



**T20** **Brasil 2024**  
Let's rethink the world

## T20 POLICY BRIEF

Task Force 01

### FIGHTING INEQUALITIES, POVERTY, AND HUNGER

# A Global Common Good: Prioritising Investment in Early Childhood Development, Education and Care to Combat Inequalities, Poverty, and Hunger from the Beginning

**Mathias Urban**, Desmond Chair of Early Childhood Education, Dublin City University, Early Childhood Research Centre (Ireland)

**Constanza Liliana Alarcón Párraga**, Independent consultant and former Vice-Minister of Education of the Republic of Colombia (Colombia)

**Carolina Semmoloni**, Research Fellow, Dublin City University, Early Childhood Research Centre, (Ireland and Argentina)

**Alejandro Acosta**, Senior advisor, International Network on Peace Building with Young Children, INPB, CINDE, Fundación Centro Internacional de Educación y Desarrollo Humano (Colombia)

**Pramod K. Anand**, Research Fellow, Research and Information Systems for Developing Countries (India)

**Emily Vargas-Barón**, Director, RISE Institute, Washington, D.C. (USA)

**Claudia Costín**, Founding director, Centro de Excelência e Inovação em Políticas Educacionais- CEIPE-FGV, São Paulo (Brazil)

**Lynette Okengo**, Executive director, AfECN, African Early Childhood Network, Nairobi, (Kenya)

**Mercedes Mayol Lassalle**, World President, Organisation Mondiale pour l'Éducation Prescolaire (OMEP)

**Vina Adriany**, Director, South East Asian Ministers of Education Organization / Regional Centre for Early Childhood Care, Education and Parenting (SEAMEO CECCEP) (Indonesia)

**Yulida Pangastuti**, Researcher and Lecturer, Universitas Gadjah Mada / Tulodo Indonesia/ JADI ANAK, (Indonesia)



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## TF01

## Abstract

Global consensus and research recognise high-quality early childhood development, education, and care (ECD/ECEC) systems as essential for achieving productive societies and sustainable development, reducing poverty and unrest, overcoming inequality, and improving lifelong health, well-being, and educational attainment.

While countries in all global regions have made progress towards officially adopting public ECD/ECEC policies, they are at risk of being undone in a global economy under pressure from mounting geo-political tensions and still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. For developing economies, the World Bank identifies ‘the tightest financial conditions in decades’.

Young children are most affected by mutually reinforcing crises (poverty, pandemics, climate change, forced migration, wars), and the imminent failure to achieve the 2030 SDGs.

In 2023, the G20 *Leaders’ Declaration* reiterated the importance of ensuring 'equal access to affordable, inclusive, equitable, safe and quality education' beginning from early childhood. To achieve the ambitious goals set by the Brazilian Presidency, it is urgent to *rethink the world* in the unique multilateral forum provided by G20.

This Policy Brief argues that renewed commitment to ECD/ECEC by G20 is crucial for achieving the SDGs, and outlines how G20 can assume leadership in revitalising ECD/ECEC in a global discourse. It focuses on urgent, high-priority tasks:

- Finance for ECD/ECEC in challenging economic conditions
- Equitable, multisectoral ECD/ECEC policies
- Integrated ECD/ECEC systems that support nutrition, health, well-being, safety, and education within strong ethical and legal frameworks.



This brief builds on the Tashkent Declaration, Abidjan Principles, and previous T20 policy briefs, establishing ECD/ECEC as a shared responsibility and global common good.



## Introduction

This Policy Brief builds on the Tashkent Declaration adopted by the UNESCO World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education in 2022 (UNESCO 2022), the Abidjan Principles (2019) that specify state responsibility to prioritise public education from birth, and previous T20 policy briefs establishing ECD/ECEC as a shared responsibility and global common good.

The Tashkent Declaration of the World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education (UNESCO World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education 2022), adopted on 16 November 2022, emphasises the importance of ensuring quality care and education for all children, prioritising those in disadvantaged situations. It calls for early childhood services to be accessible and adaptable to the living conditions of each child. It also proposes principles and strategies to strengthen education and care for children from birth up to age 8, addressing aspects such as the quality of services, staff training, innovation, investment, governance, and the development of national multisectoral ECD monitoring and evaluation systems.

Similarly, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean<sup>1</sup> refers to five components of care: good health, adequate nutrition, responsive care, protection and security, and opportunities for early learning. These components are interdependent and interrelated and must be present for the unfolding of children's development potential (Castillo, C. 2023).

Previous policy briefs, written by our global authors' collective, have provided evidence-based recommendations that focus on systemic, multisectoral, and integrated

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cepal.org>

ECD/ECEC policies. They have been included in the final communiqués of T20 2018-2023 (see figure below).

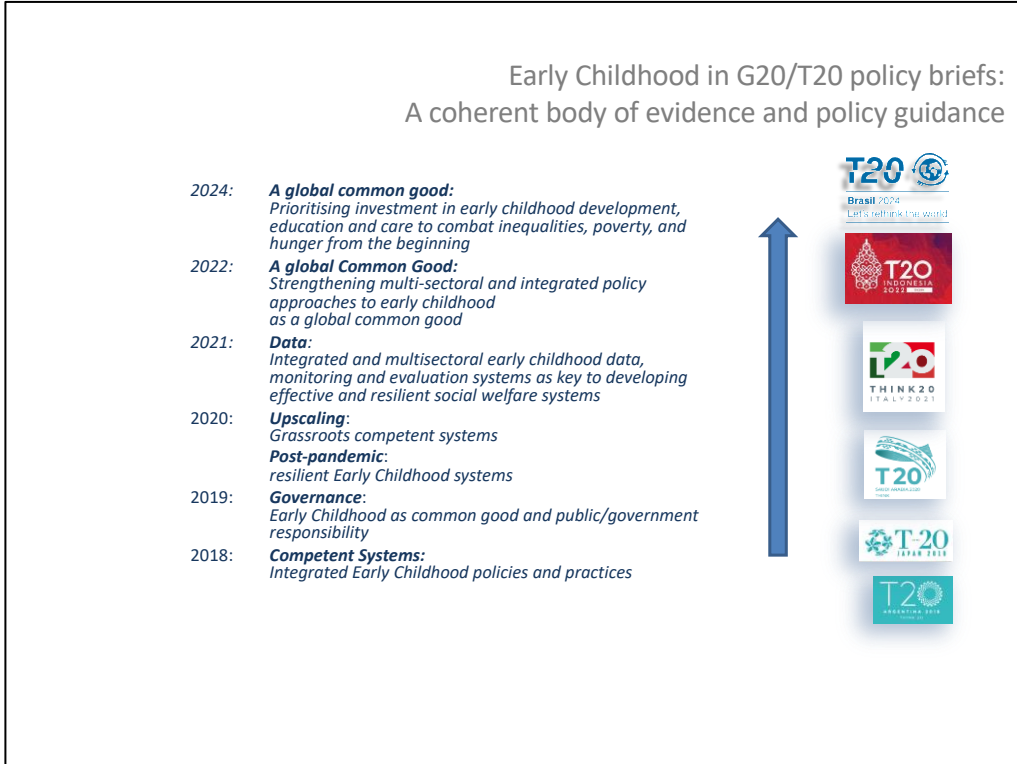


FIGURE 1. T20 policy briefs by the authors

## The Challenge

Since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, states have made significant progress in recognizing children as subjects of rights, including the necessary protection during childhood to ensure optimal development and the creation of opportunities that allow them to live authentic and meaningful lives, both personally and socially. Realising these rights in meaningful ways requires moving beyond the mere preservation of existence. It implies concrete action by signatory states to create optimal affective, social and material conditions for their realisation. Following the UNCRC's *General Comment No.7*, it also implies providing real and concrete opportunities for ALL children to realise and fulfil their rights, beginning from birth.<sup>2</sup>

Based on extensive research, global consensus recognises that high-quality early childhood development, education, and care (ECD/ECEC) systems are essential for attaining human rights and dignity, building productive societies, reducing poverty and inequity, and achieving lifelong health, well-being, educational attainment, and sustainable development (Kagan & Tucker 2018, 2019; OECD 2009; Urban et al. 2012).

Investing in the early years of human life is imperative for any country seeking to increase the well-being of its citizens, ensure opportunities for development and protection, reduce poverty, and improve economies through diversification and innovation (UNICEF, 2023).

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/GeneralComment7Rev1.pdf>

However, access to ECEC is unequal and varies widely between and within countries. As of 2023, only 89 countries had adopted multisectoral policy documents for early childhood development (Vargas-Barón et al., 2022). The absence of state policies and high levels of privatisation of services in several countries have resulted in low access to essential children's services. This correlates with the economic level of many families living in poverty. According to UNESCO and UNICEF data, in low-income countries, children from the wealthiest families are eight times more likely to participate in ECEC programmes than children from families in the poorest quintile. "Equitable access is a prerequisite for inclusion. One in four children do not have access to education in the year before they enter primary school. Four out of ten have not started school at the age at which they are supposed to be in school in their countries. And only three out of ten countries have at least one year of compulsory pre-primary education.<sup>3</sup> There are wide disparities in access to pre-primary education between poorer and better-off groups and between majority and minority groups" (UNESCO 2021).

Furthermore, studies confirm that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a decline in the net enrolment rate for pre-primary children who are one year short of primary school entry age.<sup>4</sup>

While countries in all global regions have made progress towards establishing public ECD/ECEC policies, they are at risk of poor implementation due to global economic

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<sup>3</sup> At the time of writing the policy brief, an international initiative is underway with the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to install a new legal instrument to enshrine the right to early childhood education and free pre-primary education in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cepal.org/>

pressures, mounting geo-political tensions, and the slow recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. For developing economies, the World Bank identifies 'the tightest financial conditions in decades'.<sup>5</sup>

Young children are most affected by The polycrisis, composed of mutually reinforcing crises, including poverty, pandemics, forced migration, wars, climate change, and the imminent failure to achieve the 2030 SDGs, especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC).

Therefore, it is crucially important that global agreements that enable and support local as well as regional policies for comprehensive ECD/ECEC include elements that experts have identified as basic to their implementation, such as sustainable financing, intersectoral collaboration, and high-quality services that give priority to vulnerable populations, including children at risk, with developmental delays, and disabilities. To achieve this, it is essential to establish national and multisectoral systems for tracking and monitoring children's development.

The challenges faced in creating conditions that contribute to this process in an equitable and inclusive manner have led to the recognition of the poor results in terms of early childhood care in contexts of high vulnerability and poverty. It is important to identify cost/efficiency and to adapt programmes that can be scalable but recognise cultural conditions, social practices in child rearing, and the particularities of each context. In multilingual countries, it is essential to provide early childhood support services in families and children's home languages.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2024/01/09/global-economic-prospects-january-2024-press-release>



Early childhood services must be of good quality, link families and communities, and recognise the ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity of all peoples (United Nations 2007; Scheidecker et al 2022). They must be flexible and adapted to geographical conditions in order to strengthen their relevance and facilitate access.

All this implies recognising that the flexibility of programmes and services is key but depends on the ability of distinct sectoral policy areas, and government departments (e.g. health, education, social policy) to embrace intersectoral collaboration. It implies overcoming fragmented, sectoral or atomised interventions and concurring in designing and implementing strategies that enable the actors involved to work together in multisectoral and, ideally, integrated ways to go beyond their particular professions, capacities and competencies. If taken seriously, this form of participatory policy planning and implementation will result in people-centred systems, the realisation of children's rights, and their comprehensive development.

## Relevance for the G20 agenda and its priorities

In 2018, G20 launched its Initiative for ECD/ECEC. Since then, T20 has adopted a body of annual policy briefs, authored by our group, outlining solutions for just and equitable ECD/ECEC policies and programmes at local, national, and global levels.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Urban, M., Cardini, A., & Flórez-Romero, R. 2018. It Takes More Than a Village. Effective Early Childhood Development, Education and Care Services Require Competent Systems / Los servicios efectivos de desarrollo, educación y cuidado de la primera infancia requieren sistemas competentes. In A. Cardini (Ed.), *Bridges to the future of education: policy recommendations for the digital age / Puentes al futuro de la educación: recomendaciones de política para la era digital* (pp. 25-42). Buenos Aires: Fundacion Santillana.

Urban, M., Cardini, A., Costín, C., Floréz-Romero, R., Guevara, J., Okengo, L., & Priyono, D. 2020. *Upscaling community based early childhood programmes to counter inequality and foster social cohesion during global uncertainty*. Retrieved from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: [https://t20saudiArabia.org.sa/en/briefs/Pages/Policy-](https://t20saudiArabia.org.sa/en/briefs/Pages/Policy-Brief.aspx?pb=TF4_PB5)

[Brief.aspx?pb=TF4\\_PB5](https://t20saudiArabia.org.sa/en/briefs/Pages/Policy-Brief.aspx?pb=TF4_PB5)

Urban, M., Cardini, A., Costín, C., Floréz-Romero, R., Guevara, J., Okengo, L., & Priyono, D. 2020. *Post-Covid-19 to 2030: Early childhood programs as a pathway to sustainability in times of global uncertainty*. Retrieved from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: [https://t20saudiArabia.org.sa/en/briefs/Pages/Policy-Brief.aspx?pb=TF7\\_PB3](https://t20saudiArabia.org.sa/en/briefs/Pages/Policy-Brief.aspx?pb=TF7_PB3)

Urban, M., Cardini, A., Guevara, J., Okengo, L., & Flórez-Romero, R. 2019. Early Childhood Development Education and Care: The Future Is What We Build Today. In P.

In 2023, the G20 Leaders' Declaration reiterated the importance of ensuring 'equal access to affordable, inclusive, equitable, safe and quality education' beginning from early childhood. Achieving the ambitious goals set by the Brazilian Presidency (combating hunger, reforming global governance, and climate change), it is now urgent to *Rethink the World* in the unique multilateral forum provided by the G20. Even more so as G20/T20 Brazil 2024 is a clear indication of the leadership taken by global south regions (Indonesia, India, and now Brazil) to reframe and reform an increasingly dysfunctional

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J. Morgan & N. Kayashima (Eds.), *Realizing Education for All in the Digital Age* (pp. 9-16). Tokyo: Asian Development Bank Institute.

Urban, M., Guevara, J., Cardini, A., Acosta, A., Vargas-Barón, E., Costín, C., . . . Priyono, D. 2021. *How do we know goals are achieved? Integrated and multisectoral early childhood monitoring and evaluation systems are key to developing effective and resilient social welfare systems*. Retrieved from <https://www.t20italy.org/2021/09/20/how-do-we-know-goals-are-achieved/>

Urban, M., Guevara, J., Cardini, A., Acosta, A., Vargas-Barón, E., Costín, C., . . . Pangastuti, Y. 2022. *Education for Survival. Strengthening multisectoral and integrated policy approaches to early childhood education, care, and development as a global common good*. Retrieved from <https://www.t20indonesia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/EDUCATION-FOR-SURVIVAL-STRENGTHENING-MULTI-SECTORAL-AND-INTEGRATED-POLICY-APPROACHES-TO-EARLY-CHILDHOOD-EDUCATION-CARE-AND-DEVELOPMENT-AS-A-GLOBAL-COMMON-GOOD.pdf>

global order and its institutions, which is ill-prepared to address the imminent challenges of The polycrisis now affecting all countries of our planet.

As a *global common good*, investments in ECD/ECEC will contribute to achieving many ambitious aims. They will yield many highly desirable pay-offs: they will bear fruit immediately and help to achieve the entire SDG framework—a fulcrum of inter-SDG interconnects—especially zero hunger (SDG2), good health and well-being (SDG3), quality education (SDG4), gender equality (SDG5), reduced inequalities (SDG10); supported by clean water and sanitation (SDG6), peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG16), and partnerships for the goals (SDG17), and lead to no poverty (SDG1), decent work and economic growth (SDG8).

Renewed commitment to ECD/ECEC by the G20 can help focus world attention on effective actions that would be crucial for achieving the SDGs and building momentum for intensifying country commitment to young children of all abilities and their families.

In a wider geo-political context, armed conflicts, including the increasing likelihood of the emergence of new ones, are deepening and complexifying the forms of violence that affect contemporary society. They have severe implications for young children, their families, and communities. At a side event at the United Nations General Assembly in 2023, the Early Childhood Peace Consortium (ECPC), convened by Ireland, Chile, and Colombia, emphasised early childhood development as a 'sustainable pathway to peace'. The message is supported by international organisations, including the International Network on Peace Building with Young Children (INPB). Just as it is necessary for countries' general development policies to include policies for early childhood, with emphasis at the present time on the issues of inequity, poverty, and hunger, with a focus on promoting the integral development of the child, it is impossible to confront the problem of violence in the world without advancing in the construction of a **culture of**



**peace** that includes appropriate strategies in public policies from early childhood onwards. The G20 under the Presidency of Brazil, with the reform of global governance as one of its priorities, presents a powerful opportunity to advance the global peace led by the global south.



## Policy Recommendations for the G20

The G20 is a collective and multilateral forum that could—and should—assume leadership in revitalising ECD/ECEC by spearheading global high-level discourse focusing on three urgent, high-priority tasks:

- Increasing finance for ECD/ECEC services and systems despite challenging economic conditions.
- Forging equitable, multisectoral, and up-to-date ECD/ECEC policies for all countries and ensuring that financing and technical support are available for effective policy implementation.
- Developing integrated, inclusive, and high-quality ECD/ECEC systems that support child and family development, good parenting and responsive caregiving, nutrition, health, well-being, safety, and education within strong ethical and legal frameworks for ALL children, including those with developmental difficulties.

### **More specifically, the G20 collectively should encourage and support States**

**I. to recognise the value and importance of expanded and sustainable investments in evidence-based early childhood policies.**

II. Scientific evidence amply supports the positive impact of these investments, demonstrating that they are one of the most effective strategies for reducing social gaps, combating poverty and addressing social injustice. ECD/ECEC multisectoral policies not only lay the foundation for healthy and equitable child development but also promote the building of more inclusive, productive, and prosperous societies in the long term.

- III. **to improve the living conditions of young children holistically**, beyond the provision of early childhood development, education, and care programmes, ensuring the direct participation of families and communities
- IV. **to develop framework policies and strategies that enable upscaling** effective, locally and culturally responsive, context-specific ECD/ECEC programmes and services within a universal, rights-based approach.
- V. **to establish effective multi- and inter-sectoral policies**, technical, budgetary, and operational coordination between programmes and strategies for ECD/ECEC, together with care economy systems, food security, home health and access to housing, combating poverty, promoting social cohesion and giving priority to planning for the needs of children before, during and after major climate and other emergencies.
- VI. **to focus on capacity-building at all levels of government** (local, regional, national), enabling the creation of innovative ECD/ECEC policies and programmes that use technology appropriately and respond to evolving local conditions.
- VII. **to establish and maintain conditions necessary for systematic co-creation of ECD/ECEC knowledge** and evidence anchored in the particularities of diverse cultural, geographic, and ecological contexts.
- VIII. **to recognise the role of non-state actors**, such as non-governmental organisations and academia, in the provision of ECD/ECEC services and to regulate, without limiting innovation, their organisation, the quality of their proposals, pre-and in-service training, modes of operation, sustainability, material and building conditions, and the certification and employment status of their personnel.
- IX. **to yield the key role of ECD/ECEC in the context of a global right to education** and as a prime enabler of the entire SDG framework, as specified in SDG 4.7: ECD/ECEC policies and programmes must include human rights, gender equality, a

culture of peace, non-violence, and knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development and lifestyles.

X. **to link ECD/ECEC policies with other public policies as systems of care and support**, especially regarding the status and needs of women and children, with priority placed on early childhood intervention for the early developmental needs of children with at-risk situations, developmental delays and disabilities.

XI. **to make use of scientific evidence in decision-making processes**, in order to develop sustainable policies and their systematic implementation.

Policies for integrating early childhood development, such as those proposed here, constitute a vitally important initiative to overcome the sectoral fragmentation and polarisation that affect many countries and increasingly characterise international relations. In effect, *multisectorality*, the articulation of the state with civil society and international cooperation, as well as national central-level articulation with regional and local governance levels, has been achieved through the planning and implementation of multisectoral early childhood policies. Participatory ECD/ECEC policy planning has generated processes that create new and more productive relationships among various key actors in countries. Finally, by placing priority on the rights and well-being of children, countries discover new ways to strengthen their roles in national and international cooperation, and they create a revised institutional architecture and framework that advances the construction of a culture of peace and social justice, which is essential to achieve survival, equity, and human rights.



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# Let's **rethink** the world

