

TOWARDS ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

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Annotation: Some of UNICEF's efforts to improve preschool education in Uzbekistan are outlined in this article. And a report on the status is given. Information is provided on how to improve preschool education and achievements.

Key words: UNICEF, preschool education, support, government, quality, children, training.

National Progress in Early Childhood Education since the establishment of the Ministry of Pre-School Education (MOPSE) From 2018 to date, UNICEF has invested nearly US \$ 2 million to support the Government in preschool education. This investment resulted in adoption of new laws, national policies and plans, data collection and quality assurance mechanisms. UNICEF further supported the quality of preschool education by reviewing the preschool curriculum, Early Learning Development standards, and teacher training. Service delivery has been expanded through the introduction of alternative models, further introducing digital solutions targeting children, parents and teachers. With such support, the government has been able to provide quality preschool education to almost 2 million children in the age group of 3-6 years by early 2022.

Establishment of the Ministry of Preschool Education (MOPSE) by the decree of the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, dated September 30, 2017

Law on Preschool Education (2019) aimed at providing universal access to quality preschool education for all eligible in a gradual manner and ensuring at least one year preschool education before entering school in line with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.2;

Establishing preschools using Public-Private-Partnership models, particularly family preschools (>12000 new non-state preschools established since 2018 till 2021);

Enrollment rates increased from <30% in 2017 to 69,4% in 2022 (June);

New curriculum "Ilk Kadam" based on competency-based approach and in line with the revised Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS) being implemented in all preschools since 2018;

An Education Management Information System (EMIS) piloted and scaled up in 2018-19, now being upgraded;

A Preschool Education Quality Assurance Framework (EQAF) and mechanism for self-assessment and external evaluation established;

Digital platforms such as “Bebbo” for parents and “Learning Passport” launched for providing information and training for parents, teachers and other caregivers;

Several studies undertaken providing information to support evidence-based planning and programming.

UNICEF partnership with the Ministry of Preschool Education in the Republic of Uzbekistan

In 2017, UNICEF prepared an Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy Review which contributed to the decision of the Government of Uzbekistan to create a new Ministry for Preschool Education (MOPSE). Law on Preschool: During 2018-19, UNICEF provided technical expertise to the MOPSE to develop a new Law on Preschool Education, which guarantees one year preprimary education for children before they enter schools. This is in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 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”. The Law was approved by the President in December 2019. In 2018, UNICEF led the preparation of Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2019-2023 which provided a long-term vision for the education system in the country and outlined a coherent set of practicable strategies to reach its objectives. The ESP enabled MOPSE to receive \$ 10 million as grants from Global Partnership for Education (GPE), which is now being implemented along with the World Bank’s Preschool Education project. During 2017-2018, UNICEF supported the MOPSE to plan for expanding preschool provision in the country using non-governmental resources. This had culminated in a major Conference on the “Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models for expanding Preschool Education in the country” on March 24, 2018. In 2019, UNICEF developed & recommended three types of Alternative models of preschool education:

- i. “School readiness” groups for 6 years-old children;
- ii. Mixed age groups for 3-5 years-old children; and
- iii. Play groups for 3-5 years-old children

MOPSE implemented one year “School readiness” groups for 6 years-old children at scale since 2020; UNICEF along with MOPSE currently are piloting (since 2021) other alternative preschool models (mixed groups and play groups) in 10 sites in two regions – Namangan and Khorezm; with 400 children participating. In 2018,

UNICEF provided technical expertise to the MOPSE to revise the Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS) and prepare a new Preschool curriculum “Ilk Qadam” (First Step). “Ilk Qadam” is now implemented in the preschools of Uzbekistan. Since 2019, UNICEF has been providing technical support to develop in-service training programme for preschool teachers on ELDS and new curriculum; UNICEF and MOPSE have developed 6 teacher training guidebooks and have also trained Master Trainers. In 2019-2020, UNICEF supported MOPSE and SISEQ in developing Teacher Professional Competency Standards (TPS) and piloting the same for preschool teachers. The TPS is aimed at benchmarking teachers against the competencies on six dimensions of teacher professional work and development. COVID-19 Response: UNICEF supported MOPSE to address the COVID-19 scenario in the following ways: (i) carried out

a rapid assessment of ECE at home during the COVID-19 lockdown; (ii) analyzed Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) conditions in preschools to inform safe preschool re-opening requirements; (iii) developed Safe Preschool Re-opening Guidelines; and (iv) developed Training materials for preschool teachers and staff for COVID-19 related safe practices.

Reforming Preschool Education – National Law and Policies

Key Results:

- Government’s commitment to SDG 4.2 (one year pre-primary education)
- Recognition, regulation and collaboration of private provision in preschools
- First ever successful PPP in Uzbekistan social sector; enhanced access and enrolments in preschools
- International Financial Institutions (World Bank & IsDB) investing in PPP model preschools.

Public Private Partnership (PPP) models for Preschool Expansion

Presidential Decree # 3651 (April 2018) provides the framework, provisions and obligations for private investors for establishing and operating preschools under the Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangements.

Features:

- Provision of land for free for construction and management of private preschools;
- Allocation of un-used public spaces / preschools for construction of private preschools;

- Provision for family based private preschools;
- Philanthropy in the form of patronage of preschools by private persons/ establishments;
- Tax concessions to private sector;
- Concessional lending for private preschools for a period of 15 years, incl. with a three-year grace period;
- subsidies from the state budget in the amount of up to 50% of the amount spent on students from poor background.

Introducing innovative models of Early Childhood Education

Alternative & Innovative models of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

Key Results

- MOPSE is expanding the alternative models through mobile buses (65 IZUZU preschools) covering 6200 children.
- MOPSE is scaling up the alternative models in 40 play groups covering a total of 600 children in Samarkhand and Namangan region under the World Bank & GPE funded Early Childhood Education project (2019 – 2024).
- With funding and support of the European Union, UNICEF is expanding alternative models of preschools to provide multilingual, inclusive education in at least 10 sites in Surkhandarya region during 2022 -2023.
- Islamic Development Bank (ISDB) will help MOPSE to scale up the alternative preschools in 50 more places during 2023-2026.

In 2011, UNICEF had introduced alternative ECE through half-day preschool programme, which was later scaled up under the World Bank's GPE supported project (2014- 2019). In 2019, UNICEF recommended three types of Alternative models of preschool education:

- “School readiness” groups for 6 years-old children;
- Mixed age groups for 3-5 years-old children;
- Play groups for 3-5 years-old children.

UNICEF piloting alternative preschools: Total 10 groups of alternative preschools are operating now in two regions – Namangan and Khorezm. 10 more groups with the focus on multi-lingual education will be established in Surkhandarya region with

EU financial support in 2023 providing services for about 500 most vulnerable children.

Improving the quality and content of Early Childhood Education

Key Results:

- The curriculum is being implemented in all 20,000 preschool in the country facilities
- The scaling up of the activities for quality implementation of the curriculum (2023 – 2026) and for periodic review of the curricular areas will be ensured by additional nancing including with support by the Islamic Development Bank within the framework of 70USD million funded project to be launched in 2023.

The “State ECE curriculum” is a regulatory document developed in line with ELDS, which reflects goals and objectives of pre-school educational institutions, key concepts of educational activities, as well as basic competencies expected from children when transitioning to the next stage of education. The State ECE curriculum is a mandatory document that shall be used as a foundation for developing a variety of preschool education programme in all state and non-state preschools in Uzbekistan. The State curriculum uses a competency-based approach, requiring holistic development of the child - a combination of knowledge, abilities, skills, and values of a child. UNICEF is supporting the rolling out of improved ECE curriculum and preparation of teachers through in-service training across all established ECE centers.

Resources :

1. <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/en/achieving-universal-early-childhood-education>
2. <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/en>
3. <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/en/education>
4. <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/en/early-childhood-education-and-development>
5. <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/en/preschool-education>
6. <https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/search?force=0>