

# WHEN CHILDREN PLAY, THEY LEARN

Investing in the early years is one of the smartest things a country can do for equity and long-term prosperity.

## WHY IT MATTERS

Early childhood experiences have a profound impact on brain development, affecting learning, health, behavior, and ultimately, lifetime opportunities. Yet millions of young children are not reaching their full potential due to a lack of nurturing care and support, which include adequate nutrition and health, early stimulation, and protection from stress. The right investments in the physical, cognitive, linguistic, and social-emotional development of young children—from before birth through their transition to primary school—are critical to put children on the path to success in school and beyond.

## OUR APPROACH

High-quality programs that help children learn through play are needed to prepare them to succeed. The World Bank works with governments and partners to develop and implement policies and programs that expand access to quality early childhood education and meet the developmental needs of all children. Our strategy takes a coordinated approach that recognizes the special challenges of poverty, gender exclusion, conflict, and disability. Gaps in cognitive and social-emotional development in children's early years, before they start school, can limit children's ability to take advantage of primary school and realize their full potential. Our approach is designed to create the enabling environments that nurture skills for success in school and in life.



We leverage experts in education, nutrition, health, and social protection to build an evidence base, so that countries can craft programs that fit their needs and are also cost-effective.

## OUR PRIORITIES:

### **1 Access to quality early learning services and programs**

We support countries in achieving their ambitious goals of increasing access to early learning opportunities, while also ensuring quality. Our efforts include improving early education through better curricula and benchmarks for success, and strengthening parental engagement in children's development. We are developing an evidence-based roadmap of the cognitive and social-emotional skills formed in the early years and how children acquire them; identifying curricula that foster these pre-academic competencies; and establishing benchmarks for quality early childhood education systems, including minimum standards for instructors, professional development, and facilities.

### **2 Cost-effective approaches to deliver early learning interventions**

We are working with development partners and experts to identify good practices on early childhood education, factoring in feasibility and affordability. This includes strategic engagement with the non-state sector.

### **3 Metrics on early learning outcomes and service quality**

We are creating a core set of globally comparable metrics that countries will be able to collect in their regular national household surveys to better understand and track children's development trajectories. The measures will generate critical data on children's cognitive and social-emotional development, and on the quality of pre-primary learning environments.

### **4 Promotion of early childhood development in conflict-affected and fragile areas**

Toxic stress in the early years can weaken and damage children's brain architecture and social-emotional development, with lifelong repercussions for learning and health. Given the increasing number of children growing up in fragile and conflict-affected areas, including as refugees, we are working to identify promising approaches for the delivery of cost-effective early childhood education programs that can protect and nurture the development of these children, despite the harsh conditions in which they live.

