



**Asia-Pacific Regional Policy Forum on Early Childhood Care and Education**  
*The Transformative Power of Early Childhood: Innovations for Inclusivity and Quality*  
19 to 21 July 2016, Putrajaya, Malaysia

## **Putrajaya Declaration**

### **Preamble**

1. We, ministers and delegates of 36 countries in Asia and the Pacific; representatives of United Nations agencies, development partners and civil society organizations; and members of research and teaching communities, gathered in Putrajaya, Malaysia, from 19 to 21 July 2016 for the second Asia-Pacific Regional Policy Forum on Early Childhood Care and Education, organized by UNESCO, UNICEF, ARNEC and the Government of Malaysia.
2. **Learning begins at birth.** This simple yet powerful sentence was noted in the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA), which was adopted in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. A year earlier, the Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasized that young children possess the right to not only survive but also to thrive and develop to their fullest potential. It is in this spirit that the participants of the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000 developed the first EFA goal of 'expanding and improving comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children'.
3. ECCE lays the foundation for children's long-term learning, development and well-being. Accordingly, we fully endorse the aspirational and universal Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4: 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' and 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**'.
4. The Putrajaya Regional Policy Forum on ECCE builds on the momentum created for education in general and ECCE in particular by a series of international fora, including the first Regional Policy Forum on ECCE (Seoul, 2013), the World Education Forum (Incheon, 2015) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit (New York, 2015). Having shared experiences and lessons learned in developing and implementing ECCE policies and discussed innovative strategies to improve the equity and quality of ECCE services in the Asia-Pacific region, we adopt this Declaration.

### **The transformative power of early childhood**

5. Today, thanks to robust research and sustained advocacy by the ECCE community, there is increased awareness among policy-makers, planners, practitioners and parents regarding the critical importance of ECCE. Those gathered at this policy forum recognize the transformative power of early childhood care and education. **Early childhood, encompassing the period from conception to 8 years of age, is the foundation of peace and sustainable development.** Early experiences influence a child's health and brain development as well as a broad range of skills, capacities and behaviours throughout life. Quality ECCE, provided in a nurturing and safe environment inside and outside the home, sets the foundation for future well-being and greater equity, particularly for disadvantaged children. Research findings point to the benefits of quality ECCE in terms of increased productivity, greater gender equality and future cost savings through

reduced school dropout and repetition, better health and a lower incidence of criminal behaviour in adulthood.

6. The countries of Asia and the Pacific have made much progress in every domain of ECCE, including in reducing extreme poverty, infant and child mortality and child malnutrition as well as increasing immunization rates and participation in pre-primary education. However, many children and families in the region have not benefited from such progress, and large disparities exist both across and within countries, with rising inequality observed in many countries based on gender, wealth, geographic location, ethnicity, language, disability and other factors, including those resulting from conflict and disasters.
7. Quality ECCE programmes are holistic and integrated, with elements of protection, health and nutrition, early stimulation and learning. Because inequity can begin even before birth, efforts need to begin early to ensure all children realize their right to develop fully and thrive in a safe, nurturing and stimulating environment. Parents, families, caregivers and educators are all critical in helping children make a seamless and successful transition from home to ECCE settings and then to primary education. **Supporting parents and families as well as developing the capacity of the ECCE workforce is essential to the qualitative improvement of ECCE.**
8. **ECCE is everyone's responsibility, but governments play a critical role** in setting and monitoring ECCE legislative and regulatory frameworks, quality standards and curricular guidelines as well as in allocating and distributing resources to ensure equity and quality. Many countries have written national ECCE policies, frameworks or action plans and although such documents usually highlight ECCE's holistic nature, few are comprehensive across all child development areas and age groups.
9. Most governments in the region still do not prioritize early childhood in their social and economic sector development plans, and public investment in ECCE continues to be very low compared to the international benchmarks for ECCE spending of 1 per cent of GDP and 10 per cent of public education funding.

#### **Action agenda to achieve SDG Target 4.2 in Asia and the Pacific**

10. We hereby declare our commitment to the realization of SDG Target 4.2 through the following actions, with a view to driving the transformation that the world aims to achieve by 2030:
  - i. Put in place integrated and inclusive legislation, policies and programmes that realize the provision of at least one year of free and compulsory quality pre-primary education, paying special attention to the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children.
  - ii. Implement integrated, multi-sectoral ECCE policies, strategies and high quality programmes coordinated across the ministries responsible for health, social and child protection, water and sanitation, justice, and education, and secure adequate resources for their implementation.
  - iii. Develop clear policies, strategies and guidelines, including action plans for the professionalization of ECCE personnel through professional development, and elevation of their status and working conditions.
  - iv. Design inclusive, accessible, high quality and integrated ECCE programmes, services and infrastructure, especially for children with disabilities, and support families as children's first caregivers.

- v. Increase government investment in ECCE and forge partnerships with the private sector, civil society and development partners to make more efficient use of financial and human resources for equitable access to quality ECCE.
- vi. Monitor and evaluate countries' progress towards SDG Target 4.2, using the global thematic indicators of readiness (child development and learning outcomes), participation (enrolment) and provision (availability) as well as public and private financing for ECCE. This process should form part of the SDG4-Education 2030 coordination process, leading to comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems at the national and sub-national levels.
- vii. Strengthen the collection, analysis and use of data, which are often scattered across multiple sectors, ensuring that this data is comprehensive and disaggregated so as to address equity and to holistically measure child learning and development outcomes.
- viii. Raise awareness of stakeholders, through evidence-based advocacy, in partnership and with technical assistance from UNESCO, UNICEF, ARNEC and other key regional agencies and networks.
- ix. Initiate the process of developing a regional framework for SDG Target 4.2 and national roadmaps for implementation, with clear timelines, under a regional coordination and support mechanism for SDG4-Education 2030.