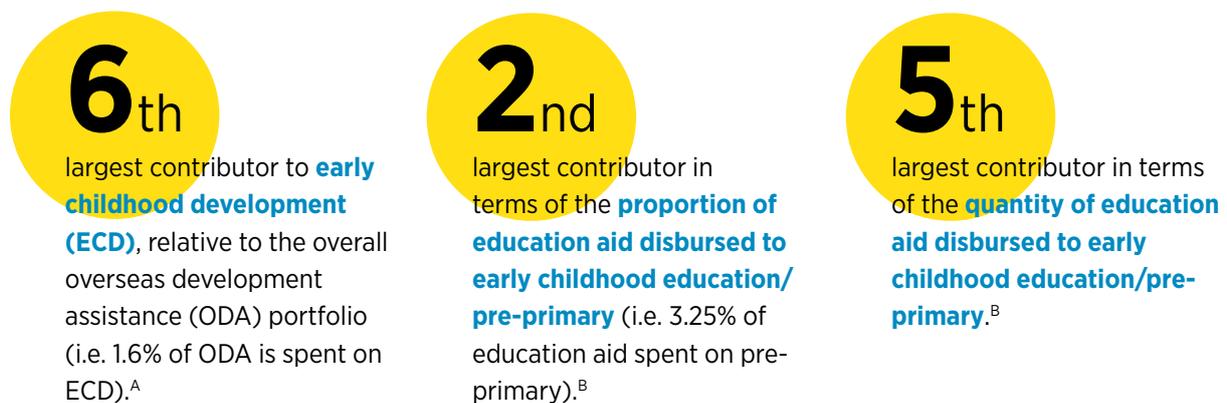


LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND

Invest in the early years

The Belgian government is **committed to supporting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, and to **contribute to eliminating poverty by means of its development assistance**. The government's focus is mainly on the world's least developed countries, primarily in Africa.

A review across 10 donors showed that in 2017 Belgium was the:



Strategic commitment to early childhood development



Disability-inclusive early education investment commitments



^A The table looking at the comparative levels of spending on ECD for the donors in this report can be found in the corresponding global report.

^B In this report, two aspects were looked at in order to draw a comparison between the aid given to early education by various donors. Firstly, the total amount (quantitative) spent on aid to early education and, secondly, in an attempt to measure donor 'effort', the authors of the report compared the ratio of aid disbursed to the early education subsector to overall aid to the education sector.

Integrated and inclusive early childhood development

The Belgian government does not have an explicit early childhood development (ECD) approach. The analysis of the government's development assistance and aid portfolio found that there was, as yet:

- No explicit focus on young children or ECD in either the project explorer and aid database for Enabel, the Belgian development agency; nor in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) database.
- No overarching strategy or commitments to ECD within their development framework and strategic documents.

Pre-primary and early education

Belgium development assistance has been supporting the upskilling of early childhood educators by using more inclusive approaches. This approach is unique across the donor analysis for this research study.

The vast majority of funding allocated within the early education sub-sector over the past five years has been directed towards projects that seek to support pre-primary teacher training by using inclusive approaches. However, the Belgium government has no strategic education policy or framework which supports their development assistance.

The country makes a relatively large contribution to aid. However, it appears not to be supported by a deliberate approach, and doesn't seem to form part of a long-term strategy. Moreover, no pre-primary components are included in Belgium's current active

project commitments, in other words, its forward-looking aid commitments. This suggests that rather than increasing support to pre-primary programmes, Belgium is actually moving away from prioritising its education aid to the early education subsector – leading to the conclusion that Belgium is currently closing down their ODA portfolio to early education.

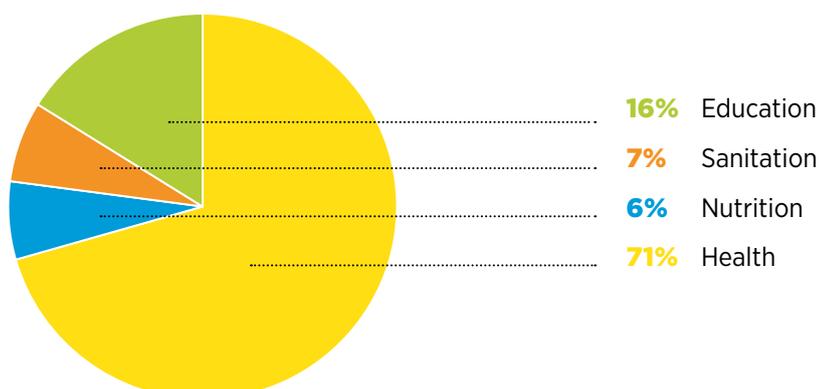
Health, nutrition and sanitation

Two-thirds of Belgium's ECD spending goes towards health (see Figure 1 for a breakdown of ECD aid within the ECD-sector domains). Belgium has a relatively large health portfolio, which reflects a focus on health spending overall for Belgium aid.

A full search of aid projects from the Belgian government showed no specific targeting of young children, nor evidence of support to the types of services which support children with disabilities, or other marginalised populations. This is mainly because the government focuses their development assistance in health on system strengthening, including workforce development, and on assisting health ministries, as part of their strategic focus areas.¹

Early childhood, or even approaches which demonstrated a focus on 'children' at all, is not a stated priority of any current projects for either the subsectors of nutrition or sanitation. While spending on health, nutrition and sanitation may benefit children younger than age five, there is very little evidence of any approaches towards supporting ECD, nor specific targeting within that of marginalised populations, including children with a disability.

FIGURE 1 Breakdown of early childhood development ODA across different ECD domains. 2017 constant US\$ disbursements, based on DAC figures



Conclusions

The Belgian government's development assistance has made an important contribution to early education ODA spending. It is one of the few donors included in this report that have been shown to explicitly support inclusive approaches to early education. In light of this, it is unfortunate that Belgian aid is actually decreasing, rather than increasing in the subsector. This means there is a loss in donors supporting the development of an education workforce by using inclusive approaches.

Moreover, the Belgian government should also better integrate a deliberate focus on ECD within their development assistance portfolio. Given that the government's development assistance has a clear approach towards sectoral support and workforce development, this offers opportunities for mainstreaming ECD programming within existing system-strengthening and workforce development.

Recommendations

The Belgian government should:

- Commit to reinstating spending on early childhood education, including scaling up financing to 10% of education ODA in the long term.
- Set timebound targets to make all ODA projects, which potentially support early childhood development, disability-inclusive.
- Use pre-existing financing in health, WASH and nutrition to support pre-existing systems and platforms to embed a greater focus on the benefits of ECD.
- Ensure that work with ministries (i.e. through work with the ministries of health) in countries helps also to foster and encourage the multi-sectoral ways of working so key to supporting ECD.
- Support the building up of workforce to deliver ECD in health, education and social protection sectors in low-income countries e.g. training of paediatricians, occupational and speech therapists, and early childhood development practitioners.
- Provide technical support to strengthen data collection to identify, track and refer children at risk of developmental delays and those with developmental delays and disabilities.



ABOUT THE RESEARCH REPORT AND DONOR PROFILES

Light for the World and their partners conducted a detailed analysis of the aid disbursements, which 10 donors have committed to support early childhood development. Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, UK and USA are the six bilateral donors reviewed for this report together with four multilateral donors namely, the European Union, World Bank, UNICEF and the Global Partnership for Education. Particular attention is paid in the research to donors' commitments towards children who are vulnerable or at risk of being marginalised or delayed in learning due to a disability. For this reason, donors' strategic frameworks were also analysed, in addition to their aid spend.

Light for the World and their partners have provided input to the donor profiles.

COMPENDIUM OF ADVOCACY TOOLS

This Donor Profile is one of 10 advocacy briefs for ODA advocacy. There are also four recipient country profiles for national advocacy, as well as a Global Report and a user-friendly checklist to support the design of inclusive ECD programmes which seek to support the most marginalised children.



A Methodology Note providing more information on the process of analysis along with all the tools may be accessed at: www.light-for-the-world.org/inclusive-ecd-investment

REFERENCES: 1. What is Enabel doing in the health sector? Enabel Belgium Development Agency. <https://www.enabel.be/content/what-enabel-doing-health-sector>. Accessed July, 2019.