

# Brief on Scoping Study

to determine priority geographical areas  
for face-to-face training and capacity  
development of parents with children aged  
birth to six years

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## Background and introduction

The first six years of a child's life lay the groundwork for subsequent health, personality development, and intellectual growth. During this period, children are heavily dependent on the care they receive from their parents and/ their primary caregiver. However, many parents find it difficult to provide their children with optimal care and stimulation. Therefore, parent support programmes are important in promoting the survival and optimal development of children.

The purpose of this study is to identify indicators for geographical targeting in the roll out of the National Parenting Parental/Primary Caregiver Capacity Building Training Programme (NPP). The scoping study applied a multi-pronged methodological approach.

### Part 1:

The scoping study applied a multi-pronged methodological approach. The study started with a comprehensive literature/document and qualitative interviews with 13 key informants. This purpose of this first round of enquiry was to identify studies and documentation that covered parenting programmes for parents who were at-risk, disadvantaged or vulnerable.

### Part 2:

The aim of the next phase was to obtain more information on the targeted groups for the training, and on the implementation of existing parenting programmes. A total of 20 interviews were conducted on the basis of purposive sampling. The National office and provincial government ECD coordinators were interviewed as part of this sample, as well as prominent Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the parenting sector. Analysis was also conducted of existing data sets to understand what data was available at the geographic level required for targeting. These two phases resulted in a synthesised report which includes an indicator index for geographical targeting the roll out of the NPP.

### Part 3:

A stakeholder mapping was conducted of organisations offering parenting programmes. This mapping was done by telephonic interviews, and a survey, and a total of 97 organisations offered parenting programmes during the period since 2018. The information has been geomapped and is [available online](#).

The report describes and analyses the strengths and challenges of the NPP, government budget allocations to Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes and parenting, what 'at-risk parents and children' means, potential indicators of at-risk parents and primary caregivers at individual/family-, community- and macro/system levels. It provides recommendations on indicators to determine priority geographical areas and characteristics of priority at-risk parents of children aged birth to six years for programme roll out.

*Parent support programmes are important in promoting the survival and optimal development of children.*

## Definition

### Who is a parent?

A “parent” is usually understood to refer to a biological, foster or adoptive mother and/or father responsible for the care and protection of a young child, who is stable in the child’s life and who loves the child and wants to protect the child. In some cases, however, the person who plays this role is not a biological, foster or adoptive mother or father. For policy purposes, we therefore adopt the broader definition offered by Gould and Ward for a “primary caregiver”. We use the term “parent” to describe the person, whether related to the child or not, who takes primary responsibility for meeting the daily care needs of the child in question, excluding those who take care of children for remuneration or reward.<sup>1</sup> (Gould, 2015)

## Policy and legislative mandate on parenting programmes

A comprehensive legislative framework provides a strong enabling environment for the implementation of the NPP.

The right of children to family and parental care is a constitutional imperative, enshrined in section 28 of the **Constitution of South Africa** (The Republic of South Africa, 1996). Parenting programmes in South Africa are covered by a variety of policies, strategies, legislation, and plans. The most notable ones being,

- Section 144 (1) in the **Children’s Act 38 of 2005** (Government of South Africa, 2010)
- the **National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy** (Department of Social Development, 2015),
- the **National Integrated Implementation Plan for Early Childhood Development in South Africa** (Department of Social Development, 2018).
- the **National Early Learning Development Standard (NELDS)** a curriculum-related policy initiative focusing primarily on the early learning needs of children from birth to four years (Department of Basic Education and UNICEF, 2009).
- the **National Curriculum Framework (NCF)** (Department of Basic Education and UNICEF, 2015).
- the Strategic Priority Area 2 in the **Revised White Paper on Families** (Department of Social Development, 2021).

*We use the term “parent” to describe the person, whether related to the child or not.*

<sup>1</sup> Foster parents are included in this definition even where they receive the foster child grant, as this grant does not constitute either remuneration or reward. It is a contribution towards the costs of caring for the child, rather than money for the direct benefit of the parent.

Section 144 (1) in the **Children's Act 38 of 2005** (Government of South Africa, 2010) prescribes that prevention and early intervention must focus on developing appropriate parenting skills and the capacity of parents and caregivers to safeguard the well-being and best interests of their children (and in particular children with disabilities and with chronic diseases), including the promotion of positive, non-violent forms of discipline. The Strategic Priority Area 2 in the **Revised White Paper on Families** (Department of Social Development, 2021) promotes parenting support as a means to strengthen families and promote family life and development of individual family members.

The policy instrument that most directly guides this strategy is the **National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy** (Department of Social Development, 2015), which acknowledges the importance of the role of parents in the early development of their child and identifies parenting support programmes as one of eight components for comprehensive early childhood development programming. The policy highlights that parenting programmes include preparation for parenthood; promotion of children's early growth, development, learning, language and education; the importance of learning through play; enablement of appropriate and positive child behaviour management; promotion of parental well-being; and promotion of child protection and safety. Furthermore, it notes that interventions such as parenting programmes have yielded positive outcomes which include the prevention of behavioural and emotional problems in children alongside an increase in parental skills and self-efficacy.

The **National Integrated Implementation Plan for Early Childhood Development in South Africa** (Department of Social Development, 2018) operationalises the policy with goal 3 dedicated to parenting support and parenting capacity building.

The **National Early Learning Development Standards (NELDS)** (Department of Basic Education and UNICEF, 2009) is a curriculum-related policy initiative focusing primarily on the early learning needs of children from birth to four years and gives premise to the fact that parents are their children's first teachers. The document is designed to provide children with the best start in life by equipping their caregivers, teachers, practitioners and parents with information and knowledge on how to ensure that their children's early experiences at home and in institutionalised forms of care and education are developmentally appropriate. Furthermore, the **National Curriculum Framework for Children from Birth to Four** (2015) (NCF) provides guidance for those developing programmes and working with babies, toddlers and young children from birth to age four (Department of Basic Education and UNICEF, 2015).

*The Strategic Priority Area 2 in the Revised White Paper on Families promotes parenting support as a means to strengthen families and promote family life and development of individual family members.*

## Description and implementation of the NPP

The NPP was developed in 2006 by the Department of Social Development with support from UNICEF. Five assumptions underly the NPP design:

- parenting can be improved through learning, and being a parent requires continuing adjustments to changing circumstances;
- parents benefit from sharing their emotional reactions with each other and receiving acceptance from their peers;
- focusing on the needs of children and parents is essential;
- parents can provide substantial help to each other if the group is well structured and they can begin to regain a sense of competence;
- trainers are responsible for giving 'good' information and for modifying misinformation given by participants.

The NPP has been implemented using a training manual and using the train-the-trainer approach. It is designed for a group of between 15 and 20 people, who participate in eleven sessions up to three hours long).

### The sessions cover 11 topics:

- (i) health and nutrition;
- (ii) play and creativity;
- (iii) physical development;
- (iv) social development;
- (v) emotional development and confidence-building;
- (vi) intellectual and language stimulation;
- (vii) child safety and protection;
- (viii) healthy family relationships;
- (ix) positive discipline;
- (x) grief and bereavement and
- (xi) the parent themselves.

*The PEDs are responsible for ensuring the programmes are implemented, whether by the PED itself or other agencies.*

## Function shift from DSD to DBE

In April 2022, responsibility for ECD policy and programmes shifted from DSD to the DBE (and to the Provincial Education Departments [PEDs]). The PEDs are responsible for ensuring the programmes are implemented, whether by the PED itself or other agencies. The role includes support for implementation. This includes monitoring and may also include subsidising non-profit providers.

**The main focus within the function shift has been on ensuring a smooth transition for the large number of ECD centres that were previously subsidised by DSD and now expect subsidies from the PEDs. There has been less attention paid to smaller programmes, including the NPP.**

The shift resulted in some degree of disruption of NPP implementation across most provinces. Northern Cape and Western Cape had relatively seamless transitions. However, in KwaZulu-Natal, with no senior officials transferred to drive implementation, social workers had not trained any parents in 2022, while in Mpumalanga and North West, non-transfer of some coordinators and social workers had hampered implementation. In Gauteng, funding for the NPP was suspended. In Free State, training for parents only began in September 2022. In Limpopo implementation was slowed down because of the function shift.

## Government budget allocation

Budgets are important because they reflect actual policy i.e. which aspects of the formal legislation and policy documents government is committing to. The **Children's Act** provides that the provincial MECs of social development "must" provide for prevention and early intervention services - whether through government providing these services itself, or funding others to do so. As seen above, the Act includes parenting programmes as one component of prevention and early intervention services.

**DBE uses two methods** to support ECD programmes financially:

1. the **conditional grant**, and
2. the subsidy to service providers paid through the **equitable share**.

The **equitable share** is the pot of money that each provincial treasury receives from national revenue and which it then uses to provide funds for each of the provincial departments. Each province has discretion as to how they allocate these funds. The early childhood development **conditional grant**, in contrast, is channelled to provinces through the responsible national department - DBE as from 2022/23. These funds must be used for the specified purpose.

The 2022/23 schedule describes the purpose of the ECD grant as:

1. "To increase the number of poor children accessing subsidised early childhood development services through centre and non-centre-based programmes; and
2. to support early childhood development providers delivering an early childhood development programme to meet basic health and safety requirements for registration; to pilot the construction of new low-cost early childhood development centres."

Only the first of these appears to allow some of the grant funds to be used for a parenting course. **Annexures to the Division of Revenue Bill** reveal that in 2022/23, R1 094,8 million is allocated through this grant to support subsidies to ECD programmes, with a further R1,0 million allocated for maintenance of centres. There is no mention of parenting programmes.

**DBE's guidelines to provinces** also seem to envisage all, or the bulk, of the subsidy going to ECD centres rather than non-centre-based programmes such as parenting. The **national DBE and DSD budget votes for 2022/23** make no mention of parenting programmes.

*The Children's Act provides that the provincial MECs of social development "must" provide for prevention and early intervention services*

The **provincial DSD votes** meanwhile have two sub-programmes that are relevant for our purposes:

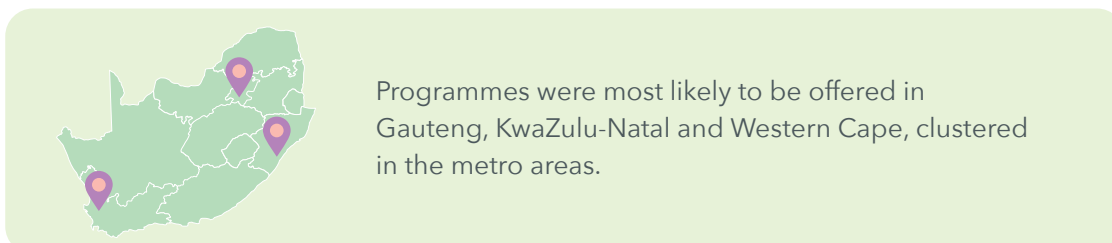
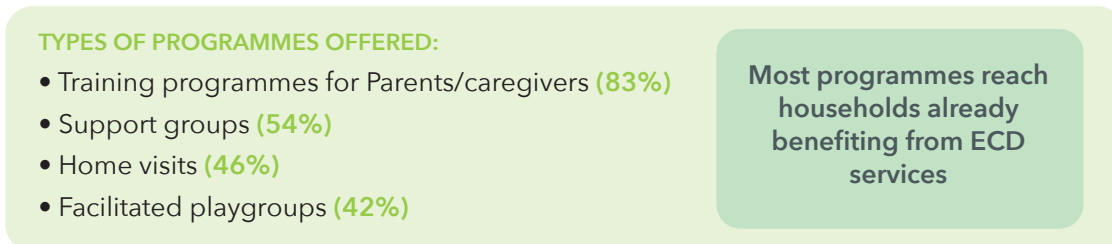
1. Firstly, there is the **ECD & Partial Care Sub-Programme** within the Children and Families programme. This is where the budget for funding of ECD centres as well as other ECD programmes was previously located.
2. Secondly, there is the **Care & Services to Families Sub-Programme** within the Children and Families programme. Some of the narratives in provincial budget votes reveal that this sub-programme is used to fund parenting programmes.

With the main responsibility for ECD shifting to education, there could be confusion as to whether a parenting programme for parents of pre-school children would fall under education or social development. What is noteworthy is that while virtually all the 2022/23 DSD and PED votes refer to the function shift, none of the PED votes mentions parenting. Hence there is no specific budget for parenting programmes.

## Parenting programmes offered by non-government providers

The study identified **97 organisations** that had offered parenting programmes in the period since 2018.

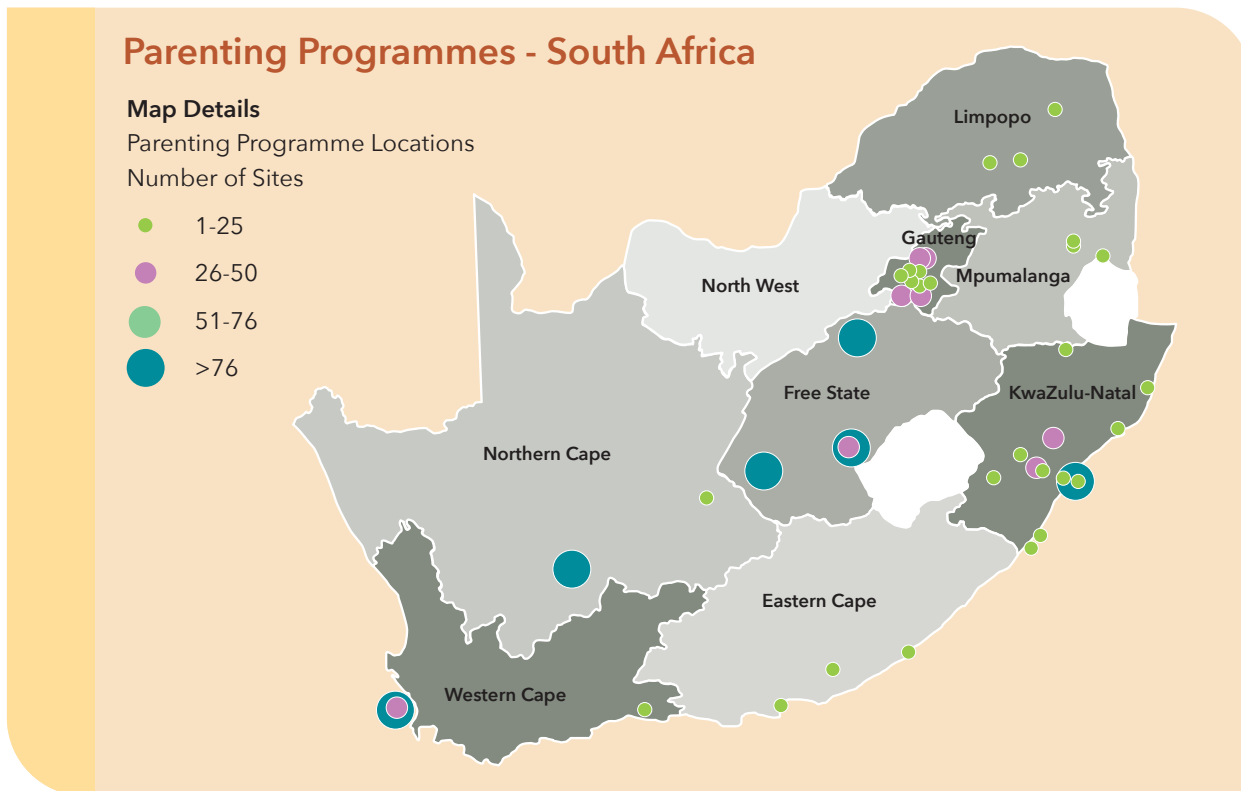
Key data points on Parenting Programmes offered in South Africa 2018 - 2022



Programmes were most likely to be offered in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape, clustered in the metro areas.



The map below shows the number of programmes reported for different municipalities.



Graphic representation of parenting programmes in our sample (head offices)

## Factors to consider in targeting

A socio-ecological model was used to analyse the risks associated with parents/caregivers on three different levels namely: 1) individual/family level, 2) community level, and 3) system/macro level.

At the **individual and family level**, literature on 13 parenting programmes implemented across nine provinces highlighted the following risks: low literacy levels with limited or no education; developmental delay; caregiver-headed households (i.e. where a parent is not present); depressed pregnant parents, disabled children, refugee/immigrant, teenage/young parents and children exposed to more than one language.

At the **community level**, parents living in informal settlements and remote villages were identified; as were those living in areas with high levels of intimate partner violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and violent crime; and areas with limited access to early learning programmes.

At the **macro level**, the poverty rate, a range of poverty-linked and nutrition-linked indicators, and low immunisation coverage were highlighted.

The documents from which these risks were drawn generally provide a description of the situation of the caregivers currently being reached, rather than evidence that parents with these characteristics are “at-risk”.

*At the macro level, the poverty rate, a range of poverty-linked and nutrition-linked indicators, and low immunisation coverage were highlighted.*



**Targeting:** When asked for suggestions on indicators for targeting, just under half of the 26 people interviewed in the study suggested that primary caregivers in **remote rural areas** be targeted, with smaller numbers suggesting informal settlements and farms. Just under half suggested a focus on areas with a **high rate of teenage pregnancies**. Five suggested focusing on grandparents who served as primary caregivers of children.

Eight of the 26 interviewees suggested focusing on parents and caregivers of children from **birth to three years** given the importance of the parent-child bond and stimulation in the child's first 1000 days for child development. They also noted that this age group is generally neglected in terms of stimulation and early learning programmes.

Nearly a third of the 26 interviewees felt that **all parents and caregivers should be targeted**. However, while all might benefit from the programme, the study was tasked with providing a method of targeting, or prioritisation, given budget and resource limitations.

## Recommendations for geographical targeting

**We were asked to identify priority areas for geographical targeting of the NPP as it rolls out. What does this mean?**

The term "**priority**" implies that the focus should be on those in greatest need – or whose children are in greatest need.

The term "**geographical**" implies that this study focus on geographical areas in which implementation of the NPP should be concentrated.

Within the identified priority areas, there will need to be further, programmatic decisions as to decide which parents and caregivers are targeted.

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**We followed the following three steps for the targeting.**

### Step 1

#### **Which areas stand out as different?**

The first step in geographical targeting is to look for areas where there are **clear differences** between geographical areas. We wanted to identify the areas, or clusters of areas, that STAND OUT.

For this, we needed some indicators. The study suggested many indicators but not all of them were practical.

### Step 2

#### **What indicators are practical to use for targeting?**

The second step is to select the indicators. There is simply not enough data available at municipal or even district level to use all the indicators that were suggested for targeting in the scoping study.

Instead, we suggest using **a few key indicators** for geographical mapping and that DBE then focus within those areas on parents with particular characteristics.

The proposed approach utilises three indicators. These indicators are those for which disaggregation is available at district level.

**# INDICATOR 1 - POVERTY:** Poverty, is also associated with low education levels, unemployment, rurality, and poor living conditions. All of these factors make parenting much for difficult. There is also data available for poverty indicators.

An analysis of poverty using the 10% sample of the 2011 census (the most recently available national data that allows sufficient geographical disaggregation) categorizes the country's municipalities into ten household income-based deciles. It reveals that Western Cape, North West, Free State and Gauteng have no municipalities in the bottom income decile. This makes nationally-defined levels of poverty on their own a poor instrument for targeting of a programme to be rolled out in all provinces. The indicator is nevertheless useful in indicating, within each province, which municipalities tend to be poorer than others.

What is noteworthy the extent to which the poorest areas coincide with what were homeland (Bantustan) areas in the apartheid years.

**# INDICATOR 2 - EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMMES (ELP):** Target group for the NPP should be **parents of children who are not accessing other ECD stimulation programmes.**

There is a large number of parents and caregivers who could benefit from a parenting programme. To date, however, only a small number have been reached. Where the NPP has been implemented through ECD centres, parents and caregivers of children who are not enrolled in such programmes are missed. Children who are already enrolled in ECD centres could already benefit from opportunities for stimulation, monitoring, and other benefits that help children thrive. For future targeting of the NPP the programme should instead focus on parents of children who are not accessing other ECD stimulation programmes. The recent ECD census of early learning programmes (ELPs) is useful in this respect.

**# INDICATOR 3 - RURALITY:** We propose focusing on municipalities that are predominantly "**deep rural**"<sup>2</sup> given the relative preponderance of children in these areas, and the much larger population when compared to formal rural.

The household income poverty map reveals that rurality is a key poverty indicator. Children and parents in rural areas are at a disadvantage, among others, because of the higher levels of poverty that characterise the areas. They are also less likely to have access to services, ranging from household-level services (such as running water inside their dwelling, decent sanitation and electricity) to other services such as affordable transport, and nearby clinics and ECD services.

Poverty, existence of early learning programmes and rurality were all suggested in the literature/document review as well as by interviewees and survey respondents as good indicators for geographical targeting of the NPP. They are all ones for which relatively reliable nation-wide data are available.

*The proposed approach utilises three indicators. These indicators are those for which disaggregation is available at district level.*

2 Usually ex-homeland areas which were established under Apartheid as pseudo-national homelands for the majority of the Black African population - to which they were moved.

## Step 3

### Creating the index with a composite score

We took all the municipalities in South Africa and scored them using these three indicators. The scoring was done as follows:

- **POVERTY:** Municipalities with a poverty rate between 40% and 59,9% score 1,<sup>3</sup> those with a poverty rate between 60% and 79,9% score 2, and those with a rate of 80% or more score 3.
- **EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMMES:** A limited access or scarce ELPs per young child as recorded in the ECD census of 2022: The worst-off municipalities score 1.
- **RURALITY:** Rurality, with municipalities in which more than 50% of women aged 15-44 years live in deep rural areas score 1.

The composite score is calculated as a simple sum of these three factors. The fact that the poverty rate scores range from birth to three while the other two factors have a maximum of one reflects that the poverty rate has a higher weighting.

The districts that receive the highest score are those that should be the priority districts for the roll out of the NPP.

The districts at the top of the list for each province are the priority districts when using the three-factor composite score. (The final column gives a composite score based only on rurality and poverty.) Some provinces have a number of municipalities with 4s and 3s, while others only have 2s and 1s.

Since the NPP will be rolled out in all 9 provinces, we recommend that each province start at the top of their list and work their way down. The full list can be found in the Strategy Document for the roll out of the NPP.

**Example of priority districts with score of 4 from the Eastern Cape. Interestingly, none of these have low ELP, but they all have high poverty and rurality - which leads them to have a score of 4.**

Municipality	Low ELP	Rurality	Poverty	Composite; Low ELP+RURALITY+POVERTY	EXCLUDING LOW ELP
Mbhashe		1	3	4	4
Emalahleni-EC		1	3	4	4
Engcobo		1	3	4	4
Ngquza Hill		1	3	4	4
Port St Johns		1	3	4	4
Nyandeni		1	3	4	4
Mhlontlo		1	3	4	4
Mbizana		1	3	4	4
Ntabankulu		1	3	4	4

*Poverty, existence of early learning programmes and rurality were all suggested in the literature/document review as well as by interviewees and survey respondents as good indicators for geographical targeting of the NPP.*

<sup>3</sup> The ones who score 1 will be municipalities to be considered first for the roll out.

## Other factors to consider when deciding who should come to the training sessions for the NPP?

The study also provided many ideas for which categories of parents to target within the targeted geographical areas. These are linked to the many risk factors identified above.

Two, in particular, emerged as factors for which strong arguments can be made both on grounds of vulnerability or risk, and in terms of practical feasibility.

### # INDICATOR 4: TEENAGE PREGNANCY

### # INDICATOR 5: LONE PARENTS/ CAREGIVERS<sup>4</sup>

Parenting programmes should reach the parents and children (birth - six) who need it the most, who are excluded from early learning programmes and isolated. Working together, different government departments and civil society organisations can reach these children through health care clinics, in their homes and through outreach programmes at ECD centres.

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<sup>4</sup> Lone parents are single parents/caregivers who live with their children in a household that does not include any other adults)

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