

Childcare Investments in the Philippines

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With

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About this working paper

This national report was commissioned by UNRISD. It is one of seven case studies that provided in depth qualitative evidence to a regional report entitled “Investments in Childcare in Asia and the Pacific”, supported by ADB, ILO, UNDP and UNRISD. The regional report studies the public provision of childcare across 49 countries of Asia and the Pacific through the lens of accessibility, affordability, quality, and decent work for childcare workers. The report makes recommendations for increased investments in the childcare sector to enable better socio-economic outcomes for women, decent work for childcare workers, and support transformative COVID-19 recovery leading to gender equality and sustainable development. It was coordinated by Deepta Chopra, Meenakshi Krishnan and Priya Raghavan, who also provided guidance and comments to the authors of this national report.

Abstract

Childcare is emerging as a critical policy priority to support reducing and redistributing women's unpaid care work. In the Philippines, the gendered division of childcare is one of the main reasons why the country has the lowest female labour-force participation rate and labour-market gender disparity is one of the worst in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations region. Despite enabling legislative and policy environment and standards for early childhood care and development (ECCD), there remain questions of why reforms have not transformed the ECCD sector, and why leading government agencies and local government units have found it challenging to translate policy, structural reforms and programmatic adjustments into large-scale, integrated and sustained outcomes for children and childcare workers. A gendered understanding of the issues in the ECCD sector may direct policies and programmes towards being gender transformative and contribute to attaining sustainable development goal (SDG) 5 and gender parity in other SDG targets. This study examines the situation of childcare for children aged 0 to 6 years old and how existing policy and regulatory frameworks for early childhood care and development can be made accessible and enhanced. It provides policy recommendations for duty bearers and stakeholders to promote accessible, affordable, quality childcare services and decent work for childcare workers. This would ensure better social and economic outcomes for women, improved decent work opportunities for male and female childcare workers, and support transformative COVID-19 recovery—leading to gender equality and attainment of the SDGs.

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Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
BWSC	Bureau of Workers with Special Concerns
CBPAV	Center-Based Program in Alternative Venue
CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreements
CDC/LC	Child Development Centre/Learning Centre
CDP	Comprehensive Development Plan
CDT/W	Child Development Teachers/Workers
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CHR	Commission on Human Rights
CNA	Collective Negotiation Agreements
CSC	Civil Service Commission
DepEd	Department of Education
DILG	Department of Interior and Local Government
DOH	Department of Health
DOLE	Department of Labour and Employment
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
EYA	Early Years Act
GAA	General Appropriations Act
GAD	Gender and Development
GIDA	Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Area
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
IRA	Internal Revenue Allotment
IRR	Implementing Rules and Regulations
KBA	KapitBahay-Aralan
KDCC	Kalinga Day Care Center
KOW	Kinder-On-Wheels
LCPC	Local Council for the Protection of Children
LGU	Local Government Unit
LRP	Learning Resource Package
LSB	Local School Board
LSWDO	Local Social Welfare and Development Office
NCDC	National Child Development Center
NCF	Nurturing Care Framework
NDHS	National Demographic and Health Survey
NEDA	National Economic and Development Authority
NHCS	National Household Care Survey
NNC	National Nutrition Council
OTP	Operation Timbang Plus
PAGCOR	Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation
PES	Parent Education Session
POPCOM	Commission on Population and Development
PSA	Philippine Statistics Authority
RH	Reproductive Health

RPRH	Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health
SAP	Social Amelioration Package
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEF	Special Education Fund
SFP	Supplementary Feeding Program
SNP	Supervised Neighbourhood Play
SOTAR	State-Of-The-Art Review of Day Care Services
SRHR	Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights
ULAP	Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
WEF	World Economic Forum

1. Introduction and country context

The Philippines has one of the largest populations in Southeast Asia and is considered one of the most populous countries in the world, with 109 million inhabitants in 2020 (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA] 2021a). Children aged 0 to 4 years and 5 to 9 years made up the largest age groups in the population (Philippine Statistics Authority 2017). According to the (Philippine Statistics Authority 2021b), around 4,586 infants were born every day, equivalent to 191 babies born each hour or roughly three babies per minute. Hence, an estimated 1.7 million Filipino babies are born each year. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there were only 1,516,042 registered births, the lowest record in 34 years (Commission on Population and Development 2021a).

The huge number of children born each year could be attributed to the country's uneven progress in sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR). In its report to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review in 2017, the Commission on Human Rights [CHR] identified strong cultural and religious resistance, especially from the Catholic Church and conservatives, and the local chief executives' autonomy in rendering SRHR programmes at the local level as responsible for stalling the full implementation of Republic Act 10354, An Act Providing For A National Policy On Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health also known as the RPRH Law affecting women and adolescent girls, especially from poor and disadvantaged areas. In another report¹, the CHR (2016) noted that some local officials deliberately issued ordinances and initiated campaigns that spread information through pro-life events like conferences and conventions that contraceptives are carcinogens and abortifacients. In its 2020 annual report on the Philippine Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012, the Commission on Population and Development [POPCOM] (2021b) noted that despite the allocation of Php18.88 billion (around US\$360 million) for RPRH Law implementation, the COVID-19 pandemic posed tremendous challenges due to inadequate human resources, misconception about family planning, and higher dropout rates brought about by limited operating hours of health facilities and mobility restrictions.

The family is considered the primary socializing agent in the lives of young Filipino children. From birth; until they are ready to live independently, they are cared for at home and given utmost importance by parents and relatives (Alampay 2014; Medina 2009). Socio-cultural conditions in a patriarchal society have resulted in women being confined to the home to care and attend to the daily needs of their families, which also highlights the gender division of labour where they are responsible for a variety of domestic chores (Dionisio 1993; Ofreneo, 2004; 2005; Tengco-Labayen 1998). Over the years, many fathers and men have become more involved in the complex task of child-rearing and more are willing to do unpaid care work (Oxfam sa Pilipinas 2019). However, mothers and women remain to be the primary caregivers of children and other family members (Medina 2009; Ofreneo 2005; Oxfam, 2019; Tongson, 2019). According to (Parrenas 2010), this view is deeply rooted in socio-cultural conditioning where fathers are regarded as *haligi ng tabanan* or pillars of the home whose principal role is to ensure the provision of material goods for the family. On the other hand, mothers are called *ilaw ng tabanan*, or the light of the house, who are expected to nurture the family. The existing traditional gender division of labour has been responsible for the invisibility of unpaid care work at all levels of

¹ <https://www.asiapacificforum.net/resources/national-inquiry-report-reproductive-health-rights/>

society beginning at the household level (Cabegin and Gaddi 2019; Ofreneo 2005; Oxfam sa Pilipinas 2019; Tongson 2019). Unpaid care work has led to Filipino women's marginalisation and subordination that forced many mothers to stay at home, resulting in them becoming economically dependent on their husbands or partners and more prone to abuse and violence, having less time for self-care, and pursue their personal goals and interests (Oxfam 2019; Tongson 2019). Female labour force participation (FLFP) in the country is tagged as the lowest and gender disparity in the labour market is one of the worst in the ASEAN region (Cabegin and Gaddi 2019). Consequently, women remain to be one of the poorest in the Philippines. In its 2020 report, the Philippine Statistics Authority (2020) identified women as one of the poorest sectors and 2.7 million Filipino women are food poor.

Much of the economic growth in the Philippines is concentrated in urban areas resulting in migration of poor Filipinos from farming and fishing villages in rural areas to highly urbanized cities like Metro Manila, Cebu City, Iloilo City and Davao City Asian Development Bank (2009). Balisacan (2011) noted that each decade has seen an increase in urban population in the Philippines. In the 1960s, urban growth was recorded at 3.7 percent a year, and 4.4 percent and 5.0 percent in 1970s and 1980s per year, respectively. According to Asian Development Bank (2014), by 2050 about 56 percent of the Filipinos will be urban dwellers. A host of gender issues related to urbanisation have been documented putting women at a greater risk and disadvantage (ADB, 2008; 2015; Tacoli 2012). Given the scenario that urban living will be a certainty and the twin effects of high birth rate and low mortality rate in a patriarchal Filipino society, women will continue to bear the heavy burden of unpaid care work expressed in looking after the needs of children, older persons, and the sick.

The Philippines currently ranks 17 out of 156 countries in the 2021 Global Gender Gap Report of the World Economic Forum (WEF) which measures progress in moving towards gender parity in four key areas: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. This signifies a drop in Philippine's ranking by one notch from the previous year. Notably, the country has placed second in Asia Pacific after New Zealand. As highlighted in the EU Gender Country Profile for the Philippines, though a model nation in gender equality on paper, gaps exist in the implementation of laws and in the codification of patriarchal norms in Philippine laws and policies (Alqaseer, et al. 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to derail the progress made by the Philippines in fulfilling the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Currently, the Philippines ranks 103 out of 165 countries and has only achieved SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production. A decrease in SDG 4 on quality education has been characterized by a decline in net primary enrolment rate and lower secondary completion rate. Major challenges have been noted in SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth specifically in the achievement of fundamental labour rights (Sachs, 2021).

In the Philippines, a country situated in the Pacific Ring of Fire and highly susceptible to natural hazards and climate-change disasters, worsened by persistent multi-dimension poverty and existing vulnerabilities, women and girls consistently perform more care work than men. The

2021 National Household Care Survey (NHCS)², Oxfam sa Pilipinas revealed that women spend more than half a day performing unpaid care work, including heavy and time-consuming chores such as laundry, water collection, and caring for several children even during the COVID-19 pandemic; still making unpaid care work both an issue of women and a development concern. However, there is no evidence³ that the Philippine government monitors SDG 5.4.- value unpaid care and promotes shared domestic responsibility. Hence, it is more urgent to make the necessary steps to recognize, reduce, redistribute and reward care work, one of which is investing in sustainable childcare programmes, services, and infrastructure necessary to uplift their condition and attain gender equality and wellbeing.

Methodology

Making visible unpaid childcare and its link to women's empowerment is essential in shaping care work policies and strategies, especially in countries like the Philippines, where poverty is persistent, and all women do not enjoy adequate social protection and labour force participation. As an attempt to look into the gendered dimension of sustainable investment in childcare in the Philippines, this research has the following main research question:

What investments in the childcare sector in the Philippines can ensure better social and economic outcomes for women, improved decent work opportunities for male and female childcare workers, and support transformative COVID-19 economic recovery, leading to gender equality and sustainable development?

Specifically, this research has the following objectives:

- 1) describe the childcare policy context, programmes, and services in the Philippines.
- 2) describe role of social norms and practices that influence access and availability of affordable quality childcare.
- 3) describe good practices on quality affordable childcare models and in ensuring good working conditions of childcare workers in private and public sectors
- 4) determine policy makers' and other stakeholders' awareness on the importance of investing in sustainable early childhood care
- 5) provide policy recommendations and strategies to ensure quality, accessible and affordable childcare and decent work for childcare workers.

The findings presented in this paper are part of a two and half-month qualitative research employing a literature review and interviews of various stakeholders from three major island groups in the Philippines -Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. There were three sets of interviewees: 1) policy stakeholders from the national and local levels; 2) users of childcare services at the household level, and 3) childcare providers at the child development centres or creches at the community level. The participants were chosen based on their knowledge and involvement in early childhood care and development programs, and knowledge of labour laws and decent work standards. A total of 34 interviewees participated in the study. Childcare centres in this study refer to National Child Development Centres (NCDC) established by the ECCD Council, LGU-run Child Development Centre, day care centres or creches.

² <https://philippines.oxfam.org/latest/press-release/oxfam-encourages-women-flexyourhouseband-and-celebrate-equality-home>

³ <https://openstat.psa.gov.ph/Database/Sustainable-Development-Goals>

Due to inter-island and inter-city travel restrictions brought about the imposition of the enhanced community quarantine all over the country, the primary data collection was done remotely through Zoom conferencing, FB Messenger or phone calls. The current situation due to COVID-19 pandemic and super Typhoon Odette that hit the many parts of Visayas and Mindanao have posed great challenges in coordinating and collecting data remotely due to varying community quarantine levels and work from home arrangements. Poor internet connection and cellular signal also posed problems. When permitted, field visits were done to meet the participants and take pictures of the childcare centre with their permission.

Some modifications to the interview guides were done to make it appropriate to the country context. While the interview guides were in English, interviews were conducted using a combination of English, Filipino, and the native dialect. A local interviewer who is fluent in the vernacular collected the primary data in Marawi City, Mindanao. All participants agreed to record the interviews. Except for one father and one mother, all of them agreed to share the recordings to the international team. Meanwhile, two participants at the national and local levels could not find time for an interview but they agreed to answer the questions in writing sent through email. Permissions were granted by parents and children, childcare workers, and heads of offices for taking pictures and sharing them for publication. Vignettes are anonymized and narratives were treated with utmost confidentiality. Data are kept in a secure storage away from the scrutiny of the public and individuals who were not involved in the research.

Childcare policy context

The Philippine childcare policy context denotes the recognition that women's and children's issues are inextricably intertwined. Addressing these issues aspires to achieve two-generational outcomes that advance women's rights and gender equality while promoting favourable child growth and development.

The Philippines is a signatory to three human rights treaties that provide legal and political bases for the implementation of ECCD programmes and services that would benefit children, workers, and families, especially mothers. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) certifies the delivery of plans and programmes vital for every child's survival, protection, participation, and holistic development. Meanwhile, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) Article 9 stated, "that State Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to social security, including social insurance." The treaty warrants that successful ECCD programmes require a competent, well-prepared, and well-compensated childcare workforce. Parallel to the UNCRC and the ICESCR is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW), which contains measures to incorporate gender equality principles in the legal system and repeal all discriminatory laws, as well as provisions for enabling mechanisms to protect women against all forms of abuse and discrimination. The CEDAW upholds the right to social security and protection, "particularly in cases of retirement, unemployment, sickness, invalidity and old age and other incapacities to work and the right to paid leaves." Under the CEDAW, girls possess collective rights separate from women and boys. Building on the CEDAW and other human rights treaties, the Philippines cemented its commitment further by adopting the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) that mobilized support for gender equality across government, the private sector, and civil society. Hence, even before the adoption of the SDGs, the Philippines has

pledged to take actions to reduce gender disparities and vulnerabilities of women and girls and achieve gender equality.

The 1987 Philippine Constitution included requirements that underscore the country's commitment to these treaties to promote equality among the sexes and advance the rights of children, women, and marginalized groups toward development and quality of life. Many laws on women and children followed suit.

Behind the adoption of international covenants and local legal frameworks, the National Economic and Development Authority [NEDA] and UNICEF Philippines (2018) reported that there remains a big gap in the realization of children's rights in all aspects of development. Children in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDA) and conflict zones like the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) lack access to basic services like quality education, adequate nutrition, good health, decent housing, and WASH. Consequently, they experience multidimensional poverty making them more vulnerable to climate hazards, environmental shocks, and stress. Child marriages in Muslim communities in Mindanao and adolescent pregnancy in the country remain serious problems (Save the Children 2018). The results of the National Demographic and Health Survey [NDHS] showed that one in five girls is a mother by age 19 (Philippine Statistics Authority 2018). One of the reasons for dropping out of school is marriage.

National legislation

The delivery of early childhood care and development (ECCD) programs and services in the Philippines rests on a solid foundation. It starts from the Constitution guaranteeing care, education, and holistic development of all Filipino children and recognizing the role of Filipino women in nation building. Following these constitutional provisions, there are complementary childcare policies that have an interest in advancing ECCD and women's rights.

There are notable policies that provide the legal bases to realize these, beginning from Republic Act 11148, The *Kalusugan at Nutrisyon ng Magnanay* Act (Health and Nutrition of the Mother and the Baby); Republic Act 8980, Early Childhood Care and Development Act of 2000, which Republic Act 10410, The Early Years Act of 2013 later repealed, and the Magna Carta of Women (MCW), which guarantees the establishment of day care centres and breastfeeding stations at work and in public places.

The Early Years Act (EYA) of 2013 established the primary legal basis for a comprehensive, integrative, inclusive, and sustainable National Early Childhood Care and Development System Framework, which involves multi-sectoral and inter-agency collaboration, service providers, families and communities, public and private sectors, non-government organisations, professional associations, and academic institutions. The Act includes commitments to finance the implementation of the national ECCD policy.

Meanwhile, the *Kalusugan at Nutrisyon ng Magnanay* Act addresses health and nutrition problems of new born infants, young children, and their mothers. It mandated the institutionalization of the 1000 days of life in the national plan on nutrition in the ECCD intervention package of the National Nutrition Council and in the local government unit (LGU) investment plan for health

and nutrition. In addition, it also strengthens the enforcement of Republic Act 10028, Expanded Breastfeeding Promotion Act of 2009.

Apart from the MCW, the establishment of ECCD centres is also certified under Republic Act 6972, Barangay- Level Total Development and Protection of Children Act. One of the provisions of this law under Section 3b is the "Care of children of working mothers during the day, and where feasible, care for children up to six (6) years of age when the mother is working at night." All of these childcare centres are state-funded and provide two to three-hour ECCD services from Monday to Friday to children 0 to 4 years old during the day where they are given early stimulation activities and supplemental feeding. To date, no ECCD centres are operating at night. However, due to the sheer number of children born each year, inadequate ECCD centres have been noted over the years.

To emphasize the need for childcare centres, Executive Order 340 issued by former President Fidel V. Ramos in 1997 directed all national government agencies and government-owned and -controlled corporations to have day care services for children of their employees under the age of five. Under said policies, these services shall be located within their offices or in areas accessible and acceptable for the parents. These centres also called child-minding centres are considered state-funded.

Key policy actors

As the umbrella legislation, the Early Years Act of 2013 represented a significant shift in the implementation and governance of the National ECCD Systems Framework with the following features: 1) recognizing ages 0 to 8 years as the first crucial stage of educational development; 2) designating children ages 0 to 4 as the responsibility of the ECCD Council and ages 5 to 8 years under the wing of the Department of Education (DepEd); 3) promoting inclusion and accommodating children with special needs and children with disabilities, and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity including the use of Filipino Sign Language.

Likewise, the EYA legitimised the ECCD Council, as an attached agency of DepEd. The Council is composed of the ECCD Governing Board and the ECCD Council Secretariat. The members of the Board are the cabinet secretaries of the Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), the Executive Director of the National Nutrition Council (NNC), and the President of the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines (ULAP), and one private individual, with an excellent track record in ECCD. As the ex-officio chairperson, the DepEd secretary head the Governing Board with the executive director of the ECCD Council as the Vice-Chair person.

The Early Years Act of 2013 ensures quality programming and delivery of services, the Human Resource Program guarantees the systematic professionalisation of ECCD service providers through training and continuing education programmes. The ECCD Management component involves sustained planning, implementation, supervision, oversight of ECCD standards and guidelines, and monitoring and evaluation at the provincial, city, municipal and barangay levels.

At the local levels, EYA of 2013 provides for the organisation to operate within the context of local government units (LGU) as specified in Republic Act 7160 or the 1991 Local Government

Code of the Philippines. The passing of the Code resulted in the devolution and decentralisation of basic social services that made LGUs directly responsible for the establishment and supervision of a wide range of ECCD programmes and services. Since, then LGUs have become the largest providers of ECCD services for children under the age of six.

In terms of finances, as declared under EYA of 2013, LGUs must allocate funds from their Special Education Fund (SEF)⁴ and Gender and Development (GAD) Fund⁵. Likewise, the DepEd, the DSWD, and the DOH are mandated to allocate funds from the yearly budget to support ECCD initiatives. The funds are necessary to "support the implementation of ECCD programs, organize and support parent cooperatives in establishing programs, provide counterpart funds for the continuing professional development of ECCD public service providers, and provide facilities for the conduct of community-based ECCD programs."

In 2019, the Supreme Court of the Philippines decided with finality in favour of the petition of Congressman Mandanas for the full devolution of certain functions of national government agencies and the executive branch (Congressman Hermilando I. Mandanas, et al. Vs. Executive Secretary Paquito N. Ochoa, Jr., et al./Honorable Enrique T. Garcia, Jr. Vs. Honorable Paquito N. Ochoa, Jr., et al. 2019). With the full implementation of the Mandanas Ruling⁶ in 2022, LGUs will have a much bigger budget for social services for children and their families. These policies make all LGU-run child development centres/learning centres (CDCs/LCs) fully funded and accessible to all Filipino children.

Relevant socio-cultural norms

The gendered division of care in the Philippines primarily delegates the reproductive and unpaid care work to women (Hill 2018), while men are expected to occupy the economic and productive sphere. The culture assigns more power in decision-making to the individual earning for the family, usually to the men. The reproductive and unpaid care work that women perform is often undervalued and unrecognized. When women are afforded the right to decision-making, this usually revolves around household management and care-related concerns that involve the children, older persons, and the sick.

According to a study conducted by the National Economic and Development Authority, the low rate of FLFP in the country is attributed to the gendered division of reproductive work that relegates women to the household (Cabegin and Gaddi 2019). Moreover, with limited power to decide on matters unrelated to household management, women, especially those in the lower economic strata, cannot easily take on productive and economic roles. Although there has been some improvement over the years, FLFP remains lower compared to men. The latest labour force participation rates in November 2021 put women at 52.3%, significantly lower than 76.1% among men (PSA 2021).

⁴ Under Republic Act 5547, LGUs are mandated to set aside one per cent of the real property tax collection for the Special Education Fund to provide financial support for social services.

⁵ Under Republic Act 9710 or the Magna Carta of Women, all government offices and LGUs must allocate at 5% of their annual budget for Gender and Development programme to address gender issues and achieve women's empowerment.

⁶ Under the Mandanas Ruling national government agencies who are members of the ECCD Council will start devolving some of their functions to local executives. In addition, LGUs will receive 40% share of the national internal revenue taxes (NIRT) and collections of the Bureau of Customs.

When women need to contribute financially to the family, they rely on informal care institutions to take on their reproductive roles. Although child development facilities are available in the barangay, children can only stay there for two to three hours per day, not long enough to allow mothers to take on full-time jobs. Thus, other nuclear or extended family members take on unpaid care and reproductive roles. Because of the gender norms and stereotypes surrounding care, the sister, aunts, or grandmothers often perform the work.

Fraser (2016) emphasizes the importance of reproductive and unpaid care work to maintain economic stability. According to her, women's often undervalued and invisible labour in the household reproduces the productive sphere. Unless the state recognizes the vital role of care in the economy and starts investing more in formal care, women's active and meaningful participation in the labour economy will continue to fall behind.

Childcare provision

This study affirms that childcare provision in the Philippines is provided at all levels of society through a combination of formal and informal set up, paid and unpaid care. Families in both rural and urban areas are usually in closely-knit multi-generation households, which makes it easier for families with young children to rely even on relatives living in another house to look after their children while parents are at work. This is usually done for free. For the rich and middle-class families, female domestic helpers are hired to assist in caring for children.

At the state level, the institutional terrain for the planning, financing, and implementation of ECCD in the Philippines is broad and complex. The landscape includes services, programmes, laws and policies, whose primary goals are: (a) capacitating families in providing nurturing care; (b) empowering communities in supporting children and families; (c) dispense accessible and affordable services; (d) enable families and caregivers to provide nurturing care with social protection and social welfare measures expressed in family-friendly labour policies and services and provision of universal healthcare. As specified in the Nurturing Care Framework (NCF)⁷, which the Philippines has adopted indicating three levels of support: (a) universal support, which covers all families and children regardless of social background, ethnicity, geographical location, language, religion, and other intersectional identities; (b) targeted support for children whose caregivers may be able to provide nurturing care due to poverty, displacement, or undernutrition; and (3) indicated support where additional services to young children with additional needs such as being an orphan or born to violent parents, having low birth weight or severely malnourished, or having disabilities or at risk of developmental delays.

There are three leading national government agencies most pertinent for the implementation of the integrated national ECCD System: the DOH, the DSWD, and DepEd.

⁷ Nurturing Care Framework (NCF) was launched by the World Health Organisation, World Bank Group, and UNICEF in 2018 together with partners all over the world. The NCF has "five inter-related and indivisible components of nurturing care: good health, adequate nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving and opportunities for learning" (<https://nurturing-care.org/what-is-nurturing-care/>). In the Philippines, the ECCD Council with Save the Children Philippines launched the NCF in August 2018.

1) Department of Health

As the chief agency with the overarching authority to provide national policy direction and development national plans, technical standards and guidelines on health, DOH automatically looks after the health needs of young children and their mothers. A huge national government agency, DOH has regional offices, which are responsible for supporting local health units by providing technical guidance on health and deploying doctors, nurses, midwives, dentists, pharmacists, nutritionist-dietitians, medical technologists, and physical therapists in provinces, cities, and municipalities. Being part of the ECCD Council, DOH is also the implementer of a wide array of health and nutrition services including maternal health, safe delivery, new born care, infant and young feeding, immunization, child development and disability prevention, and management of childhood diseases, and nutrition programmes. DOH budget for ECCD is under the Family Health, Immunization, Nutrition and Responsible Parenting programme, which received Php 7.12 billion (US\$139.60 million) from the 2022 national budget. However, it was not specified how much is located for immunization of infants and young children because it is lumped together with the COVID-19 and other vaccination programmes of the government. For Fiscal Year 2022 under Republic Act No. 11639, General Appropriations Act (GAA), the DOH has an approved budget of Php 183.37 billion (US\$ 3.6 billion) for 2022 (Department of Health 2021).

Table 1. DOH Budget for ECCD-related programmes and services, FY 2022⁸

ECCD-related programmes and services	Appropriated Amount in Php billions	% of DOH Total	Major Activities
Family Health, nutrition & responsible parenting	7.12 (US\$139.60M)	3.9	To provide micronutrient supplementation and family planning commodities to target population groups. This includes the PhP 250 million (US\$ 4.9 million) for Complementary Feeding.

Source: General Appropriations Act FY 2022-Volume I-A

The National Nutrition Council, who is in-charge to implement ECCD/Nutrition Intervention Package for the First 1000 Days programme has a budget allocation of Php 478 million (US\$9.37 million) for 2022⁹.

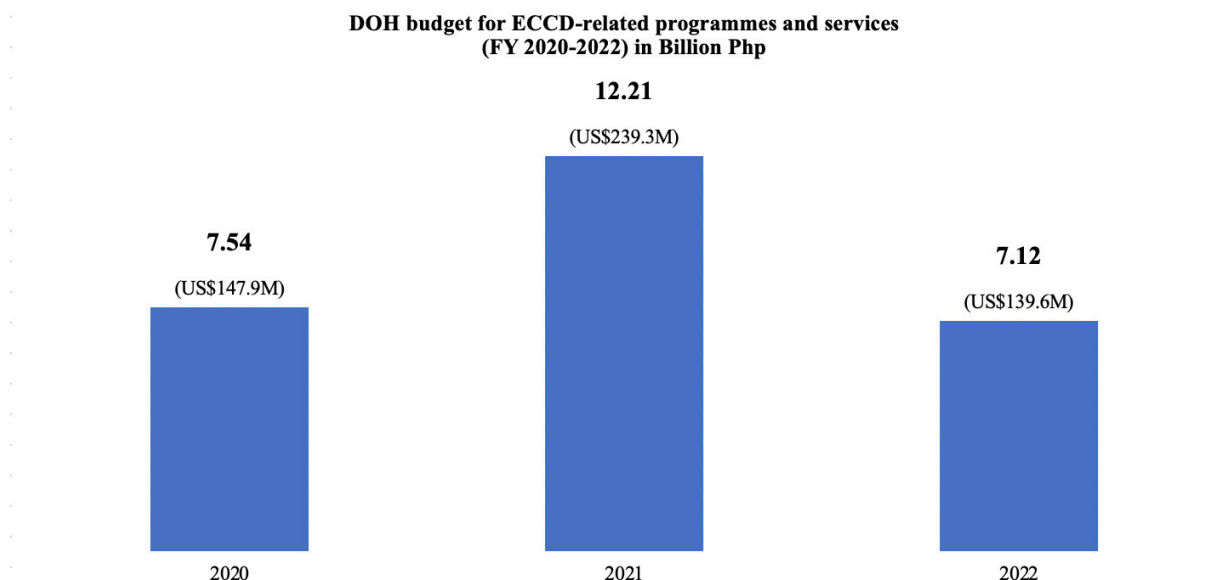
Interview data disclosed regular health and nutrition checks such as *Operation Timbang Plus* and dental checks are conducted by the municipal or city doctor, nutritionist, and dentist. Sometimes, dentists conduct lessons on proper brushing of teeth. According to the National Nutrition Council (2022), Operation Timbang Plus (OTP) "is the annual weighing and height measurement of all preschoolers 0-59 months old or below five years old in a community to identify and locate the malnourished children."

⁸ <https://dbm.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/GAA/GAA2022/Volumel/DOH/DOH.pdf>

⁹ <https://dbm.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/GAA/GAA2022/Volumel/DOH/B.pdf>

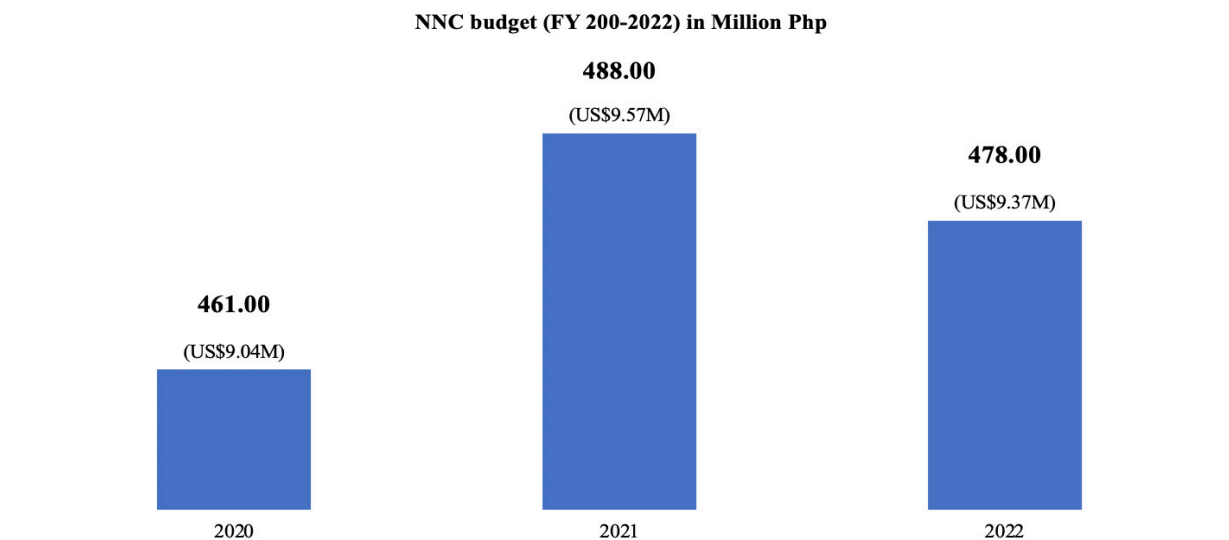
Concerning the DOH budget for ECCD-related programmes and services over three years from 2020, it was noted that funding varies each year, with 2021 receiving the highest allocations. Meanwhile, the NCC budget has been almost the same in the last three years.

Figure 1. Comparison DOH Budget for ECCD-related programmes and services from FY 2020 to 2022



Sources: General Appropriations Act FY 2020, 2021, 2022

Figure 2. Comparison of National Nutrition Council budget from FY 2020 to 2022



Sources: General Appropriations Act FY 2020, 2021, 2022

2) Department of Social Welfare and Development

DSWD is the primary agency responsible for the formulation and implementation of a wide range of social protection policies, programmes, and services. Over the years, it has served a multitude of clients and beneficiaries who are disadvantaged and vulnerable in development and humanitarian settings.

Under the DSWD a host of bureaus are working hand in hand in providing essential technical support and critical support to ECCD-related initiatives. The Program Management Bureau is in-charge of the overall monitoring and quality assurance for various ECCCD programmes, including day care centres, child minding centres or creches, and supervised neighbourhood play (SNP). It also provides guidance and funds the supplementary feeding programme enrolled in LGU-run child development programmes and monitors parenting support interventions such as family development sessions and Parent Education Sessions. The Standards Bureau and the Social Technology Bureau develop standards and new programmes, strategies, and approaches in ECCD, respectively. The Capacity Building Bureau provides technical assistance for the effective implementation of capability building activities of ECCD programmes.

Like the DOH, DSWD has regional offices that work closely with local government units through the Local Social Welfare Development Office. The partnership is regulated by Memorandum Circular No. 10 Series of 2018, Guidelines on the Provision of Technical Assistance and Resource Augmentation to Local Government Units¹⁰. As specified in the said guidelines, the DSWD should provide technical assistance in the form of training, demonstration sessions, coaching and mentoring.

The DSWD central office releases funds to field offices necessary for resource augmentation and supplemental feeding programmes. The General Appropriations Act for FY 2022 allotted the sixth largest budget for DSWD amounting to Php 202.45 billion (US\$3.97 billion).

Table 2. DSWD budget for ECCD-related programmes and services, FY 2022¹¹

ECCD-related programmes and services	Appropriate Amount in Php billions	% of DSWD Total	Major Activities
Pantawid Pamilya Pilipino Program or 4Ps (Implementation of conditional cash transfer) ¹²	107.67 (US\$2.11B)	53.18	To support the poverty reduction and social development strategy of the National Government
Supplementary Feeding Program ¹³	4.16 (US\$81.6M)	2	Feeding programmes should be administered in child development centres, day care centres, or any appropriate facilities

Source: General Appropriations Act FY 2022-Volume I-B

¹⁰ https://www.dswd.gov.ph/issuances/MCs/MC_2018-010.pdf

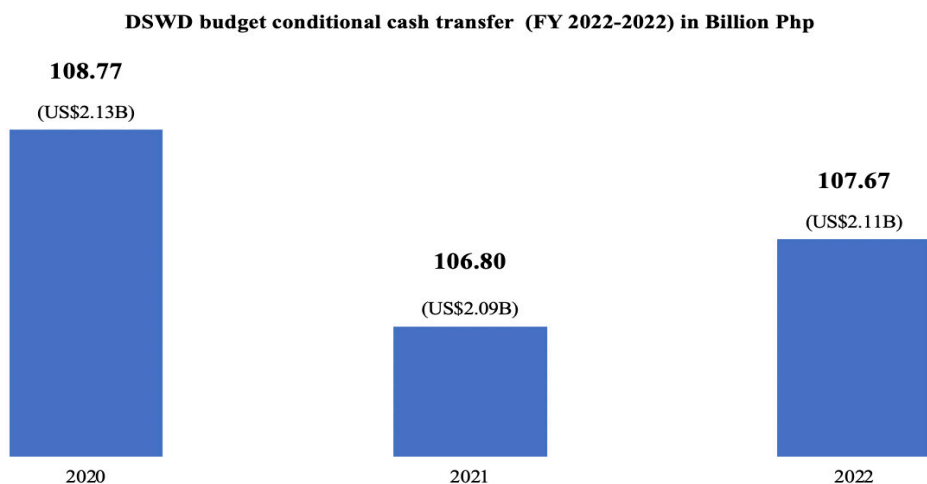
¹¹ <https://dbm.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/GAA/GAA2022/Volumel/DSWD/A.pdf>

¹² 4Ps is a poverty reduction strategy that provides grants to extremely poor households to improve their health, nutrition and education particularly of children aged 0-14.

¹³ CONDITIONAL IMPLEMENTATION - President's Veto Message, December 30, 2021, Volume I-B, page 818, R.A. No. 11639.)

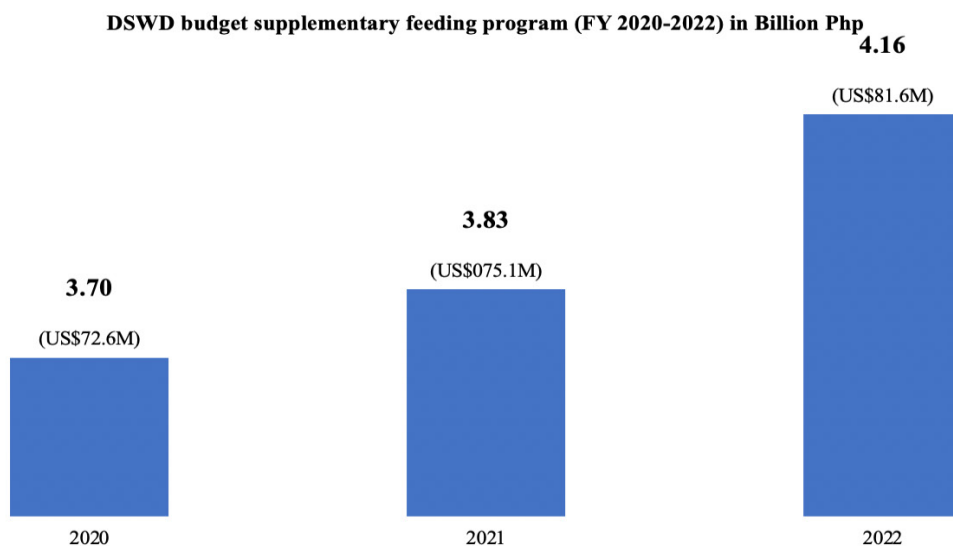
The annual DSWD budget for conditional cash transfer has remained almost the same from 2020 to 2022.

Figure 3. Comparison of DSWD budget for Conditional Cash Transfer from FY 2020 to 2022



Sources: General Appropriations Act FY 2020, 2021, 2022

Figure 4. Comparison of DSWD budget for supplementary feeding programme from FY 2020 to 2022



Sources: General Appropriations Act FY 2020, 2021, 2022

3) Department of Education with the ECCD Council

Under EYA of 2013, the DepEd secretary is the chair of the ECCD Council. While the Council's annual budget is listed under DepEd, it has its own line budget. As specified in Rule IX of the EYA's implementing rules and regulations (IRR), ECCD Council's financing should be a combination of public and private funds. Over the years, its budget has been primarily driven by the cost of building National Child Development Centres (NCDC) in target local government units through the generous support of the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation (PAGCOR), reaching as much as Php 4.25 billion (US\$83.33 million)¹⁴. However, starting in 2018 PAGCOR's support¹⁵ has expired as specified in EYA of 2015. Consequently, this provision has repercussions on the construction of NCDCs across the country. Additional funds may be generated from intergovernmental donors and government financial institutions. For FY 2022, ECCD Council's approved budget is Php 242.8 million (US\$ 4.76 million) plus Php12,562,000.00 (US\$246,313.73) was allotted for the establishment of NCDCs.

As the flagship programme of the ECCD Council, the NCDC aims to introduce good practices in implementing the integrated ECCD programme, serve as a research and innovation centre in advancing the competencies of ECCD service providers, and act as the resource centre for the community in intensifying parent education programmes. Based on the ECCD Council website¹⁶, an NCDC should be located 500 metres from the existing LGU-run day care centre and near a public school or in a government property designated by the LGU with a floor area of 124 square metres of reinforced concrete structure, with perimeter fence and playground.

Following its mandate, the ECCD Council intensifies its commitment to implement ECCD programs. Its 2022 strategic objectives focus on having more NCDCs and capacitating ECCD service providers.

Table 3. 2022 Strategic Objectives of the ECCD Council¹⁷

SECTOR OUTCOME		
Lifelong learning opportunities for all ensured		
ORGANIZATIONAL OUTCOME		
Readiness of Filipino children for Kindergarten Achieved		
PERFORMANCE INFORMATION/PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	BASELINE	2022 TARGETS
Readiness of Filipino Children for Kindergarten Achieved		
EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM		
Outcome Indicators		
1. Percentage of children from age zero (0) to four (4) years enrolled in Child Development Centres (CDCs)	4,500	75% (3,375)

¹⁴ <https://www.pagcor.ph/press-releases/pagcor-funding-for-early-childhood-care-reaches-p4.25-billion.php>

¹⁵ Under Section 11 of EYA 2013, "the Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corporation shall contribute an amount of Five hundred million pesos (Php500,000,000.00) per year for five years from its gross income to fund the establishment of National Child Development Centres and the conversion of existing Day Care Centres into Child Development Centres in various LGUs".

¹⁶ The National Child Development Center. <https://eccdcouncil.gov.ph/ncdc.html>

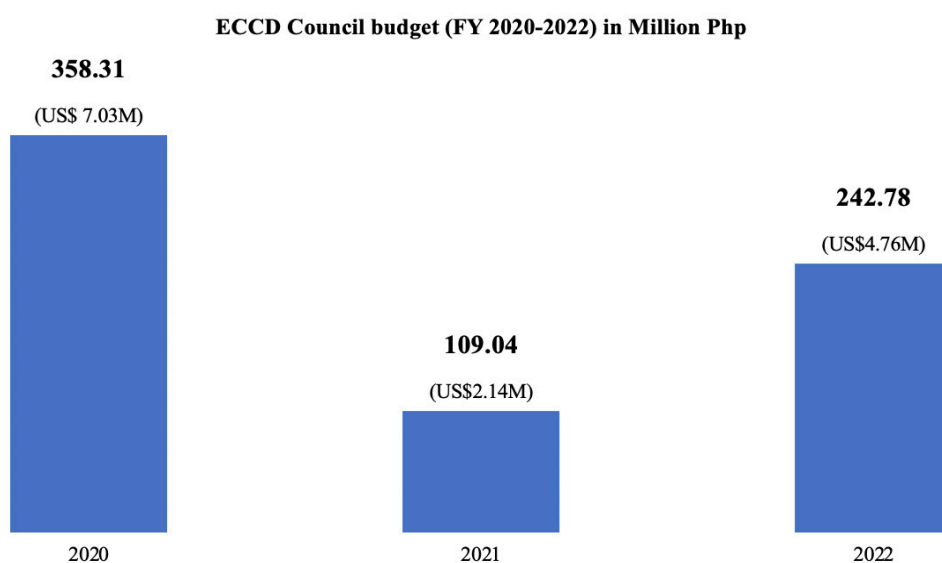
¹⁷ <https://dbm.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/GAA/GAA2022/Volumell/DEPED/B.pdf>

Table 4. 2022 Strategic Objectives of the ECCD Council¹⁷ (Continued)

PERFORMANCE INFORMATION/PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	BASELINE	2022 TARGETS
2. Percentage of ECCD Centres accredited/recognized	No Data Available	85%
3. Percentage of LGUs that support the implementation of their ECCD Program	723 LGUs	50% (362/723)
Output Indicators		
1. ECCD centres established/expanded	723 (FY 2013 - FY 2020)	0
Number of National Child Development Centres (NCDCs established)	1,800 (FY 2013 - FY 2019)	0
2. Number of ECCD Service Providers trained for capacity-building	1,813	1,823
3. Percentage of targeted NCDC sites trained in the utilization of accredited/recognition tool	125	90% (113)
4. Percentage of accreditation/recognitions conferred to the CDCs and learning centres upon submission of complete documents from DSWD.	No Data Available	90%

Source: General Appropriations Act FY 2022-Volume II

With respect to ECCD Council annual budget from 2020-2022, it was noted that year the 2021 had the lowest budget.

Figure 5. Comparison of ECCD Council budget from FY 2020 to 2022

Sources: General Appropriations Act FY 2020, 2021, 2022

At the local or community level, the local government units at the provincial, city or municipality, and barangay levels are the stewards of ECCD programmes where they take the lead in the planning, implementation, and funding of all ECCD efforts in health and nutrition, early learning, and social welfare. They also do plenty of cross-sectoral coordination with national government agencies, non-government organisations to ensure the delivery of the integrated ECCD System to every family with young children.

Interviews at the national and the local levels for this study suggested a range of institutional coordination initiatives such as setting up sub-committees under the Local Councils for the Protection of Children (LCPC)¹⁸, appointing an ECCD Focal Person, and setting up additional local mechanisms for an easier implementation of national mechanisms among others. Interviews also reveal that the Local Social Welfare and Development Office (LSWDO) is often assigned to head the multi-level coordination efforts but the task mostly concentrated on implementing, supervising, and monitoring of early stimulation and learning, PES, supplementary feeding.

ECCD programmes at the LGU level are mainly funded through their internal revenue allotment (IRA), which is distributed by the national revenue to local government units based on the computation prescribed under 1991 Local Government Code of the Philippines. Fund allocation is based on administrative division, population size, and land area. Provinces receive 23 per cent of the total IRA amount, cities, 23 per cent, municipalities, 34 per cent, and barangays 20 per cent. In terms of population, 50 percent, land area, 25 percent, and equal sharing, 25 percent. Meanwhile, barangays, receive 60 percent and equal sharing, 40 percent.

As specified under national legislations and policies, LGUs must adhere to the prescribed formula in utilizing their IRA. Twenty percent goes to the development fund; at least five percent goes to GAD, under the MCW; one per cent each for LCPCs and the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Fund.

Funds for ECCD programme implementation also come from the Special Education Fund as mandated under Republic Act 5547, where the Local School Board (LSB) headed by the mayor may use the funds for the following:

- 1) Construction, repair, and maintenance of school buildings and other facilities of public elementary and secondary schools;
- 2) Establishment and maintenance of extension classes where necessary; and
- 3) Sports activities at the division, district, municipal, and barangay levels.

Given these legislated sources of funds at the LGU level, they have plenty of money to spare. Interview data from national and local research participants confirmed that these provisions are applied at the local level. However, because of a lack of fixed ratio for the expenses related to ECCD programmes and services and the lack of access of the interviewees from the line budget, the amount spent on ECCD at the LGU does not only vary but is tricky to determine. Since LGUs in this study, especially Navotas City and Iloilo City are highly urbanized, they have more sources of funds and expectedly have higher budget allocations.

¹⁸ Local Councils for the Protection of Children which play a critical role in preventing and mitigating the impacts of abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation of children.

An obvious limitation of the efforts for the implementation, supervision, and monitoring of the ECCD programmes and services at the LGU-level is the lack of financial support and inadequate technical supervision to private-run, community-based, and employer-run childcare centre or creches. While they are not many, they are not covered by national and local appropriations on health nutrition, and education. Parents from these centres incur huge out-of-pocket expenses for childcare services or rely on relatives and more affordable carers at home.

Childcare provision at the community level is a combination of paid and unpaid care. Despite the limited hours of operations of LGU-run centres, the services relieved mothers of caring duties and provide them time to socialize with other mothers who are in the vicinity of the centre, do some errands, and do marketing. Private-run and employer-run creches offering whole day services, on the other hand, allow parents to concentrate on their office jobs and pursue a career.

In both settings and in a culture that values harmonious interpersonal relationships, childcare workers, usually females, are regarded as second mothers. They are expected not only to teach but to provide care in a warm and patient manner. Parents, especially mothers assist in the day-to-day operations of the centre on a voluntary basis. Families and childcare workers in this study disclosed they assist in cleaning, cooking the snacks, washing the dishes, helping children during hygiene routine, and distributing activity materials during class. Parents who are considered more well-off donate appliances, learning materials, school supplies, and cleaning materials.

In summary, the increasing public investment for universal ECCD programmes and services in the Philippines acknowledges the broader societal task of ensuring the readiness of children for formal schooling and providing women opportunities for labour participation. The ECCD discourse in the country reflects the complex connections between the household and the community and their links to the market and the state, where discussions and negotiations about sustainable childcare investments take place with returns for individuals, families, and society.

2. Outcomes of investments in childcare

Accessibility

The accessibility of childcare centres is influenced by 1) the socio-cultural and economic location of households and the intersectional identities¹⁹ and needs of the children and 2) the operational environment, funding, location, and demand for the services of the child care centres.

The childcare centres surveyed in this study can be categorized as LGU-run, government-owned or employment-based, and private. The profile of households ranged from poor to upper income class with the majority of poor to low-income households concentrated in LGU-run childcare centres.

¹⁹ dynamic interaction of sex, gender, class, race, religion, ethnicity, ability that influence a number of discriminations and disadvantages. Kimberlé Crenshaw, a law professor and social theorist, civil rights activist, and a leading scholar of critical race theory, coined the term in 1989. Intersectionality is a valuable lens in understanding women's and gender issues.

The enrolment-to-demand ratio observed varies across the different childcare centres surveyed. In LGU-run childcare centres, it was noted that all children are accepted even if the number exceeded the maximum 1:25 teacher-child ratio recommended by the ECCD Council. To accommodate the enrollees, childcare workers are often forced to conduct more classes in a day. It was reported that some of them handle 100 to 180 children, who are distributed into three classes.

Kalinga Day Care Center (KDCC) and DSWD Childmind Center, government-owned childcare centres have fewer children and a smaller child-adult ratio.

Admissions in all types of childcare centres are on a first-come, first-served basis. At the LGU level, children who are residents of the *barangay* are given priority but when enrollees exceeded the number of seats, they are referred to other barangays.

Getting a slot is relatively easy compared to the admission process in other similar facilities on the campus. My son was given a slot right away. We pay the tuition, but we welcome getting a discount because I am an employee. We take him to the centre at 830 AM and pick him up at 1130 AM. My classes are scheduled at the same time he is at the centre. - Mother 5, government-owned/employer-run creche, Quezon City

Strengths and Opportunities

In interviews with childcare workers and teachers, and with parents, it has been consistently mentioned that childcare centres provide a space to reduce and redistribute responsibilities related to teaching and caring for children. In Barangay Sagonsongan in Marawi City, a transitory shelter area for internally displaced families of the Marawi siege, the public childcare centres are viewed as a space where the children can process and recover from the trauma caused by the conflict. In addition, the interview disclosed that children with special needs and disabilities are also accommodated.

Day care centres help us a lot because they can help us take care of our kids and spares us time to do the household chores and take care of your younger children. They provide colouring books and lessons about taking care of the environment. - Mother 2, LGU-run childcare centre in Marawi City.

In terms of operational hours, in general the child-minding centres or creches operated from 8 am to 5 pm with some extending until 7 pm. Based on interviews with parents, this worked very well with their schedules and allowed them to focus on reproductive and productive work. One mother from a private-run community based creche shared, *"We started with them; my baby was just three months old...I work far from my home. It is good that the centre is just walking distance from our house. We drop my child in the centre before 7 AM and pick her up between 6 to 7 PM."*

With the pandemic, the childcare centres have shifted to alternative modes of learning. One employer-run childcare centre has implemented a combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning. Though this shift represents a major adjustment for both the children and child development teachers, in interviews with parents and teachers, it also has served as an opportunity for the children to build their digital skills and to socialize with their peers in a virtual

environment. With the work-from-home arrangement of many fathers, they have taken an active role in the education of their children. They were reported participating in activities online and assisting their children with lessons. One childcare worker related, *fathers are seen coaching their children during synchronous sessions and encourage their children to participate. They also assist them in muting and unmuting their microphones during online sessions.*

Gaps and Challenges

As mentioned above, the Early Years Act of 2013 mandates care for children ages 0 to 4 to fall under the ECCD System, however, the age groups accommodated in each childcare centre varies and is dependent on the resources and capacities available. In Navotas City, Iloilo City, and Marawi City, a mapping of families is conducted by the local government to create a census of children ages 2 to 4.5 and 3 to 4, respectively. However, this has not been noted to be a standard across all public childcare centres. Likewise, this practice was stopped since the start of the pandemic.

With the legal frameworks in place, various sources of funds, and increased budget, all Filipinos must have access to fully state-funded child care centres. However, local leadership and governance as mandated under the Local Government Code of the Philippines have become essential ingredients for the implementation of the ECCD system. The local executives have the authority to increase the number of publicly funded childcare centres enough to serve children in the city or *barangay* and place the facilities near houses. However, the primary concern related to the construction of new centres is the lack of available land or space, especially in congested neighbourhoods in urban areas.

According to interviewees, while there are many state-funded child care centres near homes and villages, there are also many centres which are more than 15 minutes away from children's homes or their parents' workplace. Children usually need to use public transportation such as jeepney and tricycles in going to and from the childcare centres.

It has been observed that in terms of distance, access, and proximity, government-owned or employment-based and private childcare centres are more accessible from the workplaces of parents. Government-owned centres are usually located within the premises of government institutions which allow employed parents to easily drop off and fetch their children. On the other hand, private childcare centres are usually accessed by parents through personal vehicles.

A major challenge brought about by the pandemic is the halting of in-person operations for childcare centres. This was consistently observed across all surveyed centres. Majority have since shifted to alternative learning modes such as modular and online learning, however this only occurred in the latter part of 2020 and on average, operations were discontinued for five months. Enrolment rates were also affected such as in Navotas City and Iloilo City, it has been noted that the number of enrollees decreased by 20 to 40 per cent. It was mentioned during the interviews that this was caused partly by parents not being aware that the centres had reopened.

In terms of the accessibility of alternative learning modes, parents and caregivers cited challenges in digital skills in setting up accounts in online learning platforms as well as software and hardware troubleshooting. Some children also had issues with maintaining focus and interest in

an online environment. For many childcare workers access to equipment to facilitate an online set-up was also not readily available. In LGU-run childcare centres where modular learning was implemented, distribution of modules was also affected due to health and safety concerns. Childcare workers reported difficulty in making modules, which they do by hand; printed and photocopied at the expense of the LGU.

Affordability

In this study affordability is characterised by the following indicators: total cost per child, parents' out of pocket expenses, cost as a share of parents' income, and subsidies and allowances provided to parents.

The total cost per child varies across the surveyed childcare centres with tuition fees ranging from Php2,000.00 (US\$39.22) to Php3,200.00 (US\$62.75) per month in one of the surveyed government-owned centres and approximately Php8500.00 (US\$166.67) per month in a private centre. Meanwhile, services are free in another government-owned centre. Expenses are charged against the GAD budget of the agency.

In the private facility in this study, the meals provided to children are covered by the tuition fee paid for by parents. A parent of a child enrolled in a private childcare facility is convinced that the price they pay is affordable, considering the quality of care their child receives.

In Navotas City services are free of charge but parents shelled out a range of Php100.00 (US\$1.96) to Php1,000.00 (US\$19.61) a month for expenses such as food, transportation, and school supplies. For poor to low-income families, the cost of childcare could take up a significant portion of household income even with full or partial subsidies in place.

In Iloilo City parents are required to have a one-time participation fee of Php100.00 (US\$3.92), which they pay at start of the school year. This is used for purchasing purified drinking water, cleaning materials, and school supplies. On a voluntary basis, parents contribute Php10.00 (US\$0.20) to Php20.00 (US\$0.39) daily to augment the supplementary feeding programme.

In-kind assistance in the form of rice, school supplies, and uniforms were observed in some public day care centres, however, there is no standard for the type of aid and frequency of distribution across LGUs. In Iloilo City, the *Sanguniang Kabataan* (Youth Council) donates school supplies.

Strengths and Opportunities

Childcare workers noted that childcare services must remain free as a public facility. Based on the initial interview data, parents in LGU-run childcare centres do not pay tuition but provide school supplies and other materials for the centre's daily operations. The main operation of these facilities is funded primarily by the local city or municipality, and the barangay local government provide budget augmentation or other in-kind support such as maintenance work.

A childcare worker in a highly urbanized area shared they have a zero-collection policy, ensuring that parents do not have out-of-pocket expenses in sending their children to day care facilities. In addition, child development facilities at the barangay level cater to children from poor to low-

income households. While the education is free of charge, parents do not commonly receive government cash incentives or financial assistance to support their children's education. However, some local government units allocate budget for children's school supplies and uniform.

As an integrated ECCD programme, children are provided snacks under the supervision of the LGU nutritionist. Under the Supplementary Feeding Program (SFP) of DSWD, children in child development facilities are provided with supplementary feeding using indigenous or locally processed food. The program runs five days a week for 60 days (DSWD 2010). Some LGUs provide rice subsidies to families of children in public day care centres.

They give supplemental feeding. The city government also provides school supplies. We pay a one-time fee of Php200.00 (US\$3.92).00 at the beginning of the school year for cleaning materials and school equipment. - Father 1 from an LGU-run childcare centre

Gaps and Challenges

Despite the free and accessible use of child development facilities at the barangay level, parents from poor to low-income households still struggle to provide their children's basic needs, including food, transportation, and other pedagogical supplies. Therefore, these families need additional support from the government to ensure that children receive complete and quality childcare services.

They provide biscuits to children but most of the time we shoulder the expenses for our kids. We spend Php500.00 (US\$9.80) monthly for food, school supplies and other materials but when schools just opened our expenses reaches Php 10,200.00 (US\$200.00). We do not receive subsidies from the government. - Mother 2, LGU-run childcare centre

It has been observed that for LGU-run childcare centres, subsidies and funding are also dependent on the perceived value of childcare in the community and the LGU. In a childcare centre located in a highly urbanized area, the child development teachers took the initiative to take out a short-term loan in order to build a safe and viable structure conducive for learning, while parents contributed to fundraising efforts. It was noted that there was no assistance from the barangay and LGU leaders at the time.

In relation to this, inconsistencies in the frequency and type of subsidies and in-kind assistance provided have also been observed across LGUs. This has been further exacerbated by the pandemic with most funds diverted to emergency response.

Quality

The ECCD System Framework in the Philippines employs a three-pronged approach, namely access and equity; quality, efficiency and sustainability; and accountability. Under Section 2.4. of the implementing rules and regulations of EYA 2013, the ECCD System Framework has four components, namely "ECCD Curriculum; Parents/Families Education and Involvement, Advocacy and Mobilization of Communities, Human Resource Development Program, and ECCD Management."

The ECCD Council developed the "Standards and Guidelines for Center-based Early Childhood Programs for 0 to 4 Years Old Filipino Children" (Early Childhood Care and Development Council 2015), which apply to all public child development centres (CDC) or learning centres (LC) and private-owned and managed CDCs/LCs. Private-run CDCs and LCs must be registered under the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and at the city or municipality where they operate. Private CDC/LCs include non-governmental organisations (NGO)-run and private employer-run.

Pedagogical infrastructure and age-appropriate learning inputs

Strength and Opportunities

The ECCD curriculum focuses on the total development of children and ensures the delivery of developmentally appropriate and culturally-appropriate, and inclusive early education. As an indispensable component of the ECCD Systems Framework, the ECCD Council approved the Learning Resource Package, which all LGU-run child development centres in the country are required to use. According to the childcare workers in this study, they received a series of training and seminars on implementing the routines and the activities specified in the LRP. Meanwhile, private-run childcare centres in this study have their curriculum to follow and routines to implement based on their educational philosophy. Regardless of what curriculum they use, all participants emphasized the importance of a warm, safe, and comfortable environment for the children. They value children's play and the development of skillsets children need to possess as they prepare for formal education and lifelong learning.

We have activities the whole day. In the morning, we have Circle Time where we greet each other, sing together... we ask how they are. We have Music and Art Time. We also bathe them here. We also have outdoor play for the sunlight. Then we eat. After eating, we take a nap... but our schedule is flexible and sensitive to children's needs. - Childcare worker 8, Private-run community-based creche

They have an organised learning environment. Children are comfortable because there is an air conditioner. They have a refrigerator, wash area, comfort room. The centre is orderly. There are toys, blocks, colouring materials, dominos and musical instruments. - Father 1, LGU-run childcare centre



Recreation Area of Kalinga Day Care Center, a government-owned/employer-run child minding centre, University of the Philippines, Quezon City. Photo credit: Rey M. Madriaga.

To support the developmental needs and varied interests of children, participating centre-based programmes in this study have learning areas like Reading and Writing Corner, which contains storybooks, colouring, writing, and drawing materials; Dramatic Play Area, which contain dolls, cook sets, clothes, and other toys useful for children's pretend play; and Manipulatives Corner, which contains puzzles, beads, and building blocks. Teacher-made and commercially prepared posters and other materials are also available. Sleeping Areas and Bath Areas are available in all centre-based programmes offering whole-day services. However, it was noticed that some learning materials promote gender stereotypes, and some centre equipment and furniture are not age-appropriate and unsafe for young children to use. Some shelves are too high for children to reach, electric sockets are not covered, and televisions, teachers' computers, and music players are usually within reach of children.

It is good that children interact with other children and with teachers. They learned to get along with others, play with them. They are also trained to follow instructions, taught how to colour, write, brush teeth, and wash hands. - Father 2, from State university/employer-run creche

They talk about the weather. The teacher reads stories and asks about the stories...they had a lesson about go, grow, and glow foods. One time the teacher asked the children if fruits are glow or grow foods. - Grandmother 1, Employer-run creche



Classroom of an LGU-run Child Development Centre, Iloilo City. Photo credit: Nane C. Yap.

Gaps and Challenges

Developed with extensive technical inputs from specialists, consultants, and practitioners of ECCD, the existing ECCD curriculum framework in the Philippines reflects areas of knowledge valued by families and society and presents sequenced models of learning to build young children's competencies. With the suspension of in-person sessions all over the country, childcare workers in this study were forced to hold distance learning and create weekly modules for parents and children to do at home.

While there is a good deal of agreement that a high-quality early education program is paramount, there are questions about how childcare workers unpack the LRP and how activities are co-constructed with the children to address children's diverse needs, interests, and social backgrounds in both development and humanitarian settings. A longitudinal study of Save the Children Philippines (2019) noted the lack of consistency in providing readily accessible learning materials to children at all times. In many classrooms observed, there were no materials for counting, and science materials were scarce. While some classrooms have learning materials and books for children, these were not readily accessible as they were placed on higher shelves. Likewise, a handful of childcare workers need to be reminded to use gender-equal language in classrooms and choose materials and activities that do not promote gender stereotypes.

There is no observation data in this research to document how childcare workers provide stimulation activities during the COVID-19 pandemic and whether they use gender equal language in dealing with children. However, interview data reveal that teacher-made activities distributed to the children during this pandemic are heavy on paper and pen activities and rote learning. Some childcare workers from LGU-run day centres and their supervisors shared that they do not have the technical capability to convert the LRPs to distance learning. On the other hand, families expressed their desire for in-person sessions to resume soon. According to them, they are not confident to be teachers of their children.

This is really difficult for the parents. You need patience when teaching the child using the modules provided to us. Your patience will be tested. The home setup has many distractions so you are not sure if the child is learning from you or not and whether the child is focused on the lessons. That is why we prefer the face-to-face. - Father 1, LGU-run childcare centre.

Sometimes, it is difficult. Other times, it is just fine because when the child is done with the drawing, she would play. Then you will guide her again in writing or drawing. You will tell the child to do this or that but sometimes she does not want to do it. Our concern with the lack of in-person classes is that the child does not know how to relate with others; does not know how to communicate with other children. - Uncle, LGU-run childcare centre

Physical Infrastructure, Safety/Health Standards, and Child to caregiver ratio

Strength and Opportunities

Data collected from childcare workers for this study divulged that there is a mixture of the types of structures and sizes of childcare centres, and where they are located. Childcare centres are usually constructed near the village or *barangay* halls or in available spaces near houses. Some centres are big enough with appropriate latrines and wash areas, an outdoor playground, and a kitchen, where hot meals are prepared for supplementary feeding. These LGU-run centres usually receive a good evaluation from DSWD during their annual accreditation period.

According to the Department of Social Welfare and Development, as of February 2021, there are 52,698 LGU-run ECCD centres in the Philippines. As of 2021, the ECCD Council has constructed 829 NCDCs in 1,489 municipalities and 122 cities. However, these are not enough to meet the demands of all children in the country. The slow progress in the construction of the NCDCs is attributed to low budget allocation for this item in the GAA in the last three years beginning in 2020. Interview data revealed that during annual budget deliberations, there is this general feeling among ECCD Council personnel that they are constantly begging for higher state subsidies for the construction of NCDCs, a manifestation that investment in ECCD is not the priority of the national government's financing.

Inadequate childcare centres were augmented by other forms of programmes for young children such as the Supervised Neighbourhood Play and other alternative modes of delivery such as the Kindergarten-On-Wheels (KOW) in Navotas City and KapitBahay-Aralan (KBA) of Save the Children Philippines in selected partner cities in Metro Manila.

Supervised Neighbourhood Play (SNP) is held in private houses and community centres and facilitated by childcare workers of the LGU. Like centre-based programmes, SNPs provide stimulation activities and supplementary feeding to children. On the other hand, KOW is a mobile learning unit, a container truck that moves around the city and parks strategically in areas based on the mapping conducted by the City Social Welfare and Development Office of Navotas together with the KOW teachers.



The truck used for the Kindergarten-On-Wheels, an LGU-run child development programme, Navotas City.
Photo credit: Karen Rose E. Besmanos - Damsani.



A child development worker reading a storybook to children inside the Kindergarten-On-Wheels, an LGU-run child development programme, Navotas City. Photo credit: Karen Rose E. Besmanos - Damsani.

In government-owned, employer-run and private creches in this research, which provide whole day services, there are sleeping rooms, indoor play and learning areas, recreation rooms, dining rooms, bathrooms, and kitchens. However, not all facilities in this study have an outdoor play area.



Sleeping Area of a government-owned/employer-run child minding centre, Quezon City

Gaps and Challenges

The inadequacy of quality physical infrastructure of childcare centres in the Philippines has been documented in the 2010 ECCD Council's State-Of-The-Art Review of Day Care Services in the Philippines or SOTAR. Despite the increase in the total number of ECCD centres in a decade, the key informants from DSWD and the ECCD Council revealed that these are not enough to cater to the needs of a huge number of children born each year. Consequently, the recommended teacher-child ratio of 1:10 for children three to four years old and 1:5 for infants and toddlers is often not met.

It must be noted that since most childcare centres were built before the implementation of the ECCD Council's "Standards and Guidelines for Center-based Early Childhood Programs for 0 to 4 Years Old Filipino Children", to date, many centres do not meet these standards. Some childcare centres were constructed near creeks and busy thorough fares posing danger to the safety and security of children and workers. Constructing a new facility would be too costly for the LGUs and would disrupt day care services for a long time. While construction of new ECCD centres with the financial support of the LGUs, private organisations, individuals, and parents was done in the last 11 years, there are still *barangay* or villages which do not have a permanent structure. In this case, day care services are provided in makeshift structures beside the *barangay* hall or in available spaces within the village. Many still do not have appropriate child latrines and wash areas. Children use the adult toilets in the *barangay hall*, multi-purpose hall or chapel. This situation is problematic because children and childcare workers do not have privacy, children are exposed to hazards, and interior spaces are not appropriate for children. Childcare

workers lamented that since day care services are provided in chapels or multipurpose halls, classes are suspended for a day or two and even weeks on end when there is a wake, a church activity, or meetings of organisations of persons with disabilities, solo parents and senior citizens. They are also forced to put away materials, furniture, and children's artworks and rearrange them again after the event.

The COVID-19 pandemic also resulted in many LGU-run childcare centres being converted into storage areas of relief goods for marginalised families most affected by the pandemic, or into quarantine facilities to remedy the inadequate health facilities in the LGU. Their kitchens were used to cook meals for healthcare workers and other frontliners.

There are no LGU-run childcare facilities in Navotas City and Marawi City that provide whole-day services. Meanwhile, Iloilo City has a childminding centre in the city hall for the free use of city hall employees. Likewise, the city had a childminding centre near the public market but the city council decided to close it for evaluation and identification of appropriate strategies to make it work better. The interviewee shared that, mothers who are vendors or workers in nearby establishments would drop off their children without food, extra clothes, and diapers. This put a lot of burdens to the childcare workers and centre managers, who would incur out-of-pocket expenses to feed the children.

Quality of Childcare providers

Strength and Opportunities

The Early Years Act of 2013 defined ECCD service providers as various professional, paraprofessionals, and volunteer caregivers who are directly responsible for the care and education of young children zero to four years old in centre-based and home-based programs.

Part of the said standards and guidelines is the establishment of the minimum qualifications of child development teachers (CDTs) and child development workers (CDWs). A CDT must have a bachelor's degree in Childhood Education or Elementary Education, preferably specializing in Early Childhood. In contrast, a CDW must have at least completed tertiary education.

Childcare workers interviewed in this study have long years of experience handling children despite the fact that some of them do not have security of tenure and social protection benefits from their employers. They view their work positively and recognise their contributions to child development. They expressed happiness in knowing that children learn basic concepts such as colours, shapes, the Filipino and English alphabets, children's songs, some prayers, and taking care of their bodies. They also found joy in knowing that parents and other caregivers respect them and trust them in teaching and caring for their children even for a short period of time during the day.

Gaps and Challenges

The survey by ECCD Council on the State-of-the-Art Review of Day Care Services in the Philippines or SOTAR indicated only 49 per cent of childcare workers have a bachelor's degree, while the rest have attended some college and others are high school graduates. Apart from not meeting the required minimum educational qualifications, many CDTs and CDWs did not have

adequate and up-to-date training. As of 2019, the ECCD Council, which provides technical support to LGUs, capacitated only 475 CDTs and 410 CDWs out of more than 49,000 child development workers (ECCD Council 2010).

In the same breath, some childcare workers in this study do not have bachelor's degrees or are high school graduates. While most of them are college graduates, their degrees are not necessarily related to early childhood or preschool education. Recognizing the lack, or the inadequacy of educational preparation, they regularly attend training, workshops, and seminars related to child's rights and protection, child development theories, developmentally appropriate practice, positive discipline, and creative learning experiences for children from the LGU, DSWD, NGOs, and private individuals. To quote a centre manager of a government employer-run creche: *"Not all our staff are college graduates. Even if they received training and attend seminars, it still matters if your degree is related to early childhood or education."*

The ECCD Council recommends having an ECCD focal person for each LGU. They are responsible for planning and developing policies and programmes based on data-driven reports and feedback, supervising and providing technical assistance to CDTs and CDWs. However, despite the competency standards for CDTs and CDWs and the increased LGU budget for social services, Save the Children Philippines noted a lack of competency standards for ECCD supervisors that will capacitate them in delivering a sustainable integrated ECCD programme anchored on the NCF.

Positive interactions between caregivers and children

Despite the big class size, parents and other family members interviewed for this study revealed that they are satisfied with how childcare workers are teaching their children. They found them committed, caring and warm, and easy to deal with. Below are some quotes from the participants.

I recognise the day care worker's capacity to teach my child. He is patient and loving and very focused in teaching the children. He is very devoted - Mother 3, from LGU-run child development centre

When former parents see me, they would say, you know I will enrol my younger child to the day care because my older child enjoyed the classes very much. -Centre manager 1, from LGU-run child development centre

Interview data from female childcare workers and centre managers reveal that many of them associate their work with mothering indicating that since they are mothers it is natural for them to be patient and provide warmth and care, and treat the children as their own. While there are male childcare workers in Navotas City and Iloilo City, females outnumber them. While male childcare workers are as good as their female counterparts in providing a stimulating environment, all of the male childcare workers have a reservation in assisting girls in the toilet, washing them up after defecation, and dressing them up because they might be charged with child abuse. On the hand, female childcare workers do not receive such comments and can freely assist all children regardless of their sex and gender. Below are some quotes from the participants.

It is easier for you to care for children if you are a woman because women understand how it is to care for children. Women are patient with children because they know how difficult it is for a mother to bear children. I treat children in my class like my own. -
Childcare Worker 3, Female from LGU-run child development centre.

I have assured parents that when their child who is a girl used the toilet, I would call an adult female to clean her up. I don't want to have issues with parents because of this. I am concerned that when I clean up girls, they will charge me with sexual harassment. -
Childcare Worker 13, Male from LGU-run child development centre.

Decent Work for Care Workers

Despite the availability of standards and guidelines in hiring childcare workers and their long years of service, these have not guaranteed them secure jobs and adequate remuneration. The Philippines still lacks a comprehensive legal policy to ensure decent work for childcare workers, leaving most of them in precarious conditions and without just compensation and security of tenure (Early Childhood Workforce Initiative, 2019).

Strength and Opportunities

The data collected for this study surfaces that childcare development workers are passionate and dedicated in their work. Some consider this as their “calling” and “vocation.” Cognizant of the importance of children’s formative years, childcare workers reported feeling inspired and fulfilled in seeing the positive development of their pupils. Another positive reinforcement cited by childcare workers is the moral support from children’s parents. Maintaining a good relationship with them is vital by keeping their communication lines open. Parents also extend support by volunteering to help the teachers with some work to maintain the child development centres.

The ECCD Council and the DSWD provide technical assistance to local government units implementing early childhood care and development. These government institutions continue to capacitate child development workers and ensure quality childcare. Childcare workers shared that even during the pandemic, they received training that helped them transition to the remote and modular teaching approach. However, in terms of remuneration, DSWD and ECCD Council can only encourage and advise LGUs to adequately remunerate their childcare workers.

The Local Government Code of 1991 devolved the provision of services and implementation of programmes from the national government to the local government units, including childcare and development services. Consequently, the local government unit at the municipal/city and barangay level plays a crucial role in the quality of labour conditions of childcare workers. However, interview data show that they receive varying levels of support from their local government. Some reported being satisfied with their local leaders’ support for childcare, while others noted improvements should be made.

There have been tremendous efforts from some local chief executives to grant childcare workers regular employment status with all the benefits and privileges afforded to permanent government employees.

In Navotas City, the clamour for just and fair treatment of childcare workers started from their collective effort through the full support of former Mayor John Rey Tiangco in 2010. However, it was not an easy thing to do. They received unfavourable comments from some members of the local council indicating a lack of recognition and appreciation of their contributions to the ECCD sector. In Iloilo City, qualified childcare workers were granted security of tenure through the initiatives of the late Mayor Mansueto "Mansing" Malabor who recognized the commitment and sacrifices of childcare workers and the importance of giving them tenure. One centre-manager shared:

The mayor recognised our hard work. He saw how we are relating to parents and children, and barangay officials. He also realised that day care workers earn very little. We used to earn only between Php500.00 (US\$9.80) to Php1,000.00 (US\$19.61) monthly. So, he made sure that those who are qualified will become permanent and will have security of tenure. - Centre manager 2, From LGU-run child development centre.

One interviewee from the national level shared that, the mayor of Mabalacat City, Pampanga has also institutionalised a system to ensure that there will be at least two childcare workers who will be granted a permanent status every year.

Gaps and Challenges

The range of monthly salary of childcare workers in LGU-run and government-run childcare centres interviewed for this study is between Php8,000.00 (US\$156.86) to Php19,000.00 (US\$372.55), with varying social protection benefits. Their employment status is inconsistent; some reported having a regular and permanent post with health insurance, retirement package, paid leaves, 13th month pay, clothing allowance, and other bonuses. Salaries of childcare workers with permanent status ranges from Salary Grade 1 equivalent to Php10,000.00 (US\$196.00) to Salary Grade 8 equivalent to Php19,500.00 (US\$372.55). The Philippine minimum daily wage vary from region to regions. For Metro Manila, it is Php533.00 to Php570.00 (US\$10.45 to 11.18); for Region VI, Php410.00 to Php450 (US\$8.04 to 8.82), and for BARRM, Php306.00 to 341.00 (US\$6.00 to 6.69)²⁰.

Others are in a contractual or casual position where they do not have any benefits and the no work no pay policy applies to them. Many childcare workers in this study lamented that they had to be a volunteer teacher for years receiving only between Php500.00 (US\$9.80) to Php1,000.00 (US\$19.61) a month, before being officially hired by their city government as a child development teacher or worker.

...19 years in total... 10 years as a casual employee with a monthly honorarium of Php5,000.00 (\$98.04), then 9 years as a permanent employee of the LGU. I have a bachelor's degree and passed the Civil Service examination. I applied for this position when a day care worker retired. That is the only way to have a permanent position...you can only apply to the job when somebody has retired or resigned. Up until then, you are a contractual employee. - Childcare worker 6, Female, from LGU-run child development centre

²⁰ Daily Minimum Wage Rates. <https://nwpc.dole.gov.ph/>

Apart from handling children above the ideal adult-child ratio, meaning they have to do more work despite being inadequately remunerated, the LGU assigns them to do other tasks such as assisting in meetings for other sectors such as solo parents and persons with disabilities, assist during calamities and emergencies, and distributing pensions for senior citizens. During the COVID-19 pandemic, most of them were tapped to pack relief goods and distribute the social amelioration package (SAP) of the government to poor and disadvantage residents who are most affected by the pandemic. With the precarious nature of their employment, they cannot easily beg off from this added and risky work. To quote:

Day care workers here are all-round workers. We do plenty of things like packing relief goods, helping senior citizens, and assisting in SAP distribution. Sometime we assist senior citizens. It is okay because we want to help. We are thinking that this is helping others. - Male childcare worker 3, from LGU run child development centre

The same working conditions were reported in government-owned, employer-based, and private childminding centres or creches. The only difference is that their monthly salaries comply with the minimum wage set by the government. For some childcare workers, they receive additional payments for their social security contributions and health insurance. Rather than their employers, they are the ones remitting it the Social Security System²¹ and PhilHealth

Because of there is no employer-employee relationship, the labour lawyer interviewed for this project, described their condition as "*in the purgatory*" because even if their labour rights are violated, they cannot file any legal case in either at the Civil Service Commission (CSC) or the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE). The lawyer is not aware of any test legal case related to the work conditions of childcare workers in the Philippines.

The written response of the Bureau of Workers with Special Concerns (BWSC) of DOLE stated that while there are no organized child workers registered as unions, whether in the private or public sectors, there are 34 day care workers registered as workers' association with, 1,065 total recorded memberships. The Bureau added that "*workers' association refer to organizations without definite employers, and organized for the mutual aid and protection of its members or any legitimate purpose other than collective bargaining. Therefore, these registered workers' associations are not eligible to make demands regarding their work conditions through collective bargaining agreement.*"

One of the fundamental rights of workers should be the right to organize themselves and demand better labour conditions. However, childcare workers who do not have security of tenure and are considered under the no employee-employer relationship scheme cannot officially join unions. This means they cannot participate in collective negotiation agreements (CNA) and collective bargaining agreements (CBA) with their employers. They also do not have the same benefits as regular employees. Unfortunately, this experience is common among child development workers in the Philippines. Their salaries and labour conditions are tied to the signed contracts with their respective local government unit or government institution. One

²¹ The Social Security System is the social security institution providing universal and equitable social protection for employees of the private sector and is open for voluntary contributors.

childcare worker shared, *"We are members of the employees' union here but we do not have voting power and we cannot participate in collective negotiation because we are merely contractual employees."*

In an interview with the national federation president of day care workers, it was mentioned that the federation is still pushing to pass the Magna Carta for Day Care Workers into law. When passed into legislation, the magna carta will serve as a legal framework that mandates the creation of regular government positions for child development workers in the country, which will significantly contribute to ensuring decent work for CDWs. This will grant them security of tenure, benefits, social protection measures, and other privileges. However, despite being passed in its third and final reading in the House of Representatives in 2017 (Villanueva 2017), its legislative status remains pending on the second reading in the Senate (Senate of the Philippines 2018).

The political will and priority issues of policymakers determine the enactment of the bill. The absence of this legal framework perpetuates the cycle of unjust labour practices and precarity experienced by childcare workers. Their lack of decent work is a product of combined unfair labour practices in the Philippines and undervalued reproductive care. According to the 2021 ITUC Global Rights Index, the Philippines remains one of the ten worst countries for workers (International Trade Union Confederation 2021).

Discussion

By and large, the review of literature and the interview data in this study reveal a robust, comprehensive, and integrated body of legislative frameworks and policy backdrop for the establishment, implementation, funding, monitoring, and evaluation of programmes and services related to ECCD. Apart from LGU-run childcare centres, there are government-owned, employer-run, private, and community-based childminding centres or creches, which families can rely on for half-day and whole-day of childcare services. Despite the limited hours of operations of LGU-run childcare centres of around three hours per day, the service is also recognised to reduce and redistribute childcare responsibilities of families, especially of mothers. In the process of sending their children to these childcare centres, which provide organised learning programmes to address developmental, psychosocial, health and nutritional needs of children, mothers in both formal and informal economy have the opportunity to establish good working relationships with other mothers, participate in decision-making related to the operations of the centres, and have time to socialize with other parents and community members.

Despite being considered a front-runner in Southeast Asia in creating enabling legislative and policy environment, and standards for ECCD (UNESCO and SEAMEO 2018), there remains a question why reforms have not transformed the ECCD sector on the ground and why leading government agencies and LGUs have found it challenging to translate policy and structural reforms and programmatic adjustments into large-scale, integrated and sustained outcomes for children and childcare workers.

The current setup of the ECCD Council Governing Board (GB) intends to boost ECCD outcomes through the combined efforts of the DOH, DSWD, DepEd, NNC, and ULAP. However, ensuring efficient information flow and collaborative decision-making among these agencies remains challenging because some agency mandates overlap, and boundaries for

accountabilities are obfuscated. The most glaring overlaps in management and financing are related to early education, parenting support interventions, and nutrition programs. Interviewees at the national level explained that the ECCD Council GB recommends policies, programmes, and activities and provides technical support, but it is up to the local chief executives how and when to execute them.

Familiar with the relative autonomy of the LGUs in implementing social services such as ECCD programmes is how they see it fit. While the ECCD Council has established ECCD standards, capacity building programmes for ECCD workers, and parenting interventions, the challenge lies in the fact that the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) is not part of the ECCD Council GB. As a national agency that has jurisdiction over LGUs, the DILG has the authority to issue policies and procedures to harmonise local planning, investments, and revenue management at the local level. Despite the absence of the DILG in the ECCD Council GB, over the years a huge portion of the ECCD Council's budget has been driven by the cost of establishing NCDC facilities in an LGU-designated area, purchasing of equipment, converting or remodelling of day care centres to NCDCs in LGUs. Since the establishment of the ECCD Council, it has cascaded numerous policies and guidelines to LGUs for implementation. There has been this understanding that as a policy-making body, the ECCD Council takes the initiative to set directions for the integrated ECCD programme. During the COVID-19 pandemic, rather than conceptualising how to continue ECCD services appropriate to the circumstances on the ground, LSWDOs and private learning centres waited for two months for the ECCD Council to issue the advisory²² for the opening of ECCD programs for 0 to 4 years old and implementing "Center-Based Program in Alternative Venues (CBPAV). Hence, ECCD services were discontinued for more than six months until the resumption of services in October 2020. Upon receipt of the said advisory, interviewees in the study lamented that they were left on their own to interpret and implement it in redesigning the existing curriculum for remote or blended learning with very little technical support from the ECCD Council. This situation has again blurred accountability lines between governing boards at the national and local levels.

Behind the laudable nationwide and local initiatives to promote child's rights and strengthen the ECCD System, availability of a variety of funding provisions, and the establishment of a wide array of ECCD programmes, including centre-based, home-based, SNP, and alternative modes of delivery, the persistent issues confronting the sector are its insensitivity to the plight of a great majority of ECCD service providers who have become part of the huge informal economy with little or no form of social protection, inadequate quality childcare facilities to accommodate the significant number of children born each year, and scarcity of quality and affordable creches or childminding centres that allow mothers to engage in the labour market.

In examining the plight of childcare workers and identifying barriers to their social protection and wellbeing, it is essential to dig below the surface of culturally ascribed roles to identify the fundamental cultural assumptions of why despite the non-recognition and valuing of their care work, they remain committed to their job; a consequence of feminisation of the ECCD sector in the country.

²² ECCD Council Advisory No. 1. Series of 2020. Preparation for the Opening of National Child Development Centers (NCDCs), Child Development Centers (CDCs)/Day Care Centers (DCCs) and Private Learning Centers (PLCs) Offering Programs for 0 to 4 Years Old Children

The available literature in the Philippines and interview data in this research are in line with foreign literature stating that working in ECCD settings is often associated with surrogate mothering, denoting that it is natural for females, especially mothers, to provide warmth and care (Adriany and Warin 2014; Balfour and Vittoria 2016; Tongson 2021). Hence, their employment status is a glaring manifestation of a serious gender issue in the labour market in general and in the ECCD sector in particular. Despite all the things they have to endure in caring for hundreds of children a day, helping unload families' caring duties, and allowing mothers and fathers to participate in the labour market, many childcare workers in public and private childcare centres in the Philippines have insufficient incomes to support themselves and their families. The low educational attainment of many childcare workers draws attention to their lack of social capital, forcing them to accept jobs that pay so little and work in a precarious situation. These women's traditional role as mother highlights that their productive work is merely an extension of their reproductive work at home. It only shows that they carry their less important and subordinated status even within the confines of childcare centres.

The recent WEF reports in 2020 and 2021 indicate that there is no gender gap in access to education and that more females finish college, making them eligible to participate in the labour market and pursue a career. While the MCW and EO 340 have made way for the establishment of day care centres or creches in government and private offices, the shortage of quality, accessible and affordable childcare services that operate the whole day for at least eight hours in many communities, government and private offices has been observed for the longest time. Interview data show that establishing this type of programme is not the priority of many local chief executives and the ECCD Council because they focus heavily on establishing NCDCs, implementing the newly established ECCD standards, and addressing the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic. The availability of informal, cheap childcare services rendered by poor, less educated migrant female workers from the countryside and the extended closely-knit family system have made the need for formal childcare programmes not visible in a society that does not automatically value women's unpaid care work. Interview data from mothers and service providers reveal that many mothers in their communities leave work to take care of their young children. It seems automatic that when women give birth, the home is where they should belong. However, recognising the need to contribute financially to the family, mothers engage in multiple, part-time, low-paying livelihoods such as doing errands for other people, cleaning and washing clothes and selling vegetables and other small items. These findings are similar to earlier studies where mothers expressed their desire to engage in gainful employment, but domestic responsibilities and child-rearing prohibited them from participating in the labour market (Tongson 2019; Tayag-Binuya and Tongson 2021).

With adolescent pregnancy declared as a "national social emergency" (Commission on Population and Development 2020) and the median age of marriage for females at 27 years old (Philippine Statistics Authority 2018), coupled with the lack of reliable and inexpensive childcare services means that more young mothers will not participate fully in the labour market for many years. It emanates from the conceptual viewpoint that the home is essentially the women's domain and that mothers should be the primary caregivers of young children (Ofreneo 2005), responsible for meeting their every basic need throughout the childhood period and preparing them for formal schooling (Tayag-Binuya and Tongson 2021). These tasks take many years to accomplish and

even longer for mothers with several children, a manifestation of the unsuccessful implementation of the RPRH Law and ineffective SRHR education in the Philippines. By the time children are old enough to be independent, their mothers, especially poor and less-educated, are considered too old to re-enter the labour market that has changed dramatically and fiercely, requiring a new set of aptitudes. With an outdated set of skills, these mothers forfeited enormous opportunities to establish a career, build their social capital, and receive social protection, including a comprehensive health insurance and a decent retirement package necessary for old age. Consequently, the situation fails to liberate them from economic dependence on their husbands or partners, making them more prone to violence and abuse that result in low self-esteem and mental health issues.

All the more, this study should highlight the role played by local chief executives, local councils, childcare workers and the families they serve, the public and private sectors, and civil society in providing women more choices and establishing enabling mechanisms in addressing both their practical needs and strategic gender interests. With the provisions under the Local Government Code, the local chief executives have the power to turn the tide in favour of childcare workers, children, and their parents, especially their mothers. In accordance with the international commitments and local legal frameworks, there is now a distinct obligation to uplift their status and recognise the importance of accessible, affordable, and quality childcare programmes, including childminding centres or creches to advance the need for a strategic positioning to target the wellbeing of children and their families as well as the wellbeing and social protection of childcare workers.

The Early Years Act of 2013 was a response to the clamour for a comprehensive and integrated ECCD programmes and services that also operate within the purview of the LGUs. With this scenario, it should be noted that the varying capacities, resources, and interests of LGUs and their local executives' priorities shape the trajectory of childcare investments at the local and national levels. With more financial backing brought about by the full implementation of the Mandanas Ruling in 2022, and the required utilization of the GAD budget for gender-related matters, as stipulated in the MCW, including financing child development centres and paying for salaries of CDTs/CDWs, LGUs are expected to have higher allocations for childcare services in the years to come. While it is easier to state that LGUs should do this and reflect it in the Comprehensive Development Plan, the absence of the available data on how much should be allocated for financing the ECCD sector at the national and local level remains a concern. With the focus of many decision makers and policy implementors on short-term political gains, they often overlook or dismiss the long-term positive human development outcomes available in the vast literature when they invest in ECCD. On the other hand, workplaces not covered by EYA of 2013 provisions may adhere to the provisions specified in the Magna Carta of Women in establishing day care services or creches.

3. Policy Recommendations for investments in childcare

Scrutinizing mothers' unpaid care work and examining the precarity of work of childcare workers in the country exposed the systematic transfer of invisible, unrecognized, and unaccounted subsidies to the rest of the economy (ILO 2018). As families outsource portions of childcare workers' services without appropriate compensation and social protection fortify the inherent

inequalities in the ECCD sector. Hence, a gendered understanding of the issues in the ECCD sector may direct policies and programmes to make them gender transformative and contribute to the attainment of SDG 5 and gender parity in other SDG targets.

Having economic means and reducing women's domestic work permit them to have more choices and provide them the power to decide for themselves. Taking from this point, the state is an essential component in realising sustainable childcare investments that provide universal support to all children and parents, especially mothers regardless of their social backgrounds and economic status. Following the levels of support expressed in the NCF requires looking into populations who are most vulnerable like children and parents with disabilities and developmental delays, living in abusive homes and located in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas who are more likely to suffer greatly due to economic shocks and other hazards.

In view of the findings of this report the following action points are recommended to recognise, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work of women while rewarding those who provide childcare services.

Recognize, Reduction, and Redistribution

With gender mainstreaming as a strategy, the Philippines does not lack the legal frameworks and enabling mechanisms for gender equality, but pushing for greater participation of women in the labour market requires recognising the inextricable links of their unpaid and paid care work to the rest of the economy. However, the lack of evidence that the Philippine government monitors unpaid care work is the most glaring data gap in understanding gender inequality in the country and achieving SDG 5.

Across the globe, it is a well-known fact that caring for young children keeps most mothers away from the labour market. Along this line, NEDA noted that Filipino women quit their jobs when they get married and have children (Cabegin and Gaddi 2019). Thus, it is necessary that determining the demand for childcare at home, the community level, and at the workplace must be based on qualitative and quantitative data. Investing in a national and local time-use study and other related studies that examine community and workplace culture and childcare practices can be the first step in addressing the reasons why many Filipino women are not in the labour market and why unpaid care is not mainstreamed in the work discourse in the country.

With the Mandanas Ruling at their doorstep and most of the functions of the national government devolved to the LGUs, this study accentuates that LGUs are best positioned to strengthen the existing ECCD programmes and services in the community level. Unlike the GAD budget of at least five per cent of the total annual budget and SEF allocation of one per cent, ECCD financing does not have a required or even a recommended amount to be set aside from the annual budget to fund programmes and services. While the GAD and SEF allotment are implemented in most LGUs, they are used for other purposes such as women's health and campaign to end violence against women and children (VAWC) and providing financial support to elementary and high school education, respectively. Following the recommendation of Vargas-Barón (2008), the Philippine government should spend at least 0.5% to 1% of the GDP to parent and early education and progressively earmark 14% to 20% up to a maximum of 25% of its

education budget in ECCD, and parent education spread across five to 10 years. In the same breath, LGUs may adopt this direction by allocating a maximum of 25% of their IRA to ECCD programmes and services. With the increased allocation for childcare services, private creches offering services to children below the age of five should receive subsidies and other incentives from the LGU where these facilities are located. Likewise, private community-based and home-based creches should be encouraged with subsidies and technical support from the ECCD Council. Government offices may follow suit by allocating 25 % of their GAD budget to establish childminding services within their office premises.

While this prospect may seem encouraging, the 2022 ECCD Council's budget is merely 0.06 % of the 2022 DepEd budget. Meanwhile, the ECCD budget at the LGU level is computed using various permutations. Nevertheless, the recommendation of using the people's taxes to fund childminding centres entirely is a wise investment.

With the increasing incidence of teenage pregnancy, adolescent mothers who have become among the most vulnerable are a particular group needing special attention. RPRH Law guarantees access to age-and developmentally-appropriate SRHR programmes and services. However, another law needs to complement it providing adolescent parents supportive non-judgmental environments at home, school, and community. It is essential to ensure that adolescent parents, especially mothers, no longer experience repeated unplanned pregnancies that prevent them from finishing school and eventually participating in the labour market. Hence, there has been a solid clamour for passing Senate Bill 1224 or the "Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Act." When promulgated, it will guarantee the establishment of publicly-funded creches in schools of adolescent parents.

Empowering women also requires involving the men in domestic matters by increasing their participation in unpaid care work at home. Specifically, conducting PES, developing and distributing appropriate and inclusive materials related to gender equality and women empowerment, egalitarian homes, gender-responsive parenting to parents and caregivers in all ECCD programmes should be done.

Paternity leaves permit fathers to take individual time to share in childrearing, allowing them to bond with their children and providing mothers time for themselves and pursuing their interests such as studying, working, and self-care. In the Philippines, paternity leaves coincided with the child's birth and lasted for 14 days providing the fathers time to assist the mother in caring for the newly born. While the increase from 7 to 14 days has been a positive development, there is no law providing paternity leaves to assist the mothers during their children's growing years. Providing additional paid universal paternity leaves of 24 days spread in one year is recommended for fathers with children 0 to 6 years old. This way, fathers will have at least two days off to share caring responsibilities with their wives or partners.

Interview data in this study revealed that childcare workers are overworked and underpaid. To address this issue, the ECCD Council and LGUs must review the existing competency standards and implement an appraisal framework to ensure fulfilling work conditions for all childcare workers.

Reward

The continuous contractualization of work creates precarious work conditions for childcare workers. They must continue to pursue efforts in ensuring budgetary allocations for their just compensation and social protection. Steps should veer towards universality and gender-responsiveness, leading to the passage of the Magna Carta for Day Care Workers to include all childcare workers providing formal care services in public and private childcare centres. The enactment into law of this monumental bill is not only necessary but urgent.

With the varying salaries of childcare workers in the Philippines, the ECCD Council, in consultation with the LGUs, Department of Budget and Management, must revisit the salary grading of childcare workers to ensure salary standardisation to reflect labour market remuneration trends.

Providing incentives to parents in the informal economy and contractual employees with tax breaks and paid leaves of at least five days a year to attend to familial responsibilities such as taking the child to a doctor, attending moving up day ceremonies, and enrolment, among others.

Programmes and services must be designed to support stay-at-home mothers who have lost the opportunity to engage in gainful employment, secure social protection, and attend to their personal development. The budget for these programmes and services and payment for social security and health insurance can be allocated from the LGU's annual GAD budget and the ECCD budget. Educational programmes must be based on the interests and needs of stay-at-home mothers and not merely on the ideas of local policymakers, programme implementors, and experts.

Represent

With many children born each year in the Philippines, it should be no surprise that the ECCD sector is continuously growing. Intensifying efforts in attaining gender parity positively impact economic growth and personal development. With more mothers breaking the cycle of low economic productivity through establishing state-run community-based or home-based creches, they will have time to participate in matters that affect themselves, their families, and communities. By granting tenure and social protection for all childcare workers, they will have the power to negotiate and enter into CNA with their employers. Apart from these, the following steps can be taken.

- Actively involve all parents in decision-making related to ECCD programmes and services by establishing parent cooperatives and organisations and strengthening existing ones.
- Actively involve childcare workers in decision-making by encouraging unionisation and providing platforms for social dialogue to foster collective negotiation and bargaining with their employers.
- Strengthen the role of the National Federation of Daycare Workers and similar organisations by providing capacity-building programmes and fora for promoting their rights and solidarity.

Appendices

Respondents

Table 5. Type of Respondents

Type of Respondents	<i>f</i>
Care providers	17
Policymaker (national)	8
User	9
TOTAL	34

Table 6. Type of Care Providers

Type of Care Providers	<i>f</i>
Childcare Workers	13
Centre Managers	4
TOTAL	17

Table 7. Type of Policymaker

Type of Policymaker	
National	
Division Chief DWSD	1
Representative of the Office of Senator Hontiveros	1
Deputy Executive Director ECCD Council	1
Director of Bureau of Workers with Special Concerns	1
Local	
City Mayor	1
City Councilor	1
	8

Table 8. Type of User

Type of User	<i>f</i>
Mother	4
Father	2
Grandmother	1
Uncle	1
TOTAL	9

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