

**Regional multi-sectoral meeting to promote nurturing care for early childhood  
development, Virtual, 27-29 April 2021  
Concept Note**

**Background**

The importance of early childhood development is highlighted in both the Sustainable Development Goals and the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health as a core component of societal transformation to be achieved by 2030.

World Health Organization, UNICEF and the World Bank, in collaboration with many other partners, developed and launched the Nurturing Care Framework in 2018 at the time of the World Health Assembly. The Framework, which is an evidence-based road map for action, identifies a set of best practices, encompassing five key components of nurturing care: good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, security and safety, and opportunities for early learning. It focuses specifically on the period from conception to year 3, as this is the time when brain development is extremely sensitive to external influences.

There has been a significant gain in child survival in the Region over the last two decades. Under-five mortality has declined by about 73% between 1990 and 2019 based on the latest UN estimates. However, many children who survive are exposed to multiple risks for poor development including poverty, poor health, undernutrition, excessive stress, inadequate cognitive stimulation and maternal depression. More than 250 million children under 5 years fail to reach their full potential every year in low- and middle-income countries globally - there are about 56 million children in the South-East Asia Region who are stunted and at risk of poor development.

Evidence shows that the early years of life are critical for children's healthy growth and development. During this period essential neural pathways are formed that lay the foundation for health, learning, productivity and social well-being throughout the life course. All children need multidimensional care for early childhood development (ECD) to develop their full potential. Early childhood development calls for leadership across different sectors, including health, nutrition, education, child and social protection, and community leadership.

WHO-SEARO has been advocating for comprehensive approach to ECD through regional meetings including a Parliamentarians' meeting held in 2018, in which the delegates had committed to support implementation of programmes for nurturing care for ECD in the countries. SEAR-Technical Advisory Group on women's and children's health has also recommended implementation of a holistic programme for ECD.

WHO-SEARO had earlier prepared a Strategic Framework - Role of the Health Sector in Promoting Early Childhood Development in 2011 in collaboration with UNICEF. SEAR countries have been implementing different interventions that contribute to ECD under several programmes not necessarily with a comprehensive and coordinated multi-sectoral approach.

WHO-SEARO is working closely with UNICEF to provide strategic guidance and assistance to Member States in the Region towards advocacy, capacity building and implementation support for early childhood development. Rapid assessment of national multisectoral implementation for ECD has been undertaken in selected countries.

The Regional multi-sectoral meeting is being organized to strengthen national programmes for nurturing care for ECD contributing to survival and development of children. The specific objectives are as below.

## Objectives of the meeting:

1. To orient countries on the global framework for Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development and its relevance in SDG phase
2. To share technical resources for nurturing care framework
3. To review and discuss the existing national policies, plans and implementation readiness for ECD across different sectors
4. To identify key actions for strengthening multisectoral programmes for ECD in the countries

**Venue:** Virtual

**Dates:** 27-29 April 2021: 10.00-13.30 India Standard Time (+5.30 GMT)

## Participants

- WHO-SEAR Member States:
  - National programme managers in MOH for Child health or Child development, and child nutrition
  - National programme managers in other Ministries: Responsible officers for childcare, child development or child protection, early education
- Global and regional experts
- WHO Collaborating Centres
- Representatives from Professional associations / Societies in the Region
- Representatives from UNICEF and Partner agencies
- WHO staff (HQ, RO and CO)

## Topics to be covered:

- Overview of nurturing care for ECD (NC-ECD); Domains of ECD and health sector's role
- Situation of implementation of ECD in countries; Sharing of experiences and good practices
- Implementation guidance on NC-ECD and supportive tools
- Services for children affected by development delay and difficulties
- Importance of health and wellbeing of caregivers in the family

## Follow up plan:

- **Support implementation planning** in countries: National multi-stakeholder consultations to strengthen implementation plan will be supported. Country assessment report of implementation of ECD (undertaken in early 2020) will be used for the consultation after gathering missing information or updates, as required.
- **Support capacity building** of service providers: Organize a Regional Master TOT on Care for Child development to build a regional pool of trainers; followed by National TOTs in the countries.