

Policy Analysis and Benchmarking Tool for **Universal Parenting Support**

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The report presents a Policy Benchmarking Tool for Universal Parenting Support, which was developed and piloted across five countries: Mexico, Serbia, South Africa, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Zambia. It reflects the collective efforts of UNICEF Country Offices, national consultants, government partners, Parenting for Lifelong Health (PLH) and other key stakeholders who contributed to the development, implementation and review of the benchmarking exercise.

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1 | Introduction



This document provides an overview of the Policy Analysis and Benchmarking Tool for Universal Parenting Support. The tool is intended to help governments analyse the current landscape of parenting support and plan for future expansion. It is also to be used by regional or state-level planners, as well as networks of parenting programme providers and civil society organizations that advocate for the scale-up of **universal parenting support**.

The tool aims to provide a structured approach for analysing the availability and quality of parenting policies, offering benchmarks that help self-identify strengths, gaps and areas for improvement in national efforts.

CONTENT OF THE TOOL

The tool provides a set of ten domains, each with a benchmark that can be used to measure progress over time in policy implementation towards **universal parenting support**. It is to serve as (a) a resource to governments in **institutionalizing** and **scaling up** parenting programmes and interventions and (b) a means of measuring progress internally.

DEFINITIONS OF PARENTING PROGRAMMES AND INTERVENTIONS

Parenting programmes and interventions:

a set of activities or services aimed at improving how caregivers (including fathers, mothers, grandparents and other adults) approach and execute their role as caregivers, specifically their parenting knowledge, attitudes, skills, behaviours and practices. Interventions can be integrated into existing services or delivered as a separate programme.

The policy framework benchmarks are based on global standards, guidelines and evidence.

Appendix 1 provides a summary of the most recent available evidence on parenting programmes and interventions.

*Section 5 includes definitions for all technical terms used in this tool. They are written in **boldface** the first time they are mentioned.*

RATIONALE FOR ANALYSING THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

There is strong evidence that parenting programmes and interventions can be of great benefit to parents, other caregivers and children. A wide range of stakeholders has committed to ensuring that everyone has access to essential parenting support, with some parents and caregivers benefitting from more targeted (selective) and intensive support. This is known as the “**universal progressive approach**” (see **Section 5: Definitions**). Evidence also shows the value of investing in parenting support, yet a WHO survey has estimated that only around 25% of countries worldwide have established parenting programmes that reach all who need them.¹

In November 2021, WHO, UNICEF and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (SRSCG VAC) launched a [Policy Call](#)² for national governments to commit to a minimum package of well-evidenced **parenting support** with universal coverage. This has the potential to dramatically reduce neglect and abuse, as well as the **life course** costs in terms of associated social, health and mental health outcomes.

The Policy Call recommends that governments apply a comprehensive, culturally relevant and context-specific approach to the provision of parenting programmes and interventions, based on **evidence of what works** (see Appendix 1) and including building community systems to enable peer-to-peer support, engagement of male caregivers and more targeted interventions for caregivers of children with developmental delays and disabilities.

1 World Health Organization (2020). [Global status report on preventing violence against children](#).

2 Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children, World Health Organization & UNICEF (November 2021). [Universal parenting support to prevent abuse and neglect: A policy call for national governments](#). (Also available in Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish here).

This tool complements UNICEF’s Global Parenting Support Framework (GPSF),³ which outlines UNICEF’s model for delivering high-quality, evidence-informed parenting support across all stages of childhood. It is adapted from UNICEF’s Regional Parenting Support Framework for Europe and Central Asia for the Early Years (2024). The benchmarking tool provides governments with a sense of what they have accomplished and what remains to be done in providing parenting support, while the framework provides the conceptual guidance for building that support.

PURPOSE OF THE POLICY ANALYSIS AND BENCHMARKING TOOL FOR UNIVERSAL PARENTING SUPPORT

The tool outlines ten benchmarks rooted in principles from international human and child rights frameworks as well as global parenting guidance from UNICEF, WHO and other partners. These benchmarks cover core areas that, when in place, enable governments, in collaboration with civil society, bilateral and multilateral agencies, and other stakeholders, to scale up parenting interventions and programmes with universal reach, resulting in positive outcomes for children of all ages.

Each benchmark represents an essential component in delivering parenting programmes at a national scale. These are further divided into three indicators that highlight the key sub-components of each benchmark. The benchmarks are designed as an interactive reflective analysis tool, allowing policymakers, practitioners and stakeholders to evaluate and present the current situation in scaling parenting programmes and interventions for universal coverage.

3 To add final GPSF citation

The tool is flexible and designed to accommodate diverse contexts and needs. For example, the analysis can be revisited at regular intervals, such as every three or five years, to measure progress and refine plans. This approach serves as a guide to ensure ongoing analysis and alignment with evolving national priorities.

Completion of the tool is intended to be a participatory process for stakeholders, through which they identify strengths as well as gaps and weaknesses. Participatory completion can lay the groundwork for advocacy and strategic planning on parenting interventions. By providing a structured framework, it enables the development of a national roadmap to universal parenting support that fosters collaboration and alignment across sectors. The process also encourages meaningful dialogue among stakeholders, helping to establish a shared vision for action.

While the tool helps identify current efforts and areas requiring additional steps to achieve universal parenting support, it is not intended to assess service quality. Instead, it offers a supportive framework for gaining policy and structural insights, thereby empowering stakeholders to implement sustainable, evidence-based parenting programmes that improve child and family well-being.

The completed tool is primarily intended for national or federal use, but can be adapted for local contexts. It is *not designed for cross-country comparisons*, as parenting policies and their implementation are highly context-specific, shaped by unique socio-cultural, economic and governance factors. Regular use of the tool ensures that stakeholders can track progress and update strategies effectively, supporting systemic change and long-term impact.

The Policy Analysis and Benchmarking Tool for Universal Parenting Support is designed for use in different political, social and economic contexts, including humanitarian and development contexts, recognizing that countries have diverse political and governance structures. In some countries, decision-making takes place primarily at the national level, while in other countries it occurs through a federal system with decentralized executive and legislative powers. **Where benchmarks and checkpoints reference the national or sub-national level, this should be adapted to reflect national context.** The tool's overall purpose is to provide a structured approach for analysing the availability and quality of parenting policies, offering benchmarks that help identify strengths, gaps and areas for improvement in national efforts.



2 | Understanding the Policy Analysis and Benchmarking Tool for Universal Parenting Support



The tool consists of ten domains—key policy areas necessary for achieving universal parenting support. Each domain has one benchmark that defines its essential characteristics, which is then broken down into three indicators.

The tool is presented in a table in which each row represents one of the ten policy domains. Users can see the standard and three key indicators at a glance.

Each indicator is rated on a scale from 1 to 4:

1. Not established
2. Partially developed
3. Substantially developed
4. Fully developed

These ratings are optional but can help teams:

- guide discussions
- identify strengths and
- pinpoint areas for improvement



Large-scale parenting interventions are a relatively new concept, and vary widely across different countries, cultures and settings. As a result, universally agreed standards are still in development. This requires professionals to use their judgement, considering the specific context and policy environment when analysing these interventions.

Each rating should be supported by brief evidence, such as:

- policy documents
- stakeholder inputs and/or
- group consensus

The 'notes' section serves multiple purposes:

- summarizing supporting evidence
- clarifying key definitions used in the analysis
- capturing different perspectives across sectors and
- highlighting contextual nuances (e.g. variations in federal or humanitarian settings)

Detailed documentation helps ensure consistency in future analyses and provides a valuable record of contextual changes and progress over time.

3 | Completing the Analysis



The process for completing this tool can be tailored to fit the policy and programming context of the country, along with the priorities and resources of the team implementing it. Ideally, key government stakeholders should

lead the analysis, with support from UNICEF Country Offices or other relevant stakeholders, depending on the context and capacities available. Below is a recommended approach that can be customized as necessary:

3.1 | STEPS TO COMPLETE THE TOOL

1. Preliminary mapping: Conducting an initial mapping exercise (if not already completed) can help provide context by identifying existing programmes, policies and stakeholders. This step ensures a more informed and meaningful application of the tool.

2. Identify key stakeholders: Engaging diverse stakeholders is essential to ensure a comprehensive and meaningful analysis. Stakeholders should be identified based on the country's political structure, governance system and the current level of commitment to parenting interventions. Key stakeholders may include:

- **Government decision-makers:** Representatives from ministries and departments such as health, education, social welfare, justice, finance and gender, as well as local governance, whose mandates support or influence parenting interventions.
- **Civil society actors:** Organizations implementing parenting programmes or advocating for related initiatives, including early childhood development, adolescent programming, child protection and family strengthening.
- **Academics and researchers:** Scholars and research institutions specializing in parenting, family support policies and child development, who can provide evidence-based insights and contribute to policy formulation.

- **Donors:** Bilateral, multilateral or private donors who fund parenting interventions in the country.
- **Parent and caregiver representatives:** Parent associations or non-formal parent groups, including those representing communities that have been marginalized (e.g., people with disabilities, indigenous peoples) should be involved to ensure community voices are included.
- **Humanitarian actors:** In emergency contexts, humanitarian organizations delivering parenting or child and family support interventions should be engaged. This may include government departments involved in humanitarian responses that are not currently active in development-oriented child welfare or protection programmes.

Conducting a **stakeholder analysis** to clarify roles and contributions will strengthen the process, foster shared ownership of the outcomes and provide diverse perspectives, ensuring the analysis addresses various programmatic intersections.

3. Secure stakeholder buy-in:

- Political and stakeholder buy-in is essential to ensure commitment and alignment with national priorities.
- The tool's relevance to national goals and its potential to inform strategic planning and advocacy is also critical.

4. Establish a working group:

- A working group may be established or an existing one used to oversee the analysis process.
- Representation across sectors and levels of governance can ensure credibility and alignment with national frameworks.

5. Review benchmarks:

- Benchmarks should be reviewed collaboratively to ensure a shared understanding of definitions.
- Definitions are suggested in this tool and should be adapted to reflect national terminology already defined in laws, policies or parenting programmes. However, any significant deviations from globally agreed definitions—such as those related to violence or child rights—should be clearly noted and justified. In cases where such differences arise, stakeholders should assess potential implications for policy alignment, international commitments and programme implementation.

6. Conduct the analysis:

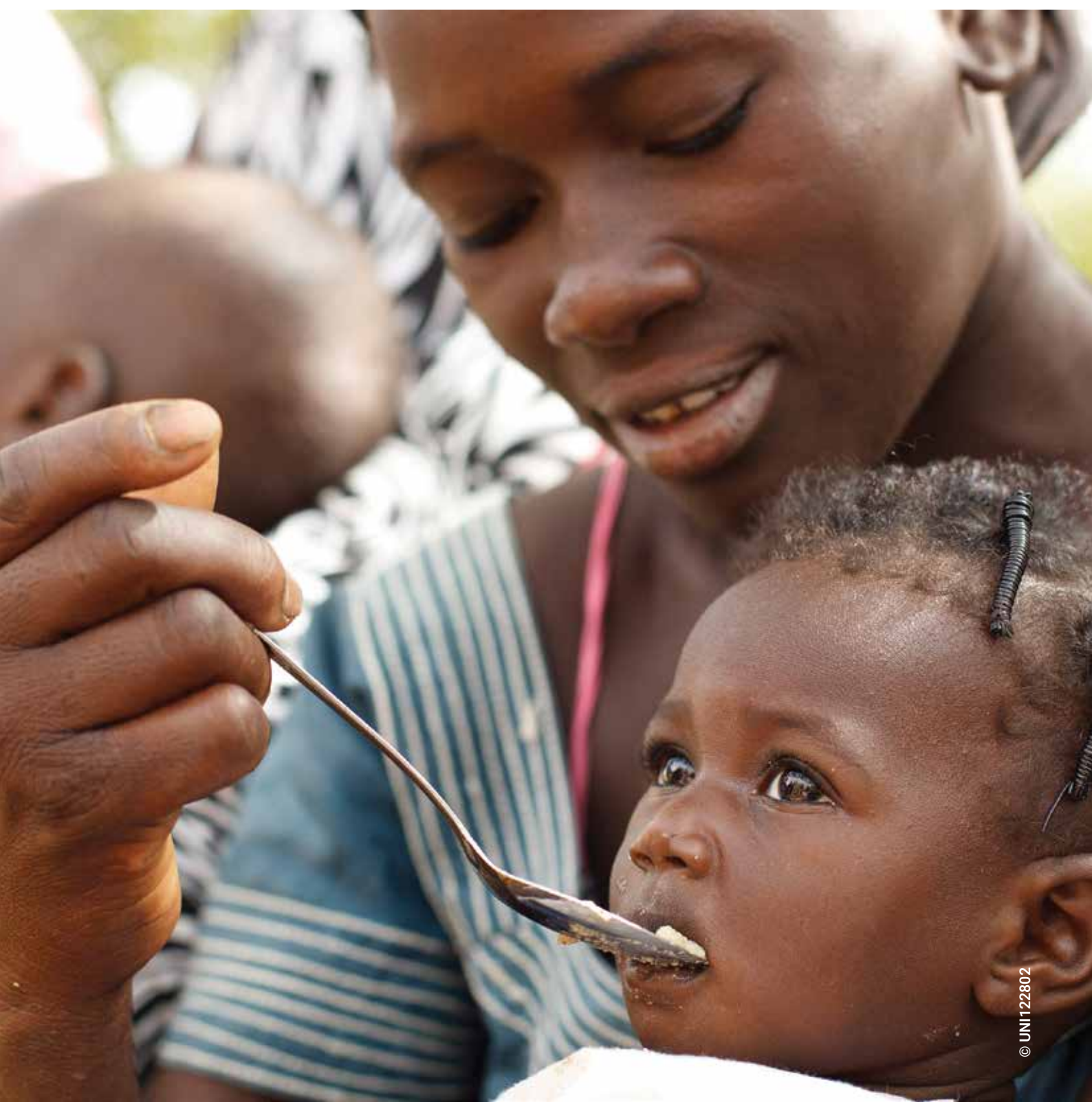
- **Basic approach:**
 - Conduct a desk review to collect information on policies, services and parenting programmes, drawing on sources including laws, policies and implementation guidance, reports, academic studies, among others.
 - Perform the analysis based on findings and validate it through stakeholder consultations.
- **Comprehensive approach:**
 - Engage stakeholders through workshops to discuss and agree on benchmarks.
 - Combine desk reviews with interviews and regular consultations to ensure a participatory process.
 - Apply the process at national and sub-national levels where relevant to reflect diverse contexts.

7. Rate and validate findings:

- Use the rating system and provide additional context by recording observations, allowing for both numerical ratings (if used) and qualitative narratives to capture detailed insights.
- Document and analyse conflicting perspectives among stakeholders to highlight areas where further consultation may be needed for future planning.

8. Present results:

- Compile findings in a country report or other formats appropriate for planning and advocacy purposes.



3.2 | TIMELINE

The timeline for completing the tool depends on the depth of analysis and the methods employed for data collection. Teams should determine the timeline based on available

resources and capacity. Three case studies below illustrate how the tool can be adapted to different contexts.

CASE STUDY 1: Piloting the Tool in Mexico

In 2024, Mexico conducted a pilot of UNICEF's Policy Analysis and Benchmarking Tool for Universal Parenting Support to assess and enhance its parenting policies. The methodology focused on inclusivity and local relevance, combining desk research with participatory consultations. The aim was to thoroughly understand Mexico's national parenting policy environment and adapt the tool to fit local needs.

The six-month pilot targeted three states: Baja California, Chihuahua and Michoacán, selected for their varied geographic, cultural and socio-economic characteristics. This choice provided a well-rounded view of the parenting support policy landscape across the country.

A descriptive qualitative research methodology was adopted, adhering to UNICEF's Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis. This ensured that the study met global standards for rigour and inclusivity.

The pilot began with a desk review to analyse key legal, institutional and programmatic frameworks, including an in-depth look at national laws and policies such as the General Law on the Rights of Children and Adolescents and the National Strategy for Early Childhood Care.

The project involved over 100 individuals through various methods so as to engage stakeholders participatively. This included 20 semi-structured interviews with experts from government, academia and civil society, focus groups with 19 representatives and four workshops with 72 intersectoral authorities and five civil society organizations. During these sessions, participants evaluated all domains of the scale, identifying strengths, challenges and opportunities within the parenting policies.

The findings and recommendations were validated through a stakeholder feedback session, ensuring transparency and accountability. This participatory method promoted ownership among participants and pinpointed areas for enhancement, such as intersectoral coordination and inclusivity for marginalized groups.

Advocacy efforts informed by the pilot's findings contributed to ongoing efforts to integrate principles of respectful parenting into the six-year national development plan, ensuring alignment with the country's long-term objectives

CASE STUDY 2:

Promoting Cross-Sectoral Dialogue Through Analysis and Benchmarking in South Africa

The benchmarking process in South Africa yielded significant benefits by fostering dialogue, increasing awareness and enhancing collaboration among diverse stakeholders in the parenting support ecosystem. Undertaken as part of a UNICEF initiative, the process enabled a structured assessment of South Africa's parenting policy landscape, identifying strengths, gaps and opportunities for improvement.

One of the most notable outcomes was the facilitation of cross-sectoral dialogue. The benchmarking tool served as a platform for engaging government officials, NGOs and academic representatives, many of whom had previously operated in silos. Stakeholders found the process invaluable for aligning their efforts, sharing insights and collaboratively identifying priorities for future action. This engagement not only validated the tool's findings, but also built trust and a sense of ownership among participants.

The benchmarking exercise also heightened awareness of the importance of parenting support as a critical component of national development. It highlighted the need for universal and coordinated parenting initiatives and advocated for multisectoral approaches. This raised awareness was timely, coinciding with emerging strategic priorities in the country.

Importantly, the process informed policy and planning. A senior government official highlighted the value of the benchmarking findings in shaping future parenting support initiatives. Additionally, the exercise underscored the need for improved coordination and monitoring systems to strengthen implementation.

Overall, the benchmarking process was a catalyst for systemic change, laying the groundwork for a more integrated and effective approach to parenting support in South Africa.



CASE STUDY 3:

Transforming Perspectives: The Impact of a Parenting Policy Analysis in Serbia

In Serbia, initial scepticism surrounded the benefits of conducting a comprehensive parenting policy analysis. Stakeholders questioned the value of evaluating existing frameworks through a dedicated parenting lens, given that there was no single lead agency with responsibility for parenting and that policies which might include parenting were managed across the ministries of health, education and social welfare. Furthermore, the concepts of parenting support and the broader family support were often used interchangeably. However, the pilot revealed the potential for meaningful change.

The process began with a comprehensive desk review, which uncovered a wide range of parenting-related policies, strategies and programmes. This step was instrumental in showcasing the breadth of resources already in place, while providing valuable insights into areas for growth. It also gave stakeholders a clearer picture of how parenting policies intersected with broader social and developmental priorities.

The structured evaluation tool applied during the pilot allowed for a systematic review of Serbia's parenting landscape. The findings demonstrated the cost-effectiveness of universal parenting programmes and provided a roadmap for strengthening intersectoral coordination. Stakeholder consultations further facilitated dialogue, breaking down initial scepticism and fostering buy-in among stakeholders.

Following the validation of the process in early 2025, the analysis will serve as a comprehensive baseline study of parenting support policies and programmes, informing the development of a cohesive national action plan with a strong emphasis on intersectoral coordination.



4 | Benchmarking tool



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Domain	Benchmark	Indicator	Rating (1-4)	Source of information	Notes
1. Legislation and policies	There are legal and policy frameworks at an overarching national or federal level that support parenting initiatives.	1. There are commitments made by political leaders at national, federal or senior levels in decentralized systems to achieve universal parenting support, outlined in an overarching document (e.g., a multisectoral policy framework).			
		2. Sectoral laws and policies related to family, child and adolescent well-being (e.g., in health, education or public security) include goals and costed action plans to guide the implementation of parenting support.			

Domain	Benchmark	Indicator	Rating (1-4)	Source of information	Notes
1. Legislation and policies	There are legal and policy frameworks at an overarching national or federal level that support parenting initiatives.	3. Parenting policies and legislation are developed based on evidence, including behavioural science, and shaped through consultations with key stakeholders, including parents and caregivers.			
2. Leadership and Coordination	There is a national coordination mechanism overseeing parenting policies, plans and programmes at the national, federal or senior decentralized level.	1. There is at least one lead ministry or agency with a clear mandate for overseeing the national parenting policies and plans at the most senior (national or federal) level.			
		2. Multi-sectoral coordination mechanisms, such as committees or working groups, are established and operational, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities at both national and sub-national levels.			
		3. A mechanism exists to ensure meaningful consultation and participation of parents, caregivers relevant stakeholders from private and public sectors, and age-appropriate representation of children in the planning, implementation and evaluation of parenting policies and programmes.			

Domain	Benchmark	Indicator	Rating (1-4)	Source of information	Notes
3. Evidence-informed programmes	Policies require parenting programmes to use evidence-informed approaches and delivery methods that are relevant to national and local contexts.	1. Parenting policies and plans require programmes to be designed with a clear theory of change and evidence base, informed by research on the social and behavioural drivers of parenting behaviours across the life course.			
		2. Parenting policies and plans require programmes to be developed, implemented and evaluated using a consultative process with regular feedback through community engagement, including parents, community stakeholders and service providers.			
		3. Parenting policies and plans establish evidence-informed criteria for designing, adapting and delivering programmes that address the unique needs of families across the life course, reflecting their diverse cultures, languages and values.			
4. Tiered approach to parenting support	National parenting policies and plans include universal, targeted and intensive interventions with increasing levels of support.	1. Parenting interventions are structured into universal, targeted and intensive levels, based on the intensity of support and the needs of different populations.			

Domain	Benchmark	Indicator	Rating (1-4)	Source of information	Notes
4. Tiered approach to parenting support	National parenting policies and plans include universal, targeted and intensive interventions with increasing levels of support.	2. Targeted and intensive parenting programmes are linked to additional services and support to address the complex needs of families.			
		3. Clear criteria are in place for identifying parents and caregivers who would benefit from targeted or intensive parenting programmes, meeting the needs of specific profiles of target populations, including groups who have faced marginalization.			
5. Scale and sustainability	The national/ federal parenting policies and plans include strategies to ensure scalability, sustainability and long-term impact and reach.	1. A costed multi-sectoral strategy is in place to scale up universal parenting support, ensuring it reaches all caregivers and children, with a focus on the most vulnerable.			
		2. A clear, time-bound plan outlines strategies to scale and replicate parenting programmes that is guided by evidence of successful implementation strategies and outcomes of the interventions that are being delivered.			

Domain	Benchmark	Indicator	Rating (1-4)	Source of information	Notes
5. Scale and sustainability	The national/ federal parenting policies and plans include strategies to ensure scalability, sustainability and long-term impact and reach.	3. Evidence-informed, innovative methods, such as digital tools, hybrid approaches and low-tech options such as radio or television, are used to complement in-person delivery and expand the reach of parenting interventions.			
6. Use of delivery platforms for scale up	Parenting interventions are integrated into different delivery platforms to address diverse needs, reach more caregivers and empower families to access additional support.	1. National policies and plans identified require parenting interventions to utilize priority delivery platforms and routine services to effectively reach parents and caregivers across the life course, addressing diverse needs and scaling support.			
		2. There are referral systems within and between delivery platforms, ensuring vulnerable families can access additional support for well-being and protection beyond parenting programmes.			
		3. Parenting interventions and services empower parents and caregivers by increasing awareness of available additional support and equipping them with the knowledge to access it effectively.			

Domain	Benchmark	Indicator	Rating (1-4)	Source of information	Notes
7. Parenting workforce	The national/ federal parenting policies and plans include a workforce strategy for quality and sustainable delivery.	1. There is a national workforce development plan that has been informed by costed workforce mapping and capacity assessment across relevant delivery platforms to identify gaps and opportunities.			
		2. The national workforce development plan or strategy includes standards for qualifications, training, supervision and support within delivery platforms to enhance workforce capacity.			
		3. Workforce training includes tools and methodologies to identify vulnerable groups, assess needs and engage families inclusively, equitably and using a family-centred approach.			
8. Public financing	There is a commitment to allocation of national/federal and decentralized level budgets to ensure the sustainability and scalability of parenting interventions.	1. Government budgets at national and sub-national levels allocate adequate resources for parenting interventions, with systems for forecasting and specific budget reporting.			

Domain	Benchmark	Indicator	Rating (1-4)	Source of information	Notes
8. Public financing	There is a commitment to allocation of national/federal and decentralized level budgets to ensure the sustainability and scalability of parenting interventions.	2. Strategies are in place to mobilize and use financial resources from public, private and international sources to support the delivery and scale-up of parenting interventions.			
		3. A system of results-based budgeting is established and includes dedicated financial resources for evidence generation, capacity building, outreach and monitoring to support effective parenting interventions.			
9. Data and monitoring	There is a system to gather, assess and use evidence for scaling and sustaining parenting support.	1. An agreed set of core indicators is in place to measure progress towards universal parenting support at the national level.			
		2. Standardized data collection tools are in place across sectors to monitor the effectiveness, quality and impact of services on children, parents and families.			
		3. Data and participatory research are used to inform policy, adapt programmes and guide decision-making at national and sub-national levels.			

Domain	Benchmark	Indicator	Rating (1-4)	Source of information	Notes
10. Social norms	National parenting policies and plans address harmful social norms and foster positive practices to promote effective and nurturing parenting across the life course.	1. Parenting policies and programmes are grounded in SBC methodologies to promote positive parenting practices and challenge harmful norms.			
		2. Parenting policies and programmes are grounded in gender analysis, support gender-equitable parenting practices that conform to national legislation and standards, and include strategies to promote male involvement.			
		3. National parenting policies promote interventions that address stigma and reduce harmful norms that legitimize violence.			

5 | Supporting information



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5.1 | DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

Adolescent: Individuals between the ages of 10-19. Younger adolescents are between 10 to 14 and older adolescents are between 15 to 19. However, definitions of adolescence vary in different contexts, and in some cases, children are considered to transition directly from childhood to adulthood.⁴

Caregiver: A person who is closely attached to the child and responsible for their daily care and support. Primary caregivers include parents, families and other people who are directly responsible for the child at home. They also include carers outside the home, such as those working in organized day care.⁵

Changing social and cultural gender norms and values:

A set of processes, approaches, tools, strategies and tactics that promote positive and measurable changes in people's environments, societies and behaviours.⁶

Child: Any person under the age of 18. (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child)

Child and adolescent participation: The act of being informed, engaged and having an influence in decisions and matters that affect one's life – in private and public spheres, in the family home, in alternative care settings, at school, in the workplace, in the community, in social media and in broader governance processes.⁷

⁴ UNICEF (2021). Parenting of Adolescents: Programming Guidance.

⁵ To add final GPSF citation

⁶ WHO (2016). INSPIRE: seven strategies for ending violence against children. [UNICEF. Social and Behaviour Change \(SBC\) Theory and Practice](#), UNICEF advanced E-Course, accessed 20 February 2025.

⁷ UNICEF (2021). Guidance on Child and Adolescent Participation as part of Phase III of the preparatory action for a European Child Guarantee.

Children and adults with disabilities:

Individuals who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, without adequate support, could hinder their equal, full and effective participation in society.⁸

Community: A network of people who share similar interests, values, goals, culture, religion and/or history, as well as a feeling of cohesion among its members. A community includes multiple relevant people to the well-being of children and families, such as children, mothers, fathers, other caregivers, teachers, health workers, legal representatives, as well as religious, social, indigenous and governmental leaders (UNICEF document).⁹

Community engagement or participation:

The process in which individuals, families or communities assume responsibility for their own welfare and develop the capacity to contribute to their development. Community participation refers to an active process whereby the beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of projects rather than merely receiving a share of the benefits.¹⁰

Culture: A set of shared values, beliefs and social norms within a society. It is dynamic and changes as societies adapt to new information, circumstances and challenges.¹¹

Disability: A long-term mental, physical, intellectual or sensory impairment that—in interaction with the environment—limits activity and restricts participation in society on an equal basis with others.¹²

Early childhood development: The period from 0 to 8 years of age, characterized by rapid physical, cognitive, linguistic and social-emotional development.¹³

Evidence of what works in parenting: The most rigorous sources of evidence for intervention and programme effectiveness include systematic reviews, meta-analyses and randomized trials or experimental evaluations. Other types of studies, such as cohort studies and comparisons of the outcomes of individuals who received the interventions with those of individuals who did not receive the intervention, provide less credible evidence on the effects of interventions.¹⁴

Evidence-informed key features of parenting interventions and programmes:

In general, effective parenting programmes and interventions share common content related to:

1. the promotion of knowledge of children's and adolescents' development, behaviour and needs through the life course,
2. responsive caregiving,
3. quality time together,
4. nonviolent discipline (including positive reinforcement, rule setting and appropriate consequences),
5. stress management and self-care,
6. communication and self-regulation skills,
7. and promoting gender-equitable norms, among others.

8 UNICEF (2022). [Global Multisectoral Operational Framework for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support of Children, Adolescents and Caregivers Across Settings](#).

9 UNICEF (2021). [Multi-sectoral approaches to addressing harmful practices in Eastern and Southern Africa: A programme brief](#).

10 Ibid.

11 UNICEF (2022). [Global Multisectoral Operational Framework for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support of Children, Adolescents and Caregivers Across Settings](#).

12 United Nations (2006). [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#): Article 1.

13 UNICEF (2022). [Early Childhood Development](#)

14 World Health Organization (2022). [Evidence, policy, impact: WHO guide for evidence-informed decision-making](#).

Similarly, parenting programmes are more likely to have positive impacts when they use strength-based approaches that build on caregivers' skills and lived experiences and when they implement the core content in ways that promote learning, for example through demonstrations and modelling, practice and rehearsal, and positive feedback. These approaches are equally effective in home and group delivery.¹⁵

Family: A social construct that may include children who live with one or both biological parents or are cared for in diverse arrangements, including living with extended family members, siblings, foster care or alternative care arrangements.¹⁶

Family-friendly policies: Policies that provide parents and caregivers with the care, time and resources to help to balance and benefit both work and family life and promote quality childcare, including maternal and paternal paid leave, breastfeeding support, and quality childcare support in formal and informal settings, and child benefits and related social protection systems.¹⁷

Family-centred approach: A family-centred approach involves working in partnership with families to better understand their circumstances and to decide on strategies that suit them and their children. It ensures all children have access to essential services and opportunities, regardless of disability, marginalization, vulnerability, or belonging to specific indigenous, ethnic or hard-to-reach groups.¹⁸

Gender-based violence: Any act perpetrated against a person's will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships. It encompasses threats of violence or coercion. It can be physical, emotional, psychological or sexual in nature, and may involve denial of resources or access to services.¹⁹

Gender equity: The process of ensuring fairness for men and women, and boys and girls, and, importantly, achieving equality of outcomes and results. Gender equity may involve temporary special measures to compensate for historical or systemic bias or discrimination. It refers to differential treatment that is fair and positively addresses a bias or disadvantage due to gender roles, norms or differences between the sexes. Equity ensures that men and women, and boys and girls, have an equal chance, not only at the starting point but also when reaching the finishing line. It is about the fair and just treatment of both sexes that considers the different needs of the men and women, cultural barriers and past discrimination of the specific group.²⁰

Gender-equitable parenting: Parenting that integrates key normative principles such as gender equality and inclusion while promoting positive gender norms and socialization to transform power structures in future generations.²¹

15 UNICEF (2021). [Mapping of parenting programmes for adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean](#).

16 UNICEF (2022). [Global Multisectoral Operational Framework for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support of Children, Adolescents and Caregivers Across Settings](#).

17 UNICEF (2019). [Family-Friendly Policies A Policy Brief: Redesigning the Workplace of the Future](#).

18 Raising Children (website), Professionals: a family-centred approach to working with parents. <https://raisingchildren.net.au/for-professionals/working-with-parents/about-working-with-parents/professionals-a-family-centred-approach>, accessed 12 December 2024.

19 <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/sexual-and-gender-based-violence.html>

20 UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (2017). [Gender Equality: Glossary of Terms and Concepts](#).

21 UNICEF (undated). [Gender-Transformative Parenting](#) (presentation).

Gender norms: Implicit or explicit rules within a society or group about acceptable, appropriate and expected attributes and behaviours for females and males. Gender norms within society shape and reinforce the different roles and behaviours expected of children and adults based on their perceived or assigned gender.²²

Implementing at scale: The expansion of support to reach families in proportion to need, where meeting and reducing the need is the objective to bring transformational impacts for children and families at a national scale.²³

Institutionalizing programmes and

interventions: Strategic choices to support vertical scaling-up of programmes and interventions.²⁴

Integration into existing service delivery platforms. Parenting programmes can be delivered as part of existing service provision platforms, including health and social services (e.g., cash transfer programmes), school or early education services, child protection and justice systems, or through civil society platforms (e.g., non-formal learning platforms, communities, religious institutions or NGOs) to maximize implementation outcomes and ensure their scalability.²⁵

Intensive parenting support: Intensive and individualized parenting interventions designed for families experiencing complex challenges that significantly affect their capacity to provide nurturing care. This includes situations involving ongoing violence, severe stress, mental health concerns, substance use, developmental risks or social isolation. These interventions often involve multidisciplinary support, therapeutic services and close follow-up, and are typically delivered by specialized professionals or trained paraprofessionals within child protection, health or social service systems.²⁶

Levels of parenting support: Parenting programmes can be classified into three tiers—universal, targeted and intensive. **Universal programmes** are delivered to all parents regardless of risk levels (i.e., no screening or selection criteria are applied). **Targeted programmes** are intended for parents who have specific needs). **Intensive interventions** are aimed at families presenting complex needs and challenges related to high-risk behaviours, including families with emerging signs of the problem (e.g., child maltreatment) as identified through a screening assessment or referral systems.²⁷

Life-course approach: A life-course approach to parenting support recognizes that caregiving needs and priorities evolve across a child's developmental stages—from early childhood through middle childhood and adolescence. It emphasizes continuous, age-appropriate and responsive support to caregivers at each stage, addressing their changing roles and challenges while promoting long-term well-being, equity and resilience for both children and families.²⁸

22 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2018). [FAO Technical Guide No. 1: Introduction to gender-sensitive social protection programming to combat rural poverty: Why is it important and what does it mean? A Toolkit on gender-sensitive social protection programmes to combat rural poverty and hunger](#). Cited in: UNICEF (2020). [Gender-responsive, age-sensitive social protection: A conceptual framework](#) (GRASSP Working Paper No. WP-2020-10). UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.

23 UNICEF (undated). [Scaling innovation for every child](#).

24 UNICEF (2021). [Mapping of parenting programmes for adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean](#).

25 UNICEF (2021). [Mapping of parenting programmes for adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean](#).

26 To add final GPSF citation

27 World Health Organization (2023). [WHO guidelines on parenting interventions to prevent maltreatment and enhance parent–child relationships with children aged 0–17 years](#).

28 To add final GPSF citation

Male engagement: Fathers and other male caregivers are engaged when they are emotionally involved and responsive caregivers, taking an active role in protecting, supporting and promoting the health, development and well-being of their children. If they are in a relationship with their child's other caregiver(s), engagement also means sharing responsibilities for care work and household decision-making, while also fostering a healthy, respectful, nonviolent, caring and equitable relationship.²⁹

Marginalization: Treatment of a person, group or concept as insignificant or peripheral.³⁰

Multi-sectoral approach: The coordinated engagement of multiple sectors—such as health, education, social protection, social welfare, child protection and justice—to address the complex and interrelated needs of children, caregivers and families, in the context of parenting support.³¹

Multi-sectoral coordination committee: A group —convened by the government — authorized to oversee and monitor a country's action plan. Typically, this group is comprised of several ministerial agencies that have a mandate on parenting, along with key civil society partners.³²

National policy framework: National action plans and policies with specific goals, implementation measures and allocation of financial and human resources.³³ (European Union) Action plans and policies may be sub-national, in decentralized and federal systems.

Norms and values: The perceived informal rules that define acceptable and appropriate behaviours and actions within a given group, community or setting and therefore guide actual behaviour.³⁴

Nurturing care: An environment created by caregivers that ensures children's good health and nutrition, protects them from threats and gives them opportunities for early learning through interactions that are emotionally supportive and responsive.³⁵

Paraprofessional: A person who typically works next to or supports the work of a professional in the same field. A paraprofessional is trained to perform certain functions but is not always legally certified or licensed to practise as a full professional, which in some fields requires college or university degrees or specialized training.³⁶

Parent: In this context, a parent is not only a child's biological mother or father. The term refers to any caregiver or guardian who is responsible for the care of a child. This includes mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, grandparents, other relatives or non-related arers.³⁷

29 Ibid.

30 Child Marriage Research to Action Network (the CRANK) (January 2023). [Research Spotlight: How to ensure efforts to address child marriage reach the most marginalised girls.](#)

31 To add final GPSF citation

32 INSPIRE Working Group. (2021) [INSPIRE Guide to Adaptation and Scale-Up.](#)

33 Definition from European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, <http://fra.europa.eu/en/content/national-policy-framework-action-plan-or-strategy>

34 UNICEF, [Technical Note: Defining Social Norms and Related Concepts](#), updated 26 December 2023.

35 WHO, UNICEF, & World Bank Group. (2018). [Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development: A Framework for Helping Children Survive and Thrive to Transform Health and Human Potential.](#) Geneva: World Health Organization

36 Definition from European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, <http://fra.europa.eu/en/content/national-policy-framework-action-plan-or-strategy>

37 United Nations Children's Fund, About UNICEF Parenting, www.unicef.org/parenting/about, accessed 19 February 2025.

Parenting: Interactions, behaviours, emotions, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and practices offered to a child by parents or other caregivers. There are many ways of practising parenting; some are positive while others are less so. Positive parenting is associated with promoting and supporting the development and well-being of the child by providing nurturing care.³⁸

Parenting behaviours: The behaviours and practices that form the foundation of parenting. Core components of parenting behaviours include caregiving, support-seeking and self-care behaviours.³⁹

Parenting programmes and interventions: A set of activities or services aimed at improving how parents and caregivers approach and perform their role as parents or caregivers, specifically their parenting knowledge, attitudes, skills, behaviours and practices.⁴⁰

Parenting support: A broad set of services, programmes, activities, resources, information and community support available to parents to help them as caregivers in their parenting role. It increases child-rearing knowledge, skills and social support, enhancing parenting competencies and promoting the well-being of caregivers and children.⁴¹

Parenting workforce: A wide range of professionals, paraprofessionals and volunteers, who are in both paid and unpaid, governmental and nongovernmental roles. As part of the broader social service workforce, they play an important role in designing, delivering and monitoring parenting support to promote positive parenting for children, youth, families and communities.⁴²

Professional: Typically a member of a well-recognized profession, often defined by the specific degree or level of education required, a particular ethical or moral code of conduct and/or licensing or certification to practise. Among social service workers, it refers to those with at least a bachelor's degree in a field directly related to social services, such as social work.⁴³

Responsive caregiving: The ability of caregivers to notice, understand and respond to their child's signals in a timely and appropriate manner. It is considered the foundational component of nurturing care because responsive caregivers are better able to support the other four components. It includes both sensitivity and responsiveness. Sensitivity is the caregiver's awareness of a child's acts and vocalizations as communicative signals to indicate needs and wants. Responsiveness is the caregiver's capacity to respond in a timely and appropriate way to a child's signals.⁴⁴

38 To add final GPSF citation

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Adapted from social service workforce definition, Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, <www.socialserviceworkforce.org/the-workforce/defining-the-workforce>.

43 Global Social Service Workforce Alliance 2015). [Para Professionals in the Social Service Workforce](#).

44 WHO, UNICEF, & World Bank Group. (2018). [Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development: A Framework for Helping Children Survive and Thrive to Transform Health and Human Potential](#). Geneva: World Health Organization

Results-based budgeting: A budget process in which budget allocation revolves around a set of predefined objectives and observed results based on performance indicators.⁴⁵

Scaling up: The process in which governments, agencies and organizations expand, adapt and sustain successful policies, programmes and services in geographic areas and over time to strengthen the effectiveness and impact of the (..) system. *(Note: this reference is for a child protection system, but applies equally to other core sectors through which parenting may be delivered).*⁴⁶

Social and behaviour change (SBC): A set of approaches that promote positive and measurable changes toward the fulfilment of children's rights. It aims to empower individuals and communities and reduce structural barriers that hinder people from adopting positive practices and societies from becoming more equitable, inclusive, cohesive and peaceful. SBC brings together perspectives and insights from multiple disciplines (including sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics and communication, among others) and combines social and behavioural sciences with community insights to enable people and their communities to expand control over the decisions they make.⁴⁷

Social norms: Behavioural rules, expectations and perceptions about others that are largely shared by people within a group or society.⁴⁸

Social service workforce: An inclusive concept referring to a broad range of governmental and nongovernmental professionals and paraprofessionals who work with children, youth,

adults, older persons, families and communities to ensure healthy development and well-being.⁴⁹

Standardized data collection: Collecting data using instruments that have been tried and tested in real life situations, with evidence on validity or reliability, facilitating comparability between individuals and groups as well as across time. (UNICEF)⁵⁰

System-strengthening: Actions to build and sustain capacity in policy, governance, financing, human resources, quality service delivery, data systems and community structures—at all levels—to ensure resilient, equitable and effective sectoral systems.⁵¹

Targeted (or selective) parenting support: Targeted parenting support refers to additional interventions provided to families experiencing specific risks or vulnerabilities that may affect their caregiving capacity. This may include poverty, adolescent parenthood, mental health challenges, disability, social isolation, exposure to violence, or legal and migration status.⁵²

Theory of change: This explains how activities are understood to produce a series of results that contribute to achieving the final intended impacts. It can be developed for any level of intervention—an event, a project, programme, policy, strategy or organization.⁵³

Tiered programmes: The balance between programme intensity and the needs of individual families. These programmes can be universal, targeted / selective, or intensive.⁵⁴

45 UNICEF (2020). [UNICEF global resource guide on public finance for children in Early Childhood Development](#).

46 UNICEF (2020). [Scaling up Child Protection: A Framework for the Future Vol. 1: Laying a Foundation for Going to Scale](#).

47 To add final GPSF citation

48 [INSPIRE: seven strategies for ending violence against children](#).

49 Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, [Defining the Workforce - Global Social Service Workforce Alliance](#)

50 UNICEF (2021) <https://www.unicef.org/evaluation/media/1786/file/UNICEF%20Procedure%20on%20Ethical%20Standards%20in%20Research%2C%20Evaluation%2C%20Data%20Collection%20and%20Analysis.pdf>

51 To add final GPSF citation

52 Ibid.

53 UNICEF (2014) [Theory of change](#)

54 World Health Organization (2023). [WHO guidelines on parenting interventions to prevent maltreatment and enhance parent-child relationships with children aged 0–17 years](#).

Universal parenting support: Foundational, population-wide interventions that are accessible to all caregivers, regardless of background or risk level. It aims to promote positive parenting behaviours, strengthen family well-being and prevent challenges before they arise. Delivered through platforms such as health care, education and community services, universal support is designed to be inclusive, non-stigmatizing, culturally relevant and often integrated into routine systems.⁵⁵

Universal progressive approach: Combines broad, population-wide parenting support with the progressive intensification of services based on family needs. It ensures that all caregivers have access to inclusive, non-stigmatizing and foundational support, while offering targeted and intensive interventions to those facing additional challenges.⁵⁶

Vulnerable children and families: Children and families who face multiple deprivations and challenges to reach their full potential, including families who have been marginalized or who have been living in extreme poverty, exposed to domestic and/or contextual violence, racism and discrimination, or forcibly displaced, among others.⁵⁷ Vulnerability is contextual. Each country will use their national definitions of childhood, caregiver, family and household vulnerability.

Values: General standards of what is or is not adequate, important, and/or worthwhile.⁵⁸

5.2 | RESOURCES

The sources of information are all global, including global UNICEF resources. These can be supplemented by regional and national resources, where required.

GENERAL RESOURCES ON PARENTING

- Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, UNICEF, WHO (2021). *Universal parenting support to prevent abuse and neglect: A policy call for national governments*.
- UNICEF (2017). [Standards for ECD Parenting Programmes in Low- and Middle-Income Countries](#).
- UNICEF (2020). [Designing Parenting Programmes for Violence Prevention: A Guidance Note](#).
- UNICEF (2021). [Parenting of Adolescents: Programming Guidance](#).
- UNICEF Europe and Central Asia (2024). [Parenting Support Framework for the Early Years](#).
- World Health Organization (2023). [WHO guidelines on parenting interventions to prevent maltreatment and enhance parent-child relationships with children aged 0–17 years](#).
- WHO (2024) [Designing, implementing, evaluating, and scaling up parenting interventions: a handbook for decision-makers and implementers](#). Geneva: World Health Organization; 2024. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

⁵⁵ To add final GPSF citation

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ UNICEF (undated). [Support for vulnerable children and families](#).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

The following websites contain the latest resources on evidence-based parenting:

- Global Initiative to Support Parents: <https://support-parents.org/>
- UNICEF's parenting website: <https://www.unicef.org/parenting/>
- INSPIRE Strategies: <https://inspire-strategies.org/>

MULTI-SECTORAL COORDINATION

- Government of Uganda, United Nations (2019). [National Multi-sectoral Coordination Framework for Adolescent Girls 2017/2018 - 2021/2022](#).
- UNICEF (2021). [Multi-sectoral approaches to addressing harmful practices in Eastern and Southern Africa: A programme brief](#).
- UNICEF (2022). [Global Multisectoral Operational Framework for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support of Children, Adolescents and Caregivers Across Settings](#).

PROGRAMME DESIGN AND ADAPTATION

- The following article describes some of the key steps in cultural adaptation of parenting interventions: Schilling S, Mebane A, Perreira KM. Cultural Adaptation of Group Parenting Programs: Review of the Literature and Recommendations for Best Practices. Fam Process. 2021 Dec;60(4):1134-1151. doi: 10.1111/famp.12658.
- Rogers, Patricia (2014). [Theory of Change: Methodological Briefs - Impact Evaluation No. 2, Methodological Briefs, no. 2, UNICEF Innocenti](#).

LIFE-COURSE APPROACH

- UNICEF (2017). [Standards for ECD Parenting Programmes in Low- and Middle-Income Countries](#).
- UNICEF (2021). [Parenting of Adolescents: Programming Guidance](#).
- UNICEF (2021). [Mapping of parenting programmes for adolescents in Latin America and the Caribbean](#).
- UNICEF (2018). [Regional Study on Parenting Adolescents and Parenting Support Programmes in Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro and Romania](#).

The following two articles provide simple information on the importance of a life-course approach.

- Black MM, Behrman JR, Daelmans B, et al (2021). The principles of Nurturing Care promote human capital and mitigate adversities from preconception through adolescence. BMJ Global Health;6:e004436: <https://gh.bmj.com/content/bmjgh/6/4/e004436.full.pdf>
- Black, M., Walker, S. P., Fernald, L. C. H., Andersen, C. T., DiGirolamo, A. M., Lu, C., McCoy, D. C., Fink, G., Shawar, Y. R., Shiffman, J., Devercelli, A. E., Wodon, Q. T., Vargas-Barón, E., & Grantham-McGregor, S. (2017). Early childhood development coming of age: science through Delivery platforms
- UNICEF (undated). [Scaling innovation for every child](#).
- UNICEF (2020). [Scaling up child protection: A framework for the future](#).

GENDER-EQUITABLE PARENTING AND MALE INVOLVEMENT

- ProMundo (2020). [The role of fathers in Parenting for gender equality](#).
- UNICEF (undated). [Technical Note on gender-responsive parenting](#).
- UNICEF. What is gender responsive parenting? <https://www.unicef.org/parenting/child-development/what-gender-responsive-parenting>
- UNICEF (undated). [Tip-sheet for gender responsive parenting](#).
- UNICEF (undated). [Tips for parentings of adolescents to support gender-responsive parenting](#).

WORKFORCE

- Global Social Service Workforce Alliance & UNICEF (2019). [Guidelines to Strengthen Social Service Workforce for Child Protection](#).
- UNICEF (2022). [Proposed Guidance and Tool for Costing the Social Service Workforce](#).
- UNICEF (2022). [Proposed Guidance on Developing Minimum Social Service Workforce Ratios](#).
- UNICEF (2023). [The Role Of The Workplace In Supporting Positive And Gender-Responsive Parenting](#).

SCALE AND SUSTAINABILITY

- INSPIRE Working Group. (2021) [INSPIRE Guide to Adaptation and Scale-Up](#).
- UNICEF (2020). [Scaling up Child Protection: A Framework for the Future. Volume 2: The Framework](#).

PUBLIC FINANCING FOR PARENTING

- UNICEF (2017). [Results-Based Management Handbook](#)
- UNICEF (2022). [Ensuring Sustainable Financing to Accelerate Momentum on Wasting](#)
- UNICEF (2021). [The UNICEF Public Finance Toolkit](#)

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- UNICEF. [How we provide evidence to deliver results for children](#)
- UNICEF. [UNICEF evaluation](#)

NORMS AND VALUES

- UNICEF (2022). [Norms for change: changing the way you see the world](#)
- UNICEF (2021). [Manual on Social Norms and Change](#)

Appendix: Parenting Interventions and Programmes

What are parenting interventions and programmes?

These are often defined as a set of activities or services that seek to improve how primary caregivers (i.e., fathers, mothers, grandparents and other adult caregivers) of children (0-17 years) approach their role as caregivers, including their knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, skills, behaviours and daily interactions and practices.¹⁻³

Parenting programmes differ from other parent support interventions (e.g., parenting campaigns) in that they consist of a structured series of sessions, use multiple learning activities and often follow a structured manual or curriculum.

Evidence that can inform decision-making about parenting interventions and programmes. Using the latest high-quality evidence is essential for governments and other stakeholders to identify effective interventions and programmes that benefit families and avoid wasting resources on interventions with no benefits or potential harm. The following are considered as the most rigorous sources of evidence for programme effectiveness:⁴

- *Systematic reviews and meta-analyses* of randomized trials, which are overviews or syntheses of the available evidence.

- *Randomized trials or experimental evaluations*, which compare changes in outcomes between a randomly selected group of participants who receive a programme with a comparison group that does not receive the programme.

In cases where randomized trials are not feasible, other types of studies can provide evidence on the possible influence of a programme on participants' outcomes. These include *cohort studies*, which follow participants over time, and *studies that compare the outcomes* of a non-randomly selected group that receives the programme with those of a group that does not receive the programme. There is less confidence in the causal effects of programmes (that is, knowing that something happened *because* of the programme being delivered) when using findings from these studies.

Parenting interventions and programmes should also be informed by a clear theory of change that identifies the needs and opportunities in the current situation, the intended outcomes and impacts, and the actions needed to achieve such impacts. The theory of change should be developed based on the latest available evidence and should establish a common understanding among all key stakeholders of the strategies to be used to achieve the desired and expected impact (result).⁵

Outcomes. Rigorous evidence from several systematic reviews, meta-analyses and randomized trials⁶⁻¹¹ shows that parenting interventions and programmes can have the following child outcomes:

- improved health across the lifespan;
- improved nutritional status;
- improved early childhood development;
- improved school attendance and academic performance;
- increased productivity and higher wages;
- decreased cycles of violence, including perpetration of future violence;
- increased safety and security;
- improved caregiver-child relationship;
- increased social cohesion.

These programmes can also have the following outcomes for families and primary caregivers' well-being:

- improved family cohesion;
- increased knowledge and attitudes;
- improved self-efficacy or confidence;
- reduced caregiver stress;
- reduced (possibly) gender-based violence.

A third component is supporting caregivers' service-seeking or support-seeking behaviour.

At the same time, there is evidence showing that some of these positive impacts tend to fade over time after programme implementation.^{8,12} Therefore, enabling policy environments that promote high-quality services for children and parents, continue support through complementary interventions, as well as booster in-person, hybrid, or digital sessions offer promise in ensuring sustainable benefits of parenting programmes over time.⁸

Similarly, there is less evidence about the potential effectiveness of other interventions such as parenting campaigns^{13,14}, although

awareness-raising on parenting behaviours through social and behaviour change campaigns may be desirable to support and complement parenting interventions and programmes.

Scope (who the intervention is reaching).

Parenting interventions and programmes vary in their intervention scope depending on whether they are **universal** (i.e., delivered to all caregivers or families with no specific selection criteria), **targeted** (i.e., directed to specific caregivers, families or groups exposed to risk factors for harsh parenting or neglect), or more **intensive** programmes for caregivers and families referred for services based on specific challenges related to high-risk behaviours (e.g., drug or alcohol dependency) or showing emerging signs of a problem (e.g., child maltreatment or clinical child behaviour problems).¹

Core content. In general, effective parenting programmes share common content related to:

1. the promotion of knowledge of children's and adolescents' development, behaviour and needs through the life course,
2. nurturing care and responsive caregiving,
3. quality time together,
4. nonviolent discipline (including positive reinforcement, rule setting and appropriate consequences),
5. stress management and self-care,
6. communication and self-regulation skills,
7. and promoting gender equitable norms, among others.^{1,18-22}

Delivery approaches. Parenting programmes are more likely to have positive impacts when they use strength-based approaches that build on caregivers' skills and lived experiences, and when they implement the core content in ways that promote learning, for example through demonstrations and modelling, practice and rehearsal, and positive feedback.²³ These

approaches are equally effective in home and group delivery. Programme approaches should be informed by evidence on current practices and needs, behavioural drivers, gender and social norms of parents and caregivers, disaggregated by age, geographic area, disability and other factors to identify the type of support required for specific audiences, especially for more targeted programmes and support.

Dosage or length. Most parenting programmes that have positive impacts on a beneficial outcome included between 4 and 12 in-person sessions.^{1,6} Some early evidence indicates that more frequent sessions (e.g., weekly) may have greater impact relative to less frequent sessions (e.g., monthly).²⁴ Furthermore, given that the effects of in-person parenting programmes tend to fade over time, they could include booster in-person, hybrid or digital sessions. Several considerations of dosage, including lengths and frequency of meetings or sessions are context-dependent and are contingent on the time available to programme staff and caregivers. More evidence is needed to understand whether doing so ensures sustainable impacts.

Delivery platforms. A delivery platform is the mechanism, institution or system through which parenting interventions and programmes are delivered. Interventions and programmes can be integrated within existing government services (e.g., health, education, early childhood development, services for intensive support, such as therapeutic services), or community systems (e.g., NGOs, other community-based organizations and religious institutions) to enhance their reach and sustainability.^{15,16} Using existing institutional platforms (e.g., child protection, health or nutrition services) for delivery can particularly enhance the scalability of programmes by increasing the likelihood of institutionalization (i.e., it becomes embedded

within a national service delivery system, with accompanying human resources, public sector budget lines and service delivery mechanisms). Parenting interventions or programmes can be delivered by professionals or paraprofessionals. Depending on the context, they may be group-based or individual and may be delivered in the home, a community setting or in an educational or health centre. Evidence indicates that parenting programmes are equally effective regardless of delivery modality and setting.^{1,6} Digital and hybrid approaches (both in-person and digital/via media) that leverage technology can be used to deploy parenting programmes at scale with reduced costs, and early evidence suggests that these approaches may be effective.^{17, 25}

The core resources that provide this evidence are listed in the bibliography below.

SELECTED RESOURCES THAT INFORM THIS APPENDIX

- ProMundo (2020). [*The Role of Fathers in Parenting for Gender Equality*](#).
- UNICEF (2014). [*Theory of Change*](#).
- UNICEF (2017). [*Standards for ECD Parenting Programmes in Low- and Middle-Income Countries*](#).
- UNICEF (2017). [*Programme guidance for early childhood development*](#).
- UNICEF (2020). [*Designing Parenting Programmes for Violence Prevention: A Guidance Note*](#).
- UNICEF (2021). [*Parenting of Adolescents: Programming Guidance*](#).
- UNICEF, World Health Organization, Parenting for Lifelong Health, End Violence Against Children, Early Childhood Development Action Network (2022). [*Global Initiative to Support Parents, Inter-Agency Vision*](#).
- World Health Organization (2017). [*INSPIRE seven strategies for ending violence against children*](#) technical package

- World Health Organization (2017). The [Adolescent Well-being Framework](#) and the [Helping Adolescents Thrive Toolkit](#)
- World Health Organization, UNICEF, World Bank Group and ECDAN (2018). [Nurturing Care Framework and Implementation Tools](#)
- World Health Organization (2022). [WHO guide for evidence-informed decision-making](#)
- World Health Organization (2023). [WHO guidelines on parenting interventions to prevent maltreatment and enhance parent–child relationships with children aged 0–17 years](#)
- [WHO mhGAP guidelines](#) and related [Caregiver Skills Training for families of children with developmental delays or disabilities](#)
- World Health Organization. [Global Initiative to Support Parents](#) website
- 6. Jeong J, Franchett EE, Ramos de Oliveira CV, Rehmani K, Yousafzai AK. Parenting interventions to promote early child development in the first three years of life: A global systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLOS Medicine*. 2021;18(5):e1003602. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1003602
- 7. Chen M, Chan KL. Effects of Parenting Programs on Child Maltreatment Prevention: A Meta-Analysis. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*. 2016/01/01 2015;17(1):88-104. doi:10.1177/1524838014566718
- 8. Backhaus S, Leijten P, Jochim J, Melendez-Torres GJ, Gardner F. Effects over time of parenting interventions to reduce physical and emotional violence against children: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *eClinicalMedicine*. 2023;60doi:10.1016/j.eclinm.2023.102003

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2. UNICEF. *Designing parenting programmes for violence prevention: a guidance note*. 2020. <https://www.unicef.org/documents/designing-parenting-programmes-violence-prevention-guidance-note>
3. World Health Organization, UNICEF. *Universal parenting support to prevent abuse and neglect: A policy call for national governments*. 2022. <https://www.unicef.org/media/111326/file/Universal-parenting-policy-note-EN.pdf>
4. World Health Organization. *WHO guide for evidence-informed decision-making*. 2022.
5. UNICEF. *Theory of Change*. 2014. *Methodological Briefs Impact Evaluation No 2*. https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/brief_2_theoryofchange_eng.pdf
9. Jeong J, Pitchik HO, Yousafzai AK. Stimulation Interventions and Parenting in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Meta-analysis. *Pediatrics*. 2018;141(4) doi:10.1542/peds.2017-3510
10. Knerr W, Gardner F, Cluver L. Improving Positive Parenting Skills and Reducing Harsh and Abusive Parenting in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review. journal article. *Prevention Science*. August 01 2013;14(4):352-363. doi:10.1007/s11121-012-0314-1
11. Jervis P, Coore-Hall J, Pitchik HO, et al. The Reach Up Parenting Program, Child Development, and Maternal Depression: A Meta-analysis. *Pediatrics*. 2023;151(Supplement 2)doi:10.1542/peds.2023-060221D
12. Jeong J, Pitchik HO, Fink G. Short-term, medium-term and long-term effects of early parenting interventions in low- and middle-income countries: a systematic review. *BMJ Global Health*. 2021;6(3):e004067. doi:10.1136/bmjgh-2020-004067

13. Pundir P, Saran A, White H, Subrahmanian R, Adona J. Interventions for reducing violence against children in low- and middle-income countries: An evidence and gap map. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*. 2020;16(4):e1120. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1120>
14. World Health Organization. *INSPIRE: Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children*. 2016. July 2016. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/57878f5e4.html>
15. Bornstein MH, Cluver L, Deater-Deckard K, et al. The Future of Parenting Programs: I Design. *Parenting*. 2022/07/03 2022;22(3):201-234. doi:10.1080/15295192.2022.2087040
16. Britto PR, Bradley RH, Yoshikawa H, Ponguta LA, Richter L, Kotler JA. The Future of Parenting Programs: III Uptake and Scale. *Parenting*. 2022/07/03 2022;22(3):258-275. doi:10.1080/15295192.2022.2086809
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18. Cuartas J, Baker-Henningham H, Cepeda A, Rey-Guerra C, ICBF Team. The Apapacho Violence Prevention Parenting Program: Conceptual Foundations and Pathways to Scale. *International journal of environmental research and public health*. 2022;19(14):8582.
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