

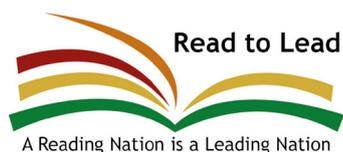


SOUTH AFRICA'S 2030
STRATEGY FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES
EVERY CHILD MATTERS



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



South Africa's 2030 Strategy for Early Childhood Development Programmes

Every Child Matters

Published by the National Department of Basic Education of South Africa.

Contact:

National Department of Basic Education: Early Childhood Development Directorate

222 Struben Street, Pretoria

Call Centre Email: Callcentre@dbe.gov.za

Media Email: media@dbe.gov.za

Switchboard: 012 357 3000

Call Centre: 0800 202 933

www.education.gov.za

Suggested citation: Department of Basic Education of the Republic of South Africa. 2023. South Africa's 2030 Strategy for Early Childhood Development Programmes. Pretoria.

ISBN Number: 978-1-4315-3988-8

2023

Back cover image courtesy of DataDrive2030.

Contents

Commonly used acronyms	4
Glossary of terms	4
1. Introduction	5
The importance of getting the early years right	5
Scope and policy context	5
Children's rights	6
Recognising the central role of parents and caregivers	6
Childcare and inclusive economic growth	7
Building new partnerships for collaborative delivery	7
Key terms	7
2. Vision and priorities	8
2030 Outcomes	8
3. Context and starting-point	10
Young children in South Africa	10
The access and quality gaps for ECD programmes	10
Profile of early learning programmes	10
Assets and resources	11
Problem statement	11
4. Theoretical framework	13
Quality early learning and development	14
5. The new service delivery model	15
Parent support programmes	15
Early learning programmes	16
Mechanisms to implement the new service delivery model	16
6. Modelling	18
Early learning programmes	18
Infrastructure for ELPs	18
Workforce	19
7. Outputs and enablers	20
8. Key milestones	22
9. Resource requirements	23
Budgetary implications	23
New funding sources and models	24
10. Conclusion	25
Appendix: Thematic summaries	26
Notes and references	29

Commonly used acronyms

ECD	Early childhood development
ECD - EI	ECD Employment Initiative
ELP	Early learning programme
CHW	Community Health Worker
DBE	Department of Basic Education
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NDP	National Development Plan
NIECDP	National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy
PPP	Public Private Partnerships
QASS	Quality Assurance and Support System
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency

Glossary of terms

Key terms in this Strategy are presented below, in line with the definitions provided in the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy 2015.

ECD programmes – The National Integrated ECD Policy defines ECD programmes as, “Programmes that provide one or more forms of daily care, development, early learning opportunities and support to children from birth until the year before they enter formal school.” It lists types of ECD programmes, which include both early learning programmes and parent support programmes.

ECD practitioner – A person who provides an ECD programme.

Early learning programmes – These are ECD programmes that are attended by children on a part-time or full-time basis, in a range of spaces, and which provide early learning and development opportunities. These include ECD centres, playgroups, day mothers, as well as toy libraries and mobile ECD programmes.

Parent support programmes – These are a broad range of ECD programmes provided to a parent or caregiver, which support one or more aspects of parenting. They include home visiting and outreach ECD programmes (such as workshops and virtual resources).

1. Introduction

The early years of every child's life provide the foundations for their future flourishing and success. In recognition of this, in the National Development Plan 2030 (NDP), government committed to universal access to early childhood development (ECD) by 2030, including two years of quality preschool.¹ These are ambitious goals, and their achievement will depend on new models of co-operation, collaboration and co-ordination, not only across departments and spheres of government, but also with the ECD sector, social partners, business and donors – and just as importantly, with families and communities.

The purpose of the 2030 Strategy for ECD Programmes is, therefore, both to provide a road map towards these goals, and to provide the basis for a new social compact between all ECD role-players, in order that effort and resources are aligned behind a common strategy.

The overarching strategy is informed by the Department of Basic Education's (DBE's) six social justice principles, each of which has been defined to carry a specific meaning and purpose for ECD:

- **Access:** Ensure rapid ECD programme expansion (new facilities and workforce) towards universal access by 2030;
- **Redress:** Ensure that historically disadvantaged population groups are prioritised;
- **Equity:** Ensure that ECD access and quality do not depend on a child's background or location;
- **Quality:** Ensure a strong focus on quality and that regulatory standards and requirements reflect the known mediators of positive child outcomes;
- **Inclusivity:** Ensure that every child's unique abilities and needs are accommodated in ECD programme provisioning; and
- **Efficiency:** Ensure that plans for quality access are realistic in a constrained fiscus and strategically leverage resources already in the system.

The importance of getting the early years right

Evidence from around the world confirms that the years between birth and school are a critical window of opportunity and risk, not only for every

child, but also for their family and wider society. A child's brain and body develops rapidly during this period, and this development can be helped or impeded by factors such as health, nutrition, nurture and stimulation. When children benefit from these, by the time they start school, they are much more likely to have in place the foundations for their personal wellbeing and future success. However, when children are denied these elements of nurturing care, there is a high risk that they will start school without having reached key developmental milestones, making it harder for them to reach their full potential, and creating costs and challenges within the schooling and other social systems.

The opportunity for government and for our social partners, therefore, is to invest substantially and strategically in the early years, in particular by supporting equitable access to quality ECD programmes, in order that no child is left behind.

Scope and policy context

The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECDP) was published by government in 2015. It defines a national comprehensive package of ECD services and support, with certain essential components. The comprehensive package includes elements that are subject to progressive realisation in terms of South Africa's constitution, such as appropriate housing, social protection, and access to basic services and sanitation. The essential package, on the other hand, encompasses, 'those services where there is a more immediate obligation on Government to provide the services, which is an essential precondition for the realisation of young children's rights that are not subject to progressive realisation but are immediately realisable'.² These include basic maternal and child health care and nutrition, support for parents and caregivers to ensure a child's optimal development, early learning programmes (ELPs), and public information.

The elements of the essential package relating to parent support, ELPs and public information are the focus areas for this Strategy. This encompasses both parent support programmes and attendance-based programmes such as ECD centres.

The role and opportunity of these types of programmes are described in more detail in Section 4. The other NIECDP priorities are equally important and require effective collaboration and planning across departments. Government's plan for these services, including maternal and child health, social grants and nutrition delivery will be developed in close conjunction with the relevant departments and set out in the updated NIECDP, with the DBE playing a key leadership and co-ordinating role.

Children's rights

The NIECDP explicitly recognises a right to ECD, in line with those rights that are immediately realisable in South Africa's Constitution, and states that, 'This Policy provides Government's recognition of the universal right of all children in South Africa to early childhood development services and the fundamental developmental importance of early childhood development.'³

South Africa is also a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that contains various provisions relating to the holistic development of young children. General Comment No7, 'Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood', states that the Committee on the Rights of the Child, 'interprets the right to education during early childhood as beginning at birth and closely linked to young children's right to maximum development.'⁴

The rights framing is useful not only because it urges us towards child-centred policy-making, but because it foregrounds the necessity of identifying the resources and capacity to provide those services that underpin the realisation of children's rights.

Recognising the central role of parents and caregivers

Government has a central role to play in leading, designing and co-ordinating the right mix of services and support for young children. However, government cannot replace parents and caregivers. The home is where every young child spends the majority of their time, and is the setting that will have the strongest influence on a child's development. Every day, parents and caregivers in South Africa show huge resourcefulness and ingenuity in how they care for and raise their children, in even the

most constrained circumstances. This Strategy does not seek to replace those efforts, but to build on them. This requires government to provide and ensure access to the services and resources that will empower every parent to perform their role as a child's first nurturer and teacher.

Childcare and inclusive economic growth

While the focus of this Strategy is on ensuring that every child has access to the early learning and development opportunities that ensure they will flourish, the benefits of ECD programmes go beyond the child and extend to the family, community and economy.

Increasingly over the past decade, global attention has turned to the role that quality childcare plays in women's economic empowerment and inclusive economic growth. The benefits are three-fold: Firstly, when primary caregivers, usually women, can access childcare they are also able to work. Conversely, mothers who cannot access childcare are often caught in a downward spiral of labour market exclusion and low income. Secondly, the ECD sector is a critical part of South Africa's care economy and has the potential to unlock new jobs and micro-enterprise development opportunities. It is estimated that around 300,000 new jobs can be created in the ECD sector,⁵ advancing the livelihoods of excluded economic groups, in particular women and youth, in remote, rural and underserved areas. Thirdly, these new jobs and services have multiplier benefits for communities; creating demand for auxiliary goods and services (such as food) and strengthening the local economy.

This wider lens helps us to see a child's early development as everyone's concern and as a foundational investment in a stronger society and economy. It also draws attention to the central role that business has to play in leading the solution-building for equitable ECD programme access. Business is one of the main beneficiaries of the childcare provided by ELPs. Similarly, business has a critical interest in improving outcomes from the education system and in building a more skilled workforce, both of which rest on putting stronger foundations in place in the early years. Where industries develop active strategies to support a social good like ECD programmes, it also positions them better to attract international

investors who are prioritising ESG (environmental, social and governance) goals.

Building new partnerships for collaborative delivery

The success of this Strategy will, therefore, depend on collaboration in delivery – collaboration across departments and spheres of government, but also and crucially, collaboration with social partners, business and donors, and with families and communities and the thousands of ECD practitioners, workers and programmes that are the backbone of the existing system.

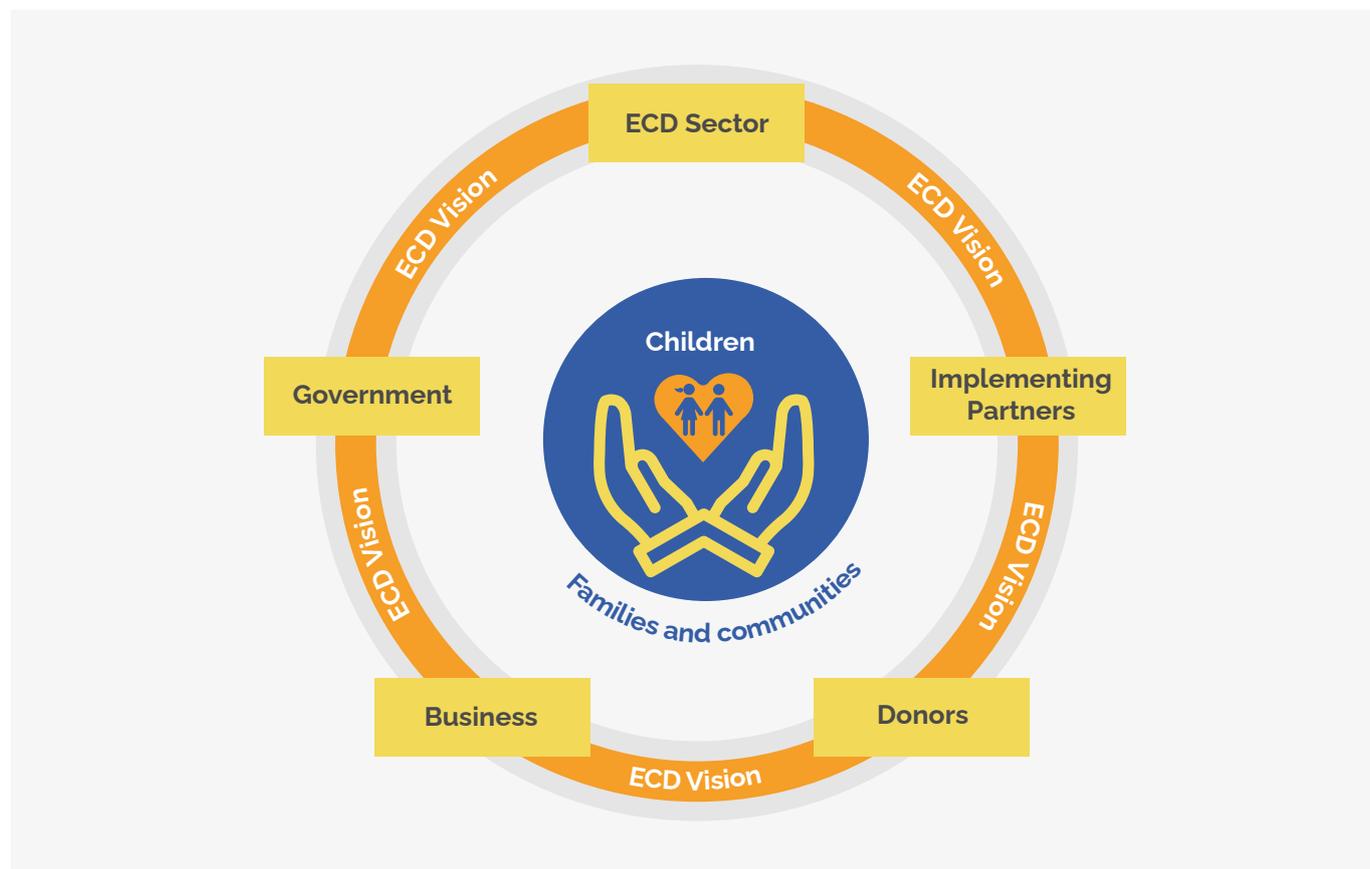
The Strategy provides a framework to bring together the endeavours of these partners with government’s efforts, in order to create a Social Compact for ECD that is a powerful engine for achieving the country’s ambitious goals for our children. This will include both new solutions, such as new institutional arrangements for public-private partnerships (PPPs), as well as strategies to ensure that solutions that are already abundant in communities become even more effective and efficient.

The proposed social compact will provide a structured mechanism to organise all role-players around a shared vision, and to forge explicit and implicit agreement about the part that each will play towards its realisation. It will give recognition to the many forms of collaborative work that already exists in ECD, and build from these to innovate and resource new models of partnership. It will therefore, by design, strengthen and institutionalise systems for participation and shared solution-building in ECD.

The vision and plan for the Social Compact for ECD will be co-developed by all role-players, with this Strategy marking the start of the process.

The invitation to all partners is to join this Social Compact for ECD and commit to playing our part in achieving our common vision for our children, and defining the collective goals that we will undertake to pursue together.

Figure 1: A new Social Compact for ECD



2. Vision and priorities

The government's vision and impact statement for 2030 is: **Universal access to quality ECD prioritising the most vulnerable children.**

Within this overarching government vision, this Strategy focuses on ECD programme provisioning specifically, by setting out the DBE's plan for rapidly expanding both access and quality for such programmes.

The definition of universal access is based on the one provided by the NIECDP,⁶ and is understood to mean that every community has the right mix and availability of ECD programmes to meet the needs of the families and children in that community.

In particular, in the light of the current context, including the significant set-backs for ECD from the Covid-19 pandemic, it is important that effort and resources are aligned behind goals that are realistic and that prioritise the most vulnerable children and families.

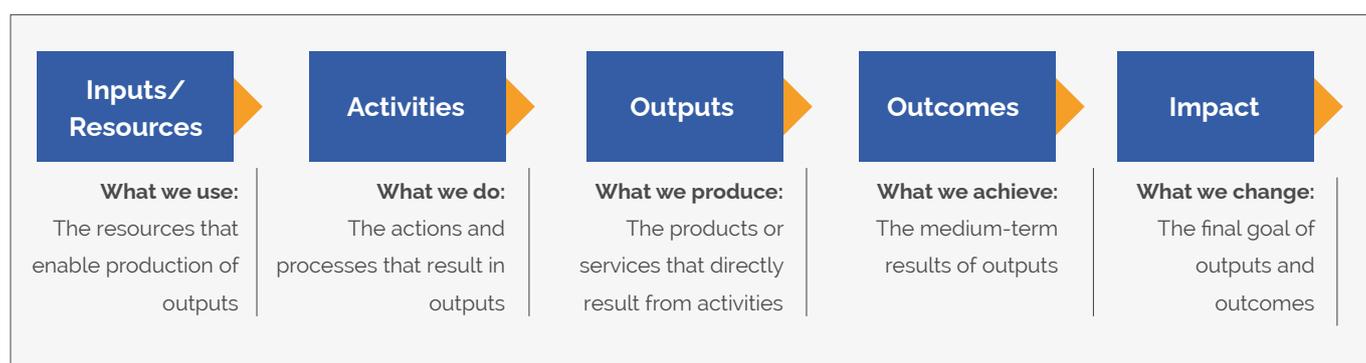
2030 Outcomes

In terms of the structure in Figure 2 below, this Strategy articulates outcomes and high-level outputs, and describes the resources required to make these happen. A separate implementation plan will set out detailed activities beneath each output. In order to achieve the impact articulated above, the DBE has identified five strategic priorities (2030 outcomes) which provide the framework for the Strategy:

1. Every child has access to a flexible package of age-appropriate, affordable ECD programmes.
2. Enabling government systems, leadership, capacity and co-ordination are in place.
3. Sufficient funding and resourcing are targeted effectively.
4. A capable ECD workforce is well-supported and equipped.
5. Programme quality is enhanced through appropriate support and monitoring.

For each outcome, focal areas are used to group outputs. The focal areas are shown in Table 1, while the detailed outputs are set out in Section 7. The appendix to this Strategy provides a short summary of each focal area that describes its significance and scope.

Figure 2: The structure for the 2030 Strategy for ECD Programmes



(Reflecting the concepts in 'Framework for Strategic Plans and Annual Performance Plans', National Treasury 2010, p.7)

Table 1: 2030 outcomes and focal areas

2030 Outcome	Focal areas
1. Every child has access to a flexible package of age-appropriate, affordable ECD programmes.	Mixed modalities of inclusive provision
	At-scale service delivery arrangements
	Appropriate nutrition provisioning in all ECD programmes
2. Enabling government systems, leadership, capacity and co-ordination are in place.	Leadership, co-ordination and accountability
	Policy, legislative and regulatory reform
	Communications and public information
3. Sufficient funding and resourcing are targeted effectively.	Budget allocations and financing mechanisms
	Appropriate facilities
4. A capable ECD workforce is well-supported and equipped.	Human resource development plan
	Recruitment and pre-registration support
5. Programme quality is enhanced through appropriate support and monitoring.	Curriculum and quality assurance
	Data and monitoring

3. Context and starting point

Young children in South Africa

The annual General Household Survey gives us a good picture of the situation of the young children who government is seeking to reach with ECD programmes, as shown in Figure 2 below.

The access and quality gaps for ECD programmes

The 2021 General Household Survey (GHS) also gives us useful insights on the number of children accessing ELPs.¹¹ About 2.2 million 0-5 year-olds attend an ELP such as a creche, nursery, pre-school, playgroup or day mother. A further 750,000 children in this age group attend Grade R or Grade 1.

This means that 1.3 million 3-5 year-olds who would most benefit from access to structured early learning opportunities, are not currently attending an ELP. The gap is closely linked to income - 66% of children in Quintile 1 are not in ELPs compared to only 36% of children in Quintile 5. Data on access to

other ECD programmes is incomplete. For example, in the 0-2 year-old age group, while 733,000 are attending an ELP, it is not known how many other children are reached by parent support programmes.

The 2021 Thrive by Five Index reported that 57% of children attending ELPs are not on track for cognitive and/or physical development and face barriers to realising their full potential. For early learning specifically, 54% of children were not able to do the learning tasks expected of children their age, with 28% of children falling far behind the expected standard - and poor children least likely to be on track.

Profile of early learning programmes

The DBE's ECD Census 2021 provided valuable insights on ELPs. Selected highlights from the Census 2021 are shown in Figure 3 on the following page.

Figure 2: Snapshot of young children in South Africa

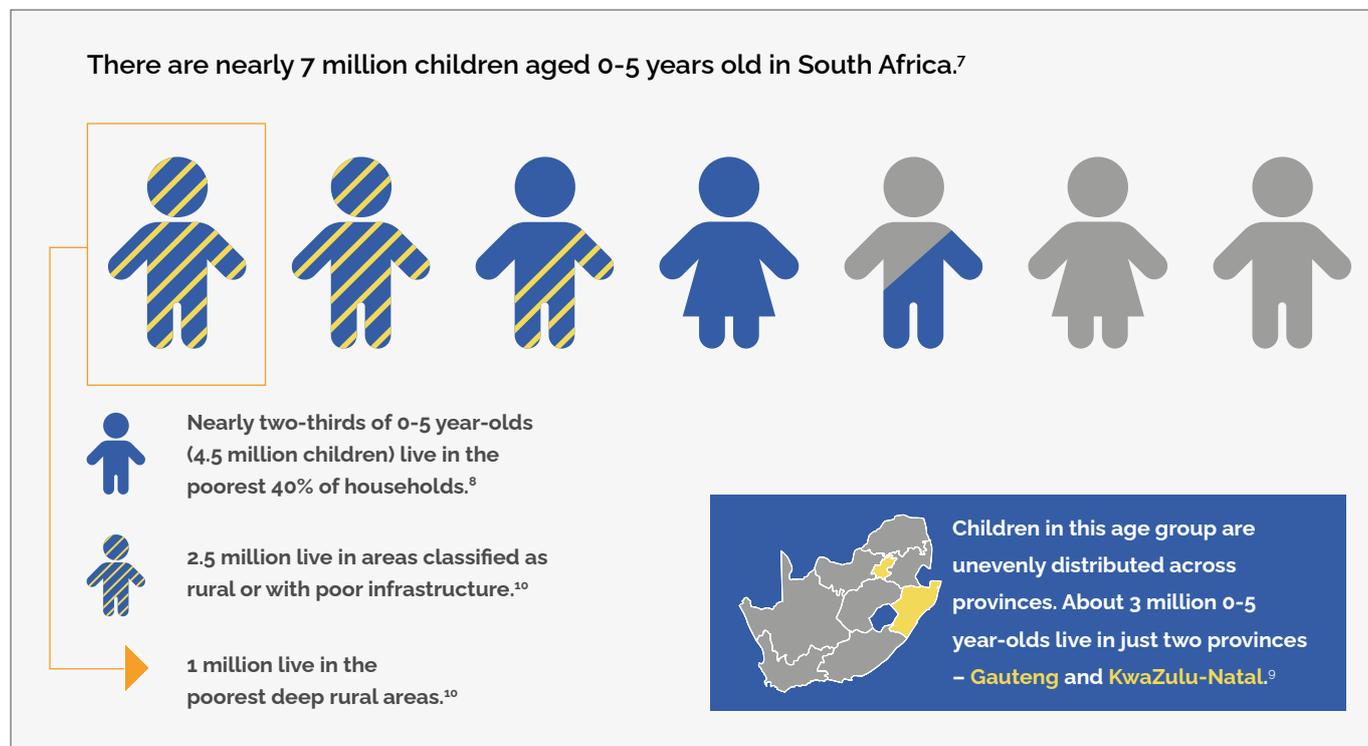


Figure 3: Snapshot of early learning programmes in South Africa



Assets and resources

The gaps in the system only provide part of the picture. South Africa’s ECD ecosystem is underpinned and characterised by a series of

important assets and resources, which signpost key leverage points for this Strategy. Harnessing these assets is particularly important in light of the fiscal constraints faced by South Africa. The main assets include:

- Tens of thousands of ELPs and practitioners, reaching children in even the lowest income contexts – and an estimated R3.7 billion in fees spent by the poorest 60% of households;¹⁹
- Millions of under-employed women with a strong caring instinct and the aptitudes to provide nurturing care, as well as quality learning and development opportunities;
- Community and residential venues where millions of children are safely cared for every day;
- NGOs and non-state actors with wide and deep experience in supporting ECD programmes;
- The informal economy – local contexts of diverse economic activity in which ELPs can operate and thrive; and
- A substantial donor and development partner funding base increasingly aligned to at-scale solutions.

Problem statement

This information helps us to define the problem that this Strategy seeks to address, which is that, the majority of children do not have access to quality ECD programmes, and the poorest children are most likely to miss out.

A range of factors underlie the unequal coverage and quality of ECD programmes. These include historical factors and deep-seated socio-economic factors. Four underlying conditions or factors are particularly relevant to government's efforts to engineer improved access and quality:

1. Supply-side barriers for ECD programmes (such as regulation and funding) and demand-side barriers for parents and caregivers (such as poor information and unaffordability) prevent the system from working in the interests of all children.
2. ECD planning and provisioning are not joined

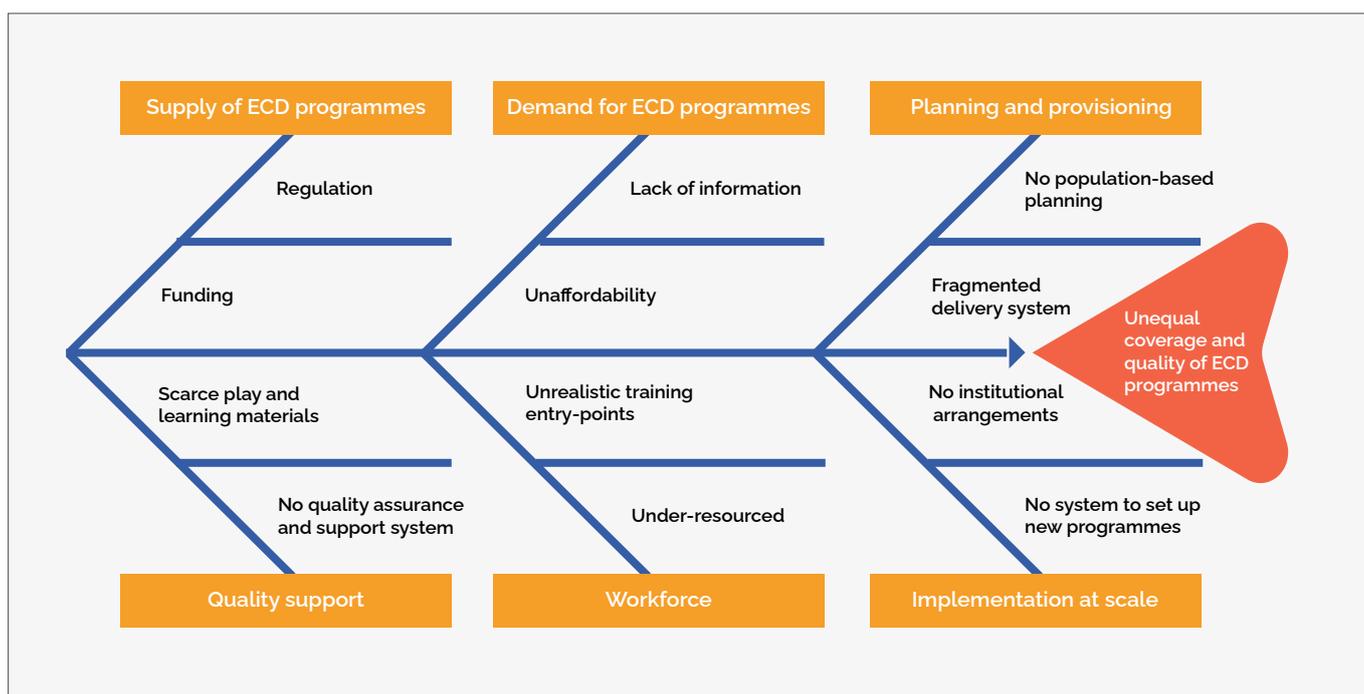
up, and do not use population-based planning methods, nor do they include mechanisms for the managed set up of new programmes.

3. There is not enough total funding in the system and parent fees cannot bridge the gap.
4. Poor working conditions for ECD practitioners, as well as the lack of sustainable jobs, training and opportunities for progression, act as a major barrier to recruitment and retention.

The way in which these underlying factors in the ECD system interact with prevailing social and economic conditions, creates an implementation gap – the gap between the goals of policy and the programmes actually provided and received. Understanding the implementation gap highlights the fifth and critical underlying factor:

5. The institutional arrangements and delivery systems for at-scale ECD programme provisioning are not in place.

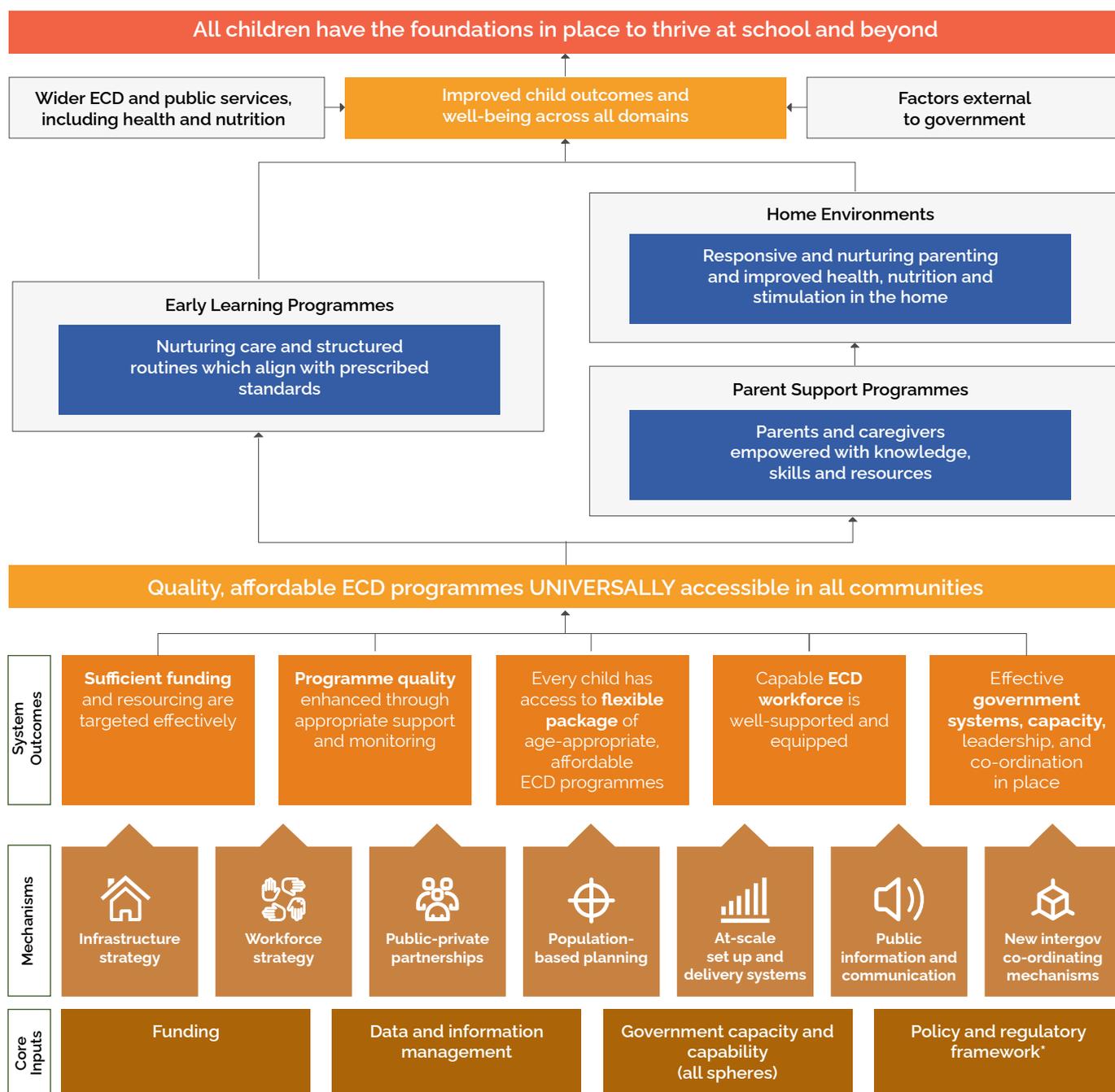
Figure 4: Contributing factors to unequal coverage and quality of ECD programmes in South Africa



4. Theoretical framework

A theory of change helps to ensure that the mechanisms proposed in this Strategy will ultimately lead to all children having the foundations in place to thrive at school. It also helps to clarify how system inputs, mechanisms and outputs, relate to the outcomes and impact that government is seeking.

Figure 5: A theory of change for ECD programmes from the perspective of the role of government



*Including all areas of policy, such as regulation, curriculum and qualifications/human resource development framework

Quality early learning and development

Early learning and development takes place across several domains. These include social and emotional (such as pro-social behaviour and forming attachments), cognitive (such as reasoning and early maths), self-regulation (such as concentration, memory and self-control), language and emergent literacy (such as listening, speaking and sounds), and physical (including fine and gross motor).

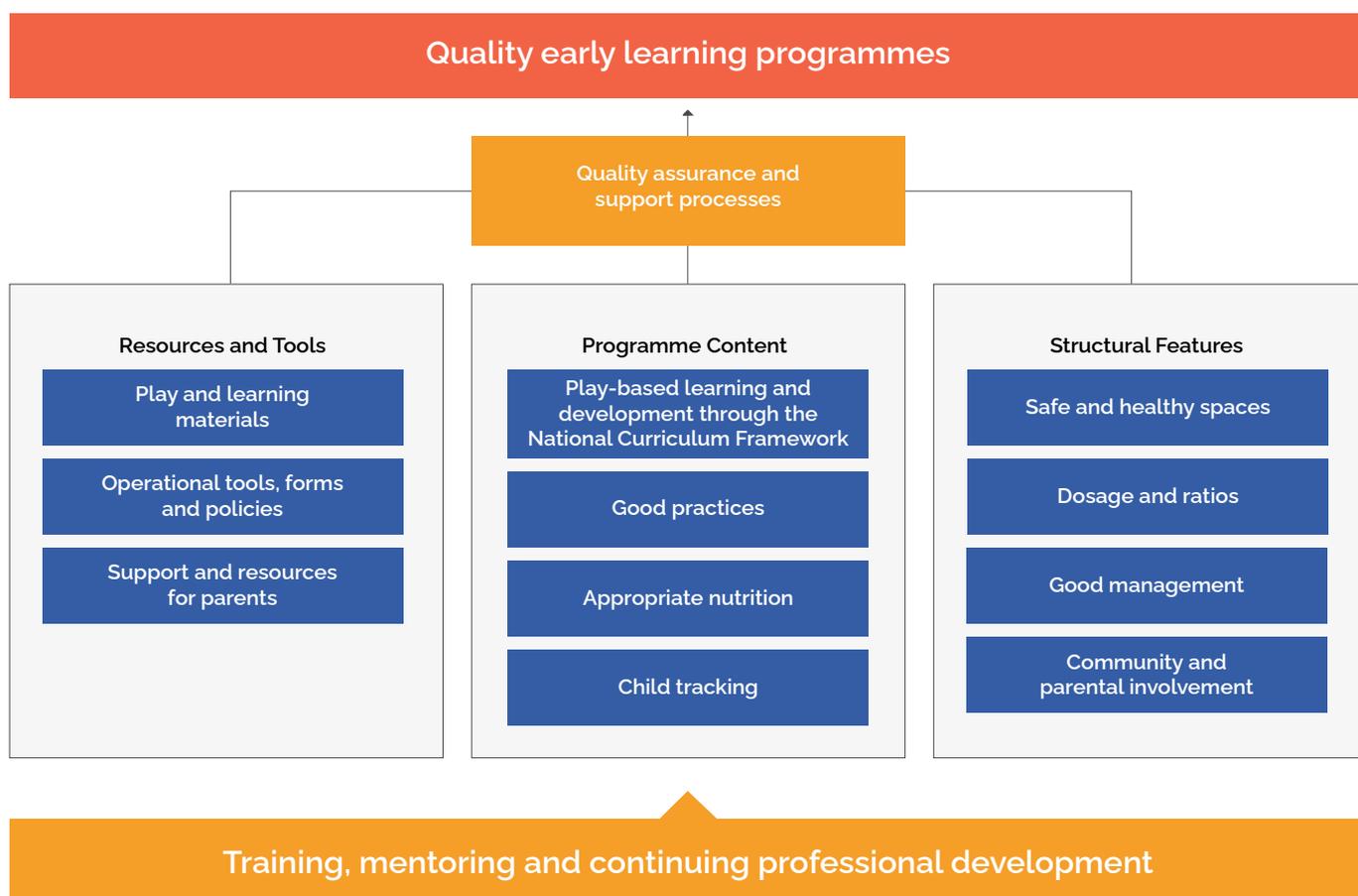
Evidence continues to suggest that children’s development across these domains is enabled by playful learning environments both in and out of the home, where there are stable and nurturing relationships, lots of talk and interaction, opportunities for child-directed play supported by adults, interactive storytelling, and plenty of physical activity. Children who benefit from these things in

the early years, are more likely to develop according to their age and ability, and to have the foundations in place to succeed at school and beyond. Quality ECD programmes are therefore understood to be the programmes that provide or support these types of opportunities and environments.

The idea of critical programme features draws attention to what research says about the ingredients of programmes that provide the opportunities and environments described above. Importantly, in terms of ELPs specifically, evidence suggests that these ingredients can be supported in a range of settings, and that it is the presence of certain programme features (shown in Figure 6) that determine quality, more than the modality or venue.

Each box shows a component of quality which studies suggest is linked to improved child outcomes.

Figure 6: Critical features of high quality early learning programmes



5. The new service delivery model

The DBE's new service delivery model is summarised as a publicly planned, publicly co-ordinated mixed provisioning model

The term "service delivery model" is used to refer to the delivery arrangements that enable properly planned, funded and regulated ECD programmes to reach every child. The concept of a service delivery model goes beyond the mix of ECD programmes in the system, and also refers to the co-ordinating and contracting arrangements which enable universal coverage and quality, and which address all elements of service delivery, including facilities, workforce and resourcing.

The proposed mixed provisioning approach is in line with the vision set out in the NIECDP, which describes a partnership model between state and non-state role players to achieve the outcomes for which government remains responsible. It indicates a shift towards state-led planning and strategy, where government discharges its responsibility for equitable access and quality, by ensuring that the right leadership, co-ordinating mechanisms, policies and funding are in place for service providers to expand and thrive where they are needed. Where necessary, government steps in itself to provide programmes directly.

In this sense, state-led planning and strategy are understood to be at the heart of the new Social Compact for ECD, under which government's leadership role is supported by new institutional arrangements for public-private partnerships, including new partnerships with business and donors. "Mixed provisioning" refers to a range of ECD programme modalities which are responsive to the circumstances and needs of families and communities. For all programmes, the priority will be two-fold: To unlock a new supply of quality programmes towards universal access, and to build quality and sustainability. The ECD programmes provided will be broadly based on the age of the child.

- *Parent support programmes:* The goal is to widen access to different parent support programmes (such as home visiting and outreach programmes) that target 0-2 year-olds and are developed, co-ordinated and supported with the Department of Health, to complement their role in delivering early health and nutrition services.
- *Early learning programmes:* The goal is to ensure that 3-5 year-old children in all communities have access to an ELP close to where they live, as well as to widen access for 0-2 year-olds so that all parents who want to work can access childcare.

For both programme types, new processes and tools for population-based planning will be used to identify and target vulnerable and under-served communities.

The DBE will also seek to strengthen the interfaces of these programmes with other components of the essential package, and explore how different service touch-points – such as clinics and South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) offices – can be more effectively leveraged to support parents and children.

Parent support programmes

The DBE will work with the Department of Health, Department of Social Development and social partners, to build on recent scoping work and develop a comprehensive picture of existing parent support programmes. A plan will be developed which will encompass:

- Mapping the different forms of parent support programmes (such as early intervention services, Community Health Workers (CHWs), parent skills workshops) on to departmental mandates towards a common understanding of roles and responsibilities;
- Reviewing the legislative framework for different types of parent support programmes to more clearly reflect agreed roles and responsibilities;
- Agreeing on clearer co-ordination mechanisms for parent support programmes at both national inter-departmental level and local implementation level;

- Improving data collection, monitoring and evaluation of parent support programmes;
- Understanding the footprint, reach and strengths of existing parent support programmes;
- Developing a package of support to strengthen the role and reach of key professionals, such as CHWs and family and community motivators;
- Designing a strategy and plan towards the rapid roll-out of effective parenting programmes in under-served and vulnerable communities; and
- Exploring the benefits of developing a new community-based family support programme.

Community-based family support programmes have been used in other middle-income countries, such as Cuba and Ecuador, to build the capability of parents and caregivers to support children's health, development and learning in the home. These types of programmes take various forms but are generally characterised by three essential elements: family, community and an inter-sectoral approach. They are generally more cost-efficient than attendance-based programmes, do not require specific infrastructure or facilities and, by harnessing existing community assets, can be rolled out more quickly. They also provide an opportunity to create new skills development and employment opportunities for women in particular.

Early learning programmes

In terms of ELPs specifically, government's approach will reflect the evidence showing that effective early learning and development can be provided in a wide range of settings. Therefore, the three main ELP modalities – ECD centres, playgroups and day mothers – will continue to be provided, alongside mobile ECD programmes and toy libraries.

In terms of venues for ELPs, in the short-term, in order to achieve the required rate of growth, and in line with the DBE's principles of equity and redress,

there will be a need for ELPs to make use of existing premises, including residential venues. At the same time, and using population-based planning, the DBE will begin planning and working towards provision of more purpose-built ECD centres. As more resources become available, the balance of modalities will shift towards these larger facilities.

Mechanisms to implement the new service delivery model

The DBE has identified the mechanisms and inputs that will be critical to the successful implementation of the service delivery model. These are shown in the theory of change in Figure 5 as well as in Figure 7 on the next page. The extent to which the four main inputs are in place is likely to be decisive. While progress has been made, government's ability to execute this Strategy will depend on further and early progress in identifying new budget allocations, building comprehensive information management systems and revising the legislative framework.

Crucially, the capability of all levels of government must also be significantly strengthened, alongside fit-for-purpose intergovernmental co-ordination mechanisms. Government needs to identify the capacity and capabilities (and the associated funding) required in each department, and in each sphere of government, to effectively discharge ECD functions and to deliver the outcomes described in this document. Linked to this, effective processes for leadership, co-ordination and accountability need to be redefined, collectively agreed and fully implemented. This will include mechanisms to track departmental progress against a fully adopted monitoring and evaluation framework.

The seven mechanisms in the theory of change include the two key components of new supply – infrastructure and workforce.

The DBE will publish a new infrastructure plan encompassing both existing facilities and new-build centres. It will also develop a human resource development plan providing accessible training and upskilling pathways as well as model role descriptions.

Three of the mechanisms pertain directly to the new delivery processes and arrangements that will ensure universal service coverage. New population-based planning tools and protocols will use an assessment of gaps and assets in an area to target resources accurately and efficiently. New strategies and arrangements for PPPs, which encompass both service delivery and ELP infrastructure, will more effectively leverage other resources in the system, including business capability, donor funding and the expertise of social partners.

These new forms of PPPs will create the right conditions for at-scale recruitment, programme set up

and support systems to establish and grow. Finally, to stimulate demand at the same time as building supply, the DBE will develop and systematise public communications targeting parents and caregivers.

It should be noted that as a cross-cutting mechanism, registration of ELPs is a critical in-field priority, and enabler of quality, access and funding. Many ELPs operate outside the regulatory net, meaning not only that they are not subject to monitoring and oversight, but also that vulnerable children cannot access the ECD subsidy. Early legislative reform, the red tape reduction work with the Presidency, and new in-field tools and systems, will help to build the enabling approaches required to ensure that every ELP is in the regulatory and funding fold.

Figure 7: Mechanisms needed to deliver quality, affordable ECD programmes accessible in all communities



6. Modelling

Early learning programmes (ELPs)

While ELP attendance remains non-compulsory, there will be some families who choose not to access such programmes. This is

often the case, for example, when the parent or caregiver stays at home to look after a younger sibling. ELP access by 2030 is therefore modelled at 70%, 85% and 95% respectively for 3, 4 and 5 year-olds.

Table 2: Current and target access to group ELPs by age group

Age (years)	Current access		Target supply/places		Gap in supply/places
	Children	Percentage	Children	Percentage	Children
0-2	733,303	21%	1,074,719	30%	353,328
3	517,071	42%	855,219	70%	361,559
4	745,808	64%	988,428	85%	305,215
5	941,121	86%	1,035,189	95%	161,978
Total	2,937,303	42%	3,953,557	57%	1,182,080

Current access is defined as children accessing any form of ELP or Grades R-2. The gap in supply/ places describes the capacity required in ELPs only (i.e. not including Grades R, 1, 2). The gap is therefore larger than the difference between current access and target supply, as it accounts for children who are not in age-appropriate programmes.

This would mean that the total coverage of ELPs for the 3–5 year-old age group rises from 2.2 million in 2021 to 2.9 million in 2030. In addition, in line with the central role of childcare in inclusive economic growth, ELP coverage will need to expand for the 0–2 year-old age group, from the baseline of 733,000 in 2021. The DBE proposes a target of 1 million places for this age group by 2030.

These combined numbers mean that the number of new places at ELPs needed per year between 2024 and 2030 would be around 170,000 (assuming a steady rate of expansion over seven years). Over the period, new access to ELPs would be created for 1.2 million additional children.

The supply of these new places at ELPs has two components – venues and practitioners. The

number of new venues needed can be modelled using different average programme sizes for modalities. The number of new practitioners and assistants needed can be modelled using the minimum adult-child ratios in the Norms and Standards for ECD Programmes.

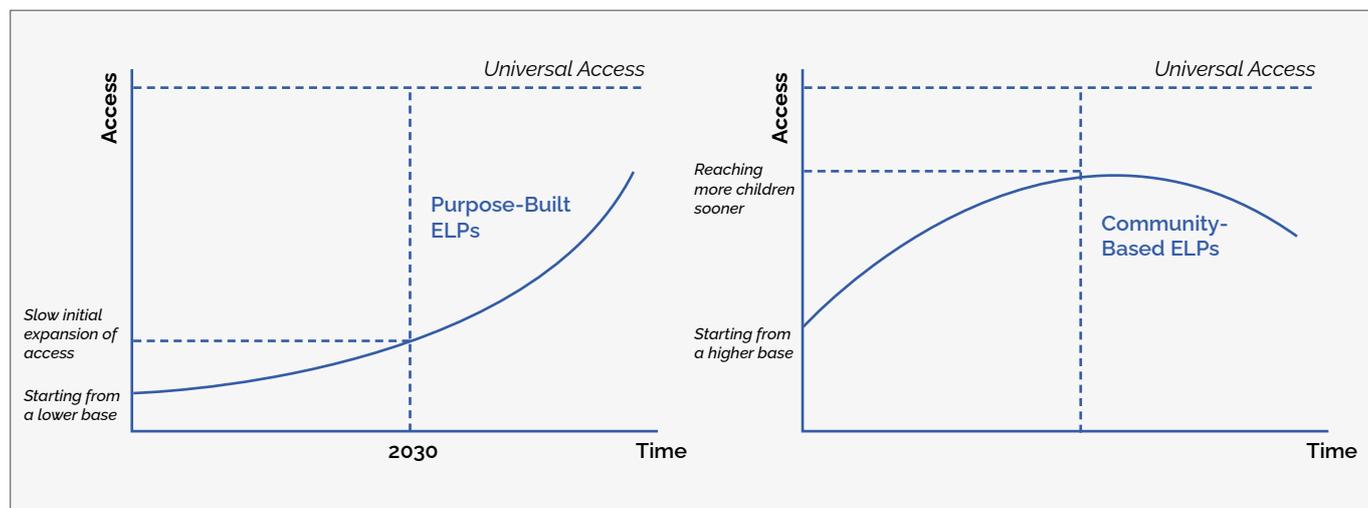
Based on these, to achieve the 2030 targets:²¹

- An estimated 270,000 new ECD practitioners and assistants will be needed; and
- An estimated 115,000 new venues will be needed.

Infrastructure for ELPs

As discussed in the previous section, in the short-term, as a pragmatic and affordable strategy for equitable access, there will be a greater need for ELPs to be run from community-based facilities that make use of existing infrastructure, including residential venues and multi-purpose premises such as community halls, places of worship and libraries. This changing role of different types of infrastructure over time, towards universal access, is shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: The changing role of different infrastructure for ELPs over time to achieve early progress towards universal access



Workforce

For ELPs, current norms and standards stipulate one assistant for every practitioner. It will therefore be necessary to map different recruitment, training and professional development journeys for these different roles, for the purposes of resource allocation.

These teaching staff are usually complemented by various site-based staff, including administrators, cooks, cleaners and gardeners, whose roles are often integral to ELP operations and quality, and therefore need to be visible and supported. Other support staff, such as mentors and coaches, will also need to be included in the detailed human resource development plan.

The 2030 target is to ensure that one million 0-2 year-olds will have access to parent support programmes, in addition to the children in this age group who will attend an ELP. The relative balance of the different parent support programmes as well as workforce requirements and roll-out strategies, will be considered and agreed with the Department of Health.

These strategies will be cognisant of what already exists and of the opportunities to better leverage key existing roles, such as those of CHWs and social workers.

7. Outputs and enablers

Focus Areas	Main high-level outputs by 2030	Key enablers and resource requirements
Mixed modalities of inclusive provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universal access to learning through play for 3-5 year-olds; • Strengthened content and reach of parent support programmes; • New processes and initiatives to more effectively leverage all service contact points; • New policies, tools and processes for inclusive ECD programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure and workforce availability; • Department of Health capacity and prioritisation; • Willing and able social partners for parent support programme expansion; • System integration for efficient signposting, referrals and support.
At-scale service delivery arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suite of population-based planning tools and processes for Provincial Education Departments; • Service specifications and contracting arrangements for delivery systems; • ECD service commissioning in place in most under-served areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial Education Departments' adoption of population-based planning methods and capacitation of district teams; • Non-state actors and major donors as willing and capable partners for PPPs; • Sufficient accurate data for population-based planning tools.
Appropriate nutrition provisioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost-efficient nutrition delivery model and guidelines developed and implemented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective collaboration with Department of Health; • Capacity to monitor quality of nutrition provisioning.
Leadership, co-ordination and accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully functioning intra-/inter-governmental processes and structures (per NIECDP); • Necessary government capacity and tools of trade defined for all spheres; • District ECD Co-ordinating Committees (DECCs) established and running; • Shared government outcomes framework and integration of KPIs in MTSF and APPs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political prioritisation led by the Presidency; • Cross-government buy-in and prioritisation of ECD; • Sufficient provincial and municipal capacity/resources for DECCs to be effective.
Policy, legislative and regulatory reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full review of NIECDP and clear policy framework for parent support programmes; • Enabling regulatory processes that reduce red tape rolled out; • Children's Amendment Bill enacted and new Norms and Standards implemented; • Stand-alone ECD legislation developed and passed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal co-operation and buy-in for red tape reduction; • Expedited Children's Amendment Bill ; • Collaboration with the Departments of Social Development and Health on short and long-term legislative reform; • Effective processes to support change management and adoption of new regulatory processes.
Communications and public information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public awareness campaign on comprehensive ECD rolled out; • Effective communication channels with the ECD sector established; • Expansion of Department of Health Side by Side campaign. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient capacity/resources in place to run a public awareness campaign; • Collaboration with other Departments in the running of a public awareness campaign.
Budget allocations and financing mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subsidy budget increased to ensure higher value and reach; • Systems for co-funding with non-state actors including results-based financing; • ECD prioritised for employment stimulus funding; • New budget lines for parent support programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiscal position and political will to prioritise ECD; • Shared vision between government and non-state actors; • A strong social compact that enables donors and private business to invest in the sector.
Appropriate facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure strategy, including new-build ECD infrastructure plan and financing; • Minimum infrastructure standards for all venue types; • Plan for unused state-owned facilities in place and implemented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information available on the current ECD infrastructure conditions; • Collaboration with local government on the identification of infrastructure that can be leveraged for centre/non-centre based programmes.

7. Outputs and enablers *continued*

Focus Areas	Main high-level outputs by 2030	Key enablers and resource requirements
Human resource development plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human resource development plan developed and implemented; Clearly articulated qualifications, training and CPD framework in place; Model workforce role/job descriptions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration with government departments and agencies to define and implement qualifications and training framework; Sufficient social partners and training institutions to deliver high quality training programmes.
Recruitment and pre-registration support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100,000+ ELP jobs created/sustained under ECD Employment Initiative (ECD-EI); Pre-registration support systems funded and operationalised; Recruitment plan and tools of trade for parent support practitioners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full integration of ECD-EI into wider government employment stimulus agenda; New frameworks and funding mechanisms to support ELPs pre-registration.
Curriculum and quality assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidelines and learning and teaching support materials for implementation of National Curriculum Framework (NCF); Provision of comprehensive training on NCF; Quality assurance and support system (QASS) developed, resourced and implemented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration with social partners on quality support; Availability of practitioner training on new materials; Sufficient and appropriate capacity and capability to implement QASS system.
Data and monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management, Information and Administration System for ECD embedded in DBE; Digital infrastructure for population-based planning developed and operationalised; Standardised tools and data systems in place to track child outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sufficient human capacity and appropriate tools of trade to enable data capturing and usage; Technology and data partnerships for population-based planning; Collaboration on Thrive by Five 2025.

8. Key milestones

The milestones listed are not an exhaustive list of outputs, but show key events and indicators that will help government to plan and track progress.



9. Resource requirements

The goals and strategies in this Strategy have substantial resource implications. A detailed ECD financing plan is being developed separately, which will address not only what resources are needed but also the different financing sources and models.

The financing plan will consider resource implications and requirements in six main areas:

- Building the quality and compliance of ELPs (including the ECD subsidy);
- Increasing the supply of ELPs (workforce, infrastructure and pre-registration support);
- Scaling up access to parent support programmes;
- Improving training and qualifications pathways;
- Implementing the nutrition delivery model; and
- Building government capacity and systems.

Some of the budgetary implications of the ECD subsidy expansion and unlocking new supply

of ELPs are discussed below. Other key areas, including parent support programmes and nutrition, will be elaborated in the ECD financing plan.

Budgetary implications

ECD subsidy

The purpose of the ECD subsidy is to ensure that cost is not a barrier to ELP access and quality for any child. To fund a basic level of quality within ELPs, it is estimated that the value of the subsidy should be approximately R8,420 per child per year (2022 prices).²² A declining per capita value means that even children who do benefit from it may not receive quality services unless parents pay fees. In addition, to ensure equitable access, overall funding for the ECD subsidy needs to be at a level that ensures it reaches all poor children who should have access to an ELP by 2030.

Given current fiscal constraints, however, it is not envisaged that the subsidy will be able to reach the full cost of ELP provision by 2030. The proposed 2030 target subsidy value is R8,138 per child per annum, which would be approximately 65% of the full cost of provision in that year after accounting for inflation.

Table 3: Cost of increasing the reach and value of the ECD subsidy to 2030

	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Eligible children in ELPs (millions)	1.88	1.94	2.00	2.07	2.13	2.19	2.25	2.32
Children subsidised (millions)	0.72	0.95	1.18	1.40	1.63	1.86	2.09	2.32
Weighted average annual per child subsidy value (Rand)	4,488	4,675	5,023	5,480	6,026	6,652	7,355	8,138
Total cost of subsidies (R billion)	3.23	4.44	5.92	7.72	9.87	12.42	15.42	18.93

Source: Ilifa Labantwana 2023, Internal modelling and calculations.

Table 3 above details the budget implications for simultaneously increasing the reach and value of the ECD subsidy. In 2023, the ECD subsidy is valued at R4,488 per child per year (approximately 53% of the cost of provision) and reaches 720,000 of the

1.88 million eligible children in ELPs, at a cost of R3.23 billion. By 2030, an annual budget of R18.93 billion will be required to reach all 2.32 million eligible children accessing ELPs with an average subsidy of R8,138 per child per year.

New ELP supply

As discussed in Section 6, an estimated 115,000 additional venues will be required to achieve universal access targets. This includes nearly 7,500 purpose-built ECD centres, costing an estimated R1-3 million each to build. This effort should be shared by government and the non-state sector and will be detailed in the new Infrastructure Plan.

Given the long lead-in times and high costs of new infrastructure projects, the government proposes leveraging home and community-based venues in the short- to medium-term, as well as repurposing unused state-owned facilities in order not to delay progress towards universal access. These strategies will require increases in the maintenance component of the ECD Conditional Grant.

In addition to new venues, to achieve universal access, an estimated 270,000 new ECD practitioners and assistants will be needed for ELPs. The workforce strategy will have two key elements: Firstly, job creation and retention through a new ECD Employment Initiative (ECD-EI); secondly, support for training and qualifications.

Workforce stipends are particularly important in supporting the sustainability of new practitioners, especially in the period when they are preparing their programme for registration and eligibility for

the ECD subsidy. The ECD-EI will, therefore, continue to be developed in conjunction with the Presidential Employment Initiative.

It is likely that 50% of the existing ECD workforce (around 100,000 practitioners and assistants) require training, in addition to the critical need to train new practitioners to support programme expansion. In terms of qualifications, while a NQF Level 4 as a base qualification is an important long-term goal, evidence suggests that it is not necessarily a driver of improved outcomes for children and that there may be other more cost-effective and practical options for practitioner skills development in the short- to medium-term – especially for those already in service. Based on estimated training costs of R9,000 per person,²³ training for existing and new workers by 2030 would cost approximately R3.43 billion.

New funding sources and models

The DBE is committed to exploring and leveraging innovative new financing models, including public-private partnerships, results-based financing, blended finance and catalytic pooled funds. Exploratory work on public-private partnerships, including service commissioning models, and results-based financing through the Education Outcomes Fund, is already underway and will be prioritised in 2024.



Conclusion

Equitable access to early learning and development opportunities is the cornerstone of improved educational outcomes and inclusive economic growth. Therefore, progress towards expanding these opportunities and ensuring that no child is left behind needs to be early and rapid.

The shift of the ECD function to the DBE has provided an opportunity to review the ECD provisioning landscape with a strategic and solution-oriented lens. This has highlighted the fundamental importance of moving forward in partnership – not only with the ECD sector, implementing partners, donors and business, but also with families and communities. The proposed

new Social Compact for ECD will therefore underpin the success of this Strategy. The immediate challenge is to create the right framework for collaboration and delivery, which structures all role-players into formal partnership, and which is operationalised through and with the provincial and municipal spheres of government.

The next phase of the development of this Strategy will be conversations with each of the role-players in this Compact, including all spheres of government, to help to build a collective understanding of the part that each can play in making our shared vision a reality.



Appendix: Thematic summaries

1. Every child has access to a flexible package of age-appropriate, affordable ECD programmes

Mixed modalities of inclusive provision

This theme is about the appropriate mix and typology of ECD programmes in the system, so that all young children and their families receive the support and services that meet their needs, regardless of circumstances or (dis)ability, and that parents and caregivers can exercise choice about the types of programmes they wish to access.

Successful partnership between all role-players requires a shared vision of the role and purpose of different ECD programme modalities and of the right balance of state and non-state provision; as well as a differentiated plan for the enablement of all forms of provision and for a multi-sectoral approach to inclusive ECD.

At-scale delivery arrangements

This theme is about the specific methods that will be used to bridge the current service delivery gap. It encompasses the institutional arrangements, population-based planning and delivery systems required for at-scale ECD programme provisioning.

Successful partnership between all role-players requires a clear delivery framework, flexible service specifications, and an enabling environment for non-state actors to expand and thrive in under-served communities.

Appropriate nutrition provisioning in all ECD programmes

This theme is about ensuring that all ELPs provide children with nutritious meals to support their growth and development. Early nutrition plays a significant role in preventing malnutrition and stunting, and supporting a child's physical development, wellbeing and learning outcomes. Nutrition provisioning also has the potential to improve regular attendance at ELPs.

Successful partnership between all role-players requires a shared vision, clearly articulated standards, and a well-defined delivery model to ensure that all children are provided with a daily nutritious meal.

2. Enabling government systems, leadership, capacity and co-ordination are in place

Leadership, co-ordination and accountability

This theme is about how different actors, including departments and spheres of government, are empowered to deliver government's ECD policy goals in line with their mandates. It encompasses the DBE's leadership role as well as systems for co-ordination and clear measures of accountability.

Successful partnership between all role-players requires clearly defined roles and responsibilities, transparency, institutionalised co-operation and a shared outcomes framework.

Policy, legislative and regulatory reform

This theme is about the changes that are needed to legislation, policy and practice in order to create a fit-for-purpose policy and regulatory regime. It encompasses a full review of the NIECDP to clearly reflect the targets and mandates of government departments. It also includes immediate red tape reduction measures, short-term amendments to the Children's Act and long-term development of a stand-alone ECD Act.

Appendix: Thematic summaries *continued*

Successful partnership between all role-players requires a shared understanding of appropriate minimum standards for all ECD programmes and shared effort and resourcing for supporting compliance with those standards.

Communications and public information

This theme is about what and how information is provided to families and communities, in order to encourage parents and caregivers to access ECD programmes, and to strengthen knowledge and skills. It also encompasses how the government communicates effectively with and listens to the ECD sector. It matters because where communities understand and value ECD it unlocks both the supply of and demand for ECD programmes, and strengthens home learning environments.

Successful partnership between all role-players requires shared messaging on ECD and the role of parents as a child's first teacher.

3. Sufficient funding and resourcing are targeted effectively

Budget allocations and financing mechanisms

This theme is about the quantum of funding, sources of funding, and appropriate funding mechanisms required to ensure access to quality ECD programmes for every child.

Successful partnership between all role-players requires a clear articulation of the funds required to achieve the goals in this Strategy, where those funds will come from, and how they will be administered and monitored in the ECD system.

Appropriate facilities

This theme is about the physical infrastructure required to achieve universal access to ECD programmes. It encompasses the upgrading of existing venues (including recognition of and support to home and community-based ECD programmes), the repurposing of unused state-owned sites, and the building of new facilities.

Successful partnership between all role-players requires joint efforts and plans to identify state and community assets that can be more effectively leveraged, to support compliance with minimum standards in all venues and to innovate new financing mechanisms for purpose-built facilities.

4. A capable ECD workforce is well-supported and equipped human resource development

Human resource development

This theme is about having sufficient and skilled human resources to enable universal provision of quality ECD programmes. It recognises that the ECD workforce is the backbone of the ECD sector, and the expansion, upskilling, supervision and mentoring of the workforce are prerequisites to both access and quality.

Successful partnership between all role-players requires a strategic human resource development plan, implemented through a multi-sectoral approach that includes social partners, training authorities and qualification bodies.

Appendix: Thematic summaries *continued*

Recruitment and pre-registration support

This theme is about the value chain that is needed to unlock a new supply of ELPs and to support ECD practitioners during the set up phase. It includes community engagement, recruitment processes, managed set up and pre-registration support.

Successful partnership between all role-players requires new forms of collaboration to implement high-volume recruitment and managed ELP set-up in under-served areas, and to deliver pre-registration and wage support for compliance and sustainability.

5. Programme quality is enhanced through appropriate support and monitoring

Curriculum and quality assurance

This theme is about ensuring that every child has an opportunity to access age- and developmental stage-appropriate early learning opportunities from birth to until the year before entering school through the effective implementation the South African National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for Birth to Four.

Successful partnership between all role-players requires clear guidelines on the implementation of the NCF, supporting materials and training, and well-articulated quality and support standards in a single national system.

Data and monitoring

This theme is about generating and collating reliable and timely data across the goals set out in the Strategy, for the purposes of planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning. This entails developing and reporting on key indicators and supporting the adoption of user-friendly data capture tools and processes. The information collected will enable the DBE to track progress against agreed goals, to plan strategically and to use new feedback loops to inform course correction.

Successful partnership between all role-players requires a well-implemented data and information system that is accessible and utilised by all stakeholders.



Notes and references

¹ National Planning Commission (2012). National Development Plan 2030. Our future – making it work.

² Department of Social Development (2015). National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy. p.55

³ Ibid. p.48 (see also pp21-23)

⁴ Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005). General Comment No. 7 (2005) Implementing child rights in early childhood. <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/GeneralComment7Rev1.pdf>

⁵ Ilifa Labantwana calculation using Statistics SA (2022). General Household Survey 2021.

⁶ Department of Social Development (2015). National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy. p.23

⁷ Statistics South Africa 2022, General Household Survey 2021. (Ilifa Labantwana calculations using background data)

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ GeoTerralimage (GTI) company (2020). 2020 projections based on Statistics South Africa 2018.

¹¹ Statistics SA (2022). General Household Survey 2021.

¹² Department of Basic Education (2022). Early Childhood Development Census 2021.

¹³ Statistics South Africa (2022). General Household Survey 2021. (Assuming average programme size of 33 children.)

¹⁴ Department of Basic Education (2022). Early Childhood Development Census 2021.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ World Bank Group (2022). South Africa Public Expenditure and Institutional Review for Early Childhood Development. p.3

¹⁸ Ilifa Labantwana calculation using Statistics SA (2022). General Household Survey 2021. (Number of children receiving the Child Support Grant.)

¹⁹ World Bank Group (2022). South Africa Public Expenditure and Institutional Review for Early Childhood Development. p.79

²⁰ Ilifa Labantwana calculations using Statistics SA (2022). General Household Survey 2021.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ilifa Labantwana (2023). Internal modelling and calculation.

²³ Ilifa Labantwana (2023). Internal research and calculation.



