

WHO-EARLY CHILDHOOD

WHO Rolls Out New Holistic Way to Measure Early Childhood



World Health Organization

The World Health Organization (WHO) has launched a new package of measures, the Global Scales for Early Development (GSED), to monitor the development of young children at population level up to three years of age.

The new GSED methodology allows for a comprehensive assessment of the development of young children up to 36 months of age, capturing cognitive, socio-emotional, language and motor skills.

The GSED provides a developmental score (D-score), a new common unit to measure development, to give an overall picture of children's development which can be tracked over time.

The GSED package will help countries, programmes and researchers gather and use data on early childhood development to better invest in services and support needed for young children and their families.

"The foundations of life-long health and well-being are formed during the vital first years of a child's life," said Dr Anshu Banerjee, WHO Assistant Director-General *ad interim*, Universal Health Coverage and Life Course and Director for Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health and Ageing. "The GSED will help us make more informed decisions to better invest in nurturing care and support children's right to reach their full potential".

Countries have long required measures that are valid and reliable to monitor development among children from birth to 36 months but standardized and globally applicable population-based measures have been scarce.

Existing measures were either designed to monitor the development of children after 24 months or lacked sufficient consideration for the diversity of contexts in which children are raised. Other measures required extensive resources to be implemented.

The new methodology was developed based on a common dataset collected from 51 cohorts in 32 countries, of which 30 are low- or middle-income countries, by a multi-disciplinary team of global experts coordinated by WHO.

Investing in children and their families

The GSED provides open-access and consistent measures to monitor early childhood development across time and groups of children. It will help generate data that will inform policymakers and governments' understanding of the barriers to children's developmental progress in their countries. This will also enable them to target resources more effectively towards policies and interventions that will support the children most at risk of not reaching their developmental potential.

Global organizations can use the data for cross-country comparisons and trend analyses to inform interventions and funding allocation.

“Just like children are measured for height and weight to check that they are growing as best they can physically, the GSED will now allow for children’s development to be measured holistically” said Dr Dévora Kestel, WHO Director of Mental Health and Substance Use. “These new measures will help us ensure that no child is left behind, as set out in the Sustainable Development Goals”.

Implementing the Global Scales for Early Development

The GSED is delivered through open access, culturally neutral forms that are easy to use across the world, with minimal adaptation required beyond translation. They are relevant across different contexts, including in emergency situations as well as in large-scale data collection efforts.

To date, the GSED measures have been validated in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and United Republic of Tanzania (1248 children per country) and data collection is ongoing in Brazil, China, Côte d'Ivoire and the Netherlands.

The current package comprises the measures (Short form and Long form), related user manuals and item guides, translation and adaptation guide, scoring guide and technical report summarising the methodology and the results of its validation. A GSED App is also available. The GSED will continue to evolve and an expanded version of the package, including global norms and standards for child development, will be released following additional data collection. **-who.int, February 27, 2023**