



Setting New Targets for Success

The major lesson in pre-primary education,
and how we can invest to improve equity
and learning by 2030



Introduction

If the global community is serious about keeping its promise to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) by 2030, there is one major intervention that needs to happen: Investing in pre-primary education.

Bright and Early

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the first five years of a child's life are the most critical to their future development. By their fifth birthday, a child's brain is already 90% developed.¹ The seeds which determine how well they fare at school and later life, have already been sown.

There is robust scientific evidence for the lasting impact quality, nurturing care has on early brain growth, and how it keeps children in school longer. Quality nurturing care includes play, health, protection, nutrition and early learning. However, while progress is being made in some areas, children's early learning is too often neglected, putting millions of children at a disadvantage before they even start school.

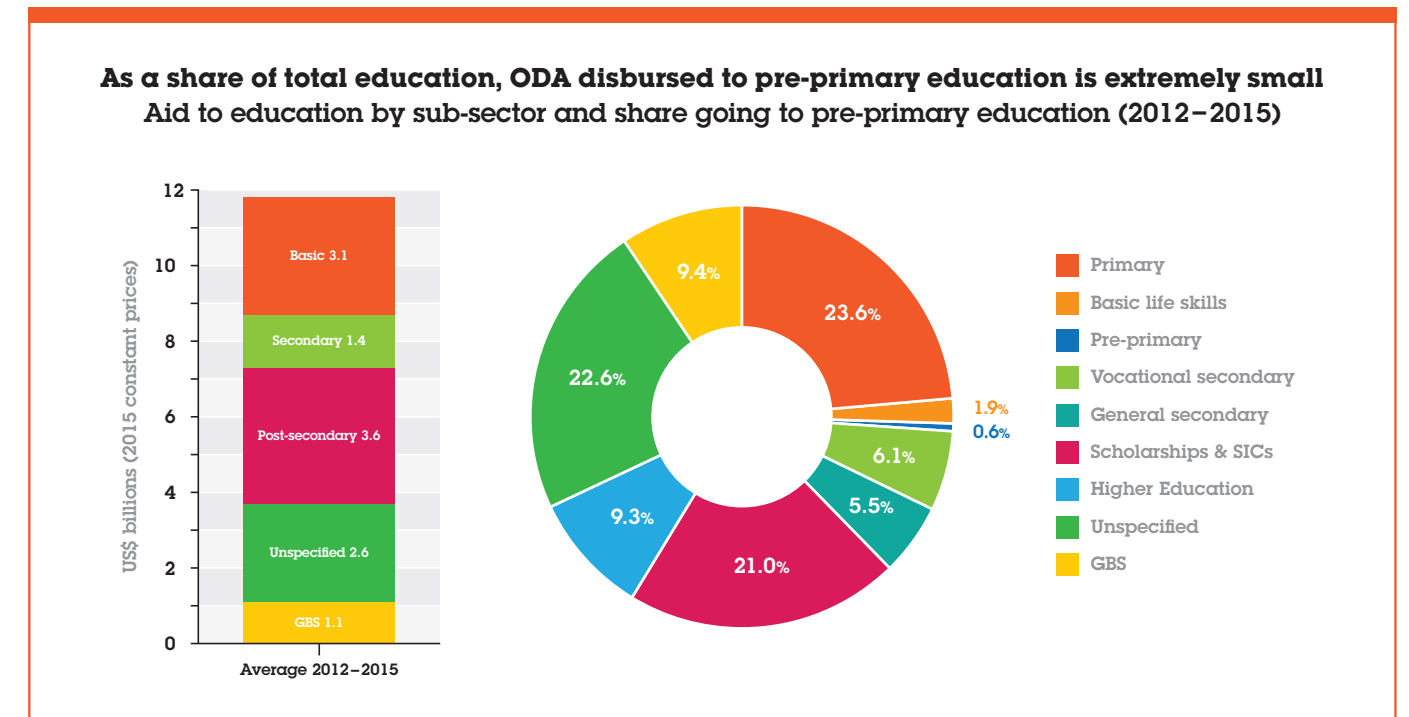
World leaders talk about these scientific findings and the need to make the most effective investments, and yet, despite this, less than 1% of education aid is actually going to one of the smartest investments: pre-primary education. This severe lack of investment is putting more than 200 million children at a disadvantage before they even start school.

The benefits of early years education are greatest for the most marginalised and disadvantaged children, including children with disabilities, impacted by HIV/AIDS or caught up in conflict and disasters, who are often least prepared for primary school or most likely to miss out on the opportunity completely.

1 — This scorecard is based on the original research for Theirworld's report: 'Bright and Early' written by Pauline Rose and Asma Zubairi, REAL Centre, University of Cambridge. For all full referencing see Pauline Rose and Asma Zubairi, *Bright and Early: How financing pre-primary education gives everyone a fair start in life – Moving towards quality early childhood development for all*, Theirworld, London, 2016

Figure 1

Source: OECD-CRS database (2017). Accessed April 2017.
Note: Refers to share of direct ODA to pre-primary education ODA and does not include Education Unspecified and General Budget Support.



There's a cruel irony at play, too. While 85% of children in low-income countries are not getting the access they deserve to pre-primary education, on the flipside, in high income countries, things are reversed: 82% of young children have access to pre-primary education. It's time to end this inequality. And when we do, the benefits will be obvious, not to just the children, but to society as a whole:

- **Knock-on effect** Children from marginalised backgrounds who attend quality pre-primary education are more likely to enrol and stay in school.
- **Better learners for life** Decent pre-primary education has a positive impact on learning throughout school, all the way into secondary education.
- **Health & wealth** Children who have benefitted from quality pre-primary education are shown on average to have better health and higher incomes later in life.
- **Return on investment** It's not just the child or their family who benefit. In economic terms, paying for early learning is one of the best investments a government can make. Every \$1 spent can lead to a return of as much as \$17 for the most disadvantaged children.²

2 — CGECCD. (2013). The importance of early childhood development to education. Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development, Prepared for the Global Meeting of the Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, Dakar.

Fair share, fair start

According to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4.2) governments and their international partners have committed to a target by 2030, that, “All girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education”. But globally, we are falling way behind this. Pre-primary is one of the most neglected areas of education aid, receiving less than 1% globally. Not one donor is meeting the minimum benchmark, and many donors lag way behind.

The core responsibility for pre-primary lies with national governments around the world who need to increase the overall share of national resources to education and begin reorienting their education budgets to ensure two years of free pre-primary, with funding in place by 2020 to allocate at least 10% of their education budget to this sub-sector.

But to support the poorest and most marginalised children, domestic commitment and investment needs to be supported by international aid donors, particularly in the poorest countries.

Setting targets for international support for pre-primary education in the early years is the focus of this scorecard. It is time donors matched their commitments with action. If it is true that “no education target will be considered met unless met for all,” then the following changes need to happen:

What are we calling for?

ODA resources (aid) to education should increase in volume. With this overall increase, aid should be targetted to benefit the poorest, with all donors allocating at least 10% of all education ODA to pre-primary education, even in humanitarian crisis. This means:

- Government donors to commit a minimum of 10% of their education aid funding (ODA) to pre-primary education, targeting the poorest and most marginalised countries and communities.
- The World Bank should allocate at least 10% of its education aid funding to pre-primary education, up from 2.7% — and reach \$375 million annually by 2020.
- The Global Partnership for Education should increase allocations to pre-primary from 4% to 10% of its budget, reaching at least \$40 million next year at their current funding levels and \$200 million annually following a successful replenishment.
- UNICEF, as one of the largest multilateral donors to education, should reverse the decline in funding and ensure at least 10% of its education budget is spent on pre-primary education.
- All humanitarian response plans should include targets holistically addressing the needs of children ages 0-5, and Education Cannot Wait should prioritise pre-primary education, reaching the 10% target.
- Donors countries, potential recipient countries and the G20 should call on the new International Finance Facility for Education (IFFEd) to include investments in pre-primary education as part of its model.

Lack of investment, from multilateral to bilateral

The sad reality is that all donors are falling way behind in aid funding to pre-primary. Multilateral donors are faring better than bilateral ones, but no donor is currently doing enough and much of the data on spending is hard to find.

Even the top multilateral donor to pre-primary education — the World Bank — isn’t giving a fair share to the sector or targeting those most in need. The World Bank, while making a significant and important contribution to the sector — accounting for 43.5% of all aid to pre-primary — still only gives a small share — 2.7% — of its total education aid to the sector, a percentage that needs to increase to 10%.

Figure 2

Source: OECD-CRS database (2017). Accessed April 2017.

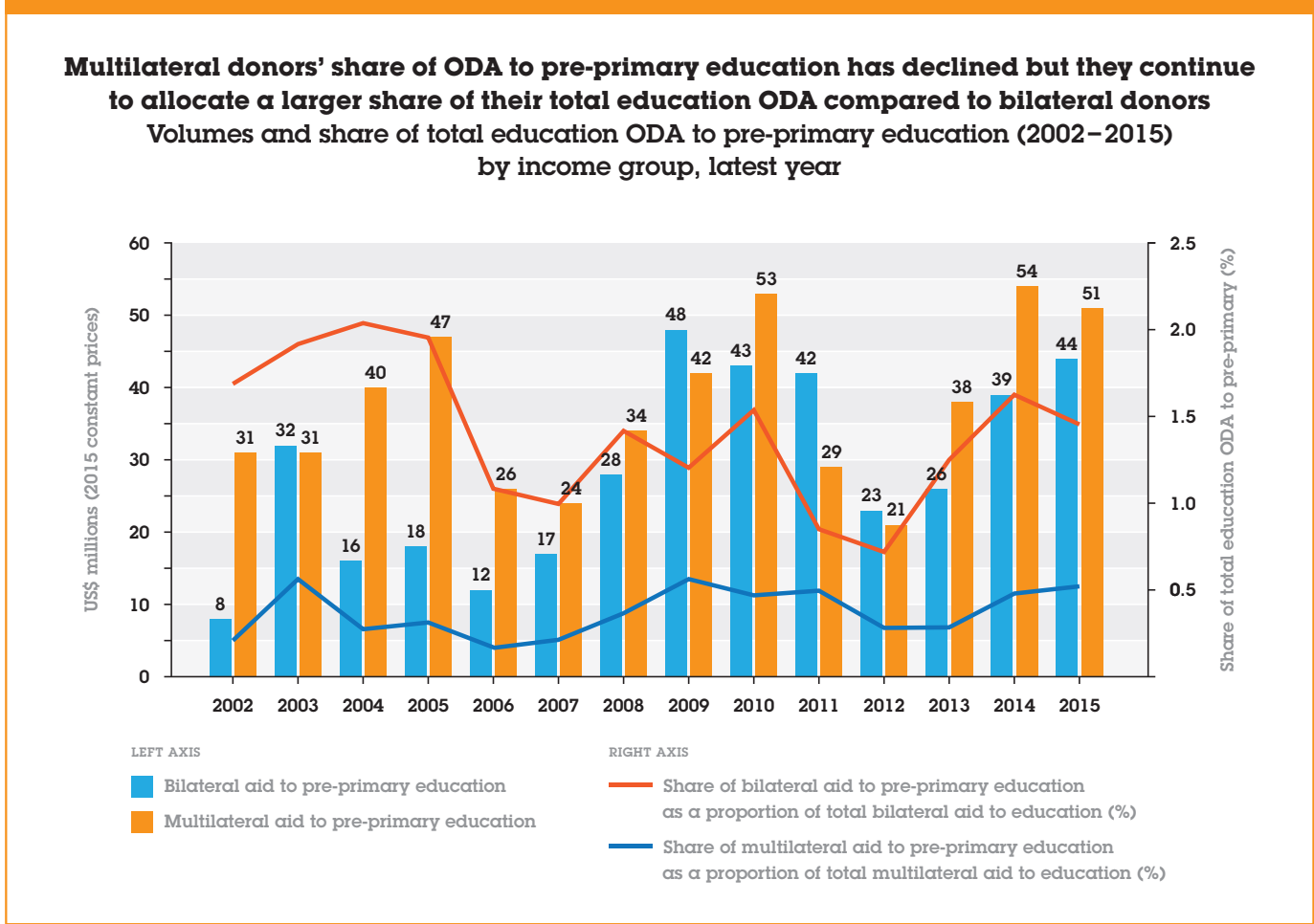
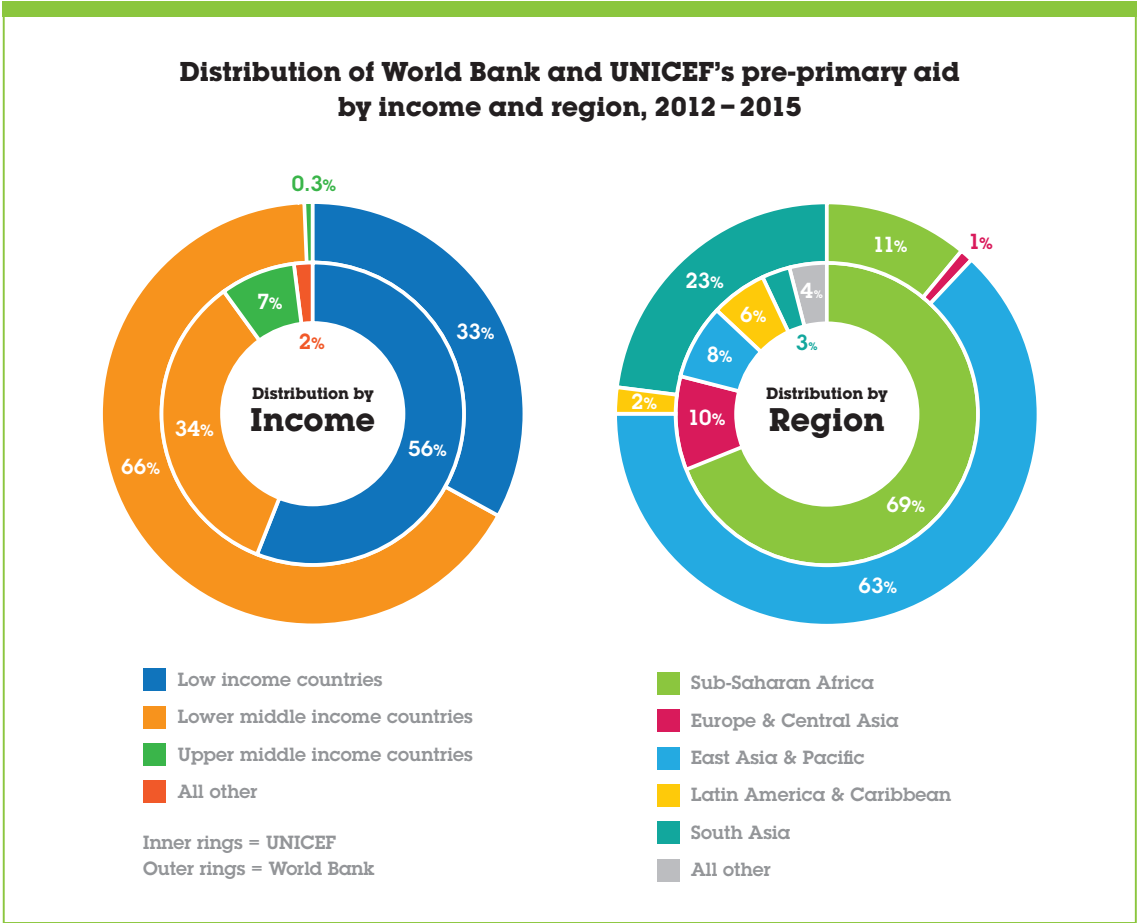
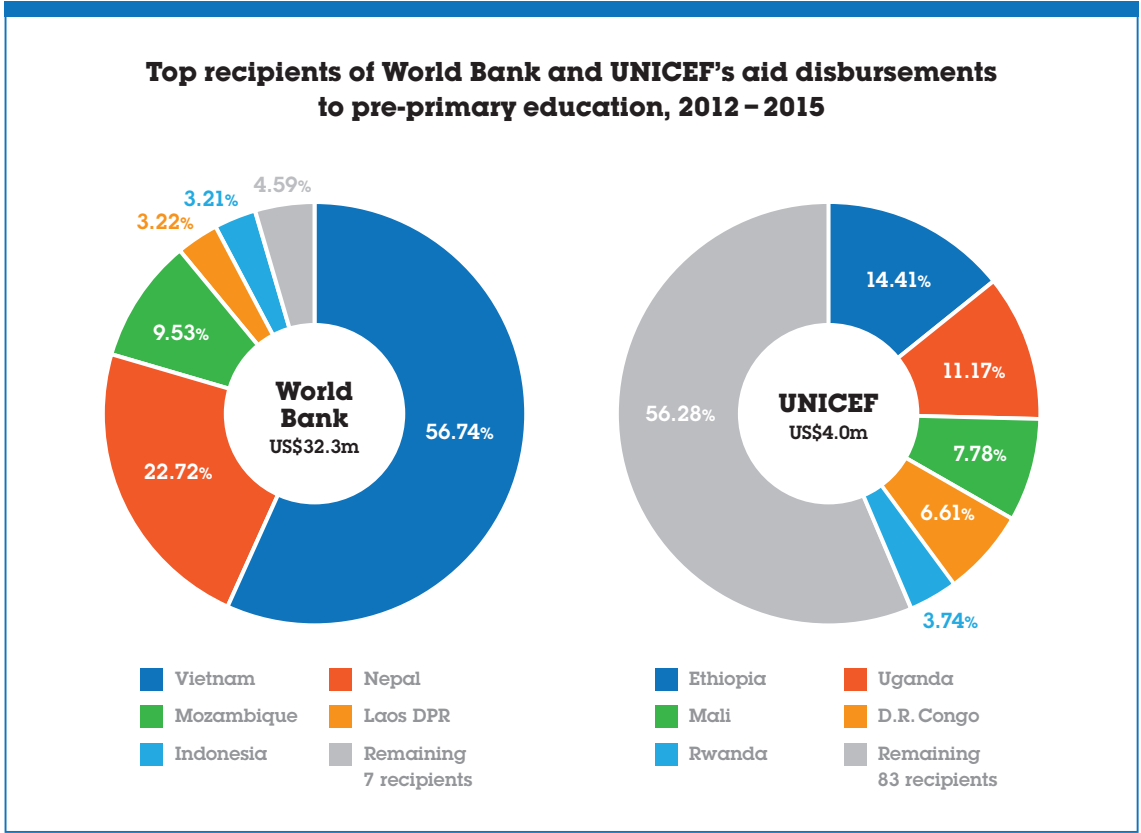


Figure 3



Source: OECD-CRS database (2017)
Accessed April 2017.
Note: +/- 1% on graphs is due to rounding.

Figure 4



Source: OECD-CRS database (2017).
Accessed April 2017.

Failure to invest...

Many of the largest bilateral donors to pre-primary education have cut their aid to pre-primary education, and there seems to be little explanation for this.

Australia reduced its bilateral aid to the sector from the \$4 million it disbursed in 2014 to \$0.5 million in 2015; in volume terms it fell from being the 3rd largest bilateral donor to 18th largest. Similarly, **New Zealand** — one of the largest donors to the sector — has also seen disbursements fall slightly from \$3.9 million to \$2.8 million, falling to the 6th largest in 2015.

...and a bias towards post-secondary

At the moment, both bilateral and multilateral donors are currently giving a disproportionate amount to post-secondary education, which unfairly benefits the richer students who have had a better start in life, rather than those most in need.

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For example, **France** is one of the top donors to education, but its aid is skewed to post-secondary. Of its \$1.2 billion total bilateral ODA to education in 2015, it gives \$828 million in direct aid to post-secondary education and only \$1.4 million to pre-primary. In percentage terms this means as much as 71.6% goes to post-secondary education, compared to 3.1% to basic education (of which 4% goes to pre-primary). France is by no means alone and overall donors are giving **26 times** more of their ODA to higher education scholarships than to pre-primary education.

Setting New Targets: A two-pronged solution — Increase and redistribute

In order to provide greater support to pre-primary education, where it can have the most impact on equity and learning, we need to urgently increase aid to education, and also redistribute aid into pre-primary care and target the poorest countries and communities.

If all donor countries start to embrace the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity’s financing recommendations, pre-primary education would rapidly expand. To do so, donors must:

- **Prioritise education:** Allocate at least 15% of their increasing ODA to education
- **Invest early:** Reach the 10% target for pre-primary education funding (multilateral and bilateral aid combined)

Opposite are the new minimum targets for pre-primary education by donor country and how it adds up. If donors are serious about prioritising education and the early years, it would be possible to mobilise \$2 billion in aid for pre-primary education by 2020.³ In addition to traditional donors, non-traditional donors have the potential to make this investment even greater.



3 — Methodology: The Targets are based on OECD DAC Constant 2014 dollars. Bilateral education ODA projections include disbursements reported to the DAC and imputed multilateral contributions to the education sector. For more information on methodology, visit [theirworld.org](#)

Donor	Current Aid to Education US\$ Million	Recommended Pre-primary Education Target US\$ Million		
	2015	2020	2025	2030
Australia	\$ 436	\$ 67	\$ 98	\$ 137
Austria	\$ 190	\$ 29	\$ 40	\$ 54
Belgium	\$ 128	\$ 21	\$ 32	\$ 47
Canada	\$ 341	\$ 65	\$ 110	\$ 171
Czech Republic	\$ 18	\$ 16	\$ 34	\$ 57
Denmark	\$ 130	\$ 22	\$ 33	\$ 46
Finland	\$ 104	\$ 14	\$ 18	\$ 22
France	\$ 1,525	\$ 204	\$ 264	\$ 334
Germany	\$ 2,338	\$ 262	\$ 292	\$ 325
Greece	\$ 19	\$ 14	\$ 30	\$ 50
Iceland	\$ 2	\$ 1	\$ 1	\$ 1
Ireland	\$ 62	\$ 11	\$ 16	\$ 24
Italy	\$ 224	\$ 60	\$ 117	\$ 197
Japan	\$ 669	\$ 150	\$ 273	\$ 444
Korea	\$ 267	\$ 84	\$ 158	\$ 245
Luxembourg	\$ 55	\$ 6	\$ 7	\$ 8
Netherlands	\$ 205	\$ 45	\$ 75	\$ 110
New Zealand	\$ 89	\$ 13	\$ 18	\$ 24
Norway	\$ 437	\$ 59	\$ 75	\$ 92
Poland	\$ 77	\$ 96	\$ 203	\$ 324
Portugal	\$ 57	\$ 17	\$ 29	\$ 46
Slovak Republic	\$ 10	\$ 13	\$ 28	\$ 47
Slovenia	\$ 9	\$ 4	\$ 8	\$ 13
Spain	\$ 97	\$ 42	\$ 87	\$ 150
Sweden	\$ 222	\$ 51	\$ 88	\$ 131
Switzerland	\$ 172	\$ 30	\$ 45	\$ 62
United Kingdom	\$ 1,433	\$ 187	\$ 240	\$ 303
United States	\$ 1,141	\$ 442	\$ 1,056	\$ 2,044
		\$ 2,023	\$ 3,474	\$ 5,508

Source: The targets are calculated based on projection data courtesy of the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity. The Commission’s projections are based on OECD DAC Constant 2014 dollars. Bilateral education ODA projections include disbursements reported to the DAC + imputed multilateral contributions to the education sector. Projections assume donors gradually shift 15% of total ODA to education while scaling up to reach 0.5% of GDP to aid by 2030. For countries already achieving these targets, contributions are kept constant. Theirworld used the total ODA Education projections and calculated the 10% allocation to pre-primary to set the targets.

As donor countries scale up their funding for education, an increasing share should go to multilateral organizations. This will make it possible to finance all global funds for education. All multilateral initiatives must also reach the 10% target. **While these funds depend on donors stepping up, we’ve set some targets for the multilateral funders based on the current resources available and the goals they have set.**

Donor	Current Aid to Education US\$ Million	Pre-primary Education Target US\$ Million
The World Bank	The World Bank’s successful IDA 18 replenishment will allow it to disburse \$25 billion annually in concessional financing	\$ 375 million annually by 2020
Global Partnership for Education	Current GPE allocations to education should allow it to reach a minimum of \$40 million to pre-primary to education next year. The GPE has set a replenishment target to invest \$1.4 billion of donor funds by 2020	Minimum \$ 40 million in 2018 \$ 140 million annually by 2020 assuming a successful replenishment
UNICEF	In 2016, UNICEF spent \$1.1 billion on education	Minimum \$ 110 million in 2018 Scaling up to at least 10% of education funding going to pre-primary as bilateral contributions to UNICEF also increase
Education Cannot Wait Fund	ECW’s first year goal is to invest \$153 million in education in emergencies, reaching \$1 billion by 2020	Minimum \$ 15 million in 2018 Reaching \$100 million by 2020 assuming increased donor contributions

Moreover, we call on all regional development banks, including the Inter-American Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, African Development Bank and Islamic Development Bank to allocate 15% of their concessional financing to education, with one-tenth dedicated to pre-primary education.

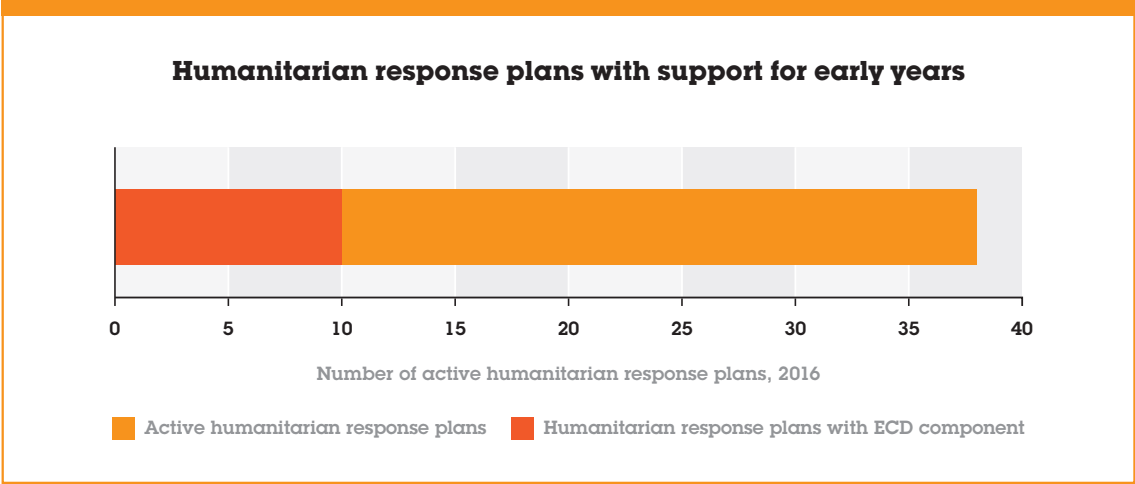
A Humanitarian Crisis: the current support for Early Childhood Development

The current scarcity in pre-primary education funding is a problem with gross humanitarian implications. And yet, in 2016, less than 40% of active humanitarian response plans, flash appeals and refugee responses included a comprehensive Early Childhood Development component.⁴

Of the 38 active humanitarian response plans in 2016, only 10 — less than a third — make any mention of early childhood development, early childhood education or similar terminology. Five humanitarian response plans include no education sector response at all. Education sector planning for emergencies is clearly overlooking the critical importance of early learning and cognitive development through non-nutritional and health interventions. It is also neglecting the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) guidelines, the evidence on brain science and what children and families need to rebuild their lives.

Clearly, pre-primary education aid funding is an issue of global, humanitarian importance. In a time when half the world’s refugees and internally displaced people are children, we need to do all we can to help world leaders stop falling behind and turn this inequality around.

Figure 5



4 — Source: The Urgent Need for Early Childhood Development in Emergencies and Disasters, Theirworld



By the time a child reaches five years old, 90% of their brain has already developed – which means the progression from birth to school is the most important time of a child's life.

But around the world children from poorer and marginalised households are unable to access support are put at a disadvantage. Those who start school at five without early years support have a limited vocabulary and ability to learn, impacting their opportunities in later life.

Theirworld's 5 for 5 campaign focuses on the 5 elements of quality nurturing care needed by every child under five: health, nutrition, play, learning, and protection. Even though the importance of these interventions has been thoroughly proven, investment in the 0 to 5 age group is still far too small.



What is pre-primary education?

The initial stage of organised instruction, designed primarily to introduce very young children to a school-type environment. Pre-primary learning programmes are centre or school-based, designed to meet the educational and developmental needs of children at least three years of age, and have staff that are adequately qualified) to provide an educational programme for the children *(adapted from the OECD definition).*

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