



E-Net Philippines organises a national training to promote inclusive and gender-responsive education policy and budget advocacy (June 2024)

2024 CIVIL SOCIETY SPOTLIGHT REPORT ON SDG 4

I. COUNTRY CONTEXT

Miseducation of Filipino Learners. “Miseducation – The Failed System of Philippine Education” sums up the Year One (2023) Report of the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II)¹. The Report uncovered some challenges, from the fragmented implementation of the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) interventions to the disjointed pathways in teacher development (from preservice to licensure, to hiring) and the absence of monitoring mechanisms, among others, which has led to the “miseducation”—or poorly delivered education—of Filipino learners, bringing about a profound education crisis.² The crisis manifests in low learning outcomes of Filipino learners in learning assessments in terms of performance in mathematics, reading, and science, as revealed by the 2022 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). The Philippines scored 77th out of the 81 participating countries and performed worse than the global average in all categories. Poor learning has also been observed in the National Achievement Tests.

To address this, the Department of Education (DepEd) has decongested the curriculum to focus on developing foundational skills. In support of the National Learning Recovery Program (NLRP), a National Learning Camp was rolled out to supplement learning efforts from the previous school year. Catch-up Fridays dedicated to reading and comprehension were also introduced. The NLRP is a promising initiative but certain elements lack clear implementation guidelines. EDCOM II evaluation found that the NLRP’s “learning camp” component designed to remediate struggling learners at the end of the school year, often misses the students in greatest need of assistance.

Issues of Access, Equity, Inclusion, and Quality Persists. The negative correlation between poverty and enrolment rates in the Philippines is evident. Of the 17 regions in the Philippines, only Metro Manila, with a low poverty rate, saw an increase in enrolment, while Western Visayas which has a higher poverty incidence had the biggest drop in enrolment.³

Participation in school remains limited as evidenced by low attendance rates in preschool among children aged 3 and 4 and in kindergarten and Filipino youths aged 5 to 24⁴. In general, boys are more likely to drop out than girls.⁵

Learners from marginalised groups and communities still face significant challenges in accessing education. Approximately 60% of children with disabilities are not registered in any educational institution or learning facility. The dropout rate for indigenous children in the Philippines is almost three times higher than the national average.⁶ The BARMM, which lags in many development outcomes including basic education, had the biggest number of children unenrolled in school due to the high cost of education. In the 2022-2023 academic year, a mere 18.82% (640,000 out of 3.4 million) of out-of-school learners (OSY) in the Philippines engaged in the Alternative Learning System (ALS), highlighting the pressing need for expanded access to this system.

In terms of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education, the top reason hindering the youth from pursuing TVET is the lack of funding for tuition or allowance. Only 17% of the country’s poorest households are enrolled in higher education institutions (HEIs).

Public school teachers continue to face various challenges in their professional lives, from inadequate compensation and benefits to heavy workloads and lack of support. The Magna Carta for Public School Teachers, which seeks to uphold and protect the rights,

COUNTRY FACTS AND FIGURES	
Population:	115,559,009 (2022)
GNI per Capita (PPPS)	11,940 (2023)
Income Group	Lower-Middle Income
HDI: Value/Rank	0.710 / 113th out of 193 (2022)
Gini Index	40.7 (2023)
Education Expenditure (% GDP)	3.58% (2022)
Upper Secondary Completion Rate Female / Male	73.0 (2023) 80.2 / 66.3
Literacy Rate (15-64 Yrs.) Female / Male	98.47 (2020) 98.54 / 98.41
2024 SDG Score/Rank	67.47 / 92nd out of 166
SDG 4 Trend	■ Significant challenges remain → Stagnating
SDG 4 Dashboard	
Climate-related disasters:	
Total No. of disasters* Regional Mean/Median	29 (2020-22) 9.3 / 4
Risk Management Index:	
Climate-driven Hazard & Exposure	7.6 (2022) Regional Mean: 4.6
Lack of coping capacity	4.1 (2022) Regional Mean: 4.3
Vulnerability	4.4 (2022) Regional Mean: 3.4
*Drought, Extreme temperature, Flood, Landslide, Storm, Wildfire	

1 A national commission tasked to undertake a comprehensive national assessment and evaluation of the performance of the Philippine education sector for the purpose of recommending concrete and targeted reforms in the sector in the next three years, from 2023 to 2025.

2 EDCOM-II-Year-One-Report.

3 PSA

4 Department of Education, Key Education Statistics SY 2020–2021, 2021.

5 DepEd data.

6 UNICEF 2020.

benefits, and privileges of public school teachers in the Philippines, remains unfulfilled in its promise.

The labour participation rate is decreasing, with females lagging behind their male peers, despite on average having higher educational attainment. According to the PSA 2023 Labor Force Survey, labour force participation dropped from 66.1% in 2022 to 64.7% in 2023. Female labour force participation was a fifth less than that of males in 2023 at 52.9% vs 76.3%. Unemployment and underemployment are youth, women, and rural problems (PSA, 2023).

Increasing Challenges due to Climate Change.

The Philippines ranks among the top five countries most vulnerable to climate change impacts.⁷ Due to its archipelagic nature, around 60% of the Philippine population in low-lying coastal areas is exposed to storms, storm surges, and coastal floods. Super typhoon Odette in 2021 and the Magnitude 7 Luzon earthquake in 2022 damaged over 19,300 classrooms. According to the DepEd's Basic Education Report (2023), only 1 out of 3 school buildings is in good condition. 200,000 school buildings which had been affected by natural calamities require repairs or reconstruction. Damage to school buildings and facilities or when schools are used as emergency and evacuation shelters can lead to delays in the academic calendar and increased absenteeism.

The country has experienced severe heat in recent months, resulting in the suspension of classes, affecting 3.6 million students from 5,000 schools. In response, the DepEd approved a gradual return to the old academic calendar, where students go on a break from April to May. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the school opening was moved to October, instead of June, and remote learning was implemented. In the succeeding years, it was moved to August. The remote and blended learning response is a good alternative to adopt if learners, especially those coming from far-flung areas and marginalised communities, can have access to resources needed for distance learning.

II. PROGRESS TOWARDS SDG 4 ACHIEVEMENT

Mainstreaming Climate Change Education (CCE). Various government agencies have taken steps to enhance the environmental awareness and skills of the younger generation. The DepEd has incorporated environmental education into the school curriculum through the Republic Act (RA) 9512 and RA 9729 or the Climate Change Act. In addition, the Department of Science and Technology (DOST) provides students with science-based knowledge to drive the creation of environmentally sustainable solutions. RA 9512 also mandates the DepEd, in cooperation with Technical Education and Skills Development (TESDA), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and Department of Environmental and Natural Resources (DENR), to roll out comprehensive capacity-building programs on environmental education. However, there remains a gap in the widespread integration and comprehensive teaching of climate change in schools.

To strengthen the integration of Disaster Risk Reduction and Management, Climate Change, and Peace Education in the K-12 Curriculum, DepEd formulated core messages on the interdependencies of these concepts, anchored on Global Citizenship Education (GCED) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

While the government budget has allocations for climate change-related activities, the amount for climate change education is not sufficient to support comprehensive programs. In 2021, DepEd allocated PHP 580 million (USD 10.8 million) for climate change education – a small fraction of the total education budget. In the 2022 climate budget, nearly 90% of the budget was allocated to four departments: Public Works and Highways, Transportation, Agriculture, and DENR for infrastructure and flood management, highlighting the need to expand the focus of current adaptation strategies.

E-Net Philippines has successfully leveraged the power of social media to promote the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 4 and Education for All advocacies, via its Facebook Live programs led by sector members, namely KALAMBAG (Youth-led), Inklusyon (Persons with disabilities), and SENIOR Citi (for Adult Learning and Education). These programs integrate Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), emphasising its critical role in addressing the interlinked global challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, unsustainable resource consumption, and inequality. Episodes such as discussions on climate change and environmental issues can be rewatched on dedicated YouTube channels, ensuring a sustained reach of the messages.

A growing number of CSOs integrate climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction into their messages and programs. This translates into training programs and module development, the creation of learning materials and hands-on skilling with and for organisations and communities. Specifically for children and youth, some NGOs and even social enterprises focus on the play-learning of children in real settings such as in mini-forests, coasts, urban parks and farms.

The Education Budget is Still Not Enough. The Privatisation Trend Continues.

One key challenge that the education sector has faced is the decades of underfunding and underspending which has resulted in problems of shortages and lack of necessary resources. The budget for education has never reached the EFA-recommended 6% GDP ratio for total education expenditure. The highest budget the government was able to allocate was in 2017 at 3.9%.¹⁰ Per student spending has seen a decline from PHP 22,979 (USD 391) in 2017 to PHP 19,943 (USD 339) in 2021, ranking among the lowest globally.¹¹

Despite an increasing budget allocation for basic education in recent years – from PHP 594.11 billion (USD 10.1 billion) in 2021 to PHP 924.7 billion (USD 15.7 billion) in 2024 – funding for the marginalised, excluded and vulnerable sector (MEVS) and Inclusive Education Programs remains minimal. Less than 2% is allocated for Inclusive Education Programs, with 7 programs under it. Disability-specific appropriation is estimated to be only 0.44% of the DepEd budget and the Alternative Learning System accounts for less than 1% of the education budget.

The increasing privatisation of education is a significant concern. Policies such as the Education Service Contracting (ESC) scheme and the Senior High School Voucher Program, under the Expanded Government Assistance to Students and Teachers in Private Education (E-GASTPE), have dedicated more public funds to private education institutions. The GASTPE and E-GASTPE, including the Senior High School Voucher System, have become DepEd's single largest budget item since 2016, averaging PHP 36 billion (USD 612.78 million) annually.

Priority bills being pushed in Congress, such as Amending the

⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/philippines/reports/climate-landscape-analysis-children-philippines>

⁸ <https://climateadaptationplatform.com/disaster-management-and-response-in-the-philippines/>

⁹ <https://www.bworldonline.com/top-stories/2024/04/19/589152/phil-education-faces-increasing-challenges-from-climate-change/>

¹⁰ WORLD BANK, 2024

¹¹ PHILIPPINE INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES (PIDS), 2024

E-GASTPE Law to include support to Schools (basically, its whole operations) and Expanding the Purpose of the Special Education Fund (SEF)¹² to support private schools, clearly indicate a general bias for the private sector.

The increasing transfer of resources from the public to the private sector weakens public schools, diminishing their role in delivering education. The privatisation of education erodes the right to free quality education, creates social inequalities, undermines teachers' working conditions, and disrupts democratic decision-making and public accountability in education.

III. CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN THE SDG 4 IMPLEMENTATION, FOLLOW-UP, AND MONITORING

E-Net Philippines, along with other CSOs, is an active member of the NEDA-SDG Stakeholders' Chamber, a multistakeholder body that brings together government, civil society, private sector, and academic institutions to develop strategies for achieving the SDGs. In the Chamber, E-Net leverages its strong community connections and member base to advocate for the educational rights of the MEVS and provide valuable feedback on the effectiveness of education policies and programs, ensuring that their perspectives are integrated into decision-making.

E-Net engages with various governance mechanisms that are crucial for monitoring and implementing SDGs, including SDG 4. These include the EducForum (the local education group recognised by the Global Partnership for Education or GPE), Open-Government Partnership, Literacy Coordinating Council, National Council Against Child Labor, and EDCOM 2, where E-Net is a member of the Advisory Council representing CSOs and has representatives in the Standing Committees for ECCD and Basic Education and for TVET and Lifelong Learning.

E-Net continues to engage education agencies and legislative bodies on issues of access, equity, and inclusion, education budget, teachers' concerns, and education bills. It is actively involved in finalising the IRRs and Roadmaps of new laws such as RA 11650 (inclusive education of learners with disabilities) and RA 11713 (enhancing teacher education), and in formulating related DepEd policy guidelines. In these activities, E-Net facilitates the participation of representatives from the MEVS.

Despite CSOs' potential contribution to SDG implementation and monitoring in the Philippines, shrinking civic space, procedural barriers, and red-tagging limit their full and effective participation. While the Philippine government relies on written questionnaires over direct consultations for civil society, this limited engagement negatively impacts CSOs' meaningful contribution to participate in decision-making processes. The DepEd's recent failure to consult CSOs and community stakeholders in the National Midterm Report on SDG 4 drafting and validation process exemplifies this. This omission was notable as CSOs and community stakeholders have direct experience with grassroots-level SDG 4 implementation, which could have provided valuable insights and feedback for the report. Red tagging poses a serious threat to civil society, deterring active engagement due to fear of harassment and persecution. This limits the effectiveness of civil society platforms, reducing the openness of mechanisms intended to include their voices.

IV. YOUTH EDUCATION RIGHTS AND ENGAGEMENT

There are 3.4 million out-of-school youth in the Philippines;¹³ more than half (between the ages of 16 and 24), who should already be in senior high school or college, come from the poorest families. For out-of-school youth and adults aged 18-30, there were notable gender differences in the reasons for non-attendance. More males were not attending school due to employment (25.9%) and lack of personal interest (17.9%). On the other hand, more females were not attending school because they had already completed their education (28.9%) or due to marriage or teenage pregnancy (17%). Regrettably, adolescent pregnancy marks the end of formal schooling for many. In 2021, the Philippine government officially declared teenage pregnancy a national social emergency, highlighting the alarming statistic of "more than 500 Filipino adolescent girls getting pregnant and giving birth every day."¹⁴

The CHED has recently notified all state and local universities and colleges (SUC, LUC) to stop accepting senior high school students (aged 16-18) starting the school year 2024-2025. If the number of Grades 11 and 12 students currently enrolled in SUCs and LUCs remains constant in 2024-2025, the same number will most likely be displaced due to CHED's directive. DepEd schools may not have the capacity to accommodate all these students, causing uncertainty and disruption in their education. DepEd said that the voucher system would still be available for private school enrolment, but this would divert resources away from the public education system.

Higher education is not easily accessible to many Filipino youths as it is highly commercialised, with private institutions dominating the sector. In AY 2022-2023, Philippine higher education institutions (HEIs) numbered 2,396, of which 697 are public and 1,729 are private. Access to TVET programs may also be limited to marginalised youth because of affordability and availability issues. Pursuing higher education and TVET becomes an unattainable goal for a significant proportion of Filipino youth, reinforcing educational and socio-economic inequities. While youth voices are still often excluded and overlooked in policy discourse and campus governance structures, new platforms such as social media have presented new avenues even for participatory engagement in political issues, transforming the landscape of political engagement, especially among youth.



¹² THE SEF IS AN ADDITIONAL ONE PERCENT (1 %) TAX ON REAL PROPERTY AND IS ALLOTTED BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT FOR THE SUPPLEMENTARY ANNUAL BUDGETARY NEEDS FOR THE OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS WITHIN THE PROVINCE, CITY, AND MUNICIPALITY.

¹³ RPSA, ANNUAL POVERTY INDICATORS SURVEY (APIS), 2020
¹⁴ WORLD BANK, 2021

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively mainstream climate change education:

- Formulate national and local policies that mandate the inclusion of climate change education in activities of all educational institutions and government agencies.
- Education agencies should collaborate with experts to develop a comprehensive and inclusive curriculum that integrates climate change education and emphasises critical thinking, problem-solving and environmental stewardship.
- Equip teachers with adequate training on climate change, environmental education, and effective teaching methodologies to effectively deliver climate change education in their classrooms. Develop a certification program for educators specialising in climate change education.
- Utilise media platforms (social media, television, radio) to disseminate information on climate change, promote public engagement, and conduct community outreach programs, including seminars and local events, to raise awareness and foster community-based climate action.
- Develop partnerships among educational institutions, government agencies, and civil society to mainstream climate change education. This could include joint research projects, teacher training programs and community engagement initiatives.

To address issues in education financing and education privatisation:

- Substantially increase the education budget consistent with the international benchmark of at least 6% of the country's GDP and expand education programs for marginalised children, youth and adults.
- Adopt a regulatory framework to strengthen state monitoring and establish minimum norms and standards for private education providers with sufficient accountability mechanisms given the potentially wide-ranging impact of the privatisation of education on the enjoyment of the right to education.
- Conduct a transparent review of the Education Service Contracting scheme, the Senior High School (SHS) Voucher Program, E-GASTPE, and take all necessary measures, including the amendment of relevant laws and policies governing private education providers if warranted, to ensure equal access and equity, and the fulfilment of the right to education without any discrimination.

To respond to challenges faced by the youth:

- Expand the capacity of public universities to accommodate more students, reduce the reliance on private institutions, and promote and support alternative pathways for students such as TVET.
- Provide more needs-based scholarships and financial aid to ensure that students from low-income families can afford TVET and higher education. Ensure provisions that can sustain the living conditions of poor students while studying.
- Advocate for a standard, equitable, and sustainable budget allocation for education that prioritises public schools and addresses the needs of marginalised students.
- Implement anti-discrimination policies that protect all students, regardless of gender identity, from bullying and harassment. Allow for gender-inclusive uniforms and learning modalities to ensure that all students feel safe and supported in their learning environment.
- Develop programs to prevent adolescent pregnancy such as comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and youth social development programs and provide support for young mothers to continue their education.
- Provide infrastructure and resources to bridge the technological divide, ensuring equal access to online and digital learning tools.
- Encourage and support youth participation in policy discussions and community and government decision-making processes. Support strengthening of student organisations and councils.
- Implement comprehensive mental health programs in schools to address the emotional and psychological needs of students. Train teachers and school staff to recognise and respond to mental health issues, ensuring students receive the support they need. *

