هيئة أبوظبي للطفولة المبكرة
Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority



ANNUAL REPORT

2025







Published by Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority
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FOREWORD

As we look back on 2025, this report tells the story of a year shaped by commitment, collaboration, and care for Abu Dhabi's youngest children.

Throughout the year, one focus guided our work: keeping children and families at the heart of everything we do. In partnership with government entities, the private sector, and families themselves, we worked to strengthen a connected system that supports children's wellbeing, development, culture, and sense of identity.

The progress captured in this report is the result of many teams and a shared purpose. From advancing evidence-based policies to delivering community initiatives and growing awareness around the importance of the early years, each milestone reflects a collective responsibility to create environments where every child can grow, learn, and thrive.

I am deeply proud of the dedication and collaboration shown by our teams and partners throughout the year. Their work reminds us that meaningful change happens when we listen, learn, and act together. As we move forward, we remain guided by data, informed by families, and grounded in our shared values.

Thank you to everyone who played a role in this journey.

Together, we continue building a more family-friendly, inclusive, and nurturing Abu Dhabi.

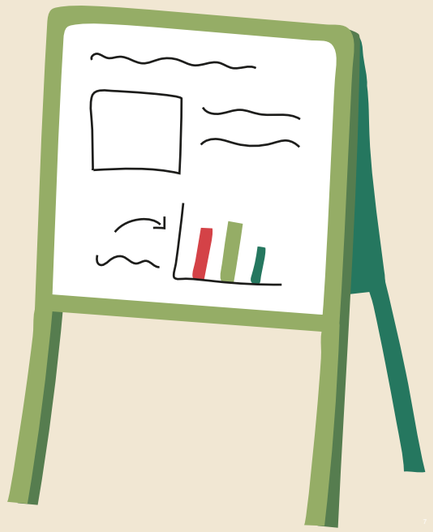


Sana bint Mohamed Suhail
Minister of Family
Director General of Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority

ABOUT THE ABU DHABI EARLY CHILDHOOD AUTHORITY

The Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority promotes optimal child development and well-being, from the early stages of pregnancy to the age of eight. We influence policies, inform decision-making through research, incubate innovative ideas, all while enabling the Early Childhood Sector and navigating the impact it's making.

We focus on Health and Nutrition, Child Protection, Family Support, and Education and Early Care. Our vision is that every young child can flourish to their full potential in a safe and family-friendly environment.



0-8

Early childhood is defined as the period from the initial stages of pregnancy to the age of eight.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT COVERS 4 ASPECTS:

Socio-Emotional



Cognitive



Physical

Linguistic



ECA MISSION

To accelerate excellence, innovation and impact in ECD.



ECA ROLES

Enabler	Broaden the capabilities of our partners to support holistic child development.
Knowledge Hub	Inform decision-making through research, data and evidence.
Impact Navigator	Monitor progress of the ECD ecosystem and impact for the community.
Incubator	Nurture the growth and sustainability of innovative ECD programs and services.
Policy Influencer	Inform and influence the development and implementation of ECD policies.

ATTRIBUTES WE ASPIRE FOR EVERY 8-YEAR-OLD CHILD IN ABU DHABI

CHILD PROTECTION

Secure

— Aware of surroundings and safely 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

ATTRIBUTES WE ASPIRE FOR EVERY 8-YEAR-OLD CHILD IN ABU DHABI

HEALTH & NUTRITION

Health & Nutrition

— Eats nutritious foods by following a healthy diet

Emotionally and Physically Secure

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

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



FAMILY SUPPORT



Values Oriented

— Respects different cultures, practices and beliefs
— 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

ABU DHABI'S EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2035

VISION

Every young child can flourish to their full potential in a safe and family-friendly environment

CROSS SECTORAL FOCUS AREAS

Early Care and Education



Family Support



Child Protection



Health & Nutrition



ABU DHABI'S EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2035



Objective 1 (Beneficiaries)

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

Programs

— Strengthen the child protection system from prevention to rehabilitation
— Deliver a sufficient and capable ECD workforce
— Enhance support for parents and primary caregivers
— Make Abu Dhabi a family-friendly Emirate
— Nurture positive cultural identity and social cohesion

Objective 2 (Ecosystem)

— Create a robust system to enhance accountability and improve quality and sustainability

Programs

— Strengthen the ECD research ecosystem and outcomes
— Ensure high-impact ECD policy & legislation
— Drive excellence & innovation in ECD
— Enhance public engagement and partnerships in the ECD ecosystem

Objective 3 (Corporate)

— Promote an integrated system for institutional enablement to improve the work environment, empower talents and govern the ECD sector

Programs

— Promote an integrated system for institutional enablement to improve the work environment, empower talents and govern the ECD sector

CHILD PROTECTION

1 STRENGTHENED A PREVENTION-TO-RESPONSE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

ECA strengthened Abu Dhabi's child protection system by institutionalising performance measurement and ecosystem-wide reporting.

Through Dama Al-Aman, a unified set of KPIs, data sources, and collection methodologies was finalised and integrated into the child protection performance framework, enabling consistent cross-sector monitoring.



2 ADVANCED NATIONAL ALIGNMENT ON CHILD PROTECTION

ECA supported the development of the National Child Protection Framework, establishing a unified, evidence-based foundation for child protection services across the UAE.

The initiative consolidated and analysed policies and operational mechanisms across 6 federal entities and 11 local entities, conducted a comparative assessment across all Emirates, and benchmarked international leading practices.

These efforts resulted in a national package of minimum system requirements and a phased implementation roadmap, laying the groundwork for coordinated national adoption.





3 IMPROVED EDUCATION ACCESS FOR CHILDREN AT RISK OF EXCLUSION

Through Rights for Every Child, ECA advanced systemic solutions to improve education access for underprivileged children

Through Rights for Every Child, ECA advanced systemic solutions to improve education access for children with limited opportunities.

The initiative engaged 12 entities across education, social protection, and charitable sectors and aligned mandates through a shared Charter and endorsement plan. During the academic year, the project facilitated access to education for 1,861 students from financially vulnerable families and was presented at the United Nations as a national effort supporting children's right to education.

4 PROGRESSED A CHILD-CENTERED CUSTODIAL VISITATION SYSTEM

ECA progressed a unified, child-centred custodial visitation system through the Framework for Child and Family Visitation Practices. A comprehensive current-state assessment was conducted across 6 visitation centres, and the framework was co-developed with 5 partners, aligning judicial, social, and family care roles.

A phased pilot plan was designed to validate implementation prior to full rollout, strengthening child safety, emotional wellbeing, and consistency of practice.





5 EXPANDED THE SAFETY CONCERN PORTAL

ECA advanced the expansion of the Safety Concern Portal to support reporting of child protection and substance-abuse cases. Training was delivered across education and health sectors.



6 ADVANCED A CHILD-CENTERED APPROACH FOR CHILDREN IN CONTACT WITH THE LAW

The Intervention Pathways for Juveniles project marked a major milestone in advancing a coordinated, child-centered approach for children in contact with the law. It strengthened early intervention, promoted fairness, and prioritized rehabilitation and positive outcomes.

Informed by international leading practices and a comprehensive review of the local juvenile justice system, the project identified key reform priorities and secured strong cross-government collaboration. It established a system-wide framework that centers children's well-being, contributing to safer communities and better futures for young people.

"Children's wellbeing today is shaped as much by digital environments as physical ones. Shared accountability is essential to creating safer spaces."

7 SIGNED THE DIGITAL WELLBEING PACT

The Online Child Protection and Digital Wellbeing Pact project contributed to strengthening the child protection ecosystem in digital environments. The project focused on promoting safer and more responsible digital experiences for children, while addressing priority online risks through a coordinated and collaborative approach.

The work was informed by a comprehensive assessment of existing online child protection practices, drawing on leading international best practices. This helped identify key priorities and opportunities for joint action, leading to the development of targeted initiatives in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

A central outcome of the project was the signing of the Digital Wellbeing Pact, an institutional commitment framework that brings together government entities and private sector partners within a shared ecosystem. The Pact establishes common principles and responsibilities and provides a practical mechanism to align efforts across awareness, prevention, and response.





Through structured engagement and technical coordination, multiple partners were onboarded to the Pact, strengthening collective action and alignment. These efforts laid the groundwork for future expansion, including school-based initiatives and broader private sector participation in advancing online child protection.

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

1 COMPLETED AN EARLY YEARS LANDSCAPE AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

ECA completed the Early Years Landscape and Needs Assessment, delivering a comprehensive evidence base to inform ECCE policy and investment decisions.

The study engaged 305 parents, 51 nurseries, 54 educators, and 19 local and federal entities, and reviewed 52 policy and program documents alongside 8 global case studies. The assessment identified 7 challenges and produced 17 recommendations.



2 COMPLETED A SUBSIDY FRAMEWORK

ECA completed the ECCE Subsidy Framework, defining eligibility criteria, funding models, and distribution mechanisms to address enrolment barriers.

The framework includes transparent scoring and ranking tools to ensure fair decision-making, alongside a monitoring and evaluation model developed with partners to track implementation and outcomes.

3 REFRESHED THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE QUALITY RECOGNITION SYSTEM (QRS)

ECA refreshed the Quality Recognition System framework with clearer standards, scoring methods, and evidence requirements. Standard operating procedures were developed to support consistent implementation, and a Target Operating Model was designed in partnership with 15 government entities, defining roles, workflows, and governance to enable piloting and long-term system integration.





4 DEVELOPED THE ABU DHABI EARLY YEARS LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

ECA completed the Abu Dhabi Early Years Learning and Development Framework, alongside an Educator Guide and Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit.

The framework was developed through consultation with 9 government entities, focus groups with university faculty and 150+ students, and engagement with educators, parents, and early childhood experts, supporting consistent, culturally grounded early learning practices across the emirate.

5 PROGRESSED THE MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS AND LICENSING REQUIREMENTS FOR PRIORITY ECD ROLES

ECA progressed the Minimum Qualifications and Licensing Requirements initiative for priority ECD roles, including ABA therapists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and social workers. The work included international benchmarking, stakeholder consultation, and analysis of academic pathways, resulting in an Implications Report and Mitigation Plan shared with partners.

“Quality in early education requires clear standards, skilled practitioners, and systems that support continuous improvement across the ecosystem.”



HEALTH AND NUTRITION

1 DISSEMINATED THE MENTAL HEALTH GUIDE

ECA implemented the Mental Health Guide across families, education, and health sectors through a multi-channel approach.

Outreach reached 5,500+ parents directly, with the guide shared across 20+ partner entities and distributed through schools and digital platforms.

Capacity-building included training 101 teachers and school leaders across 10 schools, 40 higher education students, and 130 primary healthcare providers. Digital campaigns generated 47,500+ impressions, 35,000+ media views, and 13,500+ video views, strengthening early identification and referral pathways.



2 EQUIPPED FAMILIES WITH AN EVIDENCE-BASED NUTRITION GUIDANCE

ECA released the Early Childhood Nutrition Guide, developed with input from 12 experts and informed by 350+ scientific sources.



3 ENABLED BREASTFEEDING THROUGH WORKPLACE GUIDELINES

ECA strengthened breastfeeding support through a new Breastfeeding Expansion Plan and the launch of Breastfeeding Workplace Guidelines, endorsed by the Abu Dhabi Public Health Center.

These guidelines support employers in enabling breastfeeding-friendly environments, contributing to improved maternal and infant health outcomes.

4 EXPANDED ABU DHABI'S MATERNAL AND INFANT HEALTH MONITORING SYSTEM

Through WAMDA, Abu Dhabi's maternal and infant health monitoring system expanded to 18 hospitals by 2025, covering approximately 90% of all births in the emirate.

This represents a major milestone in population-based monitoring and data-driven maternal and early childhood health planning.

"For the first time, Abu Dhabi has a near-complete picture of maternal and infant health outcomes at population level. This allows us to move from reactive support to early, preventive action."





5 PROMOTED HEALTHY HABITS FOR CHILDREN

The Healthy Lifestyles Program reached 57,837 students across 111 schools in Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, and Al Dhafra.

Enhanced evaluation tools, including pre- and post-program assessments and follow-up measures, strengthened impact measurement, while dedicated tracking ensured full participation of Children of Determination.

FAMILY SUPPORT

1 EXPANDED PARENTS' ACCESS TO TRUSTED PARENTING INFORMATION

ECA strengthened access to evidence-based parenting guidance through the Parents Platform, publishing 30+ bilingual articles and upgrading the platform to improve usability.

The platform integrates expert content, including 15 ECD Expert Corner sessions, supporting parents with practical, trusted information across key early childhood topics.



"Parents are the most influential factor in a child's early development. Supporting family wellbeing strengthens outcomes for children at every stage."

2 PILOTED FAMILY-CENTRED SERVICE MODELS TO ENABLE SCALE-UP



ECA piloted integrated service models to strengthen coordination and quality in early intervention:

— The Individualised Family Service Plan (IFSP) pilot enabled all participating families to complete comprehensive developmental and family needs assessments and maintain updated plans.

— The Family Case Coordinator model trained 30+ coordinators and began phased implementation across Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, and Al Dhafra.

— The Early Intervention Quality Framework pilot introduced bilingual digital family surveys and standardised quality indicators, showing early improvements in family engagement and goal setting.

Evaluation findings identified key enablers for sustainable scale, including workforce capability, digital integration, legal mandates, and sustainable financing.



3 ECD EXPERT PANEL

Established by ECA in 2021, the ECD Expert Panel brings together experts to provide strategic advisory across the four ECD sectors, supporting ECA initiatives through quality assurance, content review, identification of opportunities, and the provision of informed guidance to drive meaningful impact.

The Expert Corner Chat webinar series, led by the panel experts, continued to play a pivotal role in raising awareness of critical early childhood development (ECD) topics while positioning the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority (ECA) as a leading source of public-sector knowledge. In 2025, six thematic sessions attracted more than 1,200 participants, reinforcing the series as one of ECA's flagship public engagement initiatives.

Complementing these efforts, the Expert Panel delivered nine specialized workshops in partnership with key entities, including ADNOC, DGE, MoFAM, and FDF, enhancing sector-wide understanding of ECD priorities and strengthening partners' commitment to continuous learning. Each workshop was tailored to partner needs and aligned with ECA's strategic objectives, contributing to a more informed and collaborative ECD ecosystem.

4 RECOGNIZED WORKPLACES THROUGH THE PARENT-FRIENDLY LABEL

The Parent-friendly Label™ (PFL) is a UAE-wide voluntary workplace award program that allows organizations operating in the country within the semi-governmental, private and third sectors, the opportunity to earn a label in recognition of their commitment to a supportive work culture and policies which ultimately impact children of 0-8 years old. A large number of organizations across the UAE have already started their journey towards becoming a parent-friendly workplace, impacting 163,000+ employees, 105,000+ working parents, 60,000+ working parents with children 0-8 years old and 2,250+ working parents with children of determination to-date.

Distinguished organizations that received the Label in previous cycles were honored by His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE, in recognition of their commitment to fostering parent-friendly workplace policies. In its third cycle, the voluntary workplace program awarded the Label to 12 local and international organizations operating in the UAE. Three of the 12 organizations that earned the Parent-friendly Label, earned the PFL+ classification for meeting or exceeding global standards in parent-friendly policies and practices. Meanwhile, nine organizations earned the PFL classification for exceeding local leading parent-friendly policies and practices.

In the fourth cycle of the program, a pilot phase was launched to expand its scope to include the government sector (both local and federal), in collaboration with the Ministry of Family. This expansion is limited, in its fourth cycle, to a selected number of government entities as part of a pilot phase, paving the way for future expansion to cover all government entities across the UAE.

"The Thriving Child Index enables a holistic understanding of what it means for children to thrive, guiding policy and investment decisions."

5 ADVANCED DESICION-MAKING THROUGH THE CHILD INSIGHTS SYSTEM

ECA advanced strategic decision-making through the Child Insight System by evaluating 17 initiatives using an impact-driven framework. A consolidated "Use Case Map" was developed to guide prioritization based on value, feasibility, and strategic relevance, ensuring resources are directed toward the highest-impact initiatives.





6 THRIVING CHILD INDEX

Abu Dhabi progressed the Thriving Child Index, completing foundational research and developing a multidimensional wellbeing framework informed by over 100 cross-sector experts.



7 PILOTED FAMILY-CENTRED SERVICE MODELS

ECA tested integrated service models to strengthen coordination and quality in early intervention:

— The Individualised Family Service Plan (IFSP) pilot enabled 100% of participating families to complete comprehensive developmental and family needs assessments and maintain up-to-date plans.

— The Family Case Coordinator model trained 30+ coordinators and supported phased implementation across Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, and Al Dhafra.

— The Early Intervention Quality Framework pilot introduced bilingual digital family surveys and standardised quality indicators, demonstrating early positive signals in family engagement and goal setting.

Evaluation findings identified key enablers for sustainable scale, including workforce capability, digital integration, legal mandates, and viable financing mechanisms.



"Majlisna shows how public spaces can reflect culture while supporting free play, family connection, and community wellbeing."



8 MOBILISING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP PARTICIPATION

Through the Majlisna/Sustainable Public Spaces initiative, ECA collected evidence across 28 public sites, developed guidance with partners, and piloted delivery models in Al Falah and Sheikh Khalifa Medical City.

Capacity-building efforts trained 58 community volunteers, demonstrating readiness to scale child- and family-friendly public spaces across the emirate.

9

ORGANIZED ABU DHABI EARLY CHILDHOOD WEEK 2025

During Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Week 2025, ECA delivered 321 activations in collaboration with 70+ partners, attracting 65,000 participants and engaging 40,000 children through 55,000 hours of activities, reinforcing community ownership of early childhood development.

“Progress in early childhood is built on strong partnerships that allow innovation to be tested, scaled, and embedded where it matters most.”





PARTNERS WE ENGAGED IN 2025

ADNOC
National Academy for Childhood Development
PureHealth
Department of Municipalities and Transport
Department of Culture and Tourism
Ministry of Culture
Department of Education and Knowledge
Department of Health
Department of Community Development
Department of Government Enablement
Supreme Council for Motherhood & Childhood
Mubadala
Abu Dhabi Public Health Centre
National Library and Archives
General Authority of Islamic Affairs & Endowments (Awqaf)
Abu Dhabi Marine Sports Club
Abu Dhabi Sports Council
NYU Abu Dhabi
National Rehabilitation Center
NECC Clinic – Abu Dhabi
ISC – International Scientific Training Center
Higher Colleges of Technology
Khalifa Award for Education
Miral
Modon
M2
Bidaya Media
Etisalat
Meta
Yango Play
Hub71
Al Ain FC
Elggo
Shams
Al Sadeem Astronomy
Marina Mall
Miko
Babygrow
FirstCry
Kids First Group (KFG)
Liwa Education
Zayed Al Ebtesam Autism Center
Blossom Nursery
Kanzy Kids
Bright Beginnings Nursery
Orange Wheels
Little Smarties Nursery
Edu Fun Nursery
Kipina
Ajyal
Appolonia World
Cuddle Family
Kids Ai
Think Nursery
Chubby Cheeks Nursery
Creative Kids Academy
Tiny Dreams Nursery
Al Raghad
LadderUp
Bright Horizon Nursery
Thamrh
Heem Center Abilities Development
Children’s House Montessori
IDMEA
Tiny Minies

REACH OUT TO US

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