

22%

of 3–4-year-old children attend early childhood education

10%

of Grade 5 students achieve minimum proficiency level in reading

65%

of 15-year-old children experience bullying at school

1.6 million

children and adolescents (5–17 years old) are out of school

1st

in 2022 World Risk Index for most disaster-prone country



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Storytelling by a child development worker using Alas Singko storybook

Challenges

The Philippines has made significant progress in education in the past years. The country initiated a nationwide basic education reform, known as the K to 12 Program, in 2013, which enacted 13 years of compulsory education from kindergarten to senior high school. The number of learners enrolled in kindergarten to senior high school increased from about 24 million in School Year (SY) 2013–2014 to 28 million in SY 2022–2023. In SY 2022–2023, about 640,000 out-of-school learners studied in the Alternative Learning System (ALS). However, the education sector still faces various challenges.

Participation in **early childhood education** remains limited in the country. The preschool attendance rate for children aged 3 and 4 is 22 per cent.¹ While the Philippine government stipulates one year of kindergarten as compulsory education for all 5-year-old children, 34 per cent of 5-year-old children are not enrolled in kindergarten.² Moreover, 23 per cent of children aged 24–59 months are not developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being with the disparity disproportionately affecting boys, children from rural areas, the poorest households and 4-year-old children.³

¹ Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), *Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS)*, 2019.

² Department of Education, *Key Education Statistics SY 2020–2021*, 2021.

³ PSA, *Philippine 2022 National Demographic and Health Survey*.

Many children lag behind in mastering **foundational skills** such as basic literacy and numeracy. Only 10 per cent of Filipino students achieve the minimum reading standard and only 17 per cent for the minimum mathematical standard expected by the end of primary education, as defined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4.⁴ The long closure of in-person classes during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic exacerbated the learning crisis. Filipino students, on average, lost 61 per cent of the years of schooling a child is expected to have by age 18.⁵ The pandemic has a strong negative effect on students in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). It is estimated that by the end of Grade 4, students from BARMM have barely progressed from where they were at the end of Grade 1 after experiencing the pandemic (see **figure**).

There are also challenges in **socio-emotional learning**. For example, 65 per cent of 15-year-old Filipino students experience bullying at least a few times a month. Moreover, only 31 per cent of students aged 15 have a growth mindset, which is the lowest percentage among the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)-participating countries.⁶ A 2022 study also suggests that students from conflict-affected areas and urban poor communities in the Philippines generally have lower socio-emotional skills and that children who attended preschool or daycare have better socio-emotional skills compared with peers who did not have the experience.⁷

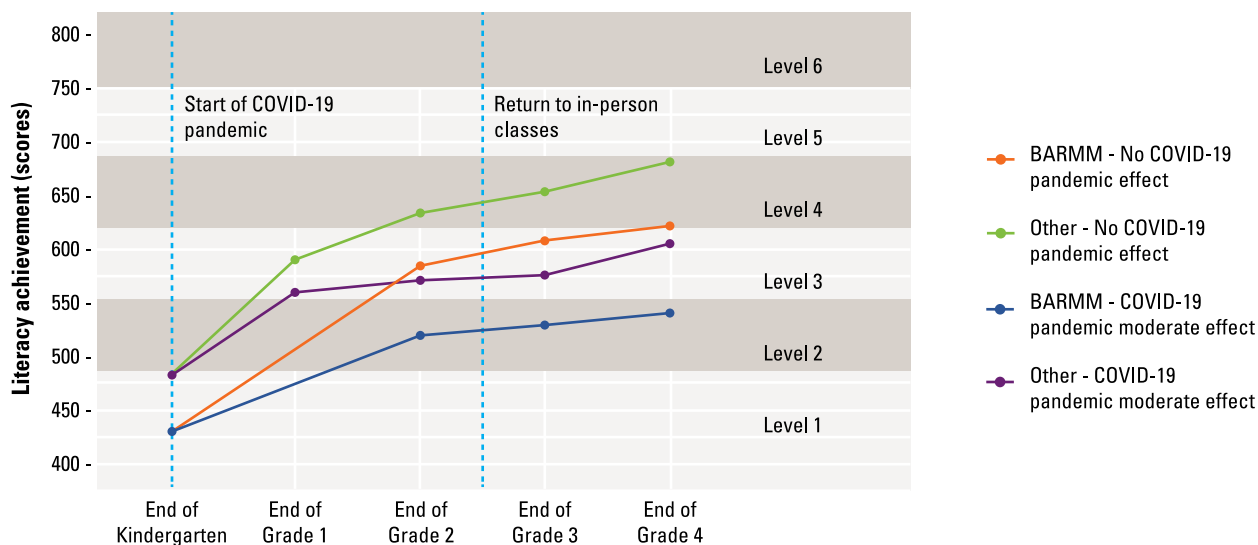
About 1.6 million children and adolescents (5–17 years old) are **out of school**, which represents 6 per cent of school-age children from kindergarten to senior high school. In particular, adolescents are less likely to complete secondary education with 12 per cent of those aged 16 and 17 not attending school for reasons such as employment and lack of interest.⁸ In general, boys are more likely to drop out than girls – 8 per cent of boys leave senior high school, while the figure is 5 per cent for girls.⁹

The Philippines is prone to **natural disasters** such as floods, typhoons, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. Typhoon Rai that hit the Philippines in December 2021 affected 29,671 schools in 11 regions, putting 711,360 children in need of education in emergency support.¹⁰

Solution

To ensure opportunities for quality education and reduce socio-economic and geographic inequalities among children and adolescents, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Philippines works from early childhood education to adolescent learning via policy, system strengthening and modelling innovations towards realising the rights of every child in education. BARMM is one of the geographical priority areas in UNICEF’s work.

Figure: Simulated literacy achievement trajectory with or without the COVID-19 pandemic effect



Source: Adapted from Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on Learning: Predictive study, 2023

⁴ Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics, 2019.

⁵ Asian Development Bank, *Learning and Earning Losses from COVID-19 School Closures in Developing Asia: Special topic of the Asian Development Outlook 2021*, 2021. Learning losses can be measured in terms of learning-adjusted years of schooling (LAYS), which capture both the quantity and quality of education. LAYS are measured as the number of years of schooling a child can expect to obtain by age 18, adjusted by a country’s average student achievement, which is measured using standardized test scores that are harmonized across countries (Patrinos and Angrist 2018 as cited in ADB 2021).

⁶ PISA, 2018.

⁷ UNICEF, Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and SEAMEO-INNOTECH, *Philippines Early Childhood Education: Kindergarten to Grade 4 longitudinal research*, 2022.

⁸ PSA, FLEMMS, 2019.

⁹ DepEd data for 2020.

¹⁰ Philippines Humanitarian Country Team, *Humanitarian Needs and Priorities Revision: Super typhoon Rai (Odette) Philippines*, 2022.

Early childhood education

Evidence suggests that early childhood education has long-term positive impacts on Filipino children's education.¹¹ In this regard, UNICEF supports the capacity development of the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) Council, local government units, child development workers/teachers, and parents and caregivers in strengthening quality and inclusive early childhood education, early identification of disabilities and smooth transition of young children from pre-school, kindergarten to elementary school. UNICEF also supports the implementation of the mother tongue-based multilingual education policy and development and distribution of storybooks in local languages for kindergarten to Grade 3 learners.

Foundational skills

Mitigating the learning crisis in the Philippines is an urgent undertaking. UNICEF works to address the learning crisis from policy development to field-level innovations. UNICEF supports the Department of Education (DepEd) in evidence generation on learning through a regional learning assessment, such as the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM), and various research initiatives. Moreover, UNICEF works with the DepEd regional office in conducting rapid assessments for learning recovery. UNICEF also works for the most disadvantaged children and adolescents, such as those in hard-to-reach areas, with disabilities, from an indigenous background and from poor households, especially through modelling digital learning interventions, such as the Learning Passport, digital stories and apps, to enhance their foundational skills.

Socio-emotional learning

Socio-emotional skills are equally critical to children's education and human development.¹² UNICEF works with DepEd to develop the assessment of socio-emotional skills that will be tested in the SEA-PLM 2024. UNICEF also implemented projects to integrate socio-emotional learning in interventions for children in conflict with the law (CICL) as well as through science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education to enhance the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children and adolescents. UNICEF provided technical assistance to DepEd's Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Service in its mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) response during the pandemic through weekly webinars for students and the provision of an MHPSS guide for school personnel as part of learning recovery. UNICEF also supports the framework development of Healthy Learning Institutions, one component of which is mental health. In addition, it worked with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Bangkok in field-testing the MHPSS



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Learners from a multigrade school accessing learning content using the offline Learning Passport hub device



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ALS learners regularly meet in a community chapel to attend their classes

¹¹ UNICEF, *SEA-PLM 2019 Policy Brief: Early childhood education*, 2022; UNICEF, ACER and SEAMEO-INNOTECH, 2022.

¹² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Social and Emotional Skills: Well-being, connectedness and success*, 2018.

system-level tool that informed DepEd on its areas of strength as well as on gaps in the policy and implementation of its mental health programme.

Alternative Learning System

UNICEF supports DepEd's ALS, which is a parallel and equivalent K-to-12 learning pathway for out-of-school children in special cases, youth and adults. The key UNICEF interventions in the ALS include the ongoing technical assistance on operationalizing micro-certification in the ALS, the development of the ALS 2.0 Information and Communications Technology Strategic Plan 2022–2026 and the ALS Research Agenda 2022–2026, and social and behavioural change strategies to increase participation in the ALS and to improve local support for the ALS delivery. UNICEF also provides model interventions to strengthen skills development among disadvantaged adolescents and young people through initiatives that focus on socio-emotional learning, STEM education, digital learning, comprehensive sexuality education and adolescent reproductive health convergence, Learning to Earning Pathways (LEaPI) and Youth Development Alliances.

Education in Emergency

Rapid and timely response to emergencies is critical to ensure children's continuous learning opportunities. UNICEF continues to advocate for education as a lifesaving and life-sustaining intervention; being a cluster co-lead, it ensures holistic, equitable and well-coordinated emergency response with government and humanitarian partners. UNICEF promotes a safe learning environment in emergencies through the delivery of temporary learning spaces, and supports teaching and learning by distributing student kits, teacher kits, school-in-a-box and storybooks as well as providing technical assistance to the government in response to various emergency situations. UNICEF also undertook learning continuity support and advocacy for the safe resumption of in-person classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. UNICEF supports DepEd in enhancing climate change adaptation and mitigation education that facilitates adolescent empowerment and civic engagement through participatory and meaningful community-based climate action. This initiative is being scaled up by improving teachers' self-efficacy in integrating climate change education into their teaching and learning delivery as well as co-designing and implementing climate action activities with their learners.



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Children singing the Philippine National Anthem in Jolo, Sulu, as they safely returned to schools in SY 2022–2023

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