

Children at risk: Global views on challenges facing children

by Roger Neugebauer

Members of the World Forum community were invited to respond to the question: "What is the most urgent challenge facing young children in your country?" Here are some of their responses:

— Africa —

Cameroon

Insecurity: Young children face lots of insecurity, both from health hazards and poor parenting practices. There does not exist any parenting education program to help especially young parents face the challenges of parenting with confidence. As such, children suffer from neglect, deprivation, and related violence from the very people who are supposed to protect them. This also includes poor nutrition that is perpetrated by poverty, large family sizes, cultural practices, and limited birth control practices

*Jamils Richard Achunji Anguaseh
 Global Welfare Association (GLOWA)*

Kenya

Both indoor and outdoor spaces are small, resulting in overcrowded classrooms with poor ventilation. Many of the centers have no consistent school feeding program, which is one major challenge considering that children cannot concentrate with empty stomachs. The teacher to child ratio is appalling. Faced with a huge number of children

teachers are overwhelmed, resulting in lack of class control. The class infrastructure is dilapidated in most cases; classes are congested, and there are limited tools for either indoor or outdoor activities.

Janet Ndeto Mwitiki

International Child Resource Institute

Nigeria

Poverty, with its concomitant effects such as malnutrition, diseases, and squalor, is the most urgent challenge facing young children in Nigeria. Most families are poor, the cost of living is extremely high, and the basic necessities of life are beyond the reach of most families. The health indicators are still high. There is wide-spread ignorance of the needs and rights of young children. Besides, the cultural orientations are not in favor and in line with best practices of childrearing. The culture of children living away from home is a problem for many, depriving them of their basic needs.

Many school-aged children are out of school for diverse reasons, including street begging, and there is no social safety net for families — Nigeria is not a welfare country.

The effects of polygamy and large families, tied up with men's ego and

prestige, constitute a big barrier. There is no appreciation of the benefits of the early years and low commitment is given to the issues of ECD at all levels.

In the quest for basic needs, parents are out all day struggling to make ends meet at the expense of their children's health and welfare. Family cohesion is being eroded and the extended family network is no longer active. The government does not seem able to cater for the needs of its people, despite all the election promises. There is a wave of insecurity in the country, which ultimately affects the family, such as high incidence of road traffic accidents, kidnapping, high unemployment, etc.

*Margaret Abosede Akinware
 Early Child Care Development and Training Initiative (ECDTI)*

Sierra Leone

The absence of learning resource materials. Sitting accommodation and school buildings are seldom available. The poor knowledge of early child development in 96% of the child care centers. The need for wet feeding, as most kids go to their care centers hungry, which cause unhealthiness.

*Kevin F W Thoronka
 ChildHelp Sierra Leone*

South Africa

The child-rearing skills of young parents impact children's self worth and feeling secure in their environment. Young parents, themselves, fall short of sound values and principles, especially with the introduction of democracy. Everyone knows their rights, yet few attach responsibility aspects to it. As a result, children are growing up feeling and behaving like they are 'entitled' to whatever they want or need.

Blossom Ngwevela

Early Learning Resource Unit

Tanzania

In my country the major challenges facing young children are:

- *Poverty.* Many families still live under the poverty line. Lack of adequate basic needs causes many children to be malnourished; hence they become vulnerable to so many diseases.
- *Poor infrastructure.* Many hospitals do not have adequate medicines and trained personnel to serve young children.
- *Inadequate awareness* among people and institutions of the importance of investing in early years.

Benedict Missani

*Ministry of Community Development
Gender and Children*

— Europe —

Belgium

The early childhood system in Belgium is universal and free of charge from the age of 2 years and six months. But the ECE system is still much too focused on white middle-class children of Belgian origin. The greatest challenge for the future will be to adapt the ECE system to the growing number of children whose first language is not Dutch or French (the official languages of Belgium). In the large cities, between 40% and 60% of the children at home speak a language other than French or Dutch.

Jan Peeters

University Ghent

Denmark

The most serious challenge facing young children in Denmark today is that they are the world's most institutionalized children. When a Danish child is 1 year old, his parents take him to day care. Eighty-five percent of Danish 1-year-old children are in day care centers, and the figure is as high as 96% of all children between 3 and 5 years, according to Statistics Denmark in 2007. The number of children in the day care system increased substantially from 1990 to 2000 — 307,800 to 548,400 children, an increase of 78%. The growing need for child care is due to Danish parents who work a lot.

Since the municipal reform took effect in January 2007 and the number of municipalities was reduced from 275 to 98, 14 counties were abolished and Denmark was divided into five regions. The municipalities have bad economies; they continue spending less money on public services. The explanation is the financial crisis and rising costs to the special needs area, which municipalities are now responsible for after the counties were abolished.

Early Childhood Education and Day Care Centers are also affected by the cutbacks and have to dismiss teachers. There will then be fewer adults to more children. Institutions merge to form larger units; there are fewer resources for trips out of the center, lower quality of food in day care centers, more uneducated assistants and more children to fewer teachers. It becomes harder to spot and help vulnerable children. Less time for each child means that it is harder for the institutions to meet the requirements of the *Act on Day Care, Recreational and After School Club facilities, etc. for children and adolescents*, which the Danish parliament passed in May 2007.

The overall purpose of this law is to provide a day care service to children

and youth that could contribute to their well being, development, and learning; prevent negative social heritage; and offer flexibility and choice for the families and consistency and continuity between the different services.

What happens at the moment is that teachers feel that life has become more and more stressful. Absence due to illness is increasing. There are fewer hands, especially in the morning and in the afternoon. Everyday life in the day care follows a particular pattern, and there is not much time for real educational work. It seems more like assembly line work, and children's curiosity and creativity are rarely stimulated. A survey in March of this year shows that the situation has changed dramatically in the last 25 years. In 1986 there were 7.5 children per teacher; today the number is 11.6 children per teacher. The teachers feel they are reduced to guardians, though they feel powerless. They can ensure that children get dressed when it's cold, that they get something to eat, and that they are not fighting on the playground. The rest is up to the kids.

It is not easy to give care and stimulation that should support each child's all-round development and self-esteem and help children get a comfortable upbringing. Fewer adults also mean more scolding and there is no time and energy to speak appreciatively and see and listen to and understand all the kids.

More children are diagnosed as needing special help. It is predicted that children at school-age will be less ready for school and that there will be a greater demand for educational psychological counseling. It is a very negative development.

A report prepared by the Danish National Centre for Social Research suggests otherwise; recruiting appropriately qualified staff means

having qualified teachers in the day care centers, and will be a great way to counteract social exclusion and reduce the number of support demands for children and discourage more young people from falling into crime.

Early childhood education and care in Denmark in the 1970s was characterized by optimism, but the spirit has slowly drowned in savings, paperwork, and downsized professionalism over the years. Experts say that the Danish day care sector is now in need of a radical reform in which presence, contact, care, and language stimulation should be given top priority.

*Helle Nebelong
Sansehaever.dk*

Estonia

In Estonia more and more children go to day care (1,5 - 7 years old), especially younger children. One problem is transition from home to day care institution and transition from kindergarten to school. School readiness is an important topic in Estonian society. We have quite big differences between schools according to quality. Parents want the best school for their children. But this is not a democratic understanding. One challenge is preschool teachers' partnership with parents. Not all parents have time for good cooperation with kindergarten. Parents who work far from their home (many fathers in Finland and other countries) do not have enough time for their children.

Early childhood education in Estonia is child-centered and play-centered. Children learn through play and activities. There are no lessons, but there are activities. In new curriculum for day care institutions (2008), play and integrated learning have an important place. One problem is that there are no male teachers. Young children would be happy if there are also some male teachers in their day care center.

*Marika Veisson
Tallinn University*

Italy

Considering that I live in a country with a tradition of a 'family-oriented society,' my experience so far working with families and young children has shown me that Italian children tend to be born into one-child families where the upbringing practices tend to be rather 'over-protective' and 'controlling.' I feel that a child's spirit of initiative and sense of independence do not develop until much later. Children are told what to do and how to behave by adults and if their behaviors do not fall within the norm, there is normally no room for dialogue, reasoning, reflection, or risk taking on behalf of the adult. On the other hand, children in one-child families tend to be very spoiled and parents tend to be more on the 'permissive' end of the spectrum, thus transmitting a number of conflicting messages that impact, in my view, interpersonal relationships and the general social development of young children.

When I watch and listen to interactions between adults and young children, I tend to notice behaviors that fall into two extreme categories: the 'submissive' child and the 'ruling' child. Linked to these upbringing practices, I feel I ought to add the impact the 'free for all' exposure to mass media and new technologies are having on young children in Italy. Many of the issues raised at Diane Levin's group sessions at the 2011 World Forum on Early Care and Education in Honolulu are beginning to become routine issues here in Italy, too, and new challenges for us in the education field.

*Eugenia Papadaki
Play English*

Moldova

Many children, particularly in rural areas, do not have the needed support for their development and learning due to poverty, neglect (as many are left behind by job-searching migrant parents), and non-existent or low-quality educational services. Also, there is no

support for young parents in developing better parenting skills. A consequence, as some studies show, is some discrepancy in school readiness between rural and urban children.

*Cornelia Cincilei
Step by Step*

Slovenia

It is hard to answer this question with one answer as children live in very different conditions and circumstances. For some of them we can say that they are coping with very serious intentions of their parents to develop even more capacities in order "to be competent members in the society of knowledge and market," forgetting the fact about their primary needs (for play, being together with loving adults, having friends for play, exploring the world on their own way and pace, etc.). On the other hand, differences among children's home environments are bigger and bigger and preschool programs are coping with this diversity, demands from parents, obligatory school system, and children's needs. Additionally, we are still coping with efforts to involve the most vulnerable children in preschool programs.

*Tatjana Vonta
Step by Step Slovenia*

Sweden

The Swedish education system is going through changes when the government is revising the preschool curricula, implementing a new preschool teacher training program, and introducing a system for preschool teacher certification. The focus of both the revised curriculum and the new preschool teacher training program is on content areas such as language, mathematics, technology and science, as well as documentation, evaluation, and didactical issues. The ambition is to make preschool more learning oriented, and these changes will affect our children.

*Anette Sandberg
Mälardalens University*

— Arab Region —

Egypt

Actually Egypt today is not the Egypt of yesterday. Egypt is changing due to the latest political changes and we must change the way we perceive Egypt. Therefore, the main challenge in my view would be how to introduce Egyptian children to democratic values, and ensure the right for expression, which should be a reflection of the latest democratic changes in Egypt due to the latest revolution. Such types of democracy in education result in a sense of empowerment by the children, and the freedom to make meaningful choices regarding their lives and futures.

*Ahmed Al Damrawy
National Union for ECD*

Iran

In my country the most challenges that young children are facing are:

- Economic and political hardship, which causes depression in families
- Forcing academics into early years
- Trying to impose views of religion on children in every way
- Lack of enough knowledge about developmentally appropriate practice, so every center does almost whatever it pleases
- Government's limited perspective on what needs to be done for the development of the young child.

*Mehra Jalili
Mehraeen Child Development Center*

Iraq

- Poor education facilities and very low coverage rate of children's entry into kindergartens. Only 5.1% of children in the age group 3-5 years have a chance to enter kindergartens run by the ministry of education (free of charge); there are private kindergartens (paid) that may increase the rate up to 10%; the situation is much better in the northern three provinces (Kurdistan region).
- The quality of education in kindergar-

tens and elementary schools is very low (due to lack of competency and efficiency of teachers, bad schools management, shortage of high-quality on-job training, very poor school environments, severe shortage of proper school buildings, congested classrooms (up to 60 pupils in the classroom), lack of electricity, and safe sanitary services).

- No school health services.
- Absence of clear national educational policy for young children and the curriculum is not updated regularly.
- Insecurity is still in Iraq and thousands of Iraqi families are internally displaced and suffer from unemployment, poverty, and social breakdown (illiteracy rate is 28% among Iraqi females); the poor and illiterate parents usually do not have value.
- Population explosion due to more than 3.5% growth rate and big families due to traditional and religious causes (close spacing, poor family planning).
- Ineffective interventional projects run by NGOs and lack of sound research dealing with young children's problems. Small-scale studies done in my department reveal that quite a large number of our young children are exposed to neglect, violence, parents working in the private sector, and beggary.

*Hassan Baey
Babylon University Medical College*

Jordan

The most urgent challenge facing young children in Jordan is poverty. Income for families doesn't cover the basics needs.

*Raed Abu Hayyaneh
Save the Children*

Lebanon

The most serious challenge facing young children in Lebanon today is the wide disparity between urban and rural children. Children of the capital enjoy: access to the most updated medical centers and services; preschools and

schools with specialized teachers and administrators; well-equipped premises to facilitate extra-curricular activities; technology at all levels; local and international concerts and plays; recently released films and DVDs. Children of the villages, on the other hand, suffer from lack of medical, educational, and leisure services, denying them in most cases their basic rights. One would think that this should not be the case of a country with a small geographical area such as Lebanon, but this disparity is broadening with the continuing political instability and the weakness of governmental intervention, especially to those in most need.

*May Abou Ajram
Arab Resource Collective*

United Arab Emirates

Language, culture, and identity: The United Arab Emirates is a diverse setting, with a wonderful mix of cultures and races from all over the world. Although this cosmopolitan setting attracts businesses and tourists from around the world, the children of the UAE are facing a threat to their culture and heritage. Parents, professionals, and policy makers are concerned about how they can prepare their children to compete globally without losing their connections to their roots. Out of 139 school inspections in 2010, only 6 were rated outstanding because many students were struggling to attain the language and religion requirements. Going back to the early years, we find that children are either spending too much time with inexperienced housemaids, or attending nurseries that are based on American, British, and Australian models, which do not incorporate the Arabic language. In both cases, when children start school at age 6, their Arabic language capability is poor.

Lack of awareness and access to high-quality early childhood: In the UAE, there is still a widespread misunderstanding of the importance of early childhood education. Many parents and even policymak-

ers do not understand the difference between high-quality early childhood care and education and a day-care or babysitting service.

Samia Kazi

Arabian Child

— Asia/Pacific —

Australia

It is heartbreaking that our indigenous children continue to report a depleted sense of belonging; many also display unacceptably low levels of literacy and numeracy. Across the board our young children are not connecting well with their environment; they are often disconnected from nature; they are not learning to take calculated risks and learn from their mistakes. Many families cannot afford high-quality early care and education for their young children. Children in the middle years are often struggling with a sense of self with peer pressure and social media placing high levels of anxiety on many. Obesity is escalating in our young children. Child protection protocols are inconsistent across States and Territories.

Carol Lymbery

Carol Lymbery Consulting

Bangladesh

1. Most of the children of 0-5 years, both from rural and urban areas, do not receive proper care, education, and attention from their parents and caregivers due to lack of early childhood development-related knowledge and awareness. The children are growing without developing their full potential. Parents mainly focus on providing enough food and that's all. They do not even have an idea about the development of a child. For example, parents buy expensive toys for their loving children and in many cases children do not have access to play with the toys because it can be broken. Most parents say children are small; they don't understand, so parents do not know if something needs to be explained properly. Working mothers are busy with domestic and other work

when they come back home; their children are taken care of by untrained and unskill-ed caregivers the whole day at home. No day-care center or centre with learning opportunities is available in the working environment.

2. Many people think that ECD starts at preschool and between the ages of 5-6 years. So, the most vulnerable age group is 0-4. Only health-related issues are concerns in this age group. If the growth is okay, then parents are happy. Parents do not have information about the importance of learning through play, interactions with the child, asking questions or reply back to children's questions.

Very few people have concerns about the issues. There are some remote areas, char, embankment, river erosion areas in the northwest part of Bangladesh where the situations are the very worst. No NGOs have ECD programs for the children in those areas. We are seriously planning to reach those areas.

Manjusree Mitra

NEZ Bangladesh

Bhutan

Children in Bhutan are considered very important and their well being is of utmost concern to parents, families, communities, and the state. Further, the traditional child care practices and social structures are supportive of children's holistic development. However, with changing times and dilution of culture and social norms, we are not spared the influence of emerging social trends, particularly the negative ones.

In a growing trend of smaller families with work-oriented fathers and mothers, many children do not seem to be receiving the amount of nurturing care and attention that they need from their parents. Parents, too, struggle in having to juggle between work and family, in the absence of competent

caregivers at home, which was not an issue in the traditional joint family system. As a result, younger children spend long hours in front of TV and electronic games, and older ones get into undesirable habits of drugs and juvenile delinquency. The issue is further compounded by poverty, broken families, and single parents in many cases. All of these challenges do not bode well for the development of young children into responsible and productive members of society.

Karma Gayleg

Ministry of Education

China

As we believe that humanity, learning capability, mental and physical health of our next generation is the foundation of economic prosperity, harmonious communities and a better society, we consider the most serious challenges our young children in China are facing are three parts:

1. *Humanity* — most of our young children in China have too much attention from both parents and grandparents (typically one child has six adults' attention); they are becoming quite self-centered, and unfortunately, lack empathy in general.
2. *Learning Capability* — entire education system is overly exam-oriented.
3. *Mental Health* — being overly judgmental.

Dongyu Zhao

Enlightenment Child Development Center

Fiji

Some of the challenges we face include attitude and mindset of parents regarding the importance of children in the early years (0-8 years); it is still not a priority to many. For parents who are able to send them to school, finance becomes the issue. There is also less recognition of the 0-8 years by all stakeholders (including policy makers) as important for children's development. Another challenge is

protection and neglect occurring through drowning, fires, and abuse in all forms. The most serious challenges would be attitude, finance, protection, and neglect.

Analesi Tuicaumia

The Little-ones Learning Centre

India

Malnutrition is one of the most urgent challenges in India as 46% of children are malnourished (National Health and Family Survey 2005-06). This is partly because of undernourishment due to poverty in some pockets and partly due to poor nutrition management and nutrition and health education among the masses.

Ganesh Chandra Upadhyay

National Council of Educational Research and Training

South Korea

Today, children in South Korea are facing serious challenges. Most mothers have a big desire for their children to go to a superior university. They try to prepare them from a very young age, like 4 or 5 years old. Usually children go to 2 or 3 different kinds of private institutes for academics and art after school. Because of that, children have a lot of stress about academics and art education.

North Korea is neglecting the education of young children. The government lost the desire to develop the educational situation because of the nationwide famine and bad economy.

Soonohk Hong

Kyungsoong University

Malaysia

The most serious challenge facing young children in Malaysia is the loss of childhood, due to the serious Malaysian parenting culture of starting young children early in academic performance. Young children today are being whisked from session to session of enrichment, starting as

young as 18 months to 2 years. For lucrative reasons, preschools are also part of this situation.

Judith Loh

National Association of Early Childhood Care and Education

Nepal

Nepal ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) in 1990. Furthermore, we have developed a National Plan of Action under the Education for All (EFA) for the period 2001-2015. One of the goals of this EFA National Plan of Action is to establish 74,000 ECD centers nationwide by the end of 2015. It has already established approximately 40,000 ECD centers (school- and community-based) as of today. Most of these ECD centers have been annexed into the existing school infrastructures — a downward extension of ECD in primary and secondary-level schools.

Besides, many national and international organizations have contributed their time, energy, expertise, and resources to establish and enhance ECD programs in Nepal and the conditions of children and situations of the ECD centers are gradually improving. However, young children are still facing manifold challenges at home and in school environments despite the above-stated efforts and actions. First, we do not have a concrete national policy for children 0-3 years. No formal program exists for children below 3 years. Generally, the parents/guardians are not aware of ECD and the holistic development of their children due to not having effective parenting education. They solely understand that it is a primary responsibility of the schools (government) to create conducive environments for overall development of their children. So at the household level, children are not being treated well and are not being given a developmentally appropriate, nurturing environment, and stimulating objects as required.

At the education level, most of the school and community-based ECD centers do not have child-friendly environments in their existing classroom set-up due to poor physical infrastructure. Most classrooms in Nepal are in traditional condition, with decaying walls, ceilings, windows, and doors, dilapidated furnishings and few, if any, educational materials. The children are deprived of essential amenities like safe drinking water, nutritious food, health, hygiene, and sanitation because of lack of adequate resources. Furthermore, there is lack of:

- ongoing assessment of the ECD center-based programs
- documentation and analysis on individual development plan (IDP) of the children enrolled in the centers
- trained/skilled ECD teachers (20-30% of trained ECD facilitators leave the job)
- developmentally appropriate stimulating environments and teaching/learning materials
- individual attention due to high gap in child-teacher ratio are the key challenges that young children face on a day-to-day basis.

These challenges have adversely impacted the holistic development of children in educational set-ups.

Although the government has created ECD curriculum, it has not been followed accordingly due to lack of trained teachers, enough financial resources, efficient planning, monitoring, and evaluations. Specifically:

- mainstreaming the ECD in national structure
- inter-sectoral gaps in communication and coordination
- lack of one-door system for proper utilization of resources
- uniformity in implementation of ECD programs
- localization of curriculum and reluctance in use by the ECD teachers

- difference in duration of ECD programs
- lack of community 'buy-in'
- inadequate budget and resources are among the other challenges of the existing ECD centers.

Institutions and organizations working in these areas have been active in advocating for change on these issues, but due to the prolonged political unrest/turmoil and the 10 years of armed conflict in the country, it has not been improved to the level desired and/or required. Therefore, International Child Resource Institute-Nepal established the National Center for Learning Resources (NCLR) in 2005 and has been implementing a set of activities in 17 pre-primary/ECD centers with an aim to create meaningful, joyful, and creative learning environments for the young children in Nepal.

Dhirendra Lamsal
ICRI-Nepal

— The Americas —

Brazil

Children face inequity and social disparities at such a high level that it jeopardizes the development of all children: rich, middle class, and most of all the children of poverty. The latest also face a complex and intricate chain of problems: violence, lack of family and social protection, poor access to health and education, and other social institutions, which are fundamental for their well being and development.

Maria Thereza Oliva Marcilio
Rede Nacional Primeira Infância

Canada

Canada, by most standards, is a prosperous and wealthy nation, yet when it comes to children, there is little in the way of federal political leadership, vision, direction, and cohesiveness of policy. Inclusive early childhood education and care, services for families, childhood poverty, and any number of issues facing children and families in

the modern Canadian society and economy are sadly and tragically disjointed in terms of their delivery and accessibility and make up — what we refer to as the patchwork of services. Each and every issue that affects children deserves our collective attention and priority, but in Canada, while there are pockets and areas of strength and comprehensive policy, there is no unifying political leadership that attempts to unify or discuss common challenges, conversations that would make our country a better place for all Canadian children.

Don Geisbrecht
Canadian Child Care Federation

Colombia

Since 2004 the political advances in Colombia on behalf of ECCC — legal protection, child and mother survival, immunization, nutrition, and family supports — are remarkable. The last strategy, issued February 2011, calls for alliances between Government and Private Sector, particularly the Corporate Sector, to broaden investment and assure sustainability of programs. Today in Colombia, from the 3.4 million children under the age of 5 only 600,000 are properly attended, leaving 2.8 million behind. The present official initiative that leans on previous advances, aims to attend to 1.2 million of these children, during the next 4 years.

Marisa Uribe
CRIOS LTDA.

Costa Rica

Providing equal access to quality basic education remains a serious challenge for Costa Rican children. Although considerable progress has been made, schools attending the most vulnerable communities continue to receive fewer hours of class time a day, suffer from grossly inadequate infrastructure, and growing levels of inter-community violence. In terms of the quality of children's learning, classroom lessons

continue to focus on the mechanical aspects of reading, writing, and arithmetic, rather than teaching for understanding. And while more students complete high school than a decade ago, the 36% that do remains a low percentage to provide children with a reasonable hope of achieving a decent living standard, or participating actively in the knowledgeable society, as adults. Furthermore, children ages 0 to 4 — and their mothers — face a different challenge: few options on affordable daycare centers (not even speaking of quality). There is actually a governmental country-wide initiative called "Red de Cuido," which translates as "Care Network" trying to find solutions for this challenge.

Melissa Arias
Asociación Amigos del Aprendizaje

Haiti

Survival: In a poverty-stricken country, the main issue facing people is having access to sufficient and adequate nutrition and clean water. Besides that, there is nothing that a Haitian parent, and more specifically a Haitian mother, values more than her kid's education. However, many parents still need to understand that physical abuse, so well seeded in our mentality during slavery, is not an appropriate discipline method and does not stimulate the brain function of a child having difficulty. To blossom, the Haitian kids need food, clean water, time and space to play, protection from all kinds of abuse, and finally, respect.

Caroline Hudicourt
Step by Step Haiti

México

The main problem for children in México is the enormous differences in opportunities that children have access to in the rural and urban areas. In the rural areas children have very bad nutrition and the health services are scarce or very far away from their homes. In regards to education, the schools that

these children attend are of poor quality, or are also very far away from their residences (sometimes they even have to walk two hours). In the urban areas, the main problem that children face is when a newborn or a baby is diagnosed with a neurological problem, the system doesn't have enough institutions to follow-up with those cases. Most of the time, those children just grow up without their problem being attended to, obviously causing a lot of difficulties in their development.

Ivan Galindo

*Infantes y Crayones and
Colegio Erik Erikson*

Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico lacks a unified long-term vision for child development. The consequences are devastating to children:

- 19% are born prematurely, putting many at risk of developmental delays and other health concerns. This rate is the highest in the world, followed by countries in Southern Africa (17.5%).
- 53% are not proficiently reading and writing by third grade, decreasing their chances of ever graduating.
- 58% live in poverty.
- 36,371 are abused/neglected, putting children's lives and futures at risk.

"It takes a village to raise a child," and the time has long come for our village to assume its responsibility.

Maria Levis

Impactivo

United States

The greatest challenge I see facing young children is the growing number of children in poverty who are not getting the proper nurturance and intellectual stimulation they deserve. These deficits cause early gaps in academic achievement and social development that become even more exacerbated when they enter the K-12 system. Our nation can succeed only with a comprehensive system of support, care, and education for all young children.

Francie Hunt

Stand for Children

United States

I believe the most serious challenge facing young children today in the United States is the lack of quality child care programs that could provide a solid foundation for young children, allowing them opportunities to enter primary school with the skills necessary to build the essential social, emotional, physical, and cognitive skills to become our future citizens with a strong social and educational foundation.

The needed cuts in our country's budget should not be made at the expense of our most vulnerable children. I believe it is our responsibility as citizens to ensure that every child has access to high-quality child care, ensuring the early years are a healthy start in life with a strong educational foundation that includes the family.

Lisa Sams

Consultant

Uruguay

The government is implementing health and education programs; results are not seen yet. Pregnancy and newborn child medical care is available throughout the country. A promising future is possible due to the shortened digital gap and opportunities opened by the OLPC (One Laptop Per Child) project. On the other hand, teachers must adapt their teaching strategies to this new tool. The different brain structure the kids have is another big challenge in the classroom routine. The voice of today's young children in Uruguay must be heard.

Magela Guimareas

Programa de Recursos Familiares