



# EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

## SITUATION OF CHILDREN IN THE PHILIPPINES REPORT



**SITUATION  
OF  
CHILDREN**  
IN THE PHILIPPINES



---

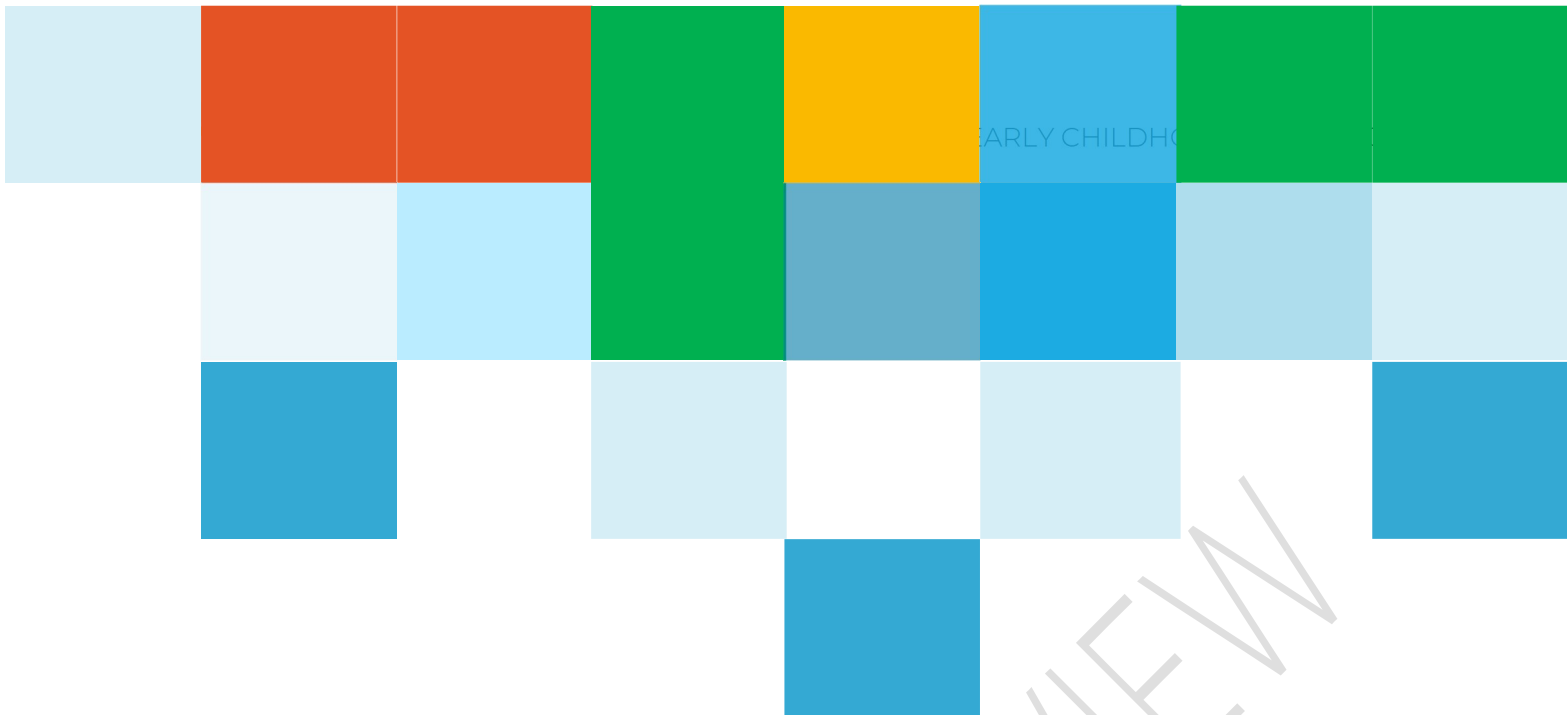
Publication Date

2023

Reports available at [situationofchildren.org/latest-evidence](https://situationofchildren.org/latest-evidence)

---

**Situation of Children Reports** provide in-depth analyses of child rights issues in the Philippines to help facilitate informed decision-making in child welfare and rights, covering areas like health, education, and protection. To view interactive dashboards and access the latest data, please visit [www.situationofchildren.org](https://www.situationofchildren.org)



Boys, and those from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds in the Philippines have less access to nursery school, kindergarten, or preschool (or early childhood education [ECE]).

A significant proportion of children have not had ECE at all. This likely impacts children's educational attainment in later levels of schooling, as those who attended preschool attained higher scores for reading, writing and mathematics at Grade 5 than those who did not. There is, however, no standard and reliable data source on the number of children aged 0–2 years enrolled in early learning programmes.

# In the Philippines, preschool education is a pivotal stage for children up to 5 years, fostering critical development and setting the foundation for future learning.

In the Philippines, ECE for 3–4-year-old children is commonly called “preschool,” which is a devolved service to local government units. ECE for 5-year-old children is “kindergarten” and it is the mandate of the Department of Education (DepEd).

Despite this difference in primary duty bearer, ECE is defined as nursery school, kindergarten or preschool between birth and 5 years of age. ECE is monitored through (i) the share of Grade 5 students with at least 1 year of ECE experience by gender, socioeconomic status, geographic location and school type, (ii) the mean scores of Grade 5 students in reading, writing and mathematics by preschool education, and (iii) the percentage of Grade 5 students who repeated grades by ECE attendance.

The ages between birth and 5 years are critical for a child’s short- and long-term

development, and ECE can have lasting positive impacts on children’s academic and social well-being outcomes.

Early childhood development. According to the ECDI2030, 77% of children aged 24–59 months are on track in terms of health, learning, and psychosocial well-being.

Early childhood development increases with increasing household wealth. Children in the lowest socioeconomic class, (66%), those born to women who have no education (47%) Children aged 48–59 months (69%) lag in achieving age-appropriate milestones and may require additional stimulation and care to catch up on their developmental goals.

The most disadvantaged in ECD are young children with disabilities and developmental delays, those in emergencies, and those who experience violence, abuse and severe neglect.

## Child Rights Situation Analysis

About eight in ten children have not attended nursery school, kindergarten, or preschool in the country as of 2019 (FLEMMS). However, in the first year of the pandemic in 2020, only two out ten children aged 3-5 years were reported to be attending school, down from almost six in ten children in 2019 based on the Annual Poverty Indicators Survey.

**In 2021, seven in every ten children, or 72.4 per cent, participated in organized learning aged one year before the official primary education entry age (net enrolment rate in Kindergarten),** far from the 83.7 per cent registered in 2017 which was the highest rate since 2010. There was a slightly higher net enrolment rate in Kindergarten among girls than among boys — 67.5 per cent to 64.7 per cent, respectively, in 2020.

**Of those children who attended preschool in 2019, slightly more than half, 54.2 per cent attended for two years or more, and less than half attended for one year** (2019 SEA-PLM Report).

**More girls have ECE experience than boys.** The pattern is the same for either urban or rural areas. A much larger proportion from the highest socioeconomic background, at 93 per cent, were found to have at least one year of ECE than those from the lowest socioeconomic background, at 83 per cent.

**Ninety-five per cent of children enrolled in Grade 5 in private schools had ECE experience.** In contrast, a much lower 84 per cent of children who were enrolled in public schools had ECE experience.

**Attendance in preschool education indicates better proficiency in basic or essential learning domains.** Those who attended preschool education obtained significantly higher mean

scores in reading, writing and mathematics. This highlights the importance of preschool education in children's later academic performance. For reading, the mean score was 10 points higher for those who attended preschool compared to those who did not. Similarly, the score difference for writing performance was found to be 12.4 points, and 9.8 points for mathematics performance.

**A child's ECE experience increases or decreases their likelihood of having to repeat grades in later years.** Children who received ECE are less likely to repeat grades than those who did not. In the Philippines, a relatively higher proportion of children with no ECE attendance (44 per cent) have repeated grades, compared to those with one year of ECE experience (30 per cent) and two years of ECE experience (31 per cent). The resultant effect of increased grade repetition may lead to system inefficiency and an inadequate use of the education budget.

There is currently no standard and reliable data source on the number of 0-2 year old children enrolled in early learning programmes, and no data on children with disabilities for this age group as there is no formal assessment. The data set out in this report against this subdimension is limited to the public sector; private sector registers are reported directly to LGUs

## Equity & Risk

### EQUITY

Gender

**A higher percentage of girls are found to attend preschool more than boys, at 88 per cent and 83 per cent respectively.** This is a gender disparity that tracks through the majority of education indicators, suggesting that boys have markedly inequitable access to education at all levels, including ECE, in the Philippines.

This potentially reduces boys' potential for educational attainment at higher levels of education, which is a concern for their educational and cognitive development in later life.

**Disability** This situation analysis has not been able to determine any substantial data that disaggregates by disability. However, while piloting the System for Prevention, Early Identification, Referral and Intervention of Delays, Disorders and Disabilities in Early Childhood, 18 per cent of children 3–4 year olds enrolled in CDCs were found to be at risk of developmental delays.

In addition, results of a Rapid Online Survey in the Philippines on access to CDCs and daycare centers were identified as the second most common effect of the COVID-19 pandemic for children with disabilities.

**Subnational** **Although the participation of 3-4 year olds in education across the Philippines is fairly low at around 40 per cent there is significant variation across regions.** For example, Region VI, Region XIII, and Region VII all have participation rates of between 50 and 60 per cent whereas the BARMM had a participation rate of less than 10 per cent.

**Others** Wealth is a significant factor that leads to inequities for preschool attendance. A higher proportion of those from the highest socioeconomic background (93 per cent) have preschool experience, compared to 83 per cent of those from the lowest socioeconomic background.

The reasons for these disparities include the lack of finances to enroll children in ECE programmes, a lack of early childhood development centers in rural areas, and a widespread perception that education for children under 4 years old is not as important as education in later years.

Wealth can also indirectly impact the extent to which children can effectively engage and learn at school as children from poorer families may have less nutritious diets or go to school hungry. DepEd is conducting school feeding programmes for children who are found to be underweight or malnourished upon screening, targeting 3.1 million children in the 2021–2022 school year.

## RISKS

**Natural hazards** **Severe weather events can destroy school buildings and infrastructure.** To respond to this risk, the DepEd has a Matatag Agenda that includes plans to build climate-resilient schools. However, natural hazard-related destruction of school infrastructure is still a major risk for ECE providers, especially those in areas where local government units have low budgets.

It has also been noted that ECE classes are often last to resume after disruptions caused by natural disasters, such as in the aftermath of Typhoon Yolanda.

**Conflict**

- **BARMM has significantly lower participation rates of 3–4 year olds in education than the rest of the country with less than 10 per cent enrolled.** It is also the most conflict-affected region in the country with armed groups having presence on the ground. It can be assumed that conflict and instability has had a severe impact on enrolment in the region.
- **Children affected by conflict of all ages are at risk of disruption to education services and access.** To seek to mitigate this risk, the DepEd Learner Rights and Protection Office has created a protocol for Children in Situations of Armed Conflict.

**Health  
Crisis/Pandemic**

**The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in significant loss of learning and learning opportunities in the Philippines,** in which some of the world’s most stringent COVID-19 containment measures were implemented, preventing many from attending school or engaging in learning for up to a year.

Such future health crisis would pose a significant risk to learning outcomes and opportunities.

**Other risks**

- **Changes to personnel and leadership or gaps in leadership through posts not being filled within the DepEd or other government bodies affect the delivery of education services in the Philippines.**

Each new senior official or representative appointed or elected may introduce new structures and priorities, which can make it challenging for INGOs and other partners to work effectively as they need to rebuild connections, networks and relationships, particularly for advocacy work.

It has also been noted that currently the position of Executive Director at the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Council has not been filled, which has the potential to impact their operations. These risks are less severe at the local level, as personnel changes within local government generally have less of an impact on educational priorities.

- At the LGU-level, the short, three-year election period means advocacy and programming at the LGU and LCE level generally needs to be reviewed and revised regularly, and new relationships built. Newly elected LCE’s can have new and different priorities, some of which will not be aligned with efforts to make progress on child rights realization.
- A Magna Carta for CDWs is currently being considered by the Philippines’ House of Representatives. Aiming to improve working conditions for CDWs, this has the potential to significantly reduce bottlenecks on ECE if passed.

Therefore, it is equally a risk if the Magna Carta for CDWs is not passed, although this analysis could determine no data to indicate that its passage is at risk.

## Legislation & Policy Analysis

Republic Act 8980 also known as the ECCD Act was signed into law on 5 December 2000. One of its key aims was to ensure the smooth transition from care to education, which was allied with ensuring that young children “are adequately prepared for the formal learning system.” The act aims to provide a comprehensive policy and system for ECCD across the Philippines.

Under the act, the monitoring of ECE standards and safeguarding as well as the provision of technical assistance falls under the remit of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). At the local level, Republic Act 6972 also known as the Barangay-level Total Development and Protection of Children Act was enacted in 1990. This mandated the establishment of a daycare center in every barangay across the Philippines.

In 2013, Republic Act 10410, also known as the Early Years Act, was signed into law. The act mandates the ECCD Council “as the primary agency supporting the government’s programmes that covers health, nutrition, early education and social services for children aged 0-4 years.” The vision of the ECCD Council, in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is that by 2030 a comprehensive, integrated and sustainable system for ECCD is in place across the country. Despite the enactment of the Republic Act 10410 many still view the provision of services for ECE as unevenly distributed across the country.

Therefore, there is currently a bill being put forward in the Senate called Senate Bill 2029. This bill “aims to give children aged 0 to 4 years old a headstart by teaching them basic skills for when they enter formal schooling.” The proposed bill also aims to address existing gaps in the Early Years Act by compelling LGUs to either establish child development centers or convert existing daycare centers into child development centers.

Based on the “Early Years First” National Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Care and Development 2030 education services will be the anchor for integrated early childhood care and development services from 60 months onwards. Education service providers will collaborate with providers of health, nutrition, WASH, social welfare, and protection services to ensure that young children aged 5 and older have access to comprehensive ECCD services.

# Bottleneck Analysis

## Demand

- **Perceptions that children under five are too young for education.** Despite the existence of numerous programmes highlighting the importance of ECE and ECCD, parents still overwhelmingly hold the view that children under 5 years of age are too young to be in education.

According to the 2019 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) 98 per cent of parents believed that children aged 4-5 were too young to go to school. This suggests that there may be a need for awareness-raising and education campaigns for parents may be required to inform them of the importance of ECE and ECCD.

The challenge is particularly acute in rural and poorer areas, compounded by a challenge that some LGUs are not implementing ECE structures and strategies effectively. This creates knock-on impacts for older children, who can be required to stay at home to look after younger siblings rather than go to school themselves.

- **Poverty is a key reason for many children not being able to pursue ECE.** Parents and caregivers can often not afford school fees, including at ECE levels.
- **Non-attendance in ECE can affect older girls.** Where younger siblings are not enrolled in ECE, this is a bottleneck for old siblings' access to education, as older siblings, particularly girls, are often tasked with taking care of younger children. This demonstrates the interconnectivity of access to education across age groups.

## Supply

- **Disparity in access to ECE is prominent, putting students from families of low-socioeconomic backgrounds and public schools at a disadvantage.** According to a 2019 report, 93 per cent of students from the wealthiest families had at least one year of ECE, while the figure falls to 83 per cent for those from the lowest income bracket.

This indicates that poverty is a key bottleneck to ECE attendance. This is also supported by the fact that daycare centers are spread equally across the country.

Lack of provision of daycare centers in poor municipalities could be a key bottleneck.

- **The early childhood development profession is not yet fully professionalized.** The ECE profession is reportedly not yet fully professionalized, with quality standards implemented consistently across the different modalities and



providers of ECE. This creates some level of disparity in the quality of ECE provided. A key professionalization drive of ECD is under way because of the Highlight Transforming Education Summit to which the Philippines is committed.

- **Limited capacity of CDWs to support children with disabilities.** CDWs often have limited capacities, training and resources to provide inclusive education for those with disabilities. This is a key bottleneck for these children, affecting their early years education with the potential to affect educational attainment and engagement in later years too.
- **Pupils who do not speak English or Tagalog face educational barriers.** This is a bottleneck particularly affecting indigenous peoples who may not speak these two languages, which are the typical languages of instruction in Filipino schools.

Enabling environment

**Limited access to ECE in the Philippines, potentially impacted by COVID-19.** Fewer than 70 per cent of 5-year-old children were enrolled in kindergarten in 2020. This number is likely to have been further reduced because of the pandemic. This suggests that not enough is being done at a systems level to encourage participation in ECE.

# References

1. Bakken, L., Brown, N. & Downing, B. (2017), Early Childhood Education: The Long-Term Benefits, *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 31:2, 255-269.
2. UNICEF. (2021). Early Childhood Education: Harness the potential of early childhood education for long-term benefits on children's learning Early Childhood Education Philippines, SEA-PLM 2019. p.1-4.
3. LawPhil. (2000). Republic of the Philippines, Congress of the Philippines: Eleventh Congress, Republic Act No 8980.
4. JD. (2021). Early Childhood Care and Education in the Philippines. Varly Project.
5. Senate of the Philippines. (1990). Sixteenth Congress of the Republic of the Philippines, first regular session: Republic Act No 6972.
6. Chi, Cristina. (2023). Senate bill filed to improve access, quality of early childhood education. Philstar Global.
7. UNICEF & SEA-PLM. (2019). SEA-PLM 2019 National Report of the Philippines. p.31.
8. UNICEF. (2019). A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing Quality Early Childhood Education.
9. Philippine Institute of Development Studies (PIDS). (2023). Policy Notes: Starting Strong: why early childhood care and development matters in the Philippines. P.2.
10. Department of Education. (2021). DepEd eyes 3.1M beneficiaries for School-Based Feeding Program for the upcoming school year.
11. DepEd. (2023). Matatag: DepEd's new agenda to resolve basic education woes.
12. Inquirer. (2023). House panel OKs proposals to create Magna Carta for child dev't workers.

---

The information presented in this report reflects the analyses and findings of the researchers and does not necessarily represent the views of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Council for the Welfare of Children (CWC), the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), or their collaborating organizations. Although efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data, this report primarily utilizes publicly available information, which may not fully encapsulate all aspects of children's situations in the Philippines.

The collaborating organizations do not assure the completeness or accuracy of the data included in these reports and accept no responsibility for any consequences stemming from their usage. The inclusion or mention of specific entities, research findings, or approaches in the reports does not constitute endorsement or preference by the collaborating organizations. Furthermore, references to specific geographic or administrative regions, or the use of the term "country," are intended solely for analytical purposes and do not indicate any position on the legal status, governance, or territorial integrity of such regions.

---