



INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN FOCUS

Integrating Early Childhood Care and Education in Sri Lanka

From Global Evidence to National Action

Renu Warnasuriya, Shobhana Sosale, and Sangeeta Dey

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Foreword

Investing in education is investing in human capital. Investing in the early years is one of the smartest decisions a country can make to eliminate extreme poverty, boost shared prosperity, and create the human capital needed to diversify and grow. Early childhood experiences have a profound impact on brain development—affecting learning, health, behavior, and, ultimately, income. An increasingly digital economy places an even greater premium on the ability to reason, continually learn, effectively communicate, and collaborate. Those who lack these skills will be left further behind. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought this reality into stark relief, and Sri Lanka is rising to the challenge.

The government of Sri Lanka recognizes the central importance of education for economic and human development. Sri Lanka does well in providing access to primary education, with a net enrollment rate of 99 percent, and secondary education, with a net enrollment rate of 84 percent. However, access to quality early childhood education is only about 70 percent for children ages three to four years. Establishing a foundation for universal access to quality early childhood education and care is the first critical step for human capital development.

The limited availability of daycare services in Sri Lanka may not only be affecting young children but also female labor force participation in the country. Many working mothers find it challenging to continue working once they have children; they tend to leave the workforce to stay at home and care for them.

The government of Sri Lanka has made significant efforts to invest in early childhood development (ECD) services, particularly in recent years through an ongoing islandwide project supported by the World Bank. Sri Lanka has a well-established program for maternal and child health that boasts free and near-universal coverage. In contrast, the government does not provide free pre-primary education to children in Sri Lanka—but it is increasingly focused on expanding access to preprimary education. To this end, it is pursuing a unique strategy of public-private partnerships to expand access to and enhance the quality of ECD services by funding facilities and building capacity of the ECD workforce in the community-owned ECD centers. In addition to the ECD centers for three- to five-year-old children, the government is planning to expand child daycare services for children under age three years.

There is a growing body of evidence about what programs work: early childhood nutrition, early stimulation, and learning programs to extend school completion all improve learning outcomes—and ultimately increase adult income potential. Gertler et al. (2013) show in a 20-year study of children in Jamaica that early stimulation interventions for infants and toddlers increased their future earnings by 25 percent—equivalent to adults who grew up in wealthier households. A World Bank Group analysis of the long-term benefits of early childhood education in 12 countries finds that children who attend preschool stay in school for nearly a year longer, on average, and they are more likely to be employed in high-skilled jobs. Evidence shows that an additional dollar invested in quality early childhood programs yields a return of between US\$6 and US\$17¹

Well-designed and inclusive early childhood care and education (ECCE) systems can improve the lives of children and families and bring significant advantages to national economies. Access to effective ECCE can equalize learning opportunities by improving school readiness and by putting children on a more equal footing at the primary school level. These early advantages have proved to have a lasting impact, affecting both educational and earning potential in the adult years. The significant income inequalities seen in countries could be addressed through investment in effective ECCE programs, and improved understanding of the benefits and potential long-term impacts of ECCE could help governments tailor programs to ensure maximum return on investment.

This study adds to the repository of research on early childhood development and specifically on the integration of early childhood care and education, drawing on global evidence to better inform national policy and action in Sri Lanka.

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NOTE

1. “Early Childhood Development,” World Bank, Washington, DC, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/earlychildhooddevelopment> (accessed July 2020).

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Abbreviations

CDC	child development center
CDO	Child Development Officer
CS	Children’s Secretariat
ECCD	early childhood care and development
ECCE	early childhood care and education
ECD	early childhood development
ECE	early childhood education
ECEC	early childhood education and care
GDP	gross domestic product
INTESYS	Integrated Early Childhood Education and Care Systems
MoE	Ministry of Education
MWCA	Ministry of Women and Child Affairs
MWCADZD	Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and Dry Zone Development
MWCASS	Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and Social Security
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCPA	National Child Protection Authority
NEC	National Education Commission
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund

All dollar amounts are US dollars unless otherwise indicated.

Terms Used in This Report

Childcare	<p><i>Childcare</i>, in the context of this study, refers to child-minding services provided for children of any age. Although the structure and regulations can differ based on the service provider, in general, childcare services include those that serve children both within and older than the early childhood age range. Childcare can also be provided in stand-alone centers, as well as in centers that are combined with schools or preschools. Depending on the service provider, these centers may or may not provide education in addition to child minding. Centers providing childcare services are generally referred to as daycare centers in Sri Lanka.</p>
Early childhood care (ECC)	<p><i>ECC</i> refers to the care component of ECCE, including providing for the health, safety, nutrition, and well-being of young children and creating conditions to enable children to reach age-related developmental milestones.</p>
Early childhood education (ECE)	<p><i>ECE</i> refers to the education component of ECCE. For preschool-age children, this refers to age-appropriate early education and developmental activities; for the under-three cohort, this refers to early stimulation.</p>
Early childhood care and development (ECCD)	<p>The terms <i>early childhood care and development (ECCD)</i>, <i>early childhood care and education (ECCE)</i>, <i>early childhood development (ECD)</i>, and <i>early childhood education and care (ECEC)</i> all refer to the care and education services provided for the early years. Various terms are used in different countries; the meaning remains the same. The term <i>ECCE</i> is used in this study to refer to early years' services.</p>
Early childhood care and education (ECCE)	
Early childhood development (ECD)	
Early childhood education and care (ECEC)	
Full and partial integration	<p>Integration in ECCE services must be viewed as a spectrum, with full integration on one end and split systems on the other. <i>Full integration</i> in this sense refers to ECCE systems in which care and education are organized and delivered under one entity or ministry. <i>Partial integration</i> refers to systems that have not achieved this level of integration but have introduced components of integration. Partial integration, for instance, includes systems in which care and education are organized under multiple institutions, but some degree of integration is achieved through the recognition of a lead ministry or coordinating body.</p>
Integrated ECCE systems	<p>In integrated systems, both care and education in the early years are provided or managed and organized under a single entity or ministry.</p>
Split ECCE systems	<p>These systems provide ECC and ECE under <i>separate or split entities or systems</i>, which often means that care and education are handled by different government ministries.</p>

1 Background and Purpose of the Study

INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to answer the following questions: Is it more effective to provide early childhood care and education (ECCE) services separately or in an integrated manner? Under what conditions would the provision of separate care and education services be more effective, and when not? The information presented in the report is a starting point for understanding a complex subject involving multiple stakeholders. A grant from the World Bank–managed and –administered Early Learning Partnership Multi-Donor Trust Fund facilitated this research. The grant activities focus on analysis of international best practices for integrated centers for ECCE and policy options for the way forward.

Changes in social and family structures, gender roles, and working environments have led some countries to introduce integrated centers for ECCE for children zero to five years, combining the advantages of preschools and childcare centers. ECCE services are becoming increasingly important for countries as a support system for working parents. The World Bank Group’s gender analysis suggests that providing affordable childcare services could help more mothers enter the labor market. In Sri Lanka, female labor force participation is low compared with international standards. Responding to employee needs, early childhood development centers in the plantation areas are already providing integrated childcare services to children ages zero to five years. Furthermore, the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic has resulted in increased vulnerability and poverty among many families. Early childhood development centers in the nonplantation areas closed in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic lock-down; they reopened in early August 2020. In the plantation sector, child development centers (CDCs) continued throughout the lock-down period with government approval; this assisted working mothers to leave their children in the daycare facilities in the plantation CDCs. The scaling up of ECCE services is developing momentum in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. ECCE is a priority area for the government of Sri Lanka, and the World Bank is supporting the government in its efforts to increase access to and improve the quality of ECCE services.

Well-designed ECCE systems can improve the lives of children and families and provide significant advantages to national economies. Access to effective

ECCE can equalize learning opportunities by improving school readiness and by putting children on a more equal footing when they reach the primary school level. These early advantages have proved to have a lasting impact, affecting both educational and earning potential in their adult years. The vast income inequalities seen in countries such as Sri Lanka could be bridged through investment in effective ECCE programs, and understanding the benefits and potential long-term impacts of ECCE could help governments tailor programs to ensure maximum return on investment.

ECCE includes both childcare and education, two activities that have traditionally been provided as separate services. Recently, there has been a growing trend to integrate childcare and education to provide more efficient services for families. Global experience suggests that the integration process must be viewed as a continuum between fragmentation and integration. Different countries fit into various stages along this continuum. Although some countries have made a conscious move toward integration, most have ended up where they are as a result of the natural trajectory of the development of childcare and education services over the years.

Within this context, this study explores the move to integration and evaluates its relevance to Sri Lanka. The report provides (1) an overview of the growing trend of integrating childcare and education in the provision of early childhood services, (2) a basic understanding of the move toward integrating childcare and education services to explore the potential benefits and challenges of integration, (3) an analysis of the ECCE environment in Sri Lanka with recommendations for improvements in the current context, and (4) relevant global experiences and examples of different approaches to improved ECCE service provision.

Early childhood services in Sri Lanka are currently organized and delivered through a multisectoral approach, with the involvement of several key ministries. ECCE has traditionally been the responsibility of the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and Social Services (MWCASS), but significant changes in ministerial mandates were introduced following the parliamentary elections in August 2020.¹ ECCE services are now organized under the State Ministry of Women and Child Development, Pre-School & Primary Education, School Infrastructure & Education Services, which falls under the purview of the Ministry of Education. In December 2019, a National Policy on Preschool Education tabled by the Ministry of Education received Cabinet approval. This policy brings early childhood education directly under the purview of the Ministry of Education and could lead to major changes in the country's ECCE landscape. Discussions surrounding the details of the reorganization were underway in September 2020. The changes could also have major implications for the integration of childcare and education and could pave the way for the reevaluation and reorganization of early childhood services.

This study examines the experiences of four other countries—Brazil, Finland, Ireland, and Japan—that offer a view into different approaches to and experiences with integration. Detailed analyses of these systems are beyond the scope of this study, and further research is needed to understand the complexities within each of the different countries. Therefore, the case studies are not intended to be comprehensive accounts and do not provide detailed information on the ECCE sector or the journey toward integration in the selected countries. They offer instead a basic overview of the selected countries and focus on specific aspects of integration in each country that are relevant to Sri Lanka.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are fivefold: to (1) present an overall understanding of how the provision of ECCE services has evolved globally over the years toward the provision of better and more holistic childcare and education for young children; (2) review split and integrated systems of ECCE service provision; (3) trace the growth of and analyze the current ECCE system in Sri Lanka to assess its strengths and weaknesses; (4) provide recommendations on whether Sri Lanka should move toward a more efficient ECCE service delivery system, and if so, how; and (5) examine the experiences of selected countries that have adopted different measures to improve ECCE service provision, to understand what works and what does not.

NOTE

1. The Ministry of Women and Child Affairs was renamed the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and Dry Zone Development in 2018, in late 2019 as the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and Social Security, and in August 2020 as the State Ministry of Women and Child Development, Pre-School & Primary Education, School Infrastructure & Education Services. The names are used interchangeably in this study.

2 Literature Review of the Integration of Childcare and Education

OVERVIEW

Early childhood care and education (ECCE) has been in the spotlight in recent years. Studies show that 85 percent of brain development is complete by the time a child is five years old and that a child's early environment and experiences set the stage for life. Research on the long-term benefits of early interventions has found that young children need both care and education in their early years. Additionally, the difficulties experienced by working parents in accessing affordable childcare have affected labor force participation in many parts of the world, leading to increased demand for childcare and requiring a rethinking of public and private sector service delivery in the early childhood years.

Most countries maintain split ECCE systems, with childcare and education governance and practice occupying distinctly different spheres. Childcare has traditionally been the responsibility of health or social welfare ministries, whereas education falls under the purview of education ministries. For most countries, split systems are a result of the natural trajectory of the development of childcare and education services over the years. However, experience shows that split systems can have inherent inefficiencies. In response, many countries have begun integrating childcare and education for the early years. This literature review explores this move toward integration, following the experiences of certain countries. At the outset it is important to note the following:

- The process of integration needs to be viewed as a continuum between fragmentation and integration. Most countries are at different stages in this continuum. Few countries have achieved full integration.
- There are many definitions and approaches to understanding integration. Integration needs to be assessed in relation to different components or dimensions of an ECCE environment, including governance, strategy, process, and service delivery. A systematic approach provides a comprehensive perspective of integration and the way different dimensions or aspects within an ECCE environment function and interact.

This study reviews the different stages of integration identified in the INTESYS Toolkit (details of the toolkit are provided in the section titled “What

Is Integration?”). It analyzes the levels of integration based on the “Reference Framework for Integration in ECEC Systems” proposed in the INTESYS Toolkit. Integration cannot be achieved through a one-size-fits-all approach, and the right fit must necessarily be determined according to the specific context of individual countries. The INTESYS framework serves as a basis for analyzing Sri Lanka’s ECCE sector and its performance with integration.

BENEFITS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

Investing in ECCE has the potential to yield significant short- and long-term benefits for individuals, families, and society. The case for investing in early care and education can be made under three main dimensions: equity, school readiness, and economics.

ECCE has the power to address the root causes of inequality that begin in the early years. ECCE can narrow early achievement gaps and place children from different backgrounds on an equal footing as they begin their formal schooling. The beneficial impact of ECCE on school readiness is underpinned by global data. A United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) study, for instance, shows that in high- and middle-income countries, 50 percent of children who attended early childhood development (ECD) programs were on track to achieve literacy and numeracy skills, whereas only 28 percent of children who did not attend were on track. In low- and lower-middle-income countries, 44 percent of children who attended ECD programs were on track compared with only 12 percent of children who did not (UNICEF 2019). In general, children who have had access to ECCE are more likely to stay in school and attain minimum educational competencies. As such, early education is known to have an impact on educational attainment and subsequently on a person’s earning potential. Effective ECCE helps foster more productive citizens who are less of a burden on the national economy.

Access to early services also opens up opportunities for mothers and caregivers to join the workforce. A study by Halim, Johnson, and Perova (2017, and cited in UNICEF 2019) conducted in Indonesia, for instance, finds that access to a public preschool for just two hours a day led to a 13.3 percent increase in women’s participation in the workforce. As discussed in the section titled “The Economic Dimension,” the benefits of ECCE thus extend beyond the child to the family and to the economy at large.

The equity dimension

The equity dimension supports the view that ECCE can equalize learning and earning opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds. “[T]he first 1,000 days of life—from conception to age three—open a critical and singular window of opportunity. During this period, children’s brains can form 1,000 neural connections every second—a once in a lifetime pace never matched again—and these connections are the building blocks of every child’s future” (Lake 2017). The importance of care and stimulation in the early years must be understood from this perspective, and the long-term damage caused by the lack of early stimulation must not be underestimated. Neuroscientist Charles Nelson, renowned for his work on brain development, notes that experience plays an essential role in building brain architecture after birth. According to Nelson, Zeanah, and Fox (2019, 8), “although it is well known that exposure to adverse

early experience can derail development..., the *lack* of experience can be particularly insidious, as the brain awaits instructions to guide its assembly that it fails to receive. As a result, neural circuitry is seriously compromised, which in turn results in delays and impairments in behavior.”

The Bucharest Early Intervention Project was a randomized controlled trial that examined the effects of early intervention. The study, which assessed brain development in different domains, identified the age before which intervention had the greatest impact on specific domains. Nelson, Zeanah, and Fox (2019, 2) speak of “sensitive periods” to describe the “effect experience has on the brain during limited periods in development.” The Bucharest study, which was able to identify sensitive periods for the development of individual domains, found that the sensitive period for expressive language and receptive language closed at as early as 15 months of age, while the sensitive period for reading closed at 24 months. The Bucharest study is among the best evidence showing the importance of critical periods of behavioral and brain development in children.

Studies have also shown the significance of nurturing and caring relationships on brain development. It is critical for infants to form bonds with parents and caregivers, and studies have shown that forming secure relationships with adults at this age can enhance a child’s ability to deal with emotional challenges in later life (Niemiec and Ryan 2009). Thus, it is important to evaluate the need for and suitability of home-based care versus center-based care for very young children. Devercelli and Beaton-Day (forthcoming) find mixed evidence on the impact of home-based and center-based care on the under-three age group. Research suggests that for families that are able to provide healthy and stimulating environments, home-based care may be a better option. A recent study in Italy, for instance, finds that children from affluent backgrounds who received home-based care had higher IQ scores than affluent peers who received center-based care from zero to two years of age (Devercelli and Beaton-Day, forthcoming). Whether home or center based, what is important is the quality of care. For many families, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, home-based care is not an option because parents have to return to work. Because of the lack of affordable childcare options, many children grow up in unsafe and unsuitable environments. In such situations, access to good quality center-based care can have a significant impact on the early development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and help negate early disadvantages to some extent.

Various correlates of poverty, including the lack of stimulation and limited access to early learning, place poor children at greater risk for poor cognitive development (World Bank 2014). In their 2005 study, Paxson and Schady find that differences in vocabulary scores were not that significant in children who are three years of age but that the gap between the poorest and richest quintiles increased progressively as the children got older, and the gap was quite substantial for children who were six years of age. The study confirmed that disadvantages in schooling commence in early childhood and that the learning gaps that result from such disadvantages have a lasting impact on an individual’s life (World Bank 2014). Delays in physical and cognitive development place these children at an early disadvantage and can sometimes cause irreversible damage. Even though ECCE can help negate some of these risk factors, unequal access and quality within the ECCE system means that poor children are disadvantaged even further, which in turn affects the learning and consequently the earning potential of these children. The inequalities that arise during this period have a lasting impact and contribute to maintaining an intergenerational cycle of poverty.

By equalizing an individual's learning potential, ECCE is also equalizing an individual's earning potential and in doing so it helps create a more level playing field where people have a better opportunity to break out of poverty. Early intervention has been recognized as a tool with which to negate the effects of poverty on children's short- and long-term outcomes (Hasan, Hyson, and Chang 2013). Alternatively, neglecting ECCE could widen income inequality by reducing opportunities for groups that are already disadvantaged. Studies have shown that ECCE can be extremely effective in compensating for the negative impacts of poverty on young children. By providing a safe and stimulating environment, ECCE can help such children overcome the deficiencies in their home environments and provide equal opportunities for these children to compete with those who are better positioned.

The school-readiness dimension

The school-readiness dimension supports the view that ECCE prepares children for formal schooling, improves their learning levels in school, and accelerates human capital accumulation. A child's overall well-being and school readiness involve development in five interconnected domains: physical development, which includes physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approach to learning and language development; cognitive development; and general knowledge (UNESCO 2007). Effective ECCE influences the development of all these areas and has the potential to have an impact on how ready a child is to begin schooling. Research finds that differences in children's vocabularies among children from different social groups can be noticed as early as 36 months of age. The primary influencing factor in developing a child's vocabulary appears to be the amount of language interaction between the child and his or her caregivers. These differences continue along a trajectory and are found to be present in nine-year-old children who are already in the formal school system. Children who are disadvantaged early carry language deficiencies well into their schooling years. A stimulating environment for language development through ECCE can lay the foundation for proper development and prevent potential lifetime stunting of a child's language development.

The impact of ECCE on school performance has been put to the test in many studies. Naudeau et al. (2011) find that ECCE can improve performance on standardized tests, reduce school dropout rates, and increase grade retention rates. A cross-national comparison of mathematics, science, and reading skills of 15-year-old students proved ECCE's impact on academic performance in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD's) Programme for International Student Assessment 2010. In Shanghai, China, the test recorded a difference of more than 60 score points between students who had attended preprimary school for more than a year and those who had not. The score point difference recorded in Israel was 120 points between those who attended preschool and those who did not (World Bank 2011). The strength of the evidence is that it shows strikingly similar results in most parts of the world. The universality of ECCE research explains the global move toward better ECCE service provision. The details are varied and complex and differ significantly across societies. However, the conclusion remains the same: ECCE is important, effective, and necessary.

ECCE deals with the holistic development of a child, where childcare and education go hand in hand. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), “‘Care’ includes health, nutrition and hygiene in a warm, secure and nurturing environment” (Marope and Kaga 2015, 17). The foundation for adult health is formed in utero and in the early childhood years, and considering the importance of this period, early health and nutrition interventions are recommended to begin during pregnancy and continue throughout early childhood. Inadequate nutrition at this stage of life could lead to serious health conditions, including malnutrition and stunting, which in turn can adversely affect physical and cognitive development in later years. Studies have shown that malnutrition and stunting before age two predict poorer cognitive and educational outcomes in later childhood and adolescence (Walker et al. 2007) and can also lead to infections, nutrition-related chronic diseases, and even, in extreme cases, death.

Proper care in the early years also has a direct impact on early education and development. For ECCE to be effective, the childcare and education components must supplement each other. “Poor care, health, nutrition, and physical and emotional security can affect educational potentials in the form of mental retardation, impaired cognitive and behavioral capacities, motor development delay, depression, difficulties with concentration and attention” (Marope and Kaga 2015, 18). The authors also show that better child outcomes can be achieved by combining cognitive stimulation and nutritional supplementation rather than through each individually. Therefore, ensuring that both childcare and education receive equal prominence in ECCE interventions is important. In practice, however, the organic and separate growth of childcare and education has led to split systems and fragmented service delivery.

The economic dimension

The economic dimension supports the view that ECCE has a high return on investment. From a purely economic point of view, ECCE makes sense. Naudeau et al. (2011) find that in longitudinal studies conducted in both developed and developing countries, participants in ECCE programs did significantly better with regard to occupational status and earnings. According to Naudeau et al. (2011) “early interventions have higher economic returns per dollar invested than interventions at any other stage of life” (World Bank 2014, 7). ECCE provides an opportunity to raise productive citizens who can contribute to a country’s economy. Studies have found that children who are disadvantaged early are more likely to be at risk for delinquency and have less-than-optimal health outcomes, which in turn translates to higher state expenditure on remedial services like probationary services for juvenile delinquents, prisons, and social services. Investing in ECCE could reduce early disadvantages and thereby reduce remedial efforts to compensate for early childhood deficiencies, which can be costly to both the individual and to society.

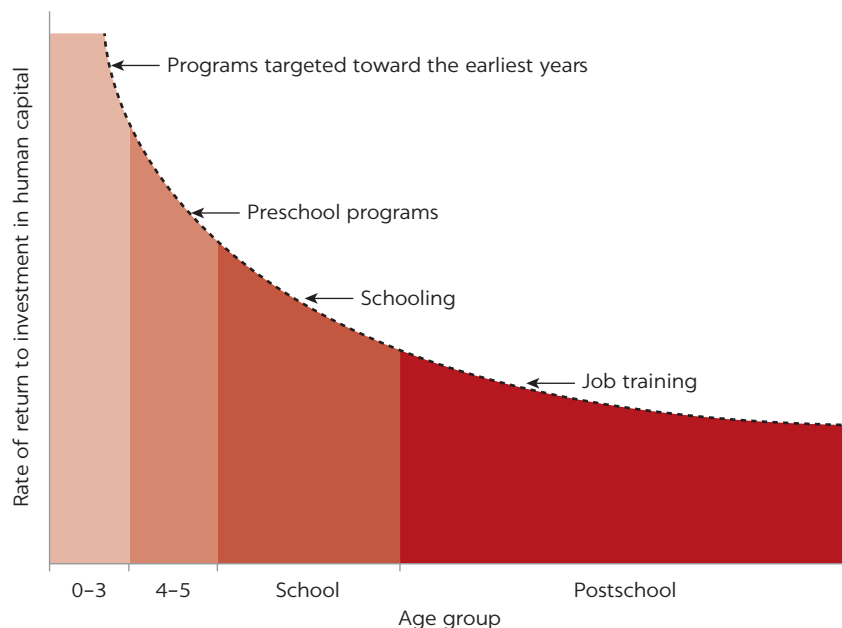
The Carolina Abecedarian Study is a seminal work demonstrating the long-term benefits of early intervention. The study, which focused on a group of children from low-income families, ranging from six weeks to five years of age, provided a full-time, high-quality educational intervention in a childcare setting. The activities focused on social, emotional, and cognitive development, with a particular emphasis on language development. The children were monitored

over time, with studies conducted at ages 12, 15, and 21. Compared with the control group, children who participated in the early intervention program had higher cognitive test scores from toddler years to age 21, had higher academic achievement in reading and math from primary grades through adulthood, completed more years of education, and were 2.7 times more likely to attend college (University of North Carolina 1999).

Studies conducted in other parts of the world show similar results. Participants of a center-based preschool education program in Bangladesh outperformed their peers in the control group by 58 percent on a standardized test on school readiness. In Colombia, children who participated in community-based ECD interventions were 100 percent more likely than the control group to be enrolled in the third grade (World Bank 2011). Figure 2.1 supports the view that “[p]ersuasive evidence exists that the greatest return on any investment in human capital comes when governments or others make investments in the early years rather than waiting to intervene until children are older” (Hasan, Hyson, and Chang 2013, 27).

Access to early years’ services also has a significant impact on the earning potential of parents and caregivers. In many parts of the world, the lack of affordable and reliable childcare options has resulted in low female labor force participation, with mothers dropping out of the workforce. In Sri Lanka, for instance, labor force participation rates among women were 36–37 percent from 2015 to 2017 but dropped to 34 percent in 2018, despite high educational attainment among women. A World Bank study (Solotaroff, Joseph, Kuriakose, and Sethi 2020) finds that having a child under age five makes a Sri Lankan woman 7.4 percent less likely to join the workforce, and this number has increased over the years. The lack of childcare options is particularly challenging in countries with a high number of female-headed households. In Sri Lanka, for instance, 23 percent of households are female headed partly because many women were

FIGURE 2.1
Early intervention and its return on investment



Source: Hasan, Hyson, and Chang 2013, adapted from Heckman 2008.

widowed during the civil war (IFC 2018). For employers, the lack of childcare options has resulted in difficulties in recruiting and retaining skilled workers, a high level of absenteeism, and low maternity return rates. According to the International Monetary Fund, Sri Lanka could raise its long-term gross domestic product by up to 20 percent by closing the workforce gender gap. Increasing access to early childhood services has the potential to increase female labor force participation, and proven success in this area has provoked more and more governments and private sector employers to provide childcare options for working mothers.

The value of investing in ECCE was recently emphasized by the World Bank's Human Capital Project (2018), which promotes investing in people as a means to achieve greater equity and economic growth. The Human Capital Index “quantifies the contribution of health and education to the productivity of the next generation of workers. Countries can use it to assess how much income they are foregoing because of human capital gaps, and how much faster they can turn these gaps into gains if they can act now.”¹ Human Capital Index data show that a Sri Lankan child who starts schooling at age four can expect to complete 13 years of schooling by her 18th birthday. However, learning-adjusted years of school, which factors in what children actually learn, is only 8.3 years in Sri Lanka (World Bank 2018). According to the Human Capital Index report, “children born in Sri Lanka today will be 58 percent as productive in adulthood compared to their full potential” (World Bank 2019, E3). Investing in ECCE could help close this gap by giving children an early start and better preparing them for school. Investing early could help Sri Lanka improve human capital outcomes for the future generation.

Despite its proven impact on human capital development, access to childcare and education remains an issue in many parts of the world, particularly in low-income and lower-middle-income countries. Although there have been recent attempts to increase access to preschools, the provision of childcare services for the under-three age group remains difficult. Fewer services are available for this group, and services are generally more expensive. The quality of early years' services is also a concern. The need for more comprehensive early years' services has gained global recognition, and the integration of childcare and education has emerged as one possible response to this growing need.

HISTORICAL TRENDS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

In most parts of the world, kindergartens and childcare centers originated as different entities, occupying the separate spheres of childcare and education. In most of Europe and in the United States, early childhood programs were largely seen as charitable institutions that provided childcare for children of poor, working-class parents. Kindergartens, nursery schools, or infant schools, as they were known in Britain, emerged as preprimary education programs for children three to five years of age. Many were influenced by the German model of Friedrich Froebel. According to social policy scholar Sheila Kamerman (2006, 15), “the roots of [ECCE] policies and programs in the European countries can be found in two mid-19th century developments: (i) protective services for neglected children and the children of poor working mothers, and (ii) preschool education focused on enhancing or enriching the development of middle-class children.”

For the most part, this distinction remained intact until about the post-World War II era. Debates surrounding the separation of childcare and education in the ECCE field came into prominence in the 1960s with the increase in female workforce participation and developments in child and family policies in the western world.

In the developing world, ECCE services expanded for two reasons: first, the growing need for childcare in tandem with increasing female labor force participation, and second, the growing recognition that socialization benefited child development and better prepared children for primary school. The traditional role of the mother as caregiver led to the belief that government action in early childhood care was unnecessary. Brazilian researcher Lenira Haddad finds that “the dominant view from the past, strongly influenced by the ‘ideology of the family’ is that the education and upbringing of young children is a private affair and not a public responsibility” (Haddad 2002, 3). In most developing countries, the responsibility for caring for children under age three fell upon the parents, while any policies related to this age group came under the domain of health care or social services. Children ages three to six were covered by the education sector. In many countries of the former Soviet Union, kindergartens remain the primary method of providing ECCE services, usually covering the three-to-six age group.

Until recently, the priority for most countries has been to achieve universal primary education, and ECCE has remained in the shadows. A UNESCO survey on ECCE conducted in 1961 captured many of the perceptions concerning ECCE and the challenges that countries interested in developing the subsector were facing. The survey found that preprimary education did not seek to undermine the role of parents, but with more mothers working outside the home the need for childcare was rising; spaces were limited, and priority was being given to children who were neglected and abused and did not have adequate parenting; programs were expensive to establish and operate; qualified teachers were in short supply; preprimary teachers had lower status and were paid less than primary school teachers; and most programs were run by private providers and included those that were run as charity and those that were run for profit (Kamerma 2006). From the 1960s onward, perceptions about the role and importance of ECCE began to change. Its prominence increased. Findings from global studies and longitudinal research during this period highlighted the significant long-term benefits of early interventions, leading to renewed commitments from governments to invest in early childhood services.

THE INTEGRATION OF CHILDCARE AND EDUCATION

In its early history, ECCE was referred to primarily as education for young children. It was only in the late 1980s that childcare began to be included in the definition of ECCE. Around this time, it was noted that “ECEC [early childhood education and care] begins at birth, varies with the age of the child, and the social context, and includes children from birth to age 3, not just the 3 to school entry age” (Kamerma 2006, 7). Despite this recognition of the importance of care in the ECCE field, enrollment rates at the time covered only children ages three to five and largely ignored the cohort under age three years. Statistical work and studies also focused on programs run under the education sector or by ministries of education, and excluded other types of care programs

for young children. According to Kamerman (2006), during this period, a few European countries had already moved toward integrating childcare and education programs, but most countries around the world kept these two functions separate. Consequently, the dominant preprimary education paradigm covering most European Union countries, OECD countries, and developing countries assumes two ECCE systems and makes an explicit distinction between programs serving the cohort of those under age three; stresses care of children while mothers work (and sometimes access to health care too), usually administered under ministries of social welfare and health; and assumes programs are serving children who are ages three to five or six years, stressing education, preparation for primary school, and socialization, usually administered under ministries of education (Kamerman 2006). Among the earliest countries to integrate the two systems were New Zealand (1986), Vietnam (1987), and Sweden (1995).

Bennett and Kaga (2010) note that because of its multisectoral nature most countries find it difficult to maintain successful integrated ECCE systems. In many cases difficulties arise from financial constraints. However, challenges in coherence have resulted because of the differing histories of childcare and education. The authors note that, “given their distinct historical roots ‘childcare’ and ‘early education’ services embody different visions of young children and childhood...today these traditions are expressed in most countries as ‘split systems’ of ECCE” (Bennett and Kaga 2010, 36).

The inefficiencies and issues concerning split systems have been increasingly recognized in recent years, with the absence of a holistic approach to children’s needs being cited as a main argument. In split systems, education begins at age three or four, and younger children are deemed to require childcare and minding. From an administrative perspective, it has been argued that split systems result in inefficiencies because of the duplication and waste of resources and conflict and competition between respective ministries.

Although split systems have worked well for some countries, others that encountered problems began using one of two strategies to overcome the issues of split systems: either greater coordination or integration. Countries that have moved toward greater coordination have put in place various mechanisms, such as coordination bodies comprising representatives from the relevant sectors, for better coordination between the ministries responsible for childcare and education. Studies show that intersectoral coordination bodies have yielded positive results, creating more public awareness of ECCE services and increased use of services (Kaga, Bennett, and Moss 2010). According to Kaga, Bennett, and Moss (2010, 7–8), “Coordination mechanisms have been found to work well when they are established for a specific purpose or to focus on a target population; however, they have proved less successful in promoting a coherent overall policy and administrative framework across sectors.”

Other countries have opted for the integration of childcare and education under a single entity. According to Haddad (2006), the integrated model can be viewed as a third model that recognizes the qualities of the previous models of “childcare services” and “preschool education.” It includes an additional element that lends dynamism to the definition. According to Haddad (2006, 12), “the legitimation of out-of-home socialization serves as a bond between care and education, and at the same time changes their meaning.” Integration is a more long-term approach that requires a considerable level of commitment and cooperation from all actors involved in providing ECCE services. Although it is often

BOX 2.1**2000 Education for All goals**

The 2000 Education for All (EFA) goals adopted at the World Education Forum, Dakar, reiterated the global need for better quality early childhood care and education (ECCE).

EFA goal 1: Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

The EFA movement supported the view that ECCE must include both care and education. Referring to the scope of this goal, “all young children must be nurtured in safe and caring environments

that allow them to become healthy, alert and secure, and be able to learn. The past decade has provided more evidence that good quality early childhood care and education, both in families and in more structured programmes, have a positive impact on the survival, growth, development and learning potential of children. Such programmes should be comprehensive, focusing on all of the child’s needs, and encompassing health, nutrition and hygiene as well as cognitive and psycho-social development” (UNESCO 2007, 15).

considered to be the costlier alternative of the two, with the increased focus on the importance of ECCE and changing societal trends, the move to integration is becoming the more meaningful option for many countries.

Integration also came as a result of the growing recognition that childcare and education cannot be separated (see box 2.1 on the Education for All Goals). According to UNESCO (2007, 15), “in practice, care and education cannot be separated, and good quality provision for young children necessarily addresses both dimensions.” Many early childhood specialists argue that programs labeled “childcare” should provide opportunities for children to grow and learn, and those labeled “early education” should nurture children and promote their social and emotional well-being (UNESCO 2007). Haddad’s views expressed in 2002 are still relevant in 2020: “the current status of ECEC policy in most countries reflects a transitional period from an old to a new order. This includes deep changes in societies in general and specifically in the family structure, while the emergence of new roles for women and mothers as well as for men and fathers call for a review of the family-state relationship regarding the responsibility for the care and education of children. As a result, a growing view of ECEC as a shared responsibility is taking place, bringing together both its social and educational dimensions” (Haddad 2002, 3).

WHAT IS INTEGRATION?

There are two main aspects of integration: first, conceptual integration or how to think about integration, and second, structural integration or how to organize ECCE services. Conceptual integration is achieved when the system has advanced beyond thinking about “childcare” and “education” separately (Bennett and Kaga 2010). Bennett and Kaga (2010) identify six different areas of structural integration: policy making and administration; access to services;

funding; regulation, including curriculum and guidelines; workforce, including structure, education, and pay; and type of provision. Experts say that integration can vary both in depth and in the extent of conceptual and structural integration and can also vary in location, that is, with the ministry of education or of welfare. As such, integration should be understood as a continuum, from minimal to full integration.

The INTESYS Toolkit developed by Ionescu, Trikić, and Pinto (2017) specifies four main stages in this continuum of integration: cooperation, collaboration, coordination, and integration. Table 2.1 depicts the characteristics associated with each of the different stages of integration. This categorization is a systematic and useful method for assessing the level of integration within an ECCE environment.

In developing the INTESYS Toolkit, Ionescu, Trikić, and Pinto (2017) found that integration requires thoughtful, targeted action at multiple levels, from legislation through governance to frontline service delivery. Therefore, understanding integration requires a systematic approach that considers the different stages of integration as they relate to the various aspects or dimensions of an ECCE environment. The analogy of the “onion model” depicted in figure 2.2 serves to clarify and explain these different dimensions.

According to this model, integration can be measured in relation to the key dimensions of an ECCE environment as described later in this chapter. The areas of structural integration identified by Bennett and Kaga (2010) follow the same logic and provide another useful categorization of the key dimensions of an ECCE environment.

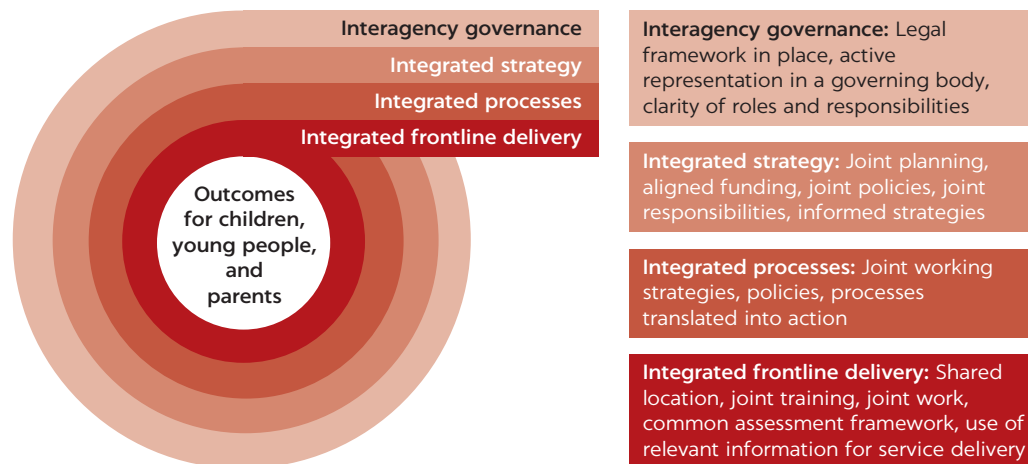
Countries approach integration from different angles based on their respective contexts to achieve varying stages of integration as it corresponds to the different levels or dimensions of an ECCE environment. The synergy between the different dimensions depicted in the onion model and the key stages of integration could vary depending on the priorities, policies, and approaches undertaken by individual countries, and the stage of integration may differ in each dimension. It is possible for a country to be fully integrated (stage 4) in one or more dimension and be at a cooperation stage (stage 1) in another dimension. Full integration may not even be possible or feasible for some countries. As an example, Japan has a relatively low level of integration in relation to interagency governance and integrated strategy but has taken measures in the recent past to introduce more integrated frontline delivery services in the form of combined ECD centers. Ionescu, Trikić, and Pinto (2017, 5) emphasize that, “integration of services can be initiated and built through both bottom-up (front line delivery, community, parents) and top down (interagency governance, policies and

TABLE 2.1 Integration stages and characteristics, by stage

	INSTITUTIONAL INDEPENDENCE	CONSISTENT OR SHARED GOALS	JOINT PLANNING	JOINT SERVICE DELIVERY	LEAD PARTNER	ONE LEADING AGENCY
4 Integration		•	•	•	•	•
3 Coordination	•	•	•	•	•	
2 Collaboration	•	•	•			
1 Cooperation	•	•				
0 Fragmentation	•					

Source: Ionescu, Trikić, and Pinto 2017.

FIGURE 2.2
The “onion model” depicting integration



Source: Adapted from Ionescu, Trikic, and Pinto 2017.

strategies) interventions, and is best when both are aligned.” A one-size-fits-all approach to integration is neither feasible nor advisable considering the complexity and multidimensional nature of ECCE. Although a country with varying levels of integration on different dimensions may appear to be less integrated than a country at the fully integrated level on all dimensions, partial integration may in fact be more beneficial for the country.

Although there are many definitions and approaches to understanding integration, this study considers the different stages of integration as identified in the INTESYS model (see box 2.2 for an overview of the INTESYS Project). The INTESYS package, which has been developed following extensive research, interviews, and pilot testing, includes a model, a toolkit, and a reference framework that captures the key elements of integration. The toolkit is designed to guide actors toward better integration, considering the entire early childhood system, from the macro to the micro level. The Reference Framework for Integration in ECEC Systems serves as a method for evaluating integration and as a tool to guide further integration. In this sense, the INTESYS package provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding and assessing possibilities of integration and is useful to this study given that the basic elements of the package can be applicable and adapted to suit different country contexts.

The INTESYS framework (figure 2.3) is based on three sets of elements that have an impact on integration:

- *Underpinning values and principles for high-quality integration* serve as the foundation for a shared vision and values among stakeholders in the process of integration.
- *Key factors supporting implementation* are the conditions that have a strong influence on integration.
- *Quality practices* provide guidance for translating values and principles into practice while considering the key factors in integration.

BOX 2.2

Overview of the INTESYS Project

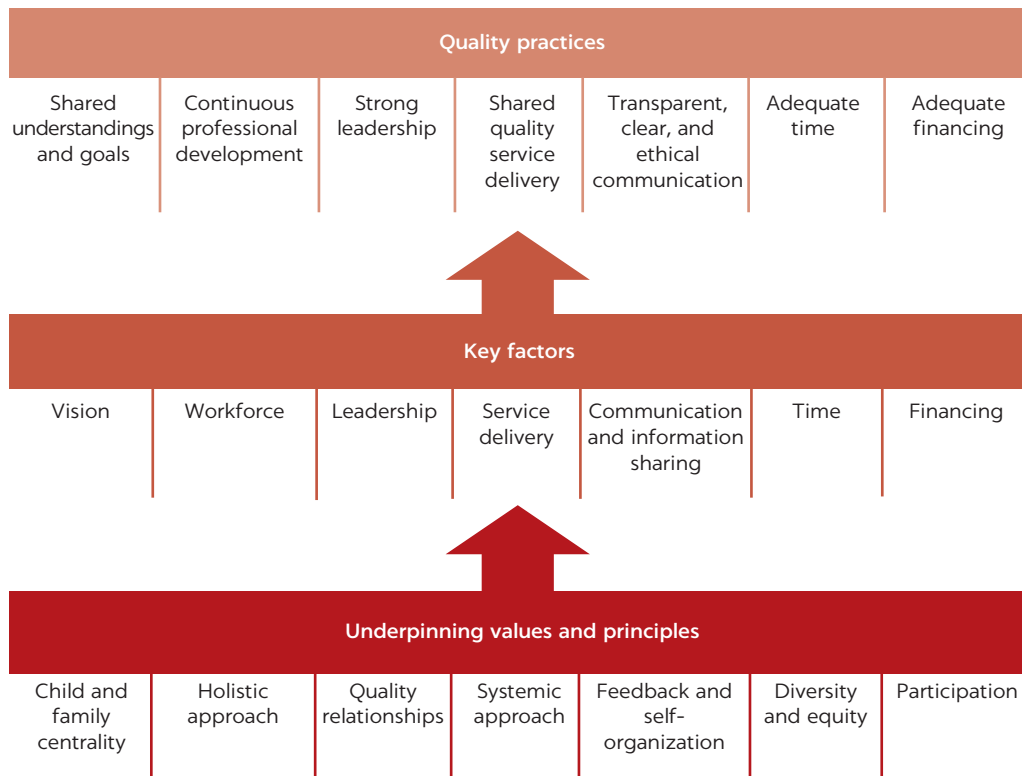
The INTESYS Project was funded by the European Commission’s Erasmus Programme and is being implemented in Europe by a consortium of partners from each of the countries^a in which it is being implemented. The project piloted the journey toward integration in four early childhood systems in Europe. Introduced in 2016, it aimed to advance early childhood policies and practices toward better and more integrated early childhood care and education (ECCE) systems across Europe, focusing in the pilot

stage on four countries: Belgium, Italy, Portugal, and Slovenia. The INTESYS Toolkit was developed to unpack the complexity of the concept of integration, to indicate key factors influencing integration, and to propose quality practices, pathways, and tools for action at different levels. The INTESYS Toolkit is designed to guide different actors toward a higher level of integration in the ECCE system.

More information is available at <https://www.issa.nl/intesys>.

a. The partners in the INTESYS Consortium are not necessarily co-funders but are more like implementing or coordinating partners. The partners are the King Baudouin Foundation (Belgium), the Universal Education Foundation (the Netherlands), the International Step by Step Association (the Netherlands), the Aga Khan Foundation (Portugal), Compagnia di San Paolo (Italy), Fondazione Emanuela Zancan Onlus Centro Studi e Ricerca Sociale (Italy), Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (Portugal), Step by Step Centre for Quality in Education (previously named Pedagoski Institut; Slovenia), and Vernieuwing in de Basisvoorzieningen voor Jonge Kinderen (Innovations in the Early Years; Belgium).

FIGURE 2.3
Reference Framework for Integration in Early Childhood Education and Care Systems



Source: Adapted from Ionescu, Trikić, and Pinto 2017.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR INTEGRATION

In many countries, integration at the central governance level has meant bringing ECCE under the auspices of a single ministry or entity. “It can be argued that it matters less in which ministry ECCE is integrated than that the ministry in question has a strong focus on young children’s development and education” (Kaga, Bennett, and Moss 2010, 8). Whereas many Nordic countries brought ECCE under social welfare, most countries, including New Zealand (1986), Vietnam (1987), Spain (1990), Botswana (1994), England (1995), Brazil (1996), and Norway (1996), decided to place ECCE under education.

Some believe that locating the responsibility for ECCE under education is important because “the education framework highlights access, affordability, concern for a (relatively) well trained workforce, and curriculum as a basic tool for practice” (Bennett and Kaga 2010, 36). Bennett and Kaga (2010, 36) go on to say that “education stresses the importance of lifelong learning and a recognition that children are learners from birth.” On the other hand, the risks associated with integration within education include “turning ECCE services more ‘school-like’ in terms of opening hours, staffing, adult-child ratios, pedagogy and physical settings; and the dissociation of ECCE from welfare, health and other related areas” Bennett and Kaga (2010, 37).

Although “schoolification” of care services has been identified as a potential risk of integrating within education, studies have shown that this risk has not materialized in most countries. According to Kaga, Bennett, and Moss (2010, 11), the concept of “schoolification” refers to “the downward pressure of primary school approaches (classroom organization, curriculum, teaching methods, child:staff ratios, and conceptions of childhood) on early childhood pedagogy.” However, they argue that, “except in one case country, there is no evidence that integration within education has brought about ‘schoolification’ of ECCE services” (Kaga, Bennett, and Moss 2010, 9).

THE ADVANTAGES OF AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM

Several advantages of integration have been observed over time:

- *Continuity for young children as they move through the early years is assured* because consistent care and education are provided in the same setting, which eliminates the difficulties with transition from childcare centers to preschool.
- *A greater focus on learning is provided* under a more skilled workforce. Country case studies show that integrating care with education has been especially beneficial to the under-three age group and to the staff who serve this age group. Integration opens up opportunities for age-appropriate learning.
- *A positive impact on curriculum development occurs* in countries where ECCE is housed under education. For instance, in most countries that adopted an integrated system, age-specific curricula were developed for the under-three and the three-and-over age groups (Bennett and Kaga 2010). In New Zealand, the link between care and education led to the development of an innovative and inclusive curriculum called the Te Whariki curriculum and a specific

learning evaluation instrument called Learning Stories (Bennett and Kaga 2010).

- *Access to ECCE services is increased.* Narrowing access inequalities (for example, in Sweden) and increased government funding have led to increased participation in ECCE (for example, in New Zealand). Greater emphasis has been placed on educational benefits from structured ECCE services for children's development and on helping parents reconcile family and professional responsibilities (Janta, Van Belle, and Stewart 2016). Integration of services permits parents to access both care and education services at the same facility. This has contributed to improving convenience and efficiency, and reducing the time, stress, and pressure associated with accessing services at multiple facilities.
- *Both workforce quality and staff benefits are improved.* Combined unions of ECCE and primary school teachers have led to an increase in ECCE staff salaries (for example, in New Zealand). An increase in the number of graduates from early childhood teacher education colleges has contributed to improved teacher standards and qualifications. In some countries, the integration of care and education has led to the creation of a new integrated early years' profession, in which the same teacher, a graduate, is trained and qualified to work with both the under-three and the three-and-over age groups. In general, integration affords more professional growth (Bennett and Kaga 2010).

The potential advantages of integration are many: a more coherent policy; greater quality and consistency across sectors in establishing social objectives; more cohesive regulation; appropriate levels of funding and staffing regimes; focused, age-specific curriculum and assessment; reduced costs to parents; and longer hours that are more accommodating for working parents (see box 2.3 for details). Overall, integration could facilitate greater and more effective investment in the youngest children, enhanced continuity of children's experiences, and improved public management of services (Kaga, Bennett, and Moss 2010).

BOX 2.3

Goals and advantages of integration

The INTESYS Toolkit summarizes seven key goals and advantages of integration:

- Stress every young child's right to survival, development, and education
- Create conditions to support parents and caregivers in fulfilling their responsibilities toward their children
- Improve accessibility and relevance of services for children and parents
- Improve the long-term outcomes in health, learning, and well-being
- Improve equity in relation to gender, socioeconomic circumstances, and disability
- Improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness of early childhood education and care services, sectors, and systems
- Foster evidence-based innovation in the delivery of sustainable services

RISKS AND CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATION

As in all systems, there are risks and challenges to integration. Foremost among them are the following:

- Challenges across sectors and ministries
 - Integration across sectors is difficult because of differing histories and traditions of center-based care and education.
 - In most countries care and education are handled by different ministries, and integration through a unified policy may not be guaranteed. ECCE involves several sectors: health, education, social services, social protection, employment, and poverty. Integration is complicated when multiple actors collaborate and coordinate. With regard to ECCE, while service (social and educational) effectiveness may be increased, policy coherence is harder to achieve (Haddad 2002).
 - Depending on how roles and responsibilities are divided among different actors, inconsistencies between the under-three and the three-and-over groups might not be eliminated. For instance, in some countries where integration took place under the education ministry, preprimary education received more focus and the attention given to the under-three age group was significantly reduced. Policy makers continue to confront a challenge to guarantee the twofold functions of ECCE—social and educational—when defining an integrated system.
- Difficulties in the provision of ECCE services
 - The high cost of full-time service delivery and bias in identifying age and disadvantaged groups for extending equal opportunities in education result in compromises to the provision of universal services. In addition, introducing a higher burden of regulation and standards for providers to comply with can inadvertently undermine the expansion of services.
 - Significant financial constraints in most countries exacerbate challenges of extending access. Limited finances restrict the ability of many countries to meet the costs of upgrading care facilities and training the workforce to meet the required standards to take on early education. This difficulty has resulted in a strong tendency to delegate public responsibility to private enterprise (Haddad 2002).
- Integration as an administrative process rather than a social service
 - Childcare and education appear to be less the focus and greater attention is on the administrative processes of increasing efficiency and reducing public costs.
 - “Due to both the high rate of mothers with young children in the labour market, and a higher demand for quality, the social sector is forced to strengthen the pedagogical dimension and the educational system is compelled to consider family needs” (Haddad 2006, 4).
- Increased costs for government and families
 - Integration can mean a substantial financial burden for governments. In addition to the administrative costs associated with reorganizing the system, the costs associated with maintaining high-quality services, enforcing regulations and quality standards, and continuous monitoring can be high.

- Adhering to higher quality standards also involves greater costs for service providers, which in turn could translate to higher costs for families.

Based on the varying levels of success with integration and common policy challenges faced by member countries, the OECD (2006) has put forward the following key suggestions to enhance the integration of early childhood services:

- Formulate and work with coordinated policy frameworks at the centralized and decentralized levels
- Nominate a lead ministry that works in cooperation with other departments and sectors
- Adopt a collaborative and participatory approach to reform
- Forge strong links across services, professionals, and parents in each community

SPLIT ECCE SYSTEMS

Although the integration of childcare and education is a growing trend, many countries still maintain split systems. In most cases, ECCE systems and policies have ended up as either split or integrated as a result of the natural trajectory of how early years' services have developed in particular countries. A few countries, however, maintain split ECCE systems by choice or because of practical difficulties with integration, including the following:

- The separate culture and tradition dominant in the childcare and education sectors
- The policy-level divide between the under-three and the three-and-over age groups, with the authority and the mandate to provide childcare (mostly for the under-three age group) and education (mostly for the three-to-five age group) for each group coming under different ministries
- Fear that childcare will get lost and overwhelmed by education
- The economic implications of the cost of upgrading the childcare workforce and other investments in services for the under-three age group

France, Hungary, and Flanders in Belgium continue to provide ECCE services through different types of split systems. Some criticisms of split systems, including inequalities between the childcare and early education sectors and the lack of continuity from the child's perspective during transition from one sector to another, have been confirmed through case studies of these countries (Bennett and Kaga 2010). However, the demand for integration in these countries is virtually nonexistent; nevertheless, the three countries have made improvements to the level and quality of ECCE.

Ireland has long maintained a split ECCE system, with education coming under the purview of the Department of Education and Skills and childcare under the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Although Ireland has recently made efforts to integrate some areas of service, experts note that a sizeable gap between policy and practice remains. The *Síolta* and *Aistear Frameworks*² introduced in Ireland to improve the quality of ECCE services are major advancements in the sector and perceived as essential “pillars of quality.” In some ways, however, these frameworks continue to uphold the separation between childcare and education. As an example, policies introduced to regulate

teacher qualifications apply differently to teachers working with children over age three and to those working with children from birth to three years, with the latter category requiring lower qualifications. According to Moloney (2019), the qualification requirements further perpetuate a two-tiered system.

NOTES

1. “About the Human Capital Project,” World Bank, Washington, DC, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/human-capital/brief/about-hcp>.
2. Ireland has introduced some key measures to maintain national quality standards and curricular frameworks and several measures to promote the practical application of Siolta and Aistear in different ECCE settings. The Siolta Quality Assurance Program regulates the quality of ECCE. The Siolta Framework comprises three main elements: 12 principles, 16 standards, and 75 components. The principles lay out the quality benchmarks for ECCE programs, the standards translate these into areas of practice, and the components serve as quality indicators to support implementation of the framework. Siolta includes a comprehensive quality assurance program designed to support ECCE staff in conducting self-assessments. In 2008, the Early Years Education Policy Unit was established to implement Siolta. The Aistear Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, introduced in 2009, addresses issues pertaining to the well-being, learning, and development of children. The framework was developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. The four themes of the Aistear Framework are well-being, identity and belonging, communicating, and exploring and thinking. Aistear can be applied in any childcare setting, and the framework is linked with Ireland’s primary school curriculum to ensure continuity in learning. For more on the practical measures of the Siolta and Aistear Frameworks, see the discussion of Ireland in appendix A.

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3 Early Childhood Care and Education in Sri Lanka

OVERVIEW OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA

The government of Sri Lanka recognizes the central importance of education for economic and human development. Sri Lanka provides free access to primary and secondary education, with a net enrollment rate of 99 percent for primary and 84 percent for secondary education. By contrast, the government does not provide free preprimary education to children. According to the early childhood development (ECD) census of 2016, the national enrollment rate among preschool children ages three to five years was 55.6 percent. The government has made significant efforts to invest in ECD, but access to preprimary education is not yet universal and the quality of early childhood education (ECE) programs remains a challenge. Access to affordable childcare is even more limited in Sri Lanka, and most childcare centers levy fees and are privately operated. Since 2000, successive governments have recognized the value of and the need to invest in the early years. Consequently, the country has seen some development in the early childhood care and education (ECCE) sector, but much more could be done.

The government of Sri Lanka is increasingly focused on expanding access to preprimary education. According to the 2016 ECD census, only 19.8 percent of ECD centers in Sri Lanka are government operated. The majority, or 70.8 percent of centers, are privately operated, about 6.5 percent of centers are run by religious entities, and 3 percent by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In addition to preschools for children three to five years old, the government is aspiring to expand childcare services for children, including for those under age three.

The limited availability of childcare services in Sri Lanka may not only be affecting young children but also female labor force participation. Working women find it challenging to continue working once they have children, and many tend to leave the workforce to stay at home and care for their children. Since 2010, successive governments have recognized ECCE as a priority area for development and have undertaken several measures. The World Bank has also provided significant support since early 2016 to Sri Lanka's ECCE sector through its funding for the ECD project currently being implemented by the State Ministry of Women and Child Development, Pre-School & Primary Education,

School Infrastructure & Education Services.¹ The project objective is to enhance equitable access to and improve the quality of ECCE services in Sri Lanka. The project, which is being implemented throughout the island, involves several activities, including teacher training, facility improvement, child development assessments, a common registration framework for ECD centers, and the introduction of a management information system to improve the quality of ECCE services in the country.

With respect to integrating childcare and education, Sri Lanka has made some progress. The country has already adopted the strategies recommended by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development mentioned in chapter 2 of this study: creating an interdepartmental coordination body and appointing a lead ministry or agency. The following discussion examines the level of success that Sri Lanka has had in overcoming challenges in the ECCE sector.

A multisectoral approach to ECCE

In Sri Lanka, the care and education of children from zero to five years are managed through a multisectoral approach (see figure 3.1 for the key stakeholders in Sri Lanka's ECCE sector). The 2018 National ECCD Policy describes ECD as a “shared responsibility among MWCA [Ministry of Women and Child Affairs] and relevant key ministries, Provincial Ministries, Departments and other state institutions involved with children in early childhood” (MWCADZD 2018, 9). Within the multisectoral system, the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and Social Security (MWCASS) is recognized as the agency with overall responsibility for ECCE. The multiple ministries involved in the ECCE sector are clearly recognized in the National ECCD Policy 2018, which lists the overall responsibilities of each entity, department, and ministry. The policy identifies the ministries and corresponding responsibilities as in table 3.1 (MWCADZD 2018).

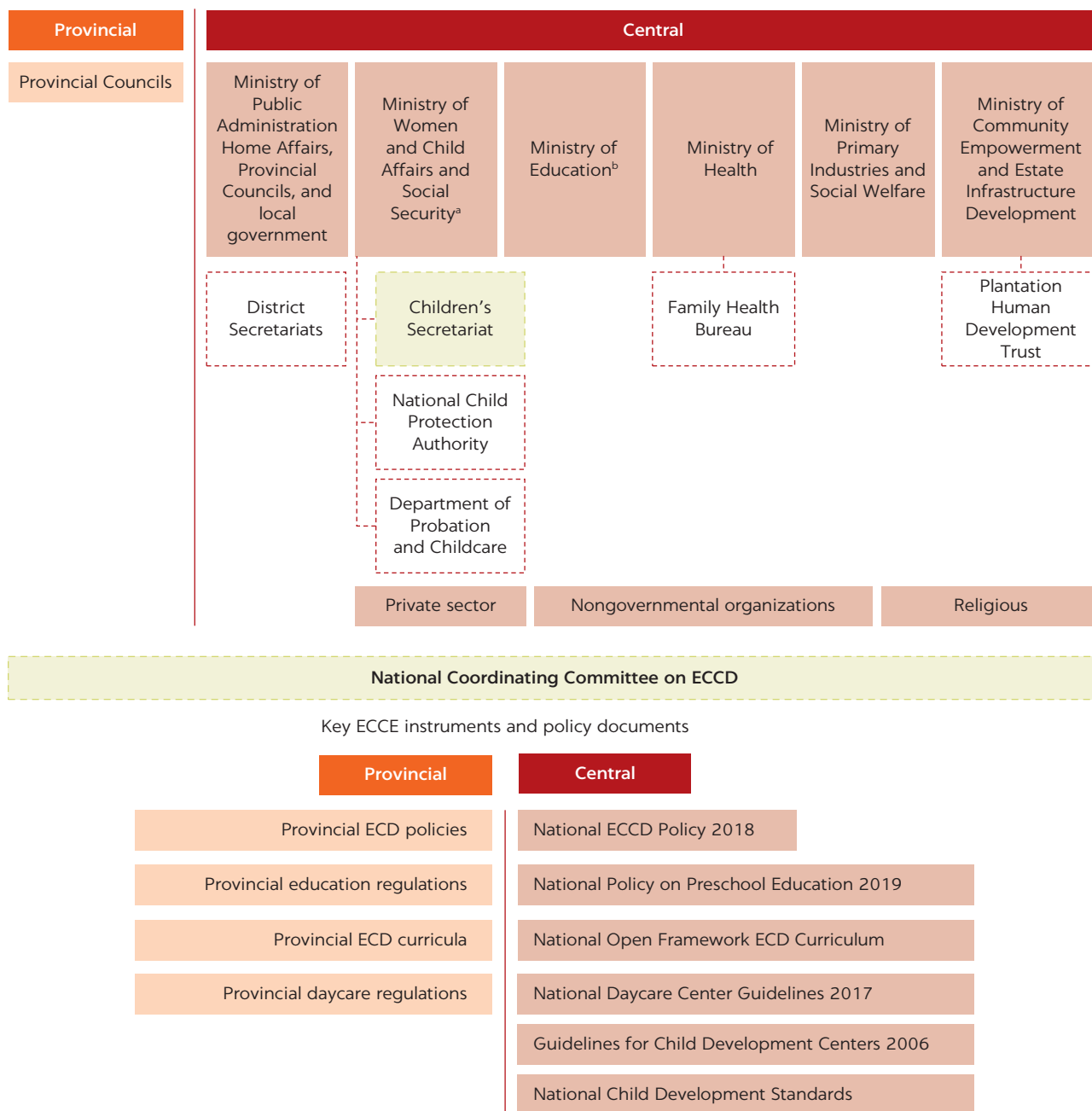
Recent changes in ministerial mandates

Early 2020 brought about a new development that has the potential to significantly change the ECCE landscape in Sri Lanka. In December 2019, the Ministry of Education (MoE) tabled a National Policy on Preschool Education to bring ECE under the direct purview of the MoE. This policy has received Cabinet approval. Following the August 2020 Parliamentary Elections and the reorganization of ministerial mandates, the MWCASS was named as a State Ministry under the purview of the Ministry of Education.

The MWCASS is currently in discussions with the MoE regarding the division of responsibilities under the new arrangement. Whether childcare would remain under the purview of the MWCASS has not yet been determined. While ECCE has been brought under one ministry, the division of responsibilities between the different bodies within that ministry would entail significantly strengthened coordination mechanisms and institutions to ensure coordinated and comprehensive service delivery for children and parents.

The reorganization would also affect the implementation of ECE at the provincial level. Since provincial governments already have well-established provincial education mechanisms that coordinate with the MoE on primary, secondary, and tertiary education, ECE could be incorporated into the provincial education system relatively easily. In this sense, bringing ECE under the purview of the MoE could increase uniformity in teaching and learning quality standards.

FIGURE 3.1
Key stakeholders in Sri Lanka’s ECCE environment



Source: World Bank.

Note: ECCD = early childhood care and development; ECCE = early childhood care and education; ECD = early childhood development.

a. Following the Parliamentary Elections in August 2020, the MWCASS was renamed as the State Ministry of Women and Child Development, Pre-School & Primary Education, School Infrastructure & Education Services. The new State Ministry now comes under the purview of the Ministry of Education.

b. Based on August 2020 Parliamentary Elections, the Ministry of Education now oversees the State Ministry of Women and Child Development, Pre-School & Primary Education, School Infrastructure & Education Services, formally known as the MWCASS.

However, the risk of schoolification of ECE services is a serious concern that deserves attention. Under these new conditions, it would also be important to set out necessary provisions for childcare to ensure that children receive both care and education services from early childhood settings. Upcoming developments could result in a radical change in the ECE implementation structure in Sri Lanka

TABLE 3.1 Sri Lanka: Key ministries responsible for ECCE

MWCASS (specific departments working on ECCE include the Children’s Secretariat, the National Child Protection Authority, and the Department of Probation and Childcare)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children’s Secretariat: Responsible for formulating policies and programs for ECCE and for coordinating and monitoring ECCE activities • National Child Protection Authority: Responsible for the regulation of childcare centers • Department of Probation and Childcare: Responsible for services provided to children recognized as vulnerable
Ministry of Health (specific units and departments working on ECCE include the Family Health Bureau)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for uplifting the health and nutrition status of children in early childhood
Ministry of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinates with the MWCASS in formulating preschool policies
Ministry of Primary Industries and Social Welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures the provision of ECCE services for vulnerable and disadvantaged children, including children with disabilities

Sources: Based on various government of Sri Lanka documents.

Note: The roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of Education and the newly constituted State Ministry of Women and Child Development, Pre-School & Primary Education, School Infrastructure & Education Services are subject to change based on the ministerial changes introduced in August 2020. The Ministry of Education will now be directly responsible for ECE (early childhood education).

ECCE = early childhood care and education; MWCASS = Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and Social Security.

and may present an ideal opportunity to build in mechanisms for better integration of childcare and education.

The role of provincial authorities

ECCE is a devolved responsibility in Sri Lanka. Article 154G (1) of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution (1987) provides provincial authorities with the power to pass legislation for the management and supervision of preschools in their respective provinces. Currently, six of the nine provinces (North Central, North Western, Sabaragamuwa, Southern, Uva, and Western) have passed statutes on preschool education, and many of them have established ECCE authorities. These statutes lay out the minimum standards for ECCE centers, the minimum qualifications for teachers, and the criteria for registration of centers, based on the guidelines and standards introduced by the Children’s Secretariat (CS).

Private sector involvement

The private sector is also a major stakeholder in ECCE service provision. ECCE services in Sri Lanka are provided primarily through preschools, childcare centers (commonly known as daycare centers in Sri Lanka), and integrated centers that have both preschool and childcare facilities. While the regulation of preschools comes under the CS and provincial authorities, the regulation of childcare centers comes under the purview of the National Child Protection Authority (NCPA). About 71 percent of preschools in the country are managed by private individuals and organizations and only about 20 percent are managed by government institutions (MWCA 2016b).

The National Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy

The National ECCD Policy of 2004 was the first government policy document to focus on the holistic development of children ages zero to five years. The policy was revised in 2018 and approved by the Cabinet in 2019. (See figure 3.2 for an illustration of the implementation hierarchy.) The policy now reads as follows:

FIGURE 3.2
National policy on ECCD: Implementation structure^a



Source: World Bank.

Note: ECCD = early childhood care and development.

a. Following the August 2020 Parliamentary Elections and the newly constituted Ministries and State Ministries, the ECCD implementation structure is under review.

The National Policy on ECCD, 2018 was introduced envisioning a better integration of all services (health, education, social services, childcare and child protection, children with disability) and all sectors (Government, INGOs [international nongovernmental organizations], NGOs, and private sector organizations) related to ECCD to implement an improved operational mechanism at all levels. Further, the implementation structure, as described in the policy, is based on a tiered coordinating committee system linking the central government, provincial authorities and grassroots level government officers. The National Coordinating Committee on ECCD is charged with the responsibility of implementing the ECCD Policy at the national level. (MWCADZD 2018)

The roles and responsibilities are under review following the August 2020 Parliamentary Elections.

The role of the Children's Secretariat

The National ECCD Policy of 2018 identifies the MWCASS as the focal ministry for implementing the policy, and the CS is recognized as the executive agency of the National Coordinating Committee. The Children's Secretariat (CS) was established in 1979 with a mandate to "formulate policies and programs on early childhood development with the objective of fostering a physically and mentally healthy child, coordinating activities with the provincial level committees and monitoring and follow up plans" (MWCA 2016a). Since the introduction of the revised ECCD policy in 2019, steps have been taken to strengthen the National Coordinating Committee and the CS. To enable the implementation and monitoring of ECCE activities, the CS has appointed 335 ECD Officers working at Divisional Secretariats islandwide. Among other activities, the CS is responsible

for ECD center and childcare center development, capacity building of teachers, the introduction of minimum standards for the registration and conduct of ECD centers, the introduction of ECD standards for children from three to five years, coordination of national and provincial committees on ECCD, and monitoring and evaluation.

Although steps are being taken to strengthen the implementation mechanism of the ECCD Policy, issues with respect to policy coherence remain. These issues impede the legal authority of the CS. The logical next step would be to strengthen the policy and legal provisions, and the enactment of a national act on ECCE. Although there has not been any concrete action in this regard, the need for a stronger legal foundation has been recognized in many forums and a national act on ECCD is in the pipeline.

Childcare centers

Childcare services in Sri Lanka are dominated by the private sector, with 78 percent of childcare centers being operated by private institutions and only 9 percent by public institutions (MWCA 2010). Many private childcare centers are affiliated with preschools and are often set up in the same premises. In recent years, public sector interest and investment in childcare have been increasing. In 2014, the CS introduced a program to establish childcare centers for children of government employees, and many government offices have done so (see box 3.1 for details). More recently, the Cabinet approved a proposal to introduce a government program to support investors interested in establishing childcare facilities. This program is being facilitated by the CS. The ongoing World Bank–financed ECD project is also supporting the expansion of childcare services by facilitating National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level training for child caregivers.

The availability of reliable childcare services has a direct impact on women's labor force participation in both the public and the private sectors, leading to growing corporate investment in childcare. The World Bank Group reports that having a child under age five reduces Sri Lankan women's labor force participation by 7.4 percent when compared with women without young children, and this rate has been increasing over the years (IFC 2018). Therefore, childcare and early childhood programs are critical to the economic development of the

BOX 3.1

Expanding childcare services for government employees

The Singithi Daycare Center was established in 2018 with support from the Children's Secretariat to provide childcare services for children of government employees. The center currently has 16 children ranging from 2 to 12 years of age. The center is managed by one qualified preschool teacher and two caregivers. The caregivers have registered for the National Vocational Qualification Level 4 daycare provider training program and are aiming to complete the course in 2020. The center

is now looking to expand its services to include a preschool within the center. They see a clear demand for integrated services within the same center and feel that this would be more convenient for parents and beneficial for children. They plan to provide preschool services only to children who are also enrolled in childcare. They are planning a separate space to conduct preschool classes. They are confident that enrollment will increase with this expansion.

country, and the International Monetary Fund reports that Sri Lanka can raise its long-term GDP by up to 20 percent by closing the gender gap in the workforce (IFC 2018).

The impact on business has led to increasing private sector investment in childcare services, and many private sector employers now provide various childcare options to employees as a recruitment and retention strategy. Companies have adopted a number of models, including on-site, off-site, and tie-in arrangements in which private sector companies outsource the management of centers to professional preschool and childcare service providers. CeeBees Preschool and Childcare Centers, for instance, provide childcare services to several high-profile corporate clients, including LSEG Technology, MAS Holdings, and WSO2 Technology, and eligible employees of these companies can enroll children in any CeeBees center. Other companies, such as Unilever and Brandix, have outsourced the management of their on-site centers (IFC 2018). Most employers provide services either free of charge or at a subsidized rate, and many of the larger corporate childcare centers provide integrated care with both childcare and preschool facilities. There are also several examples of successful public-private partnerships in the provision of childcare services, some of which are based on the workplace consortium model, in which several employers share the cost of running a childcare facility. Following the success of such facilities established in the Katunayake and Biyagama Export Zones, the municipality of Colombo is now looking to establish a workplace childcare consortium for the hospitality industry (see box 3.2 for details).

Although employer-supported childcare is a step in the right direction, it does not reach parents employed in the informal sector, which is an important consideration for Sri Lanka, where 66 percent of employed people work in informal work arrangements (Gunatilaka 2008). Providing affordable childcare options to accommodate the needs of parents working in the informal sector is a priority for Sri Lanka, and extending such services could improve outcomes for both parents and children.

ECCE in the plantation sector

The ECCE facilities provided in the plantation sector differ from the services provided in the rest of the country. The plantation areas in Sri Lanka occupy a

BOX 3.2

Public-private partnerships for childcare services

The childcare facility in the Katunayake Special Economic Zone was established in 2015 to support the demand for childcare for employees of garment factories in the zone. A total of 72 children are enrolled in the center, which is managed by a supervisor, four qualified preschool teachers, and four caregivers. The center was set up with funding from the Sri Lanka Board of Investment and is run on enrollment fees

that are paid either by parents or by the firms. The monthly fee is 3,000 Sri Lanka rupees per child, and different employers have different subsidy models ranging from no support to full support. This is an example of a successful workplace consortium model, and in 2018 the Board of Investment opened a second childcare center in the Biyagama Export Processing Zone.

Source: IFC 2018.

land area of about 230,000 hectares and are home to a population of approximately 1 million people.² Before the nationalization of plantations in the 1970s, the social welfare of estate communities was the responsibility of the plantation companies. With the nationalization of plantations, public services, including health care and education, were gradually opened up to plantation communities. Today, most plantations are managed by regional plantation companies, which play a major role in the provision of ECCE services to plantation communities.

Childcare services in the plantations evolved as a result of necessity. In many families, both parents work on the estates, and the estate management was compelled to provide some option for childcare during working hours. A primitive version of a childcare center was first introduced nearly a century ago to meet this need. Known by the community as *pulle madu*, these facilities were usually a single room where the workers' children would be taken care of by a retired worker or *pulle amma*. These centers provided only child-minding services, with no attention given to the stimulation, growth, and development of the children. At the time, plantation communities did not have access to public schools, and older children attended estate schools, which were also run by estate workers. With the nationalization of plantations in the 1970s, the situation began to change, and free education facilities were extended to the plantations. As children started enrolling in primary and secondary schools, there was demand from the community for better early education services that would prepare children for primary school. In response, the estate management developed the *pulle madu* into crèches and replaced the *pulle amma* with a crèche attendant, usually a young girl with secondary education who was given basic training.

With the political and social changes that have emerged as a result of the privatization of plantations in 1992, childcare facilities began to develop, and crèches evolved into child development centers (CDCs). The concept of CDCs was introduced by the Plantation Human Development Trust (PHDT) to provide for the holistic needs of children ages zero to five years (see box 3.3). The crèche attendant was replaced by a trained Child Development Officer (CDO), with Ordinary Level qualifications at a minimum. The PHDT also introduced a diploma course for CDOs, covering the basic skills and knowledge required to work with the zero-to-five age group. With the development of preschool education outside plantation areas, there has been demand for plantation companies

BOX 3.3

The Plantation Human Development Trust

The Plantation Human Development Trust (PHDT) was established in 1992 as a tripartite organization consisting of the government, regional plantation companies, and plantation trade unions to implement social development programs in estate communities. The PHDT has been instrumental in developing the early childhood care and education (ECCE) facilities in the estate sector and particularly in introducing the child development center (CDC) concept. By negotiating on

behalf of the communities, the PHDT has been able to secure support from the government and plantation companies to develop ECCE services through various programs, including a midday meal, home gardening, and a revolving fund for CDCs. To cater to the growing demand for ECCE services, some CDCs have started making room for children of nonworkers, and in 2019 about 30 percent of the children enrolled in CDCs were nonworkers' children.

to provide improved preschool services in the centers. The CDCs went beyond just childcare and began focusing on the holistic well-being and early education of young children. A preschool curriculum with age-based activities was introduced to centers. Changes were also introduced in the management of preschools, with parents and community committees becoming more involved. Today, the CDCs in plantations continue to function as the primary method of providing childcare and education.

The plantation CDCs that provide both childcare and preschool services to children from zero to five years are among the first integrated ECD centers in Sri Lanka. However, wide discrepancies in the facilities and in the quality of services provided in different centers are found. The level of integration also varies from center to center. In general, most centers provide childcare services for children under three and preschool and childcare services for children ages three to five. Many of the CDCs renovated under the World Bank-financed ECD project have designated areas for infants and toddlers and have facilities including breastfeeding areas, kitchenettes, and sleeping areas for children to enable the provision of childcare and education within the same premises. While they are at work between 6:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., parents leave their children at the CDCs. The preschool hours in CDCs are usually from 8:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Although there are no provisions or guidelines for conducting age-appropriate developmental activities for the younger cohort, in many CDCs the younger children do interact and engage in preschool activities on an informal level.

Based on their experience, some CDOs felt that the exposure has benefited the younger children and has had a positive impact on their development. The health and nutrition aspects in CDCs are managed by midwives who visit the centers every month. Despite limited structural integration in the holistic development of children, integrated service delivery has helped increase access to ECCE in plantations. The CDCs are delivering an essential service in the communities by providing affordable childcare, and the convenience for parents of being able to take

TABLE 3.2 Details of child development centers in plantation areas

Total number of children ages 0–4 years ^a in Sri Lanka (year)	705,986 (2001)
Total number of children ages 0–4 years ^b in Sri Lanka (year)	1,871,000 (2019)
Total number of children ages 0–5 years living in plantation areas	70,093
Total number of children ages 0–3 years living in plantation areas (%)	43,481 (62)
Total number of children ages 3–5 years living in plantation areas (%)	26,612 (38)
Total number of CDCs in plantation areas	1,368
Total number of CDOs and assistants	1,738
Total number of children enrolled in CDCs ^c (%)	30,213 (43)
Total number of nonworkers' children enrolled in CDCs (%)	9,149 (30)
Total number of children under 3 years enrolled in CDCs (%)	17,484 (58)
Total number of children 3–5 years enrolled in CDCs (%)	12,729 (42)

Source: Annual Health Return (AHR) 2018, PHDT. (The AHR is an internal planning document compiled by the PHDT and is not made available to the public. The information presented here has been provided upon the authorization of the Director General of the PHDT.)

Note: CDC = child development center; CDO = Child Development Officer; PHDT = Plantation Human Development Trust.

a. The 2001 census included data from only 18 of the 25 districts.

b. This figure is an estimate from the Department of Census and Statistics, mid-year population estimates by age group and sex, 2014–19.

c. This table only includes data on children enrolled in CDCs. In addition to this number, some children in plantation areas attend private preschools and preschools managed by nongovernmental organizations and religious organizations.

advantage of both childcare and preschool services in the same setting is a significant benefit. See table 3.2 for a snapshot of CDCs in plantation areas.

INTEGRATION OF ECCE SERVICES IN SRI LANKA

Structural integration

To understand the characteristics and level of structural integration in Sri Lanka's ECCE sector, this report uses the Reference Framework for Integration in ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) Systems proposed in the INTESYS Toolkit. Specifically, it examines Sri Lanka's progress in the seven key areas identified in the framework: leadership, service delivery, financing, communication and information sharing, workforce, time, and vision (Ionescu, Trikić, and Pinto 2017).

Leadership

The evolution of ECCE services in Sri Lanka follows the trajectory of a split system of childcare and education. ECCE was first introduced through the public health care system, which manages health and nutrition interventions for young children. Sri Lanka has well-established public health care infrastructure, and health care services during the early childhood period are provided through a network of public health midwives. The role of education in ECCE was first recognized in the General Education Reforms of 1997, which highlight the education sector's place in early development. These reforms identified the CS and the Non-Formal Education Branch of the MoE as the two institutions responsible for implementing ECE. With regard to child protection, the National Child Protection Agency (NCPA) was established in 1998 to formulate and enforce child protection laws (World Bank 2014). The ECCD Policy also recognizes the role of the Ministry of Social Empowerment and Welfare in providing ECCE services to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, particularly children with special needs. This ministry has established a model child guidance center and a resource center for children with special needs and conducts staff and preschool teacher training for special needs services. Although these milestones mark positive developments in the areas of child health, education, and protection, they also highlight the lack of a coordinated national approach to ECCE for the early years.

Coordination mechanisms and challenges in a multisectoral environment

Although it captures the holistic and integrated vision for ECCE in Sri Lanka, the National Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Policy also recognizes the multisectoral approach and calls for better coordination among ECCE stakeholders. A National Coordinating Committee and provincial, district, and village-level committees have been established through this policy, but the actual level of coordination and engagement of these committees is questionable (see section titled "The National ECCD Policy" for details). The roles and authority of central government and provincial authorities in relation to the implementation of the ECCD Policy and the delivery of services are unclear. While the policy recommends the establishment of coordinating committees at different levels of government, provincial authorities also have committees within their own structures, and there is no clear link or coordination between these

different committees. This lack of clarity in turn affects the allocation of finances and other resources and leads to duplication of functions. The policy framework is also lacking with regard to regulation of and coordination with the private sector. Considering that about 71 percent of preschools and 78 percent of childcare centers are managed by the private sector, it is imperative for the country to formulate a distinct regulatory framework for private providers.

The split and multisectoral nature of ECCE service provision is clearly demonstrated in the results of the World Bank's Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER)-ECD analysis conducted in Sri Lanka in 2014.³ SABER covers all sectors involved in ECCE and analyzes a country's performance in relation to three primary goals: establishing an enabling environment, monitoring and assuring quality, and widely implementing ECCE (World Bank 2014).

Sri Lanka received mixed results in the SABER-ECD analysis, achieving “established” or “advanced” scores for health, nutrition, and social protection policies and “latent” or “emerging” scores for ECE provision. The World Bank notes that, “while Sri Lanka has made progress in some aspects of the policy framework (including developing a multi-sectoral ECCE policy and establishing mechanisms for inter-sectoral coordination), the development of its sector-specific policies is highly imbalanced” (World Bank 2014, 13). While the provision of health and nutrition services, which are delivered through a well-established health system, is successful, Sri Lanka needs better policies and implementing mechanisms to ensure the inclusion of early education in ECCE. However, since 2014 measures have been introduced to streamline, standardize, and regulate ECE service provision. The revised National ECCD Policy of 2018 and the National Preschool Policy of 2019 are expected to bring about further improvements. In addition, the ECD project currently being implemented by the MWCASS has undertaken several initiatives, including teacher training, facility improvement, and the introduction of a management information system to improve the quality of ECE in the country.⁴

Issues concerning preschool education (ECE)⁵

Because preschool education has not traditionally been included under the education sector and the MoE, the delivery of early education and the structural mechanism for the provision of preschool education has been somewhat confused. One of the challenges in establishing a strong implementation structure for preschool education is that there is currently no clear precedent for state engagement in the provision of ECCE services because, unlike health and social services, ECCE, particularly early education, is not traditionally provided by the state. World Bank (2014, 13) notes that “the legal framework for ECD provision in Sri Lanka does not provide adequate clarity on the implementation structure on ECE and on who should take the lead role in implementing ECE.” A Preschool Education Policy was tabled by the MoE and approved by the Cabinet in December 2019. Changes in ministerial mandates introduced following the August 2020 Parliamentary Elections have brought ECCE under the purview of the MoE for the first time. The MWCA has been named as a State Ministry under the MoE, and a major reorganization of the ECCE implementation structure is under way. In the past, the lack of institutionalized roles and responsibilities regarding preschool education had been a major challenge to the provision of holistic and integrated services. With the recent changes, it is anticipated that the MoE will take the lead in implementing ECE (see section titled “Recent Changes in Ministerial Mandates”).

Provincial Councils have the authority to manage preschools within their respective provinces, and many provinces have developed their own preschool curricula and regulations. In addition, many private preschools use their own curriculum, and many of these schools cater to parental demand for academic development, which can be attributed to the entrance requirements for private primary schools. This is particularly true of schools in urban areas, which have highly competitive entrance processes and require a high level of academic competency from entrance candidates. The World Bank (2014, E5) finds that “most households cite preparation for primary school as the main reason for sending their children to preschool...there is thus a tendency among parents to view preschools as centers for preparing their children academically for primary school rather than as a place for promoting the holistic development of young children.”

A concentration on academic instruction, which deviates from the concept of holistic child development, is a consequence of the disconnect between preschool and primary school caused by the fact that preschools and primary schools have until recently come under the purview of two different entities. The varying standards and expectations of preschool education prevent children from experiencing a smooth transition from preschool to primary school. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of a standard ECE curriculum that encompasses the different components of age-appropriate and holistic early education. In 2019 the CS began developing a National ECCE Curriculum to bring direction and standards in the provision of ECE.

The National Policy on Preschool Education 2019

The need for better regulation and implementation of ECE has been acknowledged at the national and provincial levels, and in 2019 Sri Lanka reached a significant milestone in the ECE sector when the National Education Commission (NEC) finalized the country’s first National Policy on Preschool Education (see box 3.4). According to NEC Act No. 19 of 1991, the NEC is mandated to “make recommendations to the President on educational policy in all its aspects, with a view to ensuring continuum in education policy and enabling the education system to respond to changing needs in society, including an immediate review of

BOX 3.4

The significance of a national policy

The significance of the National Policy on Preschool Education is that it overrides any provincial policies on preschool education and thereby introduces a higher level of authority to regulate and standardize preschool service provision across the country. The overriding authority of national education policies was upheld in the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka (Supreme Court Application 300/2000, August 23, 2000), wherein the judge upheld that education-specific devolved powers to Provincial Councils must

conform with national policy. This decision has bearing on the authority of the National Policy on Preschool Education. In October 2019, the NEC submitted the preschool education policy for presidential approval. The MoE also tabled the National Policy on Preschool Education. The Cabinet approved the MoE policy in December 2019. The policy is expected to improve policy coherence between central and provincial authorities, and to lay the foundation for more standardized preschool services in the country.

educational policy and plan or plans and the making of recommendations to the President, on a comprehensive national education policy” (NEC 2014).⁶

In October 2019, the NEC submitted the preschool education policy for presidential approval. Subsequently, the MoE also put forward a National Policy on Preschool Education in an effort to bring ECE under the purview of the MoE. The MoE policy received Cabinet approval in December 2019. The move to develop a national policy on preschool education is testament to the growing recognition and appreciation of the benefits of age-appropriate education and development in the early years and the need for a more integrated approach to ECE. Provincial authorities will now be required to revise their own policies and regulations to fall in line with the requirements of the national policy.

Multiple administrative authorities

While the National ECCD Policy covers the entire early childhood period from zero to five years, in practice there is a distinct separation between children of the under-three and three-to-five age groups and the authorities that govern the different cohorts. Children from zero to three years are generally enrolled in childcare centers while children who are three to five years attend preschools and sometimes childcare centers in the afterschool hours. Preschools come under the authority of the CS while childcare centers are regulated by the NCPA of the MWCASS. The existence of multiple administrative authorities can be a challenge to integration, particularly in cases in which the coordination mechanisms between the authorities are inadequate. The NCPA is charged with monitoring and regulating childcare centers in coordination with provincial authorities. At the ground level, this means that CDOs attached to the NCPA monitor childcare centers, while ECD Officers attached to the CS and the provincial authorities monitor preschools. This situation can result in challenges, particularly in combination centers that have both childcare and preschool facilities, and the lack of coordination between these two categories of officers can be an impediment to effective monitoring and regulation.

The minimum standards and guidelines for childcare centers and preschools also differ from each other. Preschools are required to adhere to the guidelines prepared by the CS (and corresponding provincial guidelines), whereas childcare centers adhere to the National Daycare Guidelines, formulated by the NCPA and approved by the Cabinet in 2017. The guidelines clearly apply to combination centers or Type 1 childcare centers, defined as centers “which accommodate Infants, Toddlers, Pre-schoolers and School-Aged Children, where the Centre may or may not function as a preschool for children between 7.00 a.m. and 12.00 p.m.” (MWCADZD 2019a, 4).

In 2019, the NCPA drafted a National Policy for Child Daycare Centers with a vision to “ensure the availability of quality, affordable and accessible Day Care services in Sri Lanka to protect the rights and wellbeing of all children that are placed in Day Care Centers, and also to encourage parents (especially mothers) to take up or return to employment by the availability of Day Care services” (MWCADZD 2019b). This policy applies to different types of childcare services (as defined in the policy) and covers all children from 3 months to 16 years of age. The policy recognizes the multisectoral nature of childcare service provision and explicitly mentions the key government ministries and stakeholders to be involved in the regulatory framework. The policy also holds Provincial Councils and local governments responsible for implementing the provisions of the policy

and for using it as a guideline for provincial-level activities and projects (MWCADZD 2019b). The NCPA has been tasked with the monitoring of childcare centers and implementation of the policy. Although this policy applies only to childcare centers, it clearly recognizes and brings under its purview combination childcare-preschool centers.

Although the CS has been recognized as the lead agency in the ECCE sector in Sri Lanka, care and education services continue to be provided by multiple actors, and it is the lack of coordination and cooperation among key stakeholders that is a challenge to the provision of holistic services. The ECCE policy-making environment exhibits significant inconsistencies. While the health and nutrition components of ECCE are functioning efficiently within a well-established system, the education component is less clear-cut. This divide between childcare and education service provision, and the differing policies and provisions that apply to the respective sectors, are a challenge to structural integration and the provision of integrated ECCE services. Structural integration is also made more difficult by the lack of clarity regarding the regulatory authority and division of implementation responsibilities between the central and provincial governments and the lack of coordination with and regulation of the private sector.

Service delivery

Types of ECCE service providers

Three main types of institutions provide ECCE services in Sri Lanka: preschools, childcare centers, and combination ECD centers providing both preschool and childcare services. In addition, a limited number of home-based care programs are available. Most centers in the country are preschools, which serve children from ages three to five years. According to the ECD census of 2016, only 2 percent of children enrolled in preschools were under age three (MWCA 2016b). For the most part, ECE is provided through private and public preschools and childcare is provided by private and public childcare centers. However, a few centers provide both preschool and childcare services although not necessarily to the same group of children. According to the World Bank, in 2013 an estimated 11 percent of centers were combination childcare-preschool centers (MWCADZD 2019b). These centers function as preschools for children of the three-to-five age group (some also have “play school” groups for children as young as one year) and provide childcare services for younger children on the same premises. In addition, school-going children also attend childcare centers after school hours.

About 75 percent of preschools have a teaching time of four hours, but some centers also provide childcare services after school hours (MWCA 2016b). In this arrangement, the center serves as a preschool for a portion of the day and as a childcare center for the remainder of the day. Other centers, similar to the CDCs in plantation areas, provide childcare and preschool services simultaneously for different groups of children. Despite some differences in how they operate, most centers that provide both childcare and preschool services have a similar approach to ECCE, in that childcare and education function in separate spheres within the same center. Thus, the level of integration between care and education is limited, even within centers that are based on an integrated model. See tables 3.3–3.5 for information about preschools and childcare centers in Sri Lanka.

TABLE 3.3 Details of early childhood development centers (preschools)

Total number of ECD centers	19,668
Percentage of privately run centers	70.8
Percentage of government-run centers	19.8
Percentage of centers run by religious institutions	6.5
Percentage of centers run by nongovernmental organizations	3.0
Percentage of centers registered under Provincial Councils	73.0

Source: MWCA 2016b.

Type of provision refers to the service model through which ECCE services are delivered. Kaga, Bennett, and Moss (2010, 27) describe this as “to what extent have different forms of provision for different age groups or purposes been replaced by more integrated forms of provision.” In Sri Lanka, ECCE services are provided primarily through preschools, childcare centers, and, because of the recent move toward a more integrated service model in the form of ECD centers, childcare-preschool affiliations and child development centers in plantations. However, Kaga, Bennett, and Moss (2010) argue that the type of service provision does not determine the depth of integration in a country and that meaningful integration can be achieved even with diverse service provision options.

While countries such as Finland have deeply integrated national systems with one service model of age-integrated centers, other countries, such as Denmark and New Zealand, have well-integrated systems with different types of service models, including age-segregated centers (Kaga, Bennett, and Moss 2010). This fact is pertinent to Sri Lanka. As discussed in the remainder of the report, Sri Lanka is moving toward more integrated centers, yet the degree of integration within centers and at the national level is still limited. Therefore, the introduction of integrated centers (by age and purpose) alone is not an indicator of integration at the national level. It could, however, be an indicator of a change in mindset, an acceptance of the need for better integration, and in this sense a first step toward meaningful integration.

Access to ECCE services

With regard to access, preschools and childcare centers function as separate entities. The overall national enrollment rate for preschool-age children is 56 percent (table 3.4), although there are wide regional disparities in enrollment. Enrollment rates in the rural and estate sectors were recorded at 48 percent and 44 percent, respectively (MWCA 2016b). Enrollment in preschools also varies by age, with higher levels of enrollment for children in the four-to-five age group, supporting the notion that many parents send children to preschool as preparation for primary school. Enrollment at the national level was 81 percent for children age five years, 64 percent for children age four years, 23 percent for children age three years, and only 3 percent for children age two years (MWCA 2016b). ECCE services are provided in childcare centers as well as in preschools. The National Survey on Early Childhood Development conducted in 2010 (MWCA 2010) collected information from 448 childcare centers in the country (table 3.5).² A total of 5,567 children were enrolled in these centers—24.9 percent of these children were between one and two years and

TABLE 3.4 Details of children enrolled in preschools

Total number of children ages 0–4 years (2001) ^a	705,986
Total number of children ages 0–4 years (2019) ^b	1,871,000
Total number of children attending preschools (2–5 years)	578,160
Overall enrollment of preschool-age children (3–5 years) (percentage of children)	56.0
Percentage of children enrolled who are 5+ years of age	47.6
Percentage of children enrolled who are 4+ years of age	37.3
Percentage of children enrolled who are 3+ years of age	13.3
Percentage of children enrolled who are 2+ years of age	1.8

Source: MWCA 2016b.

a. The 2001 census included data from only 18 of the 25 districts.

b. This figure is an estimate from the Department of Census and Statistics, midyear population estimates by age group and sex, 2014–19.

TABLE 3.5 Details of childcare centers

Total number of childcare centers included in the census ^a	448
Number of privately run centers (%)	347 (78)
Number of public centers (%)	42 (9)
Number of centers run by religious institutions (%)	12 (3)
Number of centers run by nongovernmental organizations (%)	22 (5)
Total number of children in childcare centers (2–5 years)	5,567

Source: MWCA 2010.

Note: The National Census on Early Childhood Development conducted in 2010 is currently the only source of information on childcare centers in Sri Lanka. The 2016 National Census on Early Childhood Development Centers (MWCA 2016b) covered only preschools and early childhood development centers, not childcare centers. Though there are gaps in the information, and the figures are somewhat outdated, the data provide a general idea of the number of childcare centers operating in the country.

a. The National Census on Early Childhood Development 2010 was conducted in seven of the nine provinces in Sri Lanka, with limited representation in some of the seven provinces.

24.8 percent were between two and three years. Only 6.5 percent of children were older than five years. There were, however, variations in the age ranges in different provinces (MWCA 2010). Some 43 percent of total childcare centers were in estate areas and 60 percent of children enrolled in childcare were from the estate sector (MWCA 2010).

Although current enrollment rates appear to suggest higher demand for preschools than for childcare centers, a change in this situation can be anticipated. Sri Lanka has the most rapidly aging population in South Asia, and aging coupled with the increase in noncommunicable diseases will have a major impact on dependency ratios and family support structures (UNFPA 2017). As extended family support decreases and families become less able to care for young children at home, the demand for childcare is likely to increase. As more women opt out of the labor market to take on family responsibilities, employers will be more willing to invest in childcare for their employees. This trend is already under way, and many private sector companies and government offices have started introducing childcare facilities in the workplace.

In the public sector, the CS introduced a program in 2014 to expand ECCE facilities by establishing childcare centers for the children of government employees.

Although these centers began with childcare services, many are now expanding to include preschools as well (see box 3.1, earlier in this chapter). Some centers have seen an increase in enrollment after preschool facilities were added, which can be attributed to the fact that the integrated service model eliminates the need for drop off and pickup between preschool and childcare, making access more practical and convenient for parents. If done well, this model can also facilitate a smoother transition for children. In this sense, societal demands are paving the way for more integration in ECCE centers. A similar situation was seen in the plantation CDCs, which began with childcare services and developed into integrated child development centers in response to the growing demand for preschool facilities.

Determinants of access

Other factors influencing access to preschools in Sri Lanka include household socioeconomic status and the location (urban, rural, or estate) of the household. The ECD census of 2016 (MWCA 2016b) found that children from wealthier households are more likely to attend preschools and that children from urban areas (68 percent) are more likely to attend than children from rural (48 percent) and estate (44 percent) areas. According to the census, 52.5 percent of preschool-age children in the rural sector and 56.1 percent in the estate sector are not enrolled in preschool. By contrast, the percentage of children enrolled in childcare centers was lowest in urban areas (12 percent) and highest in estate areas (60 percent). The 2010 survey found that children enrolled in childcare centers were predominantly from lower-middle-income (57 percent) and lower-income (19 percent) families (MWCA 2010). The data suggest that childcare is the primary concern in estate areas, whereas the benefits of preschool are more recognized in urban areas. It can also be deduced that the majority of children enrolled in estate childcare centers are in the zero-to-three age group. With the introduction of the CDC model and the development of preschool facilities, however, more children have been accessing preschool facilities in CDCs. With more CDCs being developed under the ECD project, it is expected that enrollment rates in these areas will increase further.

Financing

Sri Lanka's level of public investment in ECCE is relatively low. Public expenditure on ECCE was 0.0001 percent of GDP in 2011/12, compared with an average public expenditure (among middle-income countries) of 0.03 percent (World Bank 2014). The ECCE budget, however, does not cover early childhood health and nutrition services, which are delivered through the health sector (World Bank 2014). Public funding for ECE is not included in the public education expenditure allocated to the MoE. Instead, ECE funding is allocated to the CS and other institutions involved in the delivery of ECCE services. This budgetary allocation reinforces the split in the structural integration and in the provision of care and education services. According to the World Bank (2014, 33), "global trends indicate that where ECCE is free, it may be overused, but without public funding ECE is often unsustainable and highly inequitable." The vast majority of ECCE services in Sri Lanka are privately financed, and it is estimated that 85 percent of centers (including childcare centers) levy fees (World Bank 2014). As such, a combination of public and private funding sources and mechanisms must

be considered when developing the ECCE sector in the country. Public funding is specifically important in creating more equity in ECCE services and in expanding services to disadvantaged populations.

Communication and information sharing

Minimum standards for preschools and childcare centers

With the increasing awareness and acceptance of the benefits of ECCE, there has been a gradual upswing in efforts to regulate and standardize ECCE services. The need for regulation of the ECCE sector stems from recognition of the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the ad hoc delivery of services. Standardization efforts have been based on the concept of holistic child development, and these efforts have focused on creating a standard ECCE framework to guide service providers in delivering both the childcare and the education required for holistic child development. While the revision to the National ECCD Policy and the strengthening of the National Coordinating Committee have helped these efforts, the role of provincial authorities has remained a challenge to standardization. Because of the devolved nature of the ECCE sector, the CS has focused on developing guidelines and standards, which can in turn be adapted and enforced by provincial authorities. The Guidelines for Child Development Centers were introduced in 2006 to ensure that the basic needs and safety of children were met in ECD centers. Although the guidelines include a set of minimum standards for child development centers, these standards deal primarily with the infrastructure and facilities of centers and not with teaching and learning standards.

The National Policy on Preschool Education will have a major impact on the regulation of teaching and learning standards in preschools. The primary aim of the policy is to create the conditions to develop and regulate the preschool sector, to ensure that all preschools in the country meet predetermined quality standards. Because provincial policies are required to be in line with national education policies, the National Policy on Preschool Education has the potential to have a significant impact on standardization of the sector.

Minimum standards for childcare centers are set out in the National Daycare Guidelines, formulated by the NCPA in 2017. To introduce more holistic childcare, the guidelines indicate that centers are charged with providing both childcare and education. Section 7: Care, Learning, and Play, for instance, deals with the requirement that centers provide age-appropriate learning material and introduce suitable activities to promote the holistic growth of children (MWCADZD 2019a). In addition to the general guidelines provided in this section on how to promote growth and development, specific care instructions are provided for different age groups. Each set of guidelines contains age-appropriate activities and stimuli, as well as care instructions. Thus, there is some effort to introduce principles of integration and holistic development in childcare settings that are not preschools.

Early Childhood Development Standards for Sri Lankan children

The Early Childhood Development Standards for Sri Lankan children ages three to five were published in 2016 and approved by the Cabinet in 2017. The purpose of these standards is to “introduce culturally valid standards for development and

learning of children from 3–5 years, which will bring about a qualitative change in learning and development of all Sri Lankan children through awareness raising in parents, caregivers and teachers” (MWCA 2016a, 8). The Early Childhood Development Standards were developed for three distinct categories: standards for the zero-to-three age group were developed by the Family Health Bureau, standards for the three-to-five age group were developed by the CS, and standards for the five-to-eight age group were developed by the MoE. The standards were developed through a collaborative process to facilitate a smooth transition from one age category to another. The primary objective of the standards is to serve as a guideline for preschool programs and to help teachers understand and promote the holistic development of children, thus promoting an integrated approach to child development. To put these standards into practice, the CS conducted training programs for ECD Officers, who in turn trained preschool teachers. The CS also published a teachers’ guide, which provides detailed guidelines on how to promote holistic development through preschool activities.

Child development assessments

In 2018, the CS went a step further by introducing child development assessments that go hand in hand with the standards. Supported by the ECD project, the CS developed a comprehensive system for assessing the learning and developmental standards for individual children at the preschool level with separate assessment toolkits for ages three to four and four to five. These assessments, which are based on the developmental milestones identified in the standards, are meant to guide preschool teachers in regularly adapting teaching methods to meet the developmental needs of the students. The assessment package includes a detailed explanation of the assessment process and a teachers’ guide to support implementation. The CS had facilitated training for 4,036 teachers on child development assessments as of late 2019, and the assessments have been implemented in approximately 3,800 ECD centers as of mid 2020.

National Preschool Curriculum Framework

The preschool policy also calls for a developmentally appropriate national curriculum framework for preschool education. The education component of ECCE is handled primarily by provincial education authorities, with an advisory role played by the MoE. Most preschools (73 percent) use some type of instruction manual or guide as curriculum, and of the centers that did use a guide, 83.7 percent used instruction manuals published by the provincial ECD authority or the provincial MoE (MWCA 2016b). The lack of a standard national preschool curriculum has been identified as a major gap in the ECE sector and one of the main causes for the varying standards among preschools.

The CS is currently addressing the gap, with the introduction of the first-ever National Preschool Curriculum. The curriculum, which is under development as of mid-2020, will be an open framework curriculum, which leaves room for adaptation. Provincial authorities can use the common framework as a guideline for developing their own curricula to suit their specific needs and context, and the common framework will be applicable to all types of preschools and early learning models within provinces. Although provincial authorities are not legally bound to adopt this framework, the National Coordinating Committee is expected to facilitate a common agreement with provinces to accept this framework as the national standard for the preschool curriculum.

A national curriculum framework will create conditions for better regulation of the quality of teaching and learning in preschools. This curriculum also promotes and provides guidance for inclusive ECE, wherein children with special needs are given due attention and developmental support. Sri Lanka could draw on international experience for promoting the adoption and application of a national curriculum framework. It would also be prudent to link the new curriculum with the primary school curriculum to facilitate a learning continuum for the early years. The Irish example of curriculum development is pertinent to this point, and Ireland has also introduced a National Transition Initiative aimed at integrating information transfer between the ECCE and primary school sectors (European Commission 2018). Similar efforts would serve Sri Lanka well in the long term and pave the way for a smoother transition for both children and teachers. Ireland's efforts in promoting the Aistear Framework, for instance, included the introduction of a network of Aistear tutors to support teachers in applying the framework and the development of an online Aistear toolkit (see the discussion on Ireland in appendix A).

Guidelines and quality standards for the under-three cohort

The curricula currently used in ECD centers most often apply to children in the three-to-five age group, and most centers, even integrated centers that enroll children of the zero-to-three age group (for childcare, preschool, or both), do not have a separate teaching-learning curriculum for the younger children. Culturally, many Sri Lankans believe that young children do best with their parents and families, and there is a somewhat negative connotation to center-based education for infants. This thinking aligns with global evidence that suggests that home-based care provided by parents or caregivers allows children to develop important bonds and secure attachments with adults and foster early emotional development. The quality of home-based care, however, depends on the caregiver's responsiveness to the child. In Sri Lanka's case, a differentiation must also be made between children who receive sufficient care and attention in their home settings and those who do not, and policy makers must consider the needs of parents who are unable to provide or access high-quality home-based childcare. Many children from disadvantaged backgrounds grow up in unsafe and unsuitable environments and do not get the stimulation, care, and development support they need in their early years. For such children, the stimulation, socialization, and care they receive in an early childhood setting could lead to major advantages in their school readiness and prospects. In such cases, the risk of "schoolification" must be weighed against the risks of neglect in the early years.

Although it is tempting to dismiss the need for curriculum for infants, it is important to understand the term "education" for infants as stimulation and support to reach their developmental potential. A curriculum in that sense refers merely to guidelines and routines that can help caregivers create a nurturing and stimulating environment for infants and toddlers. Infants are generally seen as needing care or minding and do not engage in any specific age-appropriate developmental activities. Teachers have observed that younger children learn by interacting with older children while they work in their classrooms, and many felt that this type of informal interaction was beneficial to the younger children and had a positive impact on their development. At present, most centers are integrated only in the mix of age groups of children attending, and curriculum, childcare, and education are still generally provided in separate spheres within

the centers. The under-three age group receives childcare, while the three-to-five age group receives education with some aspect of childcare. This is particularly true of the ECD centers in plantation areas.

As centers move toward integration and the inclusion of children under age three, the regulation of quality standards and the indicators used to measure quality will need to be adapted. Indicators such as child-to-teacher ratios and teaching and learning material will differ based on the age ranges of the children. In Sri Lanka, the move toward standardization and regulation should be extended to children in the under-three age group. Proper regulation is needed to ensure that the younger children in childcare centers or preschools also receive the stimulation they need for holistic development. A UNESCO study (Bennett and Kaga 2010) finds that integrating ECCE under the education sphere was especially beneficial to children younger than three years. Many of the countries that had integrated ECCE services under education ministries had separate curricula for children under three. Many of these countries also had integrated early years professions, where graduates were qualified to work with children both under three and over three years.

Workforce

Minimum qualifications for teachers and caregivers

The quality of the ECCE sector in a country depends on the availability of qualified and well-trained ECCE professionals. The qualifications and professional training of ECCE teachers and caregivers are a concern in Sri Lanka. According to the Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Centers, preschool teachers are required to have passed the Ordinary Level Examination, with a minimum of one year of professional training. Although the vast majority of teachers have Advanced Level or lower qualifications, most have some level of professional training. The situation is somewhat different for childcare providers, who are, in general, less qualified than preschool teachers. About 18 percent of caregivers have lower than Ordinary Level qualifications (compared with 3.5 percent of preschool teachers) and 43 percent have not undergone any professional training (compared with 9.5 percent of preschool teachers) (MWCA 2010, 2016b) (tables 3.6 and 3.7). Employers generally require higher qualifications for preschool teachers, while caregivers are not always required to be qualified or to have undergone any training. This situation could also reflect the more

TABLE 3.6 Details of the early childhood development workforce in preschools

Total number of preschool employees	45,941
Percentage of teachers with less than Ordinary Level qualifications	3.5
Percentage of teachers with Ordinary Level qualifications	33.6
Percentage of teachers with Advanced Level qualifications	59.9
Percentage of teachers with graduate degrees or above	3.0
Percentage of teachers with 2 or more years of professional training	33.2
Percentage of teachers with 1–2 years of professional training	49.7
Percentage of teachers with 3–6 months of professional training	7.6
Percentage of teachers with no professional training	9.5

Source: MWCA 2016b.

TABLE 3.7 Details of the early childhood development workforce in childcare centers

Total number of caregivers	1,274
Percentage of caregivers with less than Ordinary Level qualifications	18
Percentage of caregivers with Ordinary Level qualifications	41
Percentage of caregivers with Advanced Level qualifications	38
Percentage of caregivers with graduate degrees	3
Percentage of caregivers with 2 or more years of professional training	6
Percentage of caregivers with 1–2 years of professional training	26
Percentage of caregivers with 3–6 months of professional training	11
Percentage of caregivers with less than 3 months of training	14
Percentage of caregivers with no professional training	43

Source: MWCA 2010.

Note: Of the 1,274 caregivers employed in childcare centers only 612 responded to questions on the level of training received. The figures on caregiver qualifications presented in this table reflect the responses received from this group of caregivers.

established regulatory and policy environment for preschools in comparison with childcare centers.

Training opportunities for childcare providers

Steps are being taken to introduce standards to the childcare sector and to expand caregiver training. In 2016, the NCPA drafted a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 4 Curriculum for General Childcare, which is intended for childcare providers and covers the zero-to-three age group. The NCPA is collaborating with the National Apprenticeship and Industrial Training Authority, the Vocational Training Authority, and the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission to make this program accessible to childcare providers around the country. Although the recently introduced Guidelines for Daycare Centers identify the NVQ Level 4 certification as a minimum standard for childcare providers, this regulation has not yet been properly enforced. The ECD project is supporting this endeavor by facilitating NVQ Level 4 training for childcare providers and preschool teachers who are interested in expanding to include childcare services. For many countries, one consequence of adopting an integrated ECCE system has been the emergence of an integrated ECD profession that trains teachers to work with both zero-to-three and three-to-five age groups. Sri Lanka currently conducts separate training programs for preschool teachers and childcare providers, and there are no graduate-level courses for childcare providers. As the childcare sector develops, however, ensuring that training opportunities and comprehensive childcare courses are available in the country becomes important, and it would serve Sri Lanka well to address this concern at the outset. The Brazilian experience demonstrates the problems associated with inadequate training opportunities for all ECCE service categories. In 2003, 71 percent of Brazilian child caregivers did not have the required secondary education certificate, and teacher training institutions in the country did not cover the zero-to-three age group or provide teachers with the opportunity to learn about development and learning specific to this age group. A similar finding was noted at the university level, where there was no specialization in the zero-to-three age group requirements (UNESCO 2006).

TABLE 3.8 Details of caregivers who serve at both the preschool and childcare center

CAREGIVER SERVES AT BOTH PRESCHOOL AND CHILDCARE CENTER?	PERCENT
Yes	83
No	15
No response	2

Source: MWCA 2010.

Staff capacity and teacher-to-child ratios

One of the criticisms of the combined centers currently operating in Sri Lanka is the lack of dedicated professionals to serve the different age groups and needs of children. Childcare centers are often affiliated with preschools, and in many cases the same teachers and caregivers work in both the school and after-school hours in the childcare center (table 3.8). This situation is less than optimal and is not conducive to holistic child development. Most teachers and caregivers are not trained in childcare (particularly for the under-three age group), and do not adhere to daycare guidelines. Teachers often continue school activities to keep children occupied, and the resulting lack of differentiation between school hours and after-school hours can be detrimental to holistic child development. The teacher-to-child ratio is also a concern because adequate staff numbers are required to ensure the safety and well-being of children. Although the new daycare guidelines stipulate age-specific standards and coordinating teacher-to-child ratios for childcare centers, the majority of centers do not adhere to these requirements. As more centers move toward integrated service provision, the availability of an adequate number of qualified staff will be a key concern for ECCE authorities, and it is imperative that the necessary laws be introduced.

Vision (conceptual integration)

Although much remains to be done to create the structure for integration, Sri Lanka has demonstrated a growing trend toward conceptual integration in the ECCE sector. ECCE policies and perceptions are evolving more in line with a holistic or integrated approach, and these concepts have begun to translate into practice. Despite the administrative separation of childcare and education, Sri Lanka's ECCE sector has shown signs of moving toward a more integrated model of service provision. The National ECD Policy of 2004 introduced the term "early childhood development centers" to replace the term "preschools," to change the perception of preschool education. The term deviates from the view that preschools are merely miniature schools, aimed at teaching young children to read and write, and recognizes that they need to be child-friendly institutions encouraging the holistic development of young children.

Although the Sri Lankan model is somewhat different from other examples of integrated systems, in which integration happens at both an administrative level and a conceptual level, the progress made in the past decade speaks to the potential of this model within the Sri Lankan context. It must also be noted that the ECCE sector itself is relatively new in Sri Lanka and is only now developing to meet changing societal needs. Issues such as population aging and

noncommunicable disease–related mortality and morbidity have led to changes in traditional family support structures, and working parents are compelled to look outside the home for childcare support. Sri Lanka is still laying the groundwork for a strong ECCE sector, and laws, policies, and regulations are now being introduced and revised as necessary.

In gaining an understanding of the multisectoral context of ECCE in Sri Lanka, it is important to recognize that ECCE is an emerging field. Some stakeholders in the ECCE environment are functioning within strong, well-established systems. Sri Lanka’s maternal and child health (MCH) system, for instance, is world renowned for its success in providing health services at the community level. Because early childhood comes under the purview of child health, the health component of ECCE is managed by the Family Health Bureau, which is responsible for MCH services. Although this deviates from the integrated model in which childcare and education usually come under the same authority, for Sri Lanka this could be a strength. Administratively speaking, removing ECCE from the MCH system and placing it under its own administrative authority would be a mammoth task and is likely to be counterproductive. The health component of ECCE is being handled efficiently and effectively by the most competent authority in the country, and redirecting this authority to achieve better integration may not be advisable. Improving collaboration and drawing on the benefits from existing systems would better serve the sector. However, it is important to recognize that better coordination and collaboration among the key actors in the ECCE environment is needed.

For an integrated model to succeed, individual and collective action must be complementary to enhance comprehensive services for children. Better coordination and collaboration are rooted in strong legal provisions, policies, and regulations that clearly specify the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, ensure their accountability, and establish the path for a collective approach. At present, Sri Lanka does not have the necessary legal foundation to implement an effective integrated system. There is no ECD act, and the provincial statutes on ECD vary in quality, content, and enforcement. However, the country is moving in the right direction. The revised ECCD Policy was approved in 2019, and an ECD act is in the pipeline. Some provincial authorities have introduced comprehensive statutes and accompanying regulations for ECD centers. The National ECD Coordinating Committee has been established, and lower-level coordinating mechanisms are being put in place. Within this setting, the World Bank–financed ECD project is providing extensive support in developing ECCE facilities, curricula, and teacher competencies.

The new policies, guidelines, and regulations on ECCE are based on the integrated approach and focus on the comprehensive provision of ECCE services. This shift in thinking is an important first step toward creating an integrated ECCE service sector. Along with this shift, the concept of integrated ECD centers is also growing. Many service providers—both within and outside the plantations—are now moving toward the integrated service model to serve the needs of children ages zero to five. Under the ECD project, the government is constructing new ECD centers in 185 unserved and underserved locations throughout the country. These centers will include both childcare and preschool facilities, will be run by qualified staff, and will serve as model centers within the provinces. The CS is also backing the establishment of integrated centers and has been encouraging the childcare centers it supports to expand to include preschools. In the plantations, 140 new CDCs are being built and 175 CDCs are being

renovated under the ECD project. Integrated centers are also being established by private institutions to satisfy the growing demand for integrated childcare.

KEY CHALLENGES IN SRI LANKA'S ECCE SECTOR

Although many public and private centers are now moving toward integrated service models that include both childcare and preschool services, the level of integration within these centers is insufficient. Although they do provide childcare and education under one roof, in practice most centers have a long way to go in applying meaningful integrated ECCE. A few of the key challenges in Sri Lanka's ECCE sector are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Limited adherence to minimum quality standards

Although efforts have been made to introduce minimum quality standards in ECD settings, adherence to these standards is limited. The Guidelines for Child Development Centers introduced in 2006 set out minimum standards for preschools and ECD centers, and the National Daycare Guidelines introduced in 2017 set out the minimum standards for childcare centers. Along with these central government-level standards, provincial authorities can also introduce their own standards within each province. This duplication has led to difficulties in enforcing uniform standards across the country, exacerbated by the lack of effective enforcement and monitoring mechanisms and the unsatisfactory registration system for preschools and childcare centers. The standards themselves require some level of revision to ensure that they include clauses on both material standards and the quality of childcare and education.

Lack of facilities

The availability of necessary facilities to provide integrated services in centers remains a challenge. Although the potential for financial gain has led to growing interest in integrated service models, many centers that offer integrated services do so without the required space, infrastructure, and facilities. In many cases, one room in a preschool is designated for infants and younger children, and the preschool classroom is converted into childcare space after school hours. Many centers do not have enough space for children to play, rest, and learn and lack designated spaces for different age groups. Teaching staff and caregivers are also in short supply, and it is common for preschool teachers to take on afterschool shifts as childcare providers. Financial motivations have prompted an increasing number of preschools to offer childcare services, but most do so without proper planning or management, and as a result, the quality of services provided in these centers is unacceptable.

Integrated centers that function without basic facilities are not conducive to holistic child development and can even be harmful for children. The CS ECD Officers who conduct regular monitoring visits to preschools in their areas are aware of the dangers of financially motivated integrated centers that are now popping up in many areas. Many centers do not go beyond providing the basic services of feeding and minding, and children often spend their afterschool hours sitting in the same classroom, with no activity or entertainment. Younger children are often forced to sleep at a certain time, to make it more convenient

for the caregiver. With few childcare options available, however, many parents are compelled to leave children in these less-than-ideal settings. It is imperative that Sri Lanka introduce necessary laws and regulations to ensure that centers do not provide integrated services unless they have the necessary space, infrastructure, and facilities to do so. Regular monitoring is required to ensure that centers are not overcrowded and that they are able to serve the needs of the children, not only during preschool hours but after school as well. The societal demand for childcare options must be balanced with the importance and need for high-quality childcare in the early years. Although it is important to support and promote the establishment of more childcare facilities, it is equally important to ensure that the quality of childcare is not sacrificed in the process.

Ineffective monitoring

The monitoring and regulating of childcare centers affiliated with preschools are impeded by the divided responsibilities between different authorities. Although the CS is mandated to oversee ECD policies and programs, the regulation of childcare centers comes under the authority of the NCPA. As a result, the monitoring of centers at the ground level is conducted by different officers attached to different institutions, even when the services are provided in integrated centers. In practice, the division of responsibility and authority has led to confusion, and in some cases, it has been a challenge for the effective regulation of services.

Inadequate staff qualifications and training

Teacher qualifications are also a barrier to improvement. Some teachers and assistants who work in childcare centers are unqualified and untrained. This deficiency is partly a result of the traditional belief that caring for children is a natural function for women, and that no specific training is required for such work. The profession also suffers from social stigma, with lower status given to child caregivers than to preschool teachers. This stigma, combined with the lack of career development options for early childhood professionals, discourages potential candidates from entering the profession. With the introduction of new regulations, however, the situation is slowly changing, and the need for training for teachers and caregivers who work with young children is acknowledged. As the demand for training and qualifications grows, the country is likely to see an expansion of academic courses and professional training options in the early childhood field. The potential for career growth and professional development remains a concern for the country and is an obstacle to building a cadre of well-qualified early childhood professionals.

The disconnect between preschools and primary schools

The segregated nature of the administrative mechanism in Sri Lanka's ECE sector has also resulted in some challenges. The difficulty in facilitating a smooth transition from preschool to primary school, for instance, is a result of the disconnect that existed between ECE authorities and the MoE, which handles primary education. Because of limited admissions in some schools, entrance requirements for many primary schools, particularly in urban areas, have become more stringent. In some schools, children seeking admission to Grade 1 are

expected to sit for an informal entrance examination in which their basic reading, writing, and mathematics skills are tested. Although the National ECD Guidelines do not recommend reading and writing, many preschools focus on this component because of pressure from parents. These issues are less relevant in government primary schools. There is a disconnect between the expectations of primary school teachers and the competencies of the children entering Grade 1. The effects are transferred to children. Many have a hard time adjusting to the academic expectations and pressures they face when they enter primary school. The focus on academic competencies in preschool deviates from the principles of holistic development and are counter to a child's right to develop at his or her own pace.

Recognizing this situation, the CS has introduced a program to create awareness among preschool and primary school teachers and parents. Although this program can help bridge the gap in the government sector, the transition from preschool to primary school continues to be a problem in the private sector. This is a serious challenge that needs to be addressed considering that almost 71 percent of preschools are managed by the private sector. The structural changes introduced after the August 2020 Parliamentary Elections have placed ECE under the purview of the MoE. This could have a significant positive impact on bridging the disconnect, and enabling a smoother transition from preschool to primary school.

NOTES

1. The Ministry of Women and Child Affairs was renamed the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and Dry Zone Development (MWCADZD) in 2018, in late 2019 as the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and Social Security (MWCASS), and in August 2020 as State Ministry of Women and Child Development, Pre-School & Primary Education, School Infrastructure & Education Services. The names are used interchangeably in this study.
2. Plantation Human Development Trust. Accessed September 28, 2019. <https://phdt.org/2017/index.php/our-sector/>.
3. SABER is a tool introduced by the World Bank to help countries systematically examine their education policies. Launched in 2010, SABER-ECD is a diagnostic tool used to identify gaps and areas in need of policy attention, to promote the holistic development of children.
4. The ECD project is funded by the World Bank and is being implemented by the MWCASS. The project objective is to enhance equitable access to and improve the quality of ECD services in Sri Lanka. This project is being implemented across the island.
5. Preschool education is used synonymously with ECE.
6. NEC (National Education Commission). 2014. Accessed September 23, 2019. <http://nec.gov.lk/about-us/overview/>.
7. The 2010 National Census on Early Childhood Development covered only seven of the nine provinces in the country. The Northern and Eastern Provinces were not included in the census because of access limitations immediately following the conflict. There was also limited representation in some of the other provinces.

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4 Global Experiences and Relevant Aspects for Sri Lanka

OVERVIEW

The experiences of four countries (Brazil, Finland, Ireland, and Japan) are examined in this study to demonstrate global trends in early childhood care and education (ECCE) service provision. These countries offer differing experiences with integration of ECCE within varying social and economic development contexts (see table 4.1 for a summary of key ECCE indicators in each country). Each country has had elements of success, and the report highlights aspects that are particularly relevant to Sri Lanka, but that must be understood in the context of Sri Lanka's socioeconomic background, its enabling environment for ECCE, and its priorities for its population. The case studies provide useful insights into global experiences and strategies that could be adapted to Sri Lanka in developing its own ECCE sector.

Brazil commenced its journey toward integration only recently. Brazil is an example of a country that has integrated ECCE under education. It is still addressing issues with respect to the practical implementation of integration policies. Many of the challenges that have emerged in Brazil and the measures taken to overcome them are relevant to Sri Lanka. This case study along with the case study for Finland showcase two different experiences with integration and highlight varying approaches to integration.

Finland has had reasonable success with providing integrated childcare and education services in a system that has developed around the needs of working parents while prioritizing the rights of young children. Finland's Educare model demonstrates how childcare, education, and instruction can be combined to form an integrated whole. It also highlights how play can be a central tool for pedagogical activities in ECCE settings.

Ireland has made progress in the ECCE field while continuing to maintain a split system. Ireland's case study focuses on the country's efforts to introduce better coordination, regulation, and standardization in ECCE services through the introduction of common frameworks.

Japan, which is a more recent addition to the list, is still in the early stages of the integration process. Rather than completely changing its current split system, Japan has attempted to introduce integrated facilities as an alternative to

TABLE 4.1 Cross-country comparison of key ECCE indicators

INDICATOR	SOURCE	BRAZIL	FINLAND	IRELAND	JAPAN	SRI LANKA
Enrollment						
Enrollment rates in ECCE of children under age 3, public and private, 2017 (%)	OECD 2019 educational data (OECD 2019a–2019e)	23	31	—	30	—
Enrollment rates in ECCE of children ages 3–5, public and private, 2017 (%)	OECD 2019 educational data (OECD 2019a–2019e)	84	79	98	91	56 (2016)
Percentage of children enrolled in private institutions (government-dependent and independent private institutions), 2017	OECD 2019 educational data (OECD 2019a–2019e)	23 (preprimary level)	12 (preprimary level)	99	76	—
Percentage of privately run ECCE centers, 2016	MWCA 2016	—	—	—	—	70.8
Teaching standards						
Age when ECCE services begin offering intentional educational objectives	OECD 2019 educational data (OECD 2019a–2019e)	0 years	9 months	3 years	3 years	—
Typical starting age of primary education	OECD 2019 educational data (OECD 2019a–2019e)	6 years	7 years	5 years	6 years	6 years
Ratio of children to teachers (not including teacher's aides) in public and private institutions, 2017	OECD 2019 educational data (OECD 2019a–2019e)	21:1 (preprimary level for age 3–6)	10:1 (preprimary level for age 3–6)	11:1 ^b (preprimary level for age 3–6; excluding privatesector)	15:1	14:1 (2016)
Minimum qualification required to be an ECCE teacher ^c	OECD 2019 educational data (OECD 2019a–2019e)	Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree	QQI Level 5 Major Award in ECCE ^d	Short tertiary cycle or bachelor's degree	General Certification of Education Ordinary Level ^e
Expenditure						
Expenditure on ECCE services ^f (public and private) as a percentage of GDP, 2016	OECD 2019 educational data (OECD 2019a–2019e)	0.7 ^g	1.2	0.1	0.2	0.0001 (2014) ^h
Annual expenditure per child on ECCE services (public and private), 2016 ⁱ	OECD 2019 educational data (OECD 2019a–2019e)	\$3,700 ^j	\$10,961	\$6,269	\$7,500	—
ECCE system						
Type of ECCE system ^k	—	Integrated	Integrated	Split	Split system with options for integrated service delivery	Split system with options for integrated service delivery

continued

TABLE 4.1, continued

INDICATOR	SOURCE	BRAZIL	FINLAND	IRELAND	JAPAN	SRI LANKA
National ECCE act, policy, or plan available?	—	ECCE is included in general education laws ^l	Yes: Act	—	Yes ^m	Yes: Policy
National ECCE curriculum available?	—	Yes	Yes	Yes	Separate curricula for kindergartens and day nurseries ⁿ	Yes (Draft)

Sources: See source column of table and various table notes.

Note: — = not available; ECCE = early childhood care and education; ECD = early childhood development; ECEC = early childhood education and care; OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

a. The source for most of the Sri Lankan data is MWCA (2016).

b. OECD 2017.

c. In most countries the minimum qualifications required for teacher's aides and assistants are lower than the requirements for teachers.

d. Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is an awarding body that makes awards in further and higher education and training (Early Childhood Ireland 2015).

e. The National Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Centers published by the Children's Secretariat dictate that the minimum academic requirement for receiving training as an ECD staff member is a pass in the General Certification of Education Ordinary Level Examination.

f. According to the OECD classification, ECCE programs refer to programs with an intentional education component. Subcategories include early childhood educational development and preprimary education.

g. OECD 2019a.

h. Refers only to public funding for ECCE. Source: World Bank 2014.

i. These figures are based on head counts and have been converted using public-private partnerships.

j. OECD 2019a.

k. This bifurcation is based on the definition and components of the INTESYS criteria used in this study.

l. Early childhood education is included in the National Education Plans of 2001 and 2011. Source: Mami 2013.

m. The Act for the Advancement of Comprehensive Services related to Education and Childcare among Preschool Children was enacted in 2006 to establish Kodomoen or childcare-kindergarten facilities.

n. Shishido 2015.

existing facilities. The case study of Japan demonstrates how integration can be introduced gradually and within the confines of an existing ECCE system.

As mentioned in chapter 2 (figure 2.3), this study uses the INTESYS framework as a basis for analysis. The framework is based on three sets of elements that affect integration: (1) underpinning values and principles for high-quality integration, which are the foundation for a shared vision and values among stakeholders in the process of integration; (2) key factors supporting implementation, that is, conditions that have a strong influence on integration; and (3) quality practices, or guidance for translating values and principles into practices while considering the key factors in integration.

The international experiences provide a basic idea of the challenges involved with integration and highlight some of the many advantages of integrated systems. They demonstrate how different countries have adopted varying degrees of integration to suit their specific needs and conditions. These case studies are not intended to be comprehensive analyses of the systems, which are necessarily more complex than what is presented in this study. The key features and salient aspects of the ECCE models in Brazil, Finland, Ireland, and Japan are provided in table 4.2.

The experiences of these four countries and other global evidence indicate that integration must be viewed as a spectrum or continuum. Table 4.3 highlights the aspects relevant to Sri Lanka, and appendix A provides further details on these country experiences.

TABLE 4.2 Key features of ECCE models, by country

BRAZIL: AN INTEGRATED ECCE SYSTEM
<p>Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECE is a constitutional right for Brazilian children under age six. • The 1996 law recognized childcare centers as the institutions providing education to children zero–three years and preschools as the institutions providing education to children four–six years. It stipulates that both should be recognized as educational institutions. • Since 1996 the system has become integrated and reorganized under the MoE. • The 2010 National Education Plan sets out the primary objectives of the reforms: (1) increase the net enrollment of children in childcare centers and preschools, (2) ensure that basic education teachers meet required educational qualifications, (3) prepare minimum infrastructure standards for childcare centers and preschools, (4) set up a supervisory structure for ECE in all municipalities, (5) provide school meals to all children enrolled in early childhood services, and (6) make early childhood services full-time. • ECCE regulations and guidelines are prepared by Education Councils at the national, state, and municipal levels.
<p>Governance and capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since 1996 the integrated system has been coordinated under the leadership of the education sector, through the Early Childhood Education Coordination Office in the MoE. • Municipalities are responsible for providing ECCE services and training opportunities for teachers. • In 1998, the MoE introduced the nonmandatory National Curricular Reference for Early Childhood Education, the first curriculum framework for the zero–six age group. • The Mandatory National Curricular Guidelines were introduced in 1999, and the National Operational Guidelines to integrate childcare centers and preschools under the education system followed. These initiatives have helped raise the quality standards of childcare centers. • Enforcement of the quality standards has been difficult because of the lack of supervisory capacity for public services. • Few childcare centers and preschools have adopted national curricular guidelines introduced in 1999, and at a policy implementation level, the policy goals of the National Education Plan are not necessarily reflected in municipal government policy planning. • Brazil's 5,500 municipalities differ significantly in implementing the coverage and quality of service intended in the reforms. • In addition, the existence of other early childhood programs at both the federal and state levels has resulted in coordination issues and has contributed to the complexity of the Brazilian system. • Inadequate training opportunities for teachers, particularly those working with the zero–three age group, have resulted in a gap between policy and practice. For this and other reasons, there continue to be disparities between the services provided to the under-three and the three-and-over age groups. • Pedagogical links need to be made between childcare centers and preschools to facilitate continuity in the child's experience and benefit the child's progression through the different stages of development.
<p>Financing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant policy changes were made without commensurate funding provision. • The fact that municipalities do not have the mandate to establish a functional system of ECCE with defined funding causes problems. As a result, much of what has been planned and prescribed has not been put into practice.
FINLAND: AN INTEGRATED ECCE SYSTEM
<p>Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finland maintains an integrated ECCE system, and childcare and education services are regulated by the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care of 2015. • Finnish law focuses on parents' entitlement to access childcare and children's right to access care and education. • Finland provides universal access to childcare (for up to 20 hours a week) for children under school-going age (seven years). Children are eligible for childcare irrespective of whether the parents are employed. • The act provides for (1) municipal ECEC services, (2) private ECEC services or private childcare with childcare allowance, and (3) one parent staying at home on care leave and child home care allowance until the youngest child turns three. • Finland's ECEC Act includes educational objectives, and in 2015, Finland launched the compulsory concept of preprimary education for one year before entering primary school. • Children engage in preprimary education for four hours and are entitled to childcare for the remainder of the day.

continued

TABLE 4.2, *continued*

<p>Governance and capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECEC comes under the purview of the Ministry of Education and Culture. • Municipal authorities are responsible for the provision, quality, and supervision of services. They are required to provide evening, overnight, and weekend services to meet the needs of parents' work schedules. • The ECEC Act recognizes the Finnish National Agency for Education as the national expert agency on ECEC. • The agency is responsible for ECEC curriculum development. The first core curriculum for ECEC was introduced in 2016 with applicability across all public and private settings. • The curriculum strives to create a logical continuum between ECEC, preprimary education, and primary education. • Finland's Educare model reflects the integrated approach to ECEC and combines the care and educational needs of young children. The "learn by play" approach is integral to the system. • ECEC centers use a unitary model, where children from different ages (zero–seven) gather in the same settings. However, activities and groups in the center are usually organized by age. • The Educare model maintains high standards for teachers and ECEC staff. • One in three staff members in ECEC centers must have a higher education degree. Preprimary teachers must have a bachelor's degree, and other staff are required to have at least a vocational upper secondary qualification in a relevant field. • The law regulates the number of children per adult, and the ratio to be followed in ECEC centers is 4:1 for children under three and 8:1 for children age three and over.
<p>Financing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finland's municipal ECEC centers are financed primarily through tax revenues. Finnish law provides for state subsidies for municipal childcare services. • Finland also has publicly subsidized private ECEC centers. • Parents pay a fee for ECEC, determined by family income and the number of children. • Preprimary education for six-year-old children is free of charge.
<p>IRELAND: A SPLIT ECCE SYSTEM</p>
<p>Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014–2020: Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures documents the government's commitment to improving early years' services and education, particularly for children from low-income families. • In 2010, the government introduced the Free Preschool Year Program under which children between three and six years became eligible for a maximum of two years of free preschool. • The government has also introduced the Early Start Program to serve the needs of children, including those with disabilities and those who are most at risk of not reaching their potential in the education system. • ECCE services in Ireland are provided primarily by publicly funded private sector providers. The state pays a capitation fee to registered providers and in exchange they provide free preschool education to eligible children, within stipulated guidelines. • Regulations require that providers adhere to the principles of Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education.
<p>Governance and capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ireland maintains a split ECCE system. The education of children four–five years falls under the purview of the Department of Education and Skills, and the care of children from birth to school-going age is the responsibility of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. • Ireland has introduced some key measures to maintain national quality standards and curricular frameworks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ The Siolta Quality Assurance Program regulates the quality of ECCE. The Siolta Framework comprises three main elements: 12 principles, 16 standards, and 75 components. The principles lay out the quality benchmarks for ECCE programs; the standards translate these into areas of practice; and the components serve as quality indicators to support implementation of the framework. Siolta includes a comprehensive quality assurance program designed to support ECCE staff in conducting self-assessments. In 2008, the Early Years Education Policy Unit was established to implement Siolta. ◦ The Aistear Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, introduced in 2009, addresses issues pertaining to the well-being, learning, and development of children. The framework was developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. The four themes of the Aistear Framework are well-being, identity and belonging, communicating, and exploring and thinking. Aistear can be applied in any childcare setting, and the framework is linked with Ireland's primary school curriculum to ensure continuity in learning.

continued

TABLE 4.2, *continued*

IRELAND: A SPLIT ECCE SYSTEM <i>continued</i>
<p>Governance and capacity <i>continued</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ireland has also introduced several measures to promote the practical application of Siolta and Aistear in different ECCE settings. • The Better Start program was established in 2015 as the National Early Years Quality Development Service to promote quality improvement by providing state-funded Siolta and Aistear-based support services in a coherent and consistent manner. • In 2016, the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs collaborated to introduce the National Siolta-Aistear Initiative to support a coordinated rollout of both frameworks. • Aistear-Siolta Practice Guide introductory workshops followed in 2016. A network of Aistear tutors is available to support teachers in applying the framework, and the online toolkit provides access to resources. New Aistear-Siolta support initiatives are developed regularly to support its application in early years' programs. • A National Transition Initiative is also under way to integrate information transfer between the ECCE and primary school sectors. • Some measures have been introduced to address the challenges of fragmentation in policy and service delivery: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ In 2005, the Office of the Minister for Children was established to maximize the coordination of policies pertaining to children, including ECCE policies. ◦ An Early Years Education Policy Unit was established within the Department of Education and Skills. This unit is co-located with the Office of the Minister for Children.
<p>Financing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ireland only reports on the public funding of preprimary education. Ireland's total expenditure on preprimary education as a percentage of GDP was 0.1 percent in 2013, lower than the OECD average of 0.6 percent. • In 2016, the government increased investment in ECCE, and a percentage of the budget was allocated to quality improvement.
JAPAN: A SPLIT ECCE SYSTEM WITH INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY OPTIONS
<p>Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Japan's split ECCE system kindergartens and daycare centers have evolved as separate entities. • In recent years, the declining birthrate in the country coupled with the increase in the number of working mothers has increased the demand for childcare support. • In response, Japan has taken steps to integrate childcare and education at the service delivery level. • The Comprehensive Support System for Children and Child Rearing introduced in 2015 promoted combined kindergarten-childcare facilities called "Kodomoen" or ECEC centers (first introduced in 2006). • The Kodomoen exist in a split ECEC system and provide an option for integrated childcare and education at the service delivery level. • Japanese children are legally entitled to a place in ECEC, and some age groups and low-income families have free access. • Kodomoen are open to children of both working and nonworking parents.
<p>Governance and capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECEC services are provided through three main types of institutions: kindergartens, daycare centers, and Kodomoen. • The concept of certified Kodomoen facilities was first introduced in 2006 as an alternative to the traditional options. • Kodomoen are divided into four main categories: (1) childcare-kindergarten collaborations: an authorized kindergarten and an authorized childcare center that collaborate to manage comprehensive operations; (2) kindergarten: an authorized kindergarten with childcare functions; (3) childcare center: an authorized childcare center with kindergarten functions; and (4) local discretion on the type of center. • The Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare is responsible for childcare for children ages zero-five. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology is responsible for preprimary education of three-to-five-year-olds, and since 2015 the Cabinet Office has been responsible for Kodomoen.
<p>Financing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Japan's public and private expenditure on preprimary education is lower than the OECD average. Private funding of preprimary education is notably high in Japan. • Public funding is shared between national and local authorities. • A small amount of government financial aid is provided for integrated ECEC centers.

Source: World Bank compilation.

Note: ECCE = early childhood care and education; ECE = early childhood education; ECEC = early childhood education and care; GDP = gross domestic product; MoE = Ministry of Education; OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

TABLE 4.3 Summary of aspects and practices of global experiences relevant to Sri Lanka

COUNTRY	ASPECTS AND PRACTICES RELEVANT TO SRI LANKA
Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Brazilian experience highlights the importance of supplementing integration efforts with necessary support services. In particular, it highlights the need for a well-trained and well-qualified ECCE cadre in developing the ECCE sector. Brazil demonstrates the need to reevaluate the availability and content of ECCE training programs and courses in the country and highlights the importance of introducing programs and training opportunities that cover all aspects of ECCE, including the zero–three age group. It demonstrates the value of providing diverse ECCE service delivery options. In such a context, however, it becomes more important to have a well-functioning registration system to ensure that all service providers are working within national standards and regulations. Regulation mechanisms go hand in hand with new curricula and guidelines, and the Brazilian experience proves that one cannot work without the other.
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Finnish model^a demonstrates the value of providing multiple childcare options to accommodate the differing needs and schedules of working parents. While leaving room for flexibility, all options are strictly regulated by law. The Finnish model also includes publicly subsidized private ECEC centers. This model has a strong legal foundation and facilitates centralized control and regulation of approaches, methods, and standards of service while giving municipal authorities the freedom to provide services as required by their respective municipalities. The model demonstrates how to balance the needs of working parents without sacrificing the rights of the child and the quality of childcare. The Educare model is a good example of child-centered education that provides for continuity in learning and education while facilitating a smooth transition from ECCE to preprimary and primary school. Finland’s inclusive and comprehensive curriculum development process is a useful example of how to involve and incorporate the views of relevant stakeholders while maintaining a child-centered approach.
Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Irish example demonstrates the value of investing in a national curriculum framework and a national quality assurance program^b to ensure uniformity in an environment in which the vast majority of providers are in the private sector. It highlights the importance of introducing innovative measures to support the practical application of standards and curriculum. Ireland’s state-funded support services could be a useful example for Sri Lanka. Ireland’s pillars of quality (the Siolta^c and Aistear Frameworks) highlight the importance of introducing comprehensive quality assurance standards that assess both the requirements of the ECCE setting as well as the teaching and learning methods that reflect the well-being and educational outcomes for children. Ireland’s efforts to provide for the continuity of learning between preschool and primary school are exemplary. The Aistear Framework and the National Transition Initiative, which facilitates information transfer between ECCE and primary school, are particularly important. The Irish example also highlights some of the challenges associated with management of a split ECCE system. The issues concerning the inspection mechanisms and steps taken to rectify such errors could be useful to Sri Lanka.
Japan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Japan’s split ECCE environment bears some resemblance to Sri Lanka’s current status. Japan serves as a good example of how integration can be introduced gradually, without completely overhauling the existing system. The Japanese experience shows how to reorganize services in a diverse environment and how to introduce integration in a multistakeholder environment. Integration in Japan was based on a bottom-up approach, in which integration began at the service delivery level, providing an example of how components of integration can be achieved and sustained within an administratively split system. Japan responded to changing societal needs by adapting principles of integration to suit its specific country context. This example highlights the value of customization and adaptation in reorganizing ECCE services.

Source: World Bank compilation.

Note: ECCE = early childhood care and education; ECEC = early childhood education and care.

a. Council for Creative Education. <https://www.ccefinland.org/finland-education-model-c1yvnm>.

b. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Ireland. Accessed August 28, 2019. <https://www.ncca.ie/en/early-childhood>.

c. Siolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education. Accessed August 28, 2019. <http://siolta.ie/index.php>.

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5 Conclusion and Recommendations

OVERVIEW

Globally, responses to the inefficiencies of split early childhood care and education (ECCE) systems have been twofold: some countries, such as Brazil, Finland, New Zealand, Sweden, and Vietnam, have opted for integration, while others, such as France, Hungary, and Ireland, have opted for greater coordination within a split system. ECCE is a developing field in Sri Lanka, and the country has been making efforts to bring about greater coordination among ECCE stakeholders. This study serves as a starting point for considering the possibilities for Sri Lanka. Determining whether full or partial integration would be beneficial for Sri Lanka requires a more detailed exploration of the various facets of the country's ECCE environment.

Integration has not traditionally been part of Sri Lanka's ECCE structure. Efforts to develop ECCE services have continued to be based on a multisectoral approach. Different components of ECCE (primarily childcare and education) are delivered through different mechanisms and are managed by different stakeholders. The health component of ECCE is delivered through a well-established and well-functioning public health network; the childcare component is under the purview of the National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) of the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and Social Security (MWCASS); and the education component is overseen by the Children's Secretariat of the MWCASS and is implemented at the local level by provincial authorities. Thus, childcare and education currently come within the mandate of a single ministry but are handled by different authorities within that ministry. Considering recent developments described in earlier chapters, however, childcare and education may soon be divided between different entities under the Ministry of Education. The details and division of roles and responsibilities under the new implementation structure are currently being determined. In addition, several other stakeholders are responsible for the different subcomponents under the two primary fields. It is fair to say then that structural integration in Sri Lanka's ECCE sector is minimal. Within this split ECCE system, however, Sri Lanka has made significant progress toward improved coordination and the provision of more comprehensive and integrated ECCE

services. The measures discussed in this report, including the introduction of policies, regulations, standards, and curricula and the investment in improved services and facilities, have contributed toward this overall objective.

Though structural integration has been limited, Sri Lanka has made a noteworthy shift toward conceptual integration. Attitudes toward ECCE have evolved, and the need for holistic ECCE encompassing both childcare and education is increasingly recognized. This change in attitude is now being reflected in changing practices, and there is a clear move, in both the public and private sectors, toward integrated ECCE centers. In response to market demand, the level of integration within centers themselves has been increasing as more and more centers have begun providing both childcare and preschool services. Building on the momentum, more advocacy, targeting parents, caregivers, teachers, and policy makers, is required to create an understanding of the need for both childcare and education, even for children in the zero-to-three age group.

When evaluating the potential benefits of integration for Sri Lanka, integral aspects include the consideration of market demand for integration, the level of integration that might be suitable, the associated cost, access, and administrative requirements. A move toward universal integration that would involve a complete revamping of the system would mean that all ECCE centers in Sri Lanka would eventually be integrated centers. Alternatively, there might be demand for partial integration, perhaps addressing the segments of the population in which there is demand for integration. Partial integration would permit the operation of diverse service providers, including integrated, childcare-only, and preschool-only centers, allowing families to select the modality that best suits their needs. Among other aspects, discussions around reorganization would need to be based on considerations of access, administration, cost, and market demand. Sri Lanka would need to consider the specific tradeoffs it would need to make if the decision is to move toward integration. Irrespective of which option is deemed more suitable, it would be important for Sri Lanka to promote conceptual integration in ECCE service provision and to ensure that services are organized under a coherent policy framework, with coordinated governance mechanisms, and shared child development standards.

Stronger regulation at the provincial level is required to enforce quality standards in all ECCE settings, both public and private. Considering that almost 71 percent of preschools in the country are privately owned, the private sector should be given due recognition and space for engagement in developing the ECCE sector.

Enforcing quality standards in the ECCE sector and supporting the adoption of national policies and regulations would be priorities for Sri Lanka. The components of ECCE, including teaching and learning standards, infrastructure and facilities, teacher training, and child development assessments, should ideally be combined to form a comprehensive ECCE quality assurance system for Sri Lanka. A quality assurance system applicable to both public and private centers could pave the way for an institutional evaluation and certification system. The quality assurance system would need to include a quality monitoring instrument, measurement tools for child development and learning, and an evaluation mechanism that can be practically applied. Ireland's Better Start National Early Years Quality Development Service could be a useful example, serving as a guide for ECCE quality improvement in a coherent and

consistent manner. The Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes Project, initiated by UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank, also aims to develop a set of population-based measures of child development and learning and the quality of early learning environments and to assist governments in scaling up these measures. This project could serve as a useful resource for Sri Lanka.

As measured by the INTESYS Toolkit breakdown of the stages of integration, it would be fair to say that Sri Lanka does not meet all the criteria required for full integration at present. Strengthening of the National Coordinating Committee and more recently bringing ECCE under the MoE could be a move toward recognizing a lead partner, but there is little or no joint planning and minimal consistent and shared goals. Although the number of combined early child development centers is increasing, joint service delivery is still at a low level.

Considering these issues, this study identifies five priorities for Sri Lanka and recommends key actions for the improvement of ECCE services in the country:

- Introduce a strong and coherent governance framework for the ECCE sector
- Expand affordable access to both preschool and childcare services
- Introduce a practical administrative structure and regulatory framework
- Develop a comprehensive ECCE quality assurance system
- Introduce well-defined developmental standards and an appropriate curricular framework for the zero-to-three age group

The recommendations listed in table 5.1 build on the progress that has been made thus far and focus on strategies and steps that support the practical implementation and enforcement of the measures that have been introduced to date. By no means an exhaustive list, the recommendations are primarily a response to the key issues and challenges discussed in this report. The recommendations are categorized according to the different levels of intervention identified in the INTESYS model. This approach is intended to provide a better understanding of where interventions are currently focused and which areas would benefit from further intervention.

TABLE 5.1 Progress to date and recommendations for further action

LEVEL OF INTERVENTION	PROGRESS TO DATE	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER ACTION
Interagency governance	The National ECCD Policy has been revised and was approved by the Cabinet in 2019, and a National Policy on Preschool Education was formulated by the NEC in 2019. The MoE also tabled a Preschool Policy that was approved by the Cabinet in 2019.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review policy documents, mandates, and division of responsibilities agreed upon by all stakeholders • Pass a National ECD Act to solidify the legal foundation of ECD service provision • Facilitate the adoption of the ECD and preschool policies at the provincial level and the revision of provincial statutes to align with the national policies
Integrated strategy	Regulations and standards governing ECD centers have been introduced by most provincial authorities and gazetted by some.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen provincial ECD statutes to apply to all types of ECD centers (public, private, international, nonprofit, religious) • Strengthen registration, regulation, and monitoring mechanisms at the national and provincial levels^a • Introduce penalties for noncompliance with regulations on ECCE • Develop a comprehensive national ECCE quality assurance system to monitor and maintain quality at public and private centers
	Child Development Standards and a Child Development Assessment process have been introduced by the CS.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take steps to regularize the application of the standards and assessments and link data to the ECD management information system

continued

TABLE 5.1, *continued*

LEVEL OF INTERVENTION	PROGRESS TO DATE	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER ACTION
Integrated strategy, <i>continued</i>	National Guidelines for Daycare Centers have been introduced by the NCPA and a National Policy for Daycare Centers is in the pipeline.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce measures to ensure implementation of the guidelines in the centers • Introduce mechanisms to monitor and regulate both independent childcare centers and those affiliated with preschools • Improve coordination between the NCPA and the State Ministry of Women and Child Development, Pre-School & Primary Education, School Infrastructure & Education Services and Social Security and between ECD Officers and Child Rights Officers working at the Divisional Secretariat level • Develop a standardized framework and curriculum for children in daycare centers
	The first national ECD census was conducted under the ECD project, and a mini census will be conducted in 2020.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a comprehensive survey or census of childcare centers • Undertake a needs assessment to help understand the trends in childcare provision and to ascertain the requirements and preferences of working and nonworking parents and the demand for integrated centers
Integrated processes	An open framework preschool curriculum is currently being developed and will soon be adopted as the National ECE Curriculum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend the curriculum or develop a new curriculum to cover the zero-three age group • Improve the link between preschool and primary school to ensure a learning continuum for early years education • Foster better coordination with the primary education division of the MoE to ensure a smooth transition to primary school and include both public and private preschools and primary schools in these efforts
	An NVQ Level 4 curriculum has been developed by the NCPA, and childcare provider professional development programs are now being implemented by the National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority and the Vocational Training Authority. Preschool teacher training programs and refresher programs are being conducted under the ECD project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce an integrated ECD profession and encourage training providers to develop comprehensive training programs covering the care and education in the early years for the zero-five age group • Introduce measures to strengthen the cadre of ECD professionals by providing a clear pathway for professional development and opportunities for career growth
	Regulations have been introduced requiring a minimum NVQ Level 4 qualification for childcare providers, and childcare provider training programs are being facilitated under the ECD project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce stronger enforcement and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that ECD professionals, particularly child caregivers, adhere to minimum requirements • Introduce incentives and penalties to ensure that all childcare providers obtain at minimum NVQ Level 4 certification
Integrated frontline delivery	<p>The CS has introduced a program to provide childcare facilities for government employees.</p> <p>Measures have been introduced under the government of Sri Lanka program to promote the expansion of childcare services in the country.</p> <p>The integrated model of service provision is being promoted in both the public and private sectors, and 185 integrated ECD centers are being built under the ECD project as model centers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase public expenditure on ECCE to increase the supply of preschool and childcare services and thereby improve access for all segments of the population • Explore potential financing options and public-private partnerships to support the expansion of ECCE services • Create awareness of the practical application of the concept of integration and holistic development and encourage practitioners to go beyond simply providing childcare and preschool in the same center to providing meaningful integrated childcare • Introduce and enforce regulations to ensure that all centers that provide integrated services have the required staff and facilities and are equipped to provide both care and education to children of the zero-five age group

continued

TABLE 5.1, *continued*

LEVEL OF INTERVENTION	PROGRESS TO DATE	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER ACTION
Integrated frontline delivery, <i>continued</i>	The establishment of model special needs ECD centers has been undertaken by the ECD project, and training of more special needs teachers is under way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replicate model centers based on the needs of each province • Incorporate training components on working with special needs children into all ECE teacher training programs and promote inclusive education in all ECD centers
	Several successful public-private partnerships have been initiated, particularly in the childcare sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore more opportunities for public-private partnership and promote private sector engagement in developing the ECCE sector • Replicate successful models of childcare developed through public-private partnerships, especially for setting up childcare centers in ministries and government departments to support women employees with young children
	ECD awareness sessions for parents and caregivers are being conducted under the ECD project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate awareness programs into center-based health and nutrition support activities • Develop guidelines for preschools to create kitchen gardens to both provide produce for morning meals for children and build awareness among parents and children of healthy nutrition, nurturing of plants, and the concept of home gardens

Source: World Bank compilation.

Note: CS = Children's Secretariat; ECCE = early childhood care and education; ECD = early childhood development; ECE = early childhood education; MoE = Ministry of Education; NCPA = National Child Protection Authority; NEC = National Education Commission; NVQ = National Vocational Qualification.

a. At present, certain private and international preschools do not come under the purview of provincial ECCE authorities, and are therefore not compelled to abide by provincial regulations.

APPENDIX A

Global Experiences from Selected Countries

BRAZIL

Early childhood education (ECE) is a constitutional right for Brazilian children under age six. In a 1996 education law, the Brazilian government defined early childhood education as the first stage of basic education, serving the zero-to-six age group, and gave municipalities the responsibility for providing ECE services. The law recognized childcare centers as the institutions providing education to children zero to three years, and preschools as the institutions providing education to children four to six years. It stipulates that both should be considered educational institutions (UNESCO 2006). Since 1996, childcare and education have been integrated under the education system, and policy development for both care and education services is coordinated under the leadership of the education sector. The Early Childhood Education Coordination Office in the Ministry of Education (MoE) is the federal focal point for early childhood services. States and municipalities have their own education secretariats. Early childhood care and education (ECCE) regulations and guidelines are prepared by Education Councils at all three levels.

According to Brazil's 2010 National Education Plan, the primary objectives of the reforms are to increase the net enrollment of children in childcare centers and preschools, ensure that basic education teachers meet required educational qualifications, prepare minimum infrastructure standards for childcare centers and preschools, set up a supervisory structure for early childhood education in all municipalities, provide school meals to all children enrolled in early childhood services, and make early childhood services full-time.

Brazil has taken several steps to improve the quality of early childhood institutions. In 1998, the MoE introduced the nonmandatory National Curricular Reference for Early Childhood Education, the first curriculum framework for the zero-to-six age group (UNESCO 2006). Next, the Mandatory National Curricular Guidelines and the National Operational Guidelines were introduced in 1999 to integrate childcare centers and preschools under the education system. These initiatives have helped raise the quality standards of childcare centers in Brazil (UNESCO 2006).

Despite these efforts, Brazil has faced many challenges in the practical implementation of the integrated system, including the following: maintaining quality standards has been difficult due to the lack of supervisory capacity for public services; although mandatory, very few childcare centers and preschools have adopted the national curriculum; and at a policy implementation level, the policy goals of the National Education Plan are not necessarily reflected in municipal government policy planning in relation to early childhood education.

Some of the problems stem from the perception that early childhood education does not require a pedagogical framework or administrative system. In Brazil, childcare is traditionally provided in informal settings that do not conform to educational and administrative systems, and the transition to the education system has not been readily accepted by all. The lack of diversity and flexibility in reorganizing childcare centers under the education sector has meant that some of the smaller and more informal childcare providers have fallen through the cracks (UNESCO 2006).

For integration efforts to succeed, they must be supplemented by other necessary services. For instance, alongside introducing the curriculum, child caregivers need to be trained to educate children of the zero-to-three age group. The 2003 Brazilian school census showed that 71 percent of child caregivers did have the required secondary education certificate (UNESCO 2006). However, the teacher training institutions in the country neither covered the zero-to-three age group nor provided teachers with the opportunity to learn about development and learning specific to this age group, which is different from that for older children. A similar finding was noted at the university level, where there was no specialization in the zero-to-three age group requirements (UNESCO 2006). Inadequacies in teacher training programs are a practical gap in the effort to introduce an integrated system. Another issue common to many developing countries is that most childcare centers are not registered within a municipal system, and many employ untrained teachers as child caregivers. In Brazil, the lack of a functioning registration system has made it difficult to integrate childcare centers under the education system (UNESCO 2006).

Brazil's efforts to integrate and upgrade childcare centers under the education sector could be more successful if the government were to introduce core quality regulations instead of imposing a standard form of operation and management. All types of childcare centers exist in Brazil, and the diversity of delivery meets the needs of parents and helps increase accessibility.

More effort also needs to be expended to create a pedagogical link between childcare centers and preschools to facilitate continuity in the child's experience and benefit the child's progression through the different stages of development. In Brazil, disparities remain between the services provided to the under-three and three-and-over age groups. The International Early Childhood Education Task Force notes that, "although by law ECE falls under the education sector, the division of ECE provision between pre-school and childcare has meant that 'crèches' often function as daycare rather than early childhood education centers and moreover are poorly organized...and many are not integrated in the education sector and recognized as education institutions" (McConnell-Farmer, Cook, and Farmer 2012, 7).

As discussed in the chapters of this report, where to place ECCE has been a major concern for countries considering the integration option. For Brazil, bringing ECCE under education has brought about some level of success but has also opened up many risks. Some feel that integration has resulted in a greater

TABLE A.1 Summary of early childhood care and education in Brazil

Percentage of children enrolled in ECCE programs (3–5 years)	60 (2012)
Percentage of children enrolled in ECCE programs (3–5 years)	84 (2017)
Percentage of children enrolled in ECCE programs (under 3 years)	10 (2012)
Percentage of children enrolled in ECCE programs (under 3 years)	23 (2017)
Annual ECCE expenditure per child (3–5 years)	\$3,700
Percentage of children enrolled in public ECCE institutions	72
Child-to-teacher ratio in ECCE centers	21:1 (2017 for preprimary level, ages 3–6 years)
Type of ECCE system	Integrated
National ECCE policy or plan available?	ECCE is included in general education laws
National ECCE curriculum available?	Yes
Minimum qualification for ECCE teachers	Bachelor's degree

Source: OECD 2019a.

Note: ECCE = early childhood care and education.

emphasis being placed on the schooling aspect of ECCE and that services for the under-three age group have been neglected. They believe that the education system has not placed enough importance on training lay workers in childcare centers. In Brazil's case, some believe that more recognition needs to be given to the welfare aspect of ECCE.

Funding is the cornerstone of any program. In Brazil, the government made significant policy changes in ECE without making adequate provisions for the funding of early childhood programs and activities. One of the primary challenges to Brazil's integrated system is that municipalities have no mandate to establish a functional system for ECCE with defined funding. As a result, much of what has been planned and prescribed has not been put into practice. The country continues its efforts to improve the quality of early childhood services and to create an integrated system that supports children throughout the early childhood years. Brazil has taken several steps in the direction of integration. However, the country still has a long way to go before its early childhood policies can be effectively put into practice. See table A.1 for statistics on Brazil's system.

FINLAND

Childcare and education originated as separate domains, crèches and kindergartens, respectively, in Finland. Over time they have combined to provide integrated childcare and education for the early years. Every child in Finland who is under school-going age is entitled to ECCE that is provided by local authorities, once the mother's or father's period of parental allowance comes to an end, regardless of whether the parents are employed. Until recently, Finnish law focused on the parents' entitlement to childcare. The Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Act of 2015, however, approaches ECEC as a right of every child.

The ECEC options available to parents in Finland are municipal ECEC services, private ECEC services or childcare with private childcare allowance, and one parent staying at home on care leave and child home care allowance until the youngest child turns three (European Commission 2018a).

The primary means of providing municipal services is through ECEC centers. These centers are regulated by the Act on Children's Day Care, which was amended in 1983 to include educational objectives. Since then the law has undergone several revisions. The latest is the revised Act on Early Childhood Education and Care enacted in 2015. It recognizes the Finnish National Agency for Education as the national expert agency on ECEC. The act is under further revision as of 2020. The act defines ECEC as a "planned and goal-oriented entity of education, upbringing and care, with an emphasis on pedagogy" (European Commission 2018a).

Currently, ECEC comes under the purview of the Ministry of Education and Culture. ECEC is provided to children ages zero to seven, since seven is the primary-school-going age in Finland. Municipal authorities are responsible for the provision, quality, and supervision of ECEC services. Municipal authorities can decide whether to provide preprimary education in ECEC settings or in conjunction with basic education. In the latter case, children are still entitled to childcare services for the remainder of the day. Municipal authorities are also required by law to provide evening, overnight, and weekend care to accommodate parents' work schedules. Since August 2016, the universal entitlement to ECEC has been limited to 20 hours a week. Children are generally assigned to a childcare center within four months of applying. Because of capacity constraints, a child may be assigned to a center other than the one the parents have requested. In addition to municipal centers, Finland also has publicly subsidized private ECEC centers. Parents are required to pay a fee for ECEC, which is determined based on family income and the number of children. Preprimary education for six-year-old children is provided free of charge. Other ECEC options open to parents include open clubs and activities run by families, parishes, and nongovernmental organizations.

Finland's integrated approach to education and care is reflected in the Educare model, which is applied in ECEC facilities. The Educare concept aims to fulfill the childcare needs of young children, combined with an educational and instructional perspective. The "learn by play" approach is also integral to the Finnish ECEC system. With regard to education, Finland has introduced the concept of preprimary education, which was made compulsory in 2015. Preprimary education in Finland is defined as the "systematic education and instruction provided in the year preceding the start of compulsory education" (European Commission 2018a). Preprimary education is provided in ECEC centers and in schools. The Finnish National Agency for Education is responsible for ECEC curriculum development. The first National Core Curriculum for ECEC was introduced in 2016. Development of this curriculum involved the participation of a wide range of stakeholders from within and outside the ECEC field and included an open online consultation process for the public. This curriculum is used for preprimary education irrespective of the setting (public or private) in which it is provided. Based on this curriculum, local authorities can design unit-specific curricula and plans as well as individual ECEC plans for each child. The main aim of Finland's curriculum design process is to create an

integrated system comprising ECEC, preprimary education, and primary education, forming a logical continuum for the child. Children engage in preprimary education for four hours each day. Because most children have working parents, they engage in ECEC activities for the rest of the time. The National Core Curriculum for ECEC identifies five different learning areas that encompass the objectives and contents of the ECEC curriculum: rich world of language; diverse forms of expression; me and our community; exploring and interacting with my environment; and I grow, move, and develop.

The curriculum also aims to develop a child's "transversal competence," which comprises knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and will. Five interconnected competence areas are identified in the curriculum: thinking and learning; cultural competence, interaction, and self-expression; taking care of oneself and managing daily life; multiliteracy and competence in information and communication technology; and participation and involvement.

Individual ECEC plans are drawn up for each child in collaboration with the parents and incorporating the child's own view. The plans are based on the child's knowledge, skills, interests, and strengths, and specific areas in which the child needs support. Children are not expected to meet any performance requirements, and assessments are done using pedagogical documentation, through which ECEC personnel are expected to systematically observe and document the child's learning and development.

In the Educare model, the Finnish system maintains high standards for teachers and ECEC staff. One in three staff members in ECEC centers must have a higher education degree, and the minimum requirement for a kindergarten teacher is a bachelor's degree. Other ECEC staff are required to have at least a vocational upper secondary qualification from a relevant field (European Commission 2018a). Finnish daycare centers use a unitary model, in which children from different ages (zero to seven) gather in the same settings. However, activities and groups in the center are usually organized by age. The law also regulates the number of children per adult, and the ratio to be followed in ECEC centers is 4:1 for children under three and 8:1 for children three and over.

The Finnish ECEC model is a good example of a successful integrated system of education and care. This child-focused model considers the overall development of each child and strives to create an environment in which children can learn and develop at their own pace and the transition from early childhood to primary education is smooth and nonstressful. From the parents' point of view, the system provides convenient, subsidized access to childcare, and several options are open to working parents. The timing and scheduling flexibility of the childcare system and the allowances provided to support child rearing give parents the opportunity to spend time with their children while accommodating their work schedules. By applying centralized quality standards and curricula to municipal childcare centers, Finland ensures that the quality of care and education is maintained around the country. The success of Finland's integrated system is rooted in its ability to recognize and address the rights of both parents and children. For parents, the system offers safe, affordable, and flexible childcare support that facilitates a healthy work-life balance. For children, the system provides access to a stimulating learning environment to help them grow and develop in their early years. See table A.2 for statistics on Finland's system.

TABLE A.2 Summary of early childhood care and education in Finland

Total number of children 1–6 years	358,400 (2016)
Total number of children enrolled in ECCE programs	244,000 (2016)
Percentage of children enrolled in ECCE programs (3–5 years)	68 (2016)
Percentage of children enrolled in ECCE programs (3–5 years) ^a	79 (2017)
Percentage of children under 1 enrolled in ECCE programs	<1 (2016)
Percentage of children 1 year old enrolled in ECCE programs	28 (2016)
Percentage of children 2 years old enrolled in ECCE programs	54 (2016)
Percentage of children 3 years old enrolled in ECCE programs	68 (2016)
Percentage of children enrolled in preprimary education in ECCE centers	82 (2016)
Percentage of children enrolled in preprimary education in schools	18 (2016)
Percentage of GDP spent on ECCE	1.2 (2016)
Annual ECCE expenditure per child ^a	\$10,961 (2016)
Child-to-teacher ratio in ECCE centers (preprimary education) ^a	10:1
Type of ECCE system	Integrated
National ECCE act available?	Yes
National ECCE curriculum available?	Yes
Minimum qualification for ECCE teachers	Bachelor's degree

Source: Finnish National Agency for Education 2018.

Note: ECCE = early childhood care and education.

^a OECD 2019b.

IRELAND

Ireland has made significant advances in the ECCE sector while continuing to maintain a split system. Unlike many other European countries, Ireland does not have a long history of children attending preschools, and early education is traditionally provided in infant classes in primary schools. Children older than three are eligible to be enrolled in these infant classes, although it is optional. Compulsory education begins at age six.

The government of Ireland is committed to improving early years' services and education, particularly for children from low-income families. This commitment is captured in the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014–2020: Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures. In 2010, the government introduced an ECCE scheme known as the Free Pre-school Year Scheme, which provides a maximum of two free years of preschool to children between the ages of three and six years. Although participation is optional, 95 percent of eligible children were enrolled in this service in 2015/16 (European Commission 2018b). ECCE service providers are registered with the Child and Family Agency, and regulations require that any childcare service center participating in this scheme must provide a pre-school educational program that adheres to the principles of Siolta, which is the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education. In addition to the ECCE scheme, the government has introduced the Early Start Program, which is designed to “cater for the needs of children, including those with

disabilities, who are most at risk of not reaching their potential in the education system” (European Commission 2018b). These programs are offered in primary schools in underserved areas, and each Early Start class has a qualified teacher and a childcare worker.

ECCE services in Ireland are provided primarily by publicly funded private institutions, and the state pays a capitation fee to registered providers (OECD 2017a). In 2015/16 a total of 4,178 service providers were contracted to offer ECCE programs—75 percent were private while 25 percent were community service providers. The early education of children ages four to five years falls under the purview of the Department of Education and Skills, while the Department of Children and Youth Affairs is responsible for the care of children from birth to school-going age. The quality of programs is monitored by the Department of Education and Skills. In 2005, the Office of the Minister for Children was established to maximize the coordination of policies related to children, including ECCE policies. An Early Years Education Policy Unit was later established within the Department of Education and Skills, and this unit is co-located with the Office of the Minister for Children. The unit is responsible for the development of policies and the provision of early education. These measures were introduced to address the challenges of fragmentation in policy development and service delivery in the ECCE sector (OECD 2006).

The quality of ECCE services in Ireland is regulated by the *Siolta* Quality Assurance Program, introduced in 2006, and the *Aistear* Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. The *Siolta* program was developed by the Center for Early Childhood Development and Education, on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills. According to the official website, *Siolta* is “designed to define, assess and support the improvement of quality across all aspects of practice in early childhood care and education settings where children aged birth to six years are present” (<http://Siolta.ie>). These include both childcare centers and infant classes in primary schools. In 2008, the Early Years Education Policy Unit was established to implement *Siolta*. The *Siolta* Framework comprises three main elements: 12 principles, 16 standards, and 75 components. The principles lay out the quality benchmarks for ECCE programs; the standards translate these into areas of practice; and the components serve as quality indicators to support implementation of the framework. *Siolta* has a comprehensive quality assurance program designed to support ECCE staff in conducting self-assessments.

Aistear, the national Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, was developed in 2009, covering children ages zero to six years. Developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), it is designed to be applied in different settings and focuses on four main elements that are crucial for holistic development in the early years. The framework was developed through a comprehensive collaborative process involving the key stakeholders in the ECCE sector, including children, parents, teachers, practitioners, ECCE institutions, and government departments. The four themes of the *Aistear* Framework are well-being, identity and belonging, communicating, and exploring and thinking. *Aistear* can be applied in any childcare setting, and the framework is linked with Ireland’s primary school curriculum to ensure continuity in learning. A National Transition Initiative is also under way, with

the aim of integrating information transfer between the ECCE and primary school sectors (European Commission 2018b).

The Siolta Framework regulates the quality of ECCE settings, while the Aistear Framework addresses issues related to the well-being, learning, and development of children. Together, these two frameworks are often seen as the pillars of quality for ECCE in Ireland. A conscious effort is being made to promote the coordination of national quality and curricular frameworks, and several measures have been taken to ensure their practical application in different settings. The NCCA has developed a network of Aistear tutors to support infant teachers in primary schools to apply the framework, and the online Aistear toolkit provides access to valuable resources. In 2015, Better Start was established as the National Early Years Quality Development Service to promote quality improvement by providing state-funded Siolta and Aistear-based support services in a coherent and consistent manner. In 2016, the NCCA began Aistear-Siolta Practice Guide introductory workshops, and new Aistear-Siolta support initiatives are developed regularly to support its application in early years' programs. In 2016, the government increased its investment in ECCE, and a percentage of the budget was allocated to quality improvement. The National Siolta-Aistear Initiative was developed to support a coordinated rollout of both frameworks. This is a collaboration between the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

These changes in Ireland's ECCE system emerged as a result of growing dissatisfaction with the quality of ECCE service provided in the country. Moloney (2019) notes that "in spite of repeated calls to develop a coordinated and integrated approach under a lead ministry to address the care and education of children from birth to six years more holistically and coherently, policy in Ireland repeatedly perpetuates a structural and conceptual distinction between education and care. Hence early childhood services remain fractured across welfare and educational domains." Although Ireland has made several efforts to improve the quality of ECCE services, the lack of integration and coordination between childcare and education has been a challenge in implementing these policies.

A practical example of this disconnect is the Early Years Education Focused Inspections, which were introduced in 1996 to ensure the quality of ECCE programs. Initially, the Child and Family Agency was responsible for inspections, which were conducted primarily by public health nurses, who focused mainly on health and welfare instead of looking more broadly at the services provided. Moloney explains that this resulted in a "reality disconnect between those working in the sector and those working in ECCE settings" (Moloney 2019). In 2016, a parallel system of inspections was introduced, with early years inspectors from the Department of Education and Skills evaluating the quality of education in the settings. This system of inspection is an example of how Ireland continues to maintain a split system, reinforcing a clear divide between childcare and education. Experts argue that many of the newly introduced practices and regulations have led to an additional divide between the three-and-over and the under-three age groups by requiring different standards and qualifications for the two groups (Moloney 2019). The danger of such a system is that it places the under-three age group at a disadvantage with regard to investment, staff

TABLE A.3 Summary of early childhood care and education in Ireland

Percentage of children enrolled in ECCE programs (3–5 years)	98 (2017) ^a
Annual ECCE expenditure per child (3–5 years)	\$6,269 (2016) ^b
Percentage privately run ECCE centers ^c	99
Child-to-teacher ratio in ECCE centers	8:1 (for children ages 3–6 in nonpreprimary sessions) 11:1 (for children ages 3–6 in preprimary sessions)
Type of ECCE system	Split system
National ECCE act available?	No
National ECCE curriculum available?	Yes
Minimum qualification for ECCE teachers	QQI Level 5 Major Award in ECCE ^d

Sources: OECD 2006, 2017a.

Note: ECCE = early childhood care and education.

a. OECD 2017.

b. OECD 2019c.

c. OECD 2019c (although they are provided through privately run centers, 97 percent of ECCE services in Ireland are financed by public sources).

d. Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) is an awarding body that makes awards in further and higher education and training (Early Childhood Ireland 2015).

qualifications, and the approach to their holistic education. See table A.3 for statistics on Ireland's system.

JAPAN

Following World War II, kindergartens and childcare centers emerged and existed as two distinctly separate entities in Japan. Each has a different history and trajectory of growth. Until recently, unifying the two entities was not considered. However, the declining birthrate in Japan coupled with the increase in the number of working mothers reduced the demand for kindergartens and increased the demand for childcare.

In response to societal needs, Japan began taking steps to integrate childcare and education. In 2006, a joint review conference was held between Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology and Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare. The Act on the Advancement of Comprehensive Service Related to Education, Child Care etc. of Preschool Children was enacted in 2006. The act facilitated the establishment of certified Kodomoen, or childcare-kindergarten facilities. According to the act, these facilities could be divided into four main categories: childcare-kindergarten collaboration, which is an authorized kindergarten and an authorized childcare center that collaborate to manage comprehensive operations; an authorized kindergarten with childcare functions; an authorized childcare center with kindergarten functions; and local discretion to determine the type of center.

By August 2007, there were 105 certified Kodomoens in Japan, but by 2009 the number had only increased to 358. The initial efforts did not yield the expected results: “This educational reform has failed to achieve groundbreaking results, and ended up merely adding a third facility to the traditional dual systems despite the enormous efforts that both Ministries had devoted to the legislation in the Diet session...The reason that the number of this new type of facility shows sluggish growth is that in the end, there is not much support from the government, except for the collaboration childcare-kindergarten type, which receives a small amount of financial aid. There then seems no advantage to changing an existing facility to create a certified Kodomoen. Both Ministries are currently making an all-out effort to review the Kodomoen system” (Shirakawa 2010).¹

The 2012 Act on Child and Childcare Support aimed to resolve some of the issues with the Kodomoen system. Following this act, the Comprehensive Support System for Children and Child Rearing came into effect in April 2015. This system has three primary aims:

- *Provide high-quality education and childcare.* Measures taken in this regard include increasing the spread of Centers for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC centers). These centers combine the features of kindergartens and childcare centers and can be used by children irrespective of whether they have working parents.
- *Eliminate waiting lists.* This will be done by using all types of facilities, including small-scale local childcare facilities, daycares, kindergartens, and ECEC centers.
- *Support childcare within the local community.*

Japan’s integration methodology has been to introduce ECEC centers to supplement the existing system of kindergartens and childcare centers. Currently, four main types of facilities provide early childhood services: kindergartens, childcare centers, ECEC centers, and local childcare facilities. Under the new system, parents are required to obtain approval for the type of facility they would like to use.² The newly introduced ECEC centers embody the integrated system and provide education and childcare in the same facility. These centers accept children from ages zero to five years, have flexible hours of service, and are open to children of working and nonworking parents.

Different curricular frameworks apply to the three types of ECEC settings in Japan. The “Course of Study and Guideline of Daycare for Integrated Center for ECEC” applies to the Kodomoen or integrated ECEC centers, and this curriculum covers the zero-to-five age group. The “Course of Study for Kindergarten” covers the zero-to-five age group in kindergartens and the “National Curriculum for Daycare Centers” covers the zero-to-five age group in daycare centers (OECD 2017b). The minimum qualification for preprimary teachers is a short-cycle tertiary degree, which can be achieved after two years of training. Newly trained teachers in public kindergartens or ECEC centers also have to undergo a formal induction program. Quality monitoring is mandatory for ECEC centers, and the method of monitoring can be determined at the local level or by ECEC centers (OECD 2017b). Table A.4 provides statistics for ECCE in Japan.

TABLE A.4 Summary of early childhood care and education in Japan

Percentage of children enrolled in ECCE programs (3–5 years)	91 (2017)
Percentage of children enrolled in ECCE programs (under 3 years)	30 (2017)
Share of children enrolled in private centers	76 (2017)
Child-to-teacher ratio in ECCE centers	15:1 (2017)
Type of ECCE system	Split system with an option of integrated ECEC centers
National ECCE act available?	Yes
Percentage of GDP spent on ECCE	0.2 (2016)
Annual ECCE expenditure per child (age 3–5 years)	\$7,500 (2016)

Source: OECD 2019d.

Note: ECCE = early childhood care and education.

NOTES

1. The Diet is Japan's bicameral legislature consisting of the House of Representatives and the House of Councilors.
2. Japan's approval process for determining eligibility and type of childcare can be accessed under the "New comprehensive support system for children and childrearing" at <https://www.city.kobe.lg.jp/child/grow/shinseido/eigoban.pdf>.

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Changes in social and family structures, gender roles, and working environments have led some countries to introduce integrated centers for early childhood care and education (ECCE) for children ages zero to five years, combining the advantages of preschools and childcare centers. ECCE services are becoming increasingly important for countries as a support system for working parents. In countries such as Sri Lanka, where female participation in the labor force is low in comparison with international standards, providing affordable childcare services could also help more mothers to enter the labor market. Responding to the needs of employees, child development centers in the plantation areas in Sri Lanka are already providing integrated childcare services for children in this age group. The increasing demand for affordable childcare services and the growing recognition of the benefits of holistic early childhood development have brought ECCE to the forefront of Sri Lanka's development agenda.

Well-designed ECCE systems can improve the lives of children and families and provide significant advantages to national economies. Access to effective ECCE can equalize learning opportunities by improving school readiness and by putting children on a more equal footing at the primary school level. These early advantages have proved to have a lasting impact, affecting both educational and earning potential in the adult years. The significant income inequalities in countries such as Sri Lanka could be addressed through investment in effective ECCE programs, and enhanced understanding of the benefits and potential long-term impacts of ECCE could help governments tailor programs to ensure maximum return on investment.

This study seeks to answer the following questions: Is it more effective to provide early childcare and education services separately or in an integrated manner? Under what conditions would the provision of separate care and education services be more effective? The study provides an analysis of the ECCE environment in Sri Lanka, with recommendations for improvement within the current context. The information presented in the study is a starting point to foster the improved understanding of a complex subject area involving multiple stakeholders.

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