

The Early Years and Climate

The Numbers:

- **175 million** pre-primary aged children are not enrolled in pre-primary education. (GPE, 2019)
- Worldwide, **only 60 %** of all three to six-year-olds have access to pre-primary education. In low-income countries, just one-in-five children has access to preschool. (World Bank, 2022)

Why?

90% of a child's brain development takes place between birth and the age of five

- ECCE programming can serve as a **delivery point for other interventions**, including the provision of nutritious meals, access to WASH facilities, and health interventions such as check-ups and vaccinations. In addition, quality ECCE lays the groundwork for success in education and the labour market later in life and yields higher returns on investment than any other level of education. (UNESCO, 2022)

Health and Climate

- **Approximately 90%** of climate-related health effects will be borne by children under five years of age (UNESCO, 2022)
- **17 million babies** under the age of 1 breathe toxic air - putting their brains and lungs at risk (UNICEF, 2017)
- Children are also more susceptible than adults to diseases that will proliferate with climate change, such as malaria and dengue. Every year 525,000 children die from diarrhea, often caused by contaminated water. (UNICEF, 2021)
- In 2020, acute malnutrition affected an estimated **49.5 million children** under 5 while stunting affected 149 million (Plan International, 2022)

Glossary

ECD: Early Childhood Development

ECE: Early Childhood Education

ECCE: Early Childhood Care and Education

The term "early years" is used throughout our campaign report to incorporate all the key interventions and frameworks for early childhood - from birth through to the preschool years and the transition to school. ECD is also used in our campaign language.

Early years, ECD, ECE and ECCE can be regarded as encompassing all sectors relevant to the early years: healthcare, nutrition, sanitation, safety, protection, play, childcare, nurturing care and education etc. Though partners focus on different age groups, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (General Comment) defines early childhood as **below the age of eight**.

Climate

- WHO estimates that by 2050, an additional 24 million children under the age of five will be undernourished as a result of food insecurity caused by climate change (UNESCO, 2022)
- Currently, disasters and the effects of climate change account for over three quarters of internal displacement (IDMC, 2022; UNHCR and OHCHR, 2022).
- The World Bank (2018) estimates that more than **143 million people** could be internally displaced by climate change by 2050. (UNESCO, 2022)
- Children are more vulnerable to climate and environmental shocks than adults as they are more vulnerable. They are less able to withstand and survive shocks such as floods, droughts, severe weather and heatwaves
- Toxic substances, such as lead and other forms of pollution, affect children more than adults, even at lower doses of exposure. (UNICEF, 2021)
- Disasters, increased conflict, migration, caused by climate change leads to increased adversity and **toxic stress**, which harms the brain development. Toxic stress is excessive or prolonged activation of stress response systems in the body and brain, and this neurological impact results in lifelong consequences of children's educational achievement, economic success and social equity. (ECDAN, 2022)

References and Further Reading:

- [GPE \(2019\) Factsheet: Early Childhood Care and Education](#)
- [OECD \(2022\) Education at a Glance 2022](#)
- [World Bank \(2022\) Early Childhood Development](#)
- [UNICEF \(2019\) A World Ready to Learn Report](#)
- [Plan International \(2022\) Early Childhood Education](#)
- [UNESCO \(2022\) Early childhood care and education in emergencies report](#)
- [UNICEF \(2021\) The climate crisis is a child's rights crisis](#)
- [ECDAN \(2022\) ECD Knowledge Gateway](#)
- [WHO \(2022\) Immunization Coverage](#)
- [Children's Environmental Rights Initiative \(2023\) Falling Short: Addressing the Climate Financing Gap for Children](#)