

# Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority

## Our First Five Years









**“Future generations will be living in a world that is very different from that to which we are accustomed. It is essential we prepare ourselves and our children for that new world”.**

**Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan**  
The late President and Founding Father of the United Arab Emirates

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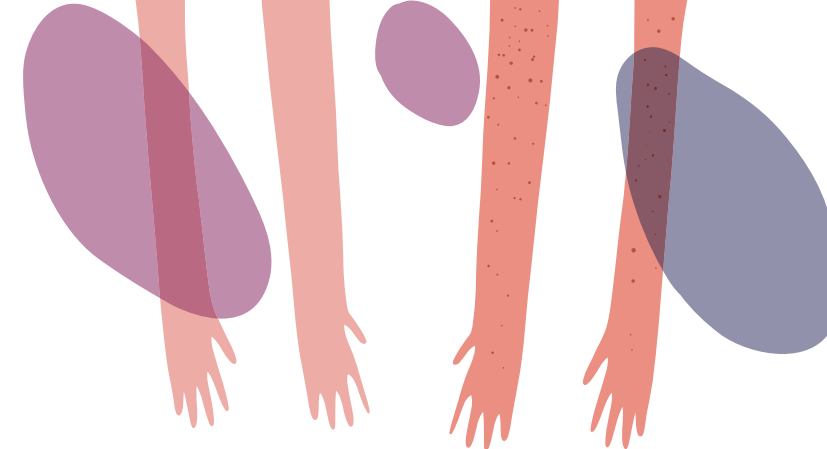
1.

## How It Began

### The Origins of ECA

The origins of Abu Dhabi's effort to reimagine the Emirate's early childhood development (ECD) landscape began in the Salama bint Hamdan Al Nahyan Foundation (SHF). Established in 2010 and chaired by Her Highness Sheikha Mariam bint Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the SHF is a family foundation dedicated to investing in the future of the UAE by investing in its people.

In 2015, SHF began to explore how it could make a positive impact in the field of ECD – a longstanding priority of its Board of Trustees and the Emirate's leadership. The effort began with a fact-finding and relationship-building mission to understand the nature and scope of ECD across the Emirate and to formulate a vision and theory of change.



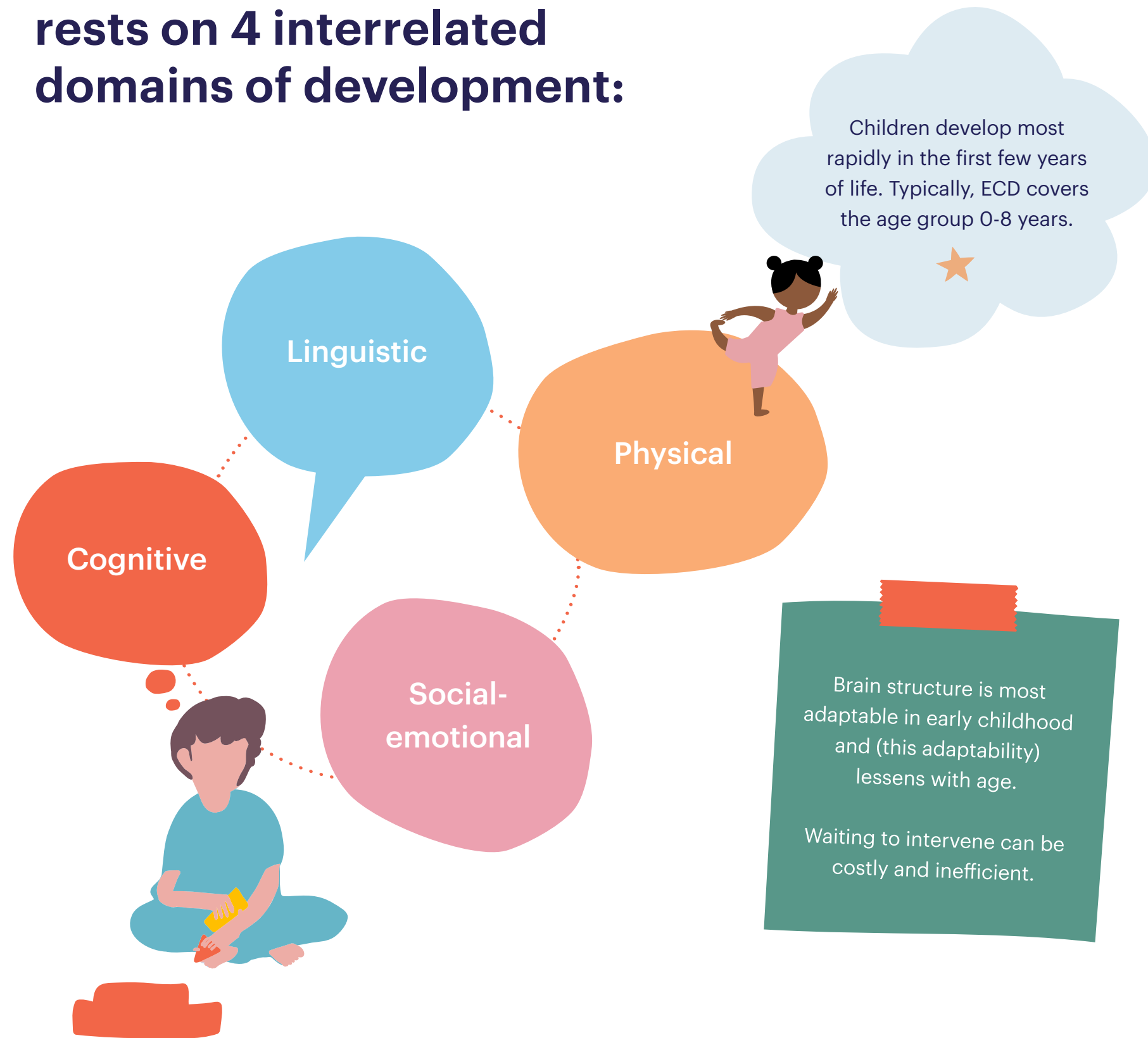
In December 2017, the initiative was brought under the umbrella of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council through the establishment of the Early Childhood Sector Committee, appointed by His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, then Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council (now President of the UAE and Ruler of Abu Dhabi). The membership of the Committee included ministers, departmental heads and other senior leaders from multiple government entities with responsibilities related to the wellbeing of young children, including health, education, child protection, and community and economic development.

Mandated to conduct an assessment of Abu Dhabi's ECD landscape and to develop strategies and policies to promote greater coordination and integration in the sector, the establishment of the Early Childhood Sector Committee signaled the determination of Abu Dhabi's leaders to leave no stone unturned in their efforts to deliver optimal outcomes for children and families.





# Early growth and well-being rests on 4 interrelated domains of development:



## 2.

### A clear direction

#### Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Development Strategy 2035

Early childhood development is a sprawling topic that touches nearly every area of government policy. Guided by this insight, the approach of the Early Childhood Sector Committee was inclusive and collaborative by design. Dedicated sub-committees were formed, bringing together policy makers, practitioners, and other key stakeholders with relevant knowledge and experience in areas related to the Committee’s mandate. The work of the Committee and its sub-committees was highly consultative, and included engaging with a wide variety of stakeholders over a nine-month period while conducting a detailed landscape scan and developing findings and recommendations.

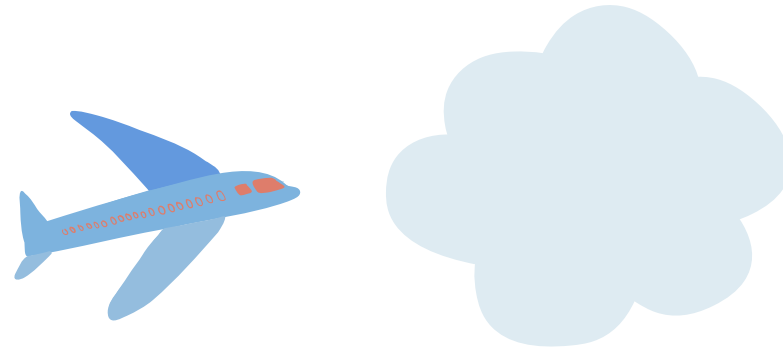
These were not your average government deliberations. To ensure the focus of its work remained on the children of Abu Dhabi, a life-sized cut-out of a young child was placed at the front of the room in every meeting. Known as the Aspirational Child, the cut-out outlined a set of attributes that every eight-year-old child in Abu Dhabi would possess if the Committee fulfilled its ambitions across the four crucial areas of health & nutrition, early childhood care & education, family support, and child protection.







In May 2019, the Early Childhood Sector Committee unveiled the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Development Strategy 2035. The vision at the heart of the strategy was for every child to be healthy, confident, curious, able to learn and develop strong values in a safe, family-friendly Abu Dhabi.



## Consistent with this vision, the strategy articulated three key goals



1.

All children have the necessary personal foundations for healthy physical and social-emotional development and early learning.

2.

All children live in a stable and secure environment and are protected from harm and danger.

3.

Parents are confident and have the capabilities to support their children's holistic development and wellbeing.

To advance these goals, the approved strategy mapped out seven programs and 19 initiatives in the areas of policy and legislation, public engagement, human capital development, systems and platforms to drive excellence and innovation, child development research, child protection, and enhancing support for parents and primary caregivers.

It was clear that implementing this strategy and creating a more coherent and aligned ECD system would require an all-hands-on-deck response. In particular, it would require the active involvement of government entities and decision-makers, early childhood professionals and private sector entities, along with children, parents, caregivers, and members of the wider community.

With that in mind, the Committee recommended the establishment of a new government entity, known as the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority, that would be responsible for driving and coordinating the implementation of the strategy in collaboration with the various stakeholders involved.

“It had to be a separate entity,” says a founding employee of ECA, who was involved in the work of the Committee. “That was one of the main things that our government partners agreed on. If the responsibility for early childhood development were to fall under an existing entity, it was always going to be heavily influenced by whatever that entity’s primary mandate was, and early childhood development is obviously much broader than that. Several of our partners were of the view that, ‘This is bigger than any of us. We need a separate government entity.’ They deserve a lot of credit for being so open to exploring that.”

“We didn’t set out with the intention to build ECA,” confirms another individual involved in the Committee’s deliberations. “The intention was just to understand the situation and see what can be done. But at the end of that process, I think everybody agreed that there was a need for a dedicated entity that could be responsible for working across government and ensuring the strategy’s implementation in collaboration with all of these different stakeholders.”





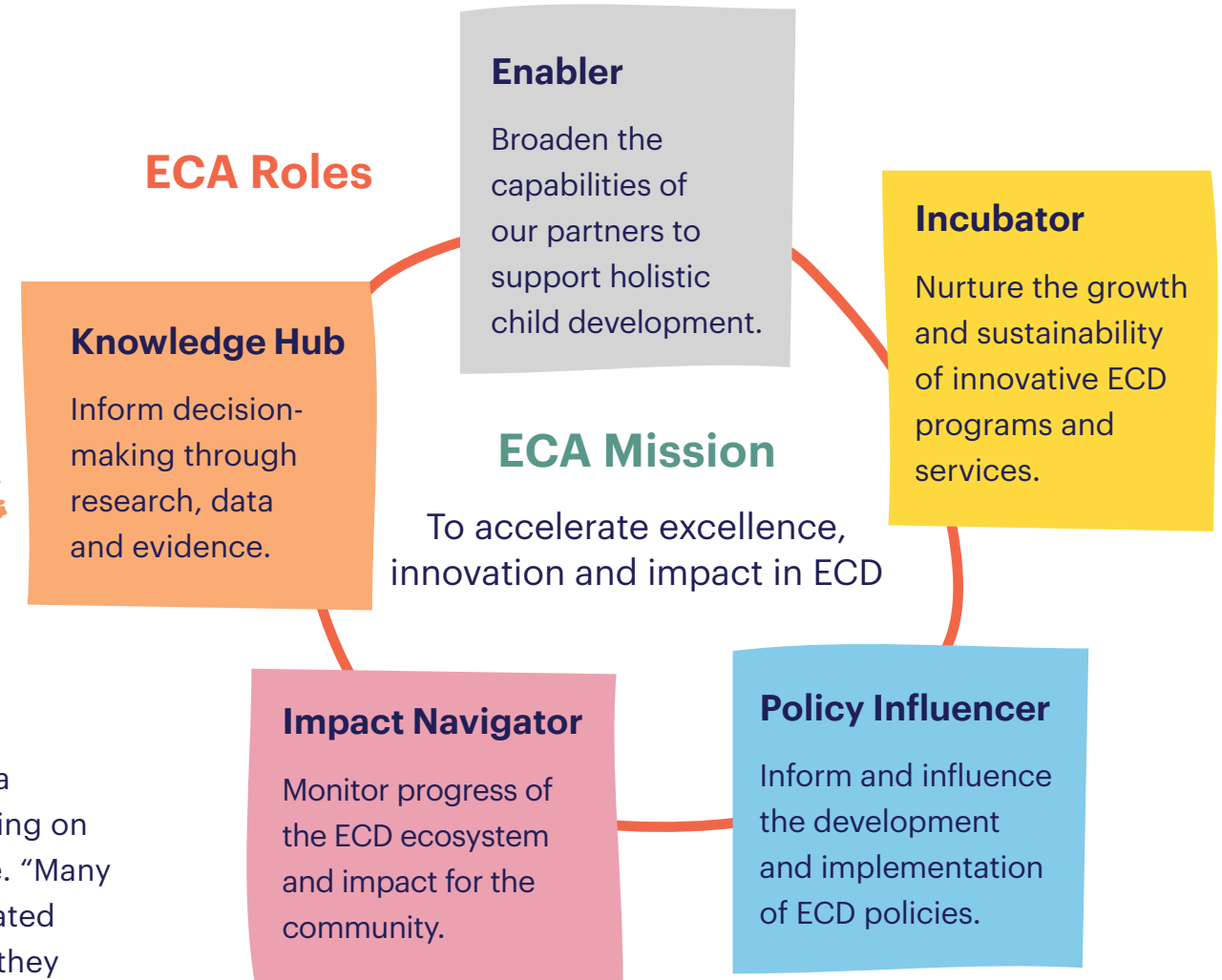


3.

## A Shared Mandate

### ECA and the Power of Collaboration

The Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority came into being on the 14th of July, 2019. According to its founding decree, ECA was tasked with “developing and implementing a comprehensive strategy for early childhood development in the Emirate, and reviewing and evaluating policies and programs related to early childhood in collaboration with the relevant entities.” The decree enshrined ECA’s focus on the period from pregnancy to eight years of age into law, and tasked the new entity with a range of functions, including proposing legislation, policies and regulations, conducting research, reviewing leading practices and making strategic recommendations.



“As far as I know, it’s unique,” says a founding employee of ECA, reflecting on the organization’s holistic mandate. “Many governments have an entity dedicated to early childhood education, and they obviously have entities focused on things related to early childhood development like health, for example. However, I’m not aware of anything quite like ECA, and we haven’t come across another entity like it.

A part of that is because we deliberately set out to create something that was custom-built to address the needs and priorities that we had identified in our discussions with our partners. We looked at what other countries were doing, but that wasn’t what shaped our approach. It was really a question of, ‘What do we need here in Abu Dhabi?’”







The sub-committees that had been formed under the auspices of the Early Childhood Sector Committee were also extended into ECA and further expanded in the form of dedicated working groups and technical teams. Specifically, each of the programs in the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Development Strategy 2035 spawned at least 2-3 working groups that led the development and implementation of prioritized initiatives.

For the next two years, these working groups met on a regular basis, working out the details of what needed to be done, how, when, and by whom. As the facilitator of these working groups, ECA ensured decision making was informed by the latest research and evidence of leading practice, that adequate human and financial resources

were allocated as needed, and that key stakeholders were involved in the activation of each strategic initiative. This collaborative approach to the meaningful co-creation of policies and programs has remained a hallmark of the ECA's multifaceted efforts to execute our mission over the last five years.

"As a social sector, we are committed as one team to leveraging all available opportunities and resources to identify challenges within the ECD sector," explains a representative of one of ECA's government partners. "By fostering innovative solutions, we aim to develop human capital, enhance child services across various domains, and create a supportive environment for parents to nurture their children within strong families and a cohesive community."



4.

## A Culture of Change

Doing Things Differently with a Purpose



Her Excellency Sana Suhail remembers the conversation fondly. Shortly after the announcement of the establishment of ECA, she met with Her Highness Sheikha Mariam bint Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who had served on the Early Childhood Sector Committee, to present a draft agenda for the first meeting of the Authority's newly-appointed Board of Trustees. Chaired by His Highness Sheikh Theyab bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, a member of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council, the eight-member Board of Trustees would oversee every aspect of the new entity's operations.

"So, the law was passed, the Chairman was appointed, and then a resolution was passed appointing the Board of Trustees," says Her Excellency Sana, who had been appointed in July 2019 to serve as Head of Transition for the new Authority (before subsequently becoming its Director General). "I said, 'Okay, we need to have the first meeting of the Board of Trustees', so I went and put together an agenda for what a meeting of a group of senior officials like this would typically look like."

Her Highness Sheikha Mariam, who would attend the meeting as a member of the Board of Trustees, took a moment to consider the document in front of her.

"She looked at the agenda, and you know what she said?" recalls Suhail. "She just said, 'Can we try to do it a little bit differently?'"

It was a fleeting moment, but one that would have a lasting impact on the culture and identity of ECA, including the way that we design our programs and engage with partners. It was also consistent with the work that had preceded our establishment, in which information had often been presented to stakeholders in creative and surprising ways in order to connect with them on a deeper level and enhance their engagement and understanding.



It is a principle that continues to guide the ECA today. “Ever since that moment, whatever we try to do, we try to do it differently,” explains Suhail. “Everything that we do, every meeting that we have, and every program and initiative that we launch, it’s always a little bit different. There is always an element of creativity. Not just for the sake of it, but because it helps to get people out of their comfort zones, to approach challenges in a different way, and to engage in more innovative thinking.”

The first step in this process was engaging with ECA’s early employees to understand the kind of culture that they wanted to create, and that they believed the organization would need in order to fulfill its unique responsibilities. Several important principles emerged from these discussions, many of which were consistent with how ECA and its partners were also approaching the transformation of the ECD landscape. These included the importance of flexibility, collaboration and taking a holistic approach.

It also included the importance of humility and respect, both internally and in our interactions with ECD stakeholders.

We also took steps to ensure that the design and functionality of ECA’s offices would be conducive to the culture that we aspired to create. “A lot of thought went into the design of our offices,” confirms a long-term ECA employee. “Whether these were the quiet spaces, the collaborative spaces, the playful touches, but also some of the really thoughtful elements for working parents that often get missed. For example, we purposely included a screen in our nursing room, so that an employee doesn’t feel like she has to miss out on an important meeting because she is breastfeeding or pumping breastmilk. We have a dedicated children’s room for the same reason. We wanted to create a genuinely parent-friendly culture by establishing a room that children are welcome to use year-round, because we understand the importance of balancing parenting and work commitments.”

Today, the principles of the ECA’s internal culture are outlined in the organization’s Culture Playbook, which is provided to new joiners as part of their onboarding process (known as Hayak, which means “welcome” in Emirati Arabic). ECA has branded its internal culture with the moniker of ‘028’, which serves as a constant reminder to always keep children from the ages of 0 to 8 at the heart of everything we do.

However, culture cannot exist on a page. It must be lived. To that end, ECA has cultivated a series of rituals that are designed to bring the organization’s culture to life each day for its employees. These include familiar workplace practices like annual offsite meetings and quarterly team gatherings. However, we have also pioneered some less conventional traditions, like Monday Mental Breaks (expert-led sessions supporting employees to maintain their mind-body balance), Meet-Free Fridays (no meetings on Fridays), and Discovery Days (where project teams brief the organization on their work and all ECA employees are invited to ask questions or propose ideas), and a ban on work-related communications after working hours and on weekends, except in urgent cases.

Importantly, ECA does not believe that its cultural impact or responsibility ends the moment an employee leaves the organization.

“You’ll notice that when people leave, we don’t have a normal farewell ceremony,” points out an ECA employee. “Instead, we have an advocate ceremony, because we believe, and hope, that members of our team will go on to be ambassadors and advocates for early childhood development even after they leave the organization.”

It’s a small thing, but it’s just another example of ECA doing things differently with a purpose.

## Our Values



### Focus

We are not about ticking boxes but rather about leaving lasting impact.

### Aspiration

We push ourselves to dream bigger, find common ground and do what’s never been done before.

### Creativity

We use ingenuity to spark unique ideas, connect with people, and inspire new behaviors.

### Empathy

We take time to understand the citizens and residents of our nation as well as our team -who they are, what they need, what traditions they embrace.

Employees are regularly encouraged to adopt these five behaviors



1.

Keep the child at the heart of everything you do

2.

Engage with purpose

3.

Practice humility

4.

Live as 'One Team'

5.

Prioritize wellness



In 2022, ECA earned the Great Place to Work Certification and was ranked in the Top 5 government entities across the UAE by the Great Place to Work Authority. In 2024, ECA was ranked second highest in terms of employee engagement and enablement across all Abu Dhabi Government entities in the Building Tomorrow's Workplace Survey, implemented by the Department of Government Enablement.





## 5.

### Full Speed Ahead:

#### Navigating the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound effect on children, families and communities everywhere. Emerging just six months after the establishment of ECA, it also left an indelible mark on the developing culture of the organization and its role in the community of Abu Dhabi.

“So, all of a sudden COVID happens and families are home, and you’re home all day with your kids, and you’re home all day with your spouse, and you’re all living under very stressful conditions, and people began to see the rips in the seams,” says an ECA employee, reflecting on the immediate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Authority’s most important stakeholders. “I actually think that COVID helped to raise the lid on a lot of the challenges that children and families were already facing.”

As a new organization with a growing team and a culture that was still being established, ECA was also disrupted by the sudden switch to remote work. However, what we soon learned was that by focusing on lessening the impact of the pandemic on children and families, we could also support the continued development of ECA while making a valuable contribution to the community.





“We never stopped,” says a founding employee of ECA. “We were not even a year old when the pandemic struck, but we continued full force in building our organization. We stepped up our communication with the public and other stakeholders, and continued activating our strategy. We also made ourselves more relevant, by stepping in where we believed that we could make a meaningful difference for people. We started developing content for families providing information and advice on various aspects of early childhood development. We launched a project called Takween in the summer of 2020, offering activities to help keep children and families entertained and engaged during that period of uncertainty.”

“Ultimately, what we found was that we were still being able to deliver,” recalls a member of ECA’s leadership team. “When it came time to look at how much of our operational plan we had delivered during the pandemic, we were still on track. So, this started some conversations internally along the lines that, flexibility does work for ECA. We can still facilitate collaboration and fulfill our responsibilities while making flexible working arrangements a permanent part of our culture.”

In parallel with the implementation of its original mandate, ECA also found itself embracing challenges and opportunities that it had not previously anticipated. This included supporting the establishment of the UAE’s first child-friendly vaccination center, and developing a dedicated parents’ toolkit containing reliable information on the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines.

ECA also spearheaded important work in early childhood care and education. For example, we collaborated with public and private sector partners in education and economic development to create a plan and roadmap for nurseries to safely re-open, to offer professional development and training to nursery caregivers, and to provide financial support to nursery operators and caregivers experiencing hardships due to loss of income during the pandemic.



“We have great leadership,” says an ECA employee, “and without that, it wouldn’t have been this way. But for ECA to be working on something as important as vaccination centers for children, and to be actually helping to build those, it was just beautiful to be part of the team that put that together.”

In June 2020, we teamed up with NYU Abu Dhabi to conduct the “Life During COVID-19: Young Children and their Families Survey,” to better understand the positive and negative impacts of the various lifestyle changes precipitated by the pandemic, and to identify practical ways to meet the specific needs of our core stakeholders.

“COVID had a huge impact on children and families, and I think we already had a very ambitious agenda and strategy, and that became even more ambitious,” recalls an ECA employee, reflecting on the organization’s response to the pandemic. “We actually grew even faster during that time than I think we would have if COVID hadn’t happened, because there was such a need for the kind of work that we had been set up to do. So, I think we got on a pretty accelerated path as a result of being new and having something to prove, but also identifying these extra opportunities for us to do practical things for children and families, and to make lives more pleasant and better for people. That commitment – and that opportunity – to have a positive impact on people’s lives continues to be what motivates us today.”







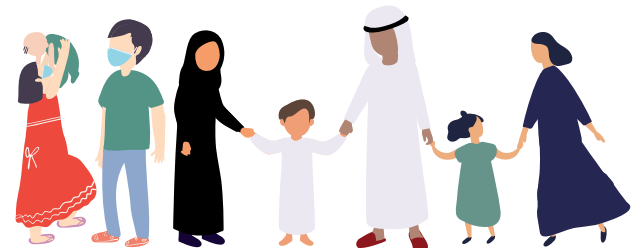
# 6.

## The Next Chapter

### The Future of Early Childhood Development in Abu Dhabi

In the years since the COVID-19 pandemic, ECA and its partners have not wavered in their efforts to continue delivering on behalf of the Emirate’s children and families. From protecting children and supporting parents, to shaping policy and driving innovation, much of this work is documented on the pages that follow.

In late-2023, four years after it had been approved by the Executive Council, an opportunity emerged to revisit and refresh the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Development Strategy 2035.



## The refresh of the strategy was driven by three factors

- 1.** New learnings about the Abu Dhabi ECD system that we and our partners had gathered over the last four years.
- 2.** The lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children, parents, service providers and the wider community.
- 3.** Ongoing shifts, such as the increasing digitization of many aspects of life, creating new needs for children and families.

The scale and capabilities of ECA had also grown over time, creating new opportunities for collaborating and generating impact. “The ECA has evolved from a local initiative into a leading, internationally-recognized organization,” says a representative of one of ECA’s long-term government partners. “By adopting evidence-based global approaches, attracting expertise, and collaborating closely with strategic partners, the ECA has implemented comprehensive and integrated strategies, developed innovative policies and programs, and contributed to the improvement of a wide range of ECD facilities and services.”

“We started out by benchmarking other places, and now they are coming to us,” confirms a long-term ECA employee. “We often have people and organizations coming to visit us now, to see what we have done within the early childhood sector in such a short time. Some of these are the same people and organizations that we used to benchmark ourselves against, and now we’re getting to share our insights and experiences with them, and having these international organizations reaching out to us, and wanting to work in collaboration with us.”

Echoing the approach to the development of the original strategy, the strategy refresh was informed by extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders from across the early childhood development landscape.





**Informed by the insights gained, and the new realities impacting children and families, the key elements of the refreshed strategy include**



**A refined and more inclusive vision:**

Every young child can flourish to their full potential in a safe and family friendly Abu Dhabi.

**Two overarching objectives:**

**1.** Ensure that children, parents, caregivers have access to appropriate services and resources to support optimum child development.

**2.** Create a robust system to enhance accountability and improve quality and sustainability.

**An updated set of attributes for the Aspirational Child,** reflecting our goals for every eight-year-old child in Abu Dhabi.

## Attributes we aspire for every 8-year-old child in Abu Dhabi

### Child Protection

**Secure**  
Aware of surroundings and safety participates in community life

**Safe From Harm and Danger**

- Protected from sexual abuse
- Free from hazards in their physical environment
- Protected from physical abuse, neglect, violence, and exploitation
- Protected from psychological neglect and abuse

### Early Care and Education

**Sociable**

- Aware of social norms and behaves well with others
- Expresses feelings appropriately

**Academic Competence**

- Demonstrates emerging logical thinking and problem-solving skills
- Uses and consumes technology appropriately and responsibly
- Performs adequately in math, science, and reading
- Communicates effectively in their native language

### Family Support

**Values Oriented**

- Respects different cultures, practices and benefits
- Strong sense of national pride
- Treats family, friends, and community members with respect

**Stable & Secure Home Environment**

- Has a place called "home"
- Parents or caregivers who can provide an adequate standard of living
- Loving and caring family relationships
- Supportive network of parents and caregivers
- Parents and caregivers who actively nurture their development and well-being

### Health & Nutrition

**Adequately nourished**

- Eats nutritious foods by following a healthy diet

**Emotionally Secure**

- Copes with stress and adversity appropriately
- Treats adults and peers with kindness
- Positive sense of self
- Feels valued and respected by primary caregivers
- Positive and supportive relationships with peers

**Emotionally and Physically Secure**

- Adequate fine and gross motor skills and coordination
- Participates regularly in exercise, sports and active play

★ These attributes apply to all children based on their individual capabilities.



To operationalize these objectives, the refreshed strategy includes 13 strategic priorities for the ECD sector to focus on until the end of 2026, spanning the four pillars of health & nutrition, early childhood care & education, family support, and child protection. These 13 priorities are our roadmap. They will be our primary area of focus in the immediate future, they are reflected in our operational and financial plans, and they are already shaping the work that we do each day in collaboration with our partners.

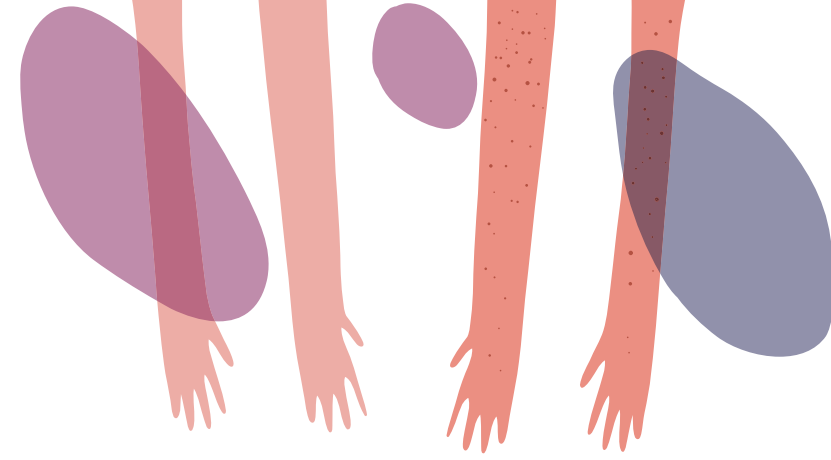
The refreshed strategy includes 13 strategic priorities for the ECD sector to focus on until the end of 2026.

### Thirteen strategic priorities have been selected for the ECD sector to focus until end of 2026

The infographic displays 13 strategic priorities for the ECD sector, organized into four pillars:

- Health and Nutrition:**
  - 1. Reducing the incidence of overweight/obesity in young children
  - 2. Enhancing early detection and intervention for children of determination
  - 3. Reducing child mortality
  - 4. Securing the mental health of children, parents and caregivers
- Early Care and Education:**
  - 5. Reducing the socio-economic gap in learning outcomes
  - 6. Increase participation in early learning opportunities
  - 7. Nurturing positive cultural identity and social cohesion
- Family Support:**
  - 8. Increasing confidence and capabilities of caregivers and supporting quality time spent between parents and children
- Child Protection:**
  - 9. Increasing confidence in the child protection system
  - 10. Securing the rehabilitation of child victims
- Other Strategic Priorities:**
  - 11. Enabling private sector participation in the ECD Sector
  - 12. Making Abu Dhabi a family friendly Emirate
  - 13. Mitigating risks and leveraging opportunities for the ECD sector coming from technology





It is important to reiterate that all of these updates are part of a refresh, and not a rewrite. Although our strategy and role have evolved, and our organization has grown from a 'government start-up' to a team of more than a hundred professionals, our shared determination to have a positive impact on the lives of children in Abu Dhabi is the same as it was when we embarked on this journey five years ago.



"The only constant is change," says a founding employee of ECA, applying this ancient aphorism to the organization's next chapter and the continued evolution of Abu Dhabi's ECD landscape. "There is no comfort zone for anyone. A comfort zone is an illusion. There is always going to be change... in the community, in the organization, physically, spiritually, mentally. And with change there is always an opportunity to grow. It's an invitation to grow. I've seen it over the last five years at ECA, and I see it now. We always embrace that opportunity of growth, and we never forget the purpose of our existence. It's been hard work, but we've had so much fun building ECA, and I have no doubt that it will continue to be a beautiful journey."



## 2 Part Two Our Impact







# 1.

## Maternal Wellbeing and Early Intervention

The Importance of Timely and Targeted Action

A key principle underpinning the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Development Strategy 2035 is the importance of intervening early. The sooner that parents can be provided with evidence-based information on the various factors that can influence ECD, and the earlier in life that developmental concerns in children can be identified, the better the long-term outcomes. That is why ECA's commitment to supporting parents and children actually begins before birth and includes a significant focus on the first three years of life.



## Maternal Health and Wellbeing

During 2021, ECA and Abu Dhabi Public Health Center (ADPHC), which operates under the Abu Dhabi Department of Health, began to jointly explore ways to gain greater visibility into various aspects of maternal health and wellbeing before, during and immediately after pregnancy. The desire for more precise and detailed information on what was happening in the lives of mothers during these crucial phases of the ECD process was driven by several factors.

“It had been identified that the Emirate had relatively high infant mortality rates compared to other developed countries,” says an ECA employee involved in these discussions. “We also had a significant number of low birth-weight babies, which extensive studies have shown is often associated with a wide range of negative consequences, including later in life. We know that the knowledge and behaviors



of mothers along with a range of external factors can have a significant influence on birth outcomes, and this led ECA and the health authorities to make it a priority to better understand maternal conditions before, during, and in the immediate months after pregnancy. By having that information, we would be able to design more targeted interventions and support programs for mothers that are informed by real data and tailored to our cultural environment.”

In 2023, these discussions culminated in the establishment of the WAMDA (Wellness and Maternal Development in Abu Dhabi) system. WAMDA aims to provide continuous and real-time information to inform policies and interventions designed to reduce infant mortality and improve the health and wellbeing of mothers and their babies.





“WAMDA is a population-based surveillance system that provides information on women that have recently given birth and their newborn child,” explains a member of the team that helped establish the system. “So, in Abu Dhabi there are around 37,000 live births per year, and our goal is to survey 10% of those mothers every year. However, it’s not just a random sample. We want to oversample for the mothers of low birth weight babies in particular, in order to identify the specific attitudes and behaviors and the physical and social environmental factors that might be contributing to these outcomes.”

The system is based on a series of two voluntary interviews conducted with mothers – the first taking place in hospital 48 hours after the birth of their child, and the second 3-6 months later. Conducted by trained personnel, the interviews collect insights into the knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and external factors impacting mothers from up to two years prior to the birth of their child and into the first six months after delivery. WAMDA is based on the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)’s Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS), which has operated in the United States for over 40 years. However, the process and questions for WAMDA are tailored to the social and cultural context of the UAE.

As a result, the interviews address specific factors such as access to fertility treatments, child spacing, consanguinity, and extended fasting while pregnant, in order to determine their association with birth outcomes.

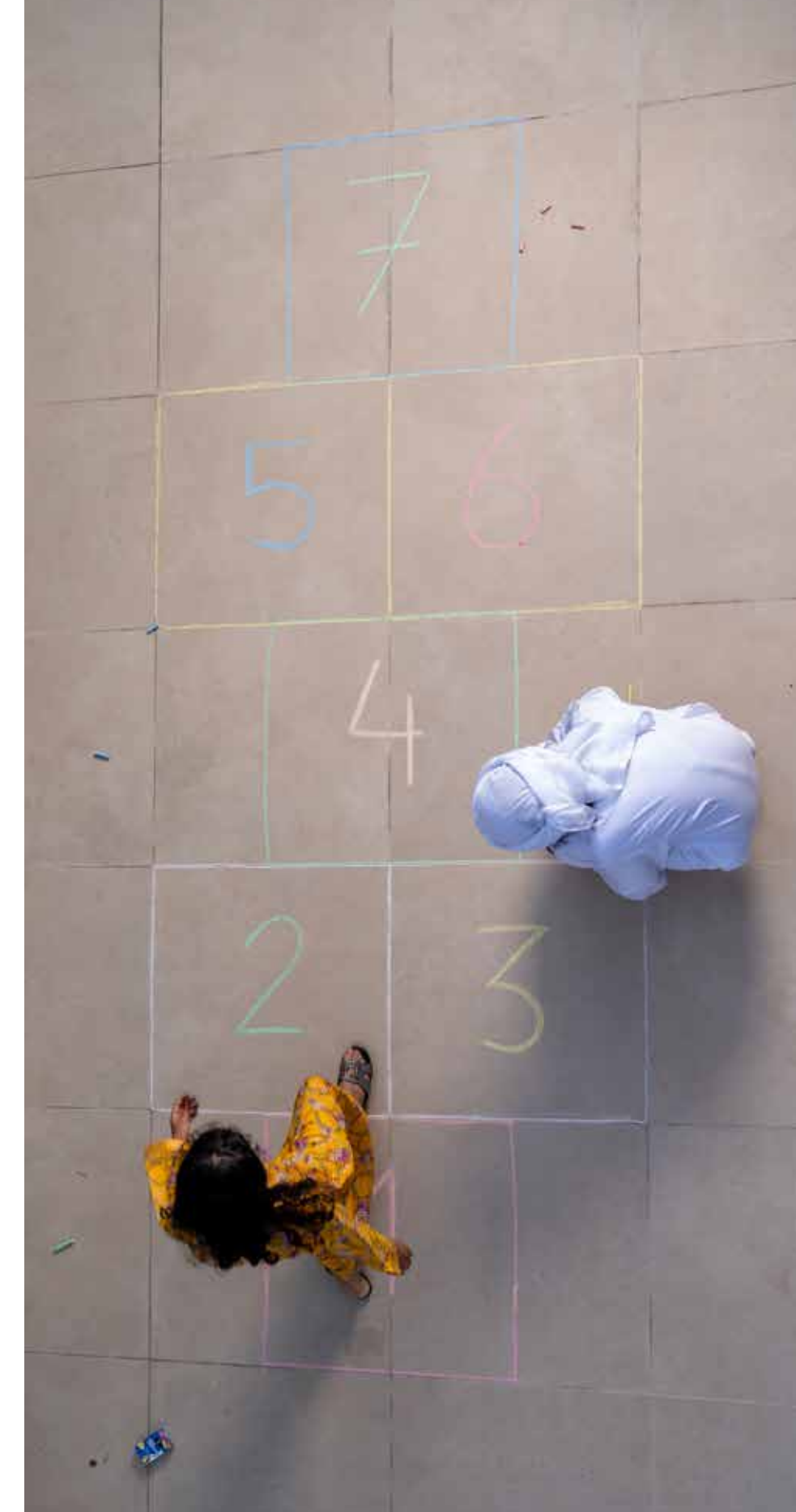
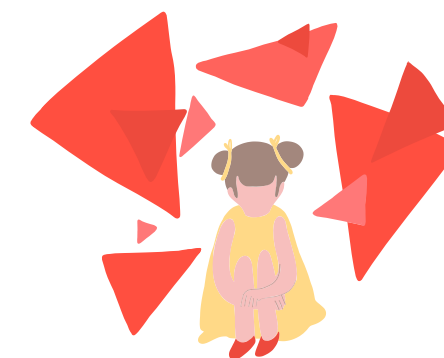
“The questions range from general topics, like how often are you visiting your doctor and whether you are taking vitamins, to more sensitive subjects, like exposure to smoking, alcohol and domestic violence,” explains an ECA employee.

ECA representatives are quick to clarify that the purpose of the system is not to judge or shame individual mothers. Rather, it is simply to get a clearer understanding of the prevalence of specific factors that may have an impact on infant health and wellbeing.

WAMDA is being implemented through a partnership between ECA, ADPHC and Khalifa University. The system was initially piloted in 2023 at four hospitals in Abu Dhabi, and more than 700 mothers have agreed to participate in the project to date. We are currently working with our partners on plans to expand the system to a total of 9 hospitals in 2024 and 18 hospitals in 2025. At that scale, we believe that the data collected by the system will be statistically significant enough to begin shaping real-world policies and interventions.

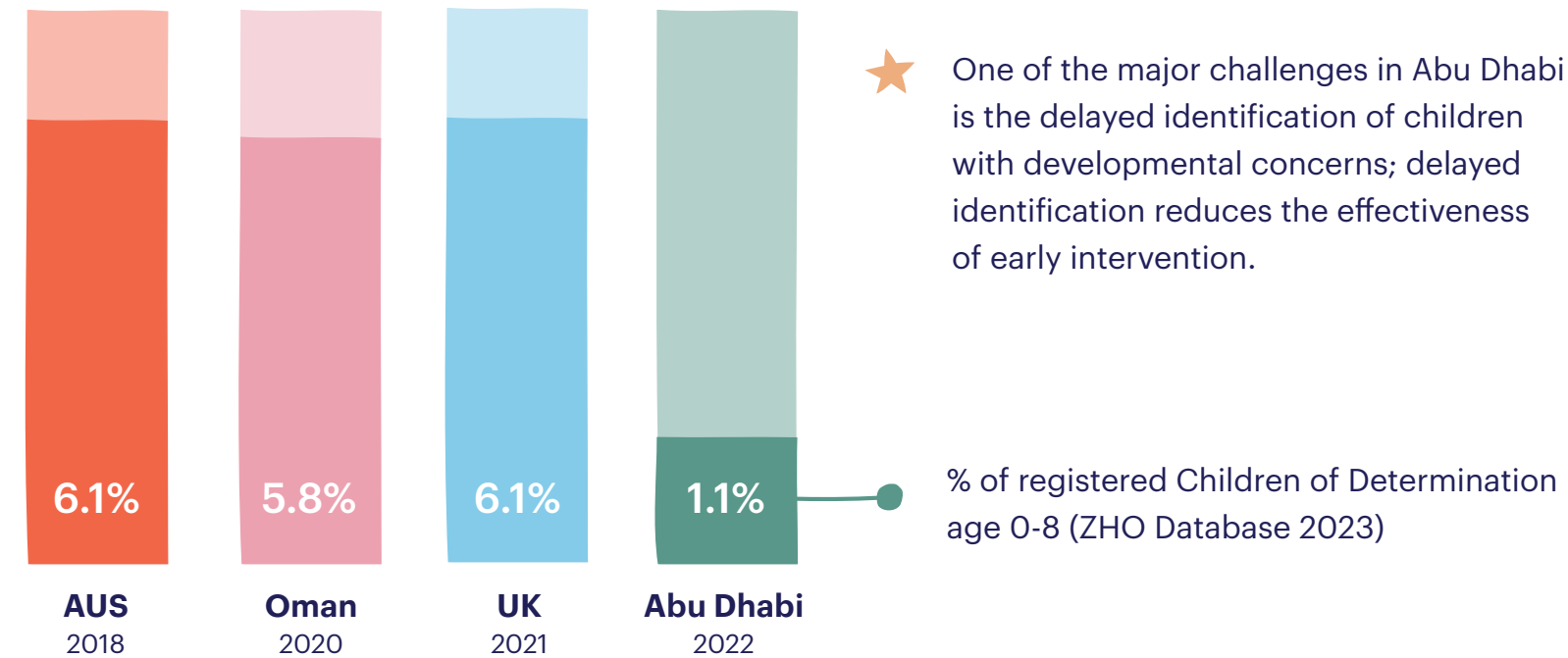
## Early Detection and Intervention

Even in ideal circumstances, it is inevitable that a certain number of children born in the Emirate each year will experience various forms of developmental delay, which may be associated with lifelong disability. In fact, according to the Abu Dhabi Strategy for People of Determination 2020-2024, among the more than 20,000 People of Determination in the Emirate, Neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism spectrum disorders, intellectual disability, and specific learning disorders are among the most common disabilities. Meanwhile, it is estimated that there may be more than 15,000 children in Abu Dhabi with disabilities that remain undetected. It is imperative that more of these children are identified as early as possible and that their families are provided with the information and support they need.





**There are an estimated 15,000+ undetected children with developmental delays and disabilities in Abu Dhabi based on comparable metrics from benchmarks**




Early detection and targeted intervention are crucial – for children and families in the first instance, but also from a wider social and economic perspective. Evidence suggests that early detection and intervention for children experiencing developmental delays and disability can deliver a range of benefits. These include improved cognitive development and educational outcomes for children, reduced parenting stress and increased family wellbeing, and higher workforce participation as well as reduced societal costs.




**Importance of early intervention**

**Improved cognitive development of children at risk of potential developmental delay**




Early Intervention Programs significantly improve child's language, cognitive development, and social-emotional development

**Reduction of parenting stress, leading to improved well being of the family**



Early Intensive Behavior Interventions are associated with reductions in stress among parents and an increase in parental knowledge and skills

**Improved schooling outcomes for children with potential development delay**



Early Intervention Programs can have significant impacts on educational attainment in school for children with potential developmental delay

★ A well-functioning early childhood intervention system can unlock significant benefits to family outcomes and the economy of Abu Dhabi.



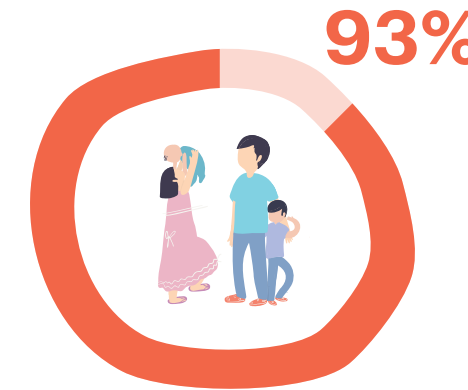
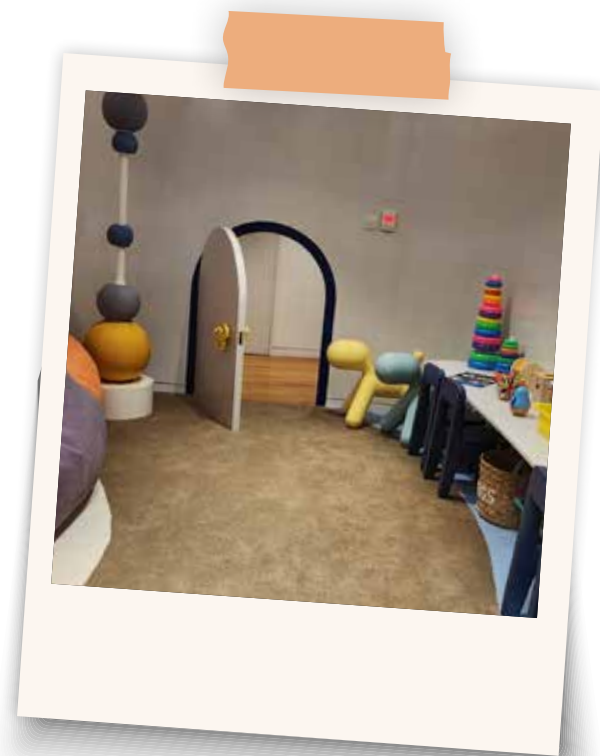
Consistent with this analysis, ECA was tasked with leading the development of an Early Intervention System as part of the Department of Community Development's Abu Dhabi Strategy for People of Determination 2020-2024. The Integrated Early Childhood Intervention Framework was developed over a period of eight months in close consultation with experts and advisors from more than 17 government and non-government organizations, and directly informed by the insights and experiences of parents of Children of Determination.

One of the most tangible outcomes of this process was the 52-page Abu Dhabi Early Intervention Guide, which was published in Arabic and English in October 2022 in collaboration with Mubadala Investment Company, the Department of Community Development, Zayed Higher Organization for People of Determination and the Abu Dhabi Public Health Center. The Guide provides parents and caregivers of children with a developmental delay or disability with practical information on the importance of early childhood intervention and the various forms of support and services that are available to them. To date, more than 10,000 copies of the Guide have been printed and distributed, with feedback suggesting that it has met an immediate need in the community for practical information on how parents and caregivers can support a child with a developmental delay or disability.

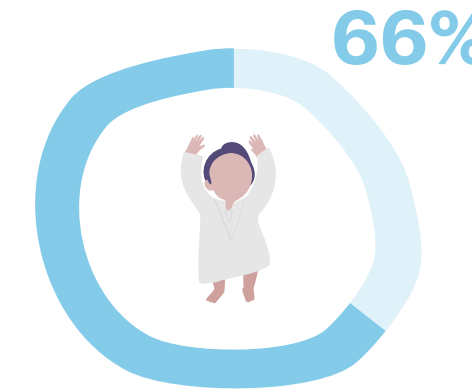
“When we first put together the Early Intervention Guide, that was something that had never been done,” recalls a member of ECA’s early intervention team. “What parents had been telling us consistently in our surveys and focus groups was that, when their child was identified as having developmental challenges, they often didn’t know where to turn to for information and advice on what to do next. Even pediatricians were not being provided with guidance on the services that were available to families in the Emirate and how they could be accessed. So, in the Guide we put together the journey of how to do that, and in the back, we provided a directory of services available in Abu Dhabi. I remember when one parent opened up a copy of the Guide, she actually started to cry, because she said that she’d been looking for this information for years... and here it was, all in one place. That was a really powerful moment that demonstrated how, even just a guide, which is certainly a long way from actually providing services, can be a significant help to parents who may be struggling to provide their children with the support that they need.”

Informed by several of the insights that emerged during the development of the Guide, we have also launched a series of pilot programs focusing on early intervention. In 2022, we partnered with Zayed Higher Organization for People of Determination (ZHO), Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK), and the Mohammed bin Rashid Centre for Special Education (MRC-NECC), to provide interactive training sessions in English and Arabic to families of children with autism. More than 128 parents, caregivers and other family members attended these sessions.

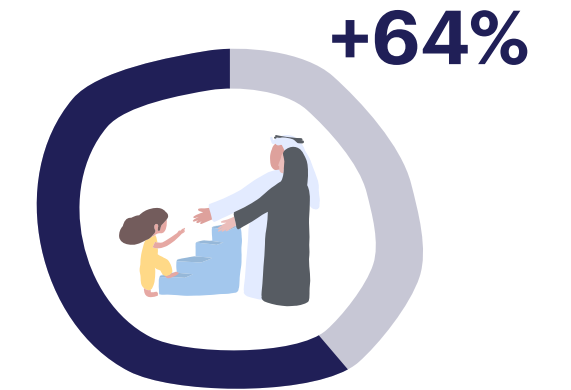
★ Outcomes of pilot training sessions held with parents of children with autism.



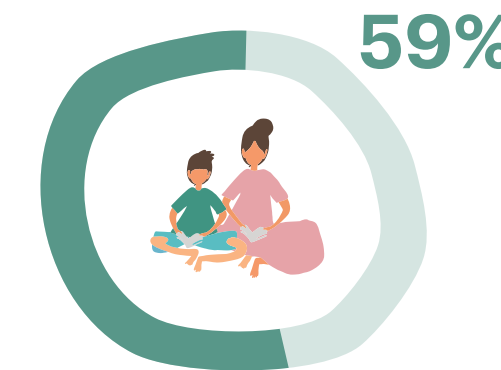
of parents were highly satisfied with the event overall



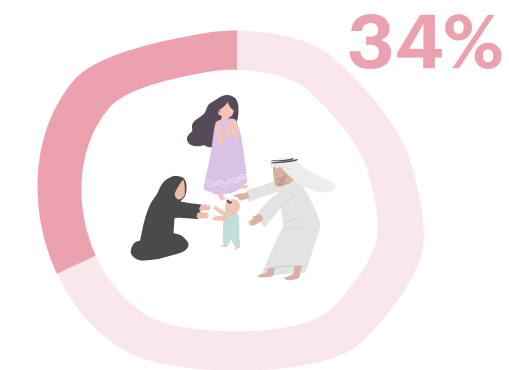
of parents reported increased awareness of causes of Autism



Increase in awareness of interventions available in Abu Dhabi



Increase in confidence in navigating interventions



Increase in awareness of importance of engaging children in activities

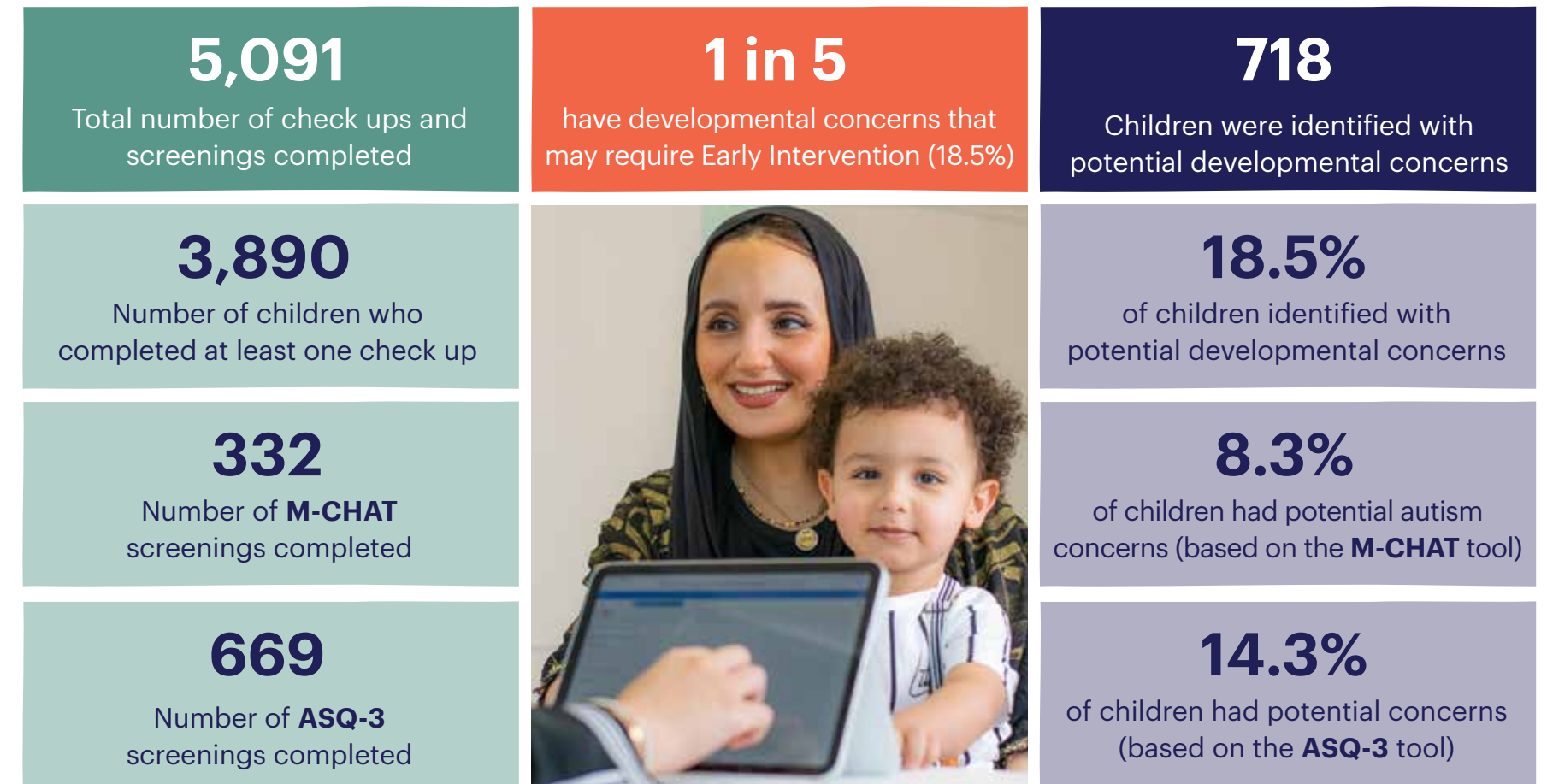


In a second pilot, we provided evidence-based information on early childhood development and the importance of raising developmental concerns early to two groups of parents with children aged 12 months and 18 months respectively. This intervention was informed by research suggesting that only 16% of parents in Abu Dhabi reported receiving guidance before pregnancy on how to identify and reduce potential risks of developmental delays, and 41% of parents reporting that they were unable to access quality information about the benefits of early childhood intervention. Relevant articles in Arabic and English were posted to our online Parents' Platform, and links to this information were texted to participating parents, removing any barriers to accessing it. The evaluation revealed high levels of satisfaction with the information, and a moderate increase in participants' understanding of developmental milestones, awareness of the typical signs of developmental concerns, and confidence to engage in activities to promote young children's development.



Our third early intervention pilot focused on providing doctors with applied training on developmental surveillance and screening for young children. Developed in partnership with the American Academy of Pediatrics, the pilot delivered training to 83 doctors from across the Emirate, 98% of whom reported that they planned to implement new changes in their practice as a result of completing the course. Following the pilot, the Abu Dhabi Department of Health has mandated the provision of developmental surveillance and screening training for all pediatricians practicing in Abu Dhabi.

In May 2023, ECA partnered with three hospitals in Abu Dhabi to introduce a Universal Child Development Surveillance and Screening Pilot. In this ongoing pilot, participating children undertake up to 12 developmental surveillance and screening checks based on the leading practices outlined by the American Academy of Pediatrics. To date, more than 5000 developmental check-ups have led to the detection of 700+ children with potential developmental concerns. Children then have the opportunity to proceed for further assessments, diagnosis and early intervention services as required. ECA is also supporting ADPHC to revise and update the Well Child Visit Standard to include universal developmental surveillance and screening at every check-up visit for children from 0 to 6 years of age.



★ Developmental surveillance and screening pilot results (September 2024).

Of course, there is much more to be done to enhance maternal health outcomes and strengthen the early childhood surveillance, screening and intervention system in Abu Dhabi. Building on the progress that we have made together, we are currently working with our partners to explore new opportunities to scale up our joint programs to reach more young children and families, while working towards the establishment of a unified policy for early childhood intervention in the Emirate.

“The importance of early detection cannot be overstated,” says an ECA employee. “Unfortunately, too many children with developmental concerns are not identified

until they go to school. By then the child has lost valuable time. We know that the first 1,000 days of a child's life are when the majority of brain development occurs, and that's when we have a real opportunity to take advantage of the plasticity that exists in young children's brains, to actually influence the brain cell organization and the neuronal proliferation that occurs during this period. If we can identify that a child is experiencing challenges as soon as possible, then we can provide them with services and support right away. The research is very clear that the earlier we act, the more of a positive impact we can have on that child's developmental trajectory for the rest of their life.”



## 2.

### Parent Support

#### Setting Up Parents and Caregivers for Success

Decades of evidence have demonstrated the long-term effect that parents have on child development outcomes, as well as the measurable impact that parent support initiatives can have on both parents and children.

**Informed by these insights, the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Development Strategy 2035 mandated ECA and its partners to:**

**Develop services and programs to strengthen the capacity of parents and caregivers to promote the healthy development and wellbeing of young children.**



### The Power of Knowledge

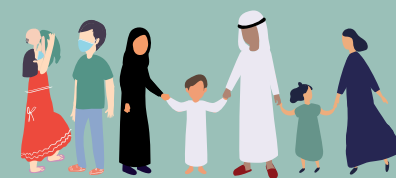
To guide our efforts, we worked with our partners to undertake a detailed assessment of ECD services and resources in Abu Dhabi. We also conducted a survey of more than 300 parents and caregivers in the Emirate to get a better understanding of their awareness of ECD topics, and to help identify the types of services and resources that would generate the most positive impact.

“We ran a survey with parents and caregivers to gauge their knowledge, attitudes and practices when it comes to health and nutrition, education, protecting children, and various other aspects of parenting,” recalls an ECA employee. “We soon realized that many parents lack essential knowledge and information about early childhood

development. They were not conversant with the latest science around subjects like brain development, or the critical importance of stimulation and play, for example. These are all things that parents could be putting into practice on a daily basis, especially when they understand the extent to which providing a variety of positive experiences for their children in the early years can benefit them for years to come.”

The knowledge gaps we uncovered were not due to a lack of effort on the part of parents. On the contrary, many parents were constantly seeking out information and looking for ways to improve their parenting skills. The challenge was identifying reliable sources of information that were up-to-date and tailored to their particular circumstances.

**Increase access to ECD resources and supports for parents and caregivers.**







“One of the main reasons that parents do not have this type of knowledge, or are not always basing their decisions on evidence-based scientific information, is because they tend to rely on sources from the internet, or they’re listening to what their neighbors, friends or parents are telling them,” explains an ECA employee involved in the Authority’s parent support initiatives. “The problem is that a lot of parenting advice that may have been accepted years ago is now outdated. A lot of this information is also not available in Arabic, or aligned with a family’s culture and values, which means it isn’t always relevant or applicable. Several parents told us that what they really wanted was a credible source of information that was evidence-based, available in Arabic, and culturally-specific to them.”

In August 2020, ECA launched a dedicated Parents’ Platform with the goal of strengthening the confidence and capabilities of parents and caregivers to support the holistic development and wellbeing of young children. A first for the region, the Parents’ Platform contains content and resources for parents and caregivers, including leading practices and knowledge related to various aspects of ECD. Content on the platform includes guides and resources tailored to parents and caregivers at different stages of their early childhood



development journey, and on specific topics such as child protection, education, health and nutrition, and developmental delays and disabilities. The platform also contains information on ECD-related events and an interactive map showcasing fun and educational activities for children.

The Parents’ Platform was developed in partnership with a diverse group of experts and organizations, including local and international representatives from the public and private sectors, academic institutions and other child-related entities. At present, the Parents’ Platform is being revamped to expand it and make it even more relevant and accessible to the parents of young children in Abu Dhabi.

In parallel, ECA’s Communications and Outreach arm has been active in producing ECD-related print and audio-visual resources, conducting awareness raising campaigns and encouraging public engagement. Areas of focus include brain development, childcare, safeguarding, early education, healthy lifestyles, infant and child nutrition and many more. At the time of writing, a major social and behavior change initiative addressing early childhood stimulation, play and learning and parental self-care is being prepared for implementation.

## Parenting Programs

Beyond the provision of information and resources, we have also worked with our partners on the design and implementation of programs that aim to improve the knowledge, skills and confidence of parents and caregivers in the Emirate. In the last three years, ECA has conducted pilots of three separate parenting programs in order to evaluate their effectiveness and suitability for a larger scale rollout. These parenting programs were developed, adapted and delivered in collaboration with more than 11 partner entities across the government, social, education and health sectors.

Initially launched in 2021, the Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting (PDEP) program was designed to cover a range of ECD matters with a particular emphasis on positive discipline. It was launched in partnership with the Canada-based Positive Discipline in Everyday Life organization and in collaboration with eight local entities. Open to parents of children between 0 and 18 years of age, the program includes modules focused on understanding how children think and feel, and practical techniques for positive engagement and non-violent conflict resolution. Over the course of the year-long PDEP pilot, more than 99 facilitators were trained to deliver the program and at the time of writing, a total of 600 families have taken part. The results of the pilot demonstrate a



significant improvement in understanding as well as changed attitudes related to various forms of parental discipline, including the complete elimination of any tolerance for violence, along with the adoption of more realistic expectations for the behavior of young children.

In November 2022, we launched a pilot of our Bedayat Program, which is focused specifically on helping divorced parents to navigate the specific parenting challenges that they and their children can face. Open to divorced and divorcing parents of children aged between 0 and 8, the program provides parents and children with evidence-based information on the impact of divorce and techniques for constructive parent-child communication.



“We know that parenting can be difficult, let alone when parents are going through a divorce,” says an ECA employee involved in the pilot. “So, we wanted to support parents going through this experience, and help promote their mental health and wellbeing while also shielding their children from conflict. We wanted parents to understand how divorce can impact children, and what they can do to act as early as possible to provide a more stable and positive environment for children as they move into a new phase of their lives. Importantly, the program has been designed for both parents and children, and this is a key difference. This is the only parenting program that we have where children actually participate in the program, including by attending play therapy sessions and support groups.”

The results of the Bedayat pilot, which included 52 parents and more than 110 children, revealed that most parents participating in the program reported higher self-confidence, lower anxiety and anger, and a better understanding of the drivers of their children’s emotions. Children participating in the program became more vocal about their needs and emotions. We have also seen patterns of reduced emotional and behavioral problems and a reported increase in prosocial behavior among children.

In March 2022, ECA announced plans for the development of an Abu Dhabi-specific parenting program in partnership with New York University Abu Dhabi, Zayed University and the Emirates College for Advanced Education. Launched as a pilot in September 2023, the Abu Dhabi Parenting Program addresses various influences on optimal ECD including health, nutrition, early education and parent self-care. Open to families with children aged between 0 and 3 years, the program was developed by a multi-national group of Emirati and international academics, experts and researchers, with the goal of ensuring that it was evidence-based and culturally-relevant.

“The Abu Dhabi Parenting Program is the first homegrown parenting program that was designed to be culturally specific to families living and parenting in Abu Dhabi, whether they are citizens or expatriates,” explains an ECA employee. “The main objective is to provide parents with basic knowledge of the importance of early childhood development and how they, as parents, can support their children’s healthy development, and build a positive and nurturing environment. The pilot included around 100 mothers and we are analyzing the evaluation results to implement necessary adaptations and broaden the scope of the program to potentially include parents of children aged 4-8 years.”

## Early Childhood Parent Support Strategy

All of these initiatives are consistent with ECA’s overarching Early Childhood Parent Support Strategy (ECPSS), which was approved by ECA leadership in December 2022, and included the input of partner entities. Consisting of eight strategic initiatives and 35 strategic actions, the ECPSS provides a long-term roadmap for the continued efforts of ECA and its partners to enable parents and caregivers in the Emirate to provide the children in their care with the best possible start in life.

As the examples in this chapter illustrate, our parenting strategy embraces a holistic approach, addressing the multifaceted needs of parents through information dissemination, skills training, awareness campaigns, and mental health support for both parents and children. This strategy is designed as a tiered system, offering universal programs accessible to all parents, specialized interventions for at-risk families, and targeted support for those in specific circumstances. By providing this complementary suite of services, we aim to equip parents with the knowledge, skills and resources necessary to navigate the challenges of parenting effectively. Our approach also recognizes that parenting needs vary widely and ensures that support is available across the spectrum of parental experiences and circumstances.



“We are getting there,” says an ECA employee, reflecting on the progress made in expanding the provision of support to parents and caregivers in Abu Dhabi. “And at the end of the day, when we look at the evaluation results for the pilot programs that we have been running to date, we can definitely be proud of what we have demonstrated so far, even if it has been one small step at a time.”

Informed by our learnings to date, and the positive feedback that we have received, we are committed to working with our partners to expand our parent support initiatives to make them available to even more parents, caregivers and families throughout the UAE in the years ahead.







3.

## Early Childhood Care and Education

Laying the Foundations for Lifelong Learning

At the time of the establishment of ECA in 2019, only around one in every ten children under four years of age in Abu Dhabi was enrolled in an early childhood education program. Consistent with the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Development Strategy 2035, we were determined to both increase and enhance children’s participation in early childhood care and education inside and outside the home, through a renewed focus on quality, cost, availability and access.



## ECCE Strategy

Based on our analysis and in consultation with ECD stakeholders, we identified a number of specific challenges that appeared to be hampering children’s participation in early childhood care and education, including:



**1.** Limited coordination between local and federal entities on education.

**2.** Lack of a dedicated regulatory body for early childhood education for Children of Determination.

**3.** Relatively low enrollment rates in early childhood care and education.



**4.** Limited geographic distribution of nurseries.

**5.** Relatively high costs of formal education and out-of-school facilities including libraries, museums and some playgrounds.

Informed by these findings, we developed a dedicated strategy for reinvigorating early childhood care and education comprising 36 actions across six initiatives designed to bridge the gaps that had been identified. The strategy aims to advance the vision of Abu Dhabi’s leadership for all children in the Emirate to have access to stimulating experiences and high-quality early childhood care and education programs that foster the development of strong values and competencies, laying a robust foundation for lifelong learning and enjoyment.

Throughout the development and implementation of the ECCE strategy, we have worked closely with several key partners, including the Ministry of Education and the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge, Department of Community Development, Department of Municipalities and Transport, Department of Economic Development, and Department of Culture and Tourism.



## Transition Pathways Program

The flagship of our early childhood care and education strategy is the Transition Pathways Program, which aims to facilitate a smooth and successful transition for children from different backgrounds through the various pathways that exist from birth to school, including their progression from home to the outside community, nurseries, kindergarten and eventually to primary school. At its core, the program involves gathering important information about children undertaking these transitions and training educators and caregivers on how this information can be used to tailor their teaching strategies.



### Informed by an analysis of promising practices in the UAE and five other countries, the program is intended to:

1.

Ensure smooth transitions as children progress from home to community, nurseries, kindergarten and primary school that promote confidence and a sense of belonging.



2.

Foster holistic growth in physical, cognitive, emotional and social domains for lifelong learning and wellbeing.

3.

Ensure parents and educators are well equipped and active contributors to the different transition pathways.

It also aims to deliver other benefits, including improved academic performance and social connectedness, higher school retention rates, and stronger community engagement in fostering a supportive environment for children.



## Learning Happens Everywhere

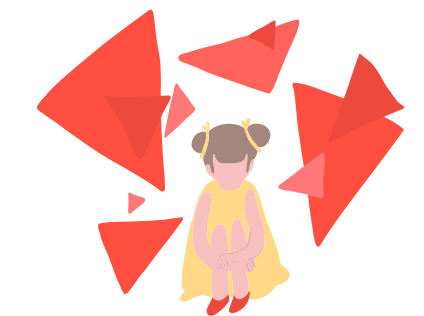
Of course, not all early childhood care and education takes place in nurseries or schools. That's why we have also been focused on improving the quality and accessibility of an ever-widening array of early childhood care and educational offerings, including but not limited to those offered by museums, libraries and family entertainment centers in Abu Dhabi, as well as public spaces such as playgrounds and parks.

To that end, in August 2024 we commenced piloting a Quality Assessment System, which aims to enhance the value of services offered to children and their families in various community settings. In doing so, we are seeking to foster environments that support children's development, to boost the confidence of parents in the quality and safety of early childhood offerings, and to build trust within the community through greater openness and transparency.

The Program places a particular emphasis on supporting children and families during two particular transition points that have been shown to be highly impactful – namely, the transition from home to nurseries and kindergartens, and from kindergarten to primary school.

“Transition programs in early childhood are vital for ensuring children have a smooth and successful start to their educational journey,” says an ECA employee. “They help build confidence, continuity in learning, and strong foundations for future success, benefiting children, families, and educators alike.”

In order to help address access challenges and increase nursery enrollment rates, we have also worked with ADEK on a plan to set up more government-run nurseries, with ten new nurseries for up to 4,000 children expected to be built between 2024 and 2025. In parallel, we have also collaborated with ADEK on the development of targeted outcomes for children in nurseries.

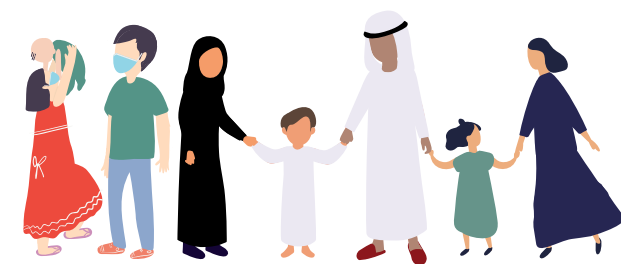






In collaboration with local universities, we have organized training programs for more than 75 practitioners and educators that work with children up to eight years of age in libraries, museums, sports facilities and family entertainment venues. We have also conducted an assessment of the infrastructure of offerings beyond nurseries and schools with a particular focus on their readiness to host Children of Determination, and we are currently collaborating with the Department of Community Development to address the gaps identified in this review.

“Children are constantly learning, and much of this learning happens outside in the world around them, including in places like museums and libraries and other institutions, and especially during play,” says an ECA employee. “We want to make sure that more children in Abu Dhabi have access to quality educational opportunities and experiences outside of nurseries and schools, and that these offerings are fully equipped to support young children’s learning and development in the most effective ways.”



## 4. Child Protection

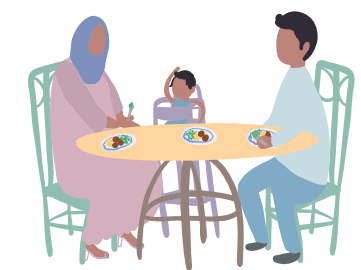
### Safeguarding Our Nation’s Most Precious Resource

One of the most solemn responsibilities of any government is the duty to protect children from harm. Consistent with this commitment, the first priority identified in the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Development Strategy 2035 was the need to strengthen the Emirate’s child protection system from prevention to rehabilitation.

This was not a new ambition. The Emirate’s leadership has demonstrated a longstanding commitment to protecting children and families. However, an analysis conducted by ECA and our partners revealed that the child protection system was highly fragmented, had a number of significant gaps, and that



coordination between stakeholders could be improved. Among other things, the fragmented nature of the system raised the risk of cases falling through the cracks, but also meant that children who had been exposed to abuse and maltreatment were often required to tell their stories to one government entity after another, reliving and potentially deepening their trauma. As remains the case in many jurisdictions globally, the child protection system was also predominantly reactive and designed to respond to cases rather than to prevent them from occurring.





**ECA and its partners were determined to address these challenges simultaneously, and together we embarked on a multifaceted effort to:**



Build a unified child protection system for young children encompassing governance, prevention, early intervention, reporting, and awareness.

Centralize and streamline the child protection process for young children to improve service response and accessibility, including medical, educational, social, mental health and sheltering services.

Provide support to ensure children's safety and protection within the family environment whenever possible, combined with safe and secure housing for young children at risk of abuse or neglect.

Ensure the child protection system has a workforce adequately prepared to address the needs of young children.

## A Difficult Conversation

In order to make headway on any of these fronts, it was first necessary to bring this difficult subject out of the shadows, and to put child protection at the center of the Emirate's early childhood development agenda. A delicate exercise in any jurisdiction, the task was somewhat more challenging in the local social and cultural context, where issues related to child protection had historically not been widely talked about. However, the positive and action-oriented response of the wider community to these discussions suggests that this initial trepidation was unfounded.

No, but people generally want to learn more and be participatory. So, I think having faith in the community – not only their willingness to discuss these issues, but actually their demand that they be supported in being better parents and caregivers – is one of most important things that we can take from this experience.”

It is an insight that has had a lasting influence on ECA, and this willingness to initiate and navigate difficult conversations – to not only say what needs to be said, but to do so in a way that is objective, constructive and collaborative – has become an integral part of our approach over the last five years.

“I think there's always been a sense that we maybe need to tip-toe and be super cautious when addressing sensitive issues, and our experience has been just the opposite,” says a member of ECA's child protection team. “We have found that parents and other members of the community want to know more. They want to know what they can do. Is it easy? No. Can we solve this challenge overnight?”





## A Collaborative and Holistic Approach

Coordination has been equally important. Informed by the findings of a detailed audit, ECA joined forces with six key entities in Abu Dhabi in 2020 to commence strengthening the Emirate's child protection ecosystem. In less than a year, this group had expanded to include more than 13 local and federal entities collaborating on the development of a holistic child protection strategy aimed at establishing and strengthening a comprehensive child protection system and services.

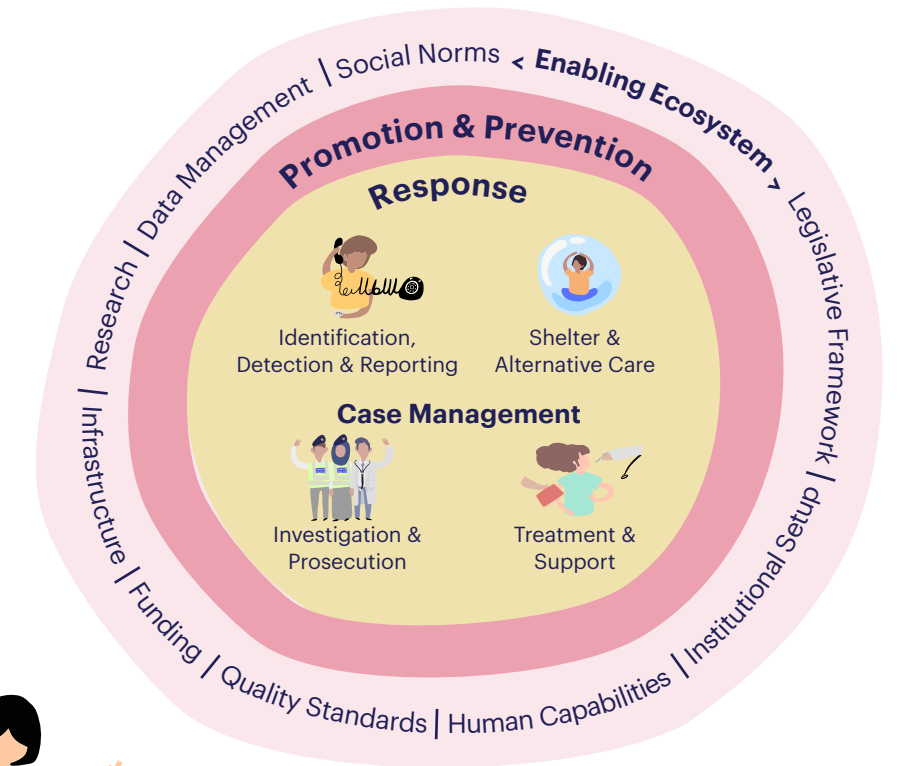
Local Entities in Abu Dhabi

National-level entities

Partner entities			
Social Sector	Education Sector	Health Sector	Justice and Law Enforcement Sector

★ Child protection planning and implementation is conducted in close collaboration with a number of partner entities.

The holistic framework underpinning the strategy spanned three levels: An Enabling Ecosystem, Promotion & Prevention, and Response. With an emphasis on preventing the incidence of child abuse cases and not just responding to them, the strategy prompted the establishment of four key prevention programs – including Safe Schools, Positive Parenting, Community Awareness Raising, and Improving Parent and Child Mental Health – and identified 29 strategic actions to be pursued.





★ A well-functioning child protection system has a number of key components.

## Tools and Resources

We also worked with our partners to develop a set of tools to support child protection and safeguarding in Abu Dhabi. Together, we established a shared understanding of the terminology, concepts and recommended responses, along with a detailed matrix of different forms of child maltreatment. The five main components of child abuse response were articulated, and a quick reference guide was prepared for health practitioners to support the early identification and management of potential child abuse cases.

The publication of a series of manuals and guidelines would soon follow, including a Child Online Protection Guide for children aged 0-8, and a Child Protection Policy and Manual for Educational Institutions, developed in coordination with the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK). At the time of writing, ECA has collaborated with its partners to help produce more than 19 separate policies, guides and sets of procedures related to child protection across the social, education, health and law enforcement sectors.

Cross-Sectoral	Social Sector	Education Sector	Health Sector	Law Enforcement Sector
Dama Al Aman Child Protection Policy for Abu Dhabi	Children Temporary Shelter Process Manual	Student Protection Policy	Draft Guide on Addressing Maltreatment Concerns in Healthcare Institutions	Child-Friendly Policing Guide
Child Protection Inter-agency Case Management Manual	Guide for Educational Institutions on the Impact of Divorce on Children	Guide on Handling Maltreatment Concerns in Schools	Draft Guide on Children Mental Health in Primary Care Settings	Investigative Interview Guide in the Child Center
Child Center Standard Operating Procedures	Screen Exposure Guideline (0-8 years)	Guide on Handling Maltreatment Concerns in Nurseries	Draft Child Protection Policy for Healthcare Institutions	
Safety Concern Portal		Dama Al Aman in Schools Handbooks	Parent's Guide to Mental Wellbeing	
Data Analytics System (currently focused on 0-8 years)		Dama Al Aman in Nurseries Handbook	★ A wide range of child protection policies, guides and procedures.	

## Empowering People

Ultimately, however, the most important resource in the fight against child abuse and maltreatment has always been people. With that in mind, we have worked with our partners on a comprehensive effort to provide tailored child protection training to individuals across a broad spectrum of professional settings where they are likely to come into contact with children.

“Across all layers of this system, child protection really resides within having qualified and capable personnel and human resources,” explains a member of ECA’s child protection team. “Whether we’re talking about frontliners such as teachers, health professionals or social workers, or other service providers that come into contact with children, they are often the ones that do the safeguarding. It’s people that speak up. It’s police officers that know how to handle a case. It is the observant teacher who notices the subtle changes and signs of abuse in a student. That’s why we have invested so much time and resources in building up the capacity of people, because they not only become better service providers, but advocates. They understand what is happening, they know how to identify it, and they can speak about it knowledgeably, which helps to create greater awareness of these issues.”

To date, we have helped to deliver child protection training courses to more than 400 people within the Emirate. These trainings have been tailored to address the specific scenarios that these individuals are likely to face, whether they are working in a frontline role, staffing a crisis hotline, coaching a children’s sports team or working in a school. On Emirati Children’s Day in 2024, Zayed Higher Organization for People of Determination (ZHO) announced that dedicated channels had also been established for the reporting of potential child protection cases involving People of Determination specifically. Unveiling the initiative, ZHO revealed that 23 of its employees had completed specialized training and would begin serving the organization in the newly-created role of Child Protection Specialist.





## Interagency Coordination and the Dama Al Aman Child Protection Policy

It did not take long for the various parts of Abu Dhabi's child protection machinery to begin working together in a more coordinated way. In addition to harmonizing policies and practices between government departments and authorities, ECA provided technical support to help establish dedicated child protection units within several government entities. We also supported the creation of the Abu Dhabi Family and Child Protection Committee – launched by the Department of Community Development on Emirati Children's Day in 2021 – and have continued collaborating with our partners on a range of evidence-based child protection initiatives.

In 2021, this cross-government collaboration culminated in the adoption of the Child Protection Inter-Agency Case Management Manual. Prepared with the input of more than eight government entities, the Manual provides an overview of Abu Dhabi's child protection system, including the approved procedures for handling potential child protection cases, and outlines the roles and responsibilities of different entities. Most importantly, it establishes a unified approach and a set of common standards to be applied by all stakeholders operating in the field of child protection.

A historic milestone was reached in November 2023 when the comprehensive Dama Al Aman Child Protection Policy was approved by the Abu Dhabi Executive Council for immediate implementation. The product of more than two years' work, and aligned with the principles of the UAE Child Rights Law (Wadeema's Law), the policy aims to ensure the safety and protection of all children in Abu Dhabi. Specifically, it seeks to ensure that all children in the Emirate can live in a stable and safe environment by empowering them to exercise their right to protection and by establishing an evidence-based system that enables early detection of issues and rapid intervention for children and families. Consistent with the collaborative nature of the process that led to its creation, the child protection policy also contains a series of measures to boost coordination between child protection stakeholders in Abu Dhabi.



## From Theory to Practice: The Child Center



Ultimately, there is arguably no more tangible example of the various elements of Abu Dhabi's holistic approach to child protection being put into action than the Child Center, which was established in June 2023, and operates under the supervision of the Family Care Authority (FCA). The vision that underpins the FCA Child Center is to bring together all of the functions necessary to provide children and families facing adverse experiences – including domestic violence and other forms of child maltreatment – with a holistic response from a single location. This simple innovation alone allows families to receive child protection services spanning case management, healthcare, victim support and aftercare at one discreet site without having to visit multiple facilities. Among other benefits, this prevents children from the trauma of repeated investigative interviews by multiple agencies and instead allows them to provide a limited number of interviews conducted in-house by qualified clinical child psychotherapists. The facility is also equipped to provide on-site medical and psychological support, preserve evidence for criminal justice purposes, and to provide children and families with a holistic intervention plan.

The FCA Child Center is the outcome of a multisectoral partnership involving more than eight local and federal entities. Designed to facilitate multidisciplinary working, it is

also intended to serve as a regional center of excellence for research, human capital development, data gathering and holistic child protection. In many ways, it represents the culmination of the original vision for holistic child protection that was envisaged by ECA and its partners, and that has shaped every aspect of the Emirate's Dama Al Aman child protection policy.

“Everyone is reading off the same page now,” says an ECA employee involved in the efforts of the Authority and its partners to transform the child protection system. “It's not a matter of each organization having to develop their own system. Yes, within your own area of responsibility, entities do have the freedom to determine how they are going to operate. However, the way that we interface with other agencies is more streamlined now. There's a consistent terminology, an overarching conceptual framework, common procedures and a shared understanding of what each agency is doing. Child protection doesn't belong to any one entity. We all have a role to play, and together we have created a framework that tells everybody, 'This is the direction that we're all moving in.' Today, all partners are actively engaged in providing prevention, treatment and response services. It is this collaborative synergy and complementarity that is building a protective and caring environment for all children.”

5.

# Human Capital

## Building and Supporting a World-Class Early Childhood Development Workforce

Parents are not alone in having a meaningful influence on their children’s growth and development. A wide array of professionals working across a diverse range of fields are also on the frontline of ECD, often in ways that are not always widely recognized. Guided by this insight, a key component of the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Development Strategy 2035 involved growing and strengthening the Emirate’s ECD workforce. Importantly, this would include both increasing the quantity of ECD professionals in the Emirate, but also the quality of the services being provided to children and their families.



### A Looming Challenge

Around the time of ECA’s founding, an acute skills shortage was emerging in Abu Dhabi’s ECD sector. In 2020, the total ECD workforce comprised approximately 28,500 practitioners. Based on trends at the time, it was projected that the Emirate would require a workforce of approximately 48,500 practitioners by 2030, creating a gap of around 20,000 ECD practitioners to be filled in less than a decade.

The task that lay ahead was not simply a matter of filling these jobs. Amidst such rapid growth, it was more important than ever that the responsibilities of ECD professionals were clearly defined, that appropriate standards and monitoring mechanisms were put in place, and that individuals working with children were given access to the knowledge and skills required to meet and ideally exceed these expectations.

Consistent with our commitment to collaboration, ECA teamed up with 13 local and federal government entities to develop a dedicated ECD human capital strategy for Abu Dhabi. The first step in this process involved conducting a detailed assessment of the ECD sector from a human capital perspective. Encouragingly, this assessment revealed four key assets and strengths for us to build upon, including:



- 1.**

A mature higher education system offering degrees in several ECD-related disciplines.


- 2.**

A growing focus on professionalizing selected ECD-related positions.


- 3.**

A strong commitment from the Government to enhance the human capital environment across the public and private sectors.

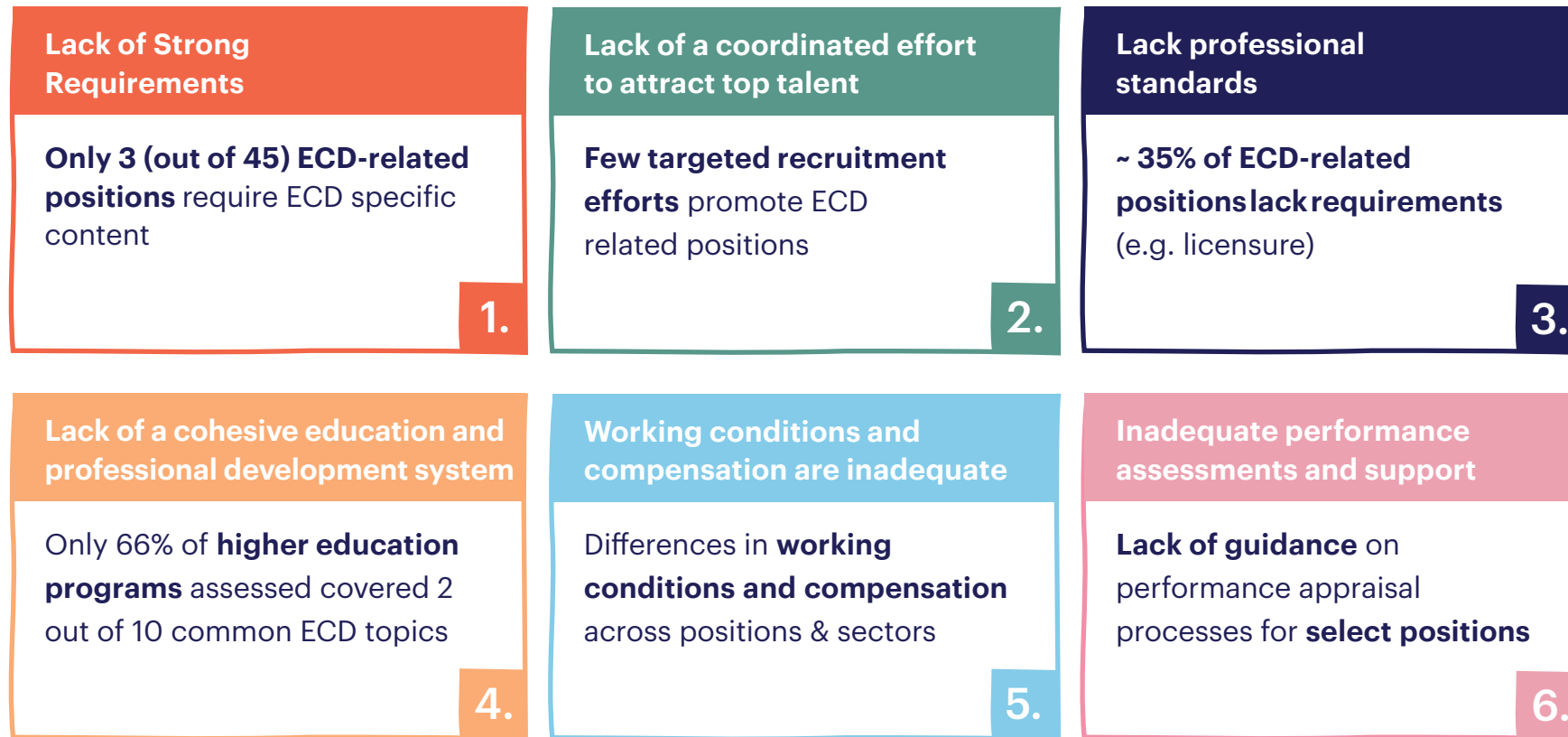

- 4.**

Overall positive sentiment from ECD practitioners, the majority of whom said they would recommend their current position to a friend and Abu Dhabi as a place to live and work.





At the same time, the assessment also revealed a number of gaps impacting the ECD human capital system in 2020.



## Mapping the Landscape

Informed by this analysis, we worked with our partners to assemble a database of ECD-related positions that existed in the Emirate. After populating this database with more than 100 roles, we agreed to focus our attention on 45 priority positions across the four key pillars of the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Development Strategy 2035: Child Protection, Health & Nutrition, Family Support, Early Care & Education.

Detailed charters were developed spanning seven key domains of ECD. Guided by these charters, clear competencies were defined for professionals working with young children and their families, outlining the qualifications, knowledge, skills and behaviors that are expected of individuals working in these positions.

Mirroring the aspirations for every eight-year-old child that had helped shape the development of Abu Dhabi's ECD Strategy, the Human Capital Strategy defined the attributes that ECA and its partners wished to see in every ECD practitioner in Abu Dhabi.

## Attributes we want to see in every ECD practitioner in Abu Dhabi

### Knowledge of Child Development

- Understands the importance of the early years
- Familiar with science-based practices to promote child and family well-being
- Familiar with the laws and policies protecting children's rights

### Effective Practice

- Promoter of positive child and family well-being, applying their knowledge of early childhood research and leading practices
- Establishes nurturing relationships with children
- Establishes relationships of mutual respect and trust with parents
- Effective communicator and attentive listener to children, families and colleagues
- Respects child and family privacy

### Values Oriented

- Committed to ensuring each child is safe, secure and supported by trusted and caring adults
- Exhibits kindness, warmth and patience in relationships with children, families and colleagues
- Shows empathy and compassion towards children and adults
- Displays honesty and fairness in relation with children, families, and colleagues

### Professionalism

- Engages in professional learning opportunities on a regular basis
- Proud of the important role they and their colleagues play in promoting child and family well-being
- Establishes relationships of respect, trust, collaboration and support with colleagues
- Adheres to the core values, principles and code of ethics for the profession
- Committed to self care and maintaining their own physical and mental health and well-being

### Foster Diversity

- Recognizes and respects the dignity, value and uniqueness of each individual
- Promotes the social and cultural heritage of the UAE
- Respects and promotes the culture, practices and beliefs of children and families
- Advances each child's development regardless of background or ability



## ECD Human Capital Strategy

These elements ultimately formed part of a comprehensive ECD Human Capital Strategy for Abu Dhabi comprising a clear vision, shared goals, five initiatives and 24 individual actions designed to facilitate the creation of:

1. A dynamic early childhood human capital ecosystem that prepares, recruits and sustains a highly effective workforce.

2. An early childhood workforce that is valued greatly and works within a supportive environment and culture.

3. Practitioners working with young children that are generous of spirit and highly capable of addressing children's needs.

With the strategy in place, we immediately got to work with our partners on its implementation, including designing and launching skills development programs focused on areas with the highest expected shortages in the coming years. Within three years, practical training had been delivered in four languages to almost 6,000 teachers employed at more than 580 nurseries in Abu Dhabi. In December 2020, we partnered with NYU Abu Dhabi to deliver training programs on ECD fundamentals to over 100 practitioners and policymakers. We also teamed up with Georgetown University and three local universities to deliver training programs in Arabic and English to over 280 child protection specialists over the course of 2020 and 2021.

Guided by our database of ECD-related positions, we launched a series of targeted programs to improve the knowledge and capabilities of hotline workers, managers of family shelters and other social support facilities. We also conducted a study to identify ways to improve the knowledge and skills of domestic workers and to strengthen their understanding of their role in the growth and development of children.



In 2023, to encourage more individuals to pursue a career in the ECD sector, ECA developed a scholarship program in partnership with United Arab Emirates University (UAEU). Through the first two cohorts of this program, we have supported 20 UAE-based Masters' students with an Early Childhood Education major. UAEU has also launched an elective course with ECA's support that covers a range of ECD-related topics and is open to students enrolled in varied programs of study.

In 2021, teachers and professors with specialist knowledge in ECD became eligible to apply for the Golden Visa in Abu Dhabi. The Golden Visa program enables individuals working in certain sectors to apply for a 10-year residency visa. The ECA website also offers dedicated information and resources for current ECD practitioners and employees, as well as students and prospective ECD practitioners, on university programs and professional development courses available in the Emirate.

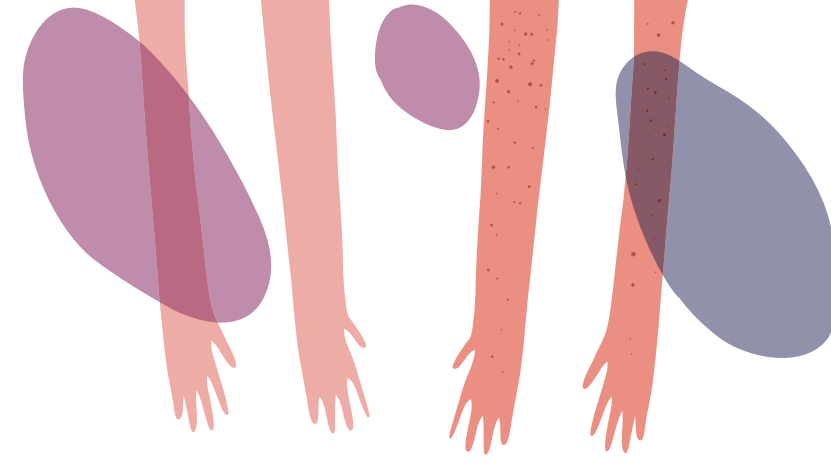
## National Academy for Childhood Development

One of the most concrete milestones in the implementation of the ECD Human Capital Strategy occurred in May 2023 with the opening of the National Academy for Childhood Development. Inaugurated by His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE and Ruler of Abu Dhabi, the Academy offers education, training and lifelong learning programs related to childhood affairs, child development and children's care, in a manner that is consistent with the values and national identity of the UAE.

The Academy is mandated to provide academic and vocational training, grant certificates and degrees, and provide consultations to and share knowledge with other key stakeholders in the ECD ecosystem. It will also conduct and commission academic and applied research, coordinate with the relevant entities to improve recruitment and employment pathways for ECD professionals, and contribute to a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. In September 2023, just three months after it was established, the Academy welcomed its first cohort of students.







“The long-term nature of our work in human capital development means that you don’t always see the impact right away, but now that we are several years into this process, we are beginning to see more evidence that these efforts are making a difference,” says a member of ECA’s human capital team. “More and more entities are coming to us, for example, seeking our guidance and advice, but also proposing ways for us to work together on human capital initiatives. We

are also seeing more entities and academic institutions taking ECD into consideration, and embedding the ECD competencies that we have developed into everything that they are doing. Today, ECD professionals in Abu Dhabi are operating in a much more supportive environment and culture than ever before, and over time, this is having a meaningful impact on the scale, the capabilities, the morale and the professionalism of the ECD workforce as a whole.”



## 6.

### Research and Innovation

On the Leading Edge of Early Childhood Development

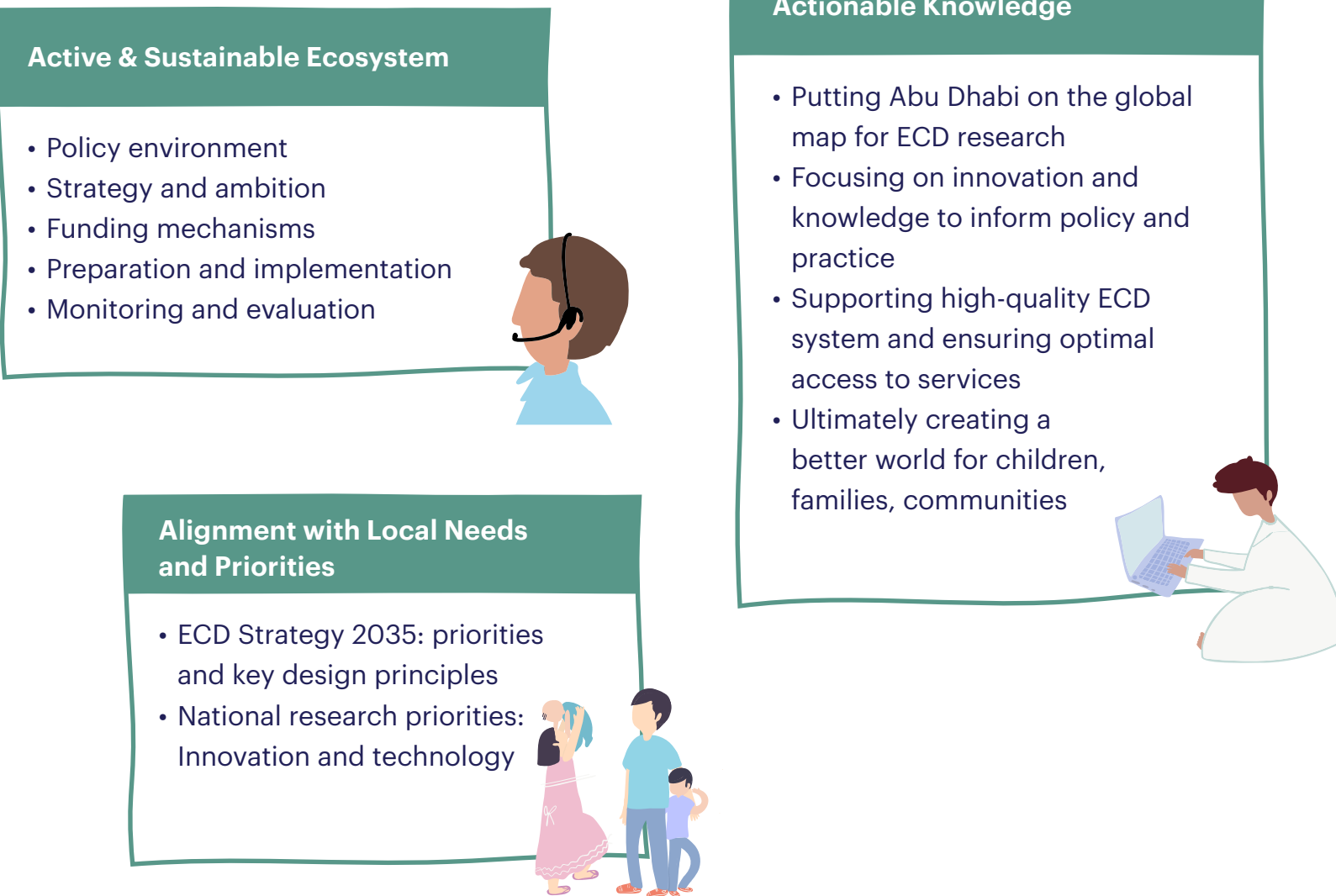
Building on our ambition to do things differently while always being guided by evidence, ECA is committed to harnessing the power of research and innovation to accelerate the implementation of the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Development Strategy 2035 and to improve outcomes for children and families.



## A Research Ecosystem for Abu Dhabi

“When the ECA’s research team was established, our strategy was based on a very clear theory of change,” recalls an ECA employee. “Our research strategy is based on three pillars. The first pillar is building an active and sustainable research ecosystem, the second is developing actionable knowledge, and the third is ensuring alignment between research and local needs and priorities.”

## A thriving Early Childhood Development research ecosystem producing actionable knowledge to inform policies and practices and have a positive impact on the lives of children and families in Abu Dhabi



This emphasis on the local research ecosystem was driven by a number of factors identified in the landscape scan conducted by the Early Childhood Sector Committee. More broadly, much of the ECD research being conducted globally was disproportionately focused on a relatively small number of countries. In fact, one study reported that less than 3% of research participants in childhood development studies published between 2006 and 2010 had been from outside the USA, Canada, UK and parts of Europe.

“One of the reasons why it is so incredibly important for us to be funding research and building an evidence base here in the UAE is because we have a unique culture,” explains a member of ECA’s research team. “There’s a huge cultural aspect to early childhood development, and a great deal of cultural knowledge that has been accumulated over the years. It’s crucial for our policies and programs to be guided by evidence-based research that reflects the realities of the people that we are here to serve.”

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## ECA Research Strategy

**Based on three key pillars,** our ECD Research Sector Strategy aims to counter this imbalance, offering more policy-relevant local data and positioning Abu Dhabi as a research innovator and disruptor by:

- 1. Building an Active & Sustainable Ecosystem**  
Creating a supportive policy environment informed by strategy and ambition that enables, monitors, and implements ECD research in Abu Dhabi.
- 2. Developing Actionable Knowledge**  
Focusing on innovation and knowledge to inform policy and practice, building and supporting high quality ECD systems and services.
- 3. Ensuring Alignment with Local Needs and Priorities**  
Embracing the UAE’s national research priorities – innovation and technology – and aligning with the priorities and design principles of the 2035 ECD Strategy.



## Supporting Research

Over two annual cycles, ECA has funded 19 individual research grants, and five critical issues grants, for a total of approximately AED 25m. Grantees have presented their work at 10 local and regional conferences, and 10 international conferences. To date, ECA-funded research projects have resulted in eight published papers in peer-reviewed journals. Our research team also incentivizes grantees to support the development of the local ECD research workforce by employing Emirati researchers at all levels of seniority. At the time of writing, over 85 Emirati researchers are engaged in ongoing research projects funded by ECA.

We have also conducted an awareness campaign to engage stakeholders in the community, academia and government on the importance of supporting and participating in local ECD research. To further strengthen the research ecosystem, we are working with our partners to support the establishment of a federal Institutional Review Board (IRB) for social research.

## A Shared Language

The most important change of all might be the increased coordination and shared understanding between stakeholders in the UAE with an interest in more high-quality, actionable, locally-relevant ECD research.

“I think one of the things that has really changed over the last five years is that more stakeholders have started speaking the same language,” explains an ECA employee. “They will often speak with us when they are setting up their own research grants. We are helping other entities to solicit proposals for certain research questions relevant to their areas of responsibility. We are really seeing this shift in the culture from within, and that is a really positive sign for the future of the local ECD research ecosystem.”



## Catalyzing Innovation

The Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Development Strategy 2035 also identified a need for new systems and platforms to drive excellence and innovation in ECD. One of our most prominent initiatives in this area is the World Early Childhood Development (WED) Movement – a flagship initiative that brings together global experts, partners and disruptors with the goal of accelerating innovation and supporting advocacy to catalyze cross-sector change in ECD.

The principal objective of the WED Movement is to redefine the global perspective on ECD starting with the child and extending to their community and the entire ecosystem, to create a world where every child can flourish. By harnessing the power of research, technology, unexpected voices and community engagement, we want to create a movement that can help lead a new wave of advancing the ECD agenda.

Specifically, WED engages practitioners and academics, innovators and entrepreneurs, philanthropists and venture capitalists, policy-makers and thought leaders, as well as children and families, in a biennial, 10-month process, designed to create and disseminate knowledge, generate new ideas and pilot actionable solutions in the field of ECD. Future challenges and opportunities faced by young children in Abu Dhabi and around the world are tackled through the creation and implementation of innovative outputs and knowledge co-creation led by WED’s multi-disciplinary experts.

In each edition, multidisciplinary Breakthrough Working Groups (BWGs) are assembled featuring experts from around the world. These experts work together to discuss challenges, generate solutions, and oversee the implementation of real-world pilots focusing on a number of pre-selected key themes. A pivotal moment in the program occurs at the WED Innovation Lab, a five-day gathering convened in Abu Dhabi where participants meet in person to define, ideate, and prototype potential solutions to be piloted in the months ahead.

“The WED Movement has implemented innovative programs that support parents, educators, and communities, ensuring that children receive the best possible start in life. It has delivered measurable improvements in Abu Dhabi rooted in ‘real world’ results with practical solutions to share with other countries, policymakers, and educators,” says an ECA employee involved in the initiative.



## WED's Four Objectives

- 1 Improve early childhood development outcomes in Abu Dhabi and around the world by encouraging disruptive innovation and generating new solutions to complement existing efforts / programs
- 2 Increase awareness globally on the key topics / challenges faced by children today, and the emerging imperatives
- 3 Be a constantly evolving global platform that drives engagement with local and international stakeholders to always pioneer new approaches to developing children that are well-prepared for the future
- 4 Provide a knowledge exchange platform that facilitates the adoption of evidence-based decision-making and solutions development



The innovation and solutioning culminates in the WED Forum in Abu Dhabi, which serves as a platform for policymakers, experts, practitioners, and stakeholders from across sectors and regions to explore ECD trends through keynote speeches, panel discussions, and interactive workshops. The forum also showcases the innovative outcomes developed by WED Experts in the preceding months, detailing current and upcoming strategies, policies, pilots, and outputs, increasing transparency and driving meaningful impact. At the inaugural WED Forum in 2022, more than 360 delegates attended, and more than 700 children and caregivers participated in a WED Fun Run hosted in partnership with the Abu Dhabi Sports Council. We have since partnered with NYU Create Abu Dhabi to advance several of the outputs that emerged from the first edition.

The second edition of the WED Movement was launched in December 2023 on the sidelines of COP28. In 2024, the WED Forum will be part of the first ever Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Week in October 2024. The week's activities will include a Research Convening, the WED Forum, an Innovation Day, ECD Fair and city-wide activations.

### In the lead-up to the Forum, we are currently piloting two solutions designed by WED Experts:

1. Majlisna, an adaptable set of hardware and digital products (both permanent and movable) aimed at redesigning public areas to foster social connections, quality time, and intergenerational bonds.

2. Hikayatna, a publicly available, online archive of stories and traditions, built with the purpose of preserving Emirati culture and heritage and enabling its transmission from one generation to the next.



“We are committed to not only creating a convening of parents, professionals, and experts that harvest innovative ideas that will accelerate change in the ECD sector, but also to sharing the solutions and learnings with countries near and far to spearhead the World Early Childhood Development Movement,” said Her Excellency Reem bint Ebrahim Al Hashimy, UAE Minister of State for International Cooperation and Chair of the WED Movement.





## An Entrepreneurial Culture

Another key pillar of our efforts to stimulate innovation is our Anjal Z (“Generation Z” in Arabic) initiative, delivered by ECA in collaboration with Abu Dhabi Investment Office, Hub71, Techstars and public and private sector partners. Established in 2020, Anjal Z aims to bring innovative global ECD startups to Abu Dhabi to help address a range of early childhood development challenges. The program’s three pillars enable startups to localize tech and non-tech offerings that support the holistic growth and development of our youngest residents. The program prioritizes startups offering potential solutions that are broadly aligned with the goals of the Emirate’s ECD strategy.

### The annual Anjal Z Techstars Founder Catalyst Program is a ten-week long experience built on the following three pillars...



- **Mentorship:** The program organizes weekly masterclasses, localization classes and 1:1 mentorship with industry experts. On average, up to 100 hours of mentoring support is provided to each cohort of the program.
- **Localization Support:** Startups participating in our ‘Launch Track’ are matched with multiple public and private sector partners to help refine their offerings to Abu Dhabi and the broader MENA region. These partners can help to open doors, collaborate on pilots and potentially become early customers. Startups also gain access to a thriving ecosystem of potential investors, partners and customers through ECA’s Ecosystem Development Lab (EDL), which brings together more than 50 representatives from across the public, private and academic sectors each year to facilitate potential collaborations with Anjal Z startups.
- **Financing:** In partnership with Abu Dhabi Investment Office, Anjal Z provides financial assistance in the form of an equity-free grant of up to AED 820k per Launch Track startup across three tranches based upon the achievement of customized key performance indicators (KPIs) agreed upon by ECA. Participating startups are also given the opportunity of enrolling in Hub71’s Access Program (formerly known as the Company Building Program), which provides them with access to a broader network of potential investment partners in the UAE.

“This program taught me how to strategize and expand my company internationally in the most efficient way,” says one participating founder. “Not only was I able to learn about the culture of Abu Dhabi, but I was able to embed the values and norms into growth strategies as I acquire customers.”

The application process is highly competitive, with approximately 300+ startups applying since 2023. Participating companies have created a wide array of solutions – including but not limited to science-backed toys and Arabic content for children, microbiome testing kits for parents who want to learn more about their baby’s gut health, a screen-free storytelling device, and many more.

Anjal Z also offers a dedicated Abu Dhabi Youth Challenge – a weekend-long bootcamp designed for aspiring entrepreneurs with an interest in addressing societal issues. In the challenge, participants develop innovative solutions to real-world ECD challenges and learn how to transform their ideas into potential startups. The program includes intensive workshops, mentorship and teamwork sessions, and provides internship opportunities to selected candidates. To date, 30 Abu Dhabi Youth Challenge participants have undertaken internships and three have secured full-time jobs with Anjal Z startups.

“Yes, I would do it all over again, ten times over,” says a participant in the Abu Dhabi Youth Challenge. “It was an invaluable experience that taught me how to communicate in public, collaborate within a group, and most importantly, function as part of a team.”





Initially focused primarily on established startups, since 2023, the Anjal Z Techstars Founder Catalyst Program has offered a dedicated track – Ignite Track – for early-stage founders, offering virtual masterclasses, mentorship and advice. To date, Anjal Z has enabled us to provide targeted support to 24 growth-stage and 27 early-stage start-ups from more than 50 countries, with at least 10 participating startups establishing a permanent presence in the UAE so far.

“Anjal Z was instrumental in helping us grasp the diverse markets within the UAE, such as Abu Dhabi and Dubai, each with unique dynamics,” says the founder of one participating start-up. “The program provided invaluable insights into local cultural nuances, effective communication strategies, and essential details that accelerated our understanding.”

The program also had a powerful influence on the mindset of ECA at a formative stage in its development. “Anjal Z was one of the first things that we did,” recalls a founding employee of ECA, “and for an authority that was focused on children to start from that perspective – working alongside these

private sector start-ups – it just brought a whole new angle to this organization and shaped the attitude of ECA in a different way from the start.”

Through our efforts to support the development of a thriving ECD ecosystem, and flagship initiatives such as the WED Movement and Anjal Z, we remain committed to working with our local and international partners to increase knowledge, generate ideas and accelerate innovation in ECD.



## Programming by Design: Athar

Athar is the in-house innovation and design-thinking function of the ECA. It provides a range of learning-based services aimed at supporting project teams by embedding deep empathy and design-thinking principles. Athar’s primary goal is to reimagine how Abu Dhabi engages with and supports the wellbeing of its children, parents and caregivers. Through these services, the function helps to reshape interactions and improve outcomes for families across the region.

Athar focuses on four key priority areas to support project teams: Process and Structure, which ensures that projects follow an organized and efficient path; Tools and Ways of Working, providing teams with the resources and methods necessary to innovate; User Centricity, placing the needs of children, parents, and caregivers at the heart of every initiative; and Metrics & Measurement, which allows for the effective evaluation of a project’s impact.

The value Athar brings to the ECA is two-fold. Firstly, it enriches ECA projects by integrating innovation and design thinking, enhancing the overall impact of select projects. Secondly, Athar plays a crucial role in upskilling ECA employees through specialized training, empowering them to apply these innovative approaches more broadly across the organization. This dual approach strengthens both individual projects and the capacity of the team to innovate and improve services for the community.





7.

## Policy and Legislation:

### A Framework for Evidence-Based Decision-Making

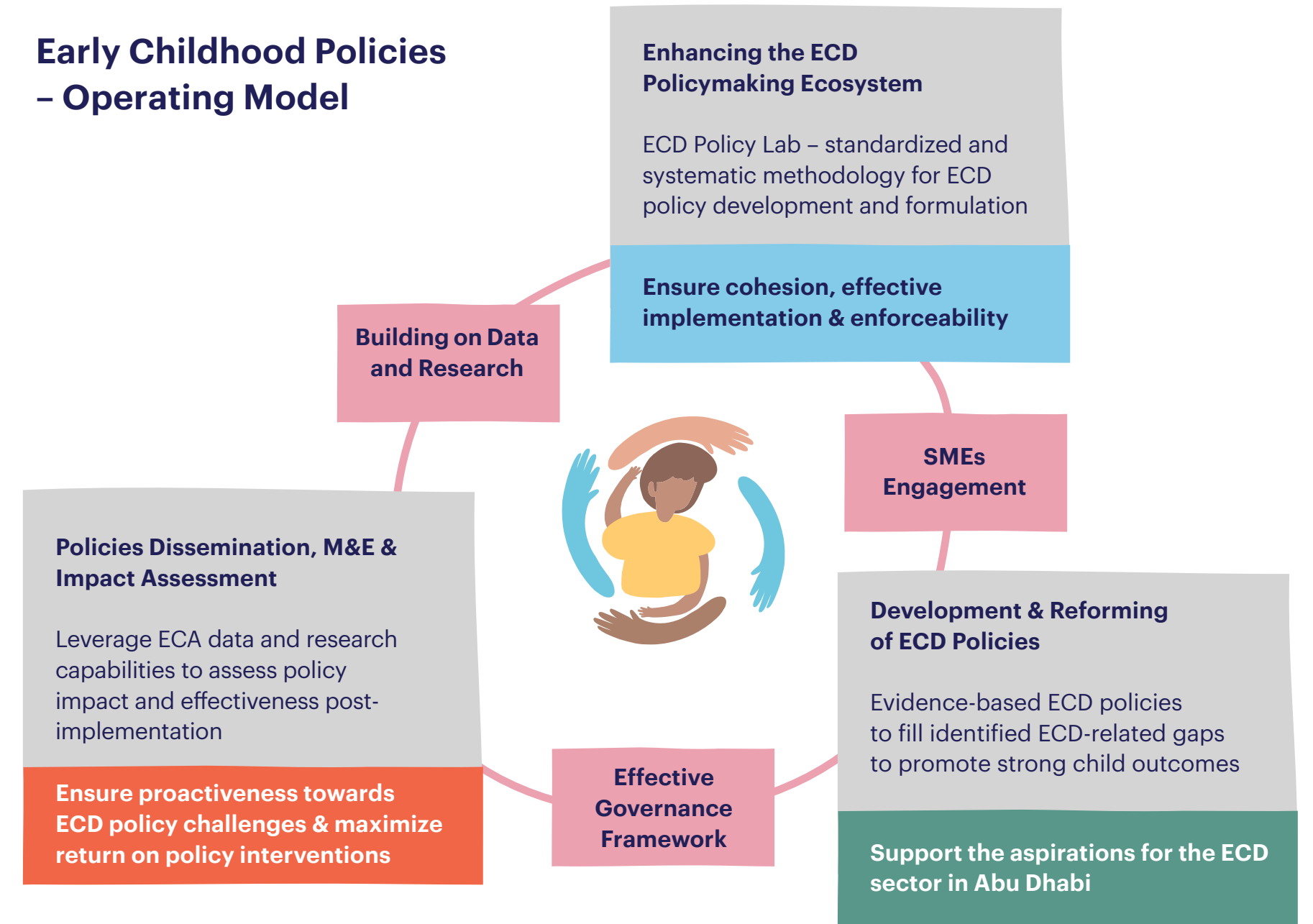
As custodian of the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Development Strategy 2035, one of ECA's primary responsibilities is to support the development of a forward-looking policy and legislation ecosystem. A key part of that ambition means facilitating greater coordination between the various government entities whose responsibilities intersect with early childhood development, as well as supporting our partners to ensure that their own policy-making processes adequately take into account the best interests of children from the prenatal period to eight years of age.



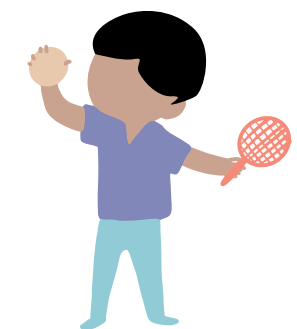
We have approached that responsibility on two fronts:

1. Designing a dedicated process for developing ECD-related policy and legislation to ensure cohesion, effective implementation and enforceability.
2. Proposing, reviewing and adjusting policies or legislation in coordination with relevant entities as required to fill ECD-related gaps and to promote high-quality services and strong child outcomes.

## Early Childhood Policies – Operating Model



In practice, that has commonly involved reviewing and assessing early childhood policies and programs in coordination with relevant entities, and proposing new policies, legislation and regulations to more effectively address the needs of children and families in Abu Dhabi.



## Partnerships for Impact

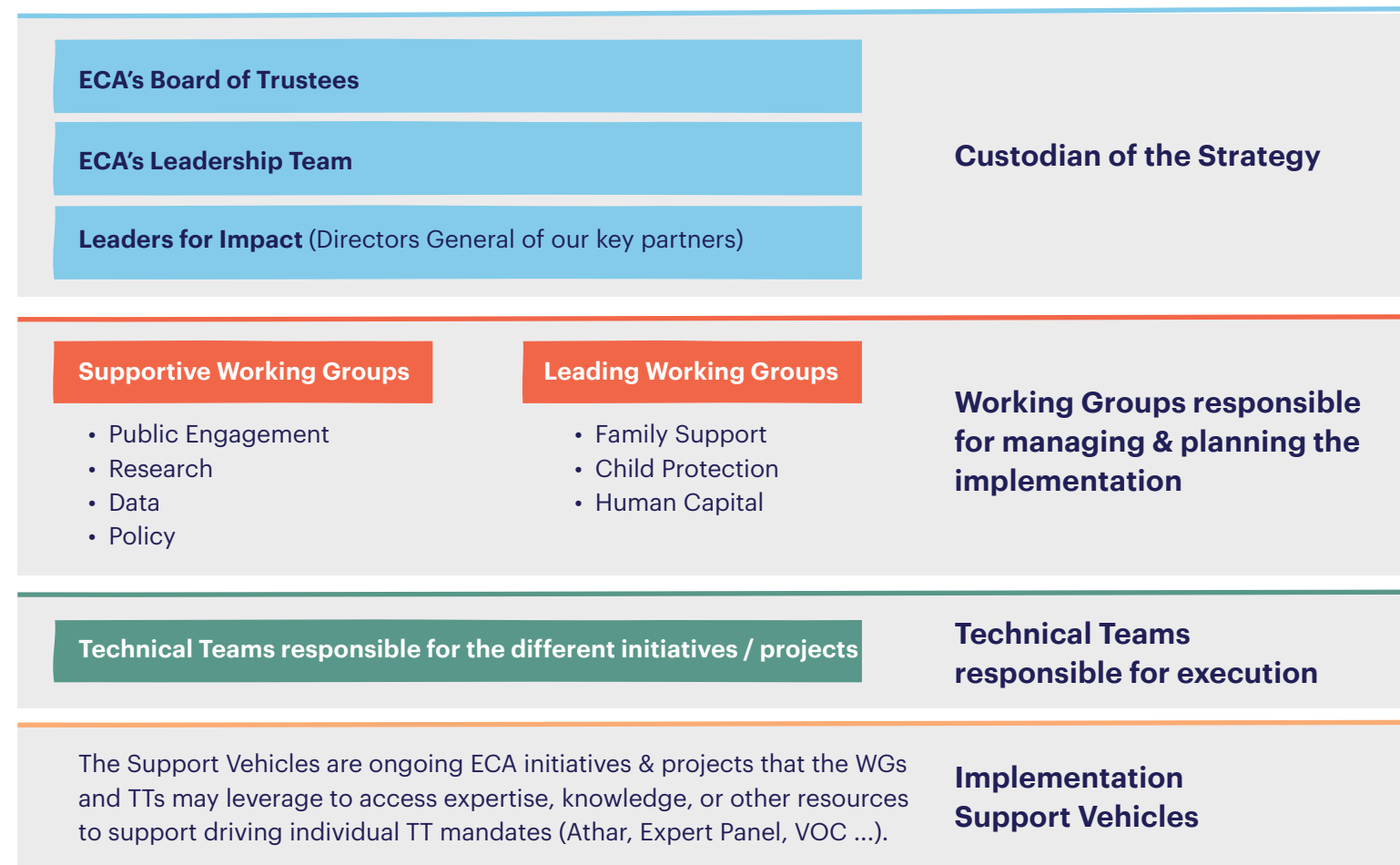
Consistent with our collaborative philosophy, multi-sectoral and multi-agency Technical Teams are responsible for designing and implementing the different ECA-led projects and initiatives. Inter-Agency Working Groups, led by ECA Executive Directors, oversee, manage and align the activities of the Technical Teams, in close cooperation with relevant partner entities.

In April 2023, we formalized our longstanding collaboration with our key partners through the establishment of Leaders for Impact. Building on

the trust and understanding that had been established over several years, Leaders for Impact is a multisectoral team comprising the Directors General of seven government agencies, in addition to the ECA, dedicated to expanding cooperation and partnership in ECD. Together, we discuss the latest developments across the Government's key areas of focus in ECD, before making evidence-based recommendations for policies and strategies.

## Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Development Strategy 2035

Several levels of leadership and oversight are engaged in implementing the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Development Strategy 2035.



## Voice of the Child

ECA and its partners are also committed to hearing directly from our most important stakeholders: the children and parents of Abu Dhabi. One of the main ways in which we do this is through an initiative known as Voice of the Child, which has established a panel dedicated to capturing the voices, concerns and suggestions of children and parents from across the Emirate, and ensuring that these perspectives are incorporated into the policy-making process.

"We cast a wide net when we are looking into a particular policy area," explains a member of ECA's policy team. "We look at local and federal regulations and systems. We do benchmarking against international examples as part of our research and analysis, and, assess and consider how relevant the findings are to the local context. We'll speak to international organizations to make sure that what we are recommending is in line with the best international practices. In the end, though, our responsibility is to propose policies that are tailored to our needs and circumstances in Abu Dhabi, and that have been developed in consultation and collaboration with our partners and stakeholders. That includes our government partners, but it also includes the private sector, and of course parents and children."

"Through this team, we seek to ensure the consolidation and coordination of communication and cooperation efforts between the main entities concerned with the sub-sectors of Early Childhood Development," said HE Sana Suhail, ECA Director General, commenting on the establishment of Leaders for Impact, "and the participation of the most prominent leaders and decision-makers in the steps aimed at the implementation of the Abu Dhabi Strategy for Early Childhood Development."





## Data and Insights

One of the most important inputs into any evidence-based policy-making process is reliable data that is current, accurate and actionable. In order to address this need, ECA has worked with its partners to streamline the collection and sharing of data related to various aspects of ECD between government agencies. Although significant amounts of data were being collected by government entities and other child-facing institutions in the Emirate, historically this information existed in separate silos. One of our first priorities was to help consolidate this data and to ensure that other important data points were also being collected.

The outcome of this process was a trove of child insights data that could inform policy decision-making across portfolios. ECA identified 21 specific data-driven insights that could be used to support evidence-based policymaking across seven key themes:

Child protection

Infant mortality

Child health

Early education

Children of Determination

Maternal health

Family diversity

Within this framework, we developed a shortlist of use cases where data-driven investigations could be particularly impactful, including reducing infant and neonatal mortality, preventing injuries, supporting maternal mental health, identifying child protection cases and early detection of Children of Determination. In July 2023, this initiative culminated in the establishment of the groundbreaking Child Insights Lab, which was launched by HH Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Executive Council. The Lab combines insights collected by ECA and its partners with data-driven storytelling methods to transform complex data trends into engaging visual narratives. Specifically, it collects and analyses cross-sectoral data provided by 11 Abu Dhabi Government entities spanning an array of ECD indicators. These data trends are then developed into animated content based on real-life scenarios which can be used to inform policy decisions.

Meanwhile, we are also working on the establishment of a dedicated ECA Policy Lab, which will aim to enhance the ECD policymaking process across the board by using evidence-based methods, fostering greater stakeholder involvement, ensuring consistency, and raising awareness and understanding of various aspects of ECD.

## Future and Foresight at ECA

ECA's work is further supported by a dedicated Future and Foresight capability. The aim of this function is to create greater resilience and sustainability for the future by identifying and understanding important trends and signals with the potential to influence the ECD landscape, and applying these insights to inform our decision-making.

Among other things, our Future and Foresight work commonly involves asking the following four questions:

1. How would our current settings hold up in different futures?

2. What changes are necessary to make them more resilient?

3. What new strategies are possible to help us anticipate and respond to the future?

4. What would be the potential ramifications of particular developments in our priority areas?

“One way to think of it is that we are constructing a map or a blueprint based on the best information that is available to us today, in order to help us navigate what is going to come, or what could come in the future,” explains a member of ECA's Future and Foresight function. “The purpose of foresight is to inform the decisions that we need to take now, not tomorrow. So, what do we need to set in place today in order to have a thriving ECD landscape in the future?”

Consistent with our commitment to collaboration, we continue to engage with a wide range of external partners on Future and Foresight initiatives, including government entities in the UAE, foreign government partners, and international organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF and the OECD.



## Changing the Conversation

The tangible impact of our policy and legislative work has been broad and far-reaching. For example, we have directly overseen the development of several new policies in collaboration with our partners, including the Dama Al Aman Child Protection Policy, along with frameworks, guidelines and manuals in areas as diverse as road safety, health and nutrition, air quality around schools, national identity, toxic substances, and the packaging and marketing of foods to children. We have also provided support to several local and federal government entities in the development of their own policies and with particular reference to the impact of these policies on children aged from 0 to 8. Perhaps most importantly, the complex topic of ECD has become more widely discussed in policy circles in the Emirate.

“There is a change that you can feel, and see,” says a founding employee of ECA, reflecting on the progress that has been made over the last five years elevating the importance of ECD in the policy conversation. “There is an awareness when you talk to people now, about the importance of keeping the child at the center of everything that we do. You hear that much more often within the government now. People saying ‘Ok, so what about children? How will this impact children?’. That was something that became contagious, and now it’s an integral part of the policy-making process.”



## 8.

### An Ideal Place to Raise a Family:

#### Creating a Family-Friendly Abu Dhabi

One of the overarching ambitions of the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Development Strategy 2035 has always been to make the Emirate a more family-friendly place to live. Working with our partners, we have sought to advance this goal on parallel tracks, including expanding activities for children and families, providing families with ECD information and knowledge resources, reshaping elements of the urban planning and design environment, and cultivating a more family-friendly work culture for working parents.



## Making the Most of Every Moment

Every summer since 2020, we have held our Takween Summer Program, which provides children, parents, caregivers, ECD practitioners and other members of the community with access to a diverse collection of developmental, educational, physical and recreational activities taking place in Abu Dhabi over the summer months.

Delivered in partnership with the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi and private sector partners, the program provides participants with access to new skills, fosters positive parent-child interactions, and improves the quality of the time that children spend with their parents during the holidays. Several of the activities on the agenda each year are also designed to create greater awareness and understanding within the wider community of the importance of ECD.

In 2023/24, ECA submitted an application for the Child Friendly City label from UNICEF, and has been granted candidate city status. Following the signing of an MOU between ECA, the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood (SCMC) and UNICEF on the sidelines of COP28, we are now working with our partners to meet the requirements to obtain the Child Friendly City label. This collaborative effort is consistent with our wider ambition to create a city where children feel safe, valued, and able to play, learn and fulfill their potential.



## Urban Planning and Design

Additionally, ECA and its partners have been focused on exploring the inter-relationship between the urban planning and design environment of Abu Dhabi and ECD. In April 2023, ECA partnered with Gehl to conduct an innovative trial in Al Falah in the eastern part of Abu Dhabi city. The initiation of the project was informed by several factors, including research showing that 80% of children in Abu Dhabi did less than one hour of physical activity per week, children in the UAE between three and eight spent an average of four hours per day on social media, and over 30% of children in the UAE met the criteria for obesity.

The purpose of the trial was to examine the impact that urban design interventions and programmatic activations at the neighborhood level could have on the behavior of parents, caregivers and children. Focusing on a sub-area called Al Falah Village Centre 1, we introduced a number of creative interventions designed to boost the number of children on the site, increase their engagement in specific types of play, and reduce the digital device usage of parents and caregivers.

The interventions varied and included the introduction of:

- Picnic tables to encourage communal behavior and prolonged social interaction between age groups.
- Moveable play equipment to foster independence in toddlers and support their physical, cognitive and social development.
- Hammocks to provide more diverse sitting options, different types of play, and to strengthen the site's identity.
- Sports equipment like soccer goals to encourage physical activity and enable group activities that support children's social and cognitive development.

In total, the site offered 17 different play opportunities for children, catering to various ages and developmental needs. The response to these interventions was overwhelmingly positive, with three times more children visiting the site than usual. The study also recorded a 97% increase in play activity.



Importantly, the intervention also appeared to promote greater social interaction and reduce the use of electronics by parents and caregivers. This layer of the project builds on several other initiatives that ECA launched in previous years to address growing concerns over excessive device usage, including an experiment involving parents spending time in cafes and restaurants without their mobile devices.

The lessons learned from the Al Falah tactical intervention will continue to inform our efforts in collaboration with our partners to make the urban environment of Abu Dhabi as family-friendly as possible. In fact, the outcomes are already being used to inform Majlisna – one of the outputs of the WED Movement – which aims to activate public spaces through play, promoting active health outdoors and enhancing Emirati culture and identity for both children and adults.

“Creating thriving public spaces where all children and their families can spend quality time outdoors and connect with others, can really support healthy development,” says an ECA employee. “A city that works for young children will work for everyone else!”



## Family Time Spent Well

Time Well Spent is an ECA-led campaign to raise awareness and ensure that the messages of quality family time and reduced screen usage reach as many families as possible in Abu Dhabi. The initiative, led by our Communications and Outreach team, seeks to encourage families to prioritize meaningful interactions and activities that strengthen bonds, promote creativity, and improve overall wellbeing. Time Well Spent is a fun behavioral experiment in which families visiting cafes in Abu Dhabi are encouraged to put away their smartphones and spend more uninterrupted, “screen-free” quality time together. In 2021, 2022 and 2023, the campaign took place over four weekends in a total of 22 cafes, reaching approximately 200 families and 400 children. Participating cafes displayed banners and on-table resources including conversation topics and activity recommendations. Information about these family-friendly café weekends was shared widely through social media, email, personal networks and word of mouth. Based on the feedback collected from parents, the experience of detaching from their phones and engaging with their children proved to be highly enjoyable and instructive, and something they were determined to do more often in future.

## A More Parent-Friendly Work Culture

Another space where targeted interventions can help to make Abu Dhabi a more family-friendly place is in the workplace. In early 2020, 78% of respondents to an Abu Dhabi Quality of Life Survey published by the Department of Community Development identified “time” as the main factor that negatively impacted family cohesion. In the same study, 56% of female respondents reported challenges trying to balance work and childcare responsibilities, and 54% of all respondents cited “work pressure” as their biggest source of stress.

Guided by these findings, and motivated by the overwhelming evidence that providing working parents with greater support to balance their responsibilities can deliver benefits to children, families, employers and the community, we decided to do something about it. In December 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, ECA announced the launch of the Parent-friendly Label (PFL).

Initially launched in Abu Dhabi before being expanded nation-wide, the PFL is a voluntary workplace program that outlines a range of criteria that organizations can adopt in order to be recognized and awarded for their parent-friendly policies and practices.

### Why is a parent-friendly workplace important?

Parent-friendly workplaces help to achieve social and economic outcomes.



#### Strategic Outcomes of a Parent-friendly Ecosystem

##### Social Benefits

###### Social benefits through employee wellbeing

- Increased Mental & Physical Wellbeing
- Enhanced Gender Equality
- Women’s Empowerment
- Reduced Infant Mortality
- Improved Quality of Life

**Embedding a more parent-friendly working culture strengthens society**

##### Economic Benefits

###### Economic benefits through employee wellbeing

- Increased Productivity
- Improved Labor Participation
- Enhanced Employer Brand Equity & Perception
- Stronger Recruitment and Retention Rates
- Increased GDP Value

**Economic benefits are a consequence of parent-friendly workplaces**

“To begin with, we looked at the current landscape, and we found that a lot more could be done to help working families,” explains an ECA employee reflecting on the origins of the PFL program. “That could be in terms of things like maternity leave, paternity leave, flexibility at work, but also in terms of addressing the needs of specific groups. For example, we know that a parent of a Child of Determination may need more support. In certain cases, these things were already happening, but we wanted to help catalyze a move from undocumented practices to institutionalized policy. That’s really what the PFL is. It’s not just an award system. It’s a journey for organizations that helps them move from periodic or ad hoc practices to institutionalized culture and policies within the organization.”

The PFL program identifies 19 criteria across 5 categories that have been shown to have an immediate and positive impact on the lives of working parents and their children’s development. Developed in consultation with local and international stakeholders, the PFL criteria are intended to be versatile and applicable to workplaces in different industries and sectors.

“Just to give you one example, we organized a series of focus group discussions for the education sector, because we know that the nature of work in that sector can be different,” explains an ECA employee involved in the

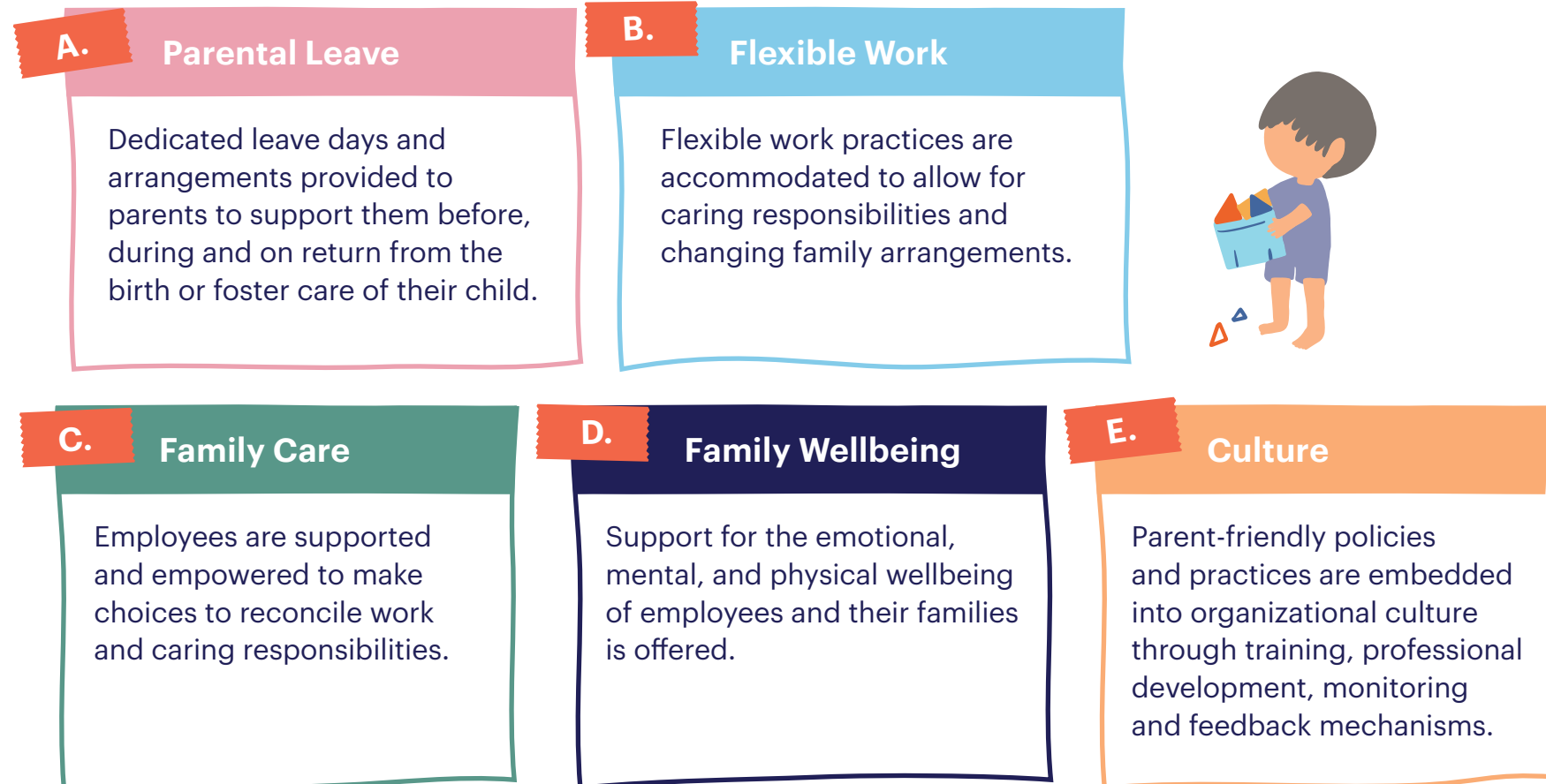
implementation of the PFL initiative. “Teachers obviously need to be in the classroom with their students, so there may be less scope for flexibility in terms of working from home. We therefore tweaked the criteria to suit the varied nature of work in different sectors. So, for schools, nurseries, educational operators and universities, the criteria encourage them to have a policy in place for how to support a teacher that has a child-related emergency, so that flexibility is there when they need it. So, it is a very robust set of criteria, but at the same time we also need to adapt to the nature of work in different sectors, and how that is changing over time.”

Together with ADPHC, ECA’s Health and Nutrition team has also been working on developing resources and guidance for employers on topics such as breastfeeding for women returning to work after maternity leave. Employers are guided on internal policies that need to be developed and arrangements that need to be made in the physical workspace to enable mothers to breastfeed their infants, including nursing rooms with facilities and equipment to pump and store breastmilk.





## The 19 criteria of the Parent-friendly Label (PFL) fall within 5 overarching categories



Organizations can apply to be recognized at one of two levels – the Parent-Friendly Label, for workplaces that exceed local requirements and standards, and the Parent-Friendly+ accreditation, for workplaces that meet or exceed leading global policies and practices. Employers that wish to apply must provide evidence to demonstrate their parent-friendly policies and practices, and a survey is distributed to their employees to provide a first-hand perspective on the work culture. At the end of each cycle, Label earners are recognized by the UAE’s leadership at a public ceremony and can officially display the PFL as a sign of their parent-friendliness.

“Regardless of the outcome of your application, you get a free customized feedback report of where you stand as an organization in terms of the parent friendliness of your policies and culture, because we do a full holistic assessment of each organization,” explains an ECA employee involved in the PFL program. “That feedback report can help to start the right conversations within the organization, including at the leadership level, about where they are particularly strong and where they could improve. It’s like a roadmap of where they need to go if they want to take their parent-friendliness to the next level.”

The program produced its first impact report in 2023 which provided data-driven insights into the rise of parent-friendly workplaces across the UAE. Furthermore, when the Abu Dhabi Government was developing a new law impacting public sector employees in 2024, it was benchmarked against the PFL criteria. This is exactly the kind of cultural impact that the program was designed to precipitate.

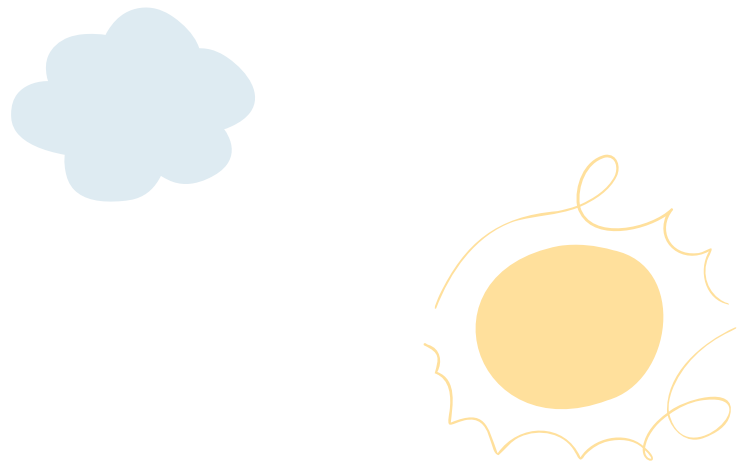
“PFL has never been about the number of applicants,” says an ECA employee. “It’s about the journey, and creating actual change on the ground, one policy and one organization at a time. The good news is that the culture is changing. The right conversations are being had, and the leaders of many organizations are thinking a lot more deeply about the parent-friendliness of their policies and practices. It’s all about making Abu Dhabi a more family-friendly place to live and work, and that’s the direction that we are going to continue moving in.”

## Fair Play

In November of 2023, more than 17,000 visitors filed into Umm Al Emarat Park in Abu Dhabi to attend the inaugural edition of the Early Childhood Development Fair, organized by ECA. Held under the theme “Learn by Playing... Develop by Learning,” the three-day Fair aimed to provide parents and caregivers with knowledge, skills and resources to support children’s mental and physical development, and to reinforce the role of Abu Dhabi as a leading destination for investment in ECD.

The Fair supported and encouraged key ECD players and families to continue creating family-friendly environments for children, said H.E. Sana Suhail, commenting on the inaugural event. “The Fair reflects one of the various initiatives that aims to improve the quality of life in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, supporting its reputation as one of the best cities for living and investing in the world.”





Over the course of the event, more than 25,000 early childhood development guides were distributed to parents, along with more than 10,000 discount vouchers (worth AED 500,000) for out-of-school programs and activities. The agenda included more than 40 educational workshops, including four workshops dedicated to Children of Determination, 12 discussion sessions and 12 theatrical performances. More than 50 entities hosted pavilions at the event, including more than 15 local and federal government entities. Their presence, along with 50 service providers, sent a powerful signal that public and private stakeholders alike are working hand in hand to advance the interests of children, families and the wider community.

Beyond the pavilions and the presentations, the overwhelming response to the Fair was a sign of how far we have come in the last five years working with our partners to elevate the importance of ECD in the national conversation, and a reminder of how much more there is to do to keep Abu Dhabi at the forefront of this multifaceted, vitally important and rapidly evolving field.

## Epilogue

### Looking Forward - the next five years and beyond

In January 2020, ECA held its first Annual Team Offsite in the presence of ECA Chairman His Highness Sheikh Theyab bin Mohamed bin Zayed as well as Members of the ECA Board of Trustees, Her Highness Sheikha Maryam bint Mohamed bin Zayed and Her Highness Sheikha Shamsa bint Mohamed bin Zayed. At the time, ECA had only 26 team members; we are a team of 112 today. On that day, the valuable guidance we received from their Highnesses emphasized four key messages: our work is not about ticking boxes, it is about leaving a lasting impact on the most vulnerable in our community – our children; having passion for the work we do is all important; collaboration, internally and with our partners, is key; and, “do government differently,” through creating a memorable work environment and experience for the ECA team.

At ECA, we reflect upon and strive to apply these principles continuously. We aspire to embody the values that we champion in our daily work and interactions with others. We aim to nurture each other’s strengths, fostering an environment where every colleague, regardless of position or seniority, is respected and supported. This commitment to nurturing extends beyond mere professional development; it’s about recognizing and realizing the potential within each team member, just as we seek to do for the children, parents and caregivers that we serve. Our workplace thrives on the belief that learning is a lifelong endeavour, with no age limit, and our team members are

encouraged to continuously expand their knowledge and skills, creating a culture of sustained growth and curiosity.

As we celebrate five years since our establishment, our focus remains on the cornerstone of our mission: the young children and families of Abu Dhabi. We know that the caring embrace of a family can play a powerfully positive role in a young child’s development. It’s a universal truth that also resonates with us on an organizational level. Since the beginning of our first five transformative years, our circle of care has been continuously enriched and strengthened by our government and private sector partners who have become an integral part of our extended family.

Together, we are working to create an ECD ecosystem in Abu Dhabi guided by one central purpose, that of supporting the healthy growth, development and wellbeing of successive generations of young children. As we look to the future, we rededicate ourselves to the enduring vision of the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Development Strategy 2035. In all of our endeavors, we remain committed to working with our partners to ensure that every young child can flourish to their full potential in a safe and family-friendly Abu Dhabi.

**It’s an exciting challenge and a unique opportunity, and one that we are proud to be a part of every day.**



## Appendix 1

### Awards received by the ECA

#### 2021

Interior Design of the Year: Office of the Early Childhood Authority (designed in collaboration with ROAR interior design studio).

#### 2022

The ECA's Abu Dhabi Child Insights System Program was selected as the most Innovative UAE Government Project of the Year in 2022. It was selected from 470 UAE Government projects and presented by the UAE Prime Minister Office (PMO) and the UAE Ministry of Cabinet Affairs.

#### 2023

Middle East Technology Excellence Award – Start Up.

#### 2023

Great Place to Work Certification; 5th place in Top 5 government entities awarded by Great Place to Work.

#### 2024

The Universal Developmental Surveillance and Screening Program won the United Arab Emirates Public Sector Initiative of the Year - Health award in the GovMedia Conference & Awards 2024.

#### 2024

The Dama Al Aman Child Protection System Building Program won the United Arab Emirates Social Equity and Inclusion Initiative of the Year - Social Services award in the GovMedia Conference & Awards 2024.

#### 2024

2nd highest score amongst all Abu Dhabi government entities in Building Tomorrow's Workplaces: Employee and Engagement Survey 2024.



## Appendix 2

### List of Acronyms

<b>ADEK</b>	Abu Dhabi Department of Education & Knowledge
<b>BWGs</b>	Breakthrough Working Groups
<b>COP28</b>	Conference of the Parties to the Convention (COP) on Climate Change
<b>DCD</b>	Department of Community Development
<b>DCT</b>	Department of Culture and Tourism
<b>DMT</b>	Department of Municipalities and Transport
<b>DoH</b>	Department of Health
<b>ECA</b>	Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority
<b>ECCE</b>	Early Childhood Care & Education
<b>ECD</b>	Early Childhood Development
<b>ECPSS</b>	Early Childhood Parenting Support Strategy
<b>FCA</b>	Family Care Authority
<b>HE</b>	Her/His Excellency
<b>HH</b>	Her/His Highness
<b>ICP</b>	Federal Authority for Identity, Citizenship, Customs and Port Security
<b>IRB</b>	Institutional Review Board
<b>KPI</b>	Key Performance Indicator
<b>MoH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>MoU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>MRC-NECC</b>	Mohamed bin Rashed Center for Special Education (branch of) New England Center for Children
<b>NACD</b>	National Academy Child Development
<b>NYUAD</b>	New York University Abu Dhabi
<b>PD</b>	Professional development
<b>PFL</b>	Parent-friendly Label
<b>SCAD</b>	Statistics Centre Abu Dhabi
<b>SCMC</b>	Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood
<b>TTs</b>	Technical Teams
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>UAEU</b>	United Arab Emirates University
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>VOC</b>	Voice of the Child
<b>WAMDA</b>	Wellness & Maternal Development in Abu Dhabi
<b>WED</b>	World Early Childhood Development Movement
<b>WGs</b>	Working Groups
<b>ZHO</b>	Zayed Higher Organization for People of Determination

## Appendix 3

### About Abu Dhabi



#### Abu Dhabi

Ruler of Abu Dhabi and President of the United Arab Emirates	His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan
Land Area*	67,340 km <sup>2</sup>
Regions	City of Abu Dhabi (Federal Capital of the United Arab Emirates) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Al Ain</li><li>• Al Dhafra</li></ul>
Population+	3,789,860
Males/Females+	2,541,465 (67%)/1,248,395 (33%)
Children 0-8 years^	~350,000 with 50% of them Emiratis
Children 0-14 years+	599,745
Working Age Population (15-64 years) +	3,120,575
Seniors (65+ years) +	69,540
Nationalities ~	There are more than 200 nationalities living and working in Abu Dhabi. The expatriate community outnumbers the population of Emiratis

\*<https://www.adro.gov.ae/About-Abu-Dhabi/Where-Is-Abu-Dhabi#:~:text=The%20largest%20of%20the%20seven,of%20the%20UAE's%20total%20landmass>

+<https://census.scad.gov.ae/home/population?tab=info&lang=en&fid=0>

^ECA estimates with data support from ICP/SCAD

-<https://www.mofa.gov.ae/en/the-uae/facts-and-figures>

## Our First Five Years tells the story of the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority as it carries out its mission to accelerate excellence, innovation and impact in the Early Childhood Development sector.



Five years of multi-sectoral partnerships, interventions, and positive changes in the lives of Abu Dhabi's young children and families.

### Read about how we've been:

- Shaping policies
- Fostering partnerships
- Implementing programs, and,
- Building a future where every child can thrive in a safe and family-friendly Abu Dhabi

### Contact the ECA ›

Email: [info@eca.gov.ae](mailto:info@eca.gov.ae)  
Phone: +971 2 4999 499  
Web: [www.eca.gov.ae](http://www.eca.gov.ae)

### ECA on Social Media ›

LinkedIn: [abudhabi-early-childhood-authority](https://www.linkedin.com/company/abudhabi-early-childhood-authority)  
Facebook: [AbuDhabiEarlyChildhoodAuthority](https://www.facebook.com/AbuDhabiEarlyChildhoodAuthority)  
Instagram: [abudhabi\\_eca](https://www.instagram.com/abudhabi_eca)  
X: [@abudhabi\\_eca](https://twitter.com/abudhabi_eca)