework aims to improve the public education system through teacher education, school governance, community engagement, and technical and managerial capacity development.

Women's economic contribution

Women and girls in the region continue to be marginalized across social, political and economic arenas. As the economy stagnates, unemployment rates increase and there are less and less opportunities for women to contribute to the economy. With poverty and inequality on the rise, females tend to suffer more and become more vulnerable. Young girls who are refugees become a child marriage project.

The region had registered the lowest levels of economic participation rates for women. However, women have made "huge gains" in the last decade or so in obtaining secondary and tertiary education where they outnumber male students. Fertility rates have also gone down rapidly across the region in the 21st century (Assaad et al., 2018). Girls seem to outperform the boys academically in the oil-rich nations of the Gulf, as well as in Jordan and Palestine. In Saudi Arabia, women do better than men in science and math. However, this outperformance of girls in education does not translate into jobs. Yemen has the lowest rate of working women of all, followed by Syria, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Lebanon, Egypt, Oman, Tunisia, Mauritania (Assaad et al., 2018). There are social, legal, economic and cultural barriers.

It is worth noting that Saudi Arabia has witnessed a steady increase in the female participation in the labor force from 21% in 2015 to 31% in 2021 (Table 4). Saudi Vision 2030 have played a role since one of its goals was to increase the participation rate of women in the workforce to more than 30%. This also came at a time when there were changes to the guardianship law, labor law and family law, as well as allowing women to drive which all made it easier for women to work. On the other hand, Egypt has seen a drop in women's participation rate from 23% in 2015 to 15 % in 2021.

Table 4. Female labor force participation rate, (% of female population ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate)

Country	% of female population ages 15+ labor force participation	
	Year 2015	Year 2021
1. Algeria	16	16
2. Bahrain	44	42
3. Egypt	23	15
4. Iraq	14	11
5. Jordan	17	13
6. Kuwait	50	47
7. Lebanon	21	21
8. Libya	34	34
9. Mauritania	28	27
10. Morocco	25	22
11. Oman	29	29
12. Palestine	18	17
13. Qatar	58	57
14. Saudi Arabia	21	31
15. Sudan	29	29
16. Syria	16	16
17. Tunisia	26	25
18. UAE	49	47
19. Yemen	6	6

Modeled International Labour Organization (ILO) estimate- ILOSTAT database. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT. FE.ZS?end=2021&locations=1A&most_recent_year_desc=true&start=2015https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT. FE.ZS?end=2021&locations=1A&most_recent_year_desc=true&start=2015, accessed August, 2022.

Source: Adapted from the World Bank Group, Labor force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate) - Arab World (2015) 22% 7 (2021) is 20% https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS?locations=1A, accessed August, 2022 (Available under CC BY 4.0)

1.3. ECCE situation in the past ten years

Ensuring early universal access to education is the foundation for inclusion in the lifelong journey to learning and in accessing decent living conditions. The absence of early childhood education can lock children into deprivation and marginalization. Numerous benefits for children attending quality early education are transmitted from one generation to the next with positive impacts on society as a whole. Yet, too many young children are missing out. If we want them to reach their full potential, we have to get it right from the start.

Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO

ECCE in the Arab region has faced many challenges including access especially to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, quality of ECCE programmes, and lack of skilled and qualified workforce (Faour and Suwaigh, 2010). Access and enrolment in ECCE, particularly for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, also remains low at 25%. The Arab region is the only developing region that has been showing an increase in poverty and hunger since 1990. Extreme poverty has increased and the rate of reducing undernourishment

is below the target by 20%. With regard to the health sector, despite some achievements, significant challenges persist resulting in insufficient access to quality health care services (UNESCO, 2016). There is also a pressing need to improve the quality of teacher education, and provide more better trained teachers, as well as the need to support schools in attracting qualified teachers. The Arab region has been struggling to supply enough skilled teachers, and countries will need to introduce an estimated half a million new teaching positions to keep up with demand (Demirjian, 2015).

Over the past ten years, some countries have shown progress in addressing ECCE issues:

- All six GCC countries ratified their early childhood laws, policies and regulation and transferred the jurisdiction to one ministry mainly the ministry of education. Some improved their practices by establishing a multi-sectoral body to coordinate the development of a comprehensive ECD strategy such as the Federal Authority for Early Education FAEE, the supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood in UAE, and the National Committee

for Childhood in Bahrain. Others established education councils, national centres for educational development such as Kuwait and Qatar. However, with the exception of UAE, not all GCC countries have developed an explicit multi- sectoral policy for early childhood development encompassing all essential sectors of education, health, nutrition, and child social protection. They have developed a policy for each sector separately such as education policy, health policy, nutrition policy, protection policy etc.

■ In **Bahrain** the public education system in Bahrain does not provide a universal free comprehensive early childhood and pre-school programme for children less than six years of age. In contrast, the only types of pre-school education programmes currently available for parents and their children under six are either independent nurseries and kindergartens or those that are embedded as part of private schools (Al Khalifa, 2021). Enrolment in pre-school is influenced largely by parents' socioeconomic status in the kingdom of Bahrain particularly because pre-school education is not compulsory in this country (Fateel et al., 2021). When compared to the neighbouring Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) in terms of early childhood education and care coverage to children aged four and five, Bahrain barely surpasses the GCC average. Currently only 52% of children attend early childhood education programmes and kindergartens in comparison to a staggering 85% in UAE and 77% in Kuwait. One of the main factors that contributed to the low ECEC coverage in Bahrain is the fact that there is no public free form of early childhood education programmes or kindergartens available to parents. As a result, most parents kept their children at home and then only enrolled them at the age of six into a public primary school (Ministry of Education, 2011).

■ **Oman** has encouraged ECCE expansion through private-sector programmes and more recently, in the public sector. Children of low-income families, especially in rural areas, still lack access to adequate ECCE services. The majority of pre-primary enrolment takes place in urban areas. For example, a 2012 study showed 94 nursery centres in the Sultanate of Oman (including for non-Omani children). Of these, 50 centres were in Muscat. Whilst the number of private kindergartens is

increasing at a fast pace across Oman, including several in rural areas, lower income families are not able to access their services, as these private kindergartens are fee-based (UNICEF, 2010). The 2010 census found the prevalence of disability amongst children below the age of 15 to be around 1%, representing some 7,400 children. Oman has a range of specialized and mainstream services for children with disabilities. The majority of children with disabilities have access to health, education and care services (UNICEF, 2010).

■ In **Kuwait** despite government schooling being readily available, many Kuwaitis choose not to send their children there, and instead enrol them in private schools. Pre-school education in Kuwait is not compulsory but free for all Kuwaiti citizens. Kindergartens strive to provide the appropriate conditions for the development of the child physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually and socially, in accordance with the child's abilities and needs (UNESCO, 2010/11). The early childhood curriculum is based on the scheme and philosophies of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), which gives children more freedom in the classroom (Noor, 2019).

■ **Jordan** has been one of the leading Arab countries on multiple indicators of early childhood development (ECD) as revealed by a regional comparison conducted by the World Bank (El-Kogali and Krafft 2015). These indicators included infant mortality, prenatal care, child immunization rates, trained nursing or delivery attendants, and three- to four-year-old children's involvement in development activities. However, in spite of these positive indicators and Jordan's increasing interest in ECCE, progress in this field has been slow. Enrolment in kindergarten level 2 (KG2) increased from 47% in 2000 to 60% in 2015, whereas enrolment in kindergarten level 1 (KG1) was 18% and in nurseries was 3% (Fink et al. 2017; Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation 2016). Children from birth to 4 years old can join nurseries, which are not mandatory. The Ministry of Education (MoE) oversees kindergarten, basic and secondary education stages, while nurseries fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD). According to the last census, 91.4% of children ages 5-16 are enrolled in primary school in Jordan (Department of Statistics Jordan, 2016).

The Directorate of Early Childhood was established and the Early Childhood Policy Framework was developed to provide policy options for the expansion of kindergartens and improve the quality of education and services. Concerning children with disabilities in particular, a Policy Framework for Special Education was developed and approved, related teacher training materials were developed, and teachers were trained. In the academic year 2015/2016, 19,650 children with disabilities were enrolled in special education programmes. The five-year Early Grade Reading and Maths Programme Initiative was launched in 2015, with the aim of improving the learning outcomes for reading in Arabic and maths in grades Kindergarten-3 (Al-Hassan, 2018).

■ In **Lebanon** in 2021, the Ministry of Education and Higer Education developed the Five-Year General Education Plan for Lebanon (5YP) with specialized expertise from UNESCO Beirut Office as an integral part of UNESCO's flagship initiative Li Beirut. The MEHE 5-Year Plan for Education aims to ensure that the most vulnerable children have access to inclusive and quality learning, to build the skills they need for a life full of potential. The Plan tackles a range of early childhood vulnerabilities that influence their ability to access education. UNESCO will provide technical assistance expertise and specialized support for the actual implementation of several key components of the 5YP with focus on access, quality and governance.

It is worth noting that unpredictable challenges, namely the influx of refugees from neighbouring countries, have influenced the reform programmes and the achievement of their targeted indicators and the desired improvement of education quality. In 2014, the Lebanese government made provisions for making ECCE opportunities available to refugees who cannot be accommodated in the public system through community-based programmes. In 2017 in Lebanon, under the Reaching All Children with Education (RACE) initiative, up to 470,000 Lebanese and non-Lebanese children, mostly Syrian refugees, were reached every year with access to formal education through support from the international community mainly the European Union and Germany along with other donors.

1.4. Commitment to the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities - CRPD

In the past decade, the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya have been the contributors to the marked increase in disabilities in those countries. Arab countries are increasingly committed to the social inclusion of persons with disabilities, not only as part of the 2030 Agenda, but also as signatories to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).

Although the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was issued in 2006, Arab countries varied in their formal confirmation, accession and ratification. Article 24 specifically recognizes "the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning". Moreover, within the article is the emphasis that persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system based on disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, because of disability.

Over the past ten years, there were major influences that contributed or hindered the development of early childhood policies and programmes. The major contributing influences reported had to do with political mobilization, having national committees that coordinated the multi-sectoral nature (Table 5).

Table 5. Reported factors and influences that contributed to the development of early childhood education policy and programmes

Country	The driving factor	Impact on the implementation of ECCE
Iraq	▪ Revision of ECCE curriculum to meet international standards	▪ Increase in pre-school enrolment
Jordan	▪ Increasing the rate of enrolment of children in pre-school	▪ Increased the enrolment rate from one year to another
Palestine	▪ Early childhood strategy in 2017 ▪ Adoption of a national committee to coordinate the work among the three ministries	▪ Planning and implementing the goals among the three ministries in a coordinated manner, since the Ministry of Health, Social Development and Education are the ministries that provide services to the childhood sector
	▪ Creating a framework for the kindergarten curriculum 2017	▪ Determine the child's competencies after graduating from kindergarten, and also identify the characteristics and competencies of the kindergarten teacher
	▪ Creating a guide for kindergarten teachers	▪ Created a guide for the kindergarten teacher, and specified the topics that will be presented and how to work with the children so that the framework governing the work within the kindergarten was defined in terms of goals and outputs
	▪ Opening of preparatory classes in public schools	▪ From the beginning of 2012, preparatory classes were started in government schools for basic education grades to provide a free seat for every child in poor or marginalized areas and families with limited income
	▪ Opening training centres for public and private kindergarten teachers	▪ Since 2003, four training centres have been opened in different regions and a model kindergarten is attached to it to apply training in it to raise the capabilities of teachers and rehabilitate them to be able to work in kindergartens
	▪ Creating training materials for governmental and private kindergarten teachers on topics related to children	▪ Designed training materials for teachers and created training materials related to educating parents about the importance of kindergarten. The Parent Education Curriculum was prepared in partnership with UNICEF
	▪ Forming a committee of institutions supporting kindergartens in order to consult with the ministry on policies, plans and implementation	▪ An active committee of external and local supporting partners was formed in order to raise funds for the implementation of the various activities of the kindergarten sector, as well as participating in the planning and implementation of some activities
Syria	▪ Creation of the Regional Center for Early Childhood Development	▪ Networking, coordination and building effective partnerships with government institutions concerned with early childhood and local civil institutions, and all those who wish to work in the field of early childhood to raise the importance of this stage ▪ Training and developing the performance of all parties to the educational process and improving its educational outputs with the aim of Improving ECCE and striving to create a world worthy of every child
	▪ Preparing the national strategy for early childhood development in Syria	▪ All children in Syria, without any discrimination, will have the appropriate conditions and environment to develop their abilities and empower them in their families, learn and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills in kindergarten and school, prepare them health-wise and psychologically for success in education and life, and raise them behaviourally and morally to contribute to building a distinguished society.
	▪ Issuance of Legislative Law No. / 21 / of 2021 AD (Child Rights Law)	▪ Strengthen the role of the state in taking care of children
	▪ National Day to encourage reading on 12/26 of every year	▪ Encourage the local community and all governmental and private agencies to appreciate the importance of reading in the life of the child
Tunisia	▪ Advocacy and political mobilization ▪ Support for technical and financial partners ▪ Develop a comprehensive policy in early childhood ▪ High social demand, support for women's employment and encouragement of private initiative	▪ All were very effective

Country	The driving factor	Impact on the implementation of ECCE
Yemen	■ Reported no factors because of ongoing war and conflicts	

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).[1]

Just as there were contributing factors to improvement of policies for ECCE, there were reported challenges and obstacles that have hindered ECCE development. These obstacles had to do with infrastructure, low investment in ECCE, evaluation mechanisms, lack of research to inform policy-makers, and lack of data (Table 6).

Table 6. Major reported obstacles or challenges hindering the development of ECCE

Country	Main challenge or obstacle	Impact on the Application of Early Childhood Education
Iraq	■ Crises and emergencies ■ Small number of ECCE programmes and projects ■ Weak support from INGOs	■ Not ascertained
Jordan	■ Denying admission to students with moderate disabilities	■ Discrimination, disrespect and inequality in schools.
	■ Lack of early intervention services in the public sector	■ Increase in the cost of early intervention.
	■ Weak financial support	■ Limits the expansion of kindergarten programmes
Palestine	■ Lack of budgets allocated to the childhood sector in Palestine	■ Planning for the development of this sector and the implementation of activities and allocation of sufficient and stable budgets in order to implement what has been planned.
Syria	■ Lack of studies carried out at the level of Palestine that examine issues related to the childhood sector in Palestine.	■ The lack of studies that highlight issues and the pros and cons of the sector are difficult to monitor and develop plans.
	■ Lack of data that talks about the situation of childhood in Palestine	■ The development of any sector requires comprehensive and detailed data related to it. For instance, in the context of ECCE, necessary data includes the number of children enrolled in pre-school, the number of children not enrolled along with their locations, the annual number of births, the facilities utilized for kindergartens, the total staff count, the number of female teachers, their qualifications, their working conditions, and their professional experiences, among other factors
Tunisia	■ Differing educational curricula ■ Weak space infrastructure/shortage of necessary equipment ■ Weak content of the professional development ■ The large number of stakeholders and the slow development of governance and evaluation mechanisms ■ Low national funds and low investment in early childhood ■ Pre-school education is not mandatory and there is no clear legal framework	■ Standardizing curricula, enhancing infrastructure and resources, strengthening professional development for educators, streamlining governance and evaluation processes, increasing national funding and investment, and establishing a clear legal framework for mandatory primary education could have high impact.

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022)

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1. Responses of Arab governments to a survey questionnaire commissioned by UNESCO, covering the period 2011-2021, which addressed issues of access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance in the 19 countries. Seven countries responded: Sudan, Yemen, Jordan, Tunisia, Palestine, Syria and Iraq.

Some countries also reported on initiatives that are under implementation such as working on student assessments beginning with end of grade 2. Initiatives include Palestine introducing activities on reuse of environmental waste in their kindergarten and Syria launching "Future Child Reader" (Table 7).

Table 7. Reported public initiatives under implementation

Country	Initiatives under implementation
Iraq	■ Nation Child Protection Policy ■ Protection of Children from Internet Risks (beneficiaries are children 4-6 years, duration 3 years)
Palestine	■ Bethlehem Educational Creative Reuse Centre to reuse environmental waste in the implementation of activities inside kindergartens.
Syria	**1- Get ready for school** ■ Provide the opportunity for the largest number of children to attend school. The target age group for this initiative: Children must be five years old and unable to enrol in a kindergarten due to economic or social conditions. ■ Provide them with the necessary skills, good care, and develop their mental, cognitive and social-emotional readiness to be ready to move easily to the first grade of basic education in line with the achievement of SDG 4 (Ensuring the provision of quality, equitable and inclusive education for all). ■ Amend the law on compulsory education by adding the preparatory year of kindergarten in the compulsory educational ladder. **2- Building national capacities in early childhood - the first thousand days of a child's life - nursery school from 0 to 3 years old** ■ Build the capacities of children in the first thousand days of their lives attending to their health, psychological, emotional and social well-being through: (Support parents, support caregivers for children in day care centres and nurseries, invest in services provided to children and raise the level of their overall quality to enable them to survive and thrive in the best way). ■ Improve the quality of care for the upbringing and general development of children at this age of their lives by reaching more children in day care centres, nurseries and families. ■ Provide children with preventive and promotional services to achieve dramatic improvements in their general development, health, well-being, protection and early learning. **3. Future Child Reader** ■ Promote a culture of reading for fun, exploration and inspiration in early childhood. ■ Build and develop a generation that is passionate about reading and make it an authentic daily habit.
Tunisia	■ Preparatory year roll-out project ■ Assessment of students' achievements at the end of grades 2, 4, and 6 ■ The National Early Childhood Development Strategy (2017-2025) / Advocacy Plan - Evaluation and Follow-up Scheme and Funding Plan

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022)

There were early attempts at creating a regional collaboration on education issues and particularly quality. In 2010, ALECSO, Qatar foundation, and the World Bank organized the Doha Ministerial Colloquium on Quality of Education. The Ministers of Education of 18 Arab countries committed to the Doha Declaration on Quality Education for All where they will establish quality national standards for all dimensions of the education system, particularly for teachers and other education professionals. As a result, ARAIEQ was formed and it tied together many existing regional initiatives and institutions. It was to be 'for the Region by the Region' (Thacker & Moreno, 2015). Among its goals was to create a regional network of experts and communities of practice. It also aimed at providing tools and usable knowledge to policy-makers and practitioners.

ARAIEQ targeted five areas of educational quality: evaluation, teacher policies, early childhood development, information technology, and entrepreneurship. ARAIEQ collaborated with organizations located at the local level which became regional hubs in the ARAIEQ network, each responsible for hosting an ARAIEQ programme and developing regional expertise and knowledge. The Regional Hubs were responsible for developing work plans and submitting programme deliverables (such as workshop reports and studies). One of these programmes focused on early childhood development.

ARAIEQ was to be a 10-year programme that aimed at building capacity in the medium and long-term. With ALECSO in charge of coordination. However, donors such as the Qatar Foundation did not come forward to support the programme and ARAIEQ ended up being a three-year programme mainly funded by the World Bank and ended in 2015 (Morgan, 2017, Thacker & Moreno, 2015).

As this initiative was ending, the Regional Hub ARC for the Arab Programme of Early Childhood Development (APECD) held a forum in December 2014 in Jordan, attended by representatives of ministries of education and social affairs, childhood councils, non-governmental organizations and academia. This laid the foundation for the Arab Network for Early Childhood Development (ANECD), https://anecd.net/en

After 2015 and with the Sustainable Development Summit, Arab countries committed to adopt the vision of the 2030 Agenda in their national development plans. To achieve this goal, the 2030 Agenda established five pillars ("5 Ps"): people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership.

The SDG 4 called for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. It also called for building and upgrading education facilities that are child-, disability-, and gender-sensitive and for providing safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

Target 4.2: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education;

- Indicator 4.2.1: Proportion of children aged 24-59 months who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex

- Indicator 4.2.2: Universal participation in at least one year of organized learning before children begin primary school.

Target 4.a: Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all;

- Indicator 4.A.1: Is the proportion of schools with access to (a) electricity; (b) the internet for pedagogical purposes; (c) computers for pedagogical purposes; (d) adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities; (e) basic drinking water; (f) single-sex basic sanitation facilities; and (g) basic handwashing facilities (as per the WASH indicator definitions).

Target 4.c: By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing states.

These targets relevant to ECCE were ambitious goals for the Arab region. Arab countries worked at integrating their commitments to the SDGs into their education systems and programmes. This required that they take steps to prevent and address all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparity, vulnerability and inequality in educational access, participation, and completion as well as in learning processes and outcomes. To do that, Arab countries revisited their national education strategies and engaged in dialogue within and across the countries. Many countries launched Vision 2030 in education, held regional meetings, developed new national strategies, and benefited from technical assistance offered by organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank among others. Countries that hosted refugees and internally displaced people worked at improving their response plans from a survival humanitarian approach to a more resilient one with an education and care component for children in crisis and conflict.

Table 8 presents the strategies that Arab countries worked on developing after 2013.

Table 8. National strategies

Country	Strategy	Year
1. Bahrain	2013–2017 National Childhood Strategy addressed children's rights with respect to health, education, protection, participation, and non-discrimination. It also addressed gender equity and inclusion of children with disabilities (Brik et al. 2020)	2013
2. Egypt	Sustainable Development Strategy: Egypt's Vision 2030 by the Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform	2016
3. Iraq	The National Strategy for Early Childhood Development in Iraq (2022-2031)	2022
4. Jordan	The National Early Childhood Development Strategy	
	The National Strategy for Human Resource Development 2016–2025- positioned early childhood education and development (ECED) as one of its four central pillars	September 2016
	Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis 2018–2020 (JRP)	2018
5. Kuwait	■ National Programme for Healthy Living was a five-year plan (2013–2017) to promote healthy eating and exercise to improve health and well-being (Brik et al., 2020) ■ Educational Reform Programme (2015–2019) is a partnership between the government of Kuwait and the World Bank designed to revise school curricula across 12 grades to promote students' competence ■ Kuwait Vision 2035	2015
6. Lebanon	Five-Year General Education Plan (5YP) with focus on access, quality and governance.	2021
7. Oman	Ninth National Development Plan 2016–2020 and Oman Vision which included a number of targets that have the potential to promote child well-being, including enhancing the standard of living of all citizens and reducing disparities across different geographic regions and income groups	2016
8. Palestine	National Strategy for Development and Intervention in Early Childhood (2017-2022)	2017
9. Qatar	The National Development Strategy 2017–2022	2017
	Qatar's Mental Health Strategy 2013–2018	
10. Saudi Arabia	■ Saudi National Curriculum Framework 0-6 years ■ Saudi Arabia National Commission for Childhood	2018
	The National Childhood Strategy which focuses on five axes: social protection, environmental security, culture and media, health, and education	
11. Sudan	Education Sector Strategic Plan (2018–2023)	2018
12. Syria	The National Early Childhood Development Strategy	2017
13. Tunisia	National Multi-sectoral Strategy for Early Childhood Development http://prescolaire.tn	2016
14. UAE	National Strategy of Motherhood and Childhood (serving as the main reference to policy-makers in motherhood and childhood domains)	2018
	Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood	
	UAE's National Strategy to Improve Education Sector (2015–2021)	
15. Yemen	National Strategy for Early Childhood Development 2012-2016	

Note: There was no data provided from the following countries: Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, and Morocco.

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID 19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

1.5. Commitment to ECCE

Regional meetings organized by several partners have contributed to maintaining the momentum and establishing a clear and operational roadmap to help countries move forward (UNESCO, 2021b). There were also several regional conferences held by UNESCO to discuss ECCE in the Arab region. Issues of inclusion were on the agenda as well as education in emergencies and teachers. Several international agencies and stakeholders also took part.

After 2015, the regional meetings included ECCE in their key statements as well as equity and inclusion issues and quality of education (Table 9).

Table 9. Regional meetings held to move forward with ECCE

Meetings	Outcomes
Arab States Regional Conference on Education Post-2015 January 27-29 2015 Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt	The Sharm El Sheikh Statement- identified key priority areas: 1. Equitable and inclusive access for all especially ECCE 2. Equity and inclusion (e.g. steps in eliminating the barriers that people with disabilities face to attain their right to education) 3. Quality and relevance of education, and teachers 4. Citizenship and Education for Sustainable Development 5. Enabling policies and mechanisms for the future education agenda (develop comprehensive national monitoring and evaluation systems to generate sound evidence which we will use for policy formulation and management of education systems)
First Arab Regional Meeting on Education 2030: *'Towards Collective Action in Achieving Education 2030 Goal in the Arab Region'* December 2015 Egypt	■ Set immediate actions to be undertaken to operationalize the Education 2030 Agenda ■ Adopted the Arab Regional Roadmap for SDG 4 – Education 2030
First Early Childhood Development Conference in the UAE: Redesigning Early Childhood Education and Care Services. IBE-UNESCO 2016	■ The conference was the first of a series of annual conferences to be organised in the UAE, which aimed to provide decision-makers, educational leaders and educators with access to the latest research and development in ECCE. Additionally, the conference provided a platform for the ECCE community to reflect on this research and development and to form insights to redesign ECCE for children aged from 0-8 in the UAE.
Arab Regional Support Group for Education 2030 July 2016	■ Development of a dedicated portal, technical training on indicators, and agreement to scale up collective support actions in 2017 and 2018 with focus on regional technical guidance, country-based support, advocacy and communication, reporting and monitoring, and financing.
Second Regional Arab Meeting on SDG 4 Education 2030- *Dubai Roadmap for Education 2030 in the Arab Region* – Dubai ,2017	■ Reaffirmed the transformative power of quality education in preventing and mitigating the impact of conflict, providing protection in time of crisis, equipping the affected with the necessary knowledge and skills to recover and reconstruct, and giving hope for the future. ■ Restated its dedication to the inclusion of refugee children and youth systematically in national educational planning processes in order to monitor their participation and educational attainment. ■ Promoted sharing of experience and outstanding initiatives at the national, sub regional and regional levels through the use of different means
A new vision for early childhood education in the Middle East and North Africa High-Level Regional ECE Workshop, February 19-23, 2017- Kuwait	■ Organized as part of the Education for Competitiveness (E4C) initiative ■ Fifteen countries in the Middle East and North Africa convened in Kuwait City to discuss the future of early childhood education in the region. ■ Discussed—for the first time—what it would take the region to reach SDG Target 4.2. ■ Included explicit strategies to reach the most vulnerable children, including those with special needs. ■ Committed to place quality at the heart of their ECE agenda.

Meetings	Outcomes
Third Arab Regional Meeting on Education 2030 (AR-MED) *Aligning Curriculum, Teachers and Learning Assessment to reach SDG4 targets.* November 2018 - Dead Sea, Jordan,	■ Dead Sea Commitments for 2019–2020 ■ Launched the Joint Statement of Arab States on system-wide education alignment, with a focus on harmonizing curriculum, teaching and learning assessment
Fourth Arab Regional Meeting on Education 2030 (AR-MED IV) - *Education Resilience: Working Towards Progress during the Decade of Action* 6–8 July 2021virtual	■ National action plans to accelerate progress towards SDG-4 ■ Learning loss due to COVID-19 is a critical issue affecting most countries. Political instability in some countries has exacerbated this situation, deepening the crisis of provision of quality education ■ In the Arab region, more than 15 million children were already out of school pre-COVID-19 owing to conflict and/or poverty. (United Nations, 2020). Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Arab Region – An Opportunity to Build Back Better. ■ In addition, around 48% of households did not have home internet before the pandemic. Refugees and displaced populations have been the hardest hit as they rely heavily on humanitarian assistance and had poor internet connectivity and devices

For more information on Bridging SDG 4 and Education Monitoring in the Arab region, November 2021, see: https://tcg.uis.unesco.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/11/Benchmarks-Report-ARAB_2021_EN.pdf

For more information on the 1st Arab Regional Meeting on Education 2030, December 2015: see https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/1st-arab-regional-meeting-education-2030.

All these regional meetings have led to development of new National Strategies that addressed SDGs and, especially for some, ECCE. For example, Oman included in its strategy a number of targets that have the potential to promote child well-being, including enhancing the standard of living of all citizens and reducing disparities across different geographic regions and income groups.

There were forums organized annually by ESCWA since 2014 in collaboration with the League of Arab States and other United Nations entities operating in Arab countries. The Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD) brings together Arab Governments and a broad range of stakeholders to address sustainable development priorities from a regional perspective. The forum also provides an opportunity to discuss progress, review national experiences, and enhance the region's voice at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

The AFSD advocates an inclusive and participatory approach to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda, providing a platform for dialogue among government representatives, parliamentarians, academia, the private sector, regional

intergovernmental bodies, civil society organizations, and young people, among others. In 2020 ESCWA launched an Arab SDG Monitor.

The Arab SDG Monitor https://arabsdgmonitor.unescwa.org/target-4/G4SQ.aspx is a user-friendly regional reporting platform dedicated to statistical monitoring and reporting on progress towards the SDGs, aimed at enhancing planning and decision-making at the national and regional levels. It also provides country and regional comparisons since 2000, and current projections for 2030 as per regional targets.

Supporting Teachers

The Arab countries were committed to Target 4.c regarding the quality of teaching. Teachers are key to any reform effort and, therefore, several meetings were held to address the challenges facing the region regarding the projected teacher shortage, teacher preparation and professional development (Table 10).

Table 10. Meetings to address quality of teachers

Meetings	Outcomes
Regional Virtual Meeting for Arab States Region COVID-19 education crisis - Supporting teachers in distance learning and on school reopening 3 June 2020	■ STEPP is an OECD-UNESCO Joint Initiative in support of the implementation of SDG-target 4.2 on ECCE. ■ It generates evidence through an international pre-primary education personnel survey for use in low- and middle-income countries. ■ It collects data, information from teachers and directors of ECCE centres on working conditions and job satisfaction, pedagogical and professional practices, training, and professional development of ECCE personnel and characteristics of ECCE personnel and settings in which they work. This information helps in the development of effective policies and strategies improving the quality of ECCE and professionalization of the personnel. It also gives a voice to teachers and directors of ECCE centres.
11th Policy Dialogue Forum: Preparing Teachers for the Future We Want Montego Bay, Jamaica 5- 9 November 2018	1. International partners should intensify efforts to develop robust definitions and classifications of qualified and trained teachers and strengthen cooperation and reporting mechanisms to ensure full monitoring of SDG-target 4c. 2. Preparation of early childhood education teachers has also been long neglected. Such teachers should be trained to the same equivalent standards as other teachers, and viable pathways for untrained personnel towards training should be made available. 3. Formative teacher evaluation plays an important role in improving teachers and summative evaluation can play a role in holding them accountable to quality performance. To motivate and empower teachers, formative evaluation should be encouraged.
International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (Teacher Task Force – TTF), in partnership with the Maktoum Foundation and UNESCO "The Futures of Teaching" 20 April 2021	1. An online dialogue with a focus on the Arab States to examine the futures of the teaching profession. 2. Aims to develop a forward-looking vision of what education and learning might yet become and offer a policy agenda based on a broad-based consultative process that involves youth, educators, civil society, governments, business and other stakeholders. 3. Put teachers at the centre of discussions and debates about what tomorrow's education systems should look like. This meant involvement of teachers in education policy-making and the transformation of teacher education as key to enable teachers to lead educational change in the future. This is based on the notion that teachers are the key to education quality and innovation, a notion that is embedded in the Education 2030 Agenda under Sustainable Development Goal 4 and that is at the heart of the Hamdan Foundation's work since its inception.

For more information: See COVID-19 education crisis - Supporting teachers in remote learning and on school reopening (June 2020); Final Declaration of the 11th Policy Dialogue Forum (2018), Press release: The Futures of Teaching in the Arab States and beyond (2022)

There were also meetings held regarding supporting teachers during the COVID-19 (Table 11).

Table 11. Response to COVID-19 to support teachers

Meetings	Outcomes
UNESCO launched the Survey of Teachers in Pre-primary Education (STEPP) project in 2016.	■ Discussed a number of distance and online technological solutions implemented at country-level. ■ Among the national responses were launching new portals, platforms, and distance learning alternatives to support teaching and learning during school closures related to COVID-19 and offering free internet to access educational resources for students with connectivity issues in underprivileged communities and remote areas. Ministries, in partnership with local organizations and charities, also provided students with electronic devices. ■ Ministries of education continue to explore alternative strategies to remote learning. Countries that participated were Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). They discussed the challenges of COVID-19 school closures: 1. A systematic lack of remote learning systems to access teaching and learning content; 2. Access to digital devices and internet connectivity; 3. Teacher training and support; and 4. Learning assessment.

For more information: See COVID-19 education crisis - Supporting teachers in remote learning and on school reopening (June 2020).

Building Resilience

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity. People can adapt to various tasks and environments, taking advantage of opportunities to reach their individual potential. Arab host countries had to develop plans to deal with the influx of refugees. Between 2011 and 2016 the global refugee population increased by 65% (UNHCR, 2016).

Table 12. Example of strategies for education in emergencies

Strategy	Key components
UNESCO Strategic Framework for Education in Emergencies in the Arab Region (2018-2021) Launched in 2017	The Strategic Framework consists of four strategic goals that are anchored in the three pillars of education (Access, Quality and System Strengthening) and which emphasize the importance of relevant and inclusive education to meet the challenges confronting learners, educators, and education systems in both crisis and post-crisis settings. Over 47 million people across the Arab Region are affected by conflict and crises. This is not only an ongoing humanitarian crisis, it is a development one, affecting every part of society, especially young generations. Over 13 million children and youth in the region are not going to school. Displaced persons in the region face deteriorating conditions. The strategic goals are 1. Children and youth affected by crisis access inclusive and quality learning opportunities 2. Learners affected by crisis are empowered with values, knowledge, and skills for life and work 3. Education actors provide quality education for better learning outcomes 4. Education systems are responsive and resilient to crisis
UNHCR the Refugee Education 2030: A Strategy for Refugee inclusion September 2019	1. Promote refugee inclusion in and through education. The strategy aims to easing the pressure on host countries, enhancing refugee's self-reliance and supporting the conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity. (UNHCR, 2019). 2. Reflect contemporary understanding that refugees and displaced persons are often unable to return home for long periods (some estimate 20 years), and that earlier, short-term approaches to refugee education have been insufficient. 3. Provide ministries of education at national and/or district levels with data and/or data analyses disaggregated by age and gender to facilitate improved monitoring of progress across education cycles. 4. Also, provide data on children and youth with disabilities. 5. Provide many examples of successful efforts to improve education opportunities for refugee and other displaced children and youth globally.

Source: Based on UNESCO (2017d) and UNHCR (2019a).

SDG-4 reaffirms that all children have the right to health, education, legal registration, and protection from violence in conflict zones or refugee contexts.

On 17 December 2018, the United Nations General Assembly affirmed the Global Compact on Refugees, https://globalcompactrefugees.org/ after two years of extensive consultations led by UNHCR with Member States, international organizations, refugees, civil society, the private sector, and experts.

The Global Compact on Refugees is an important framework for protecting, supporting and empowering children who represent more than half of all refugees. The Initiative for Child Rights in the Global Compacts has developed this collection of practices to support governments to put the GCR into practice with children at its heart. It provides a blueprint for governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure that host communities get the support they need and that refugees can lead productive lives. It constitutes a unique opportunity to transform the way the world responds to refugee situations, benefiting both refugees and the communities that host them.

In 2018, WHO, UNICEF and others launched the Nurturing Care Network. Leading multilateral donors have adopted Nurturing Care as the global standard for integrated ECD. This framework provides a useful benchmark against which to evaluate the services offered to young refugee children and their families. It applies to children from conception through age 8.

It is a framework designed to help children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential. To reach their full potential, children need the five inter-related and indivisible components of nurturing care: good health, adequate nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving and opportunities for learning. This framework provides support for families and young children living in conflict zones, and transitional or refugee context as well as marginalized communities subject to structural violence and inequality (Bouchane et al., 2018).

Inclusion 'Nothing about US without US'

Even if the Arab countries signed CRPD, it does not unless it is followed by having the rights of the disabled clearly expressed within the national legislation of each country of the region. Ten years ago, the Arab region had no common strategy for dealing with disability. Arab countries have different definitions of disability: "people with special needs", disabled, "people with determination", etc. The lack of data and information makes it difficult to provide for clear policies and services. There is a need to move from simply pledging a commitment to actual action plans that focus on inclusion (Hadidi and AlKhateeb, 2015).

ESCWA has played a role in raising awareness about people with disabilities. It has established a regional database with harmonized data on disability, according to Washington Group definitions. It also publishes regional and national research on select topics, such as status reports on social protection for persons with disabilities.

In 2014, ESCWA published its first report on Disability in the Arab Region: An Overview. It was the first attempt to collect and analyze data relating to disability in the Arab countries. The report was used as an important advocacy tool to draw the attention of policy-makers to the rights and needs of this population. In 2017 in Morocco, ESCWA conducted a workshop on Improving Disability Statistics in the Arab Countries. The purpose of this technical meeting was to improve the capacities of member countries to compile and produce relevant disability statistics. According to ESCWA (2018) disability prevalence rates in the region range from 0.2% in Qatar to 2.03 in Palestine to 4.8% in Sudan and 5.1% in Morocco. In most Arab countries, the prevalence rates are higher among men than among women. Literacy rates are lower for persons with disabilities across the region. In Oman, for example, 87% of persons without disabilities are literate compared to only 31.2% of persons with disabilities ESCWA (2018, p. 34). Based on the types of disabilities, the report also shows that mobility is the most prominent disability at 21.6% in Qatar and 43.3% in Egypt, and vision impairment is n second highest with 12.6% in Qatar and 26.5% in Iraq and Palestine.

In 2020, ESCWA launched Arab Digital Inclusion Platform portal https://www.unescwa.org/portal/adip. This Arab Digital Inclusion Platform Portal provides access to information on disability as it relates to the Arab region, including research and resources published by ESCWA and other regional and international organizations, laws and policies from the Arab region, toolkits to aid in the development and guidelines on e-Accessibility, and best practice cases from the Arab region on e-Accessibility. Another initiative was https://e-inclusion.unescwa.org/, which provides digital inclusion resources by country.

At the Doha International Conference on Disability and Development (DICDD): "Leaving No One Behind" December 2019, the Qatar Foundation for Social Work (QFSW) launched the "Doha Declaration". It serves as a reference point for world governments and a catalyst for positive global change; underscores Qatar's commitment to inclusive policies that provide greater opportunities for people with disabilities; and reaffirms the principle of 'Nothing about Us without Us' and promotes an inclusive education system, including disability-friendly environment and facilities as well as assistive technologies.

Table A2 provides the available disability policies for each country and the year they were launched as per their official government website. It shows that most countries updated their disability policies after 2015 except for Iraq, Libya, and Yemen and there is no data from Syria. In 2011, a ministerial decree authorized the Ministry of Education of Iraq to create special classes and schools for students who are "slow learners or have visual or hearing weakness". Lebanon is currently working on developing a national strategy for inclusive education. Jordan launched in 2020 its 10-Year Strategy for Inclusive Education. Most of the governing body for disabilities are usually part of Social Affairs Ministries. However, countries like Jordan established the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is in charge of policy-making, planning, and coordination. In 2018, MOEHE of Qatar established the first database for students with special needs. Table A3 shows the governing body for disability issues which is usually under social affairs. It is interesting that UAE refers to people with disabilities as "people of determination".

The exact number of people with disabilities in Iraq remains unknown because the government has not collected reliable statistics. In 2019, the United Nation's Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities said the country, after decades of violence and war,

had one of the largest populations of persons with disabilities in the world.

The disability prevalence among children up to and including the age of four years ranges from 1.7% for Morocco and Bahrain to 0.5% for Palestine (UNESCWA. 2017, 2018). This relates to early detection and intervention aiming to identify and prevent disability among small children and warrants attention.

Most Arab countries introduced policies for special education services for children aged 6–15 years. However, in the early 1990s, some Arab countries introduced early childhood special education for 3- to 6-year-old children. There is a shortage of early intervention programmes in many Arab countries, However, Arab Gulf countries have introduced evidence-based early intervention services for children with autism (Hadidi and Al Khateeb , 2015).

As an example of a specific population targeted by a national strategy, it is estimated based on international prevalence data that the number of children 0–18 years old with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Qatar ranges between 3,500 and 5,000 children. Around 230 children are likely to be diagnosed with ASD every year. The National Autism Plan launched in 2017 aims to develop a model of care, improving awareness, early recognition, diagnosis, intervention, and the transition to adulthood for children with autism (Brik et al. 2020).

To address the challenge of inclusion in education, the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) launched in 2020 a new website, Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews (PEER) https://education-profiles.org/. This website supports the monitoring of national education laws and policies.as well as providing systematic, comprehensive information on laws and policies for every country in the world. PEER is meant to support policy dialogue and peer learning. It is where countries can share experiences and learn from each other, especially at the regional level, where contexts are similar. The profiles can serve as a baseline to review qualitative progress to 2030.

Chapter 2

Achievements and challenges

2.1. Achievements

The achievements in the Arab region in relation to ECCE the well-being of children, access to ECCE services, parent support, quality of education in ECCE settings and its components. In light of the emerging crisis, whether it concerns refugees or the pandemic, discussion will focus on actions taken especially innovations as well as governance, finance and partnerships.

Health and well-being of children

Strong empirical evidence reveals that the foundations for good health, cognitive development, and social well-being are established early in life, including during the period prior to conception and pregnancy. Studies show that the health, nutrition and general preparedness for parenting of future mothers and fathers impacts birth outcomes. In addition, adverse experiences, including malnutrition, stress, neglect and abuse and a lack of stimulation during the first months of infancy impair brain development by negatively affecting the number, connections and organization of brains cells which, in turn, threaten children's health, nutrition, and cognitive and social development (Britto et al., 2017).

Countries look at the well-being of children as an indicator how well the country is providing services in terms of health, nutrition, security and safety, and early learning as well as responsive caregiving.

For the under-5 mortality in the Arab region, the rate significantly decreased in Yemen from 77/1,000 births in 2006 to 53/1,000 in 2013 (UNESCO, 2022a). Among all the countries with available data on this indicator, Mauritania was the country with the highest under-5 mortality rate in 2015-2020. The second highest rate was found in Sudan (Table 13).

Table 13. Infant mortality rate and under-5 mortality rate per 1000 live births in the Arab countries

Country	Infant mortality rate		Under-5 mortality rate	
	2010-2015	2015-2020	2010-2015	2015-2020
1. Algeria	25	21	29	25
2. Bahrain	7	6	9	8
3. Egypt	19	16	24	20
4. Iraq	28	24	35	28
5. Jordan	17	15	20	17
6. Kuwait	8	7	10	8
7. Lebanon	10	9	11	11
8. Libya	13	11	16	13
9. Mauritania	59	53	93	79
10. Morocco	24	20	29	23
11. Oman	10	7	11	8
12. Palestine	19	17	23	20
13. Qatar	7	6	9	8
14. Saudi Arabia	9	6	10	7
15. Sudan	48	43	72	64
16. Syria	21	18	18	16
17. Tunisia	15	13	15	13
18. UAE	7	6	8	6
19. Yemen	43	43	56	55

Data source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). Available under CC BY 3.0 IGO.

Measures of forms of malnutrition can inform policy-makers of the progress that has been made in improving the lives of young children.

■ Stunting generally occurs during the 1000-day period that spans from pregnancy to a child's second birthday. Without interventions, stunting can lead to lifelong consequences including delayed motor development, impaired cognitive function and higher risk of metabolic and chronic diseases.

■ Wasting, or thinness, is a symptom of recent and acute nutritional deficit and/or severe disease, resulting in rapid weight loss or the failure to gain weight normally. Wasting requires urgent interventions and can be reversed with refeeding.

■ Overweight or obesity is another form of malnutrition. The consequences include cardiovascular diseases (principally heart disease and stroke) and Type 2 diabetes.

The burden of malnutrition in all its forms remains a challenge. Recent estimates for 2019 are that 22.5% of children under 5 years of age were stunted, 9.2%

wasted and 9.9% were overweight. With 27% of the adult population obese, the Arab Region ranked second in the world for obesity. Some 29% of children under five in Qatar are overweight or obese. These children are likely to remain overweight as adults, with higher risk for health conditions such as Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease. The Qatar National Nutrition and Physical Activity Action Plan 2011-2016 aims to reduce these rates by establishing comprehensive nutrition programme and healthy eating programmes for schoolchildren (Towfighian et al., 2017).

Very few countries are on track to reach childhood nutrition targets by 2025 and 2030. Since at least 2000–02, there has been a sustained, consistent decline in undernourishment in the Arab countries, which came to a halt in 2014–16, after which the indicator started to rise. Libya has highest rates for stunting and obesity while wasting is highest in Yemen. UAE and Qatar had the highest participation rate in organized learning (Table 14).

Table 14. Status of child well-being

Country	Forms of malnutrition for % of children under age 5 suffering from			Learning
	Wasting moderate and severe	Stunting moderate and severe	Overweight-obesity	Participation rate (%) in organized learning one year before the official primary entry
1. Algeria	2.7 (2019)	9.3 (2020)	12.9 (2020)	-
2. Bahrain	-	5.1 (2020)	6.4	70.07 (2019)
3. Egypt	9.5 (2014)	22.3 (2020)	17.8 (2020)	36.72 (2019)
4. Iraq	3 (2018)	11.6 (2020)	9 (2020)	17.74 (2007)
5. Jordan	2.4 (2012)	7.4 (2020)	7.1 (2020)	49.64 (2020)
6. Kuwait	2.5 (2017)	6 (2020)	7.1 (2020)	69.31 (2020)
7. Lebanon	-	10.4 (2020)	19.7 (2020)	-
8. Libya	6.5 (2020)	43.5 (2020)	25.4 (2020)	-
9. Mauritania	11.5 (2018)	24.2 (2020)	2.7 (2020)	-
10. Morocco	2.6 (2017)	12.9 (2020)	11.3 (2020)	72.94 (2020)
11. Oman	9.3 (2017)	12.2 (2020)	4.8 (2020)	86.28 (2020)
12. Palestine	1.3 (2020)	7.8 (2020)	8.5 (2020)	68.41 (2020)
13. Qatar	-	4.6 (2020)	13.9 (2020)	94.9 (2020)
14. Saudi Arabia	-	3.9 (2020)	7.6 (2020)	53.01 (2020)
15. Sudan	16.3 (2014)	33.7 (2020)	2.7 (2020)	39.93 (2018)
16. Syria	11.5 (2010)	29.6 (2020)	18.2 (2020)	39.59 (2013)
17. Tunisia	2.1 (2018)	8.6 (2020)	16.5 (2020)	42.09 (2002)
18. UAE	-	-	-	99.74 (2020)
19. Yemen	16.4 (2013)	37.2 (2020)	2.7 (2020)	4.13 (2016)

Data source: UNICEF, Using data to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for children, https://data.unicef.org/sdgs/, accessed June, 2022. Available under CC BY-NC 3.0 IGO.

Some countries have qualified centres for children with special needs (Table A5) and have programmes for early detection and intervention (Table A6). Five out of the six countries reported having programmes for refugees or displaced children 0-8 who have special needs (Table A7).

To put policies into action from the national strategies, countries developed specific initiatives and programmes. These programmes are usually followed by systematic, rigorous evaluations as to the effectiveness of policies and programmes. The Gulf countries, developed programmes to promote child well-being as follows: (Brik et al. 2020).

■ The Kuwait Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health was established in 2012 to serve as a professional association to increase access to mental health services and to promote research on the mental health of children and adolescents in Kuwait.

■ The Early Intervention Association for Children with Special Needs in Oman provides early intervention services from birth to age 6 years for children with disabilities.

■ The UAE implemented the Child Obesity Prevention Project in eight schools in 2011–2012, and the Fat Truth campaign in 2009 to raise awareness of the importance of healthy eating and exercise.

■ In 2017, in Qatar, the Sidra Medical and Research Centre launched the Sidra Child Advocacy Program, which was the first protection programme for child abuse. The goal is to promote a national prevention strategy on child abuse as well as a network of service providers to help children who have been abused.

■ In Saudi Arabia, the Down Syndrome Charitable Association provides an early intervention for parents and children ages 0–8 years with Down Syndrome. The programme serves children with Down Syndrome and their parents by preparing children for school through training them to be self-reliant, independent, and prepared socially and psychologically. The programme also assists in the process of integration into society (Faour and Suwaigh, 2010).

■ As for Jordan, there is no comprehensive ECD policy for the Syrian crisis, or for Jordanians, that

covers all aspects of Nurturing Care. Many sectoral policies and strategies do not connect to each other or see themselves as part of a broader focus on young children's well-being. In addition to public Ministry of Education kindergartens, there are a variety of NGOs providing kindergartens (or "kindergartens-like" services, such as accelerated kindergartens experience of three months) and nurseries for children under age four. However, these usually charge fees (outside of camps), and most Syrians cannot afford to send their children to them. Inside camps, these kindergartens/childcare centres become a hub for reaching parents with responsive care sessions and sessions about health, hygiene, and nutrition. Training provided by NGOs to parents is good on safety and child protection. However, student-to-teacher ratios are high, and one kindergarten in Za'atari camp is, daily serving 550 children aged 4 and 5 in two shifts (King and McKinney, 2020).

As for being developmentally on track, Arab countries that participated through Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) done with UNICEF had low rates of 3- to 5-year olds being developmentally on track in literacy and numeracy except for Qatar. For example, only 18% of children in Iraq and West Bank and Gaza are deemed to be developmentally on track in early literacy and numeracy development. Only around 30 to 40% of children in Algeria, Oman, and Tunisia are found to be developmentally on track. While Qatar's proportion is higher, it is still below that of other high-income countries for which MICS data are available (El-Kogali and El Tayeb, 2020).

Parenting support and programmes

Parents are the child's first educator and they take on an active role in the early childhood education process. Parents can help ensure that their child has all the support they need to develop to their full potential, create a more positive experience for children, and help children perform better, when they are in school. This is why providing support and parent education programmes helps build parents' ability to promote their children's development through interactive responsive care and activities that help children explore and learn.

Arab countries who responded to the survey noted that they receive support at the pre-school level but not at the early primary years (Table 15).

Table 15. Reported state support for parents of children in pre-schools and grades 1&2

Level of education	Iraq	Jordan	Palestine*	Syria	Tunisia	Yemen
Pre-school	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
Grades 1& 2	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

Note: Despite the absence of state support for parents, the Ministry of Health collaborated with UNICEF to prepare a parental education curriculum that provide training workshops conducted within kindergarten premises.
Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

There are several parenting programmes in the Arab region. This report provides a glimpse at some of them:

Health, Early Learning And Protection Parenting Programme (HEPPP)

Developed by a team of early childhood experts, academics and practitioners from Egypt, Palestine and Lebanon, HEPPP was first piloted in community centres in Lebanon and Egypt between 2012 and 2014. It adopts a holistic, integrated and inclusive approach covering health, nutrition, early learning, social welfare and physical protection in a coherent and interactive way. It addresses the continuum of the child's age from before birth to 6 years. Fathers and mothers followed the training together, as a family unit with their children. Participating parents were divided in two groups according to the age of their children, one group for pregnancy to age 3 and the other for age 4–6. It consists of a structured set of 15 weekly interactive training sessions, lasting two to three hours each. The topics ranged from pregnancy and breastfeeding to nutrition, hygiene, health issues, communication between parents; reinforcing positive behaviour; play; critical thinking, learning and inquiry-based skills; and nursery, kindergarten and school readiness. The evaluation found a clear impact on participants' knowledge, practices and attitudes in most topics, and identified various ways to improve the programme.

With the influx of refugees HEPPP added five more sessions to integrate an element of psychosocial care and support for the caregivers, covering mental health and well-being; depression; grief; psychosomatic disorders; and violence. It also opened the programme to single parents and extended family members acting as caregivers. The first round of implementation with refugee families was carried out between 2016 and 2018 in Lebanon and Jordan. It involved Syrian and Palestinian refugees from Syria and parents from underprivileged Lebanese and Jordanian host communities, who are being made increasingly vulnerable by the influx of refugees.

The Mother Child Education Program- MOCEP

MOCEP was one of the 2010 WISE Awards winners. It is a 25-week-long, home-based, low-cost training programme. It serves children from five to six years of age who do not have access to pre-school education services, and their mothers. The programme targets both the mother and the child, with educational outcomes geared towards both groups. It enriches children cognitively, in order to boost school readiness and optimal psychosocial development, and trains mothers, creating sustainable nurturing and healthy home environments.

MOCEP has proved innovative in developing a low-cost, effective, home-based programme for young children with new training materials and methodology. As such, it formed the basis for the government's family education programme. It has also inspired the use of new media, such as distance learning via TV, and the development of new models of family education at ACEV, such as the Father Support programme. It has been translated by NGOs working with families in Arab countries, namely Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia. NGOs in Palestine are actively seeking funds to translate and implement MOCEP in their countries.

MOCEP among refugee families and one low-income community in Beirut, Lebanon was evaluated between May 14 and September 2016 (Ponguta et al., 2019). The research suggests that, despite multiple challenges, implementation and robust evaluations of early childhood parenting programmes in fragile contexts are feasible and urgently needed.

Positive Parenting programme

Launched in November 2020 and with support from UNICEF, and funding from the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, the EU Delegation to Tunisia, and civil society organizations in Tunisia, the government of Tunisia developed a national positive parenting programme as part of the Early Childhood Development Multi-sectoral Strategy, approved for the years 2017-2023. Positive parenting aims to avoid things like violence between parents and children, reduce stress, to encourage play with kids, parents' engagement in their children's education, healthy communication, and more shared time between parents and children. Quality time together is critical to the development of healthy and happy kids—and as these kids grow up, a productive and more cohesive society.

The Positive Parenting programme offers ten-session training courses to parents in villages and teaches participants about child emotional and cognitive development, and how to impact that development as positively as possible. Some of those parents trained in Positive Parenting go on to become trainers themselves. Table 16 provides description of the parent support programmes that some countries reported .

Table 16. Description of support programmes for parents of children in ECCE as reported

Country	Age group	Geographic areas covered	Name of programme(s)	Governing bodies
Jordan	5-6 (KG2)	All directorates of education	Parental Participation, Parental Awareness (The Happy House), Raising Children's Readiness to Learn	Donor and specialized agencies conduct workshops
Syria	0-6	All provinces	Guide for Primary Care	Ministry of Health/Regional Center, Ministry of Social Affairs & Labor, Syrian Agency for Family Affairs & Population
Tunisia	0-6	Tunis, Qairawan, Junduba, Mednein	Because I care	Ministry of Woman, Family, & Childhood; Ministries of Education, Health, Finance & Economy, and Religious Affairs; UNICEF, NGOs, and private sector

Note: In Tunisia only, there is a programme at pre-schools to support children 0-6 years with special needs particularly autism. It is implemented in several provinces. Another programme (Integrate vulnerable Children) is for refugee children aged 3-5, which is present in few provinces. Both programmes are governed by the same set of governing bodies that oversee the parental support programme listed in the above table.

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

Social emotional learning support

Syrian Refugee children in Lebanon account for 1 in 14 people currently in the country. These children need academic and social emotional learning (SEL). As part of the response to this crisis, the IRC and NYU Global TIES for Children provided Syrian refugee children enrolled in Lebanese public schools with remedial tutoring programmes and social-emotional learning activities over the course of 2 years (2016-2018). Tutoring in a Healing Classroom (referred to subsequently as HCT) is a remedial programme in which teachers incorporate SEL-based classroom practices (IRC, 2021). The programme targeted an estimated 5000 Syrian refugee children enrolled in Lebanese public schools and about 170 teachers working with them. These students attended 2.5-hour-long tutoring sessions three times a week, with each session consisting of three lessons (Arabic, French/English, mathematics) and each lesson lasting between 30 to 40 minutes. Each class averaged about 29 students. This programme was designed to run over the course of a 32-week school year and divided into two 16-week cycles.

The impact of this programme was evaluated on children's literacy, numeracy and social-emotional skills. This programme establishes a safe, nurturing learning environment and provides students additional support to learn foundational academic and social-emotional skills. The programme added different skill-targeted SEL interventions: 1) Mindfulness activities, 2) Brain Game activities and 3) a 5-component SEL curriculum.

A half year of HCT, when compared to just public school, had positive impacts on students' perception of their public schools and behavioural regulation skills.

A half year of HCT + Mindfulness, when compared to public school, showed positive impacts including improvement in literacy and numeracy skills, behaviour regulation skills, and positive perceptions of their public school environment, amongst other SEL outcomes. Overall, the combination of HCT + Mindfulness had the greatest impact on improving Syrian refugee children's academic and SEL outcomes.

Access to ECCE services

The UNESCO Regional overview: Arab States (2015) EFA Global Monitoring Report summarized the progress made in the first fifteen years of the 21st century in increasing access to and quality of education among the Arab nations. The countries that provided data showed improved participation in pre-primary education, in particular Algeria, Egypt and Qatar where the GERs more than doubled. In Algeria, the participation level increased from 2% in 1999 to 79% in 2011 and is projected to exceed 100% in 2015. Its massive expansion of pre-primary provision has led to an increase in the expected number of years of pre-primary schooling from zero to nearly one year. Lebanon remained the country with the highest pre-primary GER in the region, at 91% in 2012.

In 2015, less than 15% of children in Syria, Yemen and Saudi Arabia were formally enrolled in pre-school (UNESCO, 2015a). Only a fraction of these children is believed to attend school daily, with children from disadvantaged areas less likely to do so. There is low public provision of pre-primary education, with only

29% of pre-primary enrolment in public programmes compared with 71% of pre-primary enrolment in private kindergartens and nurseries (El-Kogali and Kraft, 2015).

ECCE access is a complex concept embracing notions of: conditions of access (free or fee paying, public or private); scope (sessional, half-day or full-day); formal or in-formal and quality (including whether services are flexible and appropriate to the age of the child).

Children belonging to economically vulnerable communities and other traditionally marginalized communities and groups including children living in emergency and migratory situations, have less or no access to ECCE. Such adversities often coincide with the economic level of the family and become cumulative as children grow older (Britto et al., 2017).

Private providers dominate the scene in countries of the Arab region. Participation of children under three in ECCE programmes in Arab countries tends to be limited to middle class and above. Table A10 provides the types of providers for ECCE and the age groups in the GCC countries. In some Arab countries, like Yemen, it is almost non-existent. In Lebanon, over 80% of kindergarten enrolments are private.

In Sudan and according to its (General Education Sector Strategic Plan 2018/19 – 2022/23), about 72% of basic schools have a pre-school attached to them. It is estimated that pre-school GER increased by 6 percentage points from 37.1% in 2009 to 42.8% in 2016 and Table 17 shows further progress for the year 2018.

Table 17. GER access rates for pre-primary over the years by country and year (2015 and 2020)

Country	Gross enrolment ratio, pre-primary, both sexes (%)	
	2015	2020
1. Algeria	-	-
2. Bahrain	56	52.6
3. Egypt	29.9 (2016)	29.27 (2019)
4. Iraq	-	-
5. Jordan	25.89	31.55
6. Kuwait	68.01	60.25
7. Lebanon	-	-
8. Libya	--	-
9. Mauritania	10.49	-
10. Morocco	56.84	60.42
11. Oman	57.81	56.73
12. Palestine	53.67	58.11

Country	Gross enrolment ratio, pre-primary, both sexes (%)	
13. Qatar	57.59	62.45
14. Saudi Arabia	21.4	21.79
15. Sudan	44.77	47.4 (2018)
16. Syria	-	-
17. Tunisia	43.71	-
18. UAE	80.56	94.21
19. Yemen	1.59 (2016)	

Data source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. SDG 4 indicators, http://sdg4-data.uis.unesco.org/, accessed August, 2022.

Palestine, despite the challenges it faces, has also made significant progress in pre-primary education. Net enrolment now stands at 62%, representing growth of more than 20% in net enrolment rates in the last decade. In May 2016, the Palestinian Authority launched the first Palestinian national curriculum framework for kindergarten education and the Minister of Education and Higher Education said 'early childhood education is the mechanism to attain our future as a nation' (Nasser, 2018).

Jordan has had great success expanding access to KG2 in the past decade. In 2019, Social Protection and Poverty Alleviation Strategy for 2019–2025, which primarily aims to provide financial support to the 14.4% of Jordanians living in poverty and also expands access to kindergarten (UNICEF Jordan, n.d.). A recent study of kindergarten enrolment in Jordan found that only 56% of Syrian 5-year-olds attended KG2 in 2017–2018, much lower than the 92% of Jordanians who did (DeStefano et al., 2018). Participation in KG1 (almost exclusively private) is low for both Jordanians and Syrians. Meanwhile, nurseries and childcare centres (for children under 4) are left to the private sector. Private sector nurseries and childcare centres typically charge fees to families. There are a few free or subsidized nurseries that the National Council of Family Affairs runs 80 nurseries. The Education Reform Support Programme (ERSP), which was approved by the World Bank on December 2017. The US$200 million project will help Jordan expand access to early childhood development, and improve teaching and learning conditions for Jordanian and Syrian refugee children. The programme will benefit approximately 700,000 Jordanian and Syrian refugee children (World Bank, 2017b).

In Kuwait, early childhood initiatives included a pilot project to use the Reggio Emilia model in kindergartens and making kindergarten mandatory. For this purpose, a group of teachers from Kuwait's government kindergartens attended workshops to be trained in the Reggio Emilia model (Winokur, 2014: 107)

As for ECCE programmes in emergencies, the case of Sudan is worth noting. Sudan has developed an educational strategy to integrate displaced children within host communities. There are also early childhood programmes in the camps for the displaced. Jordan, Palestine, and Syria reported on having school readiness programmes for displaced children.

In 2018 in Lebanon, the ministry of Education launched its inclusive education program, a pilot targeting 30 public schools in all governorates of Lebanon. The purpose is to promote the development of inclusive education in Lebanon and ensure quality education for all children, including children with disabilities and learning difficulties. The Ministry provides schools with methodological support to teachers on curriculum adjustment, teaching techniques and strategies, and supports children with special education needs and learning difficulties.

The information available for Gulf countries is that 5 out of 6 schools are adapted to children with disabilities. Morocco and Palestine are the only countries in their respective regions with data on this indicator. In Morocco adapted facilities in primary have grown from 17.3% in 2017 to around 20% in 2020. In Palestine, the proportion of adapted schools increased from 31.1% in 2017 to 54% in 2020.

(UNESCO, 2021a). Some Arab countries adapted their school's infrastructure and materials for students with disability at the primary level. All six GCC countries have 100% adapted schools for the disabled whereas Palestine had 60% and Morocco had 20% (Table A4).

In UAE, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) published a handbook that is intended for use by Dubai private school leaders, governing boards and school operators. It uses Dubai's

Inclusive Education Policy Framework (2017) which provides information about the standards necessary for the improvement of inclusive education provision and Implementing Inclusive Education: A Guide for Schools (2019) which provides information to Dubai private schools to support the implementation of inclusion and equity in their educational policy and practice (KHDA, 2019).

In Morocco, only half of children go to pre-primary schools; In rural areas, it is as low as a third. Nevertheless, the government has launched an ambitious national programme to lift enrolment in early education to 67% by 2021. It will involve 100,000 additional students being enrolled – with an emphasis on rural areas – 28,000 teachers trained and 4000 new classes opened. A 10-year plan to enroll 730,000 extra students will require 55,000 new teachers and 57,000 additional classrooms (Theirworld, 2018).

In Iraq, a 2011 ministerial decree authorized the Ministry of Education to create special classes and schools to educate students who are 'slow learners or have visual or hearing weakness' (Article 14). As of 2019, there were 1,325 schools with special classes for children with disabilities, of which 107 were in rural areas (Sedmik et al., 2021).

A free and compulsory one-year of universal quality pre-primary education is the minimum recommendation for all countries to implement SDG Target 4.2 (UNESCO, 2021c). The Arab countries that reported having plans to add a year of pre-primary were Palestine, Tunisia, and Jordan.

Quality ECCE workforce

Despite the important role of ECCE personnel, in the Arab States many are inadequately prepared, are relatively poorly paid, and lack recognition (Neuman, et al., 2015). There is limited information available on the training and working conditions as well as practices and needs of ECCE teachers, particularly in low-and-middle-income countries (Neuman et al., 2015). When available, the data is more often system-level/structural information (e.g. number of teachers, teacher-child ratio, teacher qualification) than personnel-level, qualitative information (e.g. what teachers do, how they work, how they interact with children, what challenges they experience in ensuring good quality care and education).

A number of different dimensions of quality exist in the ECCE literature:

- Structural aspects – These include center's infrastructure and materials, health and safety aspects physical environment standards, low student-teacher ratios, group composition, staff qualifications, high levels of teacher training, experience, and salary.

- Process – child-teacher interaction (warmth, responsiveness, and instructional rigour) a child's day-to-day experiences in early learning settings and interactions with teachers, peers, and materials, the quality of daily routines.

- Curricula – In high-quality programmes, they are based on comprehensive early learning standards, address the whole child, are developmentally appropriate, and are effectively implemented. The early learning standards that address multiple domains of development—academic, social-emotional, and physical—Process quality is often more difficult to measure than structural quality

- Relationship with parents, and community – Not often addressed.

- Role of leadership and management – This is critical and again an aspect of quality that is not usually included in structural or process definitions

- Child Outcomes Assessment (learning and well-being) – this along with the process dimension can inform about the quality and effectiveness of ECCE programmes.

The achievement of SDG-4 and the transformation of education will depend heavily on teachers and education personnel. These teachers need to be well-trained, professionally qualified, motivated and supported within well-resourced, efficient and effectively governed systems (UIS, 2016).

In GCC countries, teacher qualifications vary between the public and the private sector. In Saudi Arabia, a bachelor's degree in early childhood education is required but in the private sector, a bachelor's degree in any subject is acceptable. UAE requires that those who teach in the public sector must hold a bachelor's degree in early childhood education with a minimum of three years experience in order to work in ECCE settings (Table A11).

Table 18 shows that teachers with the minimum required qualification in pre-primary education of having a university degree has improved from 2015 until 2020. Most GCC countries have reached the 100% mark. Bahrain made the best progress. As for teacher-child ratio, it is still high in Egypt with more than 29 children per teacher in pre-primary. Assessing and monitoring teacher attrition is essential to ensuring a sufficient supply of qualified and well-trained teachers as well as their effective deployment, support and management. Palestine has made the most progress in reducing the attrition rate from 18% in 2015 to 3% in 2020.

Table 18. Teachers qualification, pupil teacher ratio, and teacher attrition in pre-primary

Country	Proportion of teachers with the minimum required qualifications in pre-primary education, both sexes (%)		Pupil-trained teacher ratio in pre-primary education (headcount basis)		Teacher attrition rate (%)	
	2015	2020	2015	2020	2015	2020
1. Algeria	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Bahrain	51.76	100	28.96	13.1	12.49 (2018)	5.04 (2019)
3. Egypt	76.53 (2016)	82.84 (2019)	35.2 (2016)	29.97 (2019)	-	-
4. Iraq	-	-	-	-	-	-
5. Jordan	100	100	17.14	16.61	2.88 (2017)	-
6. Kuwait	75.43	98.06	12.24	8.18	-	-
7. Lebanon	-	-	15.89	15.69	-	7.87
8. Libya	-	-	-	-	-	-
9. Mauritania	10.49	-	-	-	-	-
10. Morocco	-	-	-	-	-	-
11. Oman	100	100	25.25	15.35		
12. Palestine	100	100	22.91	16.37	18.42	3.02
13. Qatar	100	100	14.17	14.97	-	-
14. Saudi Arabia	100	100	13.09	13.32	-	-
15. Sudan	-	-	-	-	-	-
16. Syria	-	-	-	-	-	-
17. Tunisia	100	-	15.78	-	-	-
18. UAE	100	100	23.36	22.65	-	-
19. Yemen	-	-	49.01 (2016)	-	-	-

Data source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. SDG 4 indicators, http://sdg4-data.uis.unesco.org/, accessed August, 2022.

Although several studies had found that "teacher quality" is the single most important school variable influencing student achievement (Mendenhall et al. 2018), measures of quality have focused mostly on the structural dimension by noting the proportion of teachers without addressing the working conditions, status, professional development and attrition.

In Bahrain, a study undertaken by the Ministry of Education in 2012 indicated that 72% of kindergartens fail to meet minimum classroom regulations and requirements against the standards set by the ministry. In addition, 77% of pre-school teachers have only reached a qualification of a high school diploma, and that there is no set syllabus or curriculum for pre-school and early childhood education programmes. One of the main factors that contribute to the poor quality and provision for early childhood education provision within the Kingdom of Bahrain is a result of the lack of work force to properly monitor, evaluate and oversee the various pre-schools and early childhood programmes (Al Khalifa, 2021). Additionally, the Kindergarten Directorate within the ministry lacks experienced and qualified professionals in the field of early childhood education, a qualification needed to oversee and manage the basic operations of such a directorate.

As for teacher qualification and compensation in terms of salary, currently the teachers' salaries in place within kindergartens average out to only about 20% of Ministry of Education primary teachers' salaries. With teaching already a low status profession in Bahrain, remunerating kindergarten teachers at only 20%

of the salary of primary school teachers is difficult to comprehend. Kindergarten and early childhood educators' low salaries was one of the main factors for difficulties with recruitment in 2011 (Al Khalifa, 2021).

When ECCE staff with higher education and specialized training care for children, children are more sociable, have higher cognitive abilities, make developed use of language and motor skills, and are more likely to be ready for school at an appropriate age. With highly qualified teachers who hold college degrees, children learn best. Having a degree is necessary, yet not sufficient to ensure that all children from birth to age 8 learn and develop to their highest potential or to ensure classroom quality or child outcomes. The quality of ECCE teacher preparation programmes is important to address the wide age group. In a study of ECCE teacher preparation programmes, findings pointed out to the existing variations in educating prospective teachers in relation to course content, faculty characteristics, field experiences, and age focus. The main age focus in these programmes prepared student teachers for the pre-school age only. The findings illustrated the gaps in providing explicit coursework for infants and toddlers, working with families, diversity issues and administering childcare programmes (Faour, 2015).

Professional development

The Moscow Framework for Action and Cooperation: Harnessing the Wealth of Nations (2010) suggested a number of actions, one of which was to improve and expand teacher training, accreditation and the professional development of early childhood professionals. Countries provide extensive opportunities for both formal and informal in-service development; allocate time for professional learning and collaboration that is built into teachers' work hours; and have in place governance structures that support the involvement of teachers in decisions regarding curriculum and instructional practice (Darling-Hammond et al. 2009). For example, in Sweden, 104 hours or 15 days a year (approximately 6% of teachers' total working time) are allocated for teachers' in-service training. In Republic of Korea, after their fourth year of teaching, teachers are required to take 90 hours of professional development courses every three years. In Singapore the government pays for 100 hours of professional development each year for all teachers in addition to the 20 hours a week they have to work with other teachers and visit each other's

classrooms to study teaching (Darling-Hammond et al. 2009). The one-shot, "drive-by," or fragmented, "spray-and-pray" workshops lasting 14 hours or less show no statistically significant effect on student learning.

In the extensive review of global reports on professional development and learning, there was no mention of any national plans for professional development in the Arab countries and more specifically early childhood. All Jordanian teachers are obliged to complete at least 20 hours of professional development on a yearly basis. Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, and Sudan reported that they have an in-service training requirement in their public sector but not for the private sector.

Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE and Kuwait have developed teachers' standards professional pathways and national qualification frameworks (Table A12). UAE has developed a certification and licensing in the exam before being certified. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, and Kuwait also require in-service training mandatory up to 30 hours. The quality of teaching at all phases is still identified as a major challenge ahead for educators in Oman (UNICEF, 2017).

Working conditions

Early childhood teaching in considered by many a marginalized profession. Early childhood educators earn much lower salaries than teachers at other levels of education do and this reflects the lack of recognition of ECCE and low status of ECCE teachers. In countries such as Sweden, higher levels of education and professional training are required for pre-primary teachers and they receive relatively high salaries (Sun et al. 2015). For those working in pre-schools they are perceived to have greater professional status than those "babysitting in nurseries or centres for children of working parents" These centres do not require or employ qualified early childhood teachers. Pre-school teachers earn less than teachers in primary or secondary school settings do.

This affects their working load with poorer working conditions, and lower professional status than their primary and secondary teaching counterparts do. Improving salaries and working conditions is therefore an important factor in increasing both the quantity and quality of ECE teachers.

Table 19. ECCE Teachers' reported salary scale, 2014

	Monthly Salary in USD (Based on current market rate)	Iraq	Jordan	Palestine	Sudan	Syria	Tunisia	Yemen
Minimum	Principals/directors	442	✕	✕	✕	60	372	75
	Teachers of ages 0-3 years	306	✕	✕	40	40	✕	50
	Teachers of ages 3-6 years	306	✕	638	40	40	372	✕
	Teachers of ages 6-8 years (Grade 1)	306	✕	638	100	40	372	50
	Primary school teachers - Grades 2-6	306	✕	638	100	40	372	50
Maximum	Principals/directors	2380	✕	✕	150	60	527	100
	Teachers of ages 0-3 years	884	✕	✕	80	60	✕	70
	Teachers of ages 3-6 years	884	✕	1160	80	60	465	✕
	Teachers of ages 6-8 years (Grade 1)	1020	✕	1160	140	60	465	70
	Primary school teachers - Grades 2-6	1020	✕	1160	140	60	465	70

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

The reported salaries (Table 19) show that in these Arab countries, ECCE teachers are paid below other professions.

According to Demirjian (2015), maintaining and retaining qualified and competent teachers in rural areas is a challenge for educational policy-makers and different stakeholders that requires strategic thinking, at par with closing and balancing rural-urban economic disparity and unequal-income. On the other hand, a more applied, cost-effective and practical policy is likely to yield swifter results, especially initiatives that focus on providing continuous professional development opportunities in urbanized areas, establishing teacher scholarship funds for rural schools, introducing modern technology and web-based learning into classroom environments to raise student's achievements, and work towards retaining the teaching workforce.

While every country is different, four key strategies can help countries build an effective ECE workforce. These are Attract, Prepare, Support and Retain. These four strategies can improve the status, training, skills and support of staff, which in turn has the potential to raise the quality of learning (Sun et al. 2015). Sudan and Syria (Table 20) reported using every possible way to attract teachers to the profession.

Table 20. Reported ways to attract teachers of ECCE in some Arab countries

Ways to attract teachers	Iraq	Jordan	Palestine	Syria	Tunisia	Yemen	Sudan
Offer educational scholarship	✓	✓		✓			✓
Offer salary bonus				✓	✓		✓
Improve working conditions			✓	✓			✓
Provide learning & teaching resources			✓	✓			✓
Offer opportunities for professional cooperation & for participating in decision-making				✓	✓		✓
Offer more professional development sessions				✓			✓

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

Learning assessment

There have been initiatives to use tools to assess the quality of ECCE programmes and children's development in some Arab countries. These tools have the potential to improve the evidence base of ECCE.

In 2014, as discussions on the Sustainable Development agenda were beginning, the Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes (MELQO) project was initiated to help generate actionable, feasible data on ECE and the quality of children's learning environments for national and global monitoring (UNESCO, UNICEF, Brookings

Institution, and the World Bank 2017). MELQO focused only on early childhood education for children roughly between 4 and 6 years (Raikes et al., 2019). The MELQO data highlights inequities, both in terms of influences on child development and learning in the pre-primary years and the quality of children's learning environments. It also can be used to point towards specific and actionable areas for improvement within ECCE systems and establishes an important baseline for school readiness. According to the interactive map https://www.ecdmeasure.org/where-we-work/ Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan, Syria and Tunisia have been users of MELQO instrument.

UNICEF Lebanon, the American University of Beirut in Lebanon, the University of Liverpool in the UK and the New York University Global TIES for Children in the USA, which have in-depth experience in this area have worked early detection tools used in the region and globally. These tools help identify various difficulties including physical, motor, visual, hearing and learning difficulties or delays, cognitive, social, emotional development, self-care, social adaptive skills and neurodiversity, which are less obvious at birth including the autism spectrum. The tools are used in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine. For example, the Ages and Stages Questionnaire-3 (ASQ-3) with its Arabic version helps practitioners in Lebanon to screen for developmental delays, disabilities, communication, and problem-solving for children 2-60 months (UNICEF,

2022). Table A14 provides other early detection tools used in some Arab countries that are compiled by UNICEF specifically for children with developmental delays and disabilities.

The Classroom Assessment Scoring Systems (CLASS) is used in Lebanon to understand the quality of teachers' instructional practices and performance (World Bank. 2021). In addition, the Nurturing Care Framework presents a holistic approach that can detect early developmental delay and disabilities.

The TIMSS and PIRLS are international assessments that monitor trends in student achievement in mathematics, science, and reading. These tests regularly provide participating countries with reliable data on their students' academic achievement in the fundamental subjects of mathematics, science, and reading together with a rich array of information about the country contexts for teaching and learning in these curriculum areas. They help countries monitor changes in achievement at regular intervals.

The Arab region's participation in international student assessments is very important to inform each country's national policy and quality of education. According to Table 21, only seven of the 13 countries administer a National Large-Scale Assessment (NLSA) at the end of primary school. Six countries have started participating in the TIMSS since 2003.

Table 21. On learning assessment and participation in cross-national assessments

Country	Does the country administer a National Large-Scale Assessment (NLSA) at the end of primary school?	Cross-national assessments
1. Algeria	No	TIMSS (2007) and PISA (2015)
2. Bahrain	Yes	TIMSS (2003, 2007, 2011, 2015) and PIRLS (2016).
3. Egypt	No	TIMSS (2003, 2007, 2015) and PIRLS (2016)
4. Jordan	No	TIMSS (2003, 2007, 2011, 2015) and PISA (2006, 2009, 2012, 2015).
5. Kuwait	No	TIMSS (2007, 2011, 2015) and PIRLS (2001, 2011, 2016, 2006).
6. Mauritania	No	PASEC (2004)
7. Morocco	Yes	TIMSS (2003, 2007, 2011, 2015) and PIRLS (2001, 2011, 2016, 2006).
8. Oman	Yes	TIMSS (2007, 2011, 2015) and PIRLS (2011, 2016).
9. Qatar	Yes	TIMSS (2007, 2011, 2015), PIRLS (2011, 2016, 2006) and PISA (2006, 2009, 2012, 2015).
10. Saudi Arabia	Yes	TIMSS (2003, 2007, 2011, 2015) and PIRLS (2011, 2016).
11. Tunisia	Yes	TIMSS (2003, 2007, 2011) and PISA (2006, 2009, 2012, 2015).
12. UAE	Yes	TIMSS (2011, 2015), PIRLS (2011, 2016) and PISA (2009, 2012, 2015).
13. Yemen, Rep.	No	TIMSS (2003, 2007, 2011).

Data source: World Bank 2019 https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/earlychildhooddevelopment, accessed August, 2022 (Available under CC BY 4.0).
Note:
- No information provided on the following countries Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Sudan, Syria Arab Republic, Palestine
- In Qatar, a nationally-representative learning assessment is organized for Grade 3 in Arabic language, English language and mathematics (UNESCO, 2022a)

The TIMSS and PIRLS also ask the parents or guardians of participating fourth grade students to complete an Early Learning Survey. The results for the PIRLS tests scores of 2011 and 2016 (Figure 4) showed that there is a positive relationship between participation in pre-primary education, its duration, and student-reading achievement at primary school. Fourth grade students who had participated in pre-primary outperformed students who had not participated. This has important policy implications in that it becomes very important to make pre-primary education available to all children.

Figure 4. Comparison between PIRLS 2011 and 2016 scores in relation to pre-primary attendance
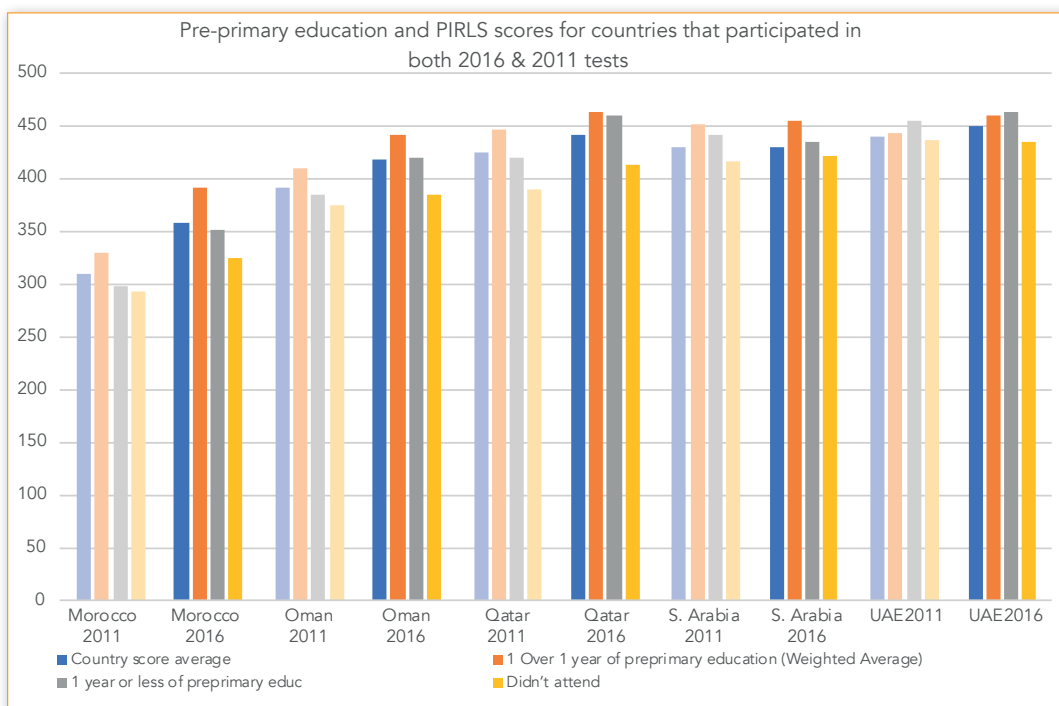
Note: 1 Over 1 Year of pre-primary education (Weighted Average) – Basma Faour (for how it was calculated see Table 22)

Data sources:

- For PIRLS 2011 data - Mullis, Ina V.S. , Martin, Michael O. , Foy. Pierre, and Drucker, Kathleen T. PIRLS 2011 International Results in Reading. Exhibit 4.7 Students attended Pre-primary education p. 128. TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center: Chestnut Hill, MA, https://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2011/downloads/p11_ir_fullbook.pdf accessed August, 2022.

- For PIRLS 2016 data - Exhibit 4.7 Early Preparation for School https://pirls2016.org/pirls/home-environment-support/attended-preprimary-education/, accessed August, 2022.

Few studies have examined the relative impact of one vs. two years of pre-school education, and none that randomly assigned this condition. All of the relevant studies focus on disadvantaged children. The existing evidence suggests that more years of pre-school seem to be related to larger gains, but the added impact of an additional year is often smaller than the gains typically experienced by a four-year-old from one year of participation (Reynolds, 1995). Why the additional year generally results in smaller gains is unclear. It may be that children who attend multiple years, experience the same curriculum across the two years rather than experiencing sequenced two-year curricula, as programmes may mix three-year-olds and four-year-olds in the same classroom (Yoshiwaka et al., 2013).

Table 22. Relationship between pre-primary attendance and achievement in PIRLS 2016 for fourth graders

Country	Country score average	[1] Over 1 year of pre-primary education	1 year or less of pre-primary education	Didn't attend
Bahrain	446	453	451	431
Egypt	330	357	312	290
Kuwait	393	400	412	390
Morocco	358	392	352	324
Oman	418	442	420	385
Qatar	442	463	459	413
Saudi Arabia	430	454	434	422
UAE	450	460	463	434

Data source: Students Attended Preprimary Education, 2016, https://pirls2016.org/pirls/home-environment-support/attended-preprimary-education/, accessed July, 2022.

[1] based on weighted average computed by author

Procedure **-3S** = Weight of those students who attended 3 years +

2S = Weight of those students who attended 2 years

Score 3= Weighted average achievement for those who attended 3 years +

Score 2= Weighted average achievement for those who attended 2 years

How the Weighted Average was computed?

Step 1- 3S= percentage of students who attended 3 years/ (percentage of students who attended 3 years + percentage students who attended 2 years).

Step 2- 2S= 1 - result of 3S

Step 3- Score 3= 3S x Achievement score for those who attended 3 years +

Step 4- Score 2= 2S x Achievement score for those who attended 2 years

Step 5- Weighted score= Score 3+ Score 2

Fourth grade students who had participated in TIMSS Math and attended early childhood education over a longer period outperformed those who had participated for a shorter period. Providing children with early access to pre-primary education could help to improve average student achievement in later schooling (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Relationship between pre-primary attendance and TIMSS math scores for fourth graders
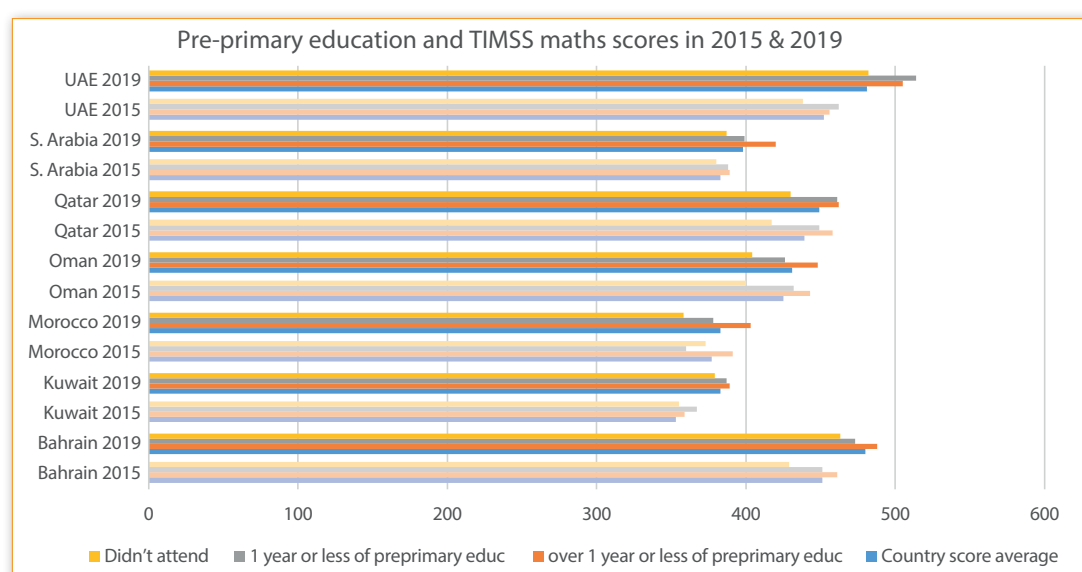
Data sources:

Grade 4- TIMSS 2015 Math score - Exhibit 4.7 Students attended Preprimary Education. https://timssandpirls.bc.edu/timss2015/international-results/timss-2015/science/home-environment-support/students-attended-preprimary-education/, accessed August, 2022.

Grade 4- for TIMSS Math 2019 Exhibit 5.14: Students Attended Preprimary Education https://timss2019.org/reports/home-contexts/

[1] weighted average computed by Basma Faour (for details see Table 22), accessed August, 2022.

Figure 6. Relationship between pre-primary attendance and TIMSS science scores for fourth graders
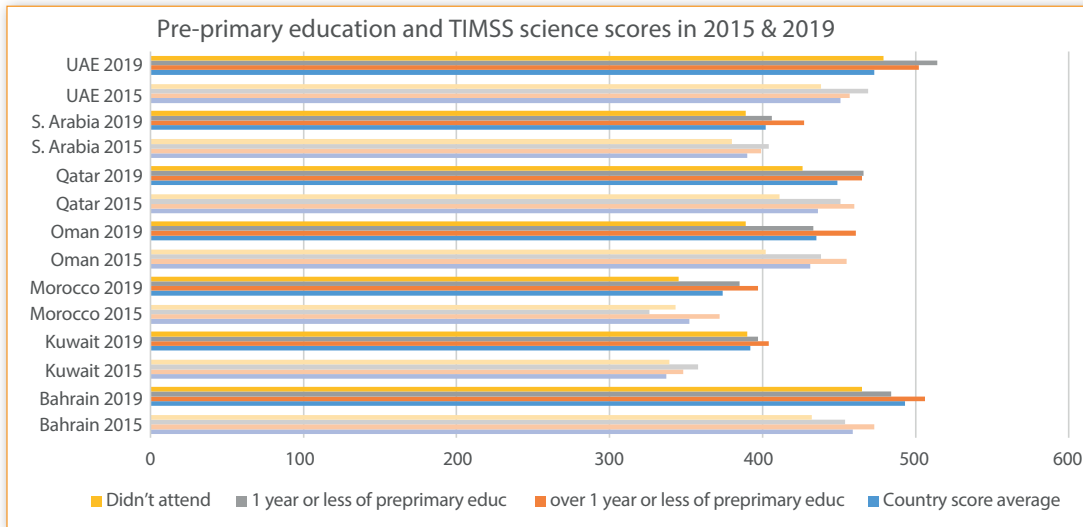
Data sources:

Grade 4- TIMSS Science 2019 Exhibit 5.15: Students Attended Preprimary Education https://timss2019.org/reports/home-contexts/, accessed August, 2022.

Grade 4- TIMSS Science 2015 Exhibit 4.7: Students Attended Preprimary Education https://timssandpirls.bc.edu/timss2015/international-results/timss-2015/science/home-environment-support/students-attended-preprimary-education/, accessed August, 2022.

[1] Weighted average computed by Basma Faour (for details see Table 22)

In the education systems of these countries, children who attended ECCE for a longer period ('more than one but less than three years') outperform those who participated in ECCE for a shorter period ('one year or less') for science fourth grade (Figure 6).

TIMSS shows the importance of early educational activities for later progress in primary school. Fourth grade students had higher achievement, on average, when their parents had engaged them in literacy and numeracy activities at an early age in the home, when the students had attended pre-primary education, or when they had literacy and numeracy skills upon entering primary school (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Parental engagement in literacy and TIMSS math score for 4th graders, 2019
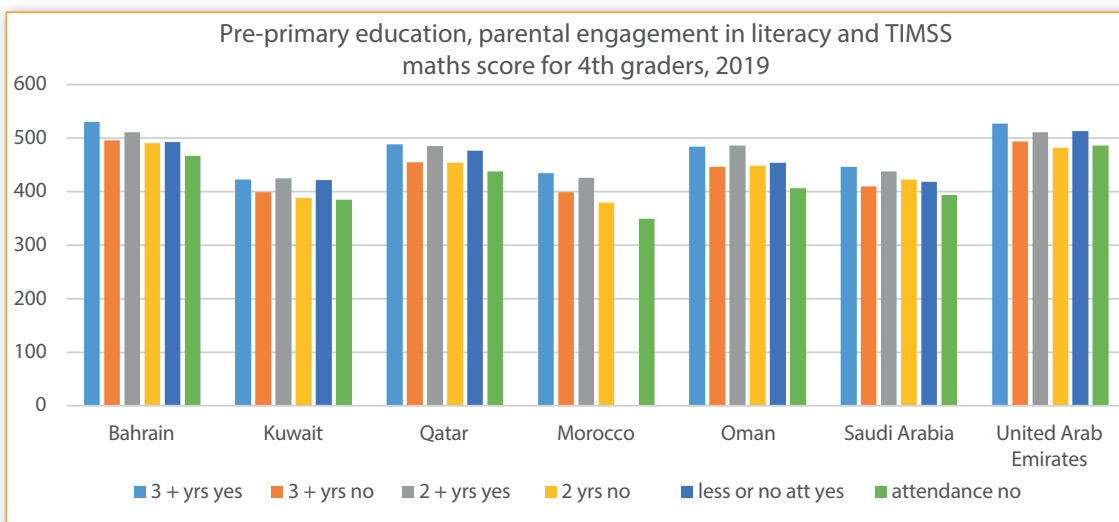
Data source:
Grade 4 TIMSS Math 2019. Exhibit 5.16- Early Prepartion for school https://timss2019.org/reports/wp-content/themes/timssandpirls/download-center/home-school/T19_Ch5-home-environment.pdf, accessed July, 2022.

Resilience and access to ECCE programme for refugees

In a review of 26 refugee and humanitarian response plans, only 9% of them included elements of early learning. Early education and parenting interventions were almost absent from the response plan. There was no mention of learning under 5. Even when it came to total humanitarian assistance funding in 2016, 2% was allocated to education and even a smaller fraction to early development and learning. (Bouchane et al., 2018). As of September 2019, 15.7% of Syrian refugees were under 5 years old (UNHCR 2019b).

Young children born into environments in which they have numerous adverse experiences, such as exposure to violence, chronic disease, or a lack of opportunities, are statistically more likely to have poor health outcomes and a level of well-being relative to the level of trauma they have endured (Felitti et al., 2019). With the lack of frequent responsive interactions with caregivers and the presence of stressors such as poverty and violence, children can develop a toxic stress response, which is a disruption of critical biological and neurological processes during the foundational stages of development. Toxic stress at an early age can have profound long-term consequences for children's development that increase their risk for poor physical and mental health outcomes, cognitive deficits, and, later, reduced earnings (Shonkoff et al., 2012).

Some of the countries who hosted refugees or internally displaced people have provided early childhood education and provided support for their caregivers. These are some examples:

Reach Up and Learn - home-visiting program

Reach Up and Learn is an evidence-based comprehensive home-visiting intervention for children ages 6 months to 3 years, and their caregivers. This programme takes a novel approach to ECCE support by integrating early childhood home visits into existing services within the humanitarian response. It responds to the needs of refugees, internally displaced persons, and other vulnerable populations in the conflict-affected settings of Jordan, Lebanon, and northeastern Syria. It is designed to help caregivers support their children's healthy development and strengthen

caregivers' capacity to provide enhanced play-based early learning opportunities for children. The programme is based on an ECD intervention known as the Jamaican Home Visiting Programme. The studies conducted on the intervention in Jamaica documented the positive impact home visiting had on psychosocial support and cognitive stimulation for children ages 9 months to 24 months. In 2017, IRC trained a team to implement in Jordan and Lebanon with Syrian refugee families.

By the end of 2017, IRC launched a weekly visiting programme in Syria in several internally displaced person camps and in urban areas where displaced Syrians were living. As of December 2019, the Reach Up programme had reached more than 4,399 children and 4,025 caregivers in the three countries: the Jordan health teams served 1,725 children and 1,669 caregivers, the Lebanon team served 320 caregivers, and the northeastern Syria programme served 1,748 children and 1,530 caregivers (Wilton et al, 2021).

Morocco Child To Child And Caravane Initiatives

In Morocco, the 2011 constitution recognized the right to education of all children. In 2013, the Ministry of National Education specified in a circular that all foreign children of compulsory school age living in Morocco could be integrated into the education system, whether formal or non-formal, public or private.

In 2018, the Ministry of National Education developed a toolkit to define a formal framework and guide to immigrants' integration into the education system at the organizational, administrative and pedagogical levels (Morocco Ministry of National Education, 2018). There was also the Child-to-Child and Caravane initiatives, and the ministry developed radio and TV spots to encourage immigrant children to enrol. In total, 5,500 immigrant children were enrolled in 2017/18 (Morocco Government, 2018). Programmes targeting disadvantaged Moroccan students have been extended to immigrants and refugees, including the King's One Million School Bags initiative, providing students with supplies since 2013 and access to housing and canteen services since 2015.

The Preschool Healing Classroom - Lebanon

In 2000, the IRC developed the Pre-school Healing Classrooms. Its aim was to provide children with a safe and predictable place to build their academic and social-emotional skills in order to deal with the outcomes of the conflict. The Preschool Healing Classrooms programme provides training for teachers, resources for teaching and learning and establishes connections with parents and school staff. It is available for the primary grades in 20 countries affected by conflict or crisis. It was later expanded to include pre-primary children (Jalbout and Bullard, 2021).

In 2014, the Pre-school Healing Classrooms teacher-training programme was adapted for Lebanon. It currently serve 3200 pre-school children and has trained/ employed 128 teachers.

The IRC's Pre-school Healing Classrooms approach focuses on children learning basic pre-literacy and numeracy skills, as well as social-emotional skills such as ways to manage their feelings, play cooperatively, express their needs, and focus. (Bouchane et al, 2018).

Ahlan simsim

In late 2017, the MacArthur Foundation announced a US$100 million grant to the Sesame Workshop and the IRC for early childhood development intervention for children and caregivers affected by conflict and displacement in the Middle East. It is in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. It is the largest initiative of its kind in humanitarian response, which delivers evidence-based early childhood programming for Syrian refugees. NYU Global TIES for Children is leading the design and execution of impact studies on the program that will double the existing body of research around what early learning interventions are most effectivefor children in crisis settings. Ahlan Simsim not only addresses immediate needs and builds a strong foundation for future wellbeing, but also has the potential to transform how the humanitarian system responds to crises around the world.

For more information: please visit www.ahlansimsim.org (available in Arabic, English and Kurdish)

Evidence from post-pilot assessments after 4 months showed that 3-year-olds improved in motor skills, early literacy and numeracy, and social emotional skills. This made for the IRC expand Pre-school Healing Classrooms for the 2016-2017 school year. The Pre-school Healing Classrooms also works with Syrian parents. Another IRC program, Families Make the Difference, aims strengthen the capacities of caregivers to reduce violence in the lives of children and support their healthy development by introducing techniques parents can use to communicate and problem-solve effectively with their children. This programme is delivered in 10-13 weekly or biweekly sessions and addresses topics such as early brain development, positive parent-child interaction techniques, stress management strategies and positive discipline practices. The IRC runs parenting programmes for caregivers of young children in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria (Bouchane et al, 2018). Preliminary findings from parents participating in Families Make the Difference parenting programmes in the countries surrounding Syria indicate a 55% increase in the use of positive coping strategies and a significant decrease in violent discipline.

The Rainbow of education

Created by the Amal Alliance and implemented in Lebanon. A six-month curriculum uses six colours of the rainbow to address different themes each month. A seventh colour is included to represent the culmination of all lessons learned. Both the Rainbow, and its early childhood development adaptation - the Mini Rainbow - were highlighted for their best practices and skillful application in refugee settings. The Mini Rainbow ECD adaptation for ages 3-6 is a 14-week curriculum that uses colours of the rainbow to address different themes every two weeks. Each colour corresponds to a different theme that links to a social-emotional competency that can be introduced to cultivate and nourish a child's early childhood development. In December 2019, at the inaugural Global Refugee Forum in Geneva, UNHCR named the Rainbow of Education one of "the most promising holistic practices" (De La Fuente, 2022).

Innovation in technology

Shu3A3

The Arab Network for Disabilities and Learning Difficulties (Shu3A3) was created to use information and communication technologies to enhance communication and the exchange of knowledge and integration efforts of stakeholders educating students with special needs in the Arab countries https://shu3a3.redsoft.org/.

Special education and e-accessibility

The Mada Assistive Technology Portal in Qatar offers people with disabilities a wide range of information about assistive technology, in both Arabic and English. The Mada Innovation Program is a regional incentive to encourage innovation in finding Arabic accessibility solutions to overcome challenges facing persons with disabilities in the region. The third component is a digital accessibility consulting service and a platform to provide accreditation and compliance testing for different platforms, including websites, mobile phones, kiosks, and public sites, in accordance with international standards.

Source: https://mada.org.qa/

Two Arab countries, Qatar and Oman, were ranked among the top 10 e-accessible countries worldwide in 2016. Both countries have embraced the issue of accessibility for people with special needs, not only to public places and services, but also to information and e-services. They developed their own regulations and legislation in line with international standards, thus becoming leaders in e-accessibility. While Qatar ranked fifth in 2016, it jumped to first place in 2020 in the G3 ICT ranking of e-accessibility (DARE Index 2020). As part of the Accessible Qatar initiative, e-accessibility has received great attention from governmental organizations and the private sector (ESCWA, 2018).

Habaybna

Parents in the Arab region are also contributing to ECCE Inclusion. In Jordan, https://habaybna.net/ Habaybna was launched in December 2017 and founded by parents whose two sons have developmental disability. It is an online resource and learning hub that provides specialized content on developmental disabilities in Arabic throughout the Arab region. The new platform aims to empower parents by providing customized knowledge – in Arabic – through articles and video interviews with specialists in the field giving practical guidance, as well as interviews with parents sharing their personal experiences and recommendations. Another important goal of Habaybna is to oppose the negative stereotypes facing children with disability and focus on their special talents instead.

Urjouha

Powered by the Arab Resource Collective ARC, https://www.urjouha.net/index-english Urjouha is an Arabic parenting website empowered by the Arab Resource collective. Developed by Arab ECD, Health, and Mental Health Experts, it is directed at to Arab caregivers in the Arab World and Arabic-speaking caregivers around the globe. Urjouha aims to provide all the possible support for parents to give their .best to their young children in their early years, a critical window for children's development.

The platform delivers simple, contemporary answers to various parenting questions in a constructive and stimulating manner for the whole family. It enhances the knowledge and abilities of its surfers through methods that emphasize justice between the mother and father in their partnership towards positive and playful parenting, and it links effective caregiving to the ever-present expression of love.

Kodrat

Technology is also helping teachers. UNESCO launched https://kodrat-unescoregional.com/ which aims at supporting teachers by building their capacities in coping with a new way of teaching and learning. The platform contains online courses targeting teachers and education practitioners to support their professional development in diverse education fields including distance learning, inclusive education, and lifelong learning.

Tabshoura (Chalk)

Tabshoura work focused from the outset on developing resources aligned with the 2015 Lebanese curriculum by grade, subject and project. Teachers created activities suitable for both an interactive platform and to meet the curricular learning objectives.

The activities were translated, edited, validated, adapted and digitized, and have been used with Syrian refugees as a supplementary resource. Recently it included other grade levels and required registration.

It was launched in 2013 and serves children from age 3-18. So far, 10,000 children benefited from this innovative device.

It is a pocket-sized server, which contains educational content to help refugee students learn. It has a built-in power bank and does not need internet or electricity to run. It acts as a hotspot and allows up to 30 students to use the interactive digital content simultaneously. A study showed that students who used the Tabshoura platform learned significantly more than children who followed the traditional educational methods.

NaTakallam

NaTakallam ("we speak" in Arabic) matches displaced Syrians with Arabic learners around the world for language practice over Skype. It offers language learning, translation and cultural exchange services delivered by individuals who have been forced to flee their homes or who are based in countries that host large communities of refugees. In addition NaTakallam offers a valuable income source to displaced Syrians mostly in Lebanon, but also in Turkey, Egypt, Armenia, France, Brazil, and Germany. Alongside language instruction, users and Syrian conversation partners engage in an intercultural exchange as well, frequently developing transatlantic friendships between worlds (Fahed, 2020).

Governance, policy, and multi-sectoral approach

Several countries have developed national education strategies following the adoption of the SDGs and some included early childhood. Table A8 provides some examples of reported policies in six Arab countries. Table A9 presents recent policies in the GCC countries in relation to ECCE.

For example, Qatar Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017-2022 included a substantial component on pre-primary (Towfighian et al., 2017). Their plan aims to:

- Concentrate investments to further develop education in the nursery stage (birth to three).

- Develop and intensify preparation programmes for early childhood teachers and school leaders.

- Implement awareness campaign to encourage enrolment.

- Develop a database for the early childhood education stage.

Some countries have started to create special units for early childhood. The Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority (ECA) aims at promoting optimal child development and well-being through four sectors: Health and Nutrition, Child Protection, Family Support, and Education and Early Care, from the early stages of pregnancy to the age of 8 (https://eca.gov.ae/).

Within their efforts to develop and implement an effective ECD research ecosystem, the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority awarded AED 1.2 million ($326,699.51) grants to fund five important ECD-related research projects. Researchers and academics from three higher education institutions will conduct research projects. Among the research topics are:

- Evaluation of health's professional knowledge with regard to supporting young 'children of determination'.

- Language assessment of Emirati Children with atypical language development.

- Exploring the causes of school absenteeism in young children.

In the GCC countries, ECCE governance differs between the public and private sector. For example, Oman has a special department of private school education for ECCE services 0-6 for the private sector and it is similar in Saudi Arabia (Table A13).

In Jordan, the National Council of Family Affairs (NCFA) is considered as "an umbrella organization that supports, coordinates and facilitates the work of its partners and relevant institutions which are involved and influential in the field of family affairs." (NCFA, 2014). NCFA is independent of the ministries. The HRD Strategy calls for establishment of "a single body to coordinate all early childhood education and development activities and decision-making" (p.25), but real progress has not been made on this objective. Although NCFA is supposedly positioned to play this role, it is not part of Jordan's formal governance structure (i.e., it is outside

of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches), and therefore lacks authority over the ministries that would be needed to provide meaningful coordination and oversight. Among NCFA multiple activities in Early Childhood Development, there is a long-term project: "Development of services provided to children from birth to four years". The project includes human resources training, activities, and development of manuals and activity sheets, in addition to building nurseries. Furthermore, efforts to coordinate early identification and intervention for young children with disabilities (for Syrians and Jordanians) are led by Jordan's Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, through a working group with humanitarian agencies and implementing partners.

Financial commitments - government and donors

It has been estimated that returns on investing just $1 in ECCE can be as high as $17 for the most disadvantaged children (CGECCD, 2013).

Libya, Sudan, and Yemen received no aid at all for pre-primary education in 2017 whereas Palestine was among the top five recipients of pre-primary aid. Furthermore, a pre-primary school-aged child residing in a conflict-affected country, would receive on average just $0.17 in aid (Zubairi and Rose, 2019). In Syria it would be US$ 0.09, Egypt $0.12, Iraq $0.001, and Palestine $7.16.

Palestine is an example of when governments prioritize pre-primary education and work together with the international community to finance and deliver on this policy priority and the impact is significant. In addition to increasing the recognition and prioritization of pre-primary education in the country, Palestine has also benefited from international financial support, accounting for 3% of all donor aid to pre-primary education in 2017.

Partnerships with local, regional, and international organization

Partnerships with local or international organization have several benefits for improving the provision of ECCE programmes particularly for vulnerable and refugee children. Below are some examples:

UNESCO's Arab Regional Education Support Strategy

Covering the period of 2016-2021, UNESCO's Arab Regional Education Support Strategy came at a time where most Member States were at a crossroad. Capitalizing on achievements made in the region, UNESCO reiterated its commitment to supporting Member States operationalize the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, in particular the Sustainable Development SDG-4 Education 2030 Agenda. UNESCO continued to provide tangible support for each Member State in the region, taking into account national needs and priorities and thus employing nationally relevant approaches. As crises in some of the Arab countries continue to effect access to quality education, and impact national education systems, UNESCO works with countres to build resilience, while ensuring that learners are able to exercise their fundamental right to quality and equitable education, both in an emergency and post-conflict setting.

LiBeirut Inititiative

LiBeirut is an international flagship initiative launched from Beirut by the Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azoulay, in the aftermath of the explosions, on August 27, 2020, to support the rehabilitation of schools, historic heritage buildings, museums, galleries and the creative industry, all of which suffered significant damage in the deadly explosions. Through LiBeirut, UNESCO and its partners immediately appealed to donors who responded to this call, providing USD$35 million: the total cost of what was needed. UNESCO has led the coordination and completion of rehabilitating 280 educational institutions. In addition to rehabilitation, UNESCO provided equipment and furniture items, as well as appliances to public schools, and carried out restoration work in eleven school libraries in the capital, training librarians and teachers and collecting books. A large number of the schools rehabilitated and equipped provide early childhood education, which ensures learning never stops for early learners during the crisis.

Education Cannot Wait (ECW) — Multi year resilience programmes (MYRP) in the 3 Arab Countries

ECW funds are invested in countries and contexts affected by emergencies and protracted crises – including armed conflicts, forced displacement, climate-induced disasters and epidemics while at the

same time working across the triple nexus to bridge into longer-term development and building resilience. Within this framework ECW have build partnerships with several countries of the region as follows:

MYRP Lebanon (2022-2024) provides out-of-school girls and boys with relevant, gender-responsive, non-formal education programmes. One of the key focuses is early childhood education level. It encompasses all early childhood education, primary, secondary and remedial learning, informed by best practices in each case (e.g. play-based learning in early childhood education). In addition, it ensures that early learners in formal and non-formal education are ready to begin learning in a second language (either in English or French) as they transition from Grade 3 to Grade 4, Moreover, MYRP Lebanon undertakes modelling scenarios to outline the scale of demand in shaping future investments within and beyond the MYRP and within the Lebanese government for medium-term planning of formal and non-formal education. It will build on existing analysis to provide guidance on several topics, including the plausibility and timing of introducing mandatory early childhood education to strengthen school readiness and foundational learning.

MYRP Syria (2020-2023) provides age-specific skills development programmes including early childhood learning under a Non-Formal Education component. It rolls up a formative holistic early grade learning tool to measure learning outcomes in early grade reading, math, and social emotional skills.

MYRP Sudan (2022-2024) prioritises the most disadvantaged including young children through MHPSS programming provision, as well as increasing access to innovative early-learning opportunities, play-based learning and SEL comprise substantial components of the programme.

UNICEF Lebanon

To assist Lebanon with the refugee situation, the economic crisis, the impact of the Beirut Blast and the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF launched two initiatives. In June of 2022,

1. UNICEF with MEHE initiated the development of its new Lebanon Country Programme Document (CPD) for 2023-2025 in consultation with high-level government officials and institutions, civil society and UN agencies. The CPD sets out programme priorities and strategies over the next three years

in line with the new "United Nations Framework" for 2023-2025 to strengthen and continue the work initiated under the previous UNICEF programme to improve children and young people's access to quality services in protection, education and health, and provide enhanced opportunities to realize their full potential.

2. Transition Resilience Education Fund (TREF) works with MEHE and contributing partners particularly the European Union and Germany through the German Development Bank KfW. The TREF is an innovative aid modality to strengthen governance, transparency, efficiency and learning outcomes for children in the education sector, including in formal public education as well as alternative learning pathways designed to improve access to inclusive and quality education for children who are out of school and not learning.

USAID QITABI

- USAID funded Quality Instruction towards Access and Basic Education (QITABI) in Lebanon which launched in 2014. It assisted with the influx of Syrian refugee learners. QITABI used an implicit SEL approach, which paved the way for QITABI2's use of a Holistic Learning Approach with a focus on child-friendly classrooms and teacher-student relationships. SEL integrated into Arabic, English, French, and Math curricula (QITABI2) which started in 2020. This $90 million programme delivered by World Learning will end in 2024. The emphasis is on early grades and early-childhood education. Given the nature of the programming and its emphasis on stronger learning outcomes, the principal partnership is with the Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERD). QITABI 2 is developing approximately 500 mini animated lessons covering the Lebanese curriculum in Arabic, English and French. They are working with the ministry to develop a roadmap for a national policy for SEL that will ensure the sustainability of efforts to integrate SEL into core curricula.

Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund

- Donors' contributions to ECCE programmes in empowering caregivers is the programme offered by the Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund. The foundation was established in 2018, with an overall goal of benefiting 20,000 refugees and

vulnerable youth in Jordan, Lebanon and UAE. The Relief International Remedial Education Programme in Azraq Refugee Camp in Jordan benefited 700 students 2019 – 2021. It provided ECD services for over 100 children of caregivers who benefit from the programme. This was done through nursery assistance for children 0-2 and educational services for children 3-5. The ECD component included the setting up of an ECD centre in Azraq Refugee Camp that allowed 116 caregivers the opportunity to continue their education and benefit from income-generating opportunities through hosting and providing day care services to their children. It gave caregivers the opportunity to attend formal school, enrol in the Remedial Education programme and extra curricula activities and to pursue work opportunities (especially for single mothers). Over 80% of the participating young mothers reported that they were able to continue successfully the formal education they had abandoned.

The survey of teachers in pre-primary education UNESCO

■ The Survey of Teachers in Pre-primary Education (STEPP) project is designed for use in low-and-middle-income countries. UNESCO implemented it from 2016 to 2019. It collects information that is known to affect the quality of pre-primary education from pre-primary teachers and centre heads. The collected information concerns training and professional development, pedagogical and professional practices, working conditions and job satisfaction, and characteristics of pre-primary personnel and the settings in which they work. Launched in 2016, STEPP is an OECD-UNESCO Joint Initiative in support of the implementation of SDG target 4.2 on ECCE, and aims to align its

content and methodology to that of the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) Starting Strong Survey to the extent feasible. STEPP is being pilot tested in 7 countries (Ahmed et al., 2020). UNESCO is currently developing a resource mobilization strategy for the second phase of the STEPP project – i.e. main survey, which will generate evidence and insights upon which to formulate concrete improvement measures in favour of a quality teaching workforce – that will involve close consultation and coordination with the participating countries and partners.

IRC, NYU Global TIES for Children and Dubai Cares

■ The IRC and NYU Global TIES for Children established a strategic partnership. Dubai Cares was one of the first donors to invest in this partnership, and the first to invest in rigorous research on school-based SEL interventions. The Spencer Foundation, the US Bureau of Population, Refugees, Migration, and the Porticus Foundation also provided the support needed for this partnership to design and implement the Evidence for Action: Education in Emergencies (3EA) initiative, bringing together programmes and rigorous research about children in crisis.

The World Bank - Jordan

■ The World Bank (2017) provided Jordan with $200 million to expand access to early childhood education, and improve student assessment, teaching and learning conditions for Jordanian and Syrian refugee children. The project will benefit approximately 700,000 Jordanian and Syrian refugee children. It will also help train more than 30,000 teachers across the Kingdom.

2.2. Challenges

The most significant challenge to progress in the majority of countries in the region is political instability and conflict, which intensifies inequality, poverty, exclusion and marginalization. The refugee crisis puts added pressures on countries affected by conflict and host governments and communities in their efforts to ensure provision of access to quality education at all levels.

Not having a common definition related to age bracket groups, service programmes and ECCE teachers continues to cause some confusion among stakeholders about related childhood concept especially when drawing policies and discussing action plans for implementation and identifying priorities for investment. Although countries recognize ECCE as a right, ECCE is not yet present in all national policies as a priority. For example, the free and compulsory one year is not enacted yet. This also applies to the

definition of inclusion and providing access to those excluded children.

Inclusion

Contextual factors, such as politics, resources, and culture, can make the inclusion challenge appear to vary across countries or groups. (UNESCO, 2021a). Without attention to pre-primary education, countries will fail to achieve the goal of inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning promised by SDG-4 (Zubairi and Rose, 2019).

In Saudi Arabia, despite decades-long efforts to move from fully segregated schools to inclusive models for students with disabilities, this goal remains difficult to achieve. The inclusive classroom initiative for all types of disabilities was established in 2016 by the Ministry of Education in a few schools, with an aim of expanding this type of inclusion to other schools in the future. Before this in 2013, the Ministry of Education had formed an educational partnership with the University of Oregon (UO) to start the Inclusive Education Project, with the goal of implementing inclusive education in six Saudi schools. However, this initiative has not progressed any further, and the number of schools implementing inclusive education

has not increased as originally intended (Abu-Alghayth et al., 2022).

Countries should address barriers to inclusion, such as ineffective or inconsistent laws and policies, lack of teacher preparation, non-inclusive curricula, absence of data on those excluded from education, lack of political will and untargeted finance. Issues of inclusion in ECCE need to be addressed through cross-sectoral policies that consider the diversity of learners, including refugee and asylum-seeking children. The urban-rural gap in pre-primary enrolment is widened by the fact that many countries have yet to expand the public provision of pre-primary education and therefore the field of childcare services is left to private providers and individual families (Bennett, 2011; UNESCO, 2015a).

Concentrating on access to education without paying enough attention to whether students are learning and acquiring relevant skills once they are in school negatively impacts ECCE outcomes.

Some countries reported on the challenges they face whether working in nurseries (Table 23). Palestine reported that there are no learning programmes in nurseries.

Table 23. Reported challenges facing nurseries

Country	Nurseries
Palestine	■ Services are restricted to feeding, cleaning and putting children to sleep. Most nurseries do not have learning programmes that develop children's skills. ■ Home nurseries are not licensed by the Ministry of Social Development and have no criteria for quality. ■ Lack requirements for safety, security and intervention during emergencies.
Sudan	■ Environment ■ Infrastructure ■ Lack of budgets allocated to the education sector
Syria	■ Little preparation for care providers ■ Sanitary environment non-existent ■ Not equipped with necessary physical requirements ■ Trained staff not available
Tunisia	■ Low public and private investment ■ No plan for quality assessment and monitoring ■ Unify approaches and curricula ■ No plan for regional staff preparation and no plan to assess its outcomes ■ No plan to encourage establishing new nurseries ■ No programme to monitor health and sanitary conditions ■ Develop nursery services at home and nurseries particularly in the areas of health, nutrition, sanitation

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

In Lebanon, the supply of childcare services is dominated by private providers (80%), followed by public providers (12%), and semi-private providers (8%). There is also uneven distribution which leads to low access to childcare providers in inland regions and rural areas. While 80% of childcare centres cater to children aged 1-3, only 58% cater to children between 0-1, and these are primarily private sector centres which generally tend to be more costly. Affordability has also become a major concern since the start of the economic crisis in 2019. In 2021, the percentage of childcare providers servicing families with payment difficulties has doubled, reaching 41%. Additionally, due to the local currency devaluation and the significant increase in fuel prices, the monthly

fees per child are no longer sufficient to cover the operational expenses of childcare providers. Therefore, in order to remain affordable, childcare providers are often constrained to compromise on quality which can negatively affect the healthy development of children. Other providers have had to increase their fees and have thus become unaffordable to many (Abou Char et al., 2022).

As for pre-primary, Tunisia reported on the need to create a mechanism for monitoring and evaluation of quality while Syria emphasized that since most kindergartens are private not public, high tuition fees prevent most parents from sending their children to pre-schools and specialized staff is not available (Table 25).

Table 24. Reported challenges facing pre-primary

Country	Pre-primary
Iraq	■ Shortage of buildings relative to the number of enrolled children ■ Wide gap in enrolment rates between urban and rural areas ■ Most teachers are not specialized in ECCE ■ Lack of modern equipment and technology such as data shows and smart boards
Palestine	■ Low enrolment. Over 20% of children join Grade 1 without having a pre-school experience and 40% of children spend only one year at pre-school. ■ Limited parental awareness about the importance of skills other than reading, writing and maths. ■ In-service training of pre-school teachers who do not have early childhood qualifications.
Sudan	■ Low allocated budgets ■ Lack of continuity of teacher training ■ Failure to keep pace with educational and entertainment methods
Syria	■ As most kindergartens are private not public, high tuition fees prevent most parents from sending their children to pre-schools ■ Deficient physical environment: lacks essential equipment (chairs, tables, boards, learning materials), lacks space, proper lighting, heating ■ Specialized staff not available ■ Limited societal awareness about the importance of this stage in the life of the child
Tunisia	■ Develop parents' ability to improve the quality of home environment with regard to infants and children ■ Raise public investment ■ Create a mechanism for monitoring and evaluation of quality ■ Unify approaches to services and curricula ■ Design plans for regional staff preparation and for assessing their outcomes ■ Develop plans to encourage establishing new pre-schools ■ Speed up the expansion of integrated pre-school education, improve the quality of its services along with parental partnership, and establish criteria for quality services to ensure a smooth transition to school.
Yemen	■ No unified curriculum, no expansion in building new pre-schools

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

Challenges for grades 1 and 2 centred on overcrowding and Palestine noted the wide gap between school and pre-school climates while Sudan reported that the

shortage of teachers and low teachers' salaries are the main challenges to provide quality programmes to their children (Table 25).

Table 25. Reported challenges facing early grades

Country	Grades 1 & 2
Iraq	■ Low competency in reading and writing due to short duration of class sessions. The duration was dictated by crowding and having 2 or 3 shifts. Competency level was also affected by COVID-19 and online learning
Jordan	■ Teacher preparation, leased buildings, teachers for supplementary classes
Palestine	■ Wide gap between school and pre-school climates and lack of concern at schools for children's needs with regard to movement and work within groups and the use of appropriate learning games and materials ■ Lack of consideration for individual differences among children when teachers present learning materials.
Sudan	■ Failure to train teachers ■ Not appointing teachers to fill the shortage of teachers ■ Low teachers' salaries, which made the teaching profession an unappealing profession that does not satisfy the aspirations of young people
Syria	■ Crowding ■ Condensed curriculum along with inability of teachers to update their knowledge and keep up with recent scientific developments ■ Economic situation of parents ■ Half-day schedule in some schools
Yemen	■ Pupil crowding, teacher preparation and development, texts not available, no expansion

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

Access to ECCE in all GCC for ages 0-5 is still a challenge with disparity and lack of equity due to the rapid growth of the private sector ECCE in these countries. Having very limited public provision of programmes for children below age 5 and a variety of informal settings such as in-formal day cares and community centres continues to cause concern about equity and access for this age group. Furthermore, private provision of ECCE programmes in all GCC countries mainly serve the needs of upper middle and high-income families and as such is defined by inequality because the more affluent households are much more likely to be enrolled than children from poorer households.

Making one year of pre-school compulsory has to take into account financial, infrastructure, and human resources issues. For example, if pre-school education is made compulsory in Bahrain, the number of specialized pre-school teachers currently available is not enough to cover the needs of the society (Fateel et al., 2021).

Challenges to child well-being and gaps in programmes to promote child well-being in the Gulf countries are related to child disabilities; regional disparities; enforcement, monitoring, and evaluation; and multi-sectoral coordination.

Jordan has an excellent vision for comprehensive ECD services for children under 8 years old described in the HRD Strategy. The challenge for Jordan is to operationalize that vision in a national ECD policy for Jordanians (King & McKinney, 2020).

The lack of overall evaluation rating systems for ECCE institutions and their subsequent accessibility and distribution does not help parents to make informed decisions at the time of admission, nor does it allow for competition and public pressure to influence policies and practices. For example, Kuwait has some more challenges, such as lack of effective regulatory and quality control, inadequate training of teachers, shortage of training and specialized academic programmes, shortage of early intervention programmes, and lack of strong public commitment (Noor, 2019).

Refugees

One of the challenges is teacher shortages in displacement contexts. One solution is to include refugee teachers in national training programmes. Refugee teachers are generally excluded: they may be denied the right to work, or strict professional regulations may prevent them from legally joining the national teaching force. Even when retraining is possible, it is often lengthy and costly, requiring full-time study (Mendenhall et al., 2018). Refugees who live in camps are often served by systems run by international agencies, separate and apart from national government systems.

Refugee children continue to face challenges in accessing education programmes in some Arab countries, which include:

- Cost of education (both direct and indirect) - though public schools in the host country may be free, sometimes the costs of school supply and transportation are a deterrent.

- Low socio-economic conditions of families, which forces young children to work, rather than attend early primary grades.

- Lack of residency permits - Lebanon for example requires proof for registration in their public schools.

- Lack of documentation and no recognition of prior learning

- Difference in language of instruction and curriculum

- Safety and protection concerns

The low quality of education, including the high number of untrained teachers, and over-crowded classrooms, exacerbated by an overall weak education system, are also deterrents for enrolment and retention in education during a crisis. There is also great need for psychosocial support for learners during crisis to enable learning in times of great stress and trauma, as well as discourage dropping-out and poor attendance.

Qualified ECCE personel

Expanding ECCE without addressing quality is detrimental. Recruitment of quality ECCE educators poses a challenge when it comes to serving the entire rapidly expanding early childhood education sector

especially in Arab countries that are witnessing a growth in the birth to age 8 population.

One challenge currently facing the education workforce is a global shortage of teachers: how can decision-makers make the teaching profession more attractive, especially for younger generations? (UN Transforming Education Summit, 2022). The UIS (2016) released the first ever estimates of how many teachers are needed to achieve SDG 4. It produced projections for five-year intervals, setting out the numbers of teachers needed at each milestone. For example, by 2025, those figures rise to 17.8 million for primary education and 33.5 million for secondary education – the result of growing numbers of youth of secondary school age. The countries facing the biggest teacher shortages in the region are Algeria (0.2 million) for primary education and Egypt (1.1 million) for secondary education.

The challenge of Action Track 3 of the Transforming Education Summit is to seek commitments and action to create an education workforce in a manner that is sustainable and achievable. Currently, teachers and education personnel are confronted by four major challenges: teacher shortages; difficulties in assuring the qualifications and professional development needs of teaching personnel; low status and working conditions, and lack of capacity to develop teacher leadership, autonomy and innovation. Shortages of teachers can often occur in particular subject areas, qualifications or training profiles, or grade levels.

Digital transformation and the use of technologies hold promise for expanding education access and enriching provision for more learners. Yet, lack of access to such technologies and requisite infrastructure, and a dearth of requisite skills among learners and teachers remains an important obstacle for unlocking their potential. The role of teachers has also expanded from knowledge providers to knowledge producers and sense-makers of complex realities (UN Transforming Education Summit, 2022).

Another key obstacle in developing quality teachers is working conditions and remuneration, which deter youth from entering the profession and in-service teachers from remaining in it. Teacher wages remain comparatively low in many countries, and in crisis-affected areas, teachers are often paid late or not at all.

Governance

Though having more than one ministry involved in ECCE may be positive in terms of providing more services that are comprehensive, it can lead to conflict between ministries or departments. Fragmented responsibility may lead to disparities in access and quality. The lack of coordination and integration has the potential to lead to weaknesses in the provision of holistic services. An example in Qatar, the Early Years Department, was established in 2016 at the MOEHE and it covers children between ages four and seven. However, MADSLA is responsible for children zero to 4 years (Towfighian et al., 2017).

Financial commitments - governments and donors

In low-income countries, governments allocate only about 3% of their education budgets to ECE compared to 9% in high-income countries (Zubairi and Rose, 2019). One of the main goals for the GPS for Early Childhood is to "expand annual international aid to pre-primary education from an average of 7% of education aid in 2016 to at least 10% by 2030". UNESCO and the GPS are urging governments to guarantee at least one year of compulsory pre-primary education for all children. According to Zubairi and Rose (2019), 16 of the top 25 donors to the education sector have either given nothing or reduced their previous spending on pre-primary education since the introduction of the SDG targets. And since the promise to give all children access to quality pre-primary education was made in 2015, aid spending on pre-primary education has declined by more than a quarter. As a result, aid spending on pre-primary education is even smaller than when the SDGs were adopted in 2015.

While there has been an increase in overall aid to education, aid to pre-primary education is a small, and declining, priority of overall aid spending, accounting for just 0.5% in total in 2017 — down from 0.8% in 2015. The negligible amount of aid given to pre-primary by donor spending is reinforcing inequity. The most disadvantaged children are more likely to be denied the opportunity to have a good start to their education. In 2017, the three top donors who have increased aid to pre-primary education were Japan, UNICEF, and UAE whereas the top three donors who have decreased aid to pre-primary education were the World Bank, Canada, and Germany (Zubairi and Rose, 2019).

UNICEF now is ranked number one in terms of prioritisation of aid spending to pre-primary education as a share of its overall aid to education. It should be noted that this is in the context of a small decline in their overall education spending. Of the 17 donors with an explicit policy focus on pre-primary education, 11 have a focus on inclusion at pre-primary education, including children with disabilities. Of these same 17 donors, 11 also include a specific focus on pre-primary education in conflict-affected countries. Recent analysis shows that only 45% of countries globally provide tuition-free pre-primary education, a figure that falls to 15% for low-income countries (Zubairi and Rose, 2019).

The research shows that high-quality birth-to-five programmes for disadvantaged children can deliver a 13% per year return on investment—a rate substantially higher than the 7-10% return previously established for pre-school programmes serving 3- to 4-year-olds (Heckman et al. 2016). Despite the latest research findings, ECCE remains an underfunded sector in the Arab region.

Use of data

Conducting additional in-depth surveys and research on ECCE, and making data and findings publicly available is an important step to better understanding the challenges facing young children. The lack of data on the state of ECCE in Arab countries also presents an obstacle to improving ECCE in the region. Without accurate and reliable data, countries cannot assess or monitor progress in enhancing ECCE. Compounding the lack of data on the state of ECCE is a shortage of evidence on what works in the region, as there is very little research on ECCE programmes in the region. There is lack of information and data on the non-formal, community and private-sector programmes in the Arab region.

There is also a lack of capacity for monitoring at the country level. There are just not enough adequately qualified personnel to monitor staff quality and supervisory visits are not frequent enough.

The SDG 4 report of UNESCO 2021 highlighted the key challenges for the region in achieving SDG4 with a focus on data (Table 26).

Table 26. A summary of the key findings/challenges in the Arab region in achieving SDG 4

SDG target	Findings
SDG 4.1 –Primary and secondary education	Very little data is available to monitor the global indicators of this target, namely learning and completion. Completion and out-of-school rates are unavailable for Gulf countries. Gulf countries have more data on learning and in general better results. Most countries improved proficiency in reading and mathematics by the end of lower secondary. Completion rates are higher in Levant countries than in other groups in all three levels of education. Out-of-school children are still a challenge in most countries.
SDG 4.2 – Early childhood	Data collected for this target in Arab States using household surveys is scarce. Administrative data is available which allows monitoring of enrolment rates on early childhood. Available data for adjusted net enrolment rates one year before the official, primary entry age is, by and large, stable for the Gulf countries and in the Mashriq.
SDG 4.a – School environment	Gulf countries reported 100% of primary and secondary schools are equipped with computers and internet, and most of them are also disability-friendly. The situation in the other regions is more varied. Attacks on students is still a reality in some of the countries facing conflicts.
SDG 4.c – Teachers	Most countries recorded that 100% of the teachers have the minimum qualification for the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels. The access of pupils to trained teachers has a more heterogeneous picture. Teacher attrition is still very high in some countries.
SDG 4 – Finance	Only a few countries have ensured the minimum investment of 15% of Total Government Expenditure until 2019. The picture is similar as far as the share of GDP is concerned, but a few countries in the Maghreb and the Gulf have reached and maintained the target. More effort is needed to produce indicators and data to efficiently monitor SDG framework in the region. This is an important challenge.

Source: Adapted from UNESCO (2021b), pp. 5-6 (Available under CC BY-SA 3.0 IGO).

This table clearly shows that data is unavailable for many indicators, making it difficult to monitor the global education framework. The report also noted that there is no regional framework to bridge with the SDG 4 framework.

Data sharing technology is still slow in effectively breaking down silos to connect government agencies across portfolio boundaries on early childhood education and care. The absence of a national online dashboard for agencies project developers and the public to build awareness and raise public expectations on early childhood development through social media.

There is a general lack of research on ECCE in the region (El-Kogali and Krafft, 2015) particularly about local context and the absence of local expertise to facilitate research.

Many Arab countries lack solid capacity in educational planning and relevant policy frameworks to guide plans and progress that responds to the new learning needs of students at different educational levels. Another major obstacle in the region is that most countries are ill equipped with data collection and analysis and information management systems to feed into situation analysis and policy development.

Learning poverty

In 2019, the World Bank introduced the concept of Learning Poverty, drawing on new data developed in coordination with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Learning poverty means being unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10. This indicator brings together schooling and learning indicators: it begins with the share of children who haven't achieved minimum reading proficiency (as measured in schools) and is adjusted by the proportion of children who are out of school (and are assumed not able to read proficiently). Around 53% of children in low- and middle-income countries cannot read and understand a simple story by the end of primary school. In poor countries, the level is as high as 80%. Such high levels of illiteracy are an early warning sign that all global educational goals and other related sustainable development goals are in jeopardy. Progress in reducing learning poverty is far too slow to meet the SDG aspirations: at the current rate of improvement, in 2030 about 43% of children will still be learning-poor. Eliminating learning poverty is as important as eliminating extreme monetary poverty, stunting, or hunger (World Bank, 2019).

Learning Poverty is higher for boys in the Arab region and even higher in poor Arab countries (Table 27).

Table 27. Percentage of children at late primary age who are not proficient in reading adjusted for out-of-school children (2022)

Country	Total	Males	Females
1. Algeria	68	69.5	66.4
2. Bahrain	32	41.9	22
3. Egypt	70	74.1	64.9
4. Jordan	52	55.3	48.2
5. Kuwait	51	58.2	44.1
6. Mauritania	95	-	-
7. Morocco	66	70.1	61.3
8. Oman	42	50.8	32.8
9. Qatar	35	41.6	29
10. Saudi Arabia	38	-	-
11. Tunisia	65	69.3	60.7
12. UAE	34	39.7	28.7
13. Yemen, Rep.	95	94.8	94.5

Note: No information provided on the following countries Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Sudan, Syria Arab Republic, Palestine.

Data source: World Bank 2019 https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/brief/country-learning-poverty-briefs, accessed August, 2022.
- no data provided

More attention should be given to the early primary years and the transition from pre-school to primary grades. For example, after two years of learning disruptions in Lebanon brought on by the pandemic and other crises, a study conducted by USAID and its QITABI2 programme showed that second-and third-grade students are reading well below their expected grade levels (World Learning, 2022).

Chapter 3

ECCE and COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on socioeconomic, academic, health and safety aspects in the region. The Arab region's gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to fall by about $152 billion as a result of the pandemic. Around 14.3 millions of Arabs plunged deeper into poverty increasing to more than 115 million overall. The pandemic intensified the inequalities that individuals living in Arab countries experience, especially low-income and conflict-affected countries. The Arab region is also home to 55.7 million people who need humanitarian assistance. Thus, the impact of COVID-19 will be extreme for the 26 million refugees and IDPs hosted in the region, many of whom live in informal settlements or camps, with inadequate access to critical health care services, water or sanitation (UN July, 2020).

The pandemic has affected children, their families and teachers in numerous ways. The effects on children relate to health such as anxiety, stress, loss of relatives, education, family issues related to poverty, job loss, and nutrition as it relates to food insecurity and malnutrition. Domestic abuse, conflict, and governance (e.g., political instability) affected children greatly (Mercer, 2020). Child mortality and children living in poverty are predicted to increase in number, which compounds the risks to development and learning (Yoshikawa et al., 2020).

The pandemic put early childhood education at an even greater disadvantage. This includes perceptions that early childhood education is less suited to distance delivery than other levels of education, concerns about young children's ability to comply with health protocols, and competition with high-stakes examinations for education ministries' attention (Neuman and Powers, 2021). Childhood was not at the centre of public conversations or a priority during the pandemic. Suddenly, children became invisible. Physical distancing, limited interactions with friends or their extended family members, and caregivers' mental health challenges reduced opportunities for children's cognitive and social interaction or stimulation outside the home. These put children's development at additional risk. The well-being of children was in jeopardy especially for those already experiencing the challenges of poverty, disabilities, refugee status, and underlying health conditions. In some Arab countries, access to health care, immunization and nutrition services was affected (Table 28).

Table 28. Services negatively affected by COVID-19

Service	Iraq	Jordan	Palestine	Sudan	Syria	Tunisia	Yemen*
Primary health care	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Nutrition programme	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Water	✓		✓	✓			
Health system	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Child protection	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Immunization programme	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

Some countries took measures to help marginalized families during lockdown. For example, Palestine offered food services, psychological counselling and smart phones for online learning as well as school supplies to the families (Table 29).

Table 29. Services provided to marginalized families during COVID-19 lockdown

Service	Iraq	Jordan	Palestine	Sudan	Syria	Tunisia	Yemen
Food	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Psychological counselling	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Social-emotional, and behavioural support to children	✓					✓	
Clothes							
School supplies	✓		✓			✓	
Smart phones for online learning			✓				

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

Some countries provided social protection measures for children with disabilities (Table 30).

Table 30. Countries with specific social protection measures for children with disabilities during COVID-19

Country	Social protection measure
Algeria	Paid leave for working women who take care of children with disabilities
Tunisia	Additional cash transfers of $70 to foster families that have children with disabilities (total of approximately $140).

Source: World Bank (2020), pp.70-71.

Many ECCE programmes closed or transitioned to providing virtual learning and services in response to countries' mandates, especially in the early months of the pandemic as reported by the Arab countries. As countries switched to remote learning because of lockdowns, there were increased inequities among learners within the country and across the globe. The most at risk were those children in low-income countries, remote rural areas, in conflict zones or children with special needs.

Arab countries took measures to ensure continuity of learning by resorting to alternative learning delivery models targeting all age groups and education levels to try to reach all learners (UNESCO Beirut, 2020). Because of the digital divide, countries used a combination of digital and non-digital approaches in their responses to school closures. For example, in addition to online learning (UNESCO, 2020b):

■ Palestine, Tunisia, Mauritania, and the UAE used Radio Based Learning.

■ Sudan, Egypt, Iraq, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Mauritania, and Qatar used TV Based Learning.

■ Syria activated several online platforms including one for early childhood learning.

■ Syria, Qatar, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, Sudan, and Palestine used online platforms such as YOUTUBE TV.

■ Iraq and Kurdistan Region in Iraq (KRI) established two platforms for all levels called "newton" and e-parwarda. Iraq also used smart phones and social media.

■ Jordan introduced two platforms: Darsak I and Darsak II, targeting all grade levels in the formal sector.

■ Lebanon launched a national platform developed by Microsoft for all grade levels.

■ Qatar activated Microsoft Teams Platform using video lessons for the early education stage.

■ Egypt used its national online platform The Egyptian Knowledge Bank which includes resources that provide access to learning resources and tools for educators, researchers, students (K to 12, in addition to technical classes), and all citizens of Egypt.

■ In addition, traditional ways of delivering learning have been promoted, such as the home-based learning and home-based instruction programme implemented in Lebanon and Morocco.

The countries surveyed reported the following measures to facilitate learning during the lockdown:

- Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia offered online ECCE learning programmes during the COVID-19 lockdown.

- Jordan used videotaped classes and computer applications for children 3-6 years and 6-8 years. Palestine sent parents videotaped educational activities to use with their children aged 3-6 at home. For children 6-8 years, Palestine used televised classes and the application TEAMS for students and teachers to meet and interact.

- Syria resorted to learning portals, the website of the Ministry of Education and Youtube for its online learning programme targeting ages 3-6 years.

- Tunisia targeted children 6-8 years with televised classes and electronic portals.

- In Sudan, the Learning Passport provided educational opportunities to displaced and refugee children and to all Sudanese students.

Learning Passport is a digital learning platform collaboratively developed by UNICEF, Microsoft, and the University of Cambridge. It has an online and offline e-learning component, which allows children to continue learning through interactive lessons and assessments.

However, teachers struggled in the beginning, as many were not completely ready for online learning. The training they had in their teacher education programmes was not specific to designing and delivering a completely online class. They learned how to integrate technology into everyday instruction and not go completely deliver a lesson on-line. They had to increase their own digital proficiency, which ranged from mastering technical tools to developing new pedagogies such as managing group work and assessments online. Table 31 shows that only Tunisia was prepared to transition to online learning.

Table 31. Extent of readiness of educational ECCE staff for transition to online learning

Type of Staff	Iraq	Jordan	Palestine	Sudan	Syria	Tunisia	Yemen
Principals	Medium level	✗	50%	✗	✗	✓	✗
Teachers of children 0-3 years	NA	✗	50%	✗	✗	✓	✗
Teachers of children 3-6 years	✗	Only for children 5-6 years	50%	✗	✗	✓	✗
Teachers of children 6-8 years (Grade 1)	✓	✗	50%	✗	✗	✓	✗

✓ = yes, ✗ = no

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

The disruptions caused by the global pandemic have created a wide range of opportunities to reinvent education by opening up new roles for teachers to recreate schools. The COVID-19 pandemic has also made clear the urgency of capitalizing on innovations that have emerged for creating child-centred approaches to foster 21st century education systems. During the pandemic, teachers joined hands to innovate and support each other during school closures - by exchanging technical assistance in using new technologies, organizing resources, using digital platforms, and developing innovative pedagogies, including those that build independence and resilience in learning. Novel approaches to education are appearing in teaching, teacher preparation and development, and school design.

The crisis produced innovation, improvisation, and ad hoc strategies as schools searched for the best way to deliver content. Teachers learned how to be innovative with the resources available to them and their students. For example, they learned that many of the parents/caregivers of the children in their classes know how to use WhatsApp and Facebook. Thus, they used those to communicate and teach. Teachers sent videos of instructions to caregivers or lessons for the children and posted them on Facebook or distributed them via WhatsApp. Teachers involved parents in taking pictures of their children's work, taught them how to make videos or recordings and send them via WhatsApp for assessment and learning evidences.

Teachers in these countries reported which resources were most helpful as a way to support them. WhatsApp and text messages were the most used (Table 32).

Table 32. Resources used to support teachers and ECCE staff during COVID-19

Resource(s)	Iraq	Jordan	Palestine	Sudan	Syria	Tunisia	Yemen
Regular meetings with teachers and staff			✓	✓	✓		
Portals and other internet tools (discussion forums)	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Virtual meetings via ZOOM, SKYPE, TEAMS, or Google MEET	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Professional development activities focused on ways to provide online learning	✓		✓	✓		✓	
WhatsApp and text messages	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Electronic forum about continuous professional development in ECCE	✓					✓	

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

Some countries reported innovative practices which continue now children are back to school such as involvement of parents and exchange of expertise among teachers (Table 33).

Table 33. Innovations/success stories during virtual learning, which will continue during face-to-face learning

Country	Innovations
Iraq	▪ Continuation of the use of online learning after going back to school
Jordan	▪ Exchange of epertise among teachers ▪ Continuation of the use of online learning after going back to school
Palestine	▪ Development of new materials by pupils and parents ▪ Involvement of parents in the learning process
Tunisia	▪ Launch the "free green line 1809" for listening, guidance, and psychological counselling for children and families. The purpose was to: (a) reduce the feelings of isolation and anxiety among children and families, (b) address violence against children, (c) respond to queries about the pandemic and quarantines ▪ Create a platform to develop online frameworks in several domains in early childhood ▪ Establish an information system to collect and analyze data in an interactive manner. ▪ Establish a notification portal for parents to help them select institutions.

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

Children living in extreme poverty seldom have access to the internet, which made the transition to online teaching and learning platforms extremely challenging. Many relied on print-based materials, self-instructional materials and television. One teacher in Lebanon expressed the challenge parents echoed, "I had poor parents who were forced to use one phone device with their three children. Children had to take turns and sometimes could not attend all the sessions online. "Thankfully", a parent said "their teacher sent us the lessons on videos and WhatsApp so that my children can watch it later."

Parent engagement was important to making ECCE virtual learning successful. However, not all parents were tech savvy or digitally literate. Palestine made available every possible resource to help parents be involved in their child's online learning (Table 34).

Table 34. How parents were involved in online learning

Way of contribution	Iraq	Jordan	Palestine	Sudan	Syria	Tunisia	Yemen
Educational materials/educational kit			✓	✗			✓
Publications on social media (Facebook, Instagram)	✓		✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Email messages			✓	✗		✓	
Read aloud with different teachers		✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
Phone calls		✓	✓	✗		✓	
Text messages		✓	✓	✗	✓		
Other, specify	Educational TV and portals	Smart applications				TV appearances	

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

Despite these measures, there were challenges relating to access to online learning, the extent of teacher preparedness and parents or caregivers familiarity with devices and their digital literacy.

Teachers faced challenges too with children's short attention span. Some kinaesthetic and tactile activities with young children could not be replicated by simply clicking on a mouse or tapping a screen. As a result, children's gross and fine motor skills were affected.

Other countries reported challenges related to infrastructure and teacher unpreparedness (Table 35).

Table 35. Reported challenges with online learning

Country	Challenges with online learning
Iraq	▪ Lack of internet coverage ▪ Weak internet signal ▪ Slow internet speed ▪ Differences in coverage between cities and remote areas ▪ Power cuts ▪ Smart phones not available to everyone
Jordan	▪ Delay in making copies of the curricula of the Ministry of Education in the beginning of the pandemic, then copying only some of the curricula, and the reason is the lack of financial resources ▪ Technical problems in students accessing the platform ▪ Poor use of distance learning platforms by parents ▪ Weak network signal
Palestine	▪ Weak internet networks and the lack of sufficient smart devices for all students ▪ The inability of children to learn from a distance because that stage of learning requires sensory experiences ▪ The inability of the teacher to diversify the activities through distance learning ▪ Individual follow-up for each child was weak with distance learning.
Sudan	▪ Lack of continuity of internet service
Tunisia	▪ Limited financial abilities of some families ▪ Lack of internet coverage ▪ Weak internet signal ▪ Slow internet speed ▪ Differences in coverage between cities and remote areas ▪ Develop easy, practical and interactive contents ▪ Secure financial and structural resources for the development of the learning programmes ▪ Develop a plan for follow-up and evaluation of the impact of the programmes

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

In Dubai, learning and assessment in the early years have been particularly hampered by restrictions on practical and play-based learning in both remote learning and when on-site, following COVID-19 social distancing restrictions in the school. According to Dr. Abdallah Karam, director of KHDA, the key challenges

were (1) Supporting students' emotional needs, improving staff morale and energy, and ensuring student engagement and learning when teaching distance and face-to-face at the same time. KHDA played a pivotal role in reconfiguring quickly and fast the distribution of the educational service mix across the education community in Dubai. It was able to provide targeted support and services through the "In This Together", What Works X, online positive parenting workshops, and risk assessment from the Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau.

As schools reopen, there is a need to think about three interconnected issues; well-being, quality learning, and safety and operations (Fullan et al., 2020). According to Fullan et al. (2020), schools need to identify strengths, challenges, needs and gaps as they transition back to school after the pandemic. This requires a reflective process of asking questions about the extent that digital learning was effective in reaching ALL learners. Questions need to address the challenges students and parents faced during COVID-19, skills students need and learning gaps seen, and examine the gaps in the education system with feedback from parents, teachers, and students.

As children returned to school in Arab countries, there were many challenges to address. Most Arab countries focused on the safety and operations. They developed guides and handbooks for health protection and focused on academic content without attention to children's mental health and social well-being as part of their COVID-19 educational responses. Furthermore, the conditions of physical distancing affected how children behaved in school and caused changes in teachers' work. These included spending time enforcing mask-wearing and sanitizing procedures and constantly reminding especially young children of physical distancing. Teachers had to ensure that they sustained play activities in physically distanced environments. This caused teachers further anxiety and stress.

Another challenge is "learning loss" where there is a gap between privileged and disadvantaged children and a lack of student involvement because students are studying at home due to school closures (Dorn et al. 2020). Educators, parents, and students have first-hand knowledge of the high cost of the lengthy period of distance learning, which included higher rates of depression and anxiety as well as lost learning opportunities for children (Dorn et al., 2020). One such example is that students lost the equivalent of three months of arithmetic learning (33%) and one-and-a-half months of reading learning on average (13%) (Dorn et al., 2020).

The Arab region was experiencing a learning crisis before the pandemic, with huge disparities across and within countries and significant numbers of students, failing to acquire the critical knowledge and skills (UNESCO et al. 2021) needed for lifelong learning as evident in the TIMSS and PIRLS results. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly 60% of children in the region could not read or understand a simple age-appropriate text at age 10 (World Bank, 2019).

Arab countries resorted to specific measures to compensate for learning loss. The six countries who responded reported that curriculum content reduction, changing the school calendar and providing resources to continue learning in summer were the most common measures they used (Table 36).

Table 36. Measures taken by the country to compensate for learning loss

Measures	Iraq	Jordan	Palestine	Sudan	Syria	Tunisia	Yemen
Made changes to the school calendar	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Provided resources to continue learning in the summer			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Provided additional support programmes for students (content and psychological and emotional support)		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Resorted to curriculum content reduction	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Carried out evaluations and assessment		✓		✓		✓	
Gave teachers extra financial compensation		✓		✓			

Note: To compensate for learning loss, Sudan also communicated with parents to provide support and assistance to their children.

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

Chapter 4

Key priorities in ECCE

Throughout the report persistent challenges revolved around issues of inclusion, quality ECCE workforce, innovations and resilience as well as issues of governance, research, and data collection. During an emergency in education, well-being needs to be a top priority, irrespective of social and emotional factors.

4.1. Inclusion and well-being

The focus on inclusion and equity – giving everyone an equal opportunity, and leaving no one behind – showed the need for increased efforts especially aimed at reaching those marginalized or in vulnerable situations. Although a lot has been done in terms of policies for the people with special needs or having refugee frameworks, there is still a long way ahead to achieve equity. As long as the private sector dominates the ECCE services without the governments competing with them, ECCE will exacerbate inequalities. Children living in poverty who have special needs or who are a minority in conflict areas will need more attention to their social and emotional well-being.

Most of the information in international or regional reports regarding ECCE in the Arab region tend to focus on the pre-primary level. The provision for services for the age group 0-3 receives little attention and is often found in reports that target development and care. That is why, providing effective evidence-based parenting programmes has the potential of supporting development of children from birth to age three.

Grades 1 and 2 are part of the ECCE definition and are rarely addressed in international reports as part of ECCE but considered as part of primary years. In many countries, the early primary grades include and different pedagogical approaches and methods, different demands and expectations than those in pre-primary. Children move from a play-based setting and small class size to a formal academic setting with larger class size. It is important to note that too many children especially low-income, refugees, children with disabilities, and others who are excluded, ones are inadequately prepared for the transition to formal school beginning in grade 1-age 6. Even among children coming from affluent settings, transition to formal schooling can be a traumatic experience.

4.2. Quality ECCE workforce

The focus on education quality, learning and skills highlights another important lesson: the danger of concentrating on access to education without paying enough attention to quality in terms of both the ECCE staff and the learning outcomes and school readiness. The indicators for the SDG 4 regarding quality focus on the structural aspect such as numbers or percentages of qualified and child-teacher ratio. The report pointed out the difficulties in assuring the qualifications and professional development needs of teaching personnel who suffer from low status and poor working conditions, and lack of capacity to develop teacher leadership and autonomy. In some Arab countries, there is a shortage of personnel to monitor or inspect teacher quality. In countries that developed licensing and stringent requirements, they pointed to teacher shortages and attrition. Very little research has been conducted on working conditions of teachers, or the teacher education preparation programmes. The report showed lack of incentives for teachers to teach in remote or rural areas. Teachers in displaced settings can help support children's social-emotional needs especially if they happen to be refugees themselves. Very little research exists on the demands and challenges for displaced teachers (Mendenhall et al., 2018).

A number of tools translated to Arabic have been developed to assess child development and programme services. This has the potential to improve the evidence base of ECCE.

As some countries prepare for inclusion in their public sector as one of their goals in their national strategies, the main priority should be preparing teachers to deal with the diversity of learners where they have to use different teaching methods, and recognize different styles of learning.

4.3. Innovation and resilience

The two crises, the COVID-19 pandemic and the protracted conflicts in the Arab region, provided glimpses of hope and opportunities despite their negative impact on children. The pandemic showed to some extent how technology can be an effective tool for learning and supporting teachers and parents in remote areas through online learning. It also showed how teachers could become innovators. Refugee settings benefited from technology that was low cost and had a parent-visiting component or support programme. Using the power of technology, parents of children with special needs created a platform to raise awareness. Scaling-up innovative approaches using technology can have great impact especially for children in low and middle-income Arab countries.

More countries need to develop a refugee response plan and move from a humanitarian approach to strengthening the education of refugees especially those in the early years.

The research findings emphasized that the annual rate of return on investment in early childhood development for children from disadvantaged backgrounds can be 13%, due to improved outcomes in education, health, sociability, economic productivity and reduced crime (Heckman et al., 2016). Despite this, public funding for ECCE to date has remained largely outside the public education system in most Arab countries, with very limited services and supports targeted to low-income families.

Several countries in low and middle-income countries have used various mechanisms to finance ECCE for poor and disadvantaged children from public revenues. For example, in Thailand, Philippines and Vietnam they have what is known as a "sin tax" and this applies to gambling, alcohol, and cigarettes. Thailand also uses lottery tax to generate revenues for ECCE. In Indonesia, large companies, as part of their corporate social responsibility, donate funds to assist children from disadvantaged families to access education including early childhood education (UNESCO, 2019b).

Arab countries that are of low and middle income will need to think of innovative ways to finance ECCE. To achieve SDG target 4.2, the countries would have to overcome the financing challenges and think of creative sustainable financing solutions in order to provide good quality ECCE.

Many Arab countries like UAE have no taxes of which a sales tax or part of income tax can be dedicated to ECCE through a national fund. In some Arab countries like Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, or Lebanon it is possible to use tourism tax as a source of sustainable funding. Most Arab countries have Zakat funds of which a portion could be allocated specifically to ECCE programmes for disadvantaged children. Innovative sources of finance can come in the form of new taxes on cigarettes for example with proceeds earmarked for early childhood programmes. Big corporations can also allocate funds as part of their corporate social responsibility.

Recommendations

The five SDG pillars are people, prosperity, planet, peace, and partnership. Without peace, it will not be possible to achieve all other goals. This is the most urgent need for almost half of the Arab countries currently in conflict or affected by conflict.

Two general guidelines should be considered within the context and culture of the region in order to move forward with ECCE.

1. Make ECCE a political priority, which Shiffman and Smith (2007) define as "the degree to which international and national political leaders actively give attention to an issue, and back up that attention with the provision of financial, technical, and human resources that are commensurate with the severity of the issue" (p. 1370). They proposed four elements that form the foundation of a framework for the determinants of political priority for global initiatives framework originally for global health initiatives:

   a. The power of actors connected with the issue; the strength of the individuals and organizations concerned with the issue, such as national political champions and advocates.

   b. The power of the ideas used to define and describe the issue; the ways in which those involved with the issue understand and portray it. This involves both public portrayals of the issue and the degree of consensus within the policy community on how the problem is defined, caused, and solved.

   c. The power of political contexts to inhibit or enhance political support; the environments in which actors operate.

   d. The power of some characteristics of the issue, which includes features of the problem.

2. Reimagine Learning-Fullan et al. 2020 explored the now, the near, and the next in the changing landscape of education. As the authors presented the three phases, they reflected on the possibility of using the opportunity that COVID-19 presented to transform the system itself. To reimagine learning there is a need to "…reflect on what we know about learning, our students, the new role of technology and the complexity of an unknown future. Six key questions can foster deep reflection:

   a. What knowledge, skills and attributes do our students need to thrive in this complex world?

   b. What kind of learning is needed for this current and future complexity?

   c. How do we ensure equity?

   d. How do we attend to well-being?

   e. What have we learned from remote learning?

   f. How can technology be best leveraged for learning in the future?

The prevailing model of schooling was built on two organizing (and confining) constructs: time (when kids learned) and space (where they learned). These two constructs were useful in the 1800 and 1900s but the COVID disruption has rendered them redundant. Students can learn and demonstrate this learning without bricks and mortar or bell times. With digital and deep learning, students can learn where they are. Students can learn when they are ready" (Fullan et al. 2020, p. 15).

There are a number of recommendations that can be drawn from this report based on the challenges, achievements and innovative approaches. The recommendations are presented under the headings: inclusion and well-being, quality ECCE workforce, innovation and resilience, and governance.

Inclusion and well-being

- Diversify the types of early childhood education that are provided, rather than focusing on one standard mode of delivery.

- Expand national visions of inclusion in education to put diversity at the core of their systems by adding the other excluded groups.

- Establish new mechanisms of access for the categories deprived of education, through complementary and alternative programmes (such as parent awareness, mother and child, mobile services, campaigns in the media, etc.)

- Make mental health and well-being a priority for everyone (teachers, children, support staff, and parents) and ensure it is considered when planning.

Quality ECCE workforce

- Develop, establish, and implement regional minimum standards for ECCE delivery based on international best practices that are culturally relevant to the values of the region, and a regional tool for measuring child development outcomes, and national ECCE regulatory frameworks with standards for early childhood services specifically for 0-4 and children with special needs.

- Develop regional partnerships with universities in the Arab World to conduct research on teacher quality and its impact on children's learning.

- To advance excellence in teaching, rethink how professional learning can be improved, with a focus on learning that is job embedded, on demand, collaborative and individualized.

- Develop new flexible programmes for professional development for administrators, teachers and staff members that are crucial for addressing student learning loss, focusing on assessment, remediation, and acceleration in order to narrow or close existing achievement gaps.

Innovation and resilience

- Work on developing emergency response education plans whether because of natural disaster or conflicts.

- Sustain parents and caregivers engagement by building on the relationship between teachers and parents and involving them in decision-making and in a very systematic way.

- Transform curricula to fit the needs of all those previously excluded. It is evident that COVID-19 affected student engagement and learning differently, and a one-size-fits-all approach will not work now, or in the future.

Governance, policy, and partnerships

- **Governance:** Ensure an "institutional anchor" that provides holistic ECCE programmes instead of the multi-sectoral nature of ECCE. Different ministries having different priorities can make it difficult for advocates to identify common solutions and secure funding (Neuman and Powers, 2021).

- **Partnerships:** Establish effective partnerships to mobilize resources needed to accelerate high-quality provision to all children 0-8. These partnerships could be between public and private sectors, local or regional partners, etc. Partnerships in the region can provide technical support and workshops to assist in monitoring and evaluation.

- **Investments:** Develop a pipeline of investments in quality childcare that will transform the opportunities available to children, women and families. Use innovative techniques to finance public ECCE programmes. This effort will galvanize a whole-of-government approach and bring together a wide range of stakeholders including parents,

communities, civil society, employers and childcare providers to address the childcare challenge through research, major new data collection, policy changes and new operational approaches.

- **Research:** Use local and global evidence to create innovations that can be scaled up. Scaling early learning involves both expansion of services from small-scale pilot initiatives to large scale efforts that reach a broader population ("smaller to bigger") and improvement of systems that are already at scale ("bigger to better") (Yoshikawa et al., 2018). Support research on ECCE especially in low and middle-income countries. Develop data-sharing technology systems to connect government agencies, civil society, and local, national, regional partners on ECCE.

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Abbreviations, terms and acronyms

Age group 0-3	Children aged 0, 1, 2 in completed years
Age group 3-6	Children aged 3, 4, 5 in completed years
Age group 6-8	Children aged 6, 7, in completed years
ANECD	Arab Network for Early Childhood Development
Arab Region	The countries are: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen
ARAIEQ	Arab Regional Agenda for Improving Educational Quality
ARC	Arab Resource Collective
ALECSO	Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECERS	Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EMIS	Education Management Information Systems
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council- includes Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain
HALDO	The Holistic Assessment of Learning and Development Outcomes
IDELA	The International Development and Early Learning Assessment
IDP	Internally Displaced People
INEE	Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies
Infant mortality rate	Probability of dying between birth and exactly 1 year of age, expressed per 1,000 live births.
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ISELA	The International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment
KHDA	Knowledge and Human Development Authority.
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
MADLSA	Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs
MELQO	Measuring Early Learning Quality & Outcomes
MOEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MOSD	Ministry of Social Development
Nurseries	Centres that provide care and education to children from birth to under 3- sometimes referred to as child-care or day care
NYU	New York University
PEER	Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
Pre-primary	Programme at the initial stage of organized instruction, primarily designed to introduce very young children, usually from age 3, to a school-type environment, and provide a bridge between the home and a school. (term used by UNESCO)
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TEP	Teacher Education Programmes
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UN	United Nations
Under-5 mortality rate	Probability of dying between birth and exactly 5 years of age, expressed per 1,000 live births.
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization

Appendices

Table A1. Selected demographic characteristics of the Arab countries (2020)

Country	Total population (millions)	% Population 0-14%		% Urban population		Life expectancy at birth (years)	
	Reference year 2020	2010	2020	2018	Annual rate of change (%) 2015-2020	2010-2015	2015-2020
1. Algeria	43.85	27.3	30.8	73	2.5	75.5	76.6
2. Bahrain	1.70	20.9	18.3	89	4.4	76.4	77.1
3. Egypt	102.33	33.3	33.9	43	1.9	70.8	71.7
4. Iraq	40.22	39.3	37.7	70	3.1	69.4	70.4
5. Jordan	10.20	36.0	32.9	91	2.4	73.8	74.3
6. Kuwait	4.27	21.2	21.5	100	1.8	74.9	75.3
7. Lebanon	6.83	27.3	25.1	89	0.8	78.6	78.8
8. Libya	6.87	28.9	27.8	80	1.7	71.7	72.7
9. Mauritania	4.65	40.5	39.7	54	4.3	63.2	64.6
10. Morocco	36.91	27.7	26.8	62	2.1	75.0	76.3
11. Oman	5.11	21.8	22.5	85	5.3	76.2	77.5
12. Palestine	5.10	39.9	38.4	76	3.0	73.1	73.8
13. Qatar	2.88	13.4	13.6	99	2.4	79.5	80.0
14. Saudi Arabia	34.81	25.8	24.7	84	2.2	74.4	74.9
15. Sudan	43.85	41.5	39.8	35	3.2	63.8	65.0
16. Syria	17.50	33.1	30.8	54	1.4	69.9	71.3
17. Tunisia	11.82	23.8	24.3	69	1.5	75.5	76.4
18. UAE	9.89	14.2	14.8	87	1.7	76.8	77.8
19. Yemen	29.83	40.7	38.8	37	4.1	66.0	66.0

Data sources: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019a) and United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019b). Available under CC BY 3.0 IGO.

In terms of population size (Table A1) Most Arab countries have a youthful population. In 2020, the population aged 0-14 ranges from 30% to 40% in 9 out of 19 countries, and from 21%-27% in 7 countries. In only 3 countries, the population 0-14 represents 13-18% of the total population (Table A1). Most Arab countries are highly urbanized: 13 countries have 70% or more of the population living in urban areas. Egypt, Sudan, and Yemen are least urbanized with less than 50% of the population living in urban areas. Life expectancy at birth has improved in all Arab countries over the past decade as a result of improved health conditions and nutrition. The table shows that some countries have reached high levels of life expectancy at birth (Qatar, UAE, Bahrain, Oman and Lebanon) while few others continue to have low levels (Mauritania, Sudan, and Yemen).

Table A2. Country policy regarding disability

Country	Disability policy	Year updated
Bahrain	Bahrain's National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2012-2016)	2019
	Bahrain Cabinet Decision No. 50 for 2019 on Establishing the Disability Assessment Committee	
Egypt	Egypt Amendment of some provisions of the Executive Instructions of the Law of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities promulgated by Law No. 10 of 2018 (issued March 4; 2020)	2019
Iraq	Iraq Law No. 38 on the Care for Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs (2013)	2013
	A ministerial decree authorized the Ministry of Education to create special classes and schools for students who are "slow learners or have visual or hearing weakness."	2011
Jordan	Jordan Law No. 20 for 2017 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	2018
	The 10-Year Strategy for Inclusive Education was launched in January 2020.	2020
Kuwait	Kuwait continued to apply a medical approach rather than a human rights-based approach to disability	2017
Lebanon	The LAW 220/2000 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	2000
Libya	Libya Law No. (5) for 1987 on Disabled Persons	
Mauritania	Mauritania National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Persons with Disabilities 2013	2013
Morocco	Morocco National Plan of Action 2017-2021 to implement public policy (states the establishment of a new disability assessment system)	2017
	2016 Morocco Law No. 97.13 on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons in Disabilities (April 2016)	
Oman	Oman Ministerial Resolution No. 94 of 2008 regarding the regulation for the issuance of a disability card 2008	2017
	A 2017 ministerial decree stated that students with disabilities, especially visual impairment and other physical disabilities, could be accepted only in fully equipped schools	
Qatar	Ministry of Education and Higher Education- https://www.edu.gov.qa/en/Pages/pubschoolsdefault.aspx?ItemID=69 established the first database for students with special needs in local schools January 2018	2018
Saudi Arabia	Saudi Regulatory Guide for Special Education (RGSE) - a document contains detailed guidelines related to special education released by the Ministry of Education to further explain the roles and responsibilities of teachers, administrators, schools and special education institutions. It also includes early intervention, family involvement, IEPs, educational team members, and measurement and evaluation in special education. (Abu-Alghayth, et al., 2022).	2016
Palestine	A National Strategic Framework for Disability was formally adopted and activated. It was developed collaboratively under the mandate of the Ministry of Social Affairs	2012 & 2017
	MOEHE's Education Sector Strategic Plan	
	2017-2022 includes key disability-related objectives	
Sudan	The Persons with Disability National Act	2017
Syria	No Data	
Tunisia	Tunisia Law No. 41 for 2016 on Revising Law No. 83 for 2005 on the Empowerment and Protection of Persons with Disabilities	2016
UAE	National Policy to Empower People of Determination	2017
	UAE's National Strategy of Children with Disabilities (2017–2021) shows the government's commitment to the rights of children with disabilities in general and particularly in areas of education, health, and protection.	
	The strategy seeks to promote early identification and early intervention, capacity building of professionals working with children with disabilities, improvement in quality control systems, inclusion, and family support programmes.	
Yemen	Yemen National Strategy for Disability 2014-2018	2014

Data sources: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019a) and United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019b). Available under CC BY 3.0 IGO.

Table A3. Disability governance body

Country	Government websites: disability inclusion	year updated
Algeria	https://www.msnfcf.gov.dz/organ/?page=13	
	Ministry of National Solidarity, Family and Women's Issues	
Bahrain	https://www.mlsd.gov.bh/disabled/disabled_committees?lang=en	2019
	High Commission for Disabled Affairs	
	Minister of Labour and Social Development	
	Bahrain's National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (2012-2016)	
	Bahrain Cabinet Decision No. 50 for 2019 on Establishing the Disability Assessment Committee	
Egypt	The National Council for Persons with Disabilities	2019
	https://hrightsstudies.sis.gov.eg/bodies/councils/local/national-council-for-persons-with-disabilities/	
	Egypt Amendment of some provisions of the Executive Instructions of the Law of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities promulgated by Law No. 10 of 2018 (issued March 4; 2020)	
Iraq	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs/Commission for the Care of people with Disabilities and Special Needs- official website	2013
	http://www.cpdsn.molsa.gov.iq/ not working but facebook account is https://www.facebook.com/cpwdasn/	
	Iraq Law No. 38 on the Care for Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs (2013)	
Jordan	The Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	2018
	http://hcd.gov.jo/en/content/overview	
	Jordan Law No. 20 for 2017 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	
Kuwait	The Public Authority for Disability Affairs	2010
	supervision of the Minister of Social Affairs and Labor	
	https://www.pada.gov.kw/en/about-authority/	
	Kuwait Law No. 20 for 2017 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	
Lebanon	The LAW 220/2000 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	2000
	National Commission for Disability Affairs (the NCDA)	
	http://www.socialaffairs.gov.lb/MSASubPage.aspx?parm=335&parentID=99	
Libya	Libya Law No. (5) for 1987 on Disabled Persons	
Mauritania	Mauritania National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Persons with Disabilities 2013	2013
Morocco	Ministry of Social Development, Family and Solidarity	2017
	https://social.gov.ma/personnes-en-situation-de-handicap-personnes-handicapees/	
	Morocco National Plan of Action 2017-2021 to implement public policy (states the establishment of a new disability assessment system)	
	2016 Morocco Law No. 97.13 on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons in Disabilities	
Oman	Oman Ministerial Resolution No. 94 of 2008 regarding the regulation for the issuance of a disability card 2008	2017
	A 2017 ministerial decree stated that students with disabilities, especially visual impairment and other physical disabilities, could be accepted only in fully equipped schools	
Qatar	The Ministry of Administrative Development, Labor and Social Affairs (MADLSA)	2018
	https://www.edu.gov.qa/en/Pages/pubschoolsdefault.aspx?ItemID=69	
	Qatar Law No. 2 on Persons with Special Needs -2004	
	Ministry of Education and Higher Education- https://www.edu.gov.qa/en/Pages/pubschoolsdefault.aspx?ItemID=69 established the first database for students with special needs in local schools January 2018	
Saudi Arabia	Council for the Care of People with Disabilities	
	https://www.my.gov.sa/wps/portal/snp/careaboutyou/RightsOfPeopleWithDisabilities	
Palestine	Ministry of Social Development https://www.mosa.gov.ps/news/657.html	2012
	https://www.mohe.ps/	
	A National Strategic Framework for Disability was formally adopted and activated. It was developed collaboratively under the mandate of the Ministry of Social Affairs	

Country	Government websites: disability inclusion	year updated
Sudan	National Council for Persons with Disabilities ncpd.gov.sd http://msd.gov.sd/mss_ar/?page_id=80 The Persons with Disability National Act 2017	2017
Syria	Central Council for Disability Affairs Services for Persons With Disabilities http://213.178.227.241/Ar/SitePage?sysCode=111#tab_111 Syria Persons with Disabilities Law No. 34 for 2004	2009
Tunisia	http://www.social.gov.tn/ Tunisia Law No. 41 for 2016 on Revising Law No. 83 for 2005 on the Empowerment and Protection of Persons with Disabilities	2016
UAE	In May 2010 first practical step towards inclusive education for students with disabilities by launching a 'School for All' initiative (MOE, 2010)	2010
	People of Determination The National Policy for Empowering People of Determination https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/strategies-initiatives-and-awards/federal-governments-strategies-and-plans/the-national-policy-for-empowering-people-with-special-needs The National Policy for Autism 2021 UAE National Strategy for Empowering People with Determination	2017
Yemen	https://y-fpd.org.ye/index.php/en/about-us-en Yemeni Forum for People with Disabilities Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour- Handicap Care & Rehabilitation Fund https://yehwrf.org/index.php Yemen National Strategy for Disability 2014-2018	

Source: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asian (UNESCWA) https://e-inclusion.unescwa.org/, accessed August, 2022.

Table A4. Proportion of schools with access to (a) electricity; (b) the internet for teaching; (c) computers for teaching; (d) adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities at the primary level

Country	Share of schools with access to electricity 2019 in %	Share of schools with access to computers for teaching in %	Share of schools with access to internet for teaching in %	Share of schools with access to adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities in %
1. **Bahrain**	100	100	100	100
2. **Egypt**	100	78.25 (2017)	71.28	-
3. **Jordan**	35.75	13.4	13.4	
4. **Kuwait**	100	100	100	100
5. **Lebanon**	100 (2017)	66.51	91.09	-
6. **Morocco**	96.19	76.46	82.8	20.07
7. **Oman**	100	100	100	100
8. **Palestine**	100	93.92	90.78	59.22
9. **Qatar**	100	100	100	100
10. **Saudi Arabia**	100	100	100	100
11. **Sudan**	54.08 (2016)	100 (2016)	-	-
12. **Tunisia**	99.94 (2018)	95.59 (2018)	48.66 (2018)	-
13. **UAE**	100	100	100	100
14. **Yemen**	60.87 (2016) upper secondary	30.54 (2016) upper secondary	-	-

Note: No data from Algeria, Iraq, Libya, Mauritania, Syria.

Data source: SDG Tracker. https://ourworldindata.org/global-education. Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning, Share of schools with access to electricity, World, 2020, https://sdg-tracker.org/quality-education#:~:text=Target%204.&text=UN%20definition%3A%20Build%20and%20upgrade,effective%20learning%20environments%20for%20all (Available under CC BY 4.0).

Table A5. Countries report of qualified centres for children with special needs

Country	Name of centre(s)
Iraq	Students with special needs are integrated into the school system in free public schools where rooms are equipped with special learning resources. There are rooms for the hearing impaired and mild mental disability. Disabilities include: speech, slow learning, vision impairment and physical disability.
Jordan	Ministry of Social Development/Ministry of Education, OPEN EMIS website; The High Council for the Rights of the Disabled.
Palestine	There are schools that teach children with total vision impairment using Braille. These students are integrated into the school system. There are also schools that teach children with total hearing impairment using sign language. These children do not join regular schools because there are no teachers skilled in the sign language.
Sudan	There are centres that care for children with partial hearing and/or vision impairment. These children are admitted to schools that have classes equipped with Braille and computer systems that cater to their needs. There are also centres that identify and care for mentally disabled children.
Syria	There are several centres that undertake a host of functions: early detection, diagnosis, treatment sessions, modification of behaviour, rehabilitation.
Tunisia	Referral Center for Early Childhood Development in Omran, a number of ECCE integrating centres, and some specialized associations.
Yemen	alnoorcenkero@gmail.com

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

Table A6. Programmes for early detection and intervention with regard to children 0-8 years who have delayed development or other disabilities

Country	Programme
Iraq	Ministry of Health
Jordan	Center for Diagnosis of Disabilities, Ministry of Health; Early Intervention Services, Ministry of Social Development
Palestine	None
Sudan	Yes
Syria	Early detection for hearing impairment programme launched by the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Syrian Organization for the Disabled (AMAL) plus the PORTAGE programme. Development and intelligence tests are also administered at all centres for the disabled.
Tunisia	A new programme for early detection of autistic children which integrates them in ECCE centres. The programme is administered by the Ministry of Family, Woman, Childhood, and the Elderly in partnership with the Ministry of Health and some specialized associations.
Yemen	There is training for disabilities, speech therapy, development of life skills and care for the vision impaired at medical clinics

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

UAE - The Sharjah City for Humanitarian Services-A specialized special needs and counselling centre providing integrated inclusion services to the Sharjah community and across the UAE. Early intervention, developmental delay, physical and occupational services diagnosis of auditory disorder,a kindergarten for the deaf and the most up-to-date assistive technologies in the world their "Measurement, Evaluation and Programming System Framework" in addition to providing certificates crash course in special needs for three to six weeks. https://www.schs.ae/en

Table A7. Programmes for refugee/displaced children 0-8 years who have special needs

Country	Programme
Iraq	None
Jordan	Programmes offered by UNICEF, UNESCO, Mercy Corps
Palestine	None
Sudan	Yes (not identified)
Syria	Yes (not identified)
Tunisia	At ECCE centres in Medein province
Yemen	UNICEF offers a programme

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

Table A8. Reported ECCE policies in the Arab countries by country and programme

ECCE programme	Iraq	Jordan	Palestine	Syria	Tunisia	Yemen	Sudan
On early childhood education							
National official parental education programme on a large scale	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓
National public child care system for children 0-3 years to assist working parents	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Official assessment system for stages of child development	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Official policy regarding pre-school education	✓	✓	NA	✓	✓	✓	✓
Published or available criteria, directives, or guidance for pre-schools	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Available learning contents or curriculum for early childhood education	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	NA	✓
On social and educational issues in early childhood							
Policy to ensure access to education for children with disabilities	✓	✓	NA	✓	NA	✓	✓
National policy for disabled children 0-8 years	✓	✓	NA	✓	✓	✓	✓
National policy to provide services to orphans and vulnerable children	✗	✓	NA	✓	✓	NA	✓
National policy on social protection that includes children 0-8 years	✗	✓	NA	✓	✓	NA	✓
Mandatory national policy on birth registration	NA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
National policy or system that addresses cases of child abuse	NA	NA	NA	✓	NA	NA	✓
National policy or system to prevent domestic violence	NA	✓	NA	✓	✓	NA	✓
Public service system that provides consultation on pregnancy and reproductive health	NA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
On health issues in early childhood							
National policy to check and follow-up on the health status of new-borns	NA	✓	✓	✓	NA	✓	✓
Public programme that provides nutritional alternatives to pregnant women who suffer from malnutrition	NA	✓	✓	✓	✗	NA	✓
Policy to support health care for children	NA	✓	NA	✓	✓	✓	✓
Decree that promotes breastfeeding for 6 months	NA	NA	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
Legislation to grant paid maternity leave	NA	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Legislation to grant paid paternal leave	NA	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Decree that covers children 0-8 years, which prevents or reduces the transmission of the AIDS virus or illness from a pregnant woman to her embryo during pregnancy	NA	NA	NA	✗	✓	NA	✓
National policy on risk assessment	NA	NA	NA	✓	✗	NA	✓

Keys: ✓ = implemented - ✗: Not implemented - NA: Not ascertained

Data sources: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019a) and United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019b). Available under CC BY 3.0 IGO.

Table A9. Recent policies in the GCC countries relating to ECCE

Country	Policies
Bahrain	■ Amendments have been made to the 2012 child Law by moving responsibilities from the Labour and Social Development ministry to the Education Ministry
Kuwait	■ First national development plan of Kuwait Vision 2035; including SDGs within ■ MOE has recently established an SDG 4 gap-mapping tool and is coordinating with several stakeholders and strategic partners with a view to furthering the educational sector and bridging all possible remaining gaps. ■ All-inclusive social protection programmes are implemented by the Ministry of Social Affairs. ■ Kuwait Vision 2035. In 2012 – 2016, the government of Kuwait provided full access to Kuwaitis and non-Kuwaitis to public services including education. Support is not only financial, but also includes skill development and support of enrolment in schools. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23384Kuwait_VNR_FINAL.PDF
Saudi Arabia	■ In order to achieve the vision of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2013 the Ministry of Education has launched under the umbrella of the national transformational programme an initiative called the development of nurseries and kindergarten programmes and the expansion of their services across the Kingdom. The initiative includes many projects such as the development of the national curriculum, the Saudi early learning standards, the quality assurance system, and policies and regulations.
Oman	■ The Ministry of Education supervises and regulates pre-school education. It sets the standards of pre-school education and provides support to gradually spread pre-schooling throughout the Sultanate. It also ensures having a unified policy in pre-school education followed up by a single authority. ■ With support from UNICEF Oman, the Government has made the expansion and strengthening of early child development services across the Sultanate a top priority, with greater coordination and collaboration among responsible ministries. UNICEF, through its cross-sectoral IECD (Integrated Early Childhood Development Model) and its partnership with the government in Oman, was able to mobilize the expansion of ECEC services to ensure high quality provision. https://www.unicef.org/oman/integrated-early-childhood-development
Qatar	Law No. 1, 2014, Regulating Nurseries The Qatar Human Resources Law (2008) mandates paid maternity leave for employees in both the public and private sectors. Maternity leave is eight weeks for the public sector and seven weeks for the private sector at full pay. According to Towfighian et al. (2017) policies also included ■ Inclusion of ECE goals in the Education and Training Sector Strategy (2013) ■ Incubating a pilot Early Childhood Center project ■ Publication of Qatar National Evaluation for Early Years Education (2015) ■ Establishment of a Department for Early Years Education (2016) ■ Development of a Policy to annex Grade 3 to the Early Years phase; including key pilot initiative in 11 Primary Schools (2016) ■ In 2017 Qatar collaborated with Ministry of Education wise and higher education and the World Bank to develop further all sectors related to early childhood education ■ The Qatar National Nutrition and Physical Activity Action Plan 2011-2016 included the objectives of planning national guidelines to promote breastfeeding, establishing nutrition and breastfeeding guidelines for all sectors in Qatar, and providing high quality nutrition and breastfeeding counselling at all health centres in Qatar. ■ The national nutrition strategy aims to reduce childhood obesity
UAE	**Federal policies:** (Wadeema Law, the UAE National Strategy for Motherhood and Childhood, and the UAE Strategic Plan for the Rights of Children with Disabilities. ■ Federal Law No. (2) of 2012 on the care of children of unknown descent, ■ Federal Law No. (3) of 2016 on the Children's Rights Act (Dima), ■ Other laws involved in ECCE are: ■ 'Health requirements for Nurseries' (Dubai Municipality, 2012) ■ 'Nursery Clinic Requirements' (Dubai Health Authority, 2016) ■ 'Wadeema's law No. 2 (Federal Government, 2016) regarding children's rights ■ Local policies: Sharjah Occupational Safety and Health System and Sharjah Framework for Early Childhood. ■ In 2017 the UAE launched the national strategy for motherhood and childhood prepared by the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood, and the UNICEF golf area office (GAO). ■ In 2019,the Early childhood authority in Abu Dhabi was established. It launched Its Early Childhood Development strategy 2035 for conception to eight years. ■ In 2022 the government the UAE government restructured the whole ECCE sector by establishing Federal Authority for Early Education FAEE Institution for ECCE cabinet with an appointed minister of state reporting directly to the Prime Minister's office and a mandate of servicing children zero to grade four. A new cabinet portfolio and a new federal bill on organizing the work of children 's institutions for ECCE with an appointed minister of state reporting directly to the Prime Minister's office and a mandate of servicing children zero to grade four. The roles and responsibilities are still in process of being drafted and the mandate is to oversee the care and education of children aged 0 to 10 years old (Gr.4)

Source: UNESCO survey on access, inclusion, refugee education, quality, monitoring and evaluation tools, governance, research, response to COVID-19, recovery plans and finance (2022).

Table A10. Types of providers covered and age groups in GCC countries

Country	Type of service						Fee payment		
	Ages			Public or private					
	0-3	3-6	6-8	0-3	3-6	6-8	0-3	3-6	6-8
Bahrain	Nurseries Day cares	Kindergarten 4-6	Primary School	Private for both nationals and expatriates	Private for both nationals and expatriates	Public for Nationals only	Parents	Parents/ Women associations	Government for nationals -
Kuwait	Nurseries Day cares	Kindergarten 4-6	Primary School	Private for both nationals and expatriates	Private for both nationals and expatriates	Public for Nationals only	Parents	Gov for nationals and parents for expatriates	Government for nationals
Saudi Arabia	Nurseries 1 month-3 years old	3-6 years old	Primary School	Private for both nationals and expatriates	Private for both nationals and expatriates	Public for Nationals only	Parents	Gov for nationals and parents for expatriates	Government for nationals
Oman		Kindergarten (3.2 -5.2)	Primary School	Private for both nationals and expatriates	Private for both nationals and expatriates	Public for Nationals only	Parents	Gov for nationals and parents for expatriates	Government for nationals
Qatar		Kindergarten 4-6	Primary School	Private for both nationals and expatriates	Private for both nationals and expatriates	Public for Nationals only	Parents	Gov for nationals and parents for expatriates	Government for nationals
UAE	Nurseries Birth to 4	Nurseries Early Childhood centres (Birth to 6) Pre-school(3-6) KG1, KG2 (4-6)	Primary School	Public for Sharjah nationals and government employees in Private	Private for both nationals and expatriates	Public for Nationals only	Parents	Gov for nationals and parents for expatriates	Government for nationals

Data sources: UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2019), http://data.uis.unesco.org/, accessed August, 2022; UNESCO & UIS (2011) & OECD (2017).

Table A11. ECCE teacher qualifications in early childhood programmes in GCC countries

Country	Formal qualifications		Formal qualifications	
	Public ECEC	Entity	Private ECEC	Entity
Bahrain	BA In Education for cycle 1 Grade 1- Grade 3	University of Bahrain's Teachers' College	Montessori Diploma/ Certificate https://uil.unesco.org/case-study/ effective-practices-database-litbase-0/ mother-child-home-education-programme-mocep	Bahrain Montessori Centre
Kuwait	BA in early childhood education or education with years of experience as minimum requirement for a teacher in work in a public school or kindergarten.	(MOE) : National Centre for Educational Development (NCED) Teacher Training for the School System	Bachelor's degree in any subject or any education diploma from country of origin -no training	

| Country | Formal qualifications | | Formal qualifications | |
	Public ECEC	Entity	Private ECEC	Entity
Saudi Arabia	Bachelor's degree in early childhood education. Saudi al-Jadidi (2012),	MOE 17/24 universities The education training and evaluation commission (ETEC	Private institutions and rural areas, kindergarten teachers need only to have a bachelor's degree in any subject (World Bank, 2017).	The education training and evaluation commission (ETEC
Oman	BA In Education for cycle 1 Grade 1- Grade 3	Ministry of Higher Education and the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) . (Tekin, Al-Salmi, and Al-Mamari, 2021).	The Sultan Qaboos University is the main entity for the preparation of teachers, instituting an Early Childhood Education Programme with international recognition and following the standards of the National Association for the Education of Young Children	
Qatar	A bachelor's degree education primary education or home economics	Bachelor's degree in any subject-no training	Bachelor's degree in any subject-no training	
UAE	BA in early childhood education to work with minimum 3 years experience	The Education Training and Evaluation Commission (ETEC)	A diploma in ECE /Or BA in child related subjects such as health, counselling, A Level three vocational qualification/ Diploma in early years education. Minimum 3 years experience	ADEK KHDA SPEA

Sources: https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/uae-wide-teacher-licensing-scheme...4/30/2016

https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23384Kuwait_VNR_FINAL.PDF

https://uil.unesco.org/case-study/effective-practices-database-litbase-0/mother-child-home-education-programme-mocep

https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/social-affairs/children/early-childhood-development-and-care

https://www.squ.edu.om/education/Units-Facilities/Academic-Departments/Early-Childhood-Education, accessed August, 2022.

Table A12. Quality assurance components for the ECCE workforce in GCC countries

Country	Framework monitoring/quality assuring the work of teachers for the ECCE sector	Professional development	Certification
Bahrain	There is currently no system for monitoring/quality assuring the work of teachers for the ECCE sector. There is a lack of functional monitoring systems and the deficiency of human expertise and capacity (Al Khalifa, 2021).		No licensing
Kuwait	There is currently no system for monitoring/quality assuring the work of teachers for the ECCE sector	(MOE): National Centre for Educational Development (NCED) conduct and monitor Teacher, and Educational Management Training information system Kuwait require in-service training mandatory up 30 hours	Montessori Certificate
Saudi Arabia	The Education Training and Evaluation Commission (ETEC) is developing standards for kindergarten teachers and principals. It is unclear, however, what the status of these standards are, how they will be used or when they will be released.	MOE Training centres attached to and administered by the ministry of education for the purpose of in-service teaching.	All teachers, kindergarten teachers must also pass a licensing exam before being certified to teach in schools.

Country	Framework monitoring/quality assuring the work of teachers for the ECCE sector	Professional development	Certification
Oman	There is currently no system for monitoring/quality assuring the work of teachers for the ECCE sector. There is the Omani project which has made progress in recruiting more Omani teachers over the past 10 years.	The Ministry of Education Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA), the Research Council, and the National Centre for Career	There are no recent stats on the recruited teachers for the ECCE sector.
Qatar	The Early Years Education Good Practice Guide: Education for a New Era. The guidelines emphasize current an integrated teaching approach rather than teacher-centred or subject-centred approaches that emphasize learning academic skills.	The Supreme Education Council (SEC) ensures that schools and teachers are functioning according to international, rigorous, and high standards. Supreme Education Council (SEC). The Early Childhood Good Practices. Doha, Qatar: SEC 2009;	No licensing
UAE	Inspectors of the early years' department of the MOEHE	30-hour in-service training is mandatory for teachers in the public sector.	
	Teacher Standards and Professional Pathways UAE Teacher and Educational Leadership Standards, A national qualification framework that include early years.	30-hour in-service training is mandatory for teachers in both private &public sector	The proposed professional licensing scheme for teachers is expected to be introduced next year and fully implemented by 2021.

For more information:
- https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/214763c8-en/index.html?Itemid=, accessed August, 2022.
- Al-Jadidi, N. (2012). The professional preparation, knowledge and beliefs of kindergarten teachers in Saudi Arabia (Order No. U590160). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1414975289). Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com.mutex.gmu.edu/docview/1414975289?accountid=14541, accessed August, 2022.

Table A13. Overview of ECCE governance in the GCC countries

Country	Ministries overseeing provisions					
	Public			Private		
	0-3	3-6- 4-6 (4-6) Public stand-alone and integrated kindergartens	6-8	0-3	3-6 (4-6) Private stand-alone and integrated kindergartens	6-8
Bahrain	Labour and Social Development ministry of Bahrain Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Bahrain- National Committee for Childhood	Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Bahrain- National Committee for Childhood	Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Bahrain-	No data	Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Bahrain- Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Bahrain- National Committee for Childhood	Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Bahrain-
Kuwait	No data	Minister of social affairs and labor	Ministry of Education (MOE) The National Centre for Educational Development (NCED)	No data	MOE - The private education department	MOE - The private education department

| Country | Ministries overseeing provisions | | | | | |
| | Public | | | Private | | |
	0-3	3-6- 4-6 (4-6) Public stand-alone and integrated kindergartens	6-8	0-3	3-6 (4-6) Private stand-alone and integrated kindergartens	6-8
Saudi Arabia	Ministry of Labour and Social Development	Ministry of Education under the early childhood general department.	Ministry of Education under the early childhood general department	The General Department and the Deputy Ministry for General Private Education	The General Department and the Deputy Ministry for General Private Education.	The General Department and the Deputy Ministry for General Private Education.
Oman	Ministry of Social Development (MOSD) is accountable for the supply of children services for age 0 – 3.2 yrs.	MoE & Ministry of Social Development (MOSD) Kindergarten 1 3.2 yrs – 4.2 years Kindergarten 2 4.2 – 5.2 yrs	MoE	The directorate general for women and children affair DG WCA within the ministry of social affairs and labor.	The Department of Private School Education Programme and Curriculum along with the Department of Pre-school	MoE
Qatar	Ministry of Administrative Development and Labor and Social Affairs for nurseries in government buildings-for government employees.	Ministry of Administrative Development and Labor and Social Affairs	Ministry of Administrative Development and Labor and Social Affairs All public Primary Schools (Grades 1-2) *Pilot underway to annex Grade 3 to Early Years	Ministry of Administrative Development and Labor and Social Affairs	Ministry of Education and Higher Education Evaluation Institute All public kindergartens/ private kindergartens (Qatar National Evaluation for Early Years Education	Ministry of Education and Higher Education Department for Private Schools All public/ private Primary Schools (Qatar National School Accreditation)
UAE	Federal Authority for Early Education FAEE Institution for ECCE cabinet " with an appointed minister of state reporting directly to the Prime Minister's office and a mandate of servicing children zero to grade four.			ADEK in Abudhabi, KHDA in Dubai SPEA in Sharjah Federal Authority for Early Education FAEE for private KG in Northern emirates only.	ADEK in Abudhabi, KHDA in Dubai SPEA in Sharjah Federal Authority for Early Education FAEE for private schools in Northern emirates only.	ADEK in Abudhabi, KHDA in Dubai SPEA in Sharjah

Education starts early

Progress, challenges and opportunities

Over the past decade, the Arab region has faced significant challenges, including geopolitical changes, civil wars, and economic crises, impacting ECCE. The Arab Spring and subsequent conflicts have disrupted education systems and hindered access to quality ECCE programmes. The presence of refugees and internally displaced persons has strained public services and created tensions.

Challenges in the region include limited access to quality ECCE, a shortage of skilled workforce, poverty, hunger, and inadequate healthcare. A significant concern is that in 2021, more than 40% of children in the Arab States region did not participate in any organized learning programme before the official age of primary school entry.

Despite these challenges, certain countries are championing ECCE. These countries have implemented comprehensive strategies, established national centres for educational development, and prioritized teacher quality and professional development.

This report presents the context over the past decade, successful practices that deserve to be scaled up and concludes with specific recommendations within each of the following themes: inclusion, quality workforce, governance, policy, and partnerships. It emphasizes the need to prioritize ECCE at the political level, reimagine learning to adapt to evolving needs, promote Inclusion, develop a skilled ECCE workforce, foster innovation and resilience, improve governance and partnerships, make strategic investments, support research efforts, and utilize data-sharing technology systems.

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