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**Other:**

MacKinder, Sophia (2024) Meeting G20 Commitments: The Crisis in Early Childhood Development (ECD). UNSPECIFIED.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13935165>

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# MEETING G20 COMMITMENTS

## The crisis in early childhood development

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### Summary

- The G20 Leaders' Summit in 2018 advocated a 'high priority' in early years, launching the G20 Initiative for Early Childhood Development (ECD), as 'early childhood is one of the most significant and influential phases of life'. The UK was a signatory of this initiative.
- Our research demonstrates, however, that public spending in lower- and middle-income countries does not deliver front-loaded investment in the early years of childhood. In the UNICEF report *Too Little Too Late*, we mapped public spending on children by age in 84 countries. An update of our analysis ahead of the Rio G20 summit showed that in the African Union, on average just 6.5% of public spending on children was spent on the under-6s, compared to 30% in EU countries. This equates to just US\$865 being spent per child until age 6 in Africa; US\$72,000 per child is spent in the EU.
- Spending less on the youngest directly contradicts the key principles of the G20 initiative. The UK had been a leader on global child poverty reduction under previous Labour governments, but has fallen behind on its responsibilities since 2010. The upcoming G20 Leaders' Summit in Brazil is a key opportunity to take a leading role in ensuring that the G20 lives up to its promises to the youngest children around the world.

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### Recommendations for policy

**At the G20 Leaders' Summit (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) in November, the UK should:**

1. Renew the commitment to - and revitalise - the G20's Initiative for ECD, setting new targets for action.
2. Encourage President Lula's Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty to prioritise support for parents in its policy portfolio, to make progress towards affordable quality childcare, child benefits, and comprehensive maternity support.

**In the longer term, the UK government should:**

1. Follow the example of USAID to improve the UK's data collection on development spending for children by age, to allow monitoring of progress in implementing ECD agendas.
2. Prioritise any new investment in development aid to make incremental adjustments to child policy portfolios in order to increase investment in the early years.

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### The G20 must recommit to early childhood development (ECD)

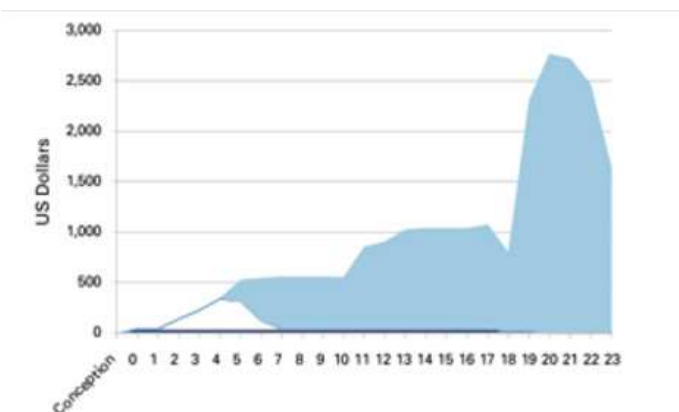
The G20's 2018 initiative acknowledged that early childhood - particularly the first 1,000 days - is one of the most significant and influential phases of life. It recognises that investment in ECD 'without any discrimination, should be a high priority as it gives all children the opportunity to achieve the full realization of their rights and responsibilities'. This was intended as a benchmark for global best practice, however progress has stalled. President Lula da Silva has called the G20 to action through its Global Alliance on Hunger and Poverty; this is a key opportunity to recognise that there is no sustainable development without child development, and to take action once again to prioritise plans for action and progressive change for the world's youngest.

## Too little, too late

In the UNICEF report *Too Little Too Late* (2023), we mapped public spending on children by age in 84 countries. The findings demonstrated that government spending in almost all low- and middle-income countries does not adequately support investment in ECD, despite the recognition by the G20 and others that ECD investment is critical to ensure good long-term health, social and economic outcomes. A recent update of our analysis ahead of the Rio G20 has found that:

- In the African Union, children aged 14 and over received ten times more government funding than children aged 2
- In African countries, only US\$835 PPP is spent on average per child until the age of six - just 6.5% of the public spending on children
- In Madagascar and Zambia, only US\$10 PPP per child under six per year is spent

### *Average age-related spending in low-income countries; early years receive little investment*

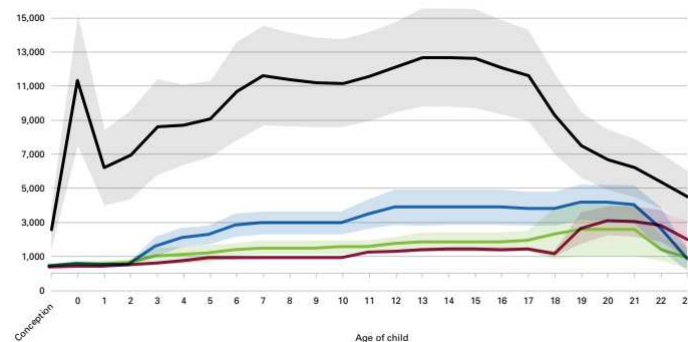


The research also highlighted that the lack of investment in ECD in lower- and middle-income countries is even more critical when viewed against the context of low investment in children overall. It found that differential spending on children within income groups is enormous. In high-income countries, cumulative spending on children between conception and age 17 is on average US\$194,850:

- More than four times the amount spent in high-middle income countries
- More than ten times the amount spent in lower-middle income countries
- Almost 20 times more than is spent on children in lower-income countries.

An illustration of the gap in ECD investment between the Global North and Global South is that European children aged 0-6 receive 28 times more early years spending than children in Africa. The failure to deliver the promises of the G20's ECD agenda risks contributing to growing inequalities both within and between countries.

### *High-income countries invest much more in children*



Country groupings: high-income, upper-middle income, lower-middle income, low-income

## Next steps for G20 and beyond

At the G20 summit in Rio de Janeiro, 18-19 November, the government should:

- Push to revitalise the 2018 G20 Commitments to ECD, generating new targets and financial commitments for financing for the youngest children
- Encourage the 'Global Alliance for Hunger and Poverty' to incorporate support for parents and families into its policy portfolio

Within the UK government's strategy for international development, the government should:

- Follow the example of USAID to improve the UK's data collection on development spending for children by age, to allow monitoring of progress in implementing ECD agendas
- Prioritise incremental adjustments to child policy portfolios; for example, each time there is an opportunity in a partner country for new public resources within the education sector, ringfencing a proportion for early learning.

### Further information

T20 Policy brief: Richardson, D. et al. (2024) [Fighting inequalities from day 1: What role for nutrition and early child development policies in the G20 and beyond?](#)  
T20 Brasil 2024 Taskforce 01 (Fighting Inequalities and Hunger) Policy Brief.

Underlying research:  
Richardson, D., Harris, D., Hudson, J., Mackinder S. (2023) [Too Little Too Late](#). Florence: UNICEF Innocenti.

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.13935165