

Philippines



E-Net Philippines



SDG Advocacy Workshop and Constituency Building of E-Net Youth members

COUNTRY FACTS AND FIGURES



Population:	109,180,815 (IndexMundi, July 2020)
Population aged 14 years and younger:	32.42% Female: 17,331,781 Male: 18,060,976 (IndexMundi, July 2020)
2021 Global Index Score:	64.5/100 (SDR 2021)
2021 Global Index Rank:	103/165 (SDR 2021)
SDG 4 Dashboard:	Challenges remain (SDR 2021)
SDG 4 Trend:	Decreasing (SDR 2021)
SDG 10 Dashboard:	Major challenges remain (SDR 2021)
2019 HDI Value/Rank:	0.718, 107 out of 189 (HDRO, 2020)
GNI per capita (PPP\$):	9,778 (HDRO, 2020)
Gini Index:	41.58 (Statista, 2020)
Income Group:	Lower-Middle Income Status (WB, 2020)
Education Expenditure:	___% of the GDP, 16.7% of the total budget (DBM, 2020)
Secondary Net Enrolment:	87.2% (JHS) ; 55.3% (SHS) (DEPED-EMISD, 2019-2020)
Literacy Rate (10 to 64 years):	91.6% Filipinos Total: 73.0 million out of 79.7 million in the same age group Female: 92.9% Male: 90.2%
Out of School:	406,435 children- 221,332 Female; 185,103 Male 900,328 adolescents- 301,922 Female; 598,406 Male (UNESCO, 2019)

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Civil Society Spotlight Report on SDG 4 for HLPF 2021

I. COUNTRY CONTEXT

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to impact the lives and livelihoods of Filipinos. The Philippines ended the pandemic year of 2020 with the country's gross domestic product (GDP) shrinking by 9.5 per cent. The country's poverty rate is projected to average between 15.5 per cent and 17.5 per cent in 2021¹ and more Filipinos are expected to remain poor and unemployed as the pandemic scars the labour market. In April 2021, there were around 4.14 million jobless Filipinos and 7.45 million persons reported underemployed.² There is a significant gender disparity in the labour force participation rate with men at 75.0 per cent compared to women at 51.4 per cent. Economic participation among women is significantly lower even as more females had a college degree or higher (14.3%) than males (9.7%).³ Moreover, employed women can be found at the lower rung of the occupational ladder with low earning capacity, resulting in reduced savings and safety nets. These point to the persisting traditional gender roles in the Philippine society.

Before the pandemic, the country was already facing formidable challenges in education access and quality. More than half of three to four-year-old children were not in school. In 2019, the Philippine Statistics Authority estimates that more than 10 million persons aged 6 to 24 years old were not attending school. The top reasons for not attending school were employment (32.8%), marriage or family matters (19.1%), finished schooling (13.6%), and lack of personal interest (13.2%). Among males, employment (38%) was cited as the top reason for not attending school. Among females, marriage or family matters (30.7%) and employment (27.2%) were the main reasons. Quality remains a long-standing challenge as reflected in previous and recent international assessments in which the Philippines' performance was dismal.⁴

The pandemic has created added barriers to education access and quality. It also impacts on the right to protection of children and youth, especially girls. According to a report from the Office of Cybercrime of the Department of Justice, there has been a 260 per cent increase in cyber-tips related to online sexual abuse and exploitation of children (OSAEC) and the major helpline in the country registered a 167 per cent increase in calls for reporting cases of child abuse and an 867 per cent increase for counselling services when compared to the same time frame in 2019. Increased vulnerability of children during COVID19 is also a result of poverty, discontinuity in the delivery of essential social services and interruptions in children's support systems.

II. EQUITY AND FINANCING CONCERNS IN SDG 4 AMIDST COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the lives of all learners in the Philippines as early as March 2020 when the first lockdown was enforced and schools were forced to close early. More than 47,000 basic public schools suspended classes disrupting the lives of 27 million students. In spite

- 1 Report from the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA)
- 2 <https://psa.gov.ph/content/unemployment-rate-april-2021-estimated-87-percent>
- 3 https://psa.gov.ph/sites/default/files/2019%20APIS_signed.pdf
- 4 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM)

of the massive enrolment drive undertaken by schools for the SY 2020-2021, and the fact that the school opening was moved back four months from June to October 2020, the school year started with 2.6 million children and youth left behind as their parents lost their jobs or became underemployed. The enrolment rate fell by a tenth from a year earlier to 25.04 million. There were drop-outs across all levels.⁵ At the kindergarten level, enrolment dropped by 239,547 learners (-12%). Total elementary enrolment (Grades 1 to 6) dropped by 1,263,482 learners (-10%). In Junior High School (JHS), there are 582,756 fewer enrollees (-7%). Only a total of 73,195 non-graded learners with disabilities are enrolled and only 405,402 students under the ALS programme.⁶

Certain regions which are already lagging, such as the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) where most provinces are among the poorest, recorded the highest drop-out numbers. BARMM saw a critical drop in kindergarten enrolment (-68%), in elementary enrolment (-75%), and again had a large loss in JHS enrolment (-58%).

The Basic Education-Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP)

The Department of Education (DepEd) embarked on the development of the Basic Education-Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) to enable learners to continue learning and for teachers to be able to deliver instruction in a safe work and learning environment amid the threat of COVID-19. The plan calls for schools to use a “blended” approach to teaching based on a mix of modular learning and online classes.

A major issue challenging the effective implementation of BE-LCP is equity in terms of learners’ access to technology and gadgets. At the country level, the National ICT Household Survey⁷ found that 6 per cent of households did not have electricity, 53.5 per cent did not have radios, 21.1 per cent did not have televisions, 79.7 per cent did not have computers, and 84.3 per cent did not have access to the internet. Another major issue is the availability of and capacity for providing learning support at home, and the physical availability of parents who may be daily wage earners and need to be at work. This situation renders more difficult the attainment of inclusive and equitable quality education.

Education Spending During COVID-19

Specific budget lines for education have been shifted to fund the emergency response to the pandemic. The 2020 DepEd budget was reduced by a hefty P21.9 billion (USD 444.3 million)⁸; the budget of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) was cut by P13.9 billion (USD 282 million); and State universities and colleges (SUCs) were inflicted with a P7.6-billion reduction (USD 154.2 million).⁹ From the DepEd budget, some P8.282 billion (USD 168 million) was further realigned for COVID-related measures. Five billion pesos (P5 billion) (USD 101.4 million) was taken from the agency’s Last Mile School Programme, which sought to build schools and classrooms in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas. Many of the realigned funds were meant to support the requirements of the BE-LCP and the marginalised learners and disadvantaged communities, including the budget for the Special Education Programme at P107 million (USD 2.1 million) and School-based Feeding Programme at P500 million (USD 10.2 million). Nonetheless, the DepEd was provided with a budget release amounting to P16.405 billion (USD 332.8 million) under the Republic Act No. 11494 or the Bayanihan to Recover as One Act to cover the funding requirements for the implementation of BE-LCP, Digital Education, Information Technology and Digital Infrastructures and Alternative Learning Modules.

5 <https://www.rappler.com/voices/ispeak/analysis-too-manychildren-not-enrolled-this-school-year-major-concern>

6 <https://mb.com.ph/2020/10/26/dep-ed-reaches-90-percent-of-last-years-enrollment-with-25-m-enrollees/>

7 From <https://dict.gov.ph/ictstatistics/nichs2019/>

8 XE Philippine Peso to US Dollar conversion was used to convert all PHP figures to USD in this Report, Retrieved Jul 5, 2021, 05:03 UTC, from <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/convert/?Amount=21900000&From=PHP&To=USD>

9 From <https://business.inquirer.net/297470/big-cuts-in-infra-education-budgets-to-fund-covid-19-dole-outs-medical-response#ixzz6xMY8gbf5>

While the 2021 national education budget was increased by 7.4 per cent to P595.069 billion (USD 12 billion), it failed to allocate sufficient funds to facilitate a smooth transition to blended, distance or remote learning.

III. EMBEDDING SDG 4 IN OTHER SDGS

The Interconnectedness of SDGs in Policies and Programmes

There are several major development programmes that mainly address other SDGs with components of SDG 4. The Comprehensive Programme on Child Protection (CPCP) 2019-2022 and the Philippine Plan to End Violence against Children (PPAEVAC) 2017-2022 consolidate the country’s commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the numerous laws and issuances of relevant agencies on child protection. A major component of these is child protection in the school setting that outlines major action points and key results for the education sector. This links to SDG 16.2 and a host of other SDG targets on child protection.

The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Programme (4Ps) is the Philippine government’s national poverty reduction strategy (Goal 1) and a human capital investment programme that provides conditional cash transfer to poor households to improve health, nutrition, and education. This programme links to SDG 1, 3, 4 and 5. However, the programme has been criticised as a “dole-out” based on a programme assessment¹⁰ released by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) in February 2021. While the programme has shown a positive impact on enrolment rates, it fails to impact poverty which is the main objective of the programme.

The Republic Act No. 11037 or the Masustansyang Pagkain Para sa Batang Pilipino Act aims at institutionalising a National Feeding Programme that will address the problem of undernutrition among Filipino children (Goal 3). The DepEd’s School-Based Feeding Programme for Kindergarten to Grade 6 pupils and the Department of Social Welfare and Development’s Supplemental Feeding Programme for Day Care Children were institutionalised in the law.

The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) is closely working with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) to provide access to quality and relevant technical and vocational education and training (TVET) opportunities. Assessments are done to provide workers with an opportunity to obtain national certification and improve employment options (Goal 8).

IV. ROLE OF EDUCATION IN SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT RECOVERY

Big Wins and Gains in Legislation for a Better Education in Pandemic and Beyond

There have been positive developments at the policy level to address education gaps during the pandemic and beyond. The passage of the new law, Republic Act 11510 or the Alternative Learning System (ALS) Act, is a major win for the marginalised, excluded, and vulnerable sectors missing out on education and for the advocates of Education for All and SDG 4 like E-Net Philippines who have long been calling for the institutionalisation of ALS. Signed into law on December 2020, the ALS programme will be expanded and strengthened to provide increased opportunities for out-of-school children in special cases¹¹ and adult learners, including Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities, to develop basic and functional literacy and life skills, and pursue and complete basic education through a systematic, flexible, and appropriate alternative basic education program outside of the formal school system.

10 From <https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidsdps2105.pdf>

11 Including learners who reside in the unreached, underserved, conflict-affected communities, and communities in emergency.

Another important legislation is underway for ensuring the right to education of learners with disabilities who remain largely untracked with only less than 10 per cent attending schools and are unable to access standard learning in the general education system. A clear and strong legislative mandate with an action programme can significantly address the educational needs of the 5.5 million learners with disabilities. This will be a major step forward to catch up after being left behind and deprived of the right to education.. E-Net Philippines, in coordination with key stakeholders actively participated and submitted inputs in the face-to-face and virtual Technical Working Group sessions (from 2019 to 2021), which worked on the formulation and finalisation of the legislative measures.

Creation of the Local Education Group (LEG) and the Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP) 2030 to Achieve SDG 4

In November 2019, the DepEd convened the Philippine Forum for Inclusive Quality Basic Education or EducForum, a multi-stakeholder¹² platform for consultation, collaborative research and analysis, and high-level advice to strategic basic education policy, planning and programming. The mandate for the State to protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and the achievement of the SDG 4 will guide the direction that the EducForum will take. The EducForum played a key role in the drafting of the BE-LCP and the formulation and finalisation of the Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP) 2030. The BEDP 2030 is the Philippines' first long-term plan for basic education covering all formal education from 5 to 18 years old, and non-formal education for youth and adults.

More Active CSO Engagement and Advocacy Work Amidst COVID-19

E-Net Philippines has been maximising the online and social media platform in its campaigning for the SDGs and engagements with duty-bearers on different education advocacies for the marginalised and in combating the spread of misinformation. E-Net has provided platforms for decision-makers to share their policy plans and priorities related to the pandemic and facilitated dialogue between the government and various sectors. Through virtual forums/webinars, E-Net has engaged the House of Representatives, the Senate, education agencies and other government agencies, local government units (LGUs) on issues ranging from ensuring continuity of education in the new normal, SDGs/SDG 4 to recover better, blended learning, education financing, child protection and positive discipline, gender equality in education, psycho-social management of stress, anxieties and depression among learners, teachers and parents, Indigenous Peoples' rights, inclusive education for learners with disabilities, and many more. These forums also provide opportunities for accountability tracking by education advocates at various levels.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

As the 10-year countdown to 2030 begins, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in major setbacks and will pose a major threat to the achievement of the SDGs, particularly SDG 4. It is, therefore, crucial to reaffirm a collective commitment to addressing inequities and gaps in order to leave no one behind. The following recommendations are put forward:

12 The Educ Forum is composed of DepEd and other government agencies relevant to basic education reform, and education partners including civil society organisations, education sector organisations, organisations and foundations coming from the private sector, and bilateral agencies and multilateral organisations.



1. Increase and protect budgets for the achievement of the SDGs and SDG 4. In its budget proposal for 2022, E-Net proposed a ten-fold increase of the ALS budget to reach a million learners, especially those who are out of school, a 5 per cent mandated budget share for Gender and Development (GAD), as well as an increase in the budget for 100 CLCs for Indigenous Peoples and for child protection amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also recommended to increase the budget for the Last Mile School programme.
2. Recovery efforts consistent with the SDGs and the SDG 4-aligned Learning Continuity Plan must be nationally funded primarily and complemented by mobilising support from local government units (LGUs) for complementary funding, including maintenance of Community Learning Centres (CLCs) and capacity-building for teachers. Education in the new normal and recovery stage requires bigger finance allocation. Appropriations for debt payments could be realigned in favour of strengthening education as a basic social service, among other essential sectors;
3. Ensuring equity, quality, and inclusion must be the foremost consideration in the multi-modal approach in education in the new normal. Build the necessary infrastructure and speed-up the requisites for multi-modal learning, including improved accessibility, electrification, and internet connection in all schools and communities in remote areas;
4. Flexible Learning Options are needed more than ever in the new normal as they can be the main avenues for delivering inclusive flexible learning, ensuring that informal, non-formal, and formal learning and lifelong learning are valued and given utmost importance. Enhance and strengthen the Alternative Learning System (ALS) and establish CLCs in all cities and municipalities;
5. Adult Learning and Education (ALE) can play a central role in responding to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. ALE contributes to building the capacities of communities to ensure that its constituencies are fully educated, engaged, and empowered to adapt to any situation, especially in times of crisis. ALS can facilitate ALE including access to the technology of adult learners, essential in the 21st century economic needs;
6. Scale-up, improve, and upgrade teachers' training to capacitate them on multi-modal learning and instruction and inclusive education;
7. Complementary initiatives at the local level need to be strengthened and supported to deliver educational services based on the local context and the specific needs of the learners and education providers;
8. Reporting and monitoring mechanisms for violence against women and girls that take into consideration COVID-19 mobility and community restrictions, as well as information and communications technology access and literacy, should be enhanced;
9. Engage existing organisations of all stakeholders, especially teachers, learners, and parents in transforming education into a system that is equitable, inclusive, gender-transformative, learner-friendly, and resilient. •



Philippine Youth Spotlight Report

Young people, especially those in the marginalised and excluded sector, are the hardest hit by the pandemic. The new normal led to a greater urgency to the already grave and overdue struggles in the education system. The shift to remote and distance learning has become a challenge for the Filipino youth, especially for those who belong to poor and rural communities. In tertiary education, only 20 per cent of the State Universities and Colleges were ready for online classes. Most college students were not prepared to attend online and modular classes due to poverty, lack of access to a stable internet connection, loss of jobs and livelihoods, and lack of income sources.

Despite the ideas of the youth that might contribute to the development of the country, young people have only limited representation in decision processes. Young activists are overwhelmed by the passage of Anti-Terror Law, a regressive act that imposes fear among those who are advocating for human rights issues. There is also a threat to the academic freedom of students with the school militarisation, which was aggravated by the termination of an agreement that restricted state forces from arbitrarily entering some university campuses.

Most of the youth today are in the working population. However, fresh graduates and young job-seekers struggle to find

employment and keep decent jobs with liveable wages given the sharp fall of the economy.

Prolonged school closures brought about psycho-social issues that were exacerbated by isolation and quarantine, thus limiting their daily mobility within the home setting. Young women and girls faced serious challenges to their safety and well-being. Even with growing awareness of and about the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) community, educational institutions remain a playground for rigid gender norms and gender inequalities. As health systems are overwhelmed in the pandemic response, sexual and reproductive health services are less prioritised while adolescents were kept at home and unable to access reproductive health measures, which led to more cases of teen pregnancies.

Believing in the vibrant and significance of youth involvement in shaping an empowering and liberating education system; in participating as informed citizens in decision-making and governance; and in fulfilling their obligations as responsible citizens, we highlight the importance of reclaiming the power of young people by organising themselves and mobilising the youth sector for education transformation and social change. •



Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) is a regional association of more than 200 organisations and individuals working towards promoting quality education for all and transformative and liberating, lifelong adult education and learning.

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Established in 1999, the Civil Society Network for Education Reforms (E-Net Philippines) is a network of 150 organisations working together to advance the right to education for all Filipinos and engaging in policy advocacy and partnerships for education reforms. E-Net Philippines is committed to expand and strengthen people's participation in pushing for education reforms and developing alternative learning systems with special concern for the marginalised, excluded and vulnerable sectors (MEVS). For this purpose, the coalition collaborates and engages with national and local government units, the academe, corporate foundations, local communities, as well as local and international organisations to create positive and meaningful changes in education policy and practice. E-Net Philippines is a member organisation of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE).