Early Childhood Education Country Profile: Tunisia

Population: 12.6 million
Population under age 18: 3.6 million (girls 1.75 million, boy 1.85 million) (28.6% of total population)
Population under age 5: 962,700 (girls 469,500, boys 4932,000) (7.6% of total population)

ECE Country Overview

According to the 2023 Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) launched in February 2024, only 47.2% of children in Tunisia aged 3-4 years old and 89% of 5 years children have access to preschool education programmes, with these rates declining to 37.4% in rural environments and to 17.4% among the poorest quintiles, making preschool education a privilege for just a few in rural areas and for the poorest. This is a major missed opportunity for human capital investment considering that early childhood education and development programmes are particularly effective for breaking the cycle of inter-generational poverty.

Public and private ECE services

In Tunisia, the provision of pre-primary education is highly fragmented between public and private service providers, and over 60% of the offer is availed by the private sector. Furthermore, pre-primary education in Tunisia exhibits significant fragmentation across rural and urban areas, alongside distinctions between public and private service providers. This education system is structured around three primary models:

- **Kindergartens** under the supervision of the Ministry of Families, Women, Children, and the Elderly (MFFEPA as per the French acronym) provide preschool services to children aged 3 to 4 years old. These institutions enrol 30% of children at the age of 3 years and 60% at the age of 4 years-old. The kindergartens vary in status, with the private sector reaching 94% of these children. This sector is notably diverse, reflecting the socioeconomic backgrounds of the targeted population and their varying access to resources. Conversely, only 6% of children attend publicly funded programmes, spread across i) organizations, ii) certain municipalities, iii) ministries (including the Ministry of Defense), and iv) MFFEPA-specific structures.
- **Kuttabs**, affiliated with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, cater to children aged 4 and 5. Originally designed to introduce the Quran, their curriculum now is aligned with the national preschool curricula. They serve 14% of preschool-age children.
- **Preparatory classes**, offered the year before primary school entry, fall under the basic education umbrella of the Ministry of Education but are not mandatory. These classes, available in public, private, and quasi-public schools, accommodate 89% of children at the age of 5 years.

A 2022 study by the Tunisian Government, in collaboration with UNICEF and other partners, including the Tunisian Union of Social Solidarity (UTSS as per the French acronym), Confederation of Citizen Enterprises of Tunisia (CONECT as per the French acronym), Tunisian Union of Industry, Commerce and Crafts (UTICA as per the French acronym), reveals that the total public spending on preschool services was only 1.6% of the education sector's expenditure.

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The national expenditure on preschool services for the 2020-2021 period was approximately 337.6 million Tunisian Dinars (TD) ($108.83 million USD). Of this, the private sector contributed 224.4 million TND ($72.34 million USD), representing two-thirds of the total expenditure. The main public expenditure is attributed to preparatory classes, with 69 million TD ($22.24 million USD).

UNICEF's work on ECE in Tunisia

In 2017, Tunisia government adopted a Multisectoral National Strategy for Early Childhood Development. A key component of this strategy, Axis 1, focuses on promoting equitable access and improving the quality of preschool education. In this context, the various ministries and stakeholders in the preschool education sector have made considerable efforts in recent years to improve the quality of services provided to young children, increase preschool coverage, and unify educational practices in the different preschool establishments.

With this backdrop, to support increased coherence in the offer of ECE services in the country, in 2019, UNICEF supported the Government in the development of national standards for infrastructure, equipment, pedagogy and management of Early Childhood Education (ECE) structures to support increased equity and quality of early childhood services.[1]

Furthermore, since 2020, UNICEF, in collaboration with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), has been engaging with the private sector to expand access to high-quality ECCE through the GIZ-implemented programme "Partnerships for Employment and Support for Medium-sized Enterprises". This effort seeks to enhance access to quality early childhood development services for the children of private sector employees, thereby aiding companies in attracting and retaining staff, especially women. The programme also aims at reducing employee absenteeism and boost productivity and overall performance.

Additionally, in the last two years, UNICEF has also supported the Tunisian government in generating evidence aimed at strengthening governance and the quality of services delivered in the preschool education subsystem.

In 2022, the Costing Analysis and 2030 Perspectives for Preschool in Tunisia took stock of the situation of preschool in Tunisia and provided guidelines to ensure significant growth in the coverage of preschool services for the age group 3-5 years, reduce disparities between models, at the same time deliver equitable and quality services, which will require both additional public resources and efforts to improve governance.

In 2023, an early learning assessment and the evaluation of Preschool System in Tunisia were carried out in addition to the study on the framework and to provide information on the impact of preschool on the

[1] The Government of Tunisia recognises the essential role of partnerships with the private sector and CSOs to increase access to quality inclusive and equitable ECCE services. In example, in 2019, the process for the development of the first quality pre-primary curriculum and quality ECCE standards at national level included extensive consultations with the private sector and CSOs.

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achievements of children, as well as identify the impact of preschool attendance, methods of organizing preschool services on the preparation of children for their primary schooling, as well as the effectiveness, relevance, efficiency and sustainability of the current preschool policy.

Finally, in 2024 UNICEF will support the Government of Tunisia to undertake an evidence-based business case for the provision of worker childcare services in the Tunisian private sector, similar to what has been already implemented in Egypt.

Resources:

Développement de la Petite Enfance: Analyses sur l'éducation préscolaire en Tunisie | UNICEF

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Early Childhood Education Country Profile: Egypt

Population: 114.5 million (women 56.6 million, men 57.9 million)
Population under age 18: 43.3 million (girls 21.1 million, boy 22.2 million) (37.8% of total population)
Population under age 5: 12.1 million (girls 5.9 million, boys 6.2 million) (10.6% of total population)

ECE Country Overview

Participation in organized early childhood learning in Egypt (vital for school readiness) has decreased in recent years. In 2021, the gross enrolment rate (GER) stood at 30% (below the average GER for low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), of 60% of all kindergarten-aged children (4-6 years old). Similarly, in Egypt, there is low uptake of available nursery services. In 2019, the first national Survey of Registered Nurseries confirmed that only 8% of young children (aged 0-4 years) were enrolled in nurseries. A key underlying factor is inequitable access based on wealth and rural/urban residence, with considerable differences by regions and governorates. Children from families in wealthier quintiles are four times more likely than children from the lower wealth quintiles to attend early childhood programmes, with boys more likely to attend than girls. By region, Upper Egypt has much lower participation with a GER of 21 per cent, while Lower Egypt has a GER of 24 per cent. It is slightly higher in the frontier (GER of 35 per cent) and urban governorates (GER of 36 per cent). [2]

Public and private ECE services

The Egyptian preschool education system is mainly composed of kindergartens and nurseries. Kindergartens are formal programmes with educational curricula designed to prepare children for school; nurseries are primarily designed for childcare for younger children and are widely varying in quality. Kindergartens are pre-primary classes for children aged (4-6) years. Nurseries are tailored for younger children (aged 2-4). Nurseries and kindergartens are under the supervision of several ministries, including the Ministry of Social Affairs & the Ministry of Education (MOE).

About half of kindergarten (KG) enrolment in Egypt is in private schools; most programs in the private sector are developed and managed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious schools in the Al-Azhar system, workplace childcare centres, non-formal-childcare in organizations and private homes. About two-thirds of nursery services are provided by NGOs, with the balance covered by an active private sector. There are no estimates of the numbers of children in these settings.

UNICEF's work on ECE in Egypt

Under UNICEF and the **Government of Egypt's Programme for Cooperation 2023-27**, UNICEF works towards supporting the government's endeavours to expand early childhood development programmes nationwide, linking it to the Sustainable Development Goal 4 and Egypt Vision 2030. Particularly, UNICEF has supported the developments of an integrated ECD national strategy 2024-2029 to guide and support

[2] UNICEF, Summary Report: Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Egypt 2021 (December 2021), <https://www.unicef.org/egypt/reports/situation-analysis-children-and-adolescents-egypt-2021>

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the scaling up of quality ECD services nationwide. The strategy – targeted at children aged between 0 and 6 - is focused on policies and legislations; proper family and community care; and access to healthcare, nutrition, education, protection, and responsive care services. Additionally, UNICEF also has supported the development of an ECD situational analysis and a framework for national Early Learning and Development Standards, used to inform the national strategy.

Moreover, in partnerships with the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MOSS) and the Federation of Egyptian Industries (FEI), UNICEF and the International Labor Organization (ILO) conducted a study in 2020-2021 to provide an evidence-based business case for the provision of worker childcare services in the Egyptian private sector. The report highlights the critical linkages between workforce access to early childhood care and development services and benefits, and the participation of women in the Egyptian labour force. It also represents the culmination of a two-phase research activity:

- The first-phase was designed and carried out to inform the business sector and partner organizations about the vital impact and necessity of childcare benefits provision not only for working mothers but also for the business environment and the macro-economy. The study examined the current situation of childcare services in the business sector and assessed the degree of appropriateness and sector endorsement of different models of childcare services.
- The second-phase aimed to develop evidence-based Early Childhood Development (ECD) models to provide various options for childcare benefits provision, and provide a minimum of 5 childcare models.

Building on this, in 2022 UNICEF and ILO in collaboration with the MoSS and FEI conducted a Piloting and Documentation of the childcare models identified in the 2020-2021 study. The purpose of this initiative was to provide insights from different companies that implemented the childcare benefit models. The findings and documentation highlight the benefits and challenges associated with each childcare model and offer guidance and best practices for organizations considering similar implementation.

Resources:

Study Report Business Case for Employer Supported Child Care in Egypt: Childcare Models for Scaling up

Providing Childcare for Workers Boosts their Productivity: Study Results

A Business Case for Employer Supported Child Care in Egypt: Case Studies

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Early Childhood Education Country Profile: Morocco[3]

Population: 37 million
Population under age 18: 12.3 million (girls 5.9 million, boy 6.4 million) (31% of total population)
Population under age 5: 3.1 million (girls 1.5 million, boys 1.6 million) (8.7% of total population)

ECE Country Overview

According to the multidimensional poverty analysis, children of under 5 years old constitute the most affected group of children (48%) by multidimensional poverty, because of the access to health and nutrition services, with rural areas being the most affected. Since 2020, preschool education has been both free and compulsory, aiming for universal enrolment by 2028 across for all age groups., reaching today almost 80% of enrolment at national level, for children between 4 and 5 years. Important efforts were made through delegated service, with an overall budget for preschool of less than 1 billion USD in 2019, to 1.9 billion USD in 2024 finance law.

Major challenges remain:

- Reaching out the most vulnerable (remote areas; low density areas…);
- Maintain a quality while scale up

As per daycare services/kindergartens, for children from 3 months to 4 years, under the supervision of the Ministry of Youth, Communication and Culture. In Morocco, we count approximately 598 private daycare services and 386 public, which makes it still very low to reach full coverage. Little attention is given to the daycare services, and no national norms or standards are available for now.

Public and private ECE services

Preschool education in Morocco is provided through a mix of public schools, private institutions, and community centers, reflecting a unique approach within the region. Morocco's proactive strategies and substantial investments underscore its dedication to enhancing education quality and equity, positioning it strongly on both regional and global stages:

- The private sector generally provides what is called “modern” preschool education.
- The public sector, on the other hand, operates with a diverse range of interventions. This is divided between the Ministry of National Education (MENPS) as a key actor legally responsible for overseeing this education with the support of the National Initiative for Human Development which is leading an ambitious program to address social demand for preschool education in rural areas and disadvantaged families. This institution adopts a governance

[3] Please note that data is based on last census 2014; the new census is planned for next Sept and MICS is under way for the first time in Morocco. Both MICS and census 2024, will provide us with more accurate date once data available (by end of 2024).

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approach and collaborates with two key foundations, *Fondation Marocaine pour la Promotion du Prescolaire* and *Fondation Zakoura,* for specific financing, monitoring, and evaluation. It's noted that the INDH currently coordinates interventions awaiting the MENPS to assume full supervisory responsibility.

- There remains, however, traditional preschool education, which is the most substantial as mentioned above, characterized by an offering that differs significantly from modern preschool education and faces the major constraint of not aligning with the MENPS-adopted framework.

The regulatory framework for preschool education and the pedagogical reference framework represent key strengths of the current preschool model. Important work has been now initiative to ensure alignment of all stakeholders, including traditional preschool and local associations, with the foundational principles of this reference framework under the new provisions of the 51-17 framework law.

Current challenges include the absence of legal status regarding preschool personnel and their initial and ongoing training, in addition to their low salaries below the minimum wage for the majority, especially in cases involving local associations.

As per Daycare services/kindergartens, important challenges are face due to the lack of available data as well as the norms of standards. The services are provided also through a mix of service providers: Ministry of Social Development, Family and Social Inclusion; Ministry of Islamic Affairs (Habous); private sector, and the Ministry of Youth, Communication and Culture.

UNICEF's work on ECE in Morocco

In the previous programme cycle (2017-2021), UNICEF has worked with the MoE on the advocacy for the generalization of preschool education. As a first step a diagnosis has been done to develop a curriculum framework as well as a skills framework for the educators and preschool personnel. This work led to the development of the strategy for the generalization of preschool education in 2018 by the MoE.

Since then, UNICEF supported the MoF and MoE in the costing of preschool education. In addition, since 2023, UNICEF is supporting the MoE in the development of low-density areas models which will be piloted starting next week.

UNICEF also work with MoE, MoH, MoSA and other CSO partners on positive parents and is now adapting a positive parenting model for preschool education.

In 2024, UNICEF launched a technical assistance to MoY to develop norms and standards for daycare service/kindergatens.

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Resources:

SitAn : Anlyse de la situation des enfants et des femmes au Maroc en 2007 | UNICEF

sitan_2019_-_module_1_-_developpement_de_la_petite_enfance.pdf (ondh.ma)

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