



Save the Children

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Philippines drops out of top 100 countries for children to grow up, driven by increase in stunting: new report



'First 1,000 Days' bill must pass to address malnutrition crisis, says Save the Children.

The Philippines has dropped eight places and fallen outside the top 100 in a global ranking of the best and worst countries for children to grow up in, a new report by Save the Children reveals.

Launched in the lead up to International Children's Day on June 1st, *The Many Faces of Exclusion* examines countries on a range of indicators related to childhood like child marriage, teenage pregnancy and child mortality, with the Philippines performing poorest by far on stunting, which has increased to now affect more than 1 in 3 children under the age of five across the country.

Despite having made tremendous economic and development progress in recent years, the Philippines fell from 96th to 104th in the 2018 report's 'End of Childhood Index', which ranks countries according to where childhood is most and least threatened. Regional neighbors China (40th), Thailand (85th) and Vietnam (96th) all ranked higher, while Indonesia was 105th.

"It's really disappointing to see the Philippines slide backwards in the index, and to see an increase in stunting levels among children under 5 when so much work is being done to try to improve nutrition standards and reverse the trend," Save the Children Philippines CEO Alberto Muyot said.

"This situation is exactly why we need to see the 'First 1,000 Days' bill pass and become enshrined in Filipino law, and start to help ensure that all children and pregnant women, especially the poorest, have access to proper health care and nutrition. When it does pass it will be a historic moment all Filipinos can be proud of.

"We look forward to the continuous support and action of both Houses of Congress and the support of the relevant government agencies in pushing for the passage of the bill. Having a safe, healthy and happy childhood is every child's right, regardless of where they are in the world. Here in the Philippines, one way that this right is protected is when the First 1000 Days bill is passed into law."

Save the Children International CEO and the former Prime Minister of Denmark, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, is in Manila for the launch of the global report.

"More than half the world's children are starting their lives held back because they are a girl, because they are poor or because they are growing up in a warzone. Early marriage, child labour and malnutrition are just some of the life-changing events that can rob children of their childhood," Ms Thorning-Schmidt said.

"It is disappointing to see that malnutrition and stunting are stalling progress here in the Philippines, particularly for children under five.

"Governments can and must do more to give every child the best possible start in life. We know just how crucial the first 1,000 days of a child's life to their future wellbeing. It's when children are most in need of good nutrition and when they are most susceptible to stunting. Greater investment and more focus is needed if we are to see the Philippines move back up the rankings and ensure every child can enjoy a safe and happy childhood. Passing the 'First 1000 Days' bill would be a great first step."

In its second year, the report includes a ranking of 175 countries where childhood is most and least threatened as a result of poor health, malnutrition, exclusion from education, child labour, child marriage, early pregnancy and extreme violence.

Singapore and Slovenia both rank first, with Norway, Sweden and Finland rounding out the top five. Eight of the bottom 10 countries are in West and Central Africa, with Niger ranked last for the second year running.

The report also found that:

- More than half of all children globally – over 1.2 billion – are threatened by conflict, widespread poverty or discrimination against girls.
- More than one billion children live in countries plagued by poverty; at least 240 million in countries affected by conflict and fragility; and more than 575 million girls live in countries where gender bias is a serious issue.

- Almost 153 million children are living in 20 countries affected by all three threats—including South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and Afghanistan.

Save the Children has been working in the Philippines since 1981. The aid agency's nutrition work includes training frontline health and nutrition workers on life-saving care for newborns and their mothers, promoting exclusive breastfeeding, managing community and school-based health and nutrition programs and promoting reproductive health to adolescents.

Save the Children is calling on governments around the world to ensure that no child dies from preventable or treatable causes or is subjected to extreme violence; is robbed of a future as a result of malnutrition, early or forced marriage, early pregnancy, or forced labour; and that they have access to a quality education.

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Notes to editor:

- What's known as the '[First 1,000 Days' bill](#) refers to House Bill 5777 or "An Act Strengthening the National and Local Health and Nutrition Programs for Pregnant and Lactating Women, Adolescent Girls of Reproductive Age and Teen-Age Mothers, Infants and Young Children in the First 1,000 Days, and Appropriating Funds Therefor"