

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR LEARNING



Teacher Ibragimo Soltanat during a class at the Early Learning Hub supported by GPE in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.
GPE/Federico Scoppa

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) works with partner country governments to improve the quality and availability of early education for all, through cross-country exchange of best practices, increased financing and investments and the promotion of laws, policies and advocacy campaigns dedicated to pre-primary learning.

THE CHALLENGE

- ▶ The world is experiencing a learning crisis and as of 2022, **70% of children** in low- and middle-income countries could not read and understand a basic text by age 10.
- ▶ Globally, **175 million pre-primary aged children** are not enrolled in pre-primary education.
- ▶ The poorest children are **7 times less likely** than children from the wealthiest families to attend pre-primary school.
- ▶ 40% of countries with data allocate **less than 2% of education budgets** to early childhood education.
- ▶ **Only 1% of aid to education** is invested in pre-primary education.

QUALITY EARLY EDUCATION IMPROVES LEARNING AND MAKES EDUCATION SYSTEMS MORE EFFICIENT

Early childhood education (ECE) is one of the most **critical and cost-effective investments** a country can

make in both its people and overall development. High quality early learning services are essential to **closing learning gaps**. Children who get quality ECE before age 5 perform better throughout their schooling than those who do not: they're more likely to enter school on time, less likely to drop out or repeat grades and more likely to complete primary and secondary school. In countries where more children attend pre-primary education, more children reach minimum competencies in reading and math by the end of primary school.

GPE APPROACH

GPE is committed to supporting partner countries to improve access, quality and learning outcomes in the early years. GPE incentivizes countries to ensure **all children have access to at least 1 year of quality pre-primary education** in line with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 commitment and the Education 2030 Framework for Action.

To strengthen ECE within national education systems, GPE builds knowledge and fosters good practices through **cross-country exchange** to develop partner

country capacity to plan and implement quality programs. GPE promotes sharing **global and regional research** related to scaling alternate models for ECE through the GPE Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) and inter-organizational collaboration.

GPE also supports **increased financing and investment for early learning** across the partnership. Through GPE grants, partner countries develop **laws, policies and advocacy campaigns** to expand the number of children enrolled in pre-primary education.

GPE RESULTS

- ▶ US\$270 million has been invested to support early education in more than 35 partner countries. In 2022, **10% of GPE financing** went towards early learning financing—a 3% increase from 2020.
- ▶ The number of children enrolled in pre-primary education in GPE partner countries has **more than tripled**, with 62% in 2020 compared to 19% 2002.
- ▶ **Two thirds of all GPE grants** in 2018 included support for early childhood care and education in partner countries.
- ▶ \$255 million in 2022 alone has been allocated toward ECE in active implementation grants. **85% of grants** included targeted support for ECE teachers (an allocation of roughly \$54 million) with initiatives for teacher recruitment, training, deployment and professional development.
- ▶ Through the Better Early Learning and Development at Scale (BELDS) initiative and in partnership with UNICEF, GPE has promoted both **in- and cross-country capacity building** in Ghana, the Kyrgyz Republic, Lesotho and São Tomé and Príncipe, and launched the [ECE Accelerator Analysis and Planning Toolkit](#).
- ▶ Under KIX, **five research initiatives** dedicated to ECE were launched in 2022 in sub-Saharan Africa, in partnership with the LEGO Foundation and the International Development Research Centre, focused on play-based learning, innovative pedagogies and how parents, educators and governments can best support early learning.
- ▶ **Nine grants** through KIX are dedicated to early learning as of 2023, making it one of the largest funding focus areas within the initiative.

LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

With GPE support, the government of Lao PDR is helping its youngest and most vulnerable students improve their reading skills. With a US\$16.8 million GPE grant, the government has been improving the quality of education by supporting school management and introducing a new pedagogical approach for teaching early reading in the national language. The reading readiness program builds children's competency in early literacy and prepares them for primary school. Over 100 kindergarten classrooms have received specialized kits of instructional materials, and almost 200 teachers have been trained to apply the program. Between 2018 and 2021, the percentage of children in target classrooms with awareness of print increased from 35% to 55%—a sign that more students are improving their reading readiness.



Students play with blocks and other materials in Aranaputa Nursery School, Guyana. GPE/Kelley Lynch