



# Millions of Children Left Behind at Every Developmental Milestone

## Gaps and Inequities in Early Childhood Development across Africa

Early childhood development (ECD) is all of the things a child needs to grow up with a strong, healthy body and brain — health care, good nutrition for mother and child, care and learning through play and stimulation, access to preschool, water and sanitation, and more.<sup>1</sup> ECD is a ‘whole child’ approach. Every child has the right to grow up healthy, curious and intellectually stimulated, to be nurtured, and to live without fear, isolation, or violence. This snapshot of equity shows how much more there is to do to ensure every child has this best start in life.

**Theirworld**

 **Best Start**



### Progress on Stunting



Stunting is **UNEQUAL** or **EXTREMELY UNEQUAL** between the poorest and richest in **37 of 47 countries\*** – roughly **8 in 10**.

\*Where data is available



### Access to Health Care



Access to the health care system is **UNEQUAL** or **EXTREMELY UNEQUAL** between the richest and poorest in **25 of 43 countries** – roughly **6 in 10**.



### Birth Registration



Birth registration ranges from **3% in Somalia** to **100% in Algeria**. Births not registered means children may be left behind or excluded.



### Violent Discipline



More than **8 in 10 children** experience violent discipline, impacting the growth of their brains.\*

\*Where data is available




### Pre-primary School Attendance



Just **3 out of 10 children** attend pre-primary school. **29 of 46 countries** show little or no progress, or are getting worse.\*

\*Where data is available



### Pre-primary School Access

Access to pre-primary school is **EXTREMELY UNEQUAL** between the poorest and richest in **17 of 21 countries**.\*
















\*Where data is available

We tracked progress on several – but not all – aspects of ECD, with a focus on nutrition. In particular, we’ve looked at equity gaps between the richest and poorest across focus areas – stunting, enrollment in pre-primary education, and basic vaccination rates (as a proxy for access to the health care system for children). Other critical components of ECD did not have data by wealth quintile available, so population-level indicators were used to give an idea of progress on ECD as a whole. These include: births attended by skilled health staff, registration at birth, exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months, children engaged in early learning at home, children left in the care of other children or alone in the last week, and violent discipline of children. Data gaps were also a concern for water and sanitation (WASH), a key component of a “whole child” approach which safeguards good nutrition and prevents deadly bacterial infection.<sup>2</sup> Clean water and sanitation facilities also make it more likely that children, especially girls, can attend school.<sup>3</sup>

The data tells a very clear story: millions of children are being left behind at every developmental milestone, and those left behind are disproportionately poor. Gaps in access to what children need to grow up healthy and resilient continue to widen as children age, compounding the missed opportunities and barriers they must overcome.

Country	Births attended by skilled health staff (% of total)	Children registered at birth (%)	Exclusive breastfeeding for first 6 months (%)	Basic vaccine access between the richest and poorest in the country is...	Children under 5 engaged in early learning at home (%)	Support for early learning at home, between the richest and poorest is...	Children left at home or in care of other children under 10 in last week (%)	Children experiencing violent discipline (%)	Children stunted (%)	Is stunting improvement on track to achieve SDG2 (a 40% reduction)?	Stunting between the richest and poorest in the country is...	Eligible children attending pre-primary school (%)	Trends in pre-primary attendance (10 year change)	Inequities in access to pre-primary school between poorest and richest is...
Algeria	97%	100%	26%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	78%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	6%	86%	12%	ON TRACK	CLOSE TO EQUAL	79%	VERY LARGE IMPROVEMENT	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL
Angola	47%	36%	—	—	—	—	—	—	29%	—	—	79%	VERY LARGE IMPROVEMENT	—
Benin	77%	85%	41%	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	28%	—	34%	91%	34%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	UNEQUAL	21%	GETTING BETTER	—
Botswana	95%	72%	20%	—	—	—	—	—	31%	STANDING STILL	UNEQUAL	18%	LITTLE PROGRESS	—
Burkina Faso	66%	77%	50%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	14%	UNEQUAL	—	83%	33%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	UNEQUAL	4%	LITTLE PROGRESS	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL
Burundi	60%	75%	69%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	34%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	—	—	58%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	UNEQUAL	7%	LITTLE PROGRESS	UNEQUAL
Cabo Verde	92%	91%	60%	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	70%	GETTING BETTER	—
Cameroon	65%	66%	28%	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	44%	—	34%	85%	32%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	34%	GETTING BETTER	—
Central African Republic (CAR)	54%	61%	34%	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	74%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	61%	92%	41%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	CLOSE TO EQUAL	6%	LITTLE PROGRESS	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL
Chad	24%	12%	0%	UNEQUAL	70%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	56%	84%	40%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	CLOSE TO EQUAL	1%	STANDING STILL	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL
Comoros	82%	87%	12%	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	—	—	—	—	32%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	UNEQUAL	23%	GETTING BETTER	—
Congo, Democratic Republic of	80%	25%	48%	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	52%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	49%	82%	43%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	UNEQUAL	4%	LITTLE PROGRESS	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL

Country	Births attended by skilled health staff (% of total)	Children registered at birth (%)	Exclusive breastfeeding for first 6 months (%)	Basic vaccine access between the richest and poorest in the country is...	Children under 5 engaged in early learning at home (%)	Support for early learning at home between the richest and poorest is...	Children left at home or in care of other children under 10 in last week (%)	Children experiencing violent discipline (%)	Children stunted (%)	Is stunting improvement on track to achieve SDG2 (a 40% reduction)?	Stunting between the richest and poorest in the country is...	Eligible children attending pre-primary school (%)	Trends in pre-primary attendance (10 year change)	Inequities in access to pre-primary school between poorest and richest is...
Congo, Republic of	94%	96%	33%	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	59%	—	42%	83%	21%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	14%	LITTLE PROGRESS	—
Cote d'Ivoire	59%	65%	12%	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	50%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	59%	91%	20%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	UNEQUAL	7%	LITTLE PROGRESS	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL
Djibouti	87%	92%	1%	—	37%	—	8%	72%	34%	STANDING STILL	—	5%	LITTLE PROGRESS	—
Egypt	92%	99%	40%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	—	—	4%	93%	22%	ON TRACK	CLOSE TO EQUAL	25%	LITTLE PROGRESS	CLOSE TO EQUAL
Equatorial Guinea	68%	54%	7%	—	—	—	—	—	26%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	CLOSE TO EQUAL	68%	VERY LARGE IMPROVEMENT	—
Eritrea	34%	—	69%	—	—	—	—	—	50%	STANDING STILL	UNEQUAL	15%	LITTLE PROGRESS	—
Ethiopia	16%	7%	52%	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	—	—	—	—	40%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	UNEQUAL	30%	GETTING BETTER	—
Gabon	89%	90%	6%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	—	—	—	—	18%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	37%	GETTING BETTER	—
Gambia	57%	72%	47%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	48%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	21%	90%	25%	STANDING STILL	UNEQUAL	34%	GETTING BETTER	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL
Ghana	71%	71%	52%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	40%	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	21%	94%	19%	ON TRACK	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	121%*	VERY LARGE IMPROVEMENT	UNEQUAL
Guinea	45%	58%	21%	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	—	—	—	—	31%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	UNEQUAL	15%	LITTLE PROGRESS	—
Guinea-Bissau	45%	24%	53%	UNEQUAL	34%	—	31%	82%	28%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	UNEQUAL	6%	LITTLE PROGRESS	—
Kenya	62%	67%	61%	UNEQUAL	—	—	—	—	26%	ON TRACK	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	74%	GETTING BETTER	—
Lesotho	78%	45%	67%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	—	—	—	—	33%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	31%	LITTLE PROGRESS	—
Liberia	61%	25%	55%	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	—	—	—	90%	32%	ON TRACK	UNEQUAL	—	—	—

														
Country	Births attended by skilled health staff (% of total)	Children registered at birth (%)	Exclusive breastfeeding for first 6 months (%)	Basic vaccine access between the richest and poorest in the country is...	Children under 5 engaged in early learning at home (%)	Support for early learning at home between the richest and poorest is...	Children left at home or in care of other children under 10 in last week (%)	Children experiencing violent discipline (%)	Children stunted (%)	Is stunting improvement on track to achieve SDG2 (a 40% reduction)?	Stunting between the richest and poorest in the country is...	Eligible children attending pre-primary school (%)	Trends in pre-primary attendance (10 year change)	Inequities in access to pre-primary school between poorest and richest is...
Libya	100%	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	21%	—	—	10%	—	—
Madagascar	44%	83%	42%	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	—	—	—	—	49%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	CLOSE TO EQUAL	14%	LITTLE PROGRESS	—
Malawi	87%	6%	70%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	29%	UNEQUAL	37%	72%	42%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	CLOSE TO EQUAL	—	—	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL
Mali	49%	81%	38%	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	29%	UNEQUAL	33%	—	39%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	UNEQUAL	4%	LITTLE PROGRESS	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL
Mauritania	65%	59%	27%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	55%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	26%	87%	22%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	UNEQUAL	3%	LITTLE PROGRESS	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL
Mauritius	100%	—	21%	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	102%	LITTLE PROGRESS	—
Morocco	74%	94%	28%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	35%	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	11%	91%	15%	ON TRACK	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	60%	LITTLE PROGRESS	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL
Mozambique	54%	48%	41%	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	47%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	33%	—	43%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	UNEQUAL	—	—	—
Namibia	88%	87%	49%	UNEQUAL	—	—	—	—	23%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	21%	GETTING A LOT WORSE	—
Niger	40%	64%	23%	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	—	—	—	82%	43%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	CLOSE TO EQUAL	7%	LITTLE PROGRESS	—
Nigeria	38%	30%	17%	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	65%	UNEQUAL	40%	91%	33%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	13%	LITTLE PROGRESS	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL
Rwanda	91%	63%	87%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	—	—	—	—	38%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	UNEQUAL	14%	LITTLE PROGRESS	—
Sao Tome and Principe	93%	95%	74%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	63%	—	16%	80%	17%	NOT FAST ENOUGH	UNEQUAL	51%	GETTING BETTER	—
Senegal	59%	73%	33%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	—	—	—	—	19%	STANDING STILL	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL	15%	LITTLE PROGRESS	—
Sierra Leone	60%	77%	32%	CLOSE TO EQUAL	54%	UNEQUAL	32%	82%	38%	ON TRACK	CLOSE TO EQUAL	10%	LITTLE PROGRESS	EXTREMELY UNEQUAL

Country	Births attended by skilled health staff (% of total)	Children registered at birth (%)	Exclusive breastfeeding for first 6 months (%)	Basic vaccine access between the richest and poorest in the country is...	Children under 5 engaged in early learning at home (%)	Support for early learning at home, between the richest and poorest is...	Children left at home or in care of other children under 10 in last week (%)	Children experiencing violent discipline (%)	Children stunted (%)	Is stunting improvement on track to achieve SDG2 (a 40% reduction)?	Stunting between the richest and poorest in the country is...	Eligible children attending pre-primary school (%)	Trends in pre-primary attendance (10 year change)	Inequities in access to pre-primary school between poorest and richest is...
<b>Somalia</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>EXTREMELY UNEQUAL</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>CLOSE TO EQUAL</b>	—	—	<b>26%</b>	<b>NOT FAST ENOUGH</b>	<b>UNEQUAL</b>	—	—	<b>EXTREMELY UNEQUAL</b>
<b>South Africa</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>8%</b>	—	—	—	—	—	<b>24%</b>	<b>NOT FAST ENOUGH</b>	—	<b>76%</b>	<b>VERY LARGE IMPROVEMENT</b>	—
<b>South Sudan</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>EXTREMELY UNEQUAL</b>	—	—	—	—	<b>31%</b>	<b>NOT FAST ENOUGH</b>	<b>CLOSE TO EQUAL</b>	<b>6%</b>	—	<b>EXTREMELY UNEQUAL</b>
<b>Sudan</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>EXTREMELY UNEQUAL</b>	—	—	—	<b>64%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>STANDING STILL</b>	<b>EXTREMELY UNEQUAL</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>GETTING BETTER</b>	—
<b>Swaziland</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>CLOSE TO EQUAL</b>	<b>39%</b>	—	<b>17%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>ON TRACK</b>	<b>EXTREMELY UNEQUAL</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>LITTLE PROGRESS</b>	—
<b>Tanzania</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>UNEQUAL</b>	—	—	—	—	<b>34%</b>	<b>NOT FAST ENOUGH</b>	<b>UNEQUAL</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>LITTLE PROGRESS</b>	—
<b>Togo</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>CLOSE TO EQUAL</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>UNEQUAL</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>NOT FAST ENOUGH</b>	<b>EXTREMELY UNEQUAL</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>GETTING BETTER</b>	<b>EXTREMELY UNEQUAL</b>
<b>Tunisia</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>CLOSE TO EQUAL</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>UNEQUAL</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>ON TRACK</b>	<b>UNEQUAL</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>GETTING BETTER</b>	<b>EXTREMELY UNEQUAL</b>
<b>Uganda</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>CLOSE TO EQUAL</b>	—	—	—	—	<b>34%</b>	<b>NOT FAST ENOUGH</b>	<b>UNEQUAL</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>STANDING STILL</b>	—
<b>Zambia</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>UNEQUAL</b>	—	—	—	—	<b>40%</b>	<b>NOT FAST ENOUGH</b>	<b>UNEQUAL</b>	—	—	—
<b>Zimbabwe</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>UNEQUAL</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>UNEQUAL</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>NOT FAST ENOUGH</b>	<b>UNEQUAL</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>GETTING WORSE</b>	<b>UNEQUAL</b>

## Methodology

Most data come from multi-indicator cluster surveys, national demographic and health surveys, or World Bank or UNESCO estimates. A full explanation of our calculations, and how ratings were assigned, can be found at [www.theirworld.org/AfricaECDsnapshot](http://www.theirworld.org/AfricaECDsnapshot). All data is the most recent available as of September 28, 2016.

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# The Opportunity

**This regional equity snapshot shows an alarming picture of early childhood development in these countries, but it also makes clear where we can begin to have the greatest impact.**

## **Target the hardest to reach.**

To close significant equity gaps, programmes and resources must be targeted to the hardest to reach children and families — especially the very poor or most marginalised or likely to be discriminated against — girls, those living with disabilities, and those geographically far from services.

## **Invest in women and girls.**

Focus on investing in the health of adolescent girls and women, in recognition of their right to health and in case they choose to become mothers. For children to have the best start possible, the health and education of adolescent girls are critical.

## **Support caregivers.**

Childcare should not be left for families and caregivers alone to figure out. High quality childcare can improve school readiness and learning outcomes and enables older children to attend school and adults to find steady work. Poor quality childcare leaves children at risk for inadequate cognitive,

emotional, and social development and potentially neglect and abuse.<sup>8</sup> Country governments, donors, and advocates must do more to support access to affordable high quality childcare, including expanding provision of early childhood care centres.

## **Integrate.**

Programme integration is key, especially at the community level. Programmes and services must be built on what exists and consider ways to provide different kinds of care at the same location. Great examples of this include incorporating vaccine delivery into a well-functioning nutrition outreach programme, and/or an established family health clinic providing toys and information to caregivers about breastfeeding and learning through play.

## **Listen to the community.**

When policies are made that impact the health of communities, policymakers must hear the needs of those communities, and use available data — or gather more — to inform decision-making. Inputs from those working and

living at the community level are critical to building programmes with maximum impact and sustainability.

## **Create national level whole child strategies.**

National level ECD policy, funding, strategy and programming must be a priority. Ministries must work together across sectors to create national strategies which detail funding requirements and ensure a whole child approach. Community services must address all of the needs of the youngest children.

## **Create whole child strategies for donor aid.**

Donors must create strategies across sectors and agencies to better target the comprehensive needs of children. Programmes in particular across the health and education sectors should be integrated in approach, acknowledge the importance of the earliest interventions, build on what is working well, and encourage integration among donor partners.

## Donor Finance Not Focused Enough on Early Years

Nutrition is on average only 1% of health sector budgets globally,<sup>4</sup> and pre-primary education is less than 7% of country government funding to the education sector (but only 2.4% for countries covered in this snapshot, with 19 countries missing data).<sup>5</sup> These investments are nowhere near the scale of investment needed to meet the globally agreed nutrition targets<sup>4</sup> and ensure every child can access pre-primary school.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, nutrition-specific donor funds currently account for less than 1% of total development assistance,<sup>4</sup> and donor spending on pre-primary education, essential for later learning, accounts for only 1.15% of donor investments in education.<sup>7</sup>



## Theirworld

Theirworld is an innovative charity which helps children to unlock their potential. Through research, pilot projects and campaigning, Theirworld is at the forefront of testing and shaping new ideas to help give children around the world the best possible start in life.

## Best Start

Best Start is a global campaign for Early Childhood Development led by children's charity Theirworld as part of a wider initiative supported by the Conrad N Hilton Foundation and others. The campaign seeks to make the case for greater global investment in Early Childhood Development to ensure that all girls and boys can have access to the best start in life. For more information go to [www.theirworld.org](http://www.theirworld.org)

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